

Mark 9:30-10:16

In these loosely connected passages, a theme continues that began with Peter's rebuke of Jesus in 8:31-33. That theme is whether we have in mind the things of God or the things of man.

What an important theme, because if we have in mind the things of man—

- if we love the praises of men; and, if we love the display of our own power, rule, and glory;
- and, if we love the so-called right to do what we wish;
- and, if we love our own importance and ability—

then our minds are on the things of man, and the cross and resurrection will be unintelligible to us.

We may agree that they happened, but we will never understand what God has done in the death and resurrection of Jesus, because such understanding means

- to abandon self praise and be consumed with the praise of God's glory as displayed in the death and resurrection of Christ,
- to abandon our own strength and rely entirely on what God has done in the death and resurrection of Christ,
- to abandon any claim of a right to ourselves and yield ourselves to the one who has bought us and made us alive in the death and resurrection of Christ.

And so we begin with 9:30-32 in which Jesus is talking about His death and resurrection to His disciples, and they don't have a clue. Jesus says, "I'm going to be betrayed, killed, and after three days raised from the dead"; and, the disciples don't even get what He's talking about.

It's basically the same thing that He had said in 8:31-33, and lest we be too hard on Peter in that text, our reading this morning is a series of examples showing that the rest of the disciples—even John the beloved, who is specifically named—have their minds on the things of men and not of God. And may God expose every particle of our earthly-mindedness as well!

Briefly, then, let us see what it looks like to have a godless mindset instead of a godly mindset.

The overall picture is of disciples who are so bent on building and displaying the impressiveness of their own ministry that these same disciples marginalize the importance of marriage and the importance of children.

- They fail to see marriage's purpose as to image God in a way that is unique in all of creation.
- They fail to see that there isn't a child on earth whose inherent value isn't equal to theirs, and indeed the humility and dependence of a child are far better illustrations of kingdom greatness than the most established and respected ministry activities of men.

In 9:33-37 we have the godless mindset of jockeying for personal greatness. The more we know God's greatness, the more we will see how His greatness dwarfs our pathetic unimportance.

Some people object to thinking of themselves as worms because it's true that God has put His image in us but that's just the point—all of the significance that you have is derivative; you *only* have *any* significance as a function of His. So, I too object to being called a worm, because to be called a dust mite, or a microbe is far too grandiose a description for you and me!

So Jesus picks up a child, who has no illusions of being greater than the adults, and points out that this child has all the derivative greatness of the Godhead—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; all the human impressiveness in the world can't add a particle to your value; and, all the unimpressiveness in the world can't subtract from it.

Dear children, put an end once and for all, your trying to show yourself better than others; it is an insane, spiritually suicidal, attack on the alone-greatness of God. Dear adults, what in heaven and on earth are we doing, when we crave and strive for the praises of men?!

Closely related to this are vv38-41 in which John points out that there are people who *are not followers of Jesus* doing mighty things in the name of Jesus. What an important word for us in a day when so many unconverted heretics have such impressive looking ministries in the name of Christ!

And, since these people are outside of the church (by John's own admission at the end of v38), Jesus tells John to leave them alone—that they may steal some praise, but at least they won't be speaking ill of Christ any time soon.

Then, Jesus takes John and the disciples back to the point He had made with the child: a genuinely converted heart, belonging to a person who has sure and eternal reward, doesn't show itself in mighty acts but in love and service *that is especially directed toward Christians*.

There's some helpful counsel for much of the sympathetic zeal of some believers: you can measure whether that zeal is the result of a transformed heart by whether it burns first for Christ and only secondarily for men, and therefore our zeal for the poor and suffering must burn much hotter for those who belong to Christ.

Now that's an idea that will surely sound strange to you if you have the mind of men instead of that of God.

Of course, a godless mindset will lead us into a fierce defense of what I may do with MY hand, MY foot, MY eye. And Jesus shows how eternally suicidal it is to guard against intrusions of my right to do what I want, rather than guarding against sin.

Really? You want to waste your passion on defending your right to do what you want? There will be plenty of time in Hell for that. Guard instead against being the cause of others' sin, or even falling into sin yourself!

And the section on divorce just exposes this. Where does the selfish sinfulness of our hearts come out more than in marriage? The Pharisees pose the question, but if you look at v10 you'll see that the disciples have a problem here too.

And Jesus clearly says that the problem is that they haven't a clue what marriage is for. The first phrase in v6 isn't a throwaway; Jesus is saying that even the *timing* of marriage proves His point. Marriage has been there *from the beginning of creation*.

May I suggest that the nonsense about "millions of years" has contributed to the weakening of our understanding of marriage? Jesus is saying that the reason that marriage has been there since the sixth day of the existence of the universe is for the purpose of glorifying God; in the rest of creation God merely expresses His glory; but, when on day six God made man male and female, God *imaged* His glory.

The selfishness that says, "my marriage is too hard," isn't directed only against your spouse—wicked as he or she may be—it's an assault upon the throne of the universe that say, "my comfort is more important to me than Your image, God!"

And divorce isn't the only way that we say such a vile thing.

- We say it also when we don't *leave* dad and mom *out* of our marriage.
- We say it also when we don't *cleave* to our wives as our very own flesh, giving ourselves so wholly to serving our wives that my first thought for myself comes after exhausting every last thought for my wife.

In such ways, we are constantly taking the one-flesh that God has designed our marriage to be, and creating cracks and fissures to separate it again into two, causing these rifts of separation in what God has joined together.

And, *every* time we do *any* of this we lift rebellious fists to heaven and say, "my comfort is more important to me than Your image, God!" And how pathetically *uncomfortable* we then make ourselves, as our hearts become twisted and self-poisoning in our failure to acknowledge and live by the fact that we were designed wholly to image Him!

Finally, in vv13-16, we see the disciples repeating their mistake from when they had been arguing about who is the greatest.

How dense they had to have been to do this after Jesus had at least once already intentionally *taken up* a child to show how our derivative significance means that the smallest child is as important as the most exalted apostle, because all importance comes from Christ.

And in the very last verse we have a wonderful picture of salvation. In v15, Jesus basically said, pay attention to how these children are about to get saved, because you adults cannot be saved in any other way. And Jesus took the children up into His arms.

Did you catch that in 9:36-37 as well? He did it twice. Jesus loves cry-room duty. In a sense, Jesus' whole mission is spiritual cry-room duty, because except for His taking us up into His own arms, our spiritual helplessness is like that of the tiniest premature infant.

He loves taking up the helpless in His arms, carrying them, being their only support in saving and blessing and comforting them. And that which He does savingly and spiritually, He also loved to do physically with actual infants in His time on earth.

I've often heard these texts explained in terms of the simplicity of childlike faith, focusing upon how we have to do what the children do. But I think that misses the point entirely. The point is that these children do *nothing*, and that Jesus does *everything*. Here, the disciples thought that they had exceeded the dependence of infants and the importance of an infants; so, Jesus twice in these passages takes an infant into His arms to show them how opposite to Christianity their thinking truly was.

Do you see what Jesus is doing here as He takes the children up into His arms? He is showing you and me that every bit of self-reliance and self-improvement that we attempt comes from unbelief.

Salvation consists in abandoning the idea that we have any importance or ability or praiseworthiness of our own and simply yielding ourselves to rest completely upon Christ, to rest completely upon His taking us up into His arms, to rest completely upon His blessing us, to rest completely upon Him.

Dear children, what you've basically heard is that the longer you go without resting completely in the arms of Jesus alone to save you, the more difficult it will be to do that very thing. Not just the culture of the world, but even many in the church, and your own sinful nature will be pushing you to depend more upon yourself, to make yourself better, to show others how valuable you are.

The longer you put off admitting with your whole heart that Jesus isn't just part of your goodness, but Jesus is your *only* goodness, and Jesus is *all* your goodness... the more time you will spend looking for goodness in yourself, and the more you will have the illusion that you actually *do* have goodness in yourself...

...and the harder your heart will be against resting completely upon Jesus to take you into His own everlasting arms and save you.