

Bible Study Guide: Week of 9-13-2021

1. Read through the passage below
2. Read my notes and commentary
3. Read the questions at the end and ponder or discuss with others

Pastor Andrew

Mark 9:30-37

30They went on from there and passed through Galilee. He did not want anyone to know it; 31for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, “The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again.” 32But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him.

33Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, “What were you arguing about on the way?” 34But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest. 35He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, “Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.” 36Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, 37“Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.”

30They went on from there and passed through Galilee. He did not want anyone to know it; 31for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, “The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again.” 32But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him.

We notice a similar pattern to last week’s reading:

1. Jesus makes a statement about himself using the term “Son of Man” to refer to his impending capture, torture, murder, and vindication.
2. The disciples show a fundamental misunderstanding of Jesus’ words. Last week, it was Peter taking Jesus aside to rebuke him for his words. This week, it is the disciples’ lack of understanding, their fear of asking about it (perhaps because of Jesus’s statement last week—“get behind me, Satan.”) Also in v. 34, the disciples show by their argument over who is the greatest that they do not grasp Jesus’ words at all.
3. Jesus offers correction. Last week, this took the form of Jesus’ statement that whoever wants to follow him must deny themselves and take up their cross in order to follow him. This week, it is Jesus’ lifting up of a child as an example of humility and service to others.

This is Jesus’ second passion prediction (of three total) in the Gospel of Mark. Each one takes this form—Jesus makes a declarative statement about himself and his coming suffering, the disciples show a lack of understanding, and Jesus offers corrective teaching. This pattern is helpful to us today as followers of Jesus. We, too, are those who forget and need a reminder of the way of Jesus; the way of the cross.

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The disciples’ arguing over which of them was the greatest is comical at this point in the gospel. Peter, James, and John had just experienced the Transfiguration at the start of chapter 9. In that scene, they proved to have nothing useful or helpful to say or do in light of Jesus’ sudden brightness and the appearance of Moses and Elijah. There, the splendor of Jesus, along with the divine voice telling the disciples to pay attention to Jesus should have been convincing to the three disciples gathered there, but they proved incompetent.

Once back down the mountain, they stumble upon the other disciples who are arguing over their inability to cast out a demon from a person—a task Jesus must do for them. By this point, they should be convinced of their own inadequacy. Yet, we read, they argued among themselves which of them was the greatest. Perhaps this is mere foolishness, perhaps delusion, or perhaps insecurity or bravado. In any case, Jesus seems to know what they've been discussing and they seem ashamed to speak to him about it.

Yet he uses a “little child”—the Greek is *paidion*, meaning infant or helpless, immature child. Rather than lifting up this child as an example of faith as he does elsewhere in the gospels, here Jesus tells the disciples that it is not about which of them is greatest in their own right or by their own strength, but more about how they treat even the least and lowest. Children—infants—in the ancient world were looked down upon as being without any official standing or status. Although children were important as heirs, that was more about who they would become and a lot less about their intrinsic worth. So Jesus takes a person who would have been considered useless, worthless, and a liability and says to the disciples, in essence, “how you treat the least and the lowest matters a whole lot more than which one of you is the greatest.” These disciples (like all disciples) need a steady dose of reminders about who Jesus is and why he came.

Discussion/Reflection Questions:

- 1. Why do you think the disciples didn't understand Jesus' mission even after Jesus' clear explanations?**
- 2. Why do you think the disciples were afraid to ask Jesus about his statements?**
- 3. In what ways do we, like the disciples did, show that we don't understand the mission of Jesus?**