

## Sermon Notes – September 19, 2021

(Mark 9:30-37)

Many of you know when I say, “G.O.A.T.” what that means – “Greatest Of All Time.” Well, Jesus’ disciples wanted to talk about who was going to be great in the kingdom of God.

I heard about an adult Sunday School class of young married couples that was meeting in their church. Before the teacher got ready to start the lesson, they were arguing about their college Alma Maters and who went to the best college. One guy said, “I went to NC State. You know they’re number one!” Another one said, “No, Carolina at Chapel Hill’s got ‘em beat!” One said, “I went to Davidson and that’s the best college!” There was one little fellow sitting there (he and his wife), and he was real quiet. They said, “Well, Johnny, where did you go to college?” He said, “Well, I just went to a little small school up north, in the north-east U.S.” They said, “Well, what’s the name of it?” He said, “Yale. Have you ever heard of it?” They all got quiet because they knew how hard it was to get into Yale. We want to go to the greatest and we often want to be the greatest. We want to be number one.

Jesus understood our desire to be great and our need to compete. He wasn’t upset with the disciples because they were ambitious, but he wanted them to balance that ambition with love for God and love for their neighbor.

You know, if you were asked, “Who was the greatest?” – some of you have heard the story of Muhammed Ali. At one time, Muhammed said, “I am the greatest boxer that ever lived.” A reporter asked him, “When you say ‘the greatest’ are you saying ‘the greatest boxer’ or ‘the greatest human being’ that ever lived?” He said, “I’m going to be the greatest boxer of all time.” The reporter said, “Fifty years from now, do you think people will still recognize you as the greatest boxer?” Muhammed Ali said, “Well, in fifty years, none of us in this room will be living, probably. I’ll be forgotten as the greatest boxer, but the only thing I won’t be forgotten for is how I helped and aided my people.” He was pretty smart, wasn’t he?

***Jesus said, “If you want to be great in the kingdom of God, it’s not about your power, your status or your position; it’s not about how***

***much you own and how much wealth you have -- it's about servanthood and serving God.***” He said, “Whoever humbles himself (like this little child) -- whoever serves the least of these, welcomes me.” You see, when Jesus took a little child in his arms, a child (in that day) had no status - no rights. They were just a piece of property. They were like the deaf and the dumb; they were like a slave and they had no rights. Jesus had a child to stand in front of him and then he picked him up, and he said, “Whoever welcomes one of these little ones, welcomes me. But, he doesn't just welcome me, he welcomes the One - God the Father - who sent me.” Jesus calls us to be servants -- to humble ourselves and be a servant.

What does it mean to be great in the kingdom of God? ... to go and do like Jesus, the greatest of all - the Master. He went to the lowest and made them feel like they were equal to everyone else because they are, in God's sight.

There's a true story about a little boy named Trevor Ferrell. He grew up in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Trevor saw a news program with his parents one night about the homelessness in downtown Philadelphia. It concerned him and he wanted to do something about it. “Mom, Dad, we've got to do something! Can't we take some blankets or some food and go down and help the homeless on the street?” So, his mom and dad talked about it. The weekend came and they rounded up some blankets, took them to downtown Philadelphia, and handed them out to some of the homeless on the street. The next weekend, they decided that they were going to make some peanut butter sandwiches and take clothes; so, little Trevor went around to his neighbors and collected clothes and blankets. Again that weekend, they took sandwiches, blankets, and clothes to the homeless. A few weeks into doing that, a news reporter heard the story about this little boy who had it on his heart to help the homeless in downtown Philadelphia. So, he did a story on him. He said, “Trevor, what in the world made you want to do this?” Trevor said, “I guess it's the Jesus living in me that makes me want to do it.” (The Jesus living in me that makes me want to do it.)

Dr. Albert Schweitzer was a medical missionary in Africa years ago. Before he was a medical missionary, he was a concert pianist and organist in Europe. He was also a well-known medical doctor. He left his

lucrative practice to be a medical missionary and start a hospital in a poor section of Africa. He was there for many years, in fact, until he died. Right before he died, a reporter asked him, “Who’s the greatest person in the world, Dr. Schweitzer?” He said, “Some unknown person who’s doing deeds of love.”

I want you to know that there are a lot of unknown people in this church who do a lot of deeds of love -- you take people to the doctor; you take food and drop it off; you pick-up hygiene kit items for school kids; you do all kinds of stuff that a lot of people in this church don’t even know you do - and I’m sure some of you do. Thank you for what you’re doing because Jesus knows, whether anybody else does or not. *Jesus said, “Wherever you go and reach out to the least among us” - it doesn’t matter if they’re a child, an elderly, the poor, an immigrant, whoever they are - and you welcome them, accept them, and extend hospitality to them - you’ve welcomed him -- and great are you, in the kingdom of God.*

“The greatest” will be those who go where Jesus goes, does what he does, and follows his example. “The greatest” are those not into “self-promotion.” You see, Jesus’ disciples wanted to be ambitious and there’s nothing wrong with wanting to take care of your needs and your family. Jesus understood that natural need. But, what he’s saying is, “Balance it out with your love for God and love for one another.” If your main driving force in life is just to be materially successful and all of that, you’re going to be unhappy at some point. God is going to ask us to give an account of our lives - how have we served one another and him? “Greatest” is to be a blessing to others and not just your own family and friends.

I want to retell a story told by Pastor Edward Markquart - who tells a true story about a man in his church named Bill Grant. Bill Grant and his wife owned a restaurant business for years. They took early retirement because he got pancreatic cancer. They had fostered 24 children in their home over the years, but when he retired, he signed-up for his church’s mission board. He signed-up to go to Louisiana after Hurricane Katrina because he wanted he and his wife to run the food truck for the volunteers. Lots of people from their church went as team volunteers to rebuild houses and pick-up debris and that kind of thing after the hurricane. He wanted to serve food, and that’s exactly what he

did. He went on two mission trips and served food to the volunteer workers. He always served with a smile, dishing out the food. They said he was always giving words of appreciation and encouragement to the volunteers when they would come back discouraged. Most of the people on that trip didn't know that Bill Grant had pancreatic cancer and it was terminal. After the second mission trip, Bill came home and he went into the local hospital. Pastor Markquart said that he went to see Bill in the hospital. He said, "Most people going into this man's room would say that he was just a weak, dying, feeble old man, but I saw a man lying there great in the kingdom of God. He was always encouraging people on those mission trips. He had done that all his life. As a foster parent, he loved and encouraged children who had nobody else. Even in the hospital, he would encourage and appreciate the nurses, even in his pain." Pastor Markquart said, "I went out to the nurses station after visiting Mr. Grant, and I told the charge nurse, with tears rolling down my face, that the man you're serving in that room is great in the kingdom of God. He loves God and he wants to serve and humble himself and appreciate everyone. That's a great man in the kingdom of God."

What kind of legacy will you and I leave when we leave this world? Will it just be money and land and possessions -- or will we have made a difference in the lives of people and have served God and have served our fellow human beings? Philip Yancey, who wrote the book, "The Jesus I Never Knew," said, "You can gauge the size of a ship that has passed out of sight by the huge wake that it leaves behind." What kind of wake will you and I leave behind? Will we have touched lives and made a difference in serving God and one another? It's not about just our advancement and promotion, it's about God and others. "The greatest" in the kingdom of God is not based on status. That was important to the Jewish men; it's important to us today. Jesus said, "Are you going to be a servant for me?" "The greatest" will be based on your servanthood. May God help us to grow in humbling ourselves to serve him. Holding a little child, Jesus said, "He who welcomes one of these, welcomes me" - whether that person be a child, an elderly, the poor, an immigrant, etc.