

# STUDY GUIDE & DAILY READINGS

Sunday, March 8, 2009

Radical Renovation (*Week 2 of 7*)

## Servanthood: A Peculiar Way to Greatness

### **Mark 9:33-37**

*Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the way?" But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest. He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all." Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me."*

### **Mark 10:32-45**

*They were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them; they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. He took the twelve aside again and began to tell them what was to happen to him, saying, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death; then they will hand him over to the Gentiles; they will mock him, and spit upon him, and flog him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise again."*

*James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to him and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you. And he said to them, "What is it you want me to do for you?" And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" They replied, "We are able." Then Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared."*

*When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John. So Jesus called them and said to them, "You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."*

*The Word from the Bible, Revised Standard Version*

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## **Destiny**

*"I don't know what your destiny will be, but one thing I know: The only ones among you who will be really happy are those who will have sought and found how to serve." — Albert Schweitzer*

## **The Definition of Greatness — Mark 9:33-37**

In the first of two similar episodes (the second is in 10:35-45) the disciples are caught discussing among themselves which of them was the greatest (Matthew 18:1-5 and Luke 9:46-48). Obviously, the disciples have not understood the eternal nature of Jesus. They can only think in human terms where greatness is defined by position and authority. Christ comes to turn our understanding of greatness upside down. In God's Kingdom, the measure of greatness is defined by service and community.

The disciples were silent because they were ashamed of their discussion. This unflattering view of the disciples is drilled into the reader of Mark. They will only understand after they lose everything.

Mark adds an episode about receiving a child in Jesus' name that does not seem to fit the dispute about rank. Jesus is now using every example he can to teach the disciples about rank and greatness in the Kingdom of Heaven. In the first century culture, a child held no rank. Children had no value until they could work and earn their way. Children were pushed to the back in every situation. They are not allowed to worship with adults; they ate last, and got the leftover living conditions.

Jesus compares the value of a child to his own value to impress on the disciples that rank, fame and applause are empty.

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### ***The Third Prediction of the Passion — Mark 10:32-34***

This is the third and final prediction of his death, rejection, suffering and resurrection, made privately and personally to the twelve. It follows the pattern of the first two predictions in 8:31-33 and 9:30-32. There is no hint that the disciples now understand any better than they did before. In verse 32, Mark lets us know that Jesus has moved ahead of the disciples as they travel toward Jerusalem. The language and tone of Mark's description is terse and abrupt and seems to indicate that Jesus is beginning to get impatient with the disciples' lack of understanding and support. The disciples' response is one of fear and amazement.

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### ***The Ambition of James and John — Mark 10:35-45***

We can only imagine Jesus' disappointment as James and John approach him directly to ask for positions of authority. They are represented as selfishly seeking the chief seats in heaven. This gives Jesus an occasion to teach the disciples humility. The phrase ***drink the cup*** is colloquial for martyrdom. ***Baptism*** is symbolic for death as found also in Luke 12:50 and Romans 6:3-4.

The irony of the request of James and John is completed in Mark 15:27 as Jesus is crucified with ***two bandits, one on his right and one of his left***. Mark subtly reminds us that true greatness and glory can only be achieved by being crucified with Christ.

Jesus finishes his rebuke of James and John by outlining again the meaning of discipleship. As disciples of Jesus we are called to service not privilege. Jesus highest service is that ***he gave his life as a ransom for many***.

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### ***Discussion Questions***

1. What is your definition of greatness? Explain your reasoning.
2. In what ways can you identify with James and John in the Gospel story from Mark?
3. When have you experienced "being served" in a really great way? What did the person serving you do? How did it feel to be served?
4. When have you experienced being a servant? What did you do? How did you feel?
5. What are some of the ordinary places in which you can model the servanthood of Jesus?

## Notes

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## Daily Readings

*Please note: We begin the year by focusing our attention on the gospel of Mark. The passages for this week focus on the last days of Jesus in Jerusalem. This is week nine of our reading from Mark.*

**Monday, March 9** – Read Mark 14:10-25. This passage includes Judas’ bargain to betray Jesus and the institution of the Lord’s Supper. These passages are dripping with dread. We know the crucifixion is coming. How will the disciples respond to the pending arrest and crucifixion of Jesus? They seem brave here, but will they be able to stand in the time of trial? The same is true for us. We are quick with words of gratitude and praise for God when things are going well. But how will our faith hold when circumstances are difficult? Do you feel moments of fear and anxiety? Do you compromise your faith when following Christ means a change to comfortable living?

**Tuesday, March 10** – Read Mark 14:26-31. Here Jesus confronts Peter with the prediction that all will falter and flee when threat comes. Jesus points out that Peter will not only hide but will clearly deny Jesus before the night is done. Mark goes on to comment about the disciples, **“all of them said the same.”** This is a difficult passage for most Christians. We know that we, too, in word or deed, have denied the authority of Christ. In what ways do you compromise your commitment to Christ in your words or actions?

**Wednesday, March 11** – Read Mark 14:32-42. As the arrest and crucifixion of Jesus approaches, Jesus takes his most trusted disciples (Peter, James and John) to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray. Three times he finds them sleeping, when he has asked them specifically to stay awake with him. As Jesus prays for God to remove the cup of suffering from him, he adds, **“not my will but yours be done.”** Clearly, Jesus shows us full obedience, even in the face of death, while the disciples can not even stay awake for an hour. As you read this passage and reflect on the sacrificial love of God, can you pray the prayer “Lord, not my will, but yours be done?”

**Thursday, March 12** – Read Mark 14:43-52. The anguish of this passage is illustrated by Judas’ betrayal with a kiss. While Jesus is willing to die for us, his betrayal is marked by the intimate expression of a kiss. Picture the act of Judas kissing Jesus. Now picture the look of grief and disappointment on Jesus’ face.

**Friday, March 13** – Read Mark 14:53-65. Mark wants us to know that the trial of Jesus was unjust. Jesus is innocent of the crimes brought against him. Can you think of times in your life when you have unjustly accused God of something?