

Sermon – Mark
Sunday June 20, 2021

Hi, my name is Jeremy and I'm one of the pastors here at Cornerstone.

Question for you. How many of you want to be great?

- Maybe you want to be great at work. You want to develop your skills and knowledge, you want to solve problems and execute well. You want to achieve your goals and lead your organization into the future.
- Maybe you want to be great in relationships. You want to be a great spouse, a great parent, a great son or daughter, a great friend.
- Maybe you want to be great at your hobby. You want to be great at music or sports, cooking or gardening, painting or photography.
- Maybe you want to be great in ministry. You want to make an impact through your gifts and service as a small group leader, a worship team member, a Sunday school teacher, someone who serves the homeless or supports a great cause.

How about you? What's one area in your life where you want to be great? Type your answer into the chat.

We all want to be great. And you know who else wants you to be great? God. In fact, he created you for greatness. He's given you gifts and abilities. He's empowered you with his Spirit.

He wants you to be great. But here's the problem. The problem isn't our desire to be great. The problem is often our motivation.

I think you'd agree that we live in an extremely self-centred culture. We grow up thinking, It's all about me. We grow up asking, What's in it for me?

And here's the problem. We often take our desire for greatness – which God has given us - and direct it not towards a greater purpose, but towards our own benefit. We get our motivation not from Jesus but from the world.

How do we do that?

Some of us want to be great so we can feel respected. How many of you know what the GOAT is? I'm not talking about the ugly farm animal with the horns and weird eyes. GOAT is an acronym that stands for Greatest Of All Time.

We want the accolades. You want to feel appreciated and respected.

Some of us want to be great for the fame. When young people were asked what they want to be when they grow up, do you know what the number one answer was? A celebrity.

We want the fame. You want more followers, more popularity, more people to know who you are.

Some of us want to be great to validate ourselves. If you grew up feeling criticized or put down, it's easy to want to prove yourself to others or even to yourself.

We want that validation. You want to show that you've made it, that your critics were wrong.

I want to be a great pastor. I want to be great at what I do. I want my ministry to help people love Jesus more and equip them in their discipleship and leadership.

But in my darker moments, it might be because I want to feel appreciated and respected. It might be because I want to prove that I can do something special. It might be because I want to prove that quitting my job as a Chartered Accountant wasn't a mistake.

God wants you to be great. But greatness isn't driven by a need for respect, fame or validation.

How does Jesus want you to be great? As a disciple, what's your motivation for doing what you do?

We're in a series called *Discipleship: 4 Perspectives*. We're looking at the theme of discipleship in each of the four gospels. Our hope is that you will see a beautifully rich picture of what it means to follow Jesus and that you'll be encouraged to follow him more closely in your day-to-day life.

Last week, we looked at the essence of discipleship according to Matthew's gospel. Today we're going to look at discipleship through the lens of Mark's gospel.

One of the things we see a lot in the book of Mark is how the disciples constantly fail to understand Jesus. Why is that? It's because they're stuck in the world's values. They're stuck in what the world wants. They're stuck in how the world sees things.

In Jesus' words, they don't have in mind the concerns of God but only human concerns (Mark 8:33).

I wonder, How true is this of you and me? Even as disciples of Jesus, how stuck are we in the world's values? How stuck are we in wanting what the world wants? How stuck are we in seeing the way the world sees?

One of Mark's goals in writing his gospel is to help disciples like you and me do a heart check. Do I get my values from Jesus or from the world? Do I want the things that matter to God or myself?

The passage we're going to look at today takes place right after Jesus has predicted his death for the third time. He's just told his disciples that things are going to get really bad. He's going to be arrested, tortured and executed. It's going to be painful and brutal.

Jesus has just opened up and shared his heart. So how do they respond?

Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. "Teacher," they said, "we want you to do for us whatever we ask."

"What do you want me to do for you?" he asked.

They replied, "Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory."

"You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said. "Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?"

"We can," they answered.

Jesus said to them, "You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared."

When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. Jesus called them together and said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

(Mark 10:35-45)

This passage is about greatness. Jesus says if you want to be great, then you must be a servant. Notice he doesn't say you must serve. Serving is what you do: helping others, meeting a need, providing care – these are all things God wants you to do.

But how many of you know that it's possible to serve but to do it for the wrong reasons?

Jesus doesn't just tell you to serve, he says, be a servant.

For Jesus, greatness isn't self-centred, it's others-focused. It's not motivated by self-interest, it's motivated by a desire to bless. That's why **True greatness is seeking the best for others even at great cost to yourself.**

If you want to be great, Jesus says, Be a servant.

So what is a servant?

A servant is someone who serves their master. They don't call the shots. They don't make the rules. Their job is to do their master's will and carry out his purposes.

A servant will do anything, however costly or inconvenient. Because being a servant isn't just what you do, it's who you are. God doesn't just care about your actions, he cares more about your attitude and motivation.

So why do you want to be great? Why do you do the things you do?

What motivated Jesus to go to the cross?

James and John mistakenly believed that he did it for his glory.

Have you ever had anyone assume they knew why you did something because that's what they would have done? This is an example of James and John projecting their motivations onto Jesus. Because if it were them, they would have done it for their own glory.

Even when Jesus talks about his suffering, they think it will be worth the gain.

After all, he'll have a kingdom to rule, he'll have a throne to sit on, he'll have servants to attend to him. So what's a little suffering compared to all that?

We have an expression for this don't we? We say, *No pain, no gain.*

No pain, no gain can be a great mantra for achieving goals. It will motivate you, help you push through adversity and develop perseverance. But this mantra can't make you great. Why not?

Because who's the one who stands to gain from your pain. You. No pain, no gain is about motivating yourself to achieve the things you want - a better body, more money, a good job.

On the cross Jesus certainly gained a lot. He establishes his kingdom, he defeats his enemies, he sits on a throne. But who does he do it for? Does he do it for his own glory? No. He gave up his glory just to come to earth!

So why does Jesus go to the cross?

This is the only place in the book of Mark where he tells us his motivation. Verse 45.

For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. (v. 45)

Why does Jesus go to the cross? He doesn't do it for his own glory. He does it to rescue us from our sin. Jesus' motivation isn't self-centred, it's others-focused. Jesus doesn't say, no pain, no gain. He says, *my pain for their gain*. I will suffer the pain so that they can have the gain, so that they can be forgiven, so that they can be healed, so that they can have eternal life.

This is where we see the ultimate expression of greatness. On the cross. Because the cross is where Jesus pays the ultimate price for the sake of others.

That's what it means to be a servant. That's what true greatness looks like. That's why servanthood is vital to following Jesus. Why? Because **it's impossible to be a disciple and not be a servant**. We live in a fallen world. Our instinct is to make it all about us. Just like James and John, how often do your prayers start off: Jesus, I want you to do for me whatever I ask.

You might not ask for a place of honour in his new government, but you do ask him to bless you. You ask him to bless:

- Your family
- Your work
- Your finances
- Your health
- Even your ministry

Don't get me wrong. Jesus wants you to pray and he wants to bless you. But the question is, who are these blessings for? Are they always only for yourself?

James and John thought that Jesus' kingdom would be like every other kingdom. It would have the same values and power structure, only they would be the ones on the top. But what they didn't realize is that Jesus' kingdom is a radically different kind of kingdom. It turns the world's values upside down. And his people are a radically different kind of people. They're the people through whom God is advancing his upside down kingdom.

Pastor Tim Keller says that the cross doesn't simply save isolated individuals to bless them with a comfortable life. The cross creates a community on a mission of servanthood.

Do you realize this was God's plan all along? To create a people through whom he would bless the world.

Where do we see this? Back in the book of Genesis, God promised Abraham to create a nation through him. And through this nation he would bless the world:

"I will make you into a great nation,
and I will bless you;
I will make your name great,
and you will be a blessing.^[a]
I will bless those who bless you,
and whoever curses you I will curse;
and all peoples on earth
will be blessed through you. (Genesis 12:2-3)

God's people don't just go to church to worship. God's people don't just meet in small groups for Bible study and prayer. God's people are a *so that* people. We are blessed *so that* we can be a blessing.

Type into the chat, We are a so that people!

This means that God's blessings aren't for you to keep. You're not blessed to have a comfortable life. You're not blessed just to be happy. You're blessed to be a blessing. To shine wherever you go and to share God's love to a broken and hurting world.

But sometimes we forget this. Sometimes we expect certain benefits. In fact, sometimes the longer we're Christians, the more we demand privileges.

After hiring a new pastor, one church that I know of got a complaint from the wife of that new pastor. She was livid that her husband didn't get a reserved parking spot. As a result, their whole family had to make the long 3-minute trek across the parking lot to get to church just like everyone else. But he wasn't like everyone else. He was a man of God, anointed and called to serve God's people!

In Jesus' time, religious leaders expected special benefits. They felt entitled and used their power for their own gain. Of course, this never happens in the church today like it does in business or politics, right?

But if it did, do you know what Jesus would say?

Not so with you... whoever wants to become great, must be your servant (v. 43)

I've been at Cornerstone for over twenty years now. I've been a pastor for the last sixteen and we've had our own building for the last six. I know Cornerstone isn't perfect, but there are so many things I love about our church... and one of them is the pastors parking spot.

For those of you who haven't been to our building yet, we have three parking lots. One main lot closest to the building where all the prime spots are. And then two overflow lots further away.

On Sunday mornings, where do you think the pastors, staff and volunteers park? In the prime spots or in the overflow lots? In the overflow lots.

Why do we do this? We do it because we're a *so that* people. Of course, it would be more convenient for us to park in the main lot. But on any given Sunday when we used to worship in-person, we'd have lots of first-time guests.

We want our guests to have a great experience. We want them to feel welcomed and loved, like there's a place for them here. And one of the ways we try to do this is by saving them the best spots.

Why do we do this? We're a *so that* people. We're not blessed so we have the best parking spots, we're blessed so that we can bless others.

In fact, when many people walk into our building for the first time, they're often blown away by our facilities. One of the first questions they ask is, Who paid for all this? Did the Town give you the money?

Then we explain that it's all privately funded. Our church raised millions of dollars ourselves. Many members gave over and above their regular tithes and offerings. They gave up vacations, home renovations and major purchases.

Why did we do this? We're a *so that* people. We're not blessed to enjoy the comforts of life, we're blessed so that we can bless others.

God gave us this vision to build a community-centre facility where people from the community could come and enjoy great programs and make friends. It would be an opportunity for us to rub shoulders with our neighbours and share the love of Jesus. That's why we call Cornerstone Centre our gift to the community.

For those of you who haven't been to one of our physical worship services yet, there's a big glass wall on the west side of the building. It gives us a great view of the homes and the people who live in our community.

On Sunday mornings, it brings in lots of light and it gives people something to stare out at when they're trying to stay awake during my sermons. But it also does something else. It reminds us why we're here. We don't do all this just for ourselves. We do it for them, for our neighbours, for our community, for the people God loves.

We're a *so that* people. We're not blessed to live happy and comfortable lives. We're blessed so that we can bless others.

As a church, **we must never forget our calling to be servants**. I've seen many churches start off strong in the beginning, but over time they turn inward and make it about themselves.

When I was in high school, I wasn't a believer yet but I was spiritually curious. So I took the bus and went to check out a local church. When the service ended, I stood in the lobby all by myself waiting for someone to talk to me.

Now I didn't know how churches worked. But I assumed churches should be full of people who were kind and eager to talk to a new person. That's a reasonable expectation isn't it? So I waited and waited and waited.

I watched people walk right by me to join their friends who were standing right next to me in a closed circle. They looked like they were having a great time. Meanwhile, I felt totally awkward. Standing there all alone hoping someone would talk to me.

To me, this church felt like an exclusive country club where only members were allowed. Of course, they never said that. I'm sure they did great things and they were lovely people. But that's the message I got. I felt like this was a place for insiders, not for someone like me on the outside.

May this never be true of Cornerstone! Someone once said that the church is the only organization in the world that exists for its non-members.

I'm so thankful for the ways God has been working here. Many people tell us how they've been warmly welcomed. Many people tell us how they love the ways we serve our community. I praise God for that. He's given us a great vision and he's brought great people.

But I also believe there's more he wants us to do. And I pray that we would never become an inward-focused church that forgets our mission as disciples of Jesus.

I pray that we would remember that we are servants. That we exist not to live comfortable lives but to serve our Master's will. I pray that we would remember that we are a *so that* people. That listening to sermons, singing worship songs, joining small groups and practicing personal spiritual disciplines aren't just for ourselves, it's to make space for Jesus to shape us so that we can better serve and love others in his name.

If this is your hope and prayer as well, type Amen into the chat.

There are so many people in desperate need of Jesus. They need his love, healing and forgiveness. They need his hope, comfort and strength. How might God be calling you to be a servant to someone?

- Maybe he's calling you to help someone with a practical need.
- Maybe he's calling you to develop a relationship with someone.
- Maybe you're already serving some people, but he wants you to have more of a servant's heart.
- Maybe he's calling you to serve in one of our outreach initiatives with your small group.
- Maybe he's calling you to start up a new ministry or initiative, and use the gifts and passions he's given you help some people.

Here's another great opportunity. Cornerstone is preparing to reopen for in-person worship services starting July 11th. We need lots of people to serve in various roles. Would you consider serving? You can find out more about these roles on our website.

[Link: www.cornerstonechurch.ca/serve]

Regardless of where you're serving, as a disciple of Jesus, we're all called to be servants.

How is God calling you to be a servant today?

Serving is always great in principle but it's never easy. It will be hard and inconvenient. It will challenge you and take you out of your comfort zone. It will require sacrifices of your time, resources and energy. And after all that, you might not get any acknowledgement or appreciation.

How do you serve when it feels like you're giving more than you're receiving?

You look to Jesus.

For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

You and I have been ransomed. To be ransomed means that we were in bondage. Bondage to our self-centredness and sin. But Jesus paid the price to rescue us and he paid that price with his life.

That means that we don't belong to ourselves anymore, we belong to the one who redeemed us. We don't live for our purposes, we live for his purposes for the world.

James and John would later learn this. The same men who argued over who was the greatest, the same men who demanded places of honour, the same men who wanted glory for themselves. These men were transformed by the love of Jesus that they saw on the cross. And they became servants.

James would later become the first martyr of the early church. He inspired faith and courage among the believers. John would later become a powerful leader. He constantly reminded Christians to love one another.

Through Jesus' example and his death on the cross, James and John were set free from their self-centredness to finally experience true greatness: Seeking the best for others even at great cost to yourself.

This means that for you to be great...

- You don't need lots of natural gifts or charisma.
- You don't need lots of connections or power.
- You don't need to be super-smart or a high-achiever.

Martin Luther King Jr said, Everybody can be great because anybody can serve.

So don't waste your life chasing power and glory. Instead live a great life! Channel your passions and ambition not for your own benefit but for the benefit of others. Love others well not for your sake but for theirs. And give your life away for others just as Jesus gave his life away for you.

Greatness is seeking the best for others, even at great cost to yourself.

So if you want to be great, be a servant.