

Mark

Lesson 13

Chapter 9:30-10:44

Leader Guide

Leader Guide Bible Studies

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NIV®

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Who Will Be the Greatest?

Prayers

Introduction

In the weeks before the last Passover, Jesus began preparing his disciples for his death. After three years with Jesus, it seemed the disciples had learned nothing in their time with Jesus. They argued among themselves who would be the greatest; they could not heal a demon-possessed boy because they did not consider to pray, and they discouraged children from coming to Jesus. But Jesus loved them, instructed them, and they continued to argue.

Who Will Be the Greatest [comments from Luke 9:46-48]

Mk 9:30 They left that place and passed through Galilee. Jesus did not want anyone to know where they were,³¹ because he was teaching his disciples. He said to them, **“The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise.”**

Mk 9:32 But they did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it.

Mt 18:1 At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”

Mk 9:33 They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them [knowing their thoughts], **“What were you arguing about on the road?”**

Mk 9:34 But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest.

Mk 9:35 Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, **“If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all.”**

Mk 9:36 He took a little child and had him stand among them. Taking him in his arms, he said to them,³⁷ **“Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.”** [For he who is least among you all—he is the greatest.]

1. It seems hard to understand why the disciples could not understand Jesus' statement on his death and resurrection. Why was this so hard for them to understand?

Despite seeing Jesus raise Lazarus and others from the dead, how could he raise himself if he was killed? A dead Messiah just didn't fit into their thinking about his kingdom to come. They still thought he would reign with kingly power – and argued among themselves who would be most honored in this earthly kingdom.

2. Being great in God's Kingdom was utterly contrary to the idea of greatness in Jesus's day as it is in ours. What did Jesus say the qualities of great leadership were in his kingdom?

Being great in God's Kingdom means taking on the role of a servant. It means putting others' needs first and not putting yourself above others.

3. What did Jesus mean by illustrating greatness by welcoming a child?

Jesus illustrated what it meant to take on a servant's humility by loving children – who had no standing or esteem in their society. I think he also just loved kids (without any object lesson to be taught).

Whoever Is Not Against Us Is for Us

Mk 9:38 "Teacher," said John, "we saw a man driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us."

Mk 9:39 "Do not stop him," Jesus said. "No one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, ⁴⁰ for whoever is not against us is for us.

Mk 9:41 I tell you the truth, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to Christ will certainly not lose his reward.

Causing to Sin

Mk 9:42 "And if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied around his neck.

[Mt 18:7 "Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to sin! Such things must come, but woe to the man through whom they come!]

Mk 9:43 If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out.

Mk 9:45 And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell.

Mk 9:47 And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, ⁴⁸ where "their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched."

Mk 9:49 Everyone will be salted with fire.

Mk 9:50 "Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with each other."

4. Mark 9:42-50 are some of the hard sayings of Jesus. Do you think these are literal or hyperbole?

See question 5 notes.

5. How does Jesus illustrate hell?

Jesus illustrated hell with torment and fire! Anything would be better than hell – living without a hand, or foot, or eyes, would all be better than the eternal torment of hell. These are illustrations of how bad hell is, not literal commands.

6. What did Jesus mean by having salt in yourself!?

Salt was of value and served useful purposes as a preservative and seasoning. If it did not have the properties of salt, it would not have a purpose. We were also created for a purpose and redeemed so that we could live in Christ for the purposes he called us.

Divorce [Additional comments from Matthew 19:1-9]

Mk 10:1 Jesus then left that place and went into the region of Judea and across the Jordan. Again, crowds of people came to him, and as was his custom, he taught them.

Mk 10:2 Some Pharisees came and tested him by asking, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?”

Mk 10:3 **“What did Moses command you?”** he replied.

Mk 10:4 They said, “Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away.”

Mk 10:5 **“It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law,”** Jesus replied.

Mk 10:6 **“But at the beginning of creation God ‘made them male and female.’**

Mk 10:7 **‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife,**

Mk 10:8 **and the two will become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two, but one.**

Mk 10:9 **Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.”**

Mk 10:10 When they were in the house again, the disciples asked Jesus about this.

Mk 10:11 He answered, **“Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her.**

Mk 10:12 **And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery.”**

[Mt 19:9 **I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery.”**

Mt 19:10 The disciples said to him, “If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry.”

Mt 19:11 Jesus replied, **“Not everyone can accept this word (not to marry), but only those to whom it has been given. ¹² For some are eunuchs because they were born that way; others were made that way by men; and others have renounced marriage because of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it.”]**

Discuss

7. What is God’s unchanging plan for marriage?

In marriage, two people "are no longer two but one" (verse 6). The discussion in Mark focuses on sexual fidelity in marriage because the actions of one spouse affects the other. Ephesians 5:22–33 addresses the spiritual union in a marriage where the couple is called to be

holy and blameless in Christ. What God has joined together; he alone can separate. The death of one spouse dissolves the marriage, the other is free to remarry (Romans 7:2-3, 1 Timothy 5:14).

8. Many things can destroy the intimacy God intended in marriage – constant arguing, lying, physical abuse, addiction, to name a few. Why is the discussion with the Pharisees focused on the act of adultery?

The discussion with the Pharisees focuses on God's intent for marriage; the two will become one flesh. A married Christian couple is in Christ as one flesh; adultery destroys the sacred tri-union between the husband, wife, and Christ. Even though divorce is permitted, many couples can forgive their partner, restore their intimacy, and re-establish their union following adultery.

9. Given Jesus' statement, what comfort can a Christian offer a divorced person?

Anyone who has seen the pain and suffering in divorce knows that judgmental attitudes are destructive. Jesus taught that divorce was a sin, not an unpardonable sin. He also taught anger is akin to murder, and lust is already adultery. Like all sin, Jesus is quick to forgive when a believer seeks forgiveness with repentance and a contrite heart. Likewise, having been forgiven, a Christian is in a unique position to extend God's grace and mercy to the divorced person.

10. What do these passages teach about being single?

If a person can remain single, it is a God-pleasing thing to do, and scriptures encourage it. Jesus said that it would be good for Christians to stay unmarried so they can devote themselves more fully to the kingdom of heaven.

The Little Children and Jesus (also found in Matthew 19:13-15 and Luke 18:15-17)

Mk 10:13 People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them.

Mk 10:14 When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, **“Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.**

Mk 10:15 **I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.”**

Mk 10:16 And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them.

11. During his ministry, Jesus showed his love for children and held them up as examples for adults to emulate. What are the qualities of children we need to have to receive the kingdom of heaven?

There are (at least) two qualities of children I admire and relate to Jesus' teaching. First is a child-like faith who believes wholeheartedly without guile or doubt, but that does not mean they do not ask questions – lots of questions! The gospel truth is simple; it is all about what Jesus has done and not about what we have done. In Christ, our sins are completely forgiven and forgotten so that we do not have to carry around a heavy burden of guilt. We are his beloved children, so we, in turn, are free to love and forgive our neighbors. Secondly, a child's joy is unbridled, and can find joy in the smallest detail around them. A child's happiness is in the circumstance of the moment and in who is with them. Likewise, joy in God's kingdom is not only after our death; it is for now and in the moment. We delight in the smallest details of His creation and the company of others.

The Rich Young Man (covered in the next lesson)

Jesus Again Predicts His Death [also found in Mt 20:17-19 and Lk 18:31-33]

Mk 10:32 They were on their way up to Jerusalem, with Jesus leading the way, and the disciples were astonished, while those who followed were afraid. Again, he took the Twelve aside and told them what was going to happen to him.

Mk 10:33 **“We are going up to Jerusalem,”** he said, **“and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, ³⁴ who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise.”**

[Lk 18:34 The disciples did not understand any of this. Its meaning was hidden from them, and they did not know what he was talking about.]

12. How does this prediction of his death compare to the previous time Jesus told his disciples about his death when they did not understand?

Jesus clearly explained to his disciples why he must go to Jerusalem and added: “They will . . . deliver him over to the Gentiles. And they will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him.” Jesus included more details of his death each time he told his disciples but they still could not take it in.

13. The disciples did not understand what Jesus was telling them but had the courage to follow, even onto death. What situations have you faced in fear, without understanding, but with faith?

My life has not been quite that dramatic, but I have faced job loss and failure, rejection, and deathly sickness. Sometimes I faced trials from my own willpower and determination; other times, I was so broken that I could only turn to Jesus and trust his provision. He has been faithful to me.

The Request of James and John [Comment inserted from Mt 20:20-28]

Mk 10:35 Then [the mother of] James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. “Teacher,” they said, “we want you to do for us whatever we ask.”

Mk 10:36 **“What do you want me to do for you?”** he asked.

Mk 10:37 They replied, “Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory.”

Mk 10:38 **“You don’t know what you are asking,”** Jesus said. **“Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?”**

Mk 10:39 **“We can,”** they answered. Jesus said to them, **“You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with,”**^v

Mk 10:40 **but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared [by my Father].”**

Mk 10:41 When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John.

Mk 10:42 Jesus called them together and said, **“You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them.**

Mk 10:43 **Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant,⁴⁴ and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”**

14. Jesus' warning on the road through Galilee (Mark 9:30-37) did not finish the argument between the disciples as to who would be greatest and sit at Jesus' right hand in his kingdom. What did they and their mother completely misunderstand about the establishment of his kingdom?

They did not understand that his death would establish Christ's kingdom as a ransom for humankind. The disciples would follow as martyrs for the kingdom of God.

15. What did they misunderstand about his kingdom?

The disciples thought the Messiah's kingdom would be an earthly kingdom and Jesus would reign as an earthly king whose power they would share. They did not understand the kingdom of heaven was spiritual and in the present. They had no understanding that Jesus would return after his death to restore his creation and fulfill all of scripture.

16. What does being a slave to all look like in your life, the life a disciple?

Even though I have often learned the lesson of being a servant and the blessings it brings, I do not quickly set aside my tasks and means to respond to my neighbor's needs. Sometimes it takes the encouragement of others to respond to others' needs.

Today, the needs of others in our community have never been more apparent - for food, employment, for child care, for words of encouragement to shut-ins.

Closing prayer (from John Baillie)

Divine Love, who eternally stands outside the closed doors of the souls of men, knocking ever and again, will You not now give me grace to throw open all of my soul? Tonight, let every bolt and lock be released that has so far robbed my life of air and light and love.

Give me an open ear, God, that I may hear Your voice calling me to high undertaking. Too often have I been deaf to the appeals You have addressed to me, but now give me courage to answer, Here am I, send me. And when any one of Your children, my human brothers, cries out in need, give me an open ear to hear in that cry Your call to service.

Give me an open mind, God, a mind ready to receive and to welcome such new light of knowledge as it is Your will to reveal to me. Let not the past ever be so dear to me as to set a limit to the future. Give me courage to change my mind, when that is needed. Let me be tolerant to the thoughts of others and hospitable to such light as may come to me through them.

Give me open eyes, God, eyes quick to discover Your indwelling in the world which You have made. Let all lovely things fill me with gladness and let them uplift my mind to Your everlasting loveliness. Forgive all my past blindness to the grandeur and glory of nature, to the charm of little children, to the beautiful things in human history, and to all the intimations of Your presence which these things contain.

Give me open hands, God, hands ready to share with all who are in want the blessings with which You have enriched my life. Deliver me from all meanness and stinginess. Let me hold my money in stewardship and all my worldly goods in trust for You; to whom now be all honor and glory. Amen