

Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost
October 7th, 2018
Pastor Matthew Ude

Mark 9:30-37 NKJ ³⁰ Then they departed from there and passed through Galilee, and He did not want anyone to know *it*. ³¹ For He taught His disciples and said to them, "The Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of men, and they will kill Him. And after He is killed, He will rise the third day." ³² But they did not understand this saying, and were afraid to ask Him. ³³ Then He came to Capernaum. And when He was in the house He asked them, "What was it you disputed among yourselves on the road?" ³⁴ But they kept silent, for on the road they had disputed among themselves who *would be the* greatest. ³⁵ And He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, "If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all." ³⁶ Then He took a little child and set him in the midst of them. And when He had taken him in His arms, He said to them, ³⁷ "Whoever receives one of these little children in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me, receives not Me but Him who sent Me."

What's going on here?

There are numerous things about this text that might puzzle us?

To begin with why can't the disciples understand Christ? Christ's words are so plain and easy to understand. Where is the misunderstanding? Of course the problem is not with the words themselves but the concept. The idea that the Messiah would die, or that any man would willingly allow himself to be killed, is so foreign to the disciples that they simply cannot comprehend what Jesus is saying.

Imagine for example that I were to tell you, "We were going to have the kids do the Michael Jackson Thriller video for the Christmas Eve service." Would any of you believe me? It doesn't matter how plain I make it. It doesn't matter how many times I say it. You would just think, "What point is he trying to make here?" You all know that we don't do things like that for a Christmas Eve service.

Being unable to understand or comprehend what Jesus was trying to tell them, the discussion of the apostles seems to have devolved into an argument over who was greatest in the kingdom. I'm sure it didn't help at all that three of the disciples had just recently been up on the mount of transfiguration with Christ.

And so Jesus has to stop them. Here we see what a good teacher Jesus is, when they can't get the lesson, he scales it back. He uses an object lesson.

Whoever receives one of these in my name, he is the greatest.

An infant child is the most helpless of all people. There is nothing that a child can do to repay you. Nothing you can receive from him/her.

You remember the fairy tales you heard growing up? You remember how a certain person would share his lunch with an old woman in the forest, or a man would decide to release a fish, or a princess would kiss a frog. The old woman was really a fairy queen. The fish was able to grant wishes and the frog turned into a prince. So the point was that you should always be nice to other people because if you are nice then something good will happen to you in turn.

But that is not what Jesus says here. This is an infant child. It's not going to magically turn into King who will grant you riches beyond your wildest dreams. And that is Jesus' whole point. The one who is greatest is not the one who helps out because he expects that he will receive something in return, but the one who is "servant of all" who helps simply to help expecting he will not get anything in return.

This is why he uses an infant as the example. No matter how many times you change his diapers, no matter how many times you feed him, no matter how many times you play games with him, you receive nothing. He isn't even capable of thanking you. He simply wakes you up again the next night.

Jesus calls the one greatest who helps his neighbor simply out of love, neither expecting nor wanting anything in return.

How can we do such a thing? Even if we don't want money, even if we don't want praise, invariably we think God will be pleased with me. I've earned a reward before the Lord.

Notice that Jesus says, "in my name." To receive a child "in his name" means that we are already believers. To do something in Jesus name means that we have accepted Christ. If we have accepted Christ we have accepted also the cross. In the cross all our sins are paid for, in the cross heaven is given to us. In Christ means that we already have everything that we could want or desire. Having everything that we could possibly want or desire we don't need to do anything out of selfishness. We can help anyone at anytime even if it costs us the world, even if it costs us our life, because all that we need is ours in Christ.

So that's it right. The point of this account is that we ought to serve one another, that we ought to do good especially to those who cannot repay us at all. That we should do good and expect nothing, not even praise in return? No, not at all

Remember this was simply the secondary point made when the disciples completely failed to understand what Jesus was telling them.

The real lesson here is that Jesus was going to be betrayed into the hands of men. That Jesus was going to die and rise again the third day. The real lesson is that Jesus came to serve those who had absolutely nothing to give him.

What could he possibly gain by dying for us? He was already lord of lords. He was already King of Kings. He was the almighty God who sat enthroned in the hosts of heaven.

How foolish do men have to be to think there is anything at all that we can give to Him.

Everything that we give to God is worthless on its own. He accepts it and loves it because he loves us. As a parent loves the drawing their child made in 3rd grade, just so God loves what we offer to him. It is worthless on its own, but God who loves us loves the pitiful gifts we set before him.

But he came anyway, even when we had nothing to offer, even when he had nothing to gain. He came to deliver us from sin and death.

Amen