

Main Idea: Today, as we come to Mark 9:33-50, we’re going to hear straight talk from The Servant about the two primary struggles of being a servant.

- I. Struggle #1: How we view of ourselves (33-37)
 - A. We tend to think of ourselves first (33-34).
 - B. We need to think of ourselves last (35-37).
 1. The Lord calls us to be servants.
 2. The Lord calls us to give attention to insignificant people.
- II. Struggle #2: How we view others (38-50)
 - A. We tend to be hard on others and easy on ourselves (38-40).
 1. The disciples had a holy-huddle mentality (38).
 2. Jesus took a grace approach.
 - B. We need to be hard on ourselves and gracious with others (41-50).
 1. Genuine disciples serve others in practical ways (41).
 2. Genuine disciples don’t cause others to sin (42).
 3. Genuine disciples deal firmly with their own sin (43-48).
 4. Genuine disciples work at living in peace with others (49-50).

Make It Personal: Three questions I need to ponder...

1. What do I think of myself?
2. What do I think of others?
3. What do I think about Christ?

Today, as we come to the end of Mark 9, we’re going to hear straight talk from The Servant about the struggles of being a servant. The Servant, of course, is Jesus. That’s how Mark presents Jesus in this gospel, as The Servant who came into this world not to be served, but to serve, ultimately by giving His life as a ransom for many. We who have received The Servant as our Savior are called by Him to be like Him. We’re called to be servants, as He is. And here’s where the struggle intensifies. The call to live as servants goes against every fiber in our self-inclined being. And the solution? According to Jesus, the solution is to take a good, hard look *at a child*.

Scripture Reading: Mark 9:33-50

It’s not easy to be a Christian. I don’t think we talk as much as we should about how hard it is to live the Christian life.

Please don’t misunderstand. It’s not hard to *become* a Christian. The Bible teaches that a person becomes a Christian simply by acknowledging his sinfulness, repenting, and believing in Jesus Christ, His atoning work on the cross, and His victorious resurrection. “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved,” Paul told the Philippian jailor in Acts 16:31. The jailor did and God saved him that very night.

No, it’s not hard to come to know Christ. But it is hard to live like Christ. The truth is, we don’t have the ability to live this kind of life, not in ourselves. The power comes from God, and to experience this power we must learn how to live a Spirit-controlled, Word-centered life. It’s not easy to be the kind of husbands and wives God calls us to be. It’s not easy to live a godly life on the job. It’s not easy to live for Christ at school. There is no part of the Christian life that is easy.

Simply stated, the life of a disciple of Jesus Christ involves *struggle*. Can we be victorious in the struggle? Absolutely. But to be victorious we must constantly face the reality of this struggle head on.

** Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ For a previous look at this passage, see the Mark series in 2004.

We're not unique. As we continue our journey through the gospel of Mark, today we come to an account that shows that Jesus' first disciples struggled, too. By taking a close look at what they did and how Jesus helped them, we can learn much about what it takes to please the Lord in our lives, challenges and all, and what makes that possible.

Here's where we're heading. Disciples of Jesus tend to struggle in two areas, as did the original twelve as seen in Mark 9:33-50. If we're going to be like our Savior, we must face and then deal with these two areas of potential struggle, not by simply trying harder either, but through the merit of Christ Himself.

The two areas of struggle? One, how we view ourselves (it's too inflated). And two, how we view others (it's too deficient of true love).

I. Struggle #1: How we view of ourselves (33-37)

I'm not talking about low self-esteem, which is really a misnomer (as sinners we have a very *high* view of ourselves and what we think we deserve, which is why the so-called *low* self-esteem kicks in). But that's a topic for another time. I'm talking about a tendency we all have as sinners, a proclivity that ruins marriages, strains parent-child relationships, fractures church families, and cripples work teams. It's this...

A. We tend to think of ourselves first (33-34). Just like the disciples did. Notice verse 33 (NIV), "They [that's Jesus and His disciples] came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, 'What were you arguing about on the road?'"

A Jewish rabbi would lead his disciples single file as they walked down a road or path (no ancient pupil walked abreast of his teacher). In Jesus' case, His twelve men formed a long line behind Him, thus giving them occasion to talk with each other without their Master knowing the subject of their conversation (or so they thought).

On this walking trip the disciples got wrapped up in a conversation they didn't intend their Master to hear. It led to an argument.

"What were you arguing about?" Jesus asked them. Of course, He knew. He always knows, brothers and sisters, for He is the Sovereign Lord.

Verse 34 says, "But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest." It's interesting that in the last story, according to verse 14, the scribes were arguing with the disciples. Now the disciples are arguing with each other. About what? About who is the greatest.

Why were they arguing about that subject? We're not told. Perhaps they were talking about the coming of the kingdom of God, which they knew Jesus was going to establish one day. Perhaps they were wondering how they would rank in the pecking order when it came to ruling in the coming kingdom.

Never mind that Jesus had just told them twice that prior to the coming bliss of the kingdom, He was going to be betrayed and die a horrible death on a cross. That part of His prediction didn't seem to stick.

We can guess what prompted the argument. Peter, James, and John had just been with Jesus on the mount of transfiguration. "We're more important to Jesus than you," they said. "We're His inner circle. Why, He can't even depend on you. You couldn't cast out that demon," they chided.

It's amazing, yet true. Jesus had just taught them about His upcoming betrayal and death (verses 31-32). They didn't seem to understand that subject, so they changed the subject, and started talking about their favorite subject.

Themselves. *I am greater than you are. No, I am. No, I am.*

Is this a problem that's unique to these twelve men? No, it certainly is not. This is a universal problem. We have all gone, in the words of the prophet Isaiah, *our own way*

(Isa 53:6). This is what it means to be a sinner. We live as though we are God in God's world. We tend to think of ourselves first (not of God, nor of others, but of *ourselves*).

This is not a trivial problem, and Jesus didn't let it slide. Notice verse 35 (ESV), "And he sat down and called the twelve." That's the posture a rabbi often assumed when teaching. "And he said to them, 'If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.'"

So our problem is that we, like the disciples, think of ourselves *first*. But according to Jesus...

B. We need to think of ourselves last (35-37). This is the paradox of discipleship. To be first, you must be last, the *very last*. This is so contrary to nature that we need to slow down and let Jesus' words produce their intended effect. Jesus is calling us to embrace two very self-denying actions in this teaching.

1. *The Lord calls us to be servants.* If you want to be first (like you just said you wanted when you were arguing), here's what it takes. You must be *servant of all*. He didn't merely say, "You need to serve a few people." He said you must be *the servant of all*.

We cannot live as a disciple of Jesus and think of ourselves first. There is only one Master (and it is Him). The rest of us are equal. We are all servants, and our Master calls us to serve each other.

You don't exist for me and my agenda. I exist for you. You exist for those around you. The Lord calls us to serve one another. When you have a need, I have a responsibility. When your fellow brother has a need, you have a responsibility. Not simply to *talk about it*, but to *do something about it*, to SERVE that brother in need.

This might sound a little abstract to us, so Jesus makes it clearer in the next two verses. In verses 36-37, "And he took a child and put him in the midst of them, and taking him in his arms, he said to them, 'Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me.'"

This is the second self-denying action we must take. He takes a child, puts the child in the middle of the disciples, and then picks up the child in His arms. The Greek is *enagkalisamenos*, lit. 'holding him in the crook of His arm'. Note Jesus' tender affection in this action.

What's true of a little child? A little child has no power or influence. He cannot advance your career. A child doesn't give you things. To the contrary he needs things and needs you to do things for him. In terms of power and production, a child is very insignificant, and that's Jesus' point.

2. *The Lord calls us to give attention to insignificant people.* Wessel makes an interesting observation when he says, "A concern for children was not invented by the welfare state: it goes back to the teaching of Jesus."² That's certainly true. But it's also true that Jesus isn't simply commending people who love children here. That's a given. We ought to love children. But this isn't a call for everyone to enlist in our children's ministry.

Notice the phrase in verse 37, "in my name". Jesus is commending those who welcome children "in my name." It's those who reach out to insignificant ones because of Christ that Christ here commends.

And it's not just children either. According to Kent Hughes (who cites William Lane), in the Aramaic language (which Jesus was speaking), *child* and *servant* are the

² Wessel, p. 706.

same word.³ When Jesus told the disciples to receive a little child, He was instructing them to receive children, yes, but He's also calling them to receive other insignificant ones, other servants, that is, other disciples.

His promise is staggering. When we do that (when we open our hearts and lives to the insignificant ones), we are actually opening our hearts and lives to Jesus Himself. And beyond that, we are also opening our hearts and lives to the One who sent Jesus into the world, God the Father Himself.

So look at that child. Look at every little insignificant person the Lord sends into your life. What you do with him says much about how you view your Savior and your Father.

Fellow disciples of Jesus, know this. God does not measure greatness the way the world does. According to the world I am great if...I have people who wait on me, who answer to me, who do what I want them to do. I am great if... I have power and money and influence and if people listen to me.

But not so in the kingdom of God. Jesus says I am great in God's eyes if...I serve others and thereby point their attention to the Lord, not myself, and if...I meet the needs of others regardless of what I get from them. When a person does that, says Jesus, that person is truly a *great person*.

The Greeks had a story of a Spartan called Paedaretos.⁴ Barclay writes, "Three hundred men were to be chosen to govern Sparta, and Paedaretos was a candidate. When the list of the successful was announced his name was not on it. 'I am sorry,' said one of his friends, 'that you were not elected. The people ought to have known what a wise officer of state you would have made.' 'I am glad,' said Paedaretos, 'that in Sparta there are three hundred men better than I am.'" And Barclay concludes, "Here was a man who became a legend because he was prepared to give to others the first place and to bear no ill will."

True selflessness is beautiful, rare, and it ought to be common-place in the church. According to our Savior, the desire to be great is a reality. But the way to deal with it is by choosing to embrace the role of a servant.

Let's face it, friends. We all struggle right here. We struggle with our view of ourselves. We think about ourselves too much. We get our feelings hurt because other people don't share the high view we have of ourselves. When we're not invited to the party, we get upset. When we've been sick and no one calls, we grow bitter. When we do a ministry and no one recognizes it, we feel slighted. We think we deserve better.

Beloved, people will never treat us as well as our sin-tainted hearts think we deserve to be treated. Your spouse won't. Your coach won't. Your waitress won't. Your deacon won't. Your church members won't. For two reasons.

One, they are sinners and can always do better. And two, we are sinners and will always tend to think we deserve better.

This is yet another of a thousand reasons why we need Jesus. We need Him to deliver us, not just from the penalty of sin so we don't go to hell, but also from the power of our sin, so we can serve the way He calls us to serve.

And He will give us that power, if we will humble ourselves and call on Him. Some of us need to pray right now, "Lord, I am so self-focused, at home, at work, in the church, in the way I treat people. Please forgive me. And please help me to change my focus, so that I think of myself last rather than first."

³ Hughes, p. 32.

⁴ As told by Barclay, p. 223.

This brings us to a second area of potential struggle we must face, as did the twelve disciples. The first? How we view ourselves. The second? How we view others.

II. Struggle #2: How we view others (38-50)

We could spend two or three weeks unpacking Jesus' teaching in the final section of Mark 9. But we need to see the flow of this text, and the big idea Jesus is after, the connection between how we view ourselves and others. And Jesus essentially makes two points, the first is the problem, and the second is the solution.

The problem? We tend to be hard on others and easy on ourselves. That's verses 38-40. The solution? We need to be hard on ourselves and gracious with others. That's verses 41-50. Let's begin with the problem.

A. We tend to be hard on others and easy on ourselves (38-40). Just like John was in the next scene. Notice verse 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.'"

The 'we' seems to indicate that John is speaking for the rest of the disciples, too. *We* saw a man driving out demons. He was doing it *in your name*, which seems to indicate, "with your authority," that he was identifying himself as a Jesus-follower. So we told him to stop, says John, because he is clearly not one of us.

Seems natural, even logical. The man is guilty of malpractice, isn't he? He's doesn't have the proper credentials. He's practicing soul-care without a license.

This was John's conclusion. John will later be known as the *apostle of love*. But that's later. There's some growth that needs to happen before that nickname applies. We don't see love here. We see a sectarian spirit, a censorious attitude.

"He's not in our camp," Lord, "so we tried to stop Him. We knew You'd approve."

What was John's problem (which of course is the *disciples'* problem? Simply this.

1. *The disciples had a holy-huddle mentality (38)*. It grows right out of the inflated view of self that Jesus just addressed. It's the "us four no more" view of God's work. The "we're the only ones that are really doing anything for God around here" club.

Why did the disciples get upset with this man? Perhaps they're remembering their own failure to cast out the demon in the last scene. Ironically, back in chapter 3, the scribes saw Jesus' miracles yet deliberately discredited them, saying they were the work of Beelzebub. Here we see Jesus' own disciples basically doing the same thing. They, too, are discrediting a work done in Jesus' name.

That last point is significant. This man was doing his work *in Jesus' name*. Jesus isn't saying that everyone has a right to do ministry however they want, nor that every ministry is a legitimate one. There *are* some people who *aren't* ministering in Jesus' name. That's another issue. If a person claims to be doing God's work but denies Christ, he is an apostate or false minister. Other Scriptures tell us what to do with those kinds of ministers: "warn them" (Titus 3:10); "command them not to teach false doctrine" (1 Tim 1:3); "have nothing to do with them" (2 Tim 3:5).

But those passages don't apply here. John says this man was driving out demons *in the name of Jesus*. And that's a good thing. This man was setting people free from demonic control, and he did so in such a way that it brought honor to Jesus. That's a good thing, right? To help people and to point people to Jesus is good, but not everyone agrees.

John didn't. The other eleven didn't either. This little poem sums up their thinking. Is it *our* thinking?

Believe as I believe, no more no less,

*That I am right, and no one else confess.
Feel as I feel, think as I think,
Eat what I eat, and drink what I drink,
Look as I look, do always as I do,
Then and only then, I'll fellowship with you.⁵*

It's the holy huddle mentality, and it characterized the disciples (and far too often still characterizes disciples). But what about Jesus? How did He respond to this news about someone outside the group doing a work in His name?

2. *Jesus took a grace approach.* In verses 39-40, we're told, "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.'"

John assumed that if a person isn't one of us it means he's against us. Jesus turned it around. If a person isn't against us, he's for us. That's the grace approach. Grace is willing to give people the benefit of the doubt.

The first instinct of grace is to give, not ask for credentials. This is a struggle for us, for all of us, those out in the world and in the church alike. Chuck Swindoll made an observation that's worth pondering:

"It is a curious fact that jealousy is a tension often found among professionals, the gifted, and the highly competent. You know, doctors, singers, artists, lawyers, business men and women, authors, entertainers, preachers, educators, politicians, and all public figures. Strange, isn't it, that such capable folk find it nearly impossible to applaud others in their own field who excel a shade or two more than they?

Jealousy's fangs may be hidden, but take care when the creature coils...no matter how cultured and dignified it may appear."⁶

Beloved, if we're going to please our Savior, we must face the fact that we tend to be hard on others and easy on ourselves. That's the problem. Here is the solution.

B. We need to be hard on ourselves and gracious with others (41-50). That's what Jesus taught in the following verses. He highlighted four characteristics that He wants His followers to exhibit. Indeed, genuine disciples will do so, and in each case, it will cost them.

1. *Genuine disciples serve others in practical ways (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."

A cup of water. Nothing big, perhaps, but it's big in the Lord's eyes, for it's a step away from self and toward others.

"If anyone gives you a cup of water *in my name*." This final phrase indicates the person's motivation. He's not doing it for mere humanitarian reasons. She's not doing the good deed to get a tax deduction, nor recognition on some plaque as a do-gooder. This person is giving the water *in Jesus' name*, that is, out of gratitude for what Jesus has done for him or her and their desire to see Jesus receive honor.

"Because you belong to Christ." If two people belong to the same Christ, then they belong to each other and should care for each other. If you have a need, it should matter to me for it matters to Him and we both belong to Him. My motivation in meeting your need is to please Him. And the person who does so, according to Jesus...

"Will certainly not lose his reward." Rewards are coming. Those who serve well in this life will be rewarded richly in the life to come.

⁵ Taken from Hughes, pp. 33-4.

⁶ In Kent Hughes, p. 33.

John Paton was a faithful missionary in the South Pacific in the 1800's. He faced cannibals, malaria, and other hardship. He had a successful ministry going in Scotland when he made it known that God was calling him to take the gospel to the New Hebrides Island (now known as Vanuatu). One old Christian gentleman tried to talk him out of it, exclaiming, "The cannibals! You will be eaten by cannibals!"

To this Paton good-naturedly responded, "Mr. Dickson, you are advanced in years now, and your own prospect is soon to be laid in the grave, there to be eaten by worms. I confess to you, that if I can but live and die serving and honoring the Lord Jesus, it will make no difference to me whether I am eaten by cannibals or by worms. And in the Great Day my resurrection body will arise as fair as yours in the likeness of our risen Redeemer."⁷

This is the DNA of a genuine disciple, according to Jesus. They serve others in practical ways, for Jesus' sake.

2. *Genuine disciples don't cause others to sin (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."

It's possible Jesus is still holding that little child we met back in verse 36. As already mentioned, the term "little ones" probably doesn't refer only to children, but speaks more generally of all of Jesus' followers.

Jesus' warning is quite severe. To have a millstone hung around your neck and be thrown into the sea?! That's a serious penalty, for this is a serious problem. It's one thing to choose to sin, and that's bad. But it's another thing to make choices that cause other people to sin.

You say, "Is that possible? Can we cause other people to sin?"

Absolutely. When a parent decides to skip church and play golf or go shopping on the Lord's Day, it's a sin that reflects his or her value system. But when their little boy doesn't get to go to church because of dad's or mom's choice, and when that little boy begins to view the worship of God as not all that important because of the parent's choice, that parent has a double problem on his or her hands. It's not just their own sin now, but also the sin they are causing. And according to Jesus, that parent will give an account for both. Jesus says it would be better for the parent to be thrown into the sea with a stone around their neck.

Yes, people are responsible for their choices. But we all influence people around us, and we can influence them to make sinful choices. And if we do, we are heading for even more serious consequences.

Let's not miss the weight of this. How we treat fellow Christians, especially young Christians, is very serious in the eyes of the Lord.

There's a third way in which genuine disciples will be hard on themselves.

3. *Genuine disciples deal firmly with their own sin (43-48)*. "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.'"

⁷ Vance Christie, *Into All the World*, p. 169.

The Lord calls us to be gracious towards others, but there's one person with whom we are to be very firm. That's *ourselves*. I am not to justify or coddle sin in my life. I must deal with it. *Cut off your hand. Cut off your foot. Pluck out your eye.*

Tragically, some have taken Jesus' words literally. The most famous case was Origen of Alexandria, who had himself emasculated in an attempt to gain victory over his lusts. Not long after that the Council of Nicea outlawed the practice. As Kent Hughes explains, "Such mutilation is not only contrary to Scripture, but it is possible to be minus hands, feet, and eyes and to be neutered and still be the most libidinous, materialistic, proud person in town...What Jesus is calling for is not physical mutilation, but spiritual mortification."⁸

My friend, which is better, a momentary rush of pleasure that comes from using my hand for sinful purposes, which of course is followed by guilt and anguish and potentially eternal punishment? OR...momentary pain, which results from taking firm action to get rid of sin in my life, which then leads to eternal pleasure? Which is better? It's a no brainer. Five minutes of pleasure followed by an eternity of suffering, is it worth it?

Sadly, many people aren't facing the reality of this gamble. They naively think, "Well, if it feels good, I should do it." So they do it. They engage in illicit sex to get a thrill. They put a drug into their body to get a high. They watch porn to get a moment of excitement. And then what? They reap a consequence.

Beloved, if we live by our feelings, we are in trouble. What's at stake? Jesus says *hell* is at stake. The word translated "hell" is *gehenna*, a Greek form of the Hebrew words *ge hinnom* ("Valley of Hinnom"). This was a valley on the south side of Jerusalem. In Old Testament times it was used for human sacrifices to the pagan god Molech (Jer 7:31; 19:5-6). King Josiah put a stop to that horrid practice. In time this valley became a place where human waste and garbage, including animal carcasses, were disposed of and burned. It became a symbol of the place of divine judgment.⁹

It's significant that no one ever spoke stronger words about hell than did the loving Savior Himself. But when He spoke of hell, there was no condescending glee in His voice, but great compassion. Please note that He talked about hell, not to publicans and "big" sinners, but here to His disciples and elsewhere to religious people.

Cole observes, "Jesus therefore spoke of hell to professed saints, and of heaven to acknowledged sinners, unlike many preachers."¹⁰ And when He spoke about such judgment, He wept (Luke 19:41).

So let's take inventory, my friend. Have your feet been taking you places you ought not be? Have your eyes been observing images they ought not see? Have your hands been engaging in activities unbecoming to a follower of Jesus? If so, what must you do? According to Jesus, cut off a foot, take off a hand, pluck out an eye. Not literally. But take drastic action to make it as difficult as humanly possible to use that foot, that hand, and that eye for sinful purposes.

Men, if you struggle with porn, get rid of your smart phone. You say, "That's radical." Yes, so is cutting off your hand, and that's Jesus' point. Get serious about getting rid of sin.

If you struggle with alcohol, what's needed is more than prayer, as important as that is. You need to radically restructure your life to get rid of influences and temptations and

⁸ Hughes, p. 39.

⁹ Wessel, p. 708.

¹⁰ R. Alan Cole, p. 224.

replace those negative influences with godly influences (church, the Word, Christian service). Take whatever step is needed to amputate that sin.

You say, "Are drastic measures really warranted?" Yes! According to Jesus, if a person isn't willing to deal with sin in this life, he's heading for hell.

Someone will object, "That doesn't fit my theology. I believe once saved always saved."

I believe that too, that once God saves a person, He keeps that person saved to the end. And one indication that He's keeping that person is this one. That person deals with sin in his or her life. If a person excuses personal sin, it's evidence that that person certainly isn't thinking like his Savior, or worse, doesn't truly know the Savior. It's not that he lost his salvation, for he never had it to begin with.

My friend, if you have sin in your life and aren't willing to get rid of it, take heed to Jesus' warning. "It's better to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to be thrown into hell with two eyes." Genuine disciples deal firmly with their own sin, and do so, of course, by the grace that God extends to them through His Son Jesus.

4. *Genuine disciples work at living in peace with others (49-50)*. "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."

Barclay says these verses "are among the most difficult in the New Testament." Wessel says that verse 49 is "admittedly one of the most difficult verses in Mark."¹¹

When Jesus says, "Everyone will be salted with fire," what's He talking about? According to Old Testament instruction, sacrifices at the temple had to be accompanied by salt (Lev 2:13; Ezek 13:24; Ex 30:35). Salt speaks of sacrifice.

We might think of it this way. You can sacrifice now OR later. It's *pay me now*, OR *pay me later*. It's suffering now, OR suffering later. It's deal with your sin now, OR deal with it at the coming judgment. "Everyone will be salted with fire." No exceptions.

In verse 50 He gives a command, "Have salt in yourselves." What's that mean? Cole's comments are helpful: "Those who have lived in the third world may not be able to give a chemical explanation, but they will know that salt is often adulterated, as sugar is, and many another commodity, by unscrupulous local retailers... The real point is that such *salt*, salt only in name, is now useless."¹²

To put it simply, saltless salt isn't good. Christless Christians aren't either.

In the sermon on the mount Jesus calls His disciples to be the salt of the earth (Matt 5:13). Salt is a preservative. We are to have a preserving influence upon a world that is rotting away.

But to do that we must be right with each other. And so He says, "Have salt in yourselves and be at peace with each other."

And this is precisely what had *not* been happening in the lives of the men who first received this instruction. The disciples had been arguing with each other about who is the greatest, then censoring another man for doing work in Jesus' name. They weren't getting along with each other nor with other believers. How would they ever reach lost people, as Jesus was training them to do?

They wouldn't, nor will we. Not until we learn how to view ourselves, and others, as He did, as servants.

So just try harder? Is that the point of Mark 9, that we should just work harder at denying ourselves and loving others? No, not at all. That's the way religion works (just

¹¹ Wessel, p. 709.

¹² Cole, p. 225.

try harder), but that's not Christianity. How do we know? We know because Mark doesn't end his story at Mark 9. There's Mark 10-16, and what happens there? What happens is that The Servant gives His life as a ransom payment for many. It's through trusting in The Servant and His atoning sacrifice that God forgives us for our inflated love of self and deficient love of others, and then gives to us the ability to die to self and then truly die for others too.

Make It Personal: Three questions I need to ponder...

1. *What do I think of myself?* Have I been putting myself *first* in life? If so, I need to repent, and ask the Lord to give me a new mind which in which I see myself as a servant. And then, by His strength, I choose to live as a servant, convinced that my life is all about Him, not me.

2. *What do I think of others?* Have I been hard on others recently while being tolerant of my own shortcomings? This too needs to change today. It's time to start being gracious with others while at the same time being hard on my own sin.

You say, "But I'm too weak. I can't change." And you're right. You cannot change, nor can I, *unless*. Unless what? Unless we can answer rightly this third question.

3. *What do I think about Christ?* Jesus Christ came to save people from their sins. Do you believe that? Have you, and are you now, putting your total trust *in Him*? My friend, He is *willing* to save you, and then begin to change you. That's why He went to the cross. And He is *able* to save you, too, and He gave evidence of that power when He conquered the grave. So let's ask Him, for whoever asks Him, always receives.

Closing Song: #364 "*My Jesus, I Love Thee*" (all four verses)

Benediction of the month: 2 Corinthians 13:14

Community Group Discussion:

1. The title of this morning's message from Mark 9:33-50 was, "*Straight Talk from The Servant about the Struggles of Being a Servant.*" Take time to read the passage again. What do we learn here about Jesus? What do we learn about what's involved in following Him?

2. In verse 33 Jesus asked His disciples a question, that they refused to answer. What was the question, and why didn't they answer it?

3. In verses 35-37, Jesus responded to the disciples' silence by *saying* something, then *doing* something, and then *saying* something else. First, focus on what Jesus *did*. What did He do in verse 36? Discuss together the implications of His actions. Then, discuss what He *said* in verses 35 & 37. What are the implications of "whoever receives a child in my name receives me"?

4. What was John's problem in verse 38, and how did Jesus respond to it? What's the take-away for us?

5. In verse 42 Jesus continues talking about "these little ones," and then gives a series of pointed commands in verses 43ff. What main point is Jesus making here? How do His words affect you personally?