

Who Is The Greatest?

Good morning Pleasant Hill! How was your week? I had a good week. It was a 4 day work week so you know it had to be good right? It was good for a few other reasons too though. On Sunday our community group named a few people that we wanted to reach out to to try to connect with and have gospel conversations with. We set our minds on being gospel focused. As a result we had the chance to serve and love several people this week.

On Thursday night, during the FasCar Rally, which by the way was truly AMAZING I had the opportunity to serve a man who came asking for help. I'll not go into his story fully here but know that he was loved, prayed with and served and Jesus name was made great.

God is moving at Pleasant Hill brothers and sisters in Christ. We need to faithfully set our minds to serving as we are called to serve so that Jesus name continues to be made great!

If you have your Bible with you, and I hope you do, go ahead and turn with me to the book of **Mark**. We will be finishing **chapter 9** today. We will be covering **verses 30 through 50**.

Anyone good at math? How many verses will we cover today? 50 minus 30? Anyone? If you said 20 verses you're wrong. Well, kind of. We will be covering 18 verses today, not 20.

Let me explain. Depending on which translation of the Bible you have you MAY have 20 verses but as I read from the ESV, English Standard Version, you'll notice that I will not read **verses 44 and 46**, they aren't in the ESV translation.

That begs the question why? Why would the ESV leave out **verses 44 and 46** from their pages? Are they unbiblical? Are they trying to hide truth from the Bible that God intended to be included?

The reason why they aren't in the ESV is because those two verses aren't included in the earliest manuscripts we have. There are multiple early manuscripts throughout the ages of the Bible. Without boring you with all of the details I'll summarize it for you and if you're still interested in hearing more about it you can research it for yourself this week.

The manuscripts we have are broken into Codex. Codex B and Codex Sinaiticus (sigh-nay-ti-kus) are the earliest two manuscripts that we have available to us. They date back to the early 4th century. Those two verses are not included in those manuscripts. It's believed that those two verses were later added by scribes to illustrate the severity of hell after each point as Jesus talks about hell with His disciples.

So what does **verses 44 and 46** say? Those verses read, "*where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.*", which we see in **verse 48** in the ESV. The ESV doesn't remove anything from the Bible that the translators thought was there from the beginning. In fact, the part that's missing is still there but only once as it was in the earliest manuscripts. However, if you have a Bible with those verses included, that's okay, several manuscripts have them in there. I just didn't want you to be confused as we read the passage this morning.

So with that in mind, let's go ahead and read our passage for today. **Mark chapter 9 verses 30 through 50** reads, "*30 They went on from there and passed through Galilee. And he did not want anyone to know, 31 for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, 'The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him. And when he is killed, after three days he will rise.'*" *32 But they did not understand the saying, and were afraid to ask him. 33 And they came to Capernaum. And when he was in the house he asked them, 'What were you discussing on the way?' 34 But they kept silent, for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest. 35 And he sat down and called the twelve. And he said to them, 'If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.' 36 And he took a child and put him in the midst of*

them, and taking him in his arms, he said to them, **37** "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me."

38 John said to him, "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us." **39** But Jesus said, "Do not stop him, for no one who does a mighty work in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. **40** For the one who is not against us is for us. **41** For truly, I say to you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ will by no means lose his reward.

42 "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea. **43** And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. **45** And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell. **47** And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, **48** 'where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.' **49** For everyone will be salted with fire. **50** Salt is good, but if the salt has lost its saltiness, how will you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another."

May God bless the reading of His Word. Will you pray with me? Amen.

Last week we read that Jesus took Peter, James and John to the top of a mountain and while they were there Jesus was transfigured into His heavenly form. We read that Moses and Elijah were there talking with Him signifying the Law, the prophets and the fulfillment of the Law in the persons of Jesus represented in harmony.

God's plan for the salvation of mankind from the beginning was on display and it was beautiful. After the transfiguration Jesus, Peter, James and John came down the mountain to find the other 9 disciples in a dispute with the Pharisees and a large crowd who had gathered to see the disciples cast out a demon from a boy.

The demon was deaf and mute and nothing the disciples did could cast him from the boy. After some discourse with the boy's father who lacked faith, begged Jesus to help him have faith and Jesus cast the demon from the boy and he was set free. After the crowds left the disciples asked Jesus why they couldn't cast out the demon and He told them that there are some things that can only be done by prayer.

There are people that you and I can share the gospel with, we can love, we can serve and we can give them every reason that we can think of to believe in Jesus and they will not hear us. Maybe better said, they cannot hear us. Only God can give them sight and hearing. We need to pray that God will open their ears and eyes to the gospel that Jesus came to give them new life.

Our prayer should be powerful weapons against the enemy. Are they?

That leads us to where we begin today. In **verses 30 through 32 Mark** writes, "**30** *They went on from there and passed through Galilee. And he did not want anyone to know,* **31** *for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, 'The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him. And when he is killed, after three days he will rise.'* **32** *But they did not understand the saying, and were afraid to ask him.'*"

After they left the mountain they headed back towards Galilee. Remember, Jesus is well known here. This is where His ministry began. This is His hometown. Everytime He comes here crowds of people gather around Him. Even in His home and His friends' homes people tear the roofs off homes to be near Him.

He's had many contentious conversations with the Pharisees and Scribes here as well. He knows that if they find Him they could try to kill Him before the time appointed for His death by the Father. The enemy is always looking to thwart God's plan for your life.

That's why Peter warns us in **1 Peter 5:8**, "*Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.*" The enemy isn't only looking to thwart God's plan for Jesus, He's looking to devour you and me as the children of God.

We need to be aware and pray for deliverance from Him daily. Again, your prayer life is crucial to your Christian walk! *If you are not praying you would be better served to walk through the African wilderness with no weapons at night than to face a day against the enemy without praying.*

Jesus, for the second time, tells His disciples about God's plan for Him. He told them "*The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him. And when he is killed, after three days he will rise.*" But they didn't get it. They didn't understand.

Have you ever prayed and asked God to give you direction in your life? Maybe it was about a job, or a relationship. Maybe it was praying asking God for help with a struggle or praying for a family member or friend and as God opens His plans so you can see you don't understand them?

You look at God and say, "No God! This isn't what I wanted!". You begin to tell God that you don't understand. You never asked Him to do what He's doing and if He'd just listen to you things would go much better for you or those you are praying for.

The disciples didn't get it. They didn't understand. Can you blame them? *The man they left their families, careers and lives for is telling them that He is going to be delivered into the hands of men, okay let's stop here for a moment. Who is delivering Him? Who delivered Jesus into the hands of men? Was it Judas? Satan? God?*

In **John chapter 10 verse 18** Jesus says, "*No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.*"

Jesus delivered Himself to be sacrificed for our sin. Jesus is our substitutionary atonement by choice. So when we read that Jesus told the disciples, *"The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men"* what he's telling them is there is a time when I will willingly give myself for the sins of those the Father has given me but that time is not now. He goes on to tell them that they will kill Him and after three days He will rise again.

These men believed that Jesus was the Messiah who had come to overthrow the Roman government and reestablish Israel as God's chosen nation hearing that Jesus will lose His life and be raised again, they didn't understand.

It's okay to not understand God's plans. The question is, do you trust Him even when you don't understand?

We know that they didn't understand because Mark tells us as much in **verse 32**. He writes, *"But they did not understand the saying, and were afraid to ask him"* Sometimes we're afraid to ask God because we know we won't like the answer.

The disciples weren't afraid to ask Jesus because they were afraid He'd yell at them. They were afraid to ask because it meant their ideas of what Jesus was supposed to do wouldn't be the reality of what Jesus was going to do.

I know this because of their conversation after Jesus tells them that He will die and be raised again. Look with me at **verses 33 and 34**. It reads, *"33 And they came to Capernaum. And when he was in the house he asked them, 'What were you discussing on the way?' 34 But they kept silent, for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest."*

There were 13 men walking long distances together. Jesus taught, they listened and they asked questions. As they walked the disciples talked to one another too. These were the disciples. They were the men who were given the charge of starting the

church, the bride of Jesus! They were given the charge of sharing the gospel and building the body of Christ!

I'm sure they were talking about deep theological things. They were wrestling with deep mysteries of eternity and delving deeply into the things that men who are called to preach cover in seminary, right?

Nope. They were bickering with one another over who was called first, who Jesus liked more and when Jesus sets up His Kingdom who is going to be His right hand man. Can you imagine those conversations?

Have you ever tried to have an argument with your spouse at a family gathering? Is it easy to keep it quiet? Do you remember being little and if you had brothers or sisters and fighting with them in the back of the car and trying not to let your mom and dad know? How'd that work out for you?

These men were having a quiet argument with the God of the universe within literal earshot and they were oblivious to the fact that Jesus knew what they were talking about.

Let me give you a clue. If these men could speak telepathically their conversations would be heard just as clearly as they would be if they were screaming at each other in the presence of Jesus.

God knows your hearts! God knows your thoughts! There is no hiding them from Jesus! So when the Holy Spirit convicts you of your heart and your thoughts and you try to hide them deep in your heart so He can't see them; know that the only thing that you are doing is planting those thoughts in the fertile ground of your corrupt heart and they will grow more quickly than weeds. They will choke the life out of your new heart and they will cause a callus to grow where God had planted a soft and tender heart.

When you are confronted with sin by the Holy Spirit, confess. Talk to Jesus. He already knows your hearts better than you know them yourselves.

This is the third week I'm going to say this, but I have to say it again. When Jesus asks questions, it's not because He wants to learn something new, it's because He wants us to learn something about ourselves.

When Jesus asks the disciples, "*What were you discussing on the way?*" He knew. He wanted them to confess it to Him. I imagine right now, in your hearts and minds God is asking you a question and the answer to that question drives to the heart of the sin that you're hiding from Him.

You have two choices right now, in this moment. Do you hide the answer in your heart and let it grow deeper roots, or do you weed the sins hidden in your heart and confess them to Him. He already knows. The question is, do you trust Him enough to bear them to Him?

Jesus sees this as a teachable moment for the disciples. He begins telling them what it takes to be great in His Kingdom. It's not being a brilliant political mind. Being great in Heaven doesn't involve power, money, or willingness to work long hours.

In **verses 35 through 37** Jesus says, "*If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.*" That's so backwards to our thinking isn't it? If you want to be first in Heaven, if you want to be the greatest, then you have to be the greatest servant.

Servants in our world are looked at as less. They are looked at as beneath us. Servants don't earn big wages. Servants don't live in big houses. Servants don't own new cars. Servants barely get by. Servants rely on whatever the Master gives them trusting that He will take care of them.

So if you're going to be a servant, it's better that you are a servant of the King because He has more than enough to provide for you.

Jesus didn't say, "*If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of **the King.***" did He? No, Jesus said, "*If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.*" **OF ALL.**

That means even if there is NOTHING the person you are serving can do for you, you serve them as if they were the King Himself. That kind of puts a new spin on things doesn't it? I mean the disciples were just arguing about who would be the greatest in heaven.

I'm sure they were bickering over who was called by Jesus and in what order. They may have mentioned who cast out the first demon, who was introduced to the crowds first as a disciples, who Jesus talks to first thing in the morning, on and on an on they were giving themselves accolades to demand their place in Jesus Kingdom.

But they didn't get it. Jesus was telling them that none of that matters. I'm telling you that none of that matters. **If you want to be recognized by Jesus when you stand before Him, if you want to hear Him say, "*Well done my good and faithful servant. You have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.*" then you need to serve all as you are called to serve.**

The world around us is filled with people who have needs. The world around us is filled with people who are looking for someone to believe in, they are looking for someone to show them that they are worth something and they are loved. We are called to serve, we should be seeking them and sharing with them the love of God through the gospel of Jesus Christ. That's our high calling.

I challenge you to begin anew this week. Search your minds for people that God has placed you in the midst of that you can serve. After you think of them, put an

action plan in mind. See them as God sees them and serve them as Christ served us.

Jesus then brought a child to them and picking the child up He said them, *"Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me."*

If you want to receive Jesus, if you want to receive the Father, seek those who need the love of God and serve them. Stop letting your heart, your thoughts, your desires keep you from serving. If you want to be close to Jesus receive those who need to be served.

After Jesus called out the disciples for their corrupt thoughts and trying to hide their sin, John speaks up for the disciples. Look at **verses 38 through 40** with me. It reads, *"38 John said to him, 'Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us.' 39 But Jesus said, 'Do not stop him, for no one who does a mighty work in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. 40 For the one who is not against us is for us. 41 For truly, I say to you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ will by no means lose his reward.'"*

These men amaze me. They amaze me because they are me. I see myself in who they are. They are men who love Jesus. They are men who were chosen and called out by Jesus and they are men who strive to walk with Jesus but somehow they just keep missing the point when Jesus talks to them.

Listening is a skill. It is. Listening requires you to hear what the other person says fully and trying to understand what they are saying before you begin trying to explain your side or your thoughts. It's really really hard to do because all of us think all the time. We have our thoughts and opinions and as someone speaks we already kind of know where they are going so we pull up our thoughts about what we think they are saying in our minds and are prepared to make a rebuttal to them about why we agree or disagree with what they are saying.

It's a skill to stop our minds from doing that. A good listener is able to fully hear what the person is saying then before they reply they ask questions to clarify things that they think they understand in case they misunderstood what the person that they are listening to is saying. Not many people do that.

John didn't do that. Jesus had just tried to explain what it takes to be first or great in heaven. It takes serving and loving even those we may not think to love or serve. While Jesus is talking John is thinking, "Yeah but, we're supposed to be great and we were given the power to cast out demons and some other guys that don't even follow you are doing the same thing and you didn't recognize them on the mountain like you did us!"

It doesn't say it, but sometimes I wonder if Jesus ever pauses and sighs when this kind of stuff happens, not just in the lives of His disciples but when He is dealing with me in my life too.

Jesus is teaching a profound eternal truth and the entire time He's teaching, John's mind is forming an argument about why he's right and someone else is wrong. Have you ever done that? Have you ever pointed out to Jesus someone else's wrongs when your convicted by the Holy Spirit?

It's human nature to deflect our sins and point the attention towards someone else. Jesus wasn't having it though. In **verses 39 to 41** Jesus said, "*Do not stop him, for no one who does a mighty work in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. 40 For the one who is not against us is for us. 41 For truly, I say to you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ will by no means lose his reward.*"

You and I are not called to judge the hearts of men. God knows those whom He has called His own. Most scholars believe that John is referring to the disciples of John the Baptist casting out demons. Most likely when the disciples saw them casting out

demons in Jesus name they rebuked them because they were not publicly given that power by Jesus as the disciples were.

The Shepherd knows who are His sheep, the disciples do not know them all. We need to be cautious not to condemn people who love and serve people in Jesus name.

We need to be aware of heresy and those who will teach false doctrine about God when it arises and refute it with correct teaching but if someone is serving in the name of Jesus and it destroys the kingdom of Satan then more power to them.

Let's wrap up our time together by reading **verses 42-50**. It reads, "**42** *Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea.* **43** *And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire.* **45** *And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell.* **47** *And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell,* **48** *'where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.'* **49** *For everyone will be salted with fire.* **50** *Salt is good, but if the salt has lost its saltiness, how will you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.*"

Jesus clearly delineates the lines between spiritual things and physical things in the part of the passage. He draws the lines between sin and our hands, sin and our feet, and sin and our eyes. Our hands, feet and eyes all lead us into sin.

We read in **1 John chapter 2 verse 16**, "*For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world.*"

I imagine that He still had the small child that He picked up in His arms when He started talking to them about receiving those with faith. As He continued talking He again makes reference to the child by saying *"Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin,"*.

Let's pause here for a moment. Are the little ones Jesus is talking about only small children?

If you and I cause small children to sin then it would better for a millstone to be hung around our necks and be thrown into the sea. Is the narrow reading of this text most correct?

No, the faith of the child is what Jesus is referring to in this passage. As brothers and sisters in Christ, all of our faith is due to the grace of God calling us and choosing to save us. We are given a great charge by the Father to love and serve one another and to love and serve those around us.

Faith is a delicate thing. We talked a little bit about that last week. Just as children can be hurt and lose their faith, so too can those who are working out their faith in fear and trembling. We need to be aware and care for one another so that we are not hindering their faith.

So Jesus lays out the differences in the flesh and the spirit and the consequence of them both. If you lose an eye on earth, if you lose your ability to walk, speak or hear, it has no bearing on your eternity. Your eternity and your flesh have nothing in common.

The flesh is flawed, sinful and broken. Your eternity is perfect, kept and held by a loving Father. If we spent half the time striving for spiritual things that we spend on fleshly things, how different our world, our families and our church would be.

The cost of losing a hand is you can't grasp anything anymore. The cost of losing a foot is you need a wheelchair to get around. The cost of losing an eye is you will

need a guide to lead you. The cost of losing your soul is you will spend eternity in a place where the worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.

Look that's not me saying it. I'm not making that up. I realize it's not popular to say, but hell is real. Jesus Himself says that people will go there for eternity.

The fear of hell should never be the reason for someone to follow Jesus. The love of Jesus is the ONLY reason to follow Him.

But know this, hell is real. If anyone dies without repenting of their sin and turning to Jesus for forgiveness their eternity will be spent in hell separated from the love of God.

The disciples, for all of their accolades from Jesus and all of their faithfulness to this point were still new believers. Even their faith was new. I imagine that Judas was one of the people who were arguing about who was going to the greatest. He had faith in Jesus, but at some point His faith was lost.

Jesus knows that even among those who have claimed His name, their faith is new and delicate. You and I need to care for one another's faith.

Jesus tells His disciples in **verse 50**, "*Salt is good, but if the salt has lost its saltiness, how will you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.*"

Salt preserves. Faith preserves us. It keeps us. If salt no longer acts like salt, if it no longer preserves, it is useless and needs to be thrown away. So too our faith, if we lose the power of our faith, if we lose our faithfulness, there is no way to regain it.

Jesus told His disciples to have salt in yourselves, have a faith that is contagious in yourselves and live at peace with one another. Those are good words for us today. If you have faith in Christ, whether it's strong or on wobbly ground, lift up one

another. Strengthen one another. Let go of disputes that may cause someone to abandon their faith.

Begin time of response.

Anytime we take communion I like to read from **1 Corinthians 11:23-26** which reads, *"For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, 'Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.' In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.'"*

For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes." Would you stand and pray with me as we begin this time of response? Pray. Amen.