August 18, 2013

**A truly great man is the servant of all**

Mark 9:33-10:16 / Key Verse: 9:35b, “If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all.”

Today’s passage has 5 different topics but we can study mainly with one theme which is “A truly great man is the servant of all.” In fact, the word, “servant” is the main key word in Mark’s gospel because the author of Mark’s gospel is emphasizing Jesus as a servant. The key verse of Mark’s gospel is Mark 10:45. “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” May God bless each of us to know the secret of becoming a truly great man and woman through today’s bible study and help us to make a new decision to live as a humble servant of all people around us! Amen.

**First, the greatest man is the servant of all (9:33-37)**

The time was right after Jesus taught his disciples about his death and resurrection second time (8:31 & 9:31). They passed through Galilee and came to Capernaum. When Jesus was in the house, he asked them, “What were you arguing about on the road?” The disciples kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest. As we know Jesus’ death was very near. However the disciples had no idea about why Jesus had to die and what would happen next after his death although Jesus taught about his death and resurrection repeatedly. At this very critical time, the disciples argued about who was the greatest among them. It reveals that they were still spiritually immature like young children.

However, Jesus did not rebuke their immaturity. Rather, Jesus took this time as an opportunity to teach how a man can be truly great. Let’s look at verse 35. “Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, ‘If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all.’”

“Who is the greatest?” is one of the most common popular questions among men. Everywhere people live, even where two people get together, they compare of who is greater. The desire to be great is natural desire since man was created in the image of God. As God is great, so we desire to be great in our nature. God did not make man to be mediocre but to be great. If someone does not have the desire to be great, he must pray to restore the desire to be great. But man’s problem is that they do not know how they can be a truly great man.

In verse 35, Jesus said to the disciples. “If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all.” Here we learn that the opportunity to be greatest is open to anyone and the greatest man is not the man who has the top position but the one who humbly serves all people considering others better than himself (Philippians 2:3b). True greatness does not come from position, or title, or rank but from how much we serve others from our hearts. The disciples must have thought that in order to be great, they must have higher position than others. But it was not true. To be great men, all they needed was to focus on how much they could serve others no matter what title or position they would be given.

Let’s read verse 36-37. “He took a little child and had him stand among them. Taking him in his arms, he said to them, ‘Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.” This is very powerful visual analogy of how we can be a truly great man by serving others humbly. As we all know, welcoming and serving little children is not an easy job. Caring them for a while can be fun because they are cute and lovely. But little children are not always lovely but also very demanding. They require us to treat them like a king. Little children are totally dependent on a care-giver. So the care-giver should serve them with whatever they need. And as applications of this analogy, it is obvious that Jesus did not mean literally welcoming only real little children but welcoming all people around us who need our care. Jesus said, “Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.”

In Korea, there was a pastor who served most abandoned poor people in the society. Their demanding for serving was endless. One day the pastor was carrying a very sick woman on his back to the hospital and on the way, he was exhausted and he dropped her from his back and he also fell on the ground. Out of too much burden for caring needy people, he complained to Jesus for the first time. But at that very moment that he began to complain to God, he saw a vision that the woman looked like Jesus who fell sick on the ground. All of sudden his sense came back, and remembered Matthew 25:35-36, “For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me,….” With this vision and the word of God, he was strengthened and stood up again and carried her on his back to the end to the hospital. From that time on, he could continue to serve most needy people with burning desire because he saw vividly in a vision that it was Jesus whom he was serving no matter whom he was serving. Serving our children, serving our bible students, serving any other needy people around us who need our care are eventually serving our Lord Jesus who gave his life on the cross and our everlasting heavenly Father our God.

In El Camino UBF ministry, there are 40 shepherds who are deeply dedicated to serve students through one to one bible study. Among many works of God, I was most touched by Missionary John Baik’s shepherd heart serving one really hopeless sheep who was most difficult to serve for a very long time. The sheep’s name was Moses and he couldn’t finish high school for a long time. He didn't even know how to read English properly although he was a native student. But Missionary John Baik raised him as a presider by faith and out of love toward him. He taught how to read English and write an essay and helped to study practically. Finally he entered the college and he became one of the most graceful shepherds. Since Missionary John Baik served most needy student to the end, he is a truly great man in God’s eyes.

I pray that I may have burning desire to always welcome and serve my two children and wife no matter what and young college students who need God’s divine love so that I may grow as a truly great man in God’s eye!

**Second, the great man is to be broad-minded and open-hearted in Jesus (9:38-41)**

Look at verse 38. After Jesus taught how they could grew as truly great man, John didn’t seem to grasp what Jesus meant. He said to Jesus, “Teacher, we saw a man driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us.” John including other disciples had strong conviction that they are the only ones who were authorized by Jesus in performing miracles such as driving out demons. We can understand John and other disciples’ exclusivity because they were still young spiritually. How did Jesus help John? Let’s read verses 39-41. “Do not stop him, no one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, for whoever is not against us is for us. I tell you the truth, anyone who give you a cup of water in my name because you belong to Christ will certainly not lose his reward.” Jesus’ disciples should be purely Jesus-centered. For example, the work of God is not only in the UBF ministry but also in other church. As we cherish our ministry, so we must cherish other ministry too. Jesus says,” I tell you the truth, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to Christ will certainly not lose his reward.” As long as serving anyone because of Jesus, we are one family in Christ and no one who does so will lose his or her reward in Christ. The great man should avoid exclusivity and should have purely Jesus-centered mind. Then he can have broad and open heart just like our Lord Jesus has broad and open heart.

**Third, the great man is absolutely careful not to cause others to sin and not to give him the chance of sin (42-50)**

Let’s read verses 42-50 together. “And if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied around his neck. If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched. Everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with each other.” Here Jesus teaches the seriousness of causing others to sin and sinning to ourselves. Jesus never exaggerates about anything but tells the truth only as it is. But here Jesus uses the sentence and words “being thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied around his neck”, “cut it off”, and “pluck it out”. All these words reveal the seriousness of causing others to sin and sinning to ourselves. According to Jesus’ teaching, hell is real and it is really the place of absolute punishment. One day those who do not repent sinning life will see no more this world except the fiery hell where even the worms do never die and are eternally tormented.

Jesus’ disciples are called to be the salt in this corrupt world. Salt is good because of its role of preservative and giving taste of food. But if salt loses its saltiness, it becomes useless and is thrown to the ground and trampled by men. To the disciples the saltiness is Jesus-like character such as true greatness in their serving personality. When the disciples serve each other and the needy people with Jesus’ love, people taste true love of God and they are drawn to God and such love preserves this world from total corruption. Salt melts when it is together with the food without changing its saltiness. Likewise, true Christians melt and become like nobody; like humble servants. Yet it gives true taste to the people making this world enjoyable and happy. When they do so, they are truly great in the sight of God.

**Fourth, the great man is the one who receives the kingdom of God with child-like attitude (10:13-16)**

Look at verses 13-16. “People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.’ And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them.” All parents like to bless their little children. So here people also were bringing their little children to Jesus to have him touch them to bless their lives. The disciples thought that they were noisy and bothering Jesus, and they rebuked them. Their hearts were far from God’s heart who accepts little children. So when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and he had to teach the very important lesson about entering the kingdom of God. Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belong to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” The little children are the symbol of immaturity but at the same time they have very precious nature which is simple and pure trust in their parents’ love. Here Jesus emphasizes entering the kingdom of God is not earning through making our own many efforts or achievement but simply receiving by trusting in God’s love. Receiving the love of God with simple trust is the beginning of growing as a great man and woman. To give and serve other, we must first receive from God his abundant love with child-like attitude which is simple and pure trust in his love.

May God bless each of us to have child-like attitude; pure and simple trust in Jesus to receive the love of God so that we may be filled with his love and with his love we may serve others abundantly and grow as truly great men and women of God! Amen!