



CANYON HILLS

COMMUNITY CHURCH

Series: Mark

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First Importance

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How are we doing this morning, church? Good? Good! Well, I am one of the Life Group pastors here on staff. It's just a joy to get to be up here with you this morning. It has been great to worship a great and mighty God and see people proclaiming their faith in Christ through baptism. It has just been a wonderful morning to this point.

I just have to be honest, though. We're family. Pastor Koby was asking what you're anxious or fearful about, and I'll just confess that there are some things I'm anxious about this morning. The main one is that my wife is due with our fourth child in nine days. It's awesome! We are pumped. We're over the moon, but if all of a sudden, five minutes into the sermon, I say, "You know what? Let's just have a time of personal prayer," and then you hear steps, we're having a baby. I love you all, but I love my wife a lot more, so if we leave, we're having a kid. Just forgive me.

Why don't you turn in your Bibles to Mark, chapter 9? If you don't have a Bible, there are black Bibles in front of you in the bottom part of the seats. If you don't own a Bible, we would love for you to have that. I just want you to be able to look at God's Word and be able to see what it says. This is not about my wisdom. This is about the Lord and what the Bible actually says, and so we want to take a look at it and see what it has to say for us this morning.

We've just been going through Mark, chapter by chapter, verse by verse, just looking at it, looking at every single Scripture in it. The thing I've loved about Mark so far is that it's all about Jesus. We've looked at his life and his ministry, and as we're going to see in the coming months, we're going to see his death and his resurrection.

This passage is a bit of a turning point in Christ's ministry. His public ministry is going to start to diminish a little bit and his private ministry, the time with his closest followers, his disciples, is going to start to increase. I titled this sermon *First Importance*, and the reason I did that is as I was looking at this passage, I just realized there is some important stuff Christ wants us to know.

It's really easy for us to think about and get focused on things that don't matter. In my life, that looks like late-night Netflix binges, a social media debate, or three straight hours of

SportsCenter. But it's also easy for us to get focused on things we think define us or give us worth, and so we get really focused on our financial portfolio, personal fitness, or having a great marriage. Not bad things, but not the most important.

It's easy for us to work hard and pursue things that are fine, but again, not the best, so we try to climb the corporate ladder. We try to gain popularity. We pursue a spouse. We try to have great kids. God calls us to something far more important than all of that. God calls us all to something with eternal purpose and first importance.

For some of you this morning, this will be the first time you are going to hear about Jesus and his mission and what that actually means for you. For others, for you and me, this is going to be something we need to hear to realize and remember what followers of Jesus do. Jesus, again, is teaching to his closest followers what really matters. First importance.

My hope is that this morning, we would see that God gives us incredible purpose in knowing him and understanding who we are in that as people, and then how to live that out with the people God puts in front of us. So, if you're at Mark 9, would you stand with me for the reading of God's Word? We're going to look at this together. We're going to start in verse 30 and we'll go through verse 37.

"They went on from there and passed through Galilee. And [Jesus] did not want anyone to know, for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, 'The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him. And when he is killed, after three days he will rise.' But they did not understand the saying, and were afraid to ask him. And they came to Capernaum. And when he was in the house he asked them, 'What were you discussing on the way?'

But they kept silent, for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest. And he sat down and called the twelve. And he said to them, 'If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.' 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.'

Father, would you be with us this morning as we look at your Word, at your Son, his life, his mission, and his purpose? God, I pray that we would walk out with a higher opinion of you and a greater love for you. Lord, I know there are many incredible situations that are hard in this room right now that people have walked in with. God, I pray that within that, they would see a good God with a good plan and that they can put their trust in you with everything. I ask these things in your name, amen.

First importance... This is insight. This is private teaching from Jesus' ministry. This isn't a big crowd. This isn't a public spectacle. This is 12 men, and God in the flesh, just patiently, lovingly teaching them. For us this morning, Jesus wants us to know him and to know his purpose, to be humble, to be servant-minded, and to bring value and hope to everyone with the gospel. Jesus is

going to present his disciples with four things that directly apply to us today. First, let's just take a look at the story in verse 30.

"They went on from there and passed through Galilee. And he did not want anyone to know, for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, 'The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him. And when he is killed, after three days he will rise.'"

He could have done ministry in Galilee. There's stuff that could have happened there. There were people who could have been healed. There was truth that could have been preached and Jesus said, "No, I have something that's more important to do than that right now. I have a message I need to share with my closest people, my disciples. I need to share it with them and tell them what's most important."

So, he says, "Guys, what I'm saying is more critical than the other things we could have been doing. This is something you need to know. This is something you need to believe. You're going to need to live for this. You're going to need to die for this. This is what matters."

If you've been walking through Mark with us and this sounds familiar, it should, because this is the second time Jesus has said this to his disciples. In Mark 8:31, he says basically the same thing. **"And [Jesus] began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again."** So, for the second time, again, Jesus comes back to this message about his life, death, burial, and resurrection.

1. *Know what's important: the gospel.* The gospel shows us a sovereign God with a plan of redemption. The gospel gives us hope and joy no matter what's going on in life. With this statement, with these two sentences he gives to them, he shows them there is a plan. God isn't a reactive God. He's a sovereign God. He's not surprised you're here today. He's not shocked by your past.

God set up his plan of redemption from a long time ago. Jesus points to that in this statement when he calls himself the Son of Man. Jesus refers to himself often with that title, almost a dozen times in the book of Mark. This is a title that points back to the Old Testament. I want you guys to see it, so keep a place in Mark 9, but I want you to turn in your Bibles with me to Ezekiel, chapter 2.

There are probably not a lot of highlights in this particular section of the Bible for you, but this is important. Christ is pointing to a major focus of his ministry and God is calling Ezekiel to do something really big. He's calling him to ministry, and Jesus is saying, "This is what I'm fulfilling with my ministry," so let me read this. Verse 1 of Ezekiel 2:

"And he said to me, 'Son of man, stand on your feet, and I will speak with you.' And as he spoke to me, the Spirit entered into me and set me on my feet, and I heard him speaking to me. And he said to me, 'Son of man, I send you to the people of Israel, to nations of rebels,

who have rebelled against me. They and their fathers have transgressed against me to this very day. The descendants also are impudent and stubborn: I send you to them, and you shall say to them, "Thus says the LORD GOD."

And whether they hear or refuse to hear (for they are a rebellious house) they will know that a prophet has been among them. And you, son of man, be not afraid of them, nor be afraid of their words, though briars and thorns are with you and you sit on scorpions. Be not afraid of their words, nor be dismayed at their looks, for they are a rebellious house. And you shall speak my words to them, whether they hear or refuse to hear, for they are a rebellious house."

Doesn't that sound like Jesus' ministry up to this point in Mark, sharing truth and hope to a bunch of people who either don't understand or don't desire to understand? He's sharing truth. He's performing miracles. He's healing people. He is doing amazing things, and then there are people who are just trying to point out something that's wrong with him and looking to find fault.

In Mark 9, Jesus is saying, "I was sent by God to come and preach the truth, and because of that truth, I'm going to be rejected." The Son of Man points back to Christ being God and God's plan of redemption.

He goes on to say that he was going to be delivered into the hands of men. *Delivered* is the same word as *betrayed*, *handed over*. He's telling them in advance that he is going to be betrayed, but again, that all points back to his mission and his purpose. Yes, he's alluding to the fact that he's going to be betrayed by one of his disciples.

If you kept reading, you would see that Judas, one of his disciples, betrays him, and then you see that the rest of his disciples abandon him and one of his best friends, Peter, denies him three times. Christ is alluding to that, but he's also pointing to the sovereign purpose of God.

Romans 4 says, "**...Jesus our Lord...was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.**" God sent Jesus to the world to die for our sins. That was the plan. In Ephesians 5, we see that Jesus did it willingly. It says, "**...Christ loved us and gave himself up for us...**" Jesus willingly laid down his life so you and I could have a relationship with him in heaven.

Jesus is telling them, "This is not a surprise to God. This is not a surprise to me. I came to die." In this statement, we see a good God who loves people and has a plan to save them, and what could be more important than this? What's more important than this? This has to do with our eternity! This is our salvation! This is the best news, because God has a plan to deal with sin, to deal with all the hurt and pain sin causes.

Through this, we also see that the gospel gives incredible hope to every person. God gives hope in the midst of broken situations. Just looking at this, again, Jesus is saying hard things with his disciples. "I'm going to be betrayed. I'm going to die. I'm going to be killed." But there's hope, because he says he also came to live. He says, "After three days, I will rise." He's pointing to the

resurrection, the time when he proves he is God, when he would defeat death so if we have faith in him, if we surrender our hearts to him, we can have eternal life. There's a lot of hope in that.

Now, some of you are here and you have had just some brutal weeks leading up to today. It was hard to get here, it's hard to worship, and it's hard to stand and sing. It's even hard to breathe because your heart just hurts so bad. There's hope for you this morning.

As a pastor, I get the honor and the privilege to pray with people when they are going through some very difficult and broken things. I get to pray for people when they're dying. I get to pray for people when they're sick, going into surgery, confessing major sin, or when everything is falling apart around them and they're like, "I have nothing else. I just need some more Jesus." That's when I get a phone call.

What a joy to get to do that and to hear people within that! Incredibly sad situations, but it's just a blessing to hear some of you say, in the midst of that sadness and brokenness, "I'm crying all the time, but I do have joy and hope because I know God saves and redeems." See, for the Christian, we know God has saved us by his grace and is preparing a place for us in heaven, a place where there's no more cancer, no more AFib, no more racism, no more natural disasters...war, divorce, suicide... Instead, peace, rest, worship, and a relationship with God in the family of Christ.

In that, even if it's only that, we have joy and hope. The world might be broken and we might be breaking, but we have hope. We have that in a good God who saves sinners like you and me by the life, death, and resurrection of God himself, Jesus Christ. God has a redemption plan for us that is just stuffed with hope.

Do you know what's important? Do you know the gospel? Do you believe the gospel? Are you living your life in response to the gospel? If you don't, or you might seem fuzzy on the details and you'd like to know more and be more rooted in it, the Starting Point class is going to be a really good thing for you to consider. In fact, I'd encourage you to sign up. It starts next week during the 11:00 a.m. service.

If you just got baptized, you're new to the faith, or you have lots of questions, this is a course that's designed for you to get questions answered and to look at God's Word and say, "What does the gospel actually mean? What does it mean that Jesus is God? What does that actually look like?"

If you have questions, I would just encourage you to go out in the lobby and sign up for that or sign up online. The reason why I encourage you to do that is because we have to know this thing. We have to know the gospel. Jesus wanted his disciples to know it and he wants us to know it.

In verse 32, we see the disciples don't seem to get it. **"...they did not understand the saying, and were afraid to ask him."** They didn't know. It seems like they almost didn't want to know. Why wouldn't you ask him? I don't know, but they go for a walk, so that's fun.

They keep walking, and then after the walk, Jesus asks them kind of a simple question. "Hey, what were you guys talking about during the walk?" They don't say anything. They're just kind of looking at their sandals and kicking the rocks because they know they were getting in a fight with each other, arguing about who was going to be the greatest. They're jockeying for position among themselves, and so Jesus gives them another lesson.

2. *Be what's important: humble.* Verse 35: "**And [Jesus] sat down and called the twelve. And he said to them, 'If anyone would be first, he must be last of all...'**" The world would say, "Make yourself great." Jesus says, "Make yourself last so I can be great." Being a Christian is not about becoming the greatest you, but pointing people to the greatest of all time.

When we fail to understand what's important, we fail to know how to be his people, but when we know and understand the gospel of grace, we can live in freedom and humility. The disciples wanted to be first for their own glory, and Jesus called them to be last for his glory.

I've been looking at this passage for couple of weeks, getting ready for this sermon. As I looked at it, I said, "You know, I want to be first a lot." Humility has always been a challenge for me because I want to beat you. I'm a very competitive guy. The good that comes from this is that I will work hard and put in the time. I will put in the work to try to achieve what I want. The bad thing is that if I have to step on you, over you, or push you over to kind of get to my destination, I am more than happy to do that. I want to be first.

Over the last couple of years, I've really had to do some thinking, some processing, and even some writing on this particular thing. One of the things I've really had to look at is that humility has to do with how I view the Lord, because when I want to be first, I'm putting myself directly against God. It's like I forget I've been saved by his grace and still need him and his mercy, and so when I want to be first, my lack of humility says to God, "God, I think I have a better plan than you. I think I'm going to take control on this one. I'd like the credit here."

Humility, or a lack of humility on my part, also has to do with how I value you, other people. I've damaged and ruined a lot of relationships because I want to be better than people. I've used people so I could be looked at as something special. I value people only to a point where I think I can manipulate them or use them to get what I want, and it just comes from a desire of wanting to be better than them and to beat them for my glory.

I realize as you guys are hearing me talk, you guys are saying, "Pastor Jeff, you are a pretty messed up individual." I totally perceive that. I get that. I'm in process. Pray for me every day. But that's my heart! That's my struggle! It is brutal! I have some problems! My sweet wife, Ashley, has started putting verses up around our house. At first, I thought they were for the kids, and then after a little bit of time, I've started to think they might be for me.

A passage that has been put up recently has been Philippians 2:3-5. "**Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among**

yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus..." I love my wife. I'm thankful for her to put that on there. That's just convicting! That's something I need to be reminded of.

Which camp do you fall in? Do you fall in the camp where you want to be first, or do you fall in the camp where you want to be last so Christ can be first? They look different. Someone who wants to be first acts like they don't need any support. Humble people pray and ask God for help. The one who's driving for greatness will try to show that they have all the answers already. The humble person daily goes to Scripture for guidance.

Someone trying to be first will put on a mask to try to look good for other people. Humble people say sorry a lot. A person who wants to be first will use pain and wrong as motivation or leverage against other people. Humble people forgive when they've been wronged. They move forward when they've been sinned against.

Which camp do you fall in? Are you striving to be great? Are you pushing to be best? Are you pushing to be first? Are you throwing other people aside to get what you want? Jesus tells his disciples, who were doing that very thing, "Stop." The world tells us, "Dream big! Be great!" Jesus says to humble yourself and make him great.

3. *Do what's important: serve.* Jesus continues on. The sentence isn't even over yet. He continues to show us how we should act. **"If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all."** The world would say, "The more people that serve you, the greater you are." Jesus says, "The more people you serve, the greater you are." Big difference!

God is looking for people with a servant's mindset, who want to actively work and respond to the gospel and live out the gospel in their everyday life, not as a means of earning their salvation but as a means of responding to the salvation they have through grace. When Jesus says, "I want you to be last of all," he's speaking to the heart, our attitude, and our mindset. When he says, "I want you to be a servant of all," He's speaking to our follow-through, what that tangibly looks like in our life.

Ashley and I just got served this last week. It has been a busy season for the Potts household. Ashley is almost due with our child, and I have lots of ministry things going on, so we're running pretty hot. We had some friends who kind of saw that, recognized that, and said, "Hey, we're going to bring you some dinner." It was very nice of them.

They came over. It wasn't an extravagant thing. They brought pizza. It was fun. It was great. They brought the kids. We had a great time. It wasn't big, but it was nice and it was needed. Ashley didn't have to cook something for dinner. I didn't have to clean something afterward...not that I actually clean after dinner. Let's just be honest. Ashley didn't have to clean up something after dinner. Hey, we're just being honest here, family. I have a lot of work to do, okay?

It was nice! It wasn't like this over-the-top, grandiose thing. It was simple and it was perfect for us. We needed it. We just needed someone to serve us. It's just a huge blessing to be around people who consistently serve, the people who are looking to jump in. They're looking for areas

where they can help, and then they follow through consistently. They do it with the mindset of wanting to give God the glory, not for their own fame or their own self, but in a way that honors Christ.

Here at Canyon Hills, there are many ways that can happen. That can happen here on the worship team on a Sunday morning, on the FIT Team, being a Life Group leader, helping someone in the Food Bank, washing windows, scrubbing toilets, hosting neighbors for dinner, bringing other people meals, or sending notes of encouragement. There are many different gifts in this body of Christ, and there are many different ways to serve, and Christ says, "Be a servant of all."

As I was thinking through this and processing through this, I was thinking, "How does this get back to the gospel? How does this get back to the mission of what we're trying to do?" Our mission statement at Canyon Hills is to make more and better disciples of Jesus Christ. We want to see people come to faith in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, and then we want to build and equip them up so they can go and share hope with people so more people can come to faith.

More and better, just a continuous cycle of that. We want to celebrate and share God's grace with everyone all the time so that ultimately every single person would come to a saving knowledge and belief in Jesus Christ. Disciples serve, and through that service, open up opportunities to share hope in Christ.

I just imagine the impact we could have in Bothell, Woodinville, Lynnwood, Mill Creek, Everett, Kirkland, and Snohomish if this church, if this room was filled with people who were actively serving for that purpose, to make more and better disciples of Jesus Christ. We just want to see every person in our neighborhoods, our schools, our cities, and throughout the entire world to know the gospel of grace, to know Christ!

To do that, we just need people who are going to humbly look to see where their gifts fit and get in the game. Christ calls us to do something with our faith. Not to earn our faith, but to celebrate our faith. Not for our credit, but for God's credit. Not for our glory, but for God's glory.

Verse 36: "**And [Jesus] 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.'**" Why a child? Why didn't he just put John in the middle of the circle and say, "Hey, love the guy who's faithful, and if you receive him, you receive me"?

Why didn't he put Peter in there? It's like, "Yeah, the guy puts his foot in his mouth from time to time, but he's a leader. He's an influencer of people. He is going to change the world. Love him and then see how the world gets impacted." He takes a little kid.

Back then, a child was not valued until they grew up and started contributing. Before then, they were looked at as kind of a drain. So, by using a kid as an example, Jesus is showing us that people that the world doesn't value are highly valued by him.

4. *Know who's important: everyone.* The world would say, "Look for the beautiful people, the valuable people, and the intelligent people, and try to become like them." Jesus says, "Love the people the world doesn't value." What does that look like?

Not an exhaustive list, but these are people with special needs, foster kids, people from third world countries, people with spotted pasts and criminal records, people with social deficiencies that make them hard to get along with, people in chronic physical pain who struggle to function well, people who don't look like you, people who don't have lots of friends, and people who are hurting.

Jesus is saying, "Love them." In fact, if we looked at the passage, he is saying to receive them. **"Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me."** Whoever welcomes, receives, takes in, and loves the undervalued receives Christ, and whoever receives Christ receives eternal life.

Who's in your life that needs to be taken in, to be received, to be cared for? With this little illustration, Jesus is saying everyone is significant in God's eyes. Everyone is significant in God's eyes, so if you're here this morning and you are feeling unlovable, I want to tell you that you have all the love in the world available to you in Christ and in the gospel. In his life, death, and resurrection, you have an unending amount of love available to you.

If you're here this morning and you are devaluing other people, know that you are going directly against someone God loved enough to make and send his Son to die for. The Bible starts with the fact that God created male and female in the image of God. That's a comprehensive list. Any man, any woman, any race, any age, any human...image of God.

This is what makes racism, sexism, and elitism so wrong, because it goes against the fabric of God's creation. It rejects the gospel that is offered to anyone who believes, and it ruins the church that's built on people's hearts, not people's skin, bank accounts, or popularity. If we know the gospel, and if we understand we are to be humble and point to God's greatness rather than our own and we are to serve, it goes to show that we should be open to serving anyone, anywhere, at any time.

Who are you serving? How's that going for you? If there was one person who's in your mind who you could tangibly serve this week, how could you do it? Who's in your Life Group that you could go and talk to and say, "Hey, I need to serve John this week. Would you hold me accountable to that? In fact, will you help me do that, because he's difficult"? No offense to Johns in the room.

Who are you serving? Jesus wants us to know him and his purpose, to be humble, to be servant-minded, to bring value and hope to everyone with the gospel. Everyone! Who needs to be given value? Who needs to be given hope in the gospel of Jesus Christ? Let's pray about it right now.

Father, we just come before you very thankful because we've just been worshiping you all morning and worshiping how great you are, how you love us, and how you're faithful to us. We've been proclaiming the gospel, the good news of your grace and how your Son was sent to die for us. We're just thankful this morning. We're thankful for you.

God, I pray for the people who are here who do not have a personal saving relationship with you. If they've been coming to church for a long time and have been surrounded by who you are but have never surrendered their heart to you, God, I pray that today would be the day of their salvation, that they would surrender their hearts to you and receive all of the love you offer.

God, I pray that you would help us as a church to be a serving, loving group of people who receive people and give them hope in the gospel and your Son. Help us do that, Lord. We love you. In your name, amen.