

Sermon Based Small Group: Mark 9:30-50

“TOUGHTALKS: Race to the Bottom

Introduction

- Have you ever had someone sit you down for a tough talk? How did it go? How did you process that talk afterwards?
- This really has nothing to do with our study, but how are you enjoying Spring? Maybe this week is a bad one to ask this question. Did you survive winter or thrive?

Reviewing the Teaching

- Read Mark 9:30-50.
- What stood out to you as a potentially significant takeaway in this week’s teaching?
 - Why did it stand out?
 - How does it relate to you in your life situation now?
- This is a tough talk from Jesus. Do you think that Jesus’ words are hard hitting and life giving, or are they “chicken soup for the soul”?
- What comes to mind when you hear the line “*Jesus did not come to make us better, he came to make us his.*”
- Before giving the disciples a tough talk, Jesus gives them good news. He came to die to make us His. The disciples did not understand this. Why were the disciples afraid in verse 32?
- Jesus takes the role of the authoritative leader and states: *Whoever wants to be first must be the very last ... and the servant of all.* What are a few types of qualities that God views as great? (Humility and Submission)
- Serving is really leading. What do you think of this statement?
 - The first challenge is to give ourselves to something greater; to God wholeheartedly, rather than our own dreams.
 - The second is to realize that our biggest challenges come from our own selfish desires that battle inside us.
- How does God measure the servant heart? God measures my significance by the attention I give to those who are insignificant.
 - Servant Heart Measure 1: “Do I make it a priority to give attention to those from whom I will get nothing in return?”
 - Servant Heart Measure 2: Am I jealous of someone else’s success? (v. 38)
 - Servant Heart Measure 3: How seriously am I taking the impact that I have on others and my environment?
- The last section of these paragraph talks about fire and salt. We get to choose our fire, purifying fire or judging fire. Does this help to understand these verses?

Digging Deeper

- Is there something that you’ve been afraid to ask in public that you might feel comfortable asking in this room?
- Keep in mind as you read this passage a stressful undercurrent throughout the Gospels. The popular conception of the Messiah was a political leader that would lead Israel out from under

Roman oppression and into the prosperity of Solomon in contrast to the suffering Servant who would ultimately be crucified.

- How would each perspective influence your thought on being a servant?
- Which perspective is more self oriented?
- It is easy to pick on the disciples. In the world around us, which choice do people make about prosperity?
- Mel mentioned three ways to get yourself noticed, especially as it pertains to a promotion; do some work of those below you, some work of those above you, and some work of those across from you. What kind of difference do you think this would make at work?
- Further children had no status. The concept of serving a child was revolutionary.
 - How about children? What value do we place on domestic work and caring for children?
 - There is a story about a final exam in leadership from a prominent business school. There were multiple choice questions and then an essay for 50%. The question was simple, "What is the name of the lady who works as a custodian on this floor during the day? How would you have done on that exam?"
- Hell is not a popular topic. Verses 42 to 50 are a bit controversial.
 - When Jesus talks about millstones and mutilations, what does He mean? Why do you think as you do? He describes this as a comparison with the word "better".
 - *It is the same way with sin. The drastic image of amputation (cutting off a foot or hand) means that we must be ruthless about sin. There can be no compromises. It must not be tolerated. It can't be allowed to smolder, it can't be confined to a corner. It will engulf you eventually — which is hell. We must confess sin and change and do anything to "put it out" — for the "fire" of sin's misery could eventually envelopes us and goes on forever. Sin never stays in its place. It always leads to hell, first in this life and then in the next. (Keller, Gospel of Mark, pp. 119)*
 - What words does Jesus use to describe hell? Fires usually go out. What about this one? The quote in verse 48 is from Isaiah 66:24. Look this up. What is significant about the position of this verse? Read verses 22 to 24.
- Verse 50 is one of those tricky verses. That is a polite way of saying that we are not confident in interpreting it. Compare "be at peace with one another" with verse 38; and then with verse 34. In the context of "the greatest", "the servant", hindering and "peace", what blocks peace and what leads to peace? Is that a contrarian point of view?

Applying it to Life

- Jesus presents two pathways here, service and status. How does each of them lead to peace? Which path do people you know choose?
- The villains here are the disciples. Comment on that.
- Questions for reflection;
 - How badly do I want to ... increase my effectiveness? Increase cohesiveness? Elevate my status? Do I want them badly enough to "just" be a servant?
 - What would happen if I could get my heart to really believe that the *race to the top* is a *race to the bottom*?
- Greatness comes through serving.
 - *To welcome others who are little shows that you accept and understand my work on the cross. I welcomed you when you were poor and helpless, and so when you welcome others who are in this condition, you have welcomed me. Only people who understand the dynamic of what I did on the cross will be able to develop this "upside down" (to the world) view of greatness. (Keller, p. 115)*

- “Only people who understand the dynamic of what Jesus did on the cross...” There are two approaches here to servanthood. We can will ourselves to do better. Or we can understand what Jesus did on the cross. How are these two approaches different? Why is one much more effective? What are steps you can take to “understand the dynamic...”?
- Do you give attention to those from whom you will get nothing in return?
- Are you jealous of someone else’s success?
- How seriously am I taking the impact I have on others and my environment?

Prayer

- Pray for God to help you see the world from His upside down perspective?
- Continue to pray for specific needs in your group.
- Is there something else from the message that you would like to pray about?