

**Who is the greatest?****Objective:** We will learn:

- That God is patient with us.
- What greatness means in God's Kingdom.

**Introduction**

- Apart from Jesus, who is the greatest person who ever lived? Why?

**Recap**

In our last study we heard how the disciples, in Jesus' absence, had been unable to heal a boy who *"has a spirit that makes him mute ... seizes him, it throws him down, and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid"*. Their inability to heal the boy had brought them ridicule and scorn from some local scribes.

**Question:**

- Can you remember why the disciples had been unable to heal the boy? Jesus healed the boy, but had first taken the opportunity to strengthen his father's faith:

<sup>23</sup>*And Jesus said to him, "If you can! All things are possible for one who believes."* <sup>24</sup>*Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, "I believe; help my unbelief!"*

**Question:**

- What are the *"all things"* that are possible for believers?

When Jesus healed the boy, the demon that was causing his terrible fits and convulsions took one last chance to hurt the boy:

<sup>26</sup>*And after crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out, and the boy was like a corpse*

Jesus then gently and lovingly took the boy by the hand and lifted him up.

**Add****Our Study Text:****Read Mark 9:30-37**

<sup>30</sup>*They went on from there and passed through Galilee. And he did not want anyone to know, <sup>31</sup>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."* <sup>32</sup>*But they did not understand the saying, and were afraid to ask him.*

<sup>33</sup>*And they came to Capernaum. And when he was in the house he asked them, "What were you discussing on the way?"* <sup>34</sup>*But they kept silent, for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest.* <sup>35</sup>*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."* <sup>36</sup>*And he took a child and put him in the midst of them, and taking him in his arms, he said to them, <sup>37</sup>"Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me."*

Our study text opens with Jesus and His disciples on the move again:

<sup>30</sup>They went on from there and passed through Galilee.



Caesarea Philippi to  
Capernaum = 27 miles

Before the Transfiguration, Jesus had healed a blind man in Bethsaida (Mark 8:22-26) and that “Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi.” (Mark 8:27).

The Transfiguration and healing of the demon possessed boy likely took place in this area, and they are now returning to the region of Galilee to the west of the Sea of Galilee.

We have heard on several different occasions that Jesus didn’t want to come into contact with people, so He could spend as much time as possible teaching His disciples. In verse 31, Mark gives us a summary of what Jesus was teaching them:

*And he did not want anyone to know, <sup>31</sup>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 has been telling them repeatedly what will happen to Him.

Just a week or so before, He had for the first time told them how He would suffer, die, and rise again.

### Read Mark 8:31-32

*<sup>31</sup>And he 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. <sup>32</sup>And he said this plainly.*

### Questions:

- What was Peter’s reaction to this first prediction?
- How do the apostles react to this second prediction we hear in verse 31?

They continue on their way and arrive in Capernaum, and are *"in the house"* as we are told in verse 30.

Jesus spent a lot of time in Capernaum, it was His second home after his hometown of Nazareth, and was considered his "base of operations" during His earthly ministry, but this would be the last time He was in this town.

**Question:**

- Whose might "the house" be? These verses may help:
  - Mark 1:21,29
  - Mark 2:1

In the house, (whoever's it is), Jesus asks the disciples:

*"What were you discussing on the way?"* <sup>34</sup> *But they kept silent, for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest.*

Luke's account makes it clearer that they are talking about who is the greatest of the twelve apostles.

**Read Luke 9:46**

<sup>46</sup> *An argument arose among them as to which of them was the greatest.*

Their argument shows us why the disciples didn't understand what Jesus was saying about His impending suffering, death and resurrection. They still had notions of Jesus setting up a mighty earthly kingdom and that they would be high officials in it, the only question was who would have what rank.

**Questions:**

- What are your thoughts on their argument?
- Why did they keep silent in response to Jesus' question?

Jesus knew what they were arguing about, as what happens next will show us, but He asks to give them an opportunity for repentance.

Rather than rebuke them, or even give up on them, Jesus shows His love for them and endless patience by using this situation as a gentle teaching opportunity. He sits down and calls them to Him:

*"If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all."* <sup>36</sup> *And he took a child and put him in the midst of them, and taking him in his arms, he said to them,* <sup>37</sup> *"Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me."*

**Apply**

**Regular Learning Task (5 minutes)**

Do we see any of the "5 Mark Themes" in this passage?

1. Jesus' power.
2. Jesus came to bring the Kingdom of God to people.
3. His disciples struggle to understand who he is.
4. The religious leaders are corrupt and hypocritical and united in their hatred for Jesus.
5. A surprising cast of characters who do get who Jesus is and come to him in faith.

**Learning Task 1 – Patience is a Virtue****Reflect and discuss (10 minutes)**

The disciples struggle with Jesus' clear account of His mission, they cannot comprehend the facts of His Passion.

**Questions:**

- What should we have expected from the disciples as Jesus repeatedly pointed them to the greatness of His suffering and His victory?
- When will the disciples understand what Jesus is telling them?
- What examples of God's (and Jesus') patience in Scripture can you recall?

Jesus' patience in dealing with His disciples in the face of what seems inexcusable ignorance is one of His most beautiful attributes.

- Have there been times when you've had to repent: "How could I have been so foolish? God's Word was clear but I ignored it!"

As with the disciples Jesus patiently calls us back to Himself week in and week out and we marvel at His patience with us.

**Read 2 Peter 3:9**

*<sup>9</sup>The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.*

**Learning Task 2 – The Greatest in God's Kingdom****Quiz, read and discuss (10 minutes)**

The TV programme, 100 Greatest Britons was broadcast in 2002 by the BBC. The programme was the result of a vote conducted to determine whom the United Kingdom public considers the greatest British people in history.

**Question:**

- Can you guess who came first?
- Who else was in the top 5?

**In verses 35-37** Jesus patiently takes the disciples foolish argument about who is the greatest, and redirects it. He is not giving some homely advice to be nice to children, but uses them as the example of those most obviously in need and helpless.

He tells us that we should make them, and anyone else like them, the objects of our devoted service. We should receive them in His name, and that we serve Jesus by serving them.

Jesus teaches that to be top of the list of the Greatest in His Kingdom, you need to be willing to be the Greatest Servant.

**Read 1 Corinthians 27-31**

*<sup>27</sup>But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; <sup>28</sup>God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, <sup>29</sup>so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. <sup>30</sup>And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, <sup>31</sup>so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."*

**Read Mark 10:43-45**

*<sup>43</sup> But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, <sup>44</sup> and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. <sup>45</sup> For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*

**Question:**

- What can we do to serve others?

Only Jesus can issue this call to greatness. Anyone else would have been called a hypocrite, but this is exactly the way Jesus behaved all the way to the cross and grave. He behaves like this even now, He still serves the needy and lowly, and the always undeserving, in Word and sacrament, serving you and me.

**Away**

In Jesus' teaching here, by saying we should be servants even of children, He gives parents a special blessing. In doing what is natural, and doing it in His name, it becomes something great in Jesus' eyes. What a great honour for those who change nappies, read Bible stories to their children and teach them to pray.

Every parent, and those whose lives are devoted to the care of children, to the care of the mentally and physically impaired, to the care of the vulnerable and aged, should see wonderful encouragement and joy in this picture.

But the dependent, the helpless, the powerless, often can do nothing to repay what has been done for them, other than saying "Thank you!"

And so it us with us and Jesus! We can never repay Him.

**Philippians 2:3-7**

*<sup>3</sup> Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. <sup>4</sup> Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.*

*<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.*