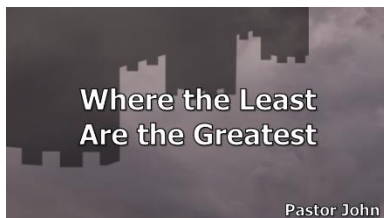


## **"Where the Least Are the Greatest"**

October 21, 2018

Mark10: 35-45

*<sup>35</sup> Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. "Teacher," they said, "we want you to do for us whatever we ask."<sup>36</sup> "What do you want me to do for you?" he asked. <sup>37</sup> They replied, "Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory."<sup>38</sup> "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?"<sup>39</sup> "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,<sup>40</sup> 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."<sup>41</sup> When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. <sup>42</sup> 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. <sup>43</sup> Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant,<sup>44</sup> and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. <sup>45</sup> 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."*



How many of you grew up with brothers or sisters or both? How many of you fought with them? How many of you enjoyed sibling rivalries with them? The Bible is full of sibling rivalries – Cain and Abel, Jacob and Esau, Joseph and his eleven brothers, Mary and Martha. Just like the sibling rivalries we experienced growing up – and maybe are experiencing now – each of these sibling relationships came

with its share of struggle and strife. Today we look at a sibling rivalry of sorts that began with two brothers' bold request and blossomed into strife in the family of disciples. Into this situation, Jesus speaks words of truth for the disciples then and for us, Jesus' disciples today. Let us pray...

"Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask."

- Mark 10:35


*"Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask".*

Boy is that a loaded request. Perhaps you have heard it before as a parent, as a coach, as a good friend. You just know that your child or friend is about to ask something even they know they should not ask. From James and John just making this request, we can infer a couple of things. First, the disciples have been with Jesus long enough to be comfortable enough with Him to ask this question. Second, they are getting to know each other and are starting to try and figure out where they measure up within the inner group that follows Jesus. This is a good example of thinking as the world thinks. They want to know if they are the favorite, or maybe if they are still valuable to the group if another is the preferred choice. Maybe a few have been hearing Jesus say that He will not be around forever, and they are beginning to size up the competition.

Clearly James and John have not been listening to Jesus and watching what Jesus does as carefully as they should have been up to this point. Since they left their boats on the seashore, James and John have seen healing after healing – restoring people to wholeness and even back to life. They have heard powerful preaching – about sowing seeds and letting their light shine. They have

witnessed Jesus' dominion over nature, as He calmed a storm just by speaking a word and, later, as He walked on the water. The twelve have even been sent out themselves and were able to heal the sick and cast out demons. They have been present when Jesus fed thousands – not once, but twice – starting with just a few loaves and fish each time. In Mark 8, they clearly heard what would be required if they wanted to follow Him. In verse 37, Jesus tells them, *"Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me"*. Deny yourself, take up your cross. Three of the disciples even witnessed the transfiguration and Jesus' ensuing conversation on the mountain with Elijah and Moses. And two of three that were there ask this question!

Jesus was kinder than I have been when asked such a question by a child, student, athlete, or friend. He replies, *"What do you want me to do for you?"* Much kinder than I would have been. Even though James and John have experienced so much with Jesus, they are still seeking their own agenda, still thinking the way the world thinks. And boy do they aim high: *"Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory"*. Not only second and third in command now, but also forever in eternity! Jesus simply replies, *"You do not know what you are asking"*. I would hope that had they thought it through, they would have come to realize this. But, being human, they did not think it through. James and John were known as the Sons of Thunder for their rough-hewn character, for their penchant to never back down, and for their aggressive behavior. For example, in Luke 9, they suggest calling down fire from heaven to destroy a Samaritan village that was unreceptive to Jesus. In some ways, this question aligns well with their early personalities.



Where the Least  
Are the Greatest

We look on James and John asking this question with a bit of smugness, I would guess. How could anyone ask to be second or third to Jesus? Yet, as brothers and sisters in Christ, we too are susceptible to asking this kind of question and other questions like it. Whenever we begin to think who is great or the best among us or when we try and rationalize who is most worthy of our attention or when we decide whose opinion is most valuable and listen only to that opinion, then we are succumbing to rivalries and division. Whenever we allow ourselves to slip into this kind of worldly and ungodly thinking, when we get caught up in ourselves, we are less likely to see God in the other, to hear His voice as it whispers to us.

Jesus then asks James and John if they can drink the cup that He will drink and be baptized with the baptism that He will endure. Culturally speaking, drinking the cup with someone indicated that you were willing to share in their fate. Sharing the cup was a sign of your pledge or your commitment to them, to join them in their destiny. In speaking of this baptism, Jesus is not speaking of the baptism in the River Jordan that began His ministry. He is speaking of the baptism of His death. On the cross, Jesus will be overwhelmed, flooded, immersed in the destiny that God has planned for Him since the beginning. Yes, these two disciples would drink the cup and they will experience the baptism of death. James would be the first disciple to be martyred. John would die to self, being transformed to the disciple known for his love. He would suffer as Jesus did, dying alone, in exile. But for now, in our passage, James and John fail to see that the path to glory begins on the road of suffering.

The rest of the disciples catch wind of James and John's request and they are not very pleased. They became indignant with James and John. Just as Jesus had become indignant when the disciples were keeping the children from Him, the ten become indignant with the brothers for wanting to elevate themselves above the rest of the group. We feel the same when something like this happens to us. We can relate to what the disciples were feeling. Jesus begins by reviewing the way the kingdom of the world operates in the halls of power. Jesus reminds them that in the world, *"those who are regarded as rulers of the*

"Those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them".

- Mark 10:42

*Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them".* The Romans say to jump and the conquered Jews ask, 'How high'? Those in authority can abuse their power and take advantage of

those under them. This is why the tax collectors we so despised by the locals – they collected what the Romans demanded plus a bit more for themselves.

This same power dynamic exists in our nation today. Power in the world view equates to the number of people under you, serving you. This power corrupts people and their thought processes. Because of this dynamic, we hear of and maybe some of us even experience abuses of power. We hear of this seemingly all the time in today's world. The *"#metoo"* movement is the most recent example of how perceived power and real power can be abused. So we, like the disciples, understand what it looks like and feels like to have someone exercise power over us in an abusive or negative way. I can picture a lot of disciples' heads nodding in agreement as Jesus makes this statement.

Jesus then redirects them to think in terms of God's kingdom. As always, Jesus' thinking is upside-down in relation to the world's thinking. In verses 43 and 44 Jesus says, *"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"*. Jesus is first saying that if they want to be really great in the kingdom of God, then they must be a servant to others. Second, if they want to be first in God's kingdom, then they will have to choose to be like a slave to all people – always doing whatever they can to help the other. This is radical, upside-down thinking.

"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."

- Mark 10:43-44

If you want to be great, it is not about how many people are below you, but it is about how many people are above you. If you truly want to please God, it is not about how many people serve you, but it is about how many people you serve. It is not about the glory you get, but it is about the glory that you bring to God. In all these things, it is about loving neighbor more than self. In following Jesus, in living out our faith, I think it all comes down to love. For us to live out an authentic faith, the basic question for each of us really comes down to this: are we willing to truly love others more than ourselves? It comes down to this question over and over, each and every day. Are we willing to truly love others more than we love ourself? Theologically and in our heart of hearts, we understand Jesus' way of thinking – the idea of loving others more than self. When viewed through our eyes of faith, the idea of being a loving servant to others makes perfect sense in our mind.

As our passage today closes, we get the 'why' Jesus calls us to live this way. Jesus modeled this way of living. In verse 45 we hear Jesus' logic for why we should love our neighbors: *"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"*. Even Jesus, clearly the greatest man ever, came to be a servant. He came not only to serve, but to willingly give His life to ransom us from the power of sin and death. If we are to really follow Jesus, then we must follow His personal example and become a servant to all. Up here, in our heads, we understand the call that Christ has placed upon our hearts and we know what it looks like to follow Jesus, but we can struggle to walk this out daily in our lives.

"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 10:45

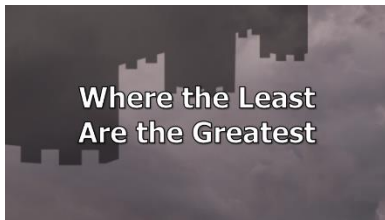
In the final talk of the Reach conference, Adam Weber addressed how we can reach and serve others authentically. It begins with understanding that Jesus loved us enough to come and suffer and die for us – that Jesus came as a ransom for many. Adam shared powerfully the realization that he himself had long ago and that now drives his passion to serve Christ and others. He shared



that one day he realized that Jesus came so that He could *"reach down into the pit that I had dug for myself, could take hold of me in my sin, and could pull me up out of that pit, and that Jesus could forgive and love*

*me"*. This made Adam realize how desperate he was for a Savior and a Lord. It is from this place of remembering what it felt like to be lost and broken, and then to be pulled up out of that pit, that Adam now seeks to serve and minister to others. It is from the place of brokenness and redemption that we can best

serve and love others as well. Whether that one in need of our love is wrestling with a broken marriage or an addiction to pills or pornography, or is struggling with how to pray or how to parent, or if they are dealing with jealousy or worry or anger in their lives – what they need is our love and compassion and to hear our story of how Jesus led us out of the brokenness that we were once in too. Those who are lost or broken need to hear how Jesus pulled us up out of that pit and loved us too. When we know what Jesus has done for us and when we are aware of what does for us, over and over each day, then our grateful response is to love others over and over, just as Jesus loves us. Adam spoke from the heart and brought many of us to tears. We get this “loving others” stuff when it is in our heart of hearts.



When we think of loving others, we know that there are many in our lives that are easy to love. If asked, we could each rattle off a long list of names of those that we find easy to love. For me, my list would start with my wife Kristin and my children, Matthew, Samuel, and Abby. They would be followed by my parents, Bob and Barbara, and by my brothers and sisters and their children, followed by my friends and so on. I would be willing to hazard a guess that you all have similar, long lists of those who are easy to love. But, truth be told, another much harder list of folks also exists within each one of us. Often it is comprised of those who have wronged us, those who we have been unable to forgive, those who have radically different ideas on politics and religion. It also includes those we deem unworthy of our love. On this list are also those who we see as



substantially different than us. Maybe this is not a short list. Yet we are called to love even these.

I first met Pat when I started volunteering on Friday afternoons at the HOPE Center. The HOPE Center is a day center for the homeless and those struggling with issues of poverty. Pat is a Native American man in his late sixties. Pat appeared to be gruff, crusty, and ready to fight at the thought of the drop of a hat. He is a Vietnam veteran and a recovering alcoholic. In my first few weeks there, this is how I saw Pat. He was a paid volunteer who did custodial work at the center. Pat would take out the trash at the end of each day, would clean out the coffee pot and get the coffee ready for the next day. He would clean the dishes if they piled up in the kitchen and would sweep and mop the area of the HOPE Center where the guests spent their day. On occasion someone would come into the HOPE Center who Pat did not like or did not get along with. It would take about a half-second to realize when this happened. Someone from the staff would usually have to get Pat back into the office area to calm him down. Well, one day it seemed Pat was running behind in the end-of-day operations and I asked if I could do the mopping - so he could do whatever else he needed to do. He very grudgingly handed me the mop and stomped off to do something else.



Pat was not someone I would naturally befriend. He was not someone I would seek out. He existed on the fringes of society and he like it that way. In my first

months at the HOPE Center I was pretty sure the grumpy, crusty man and I could co-exist in our own little worlds within the HOPE Center. I hate to admit it, but initially I did not see Pat as worth much of my time. How wrong I was. Over the course of my two years at the HOPE Center we became friends. I came to see Pat's servant heart for those in need in the community. He was not a "people person" but he did find his own way to think of others more than self. Whenever I am back in town I try and stop in at the center. When I see Pat we always share a man-hug and talk for a bit - catching up on what is happening in each other's lives. Yes, I enjoy seeing Roxanne and Anna, two of the mainstays, but I really go in to check in with Pat, my friend.

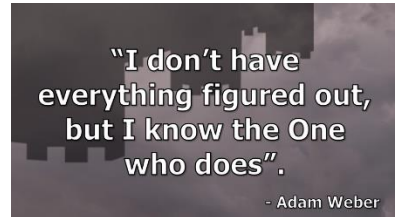


I struggled with Pat because I initially saw him as different than me. But, in many cases, we can also struggle with others because of who we are inside. We

are selfish by nature, so sometimes we want to keep God's love or God's attention to ourselves. Sometimes we think of our own wants and desires more than we think of the other's needs and desires. Yet like with James and John, like with the sibling rivalries that we used to engage in, we too must come to the point where we realize that God's love is so much bigger than we can imagine. When we understand the unending nature of God's love, then we know that we do not need to compete for God's love. We do not need to try and keep that love just to ourselves. We do not need to live in a me-first, all-others-last mentality. When we want to come up with a hierarchy for God's love, we are showing our spiritual immaturity. We are showing a lack of trust that God's love is big enough for us all. May it not be so with us. Instead, may we seek to love

and serve all of our brothers and sisters, helping to bring God's kingdom to earth, helping to spread His love.

Adam concluded his talk Saturday with these words: *"I may not have everything figured out, but I know the One who does"*. So do you. My friends, so do you. Go and share Jesus and His love with others this week, serving God alone, building God's kingdom here on earth, spreading His love. Amen.



### **GPS – Grow, Pray, Serve**

- 1) Who is the "Pat" in your life – the one you see as the least – the one who could help you grow the most in your faith?
- 2) What 'success' story do you have where God led you through or helped you overcome a struggle? How can this be a story you share?
- 3) In what ways was Jesus an example for us in service and humility and sacrifice? Where is Jesus calling you to be one of these this week?