



**Sermon Series: Mark: Living Everyday With Jesus**

**Sermon Title: The Measure of Greatness**

**Date: 1/25/2026**

In **Mark 9:30–37**, Jesus directly confronts the way people naturally measure their lives. Most of us grow up learning to think in terms of progress, success, and position. We learn to climb. Over time, that mindset doesn't just shape our goals, but how we see ourselves, others, and even our relationship with God.

This passage opens with a sharp contrast. As Jesus travels through Galilee, He is privately teaching His disciples about what lies ahead. He speaks clearly about His coming suffering, death, and resurrection (**Mark 9:31–32**). His focus is on surrender and sacrifice. At the same time, the disciples are focused on something very different. When they reach Capernaum, Jesus asks what they were arguing about on the road. They remain silent, because they had been debating who among them was the greatest (**Mark 9:33–34**).

Mark places these two conversations side by side on purpose. While Jesus is moving toward the cross, the disciples are measuring rank. And it is here that Jesus redefines greatness.

**Big Idea: Measure greatness by Jesus, not by ladders.**

Jesus reshapes their thinking through three movements in the passage.

### **1. Jesus shows us how God defines greatness**

Jesus speaks about being “handed over,” killed, and raised (**Mark 9:31**). He is revealing that God's work through Him is rooted in surrender and sacrifice, not control or status. Yet the disciples do not understand and are afraid to ask (**Mark 9:32**), showing both confusion and resistance.

Jesus makes clear that in God's kingdom, greatness does not begin with lifting yourself up. It begins with humbling yourself. Before He talks about being first, He talks about being handed over. He defines greatness

through the cross. True greatness is not about being above others, but about giving yourself for others.

## 2. Jesus reveals what is actually driving us

When Jesus asks about their argument, the disciples' silence exposes what has been shaping them. While Jesus was speaking about giving His life away, they were focused on position. Their argument points to something deeper: a struggle over worth, importance, and identity.

Jesus sits down and teaches them that anyone who wants to be first must become last and the servant of all (**Mark 9:35**). He does not condemn their desire to matter. He redirects it. He keeps their language, but reshapes their understanding of how significance is found.

In their world, greatness meant power and recognition. Jesus does not adjust that system. He replaces it. He removes ladders and introduces a life shaped by service. Greatness in God's kingdom is not built on who serves you, but on who you serve.

## 3. Jesus redirects how we move through everyday life

Jesus then places a child in the center of the group (**Mark 9:36**). In the first century, a child had no status or advantage. Jesus teaches that welcoming a child in His name is welcoming Him, and welcoming Him is welcoming the One who sent Him (**Mark 9:37**).

With this, Jesus anchors greatness to care given where there is nothing to gain. Greatness is not revealed by how many people notice you, but by who you are willing to notice. It is not displayed by how many people serve you, but by who you are willing to serve.

Jesus shifts the defining question from "Who am I above?" to "Who has God placed near me?" This redirection finds its fullest meaning at the cross, where Jesus shows that we do not climb our way to God or earn our worth. He gives His life for us. And when that truth takes hold, the need to compare and compete begins to lose its power.

Jesus does not call His followers away from greatness. He calls them into it—not the greatness of being noticed, but the greatness of becoming like Him.

### Discussion Questions:

1. **Where do you most naturally measure “greatness” in your own life?**  
Career, family, church involvement, influence, recognition, productivity, or something else?
2. **Why do you think the disciples were silent when Jesus asked what they were arguing about?**  
What does that silence reveal about what was really driving them?
3. **Jesus doesn’t reject the desire to be significant - He redirects it.**  
What does it look like in real life to move from ladder-thinking to servant-living?
4. **Why do you think Jesus used a child to illustrate greatness?**  
Who are the kinds of people today who bring “nothing to gain” but are often easy to overlook?
5. **This passage shifts the question from “Who am I above?” to “Who has God placed near me?”**  
Who might God be calling you to notice, welcome, or serve this week?