

The World Turned Upside Down  
Mark 9:33-37

## The World Turned Upside Down

### Paul Testifies to Christ

In the book of Acts, chapter 13, Luke records Paul and Silas' first visit to the Macedonian city of Thessalonica. There was a synagogue there, and, as was Paul's custom, on the Sabbath they attended the meeting. In fact, for three consecutive weeks Paul visited the group of worshipers, and Luke tells us Paul "reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and rise from the dead," and he emphatically testified that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, the Savior of whom the Scriptures spoke.

### A Significant Community Response

It is the response to Paul's gospel message in Thessalonica that concerns us this morning. We've come in Mark's gospel to the instruction Jesus gives His disciples in the house in Capernaum. He is on the way to Jerusalem, to the suffering, death, and resurrection Paul later explains to the Thessalonians. And what Jesus teaches His disciples here will have a massive impact on the world later.

In Thessalonica, while some Jews, a great many of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women were persuaded by Paul's preaching and teaching, others were filled with jealousy and rage. They formed a mob to attack Paul and Silas in the house where they were staying.

When the mob attacked, they didn't find the two missionaries, but they did find the homeowner and a few other Christians, so they dragged them before the local authorities. Listen to the accusation the men make against Paul and Silas and the gospel:

**Acts 17:6 6 And when they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city authorities, shouting, "These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also . . .**

### The Significance of the Community Response

The disciples are accused of "turning the world upside down." We often think this describes the effect of the gospel on religious culture as people leave the pagan gods and follow Christ. Or we might think of it as the effect of the gospel on the economic outlook of major cities where idolatry and temple prostitution were quite lucrative pursuits. But there is something more. **The reason these simple Jews had such a huge effect on the social landscape of their day is because they understood and embraced and exemplified what Jesus taught them as they were making their way from Galilee to Jerusalem in the final days of His life.**

**T.S. > So, let's turn to Mark 9:33-37 and find out what Jesus taught His disciples that God would later use to turn the whole world upside down. Let's discover the truth that God will use in our lives today to turn our world upside down as well!**

## **The Teaching of Jesus That Turns the World Upside Down**

### **What Jesus Is NOT Teaching**

Jesus and His disciples have arrived again in Capernaum, the town that appears to have been their home base in Galilee. There, in the house where they are staying, perhaps Peter's house, Jesus engages His disciples about an argument they were having as they traveled. He fields an effort from John to prove that he is the most loyal disciple. Then, He does some advance teaching on spiritual living.

Let's be clear, as we look at these three sets of verses over the next two weeks. Let's be clear about what Jesus is **NOT** doing. First, He is not instructing His disciples to take on the better characteristics of small children in order to enter the kingdom. Second, Jesus is not teaching His disciples to accept carte blanche every teacher who comes along claiming to be from Jesus. Third, Jesus is not exalting self-mutilation as a means of spiritual discipline or Christian discipleship!

**T.S. > So, what is Jesus teaching His disciples that God will later use to turn the world upside down? Let's take a look!**

### **Was It Just Pride or An Urgent Sense of Necessity?**

First, on the journey through Galilee from the Mount of Transfiguration back to Capernaum, the disciples have been having an apparently heated discussion regarding who among them is the greatest. At first glance this probably looks like a bunch of petty schoolboys arguing over who's the most valuable player on the ballfield. We often assume these men are simply engaging sinful pride in a testosterone fueled battle for dominance.

But take another look.

Just before the arrival in Capernaum, we find Jesus, walking with His disciples and teaching them that when they arrived in Jerusalem, He was going to be killed and rise from the dead on the third day. Mark tell us that they did not understand the saying and were afraid to ask Jesus for clarification. I think they understood something in what Jesus said, but not the whole of what Jesus said, and that's why they were arguing.

Leaders had arisen from time to time in Israel. These leaders challenged the social and political status quo and were assassinated for their efforts. I think the disciples understood what it might mean for their leader— who had clearly gotten the attention of local political figures who wanted to kill Him— I think they understood the dead part but not the rise again part. They had seen the dead part before but had never seen the rise again part.

I think their argument along the way about who was the greatest among them was basically a strategic planning meeting. If Jesus was going to die, and there was no reason to think that He wouldn't, then their movement was going to need a new leader and they needed to figure out who the new leader should be. And if that new leader was going to move the movement forward, that leader would need to be no less great than Jesus Himself, so I think they were arguing about

which of them was in the best position to replace Jesus as the leader of the group when Jesus died.

### A Teachable Moment

Now we have a teachable moment and Jesus took full advantage of it! He called them to him, sat down among them, in full teacher mode, and said to them:

*“If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.”*

Look at what Jesus is saying. **If any of you wants to replace me as first among you, then you must first become like me: last of all and servant of all.**

### Supporting Scriptural Evidence to the “Lastness” of Jesus

Listen to what **Isaiah** the prophet wrote concerning the servant of God, the Messiah:

**Isaiah 53:2-3 (ESV)** <sup>2</sup> *For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him.* <sup>3</sup> *He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.*

Doesn't that sound like someone who is “last of all”? Listen to what **Paul** records about Jesus in Philippians 2:5-8:

**Philippians 2:5-8 (ESV)** <sup>5</sup> *Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,* <sup>6</sup> *who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,* <sup>7</sup> *but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.* <sup>8</sup> *And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*

Doesn't that sound like one who is last of all and servant of all? Listen to what **Jesus** Himself says on the night He was betrayed, after He had washed the feet of His disciples:

**John 13:12-17 (ESV)** <sup>12</sup> *When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, “Do you understand what I have done to you?”* <sup>13</sup> *You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am.* <sup>14</sup> *If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.* <sup>15</sup> *For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you.* <sup>16</sup> *Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him.* <sup>17</sup> *If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.*

What Jesus teaches His disciples is that if they are to succeed in succeeding Him, as He knows they must, they must be like Him! Jesus is going to the cross, and he knows it. He is going to die

for their sins and the sins of the whole world, and he knows it. He is going to the tomb and three days on the dark of death, and he knows it. He is going to the resurrection, and ultimately to return to the right hand of the Father, and He knows it. He also knows that each of them must succeed Him in the mission to fill the earth with the knowledge of the glory of God through the witness of the gospel. Jesus does not disparage the subject of their argument, the need for competent leaders. **He defines for them the kind of leaders they must all be.**

### **A Physical Example That Turns the World Upside Down**

Then, to solidify His teaching in this moment, He provides an object lesson for them. What is a good teachable moment without an object lesson!

Jesus takes a child (if it's Peter's house they're in, it could even be one of Peter's sons), and stands the child in the middle of them all, and then Jesus goes one step further. Children are not highly esteemed in Jesus' day. They have little or no social status. They have not authority or self-autonomy. They certainly don't belong in the middle of an adult gathering, and especially not in the presence of a man as important as Jesus. You know on other occasions these same disciples have tried to prevent children from coming to Jesus, remember?

Anyway, Jesus takes this little boy and stands him among them. But the boy is not the object lesson! The child just stand there. The child says nothing profound. The child does not miracles. The child is just a normal everyday kid being exactly what you would expect. The child is not the object lesson. So, who is? Who does or says something totally unexpected? Who turns the world upside down here?

Watch Jesus. Jesus Himself is the object lesson. Watch what Jesus does. He takes the child in His arms. The word here provides the picture of Jesus sweeping up the child in a bear hug of love. The action signals unabashed affection. What Jesus does reverses the social order. Sure, a child might, under some condition, hug their parent in a social setting, but what adult would sweep up a child and make him an equal in love in a social setting? Among adults? Among grown men? What grown man would single out a mere child for favor in the presence of important men who can actually make a difference in his life? And this word for "embrace" that Mark uses has a larger impact. It also suggests that **Jesus intends His disciples to understand that His action includes not only this child but all those who are like children in their littleness and unimportance.**

Now, let me put this together for you. Jesus here teaches His disciples that if they do indeed desire to be great, a desire Jesus does not condemn but defines, then they must love and serve the least of all as if they are themselves the last of all. **Jesus turns their world upside down.**

If you want to be great, to be first in the kingdom of God, be fully like Jesus. If you want to be great, and you should, if you want to be present in the world like Jesus was present in the world in His day, and you should, then **you must become more and more like Jesus.**

As we close this morning, and prepare for the Lord's Supper, let's look at what it means to be like Jesus.

- Jesus set aside His position of glory to take on the position of servant.
- Jesus only did that which He saw the Father do and spoke only what He heard the Father say. He lived and died for the Father's glory.
- Jesus did all that He did on total reliance on the Holy Spirit.
- Jesus loved and served as the last of all and the servant of all, with love for even the least.

You say, today, that you are a follower of Jesus. You say that you have invited Him into your heart and given your life to Him. Have you, really? Are you setting aside yourself, and your desires, and your interests, and your resources in Jesus' name in order to serve others, even the least among them? Do you live solely for the Father's glory? Are you relying entirely on the Holy Spirit for each moment? Do the people around you know how much God loves them from the way you love them?

Jesus, in the final letters to the church that He dictates to John in Revelation 2-3 repeatedly calls the church to **repent**. It is not a call to conversion, to getting saved all over again (though it might be for some people who call themselves "Christians" to finally get saved for the first time!) **It is an admonition for us to check our hearts and make sure we are fully aligned with Christ to the depth of our being.** It is an instruction to be fully like Jesus and not a little like Jesus and a lot like the world.

What will turn the world upside down in our day? When we learn the lesson and put it into practice: True greatness comes not as the world might expect, but through a heart and life committed to God's glory by becoming more and more like Jesus, not only in what we think and believe, but how we live. "If anyone would be first, he must be the last of all and the servant of all," just like Jesus!