

Sermon Title: How To Be First
Scripture Text: Mark 9:30-41

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 3-3-19

Well, come with me, please, to Mark Chapter 9. This morning our venue, Lord willing, is Verses 30 through 41. The situation that is before us in this text is a time when Jesus caught the disciples having an argument over which of them was greatest. They had really had a problem with that—that argument went on until the night before Jesus went to the Cross. Jesus turned that into a great lesson for them, and a great lesson for you and me, by recording it in the Scripture. And so, I titled this: "How to Be First in His Kingdom," and that comes from a phrase in our text for this morning. Now, it's a narrative, and so imposing an outline on it can be a little bit artificial; but we will do it, nevertheless. We'll look at it under these headings: Number 1—Don't miss the big issue. Number 2—Don't argue the *wrong* issue. Number 3—Practice humility. And Number 4—Embrace your teammates.

We start out by saying: Don't miss the big issue. Now, remember: Jesus has finished up that extended ministry in Galilee—we call it the Great Galilean Ministry; He's taken His men on a big tour through some Gentile territory, and back around and across the Sea of Galilee; and then He's taken them way up to the north, on the northern extreme of the boundaries of Israel, to a place called Caesarea Philippi, and some wonderful things have taken a place there. But now, His purpose is to teach and train the Twelve Apostles and the other small group of faithful disciples who traveled with them. Having been up there in the north—and we've been studying that; I encourage you to go back and review it, if you've missed it—now, He takes them back into Galilee, but this time with a very different purpose from when He was there before. This is not a preaching tour. He's not going to go around to synagogue to synagogue to synagogue, He's not going to be dealing with masses of people, He's not going to be doing countless miracles like He had done before. He's focusing on teaching this small group.

So we read in Mark Chapter 9, Verse 30—"From there"—"there" refers to Caesarea Philippi—"they went out and began to go through Galilee, and He did not want anyone to know about it" (NASB, and throughout, unless otherwise noted). In other words, He wasn't trying to make the big impression, He wasn't displaying His credentials for all of Israel to see; He was focusing on those guys. The "big issue" that I refer to was Jesus repeating over and over, what was going to happen to Him. He needed these guys to understand it and buy into the plan. It was essential to the gospel, but at the same time, it was *very hard* for His men to grasp it. Look at the next two verses: "For He was teaching His disciples and telling them, 'The Son of Man is to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill Him; and when He has been killed, He will rise three days later.' But they did not understand this statement, and they were afraid to ask Him."

Now, this is recorded in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and this is one of those cases where you really need all three to get all the details. Matthew adds the little tidbit that, "They were deeply grieved" (Matt. 17:23). Well, of course they were grieved! They loved Jesus, they had been with Him all this time; they didn't want Him to be taken away from them. So, "They were deeply grieved," but "they were afraid to ask Him" more about it. They were still stuck on the promise that Jesus is the King, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 4:17), He's "the Son of God" (Mk. 1:1)—they were looking forward to a coronation, not a crucifixion! So it grieved them, and they just really had trouble understanding it.

Sermon Title: How To Be First
Scripture Text: Mark 9:30-41

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 3-3-19

Now, that sounds strange to us, because Jesus did say, very clearly, what was going to happen. But we weren't in their shoes, and we have the whole story now. You can rightly wonder *why* they found it so very difficult. I would point out to you that, there's an element, always, that for someone to understand things of God—to understand spiritual truth—requires God to open your heart (see Lk. 24:45; Acts 16:14; 1 Cor. 2:14; 2 Tim. 2:25). That's why we call upon God: "Teach me, show me, 'Open my eyes, that I may see...' (Ps. 119:18, NKJV)."

Remember when they were up in Caesarea Philippi, and Jesus asked them, "Who do people say that I am?" (Mk. 8:27), and He got all the plethora of answers; and then He says, "But who do you say that I am?" (vs. 28). And remember, we read this in Mark, but also in Matthew 16:16—"Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.'" Remember what came next? "And Jesus said to him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.'" Now, they had lots of evidence over a long time, but it wasn't until God the Father gave them the full understanding that they could put it together (see Jer. 24:7; Jn. 6:45; cf. Dt. 29:4). Well, something similar was happening concerning them understanding the promise of Jesus's death and resurrection.

Look how Luke puts it: Luke 9:44 and 45. Jesus says, "Let these words sink into your ears; for the Son of Man"—and now, He used that term for Himself more often than any other; and that come from Daniel 7, where the "Son of Man" is the One who brings the kingdom to Earth (vss. 13-14); He's the human king of the kingdom of God on Earth, or the kingdom of heaven. So they were all-in on that! "We're for that! We'll gladly go to Your coronation! We'll gladly sit on those thrones You mentioned, and reign with You" (Matt. 19:28). But He said, "The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men.'" But they did not understand this statement, and it was"—notice this—"concealed from them so that they would not perceive it; and they were afraid to ask Him about this statement."

So the big issue that you must not miss is that the gospel is, that we are alienated from God, and the only hope of reconciliation is what He has done for us. "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures...He was buried...He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3-4). "The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6:23). We have life because He died and rose again. That's the big issue, and don't dare miss the big issue.

Secondly, right alongside that: Don't argue the *wrong* issue. I was looking at, back when I had preached through the Gospel of Matthew, and I read my own sermon from this text in the parallel passage in Matthew, and I laughed out loud at myself about a day that I had long forgotten: We had moved my mom to Idaho; she was up here for about her last 10 years. And she wasn't quite to the state that we took away her car keys, but she had this cute little bright red, late-1980s Honda Civic—she was about 4 foot 9—and we had her under strict orders: "You can drive from your house to the corner down there—that's for the bank and grocery store is—and back. And if you drive anywhere else, you're done." And she bought in; she was good with that. So she would drive her little car back and forth to the grocery store, and it was pretty hard to keep the battery charged, so she called me one day and let me know that her car battery was dead.

Sermon Title: How To Be First
Scripture Text: Mark 9:30-41

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 3-3-19

That night, I went over to her house and I pulled my car into her driveway and I parked over to one side, and then I pushed her little car out of the garage, right next to mine, so that the jumper cables could reach from my battery to her battery. I was doing this alone and I didn't have anybody to tend the cables for me—and I'm always a little nervous about jumper cables; you know, you don't want one of the clips to fall off and short out, or something like that. I was doing it alone, and I wanted to be as careful as I could, so I rolled down the window on the driver's side of her car so that I wouldn't have to climb all the way in to start her car; I could do it from outside. So, once I got the cables connected, I went around and I leaned in through the driver's window, and I reached across and reached around the steering wheel, and I turned the key, and—proving that I was a mechanical genius—it started immediately.

However, in the next split second, that was when I was reminded that, that model of car—my mom's car—had one of those early shoulder-strap things that moved on a track along the door; and as soon as the engine started, it went into action, and the car was working just right, so the shoulder strap sensed some resistance, and so, what does it do? It *clamps down* really hard! There I was, with my head inside the car, my other end and my legs still outside the car, and—it would have made a good [entry] on "America's Funniest Videos," but, it didn't. I finally wriggled my way out, and the first thing I did: Did I go disconnect the battery cables? No. The first thing I did was look around and see if anybody caught me! And nobody did, and then, I've realized since then—nobody would ever have known if I hadn't told this dumb story. But then, with a very red face, I walked around, unhooked the cables, as *if* I wasn't embarrassed.

You know that feeling when you get caught doing something stupid? You know what it's like; I presume you do. And you know the feeling when that something that you do is not just stupid, it's selfish and it's sinful? Well, the Twelve Apostles were in precisely that situation of suddenly discovering that their sinful personal ambition was now exposed in the spotlight of the scrutiny of Jesus Himself. That brings us to the next couple of verses in our text: Mark 9:33 and 34—"They came to Capernaum; and when He was in the house, He began to question them, 'What were you discussing on the way?' But they kept silent, for on the way they had discussed with one another which of them was the greatest." Friends, these are real men; they're normal. It grates on me every time I see the idols and the icons and the gaudy artwork that supposedly portrays Jesus and the Apostles with halos around their heads. I know that's just symbolic, but nothing could be further from the truth. They were perfectly normal men, and they struggled, just like you and I struggle, in the battle against our own fallen fleshly desires and perspectives and our "me-ism," if you will.

Now, the Twelve—like I said, they were picking up on some things pretty good, and they understood that part about Jesus saying they would reign with Him; and He mentioned thrones in His kingdom—they were into that. But, they weren't catching on to the lessons about faith and humility. This is just one of *several* times that they argued among themselves, which of them was going to be greatest. Remember, there's even the one—it's recorded in Matthew Chapter 20—when James and John—the two brothers who were the "Sons of Thunder" (Mk. 3:17)—remember, they sent their *mother* to ask Jesus if *her* boys could have the prime positions in the kingdom? Jesus gave them a pretty strong answer. I commend it to you; go read it on your own. But the passage also says that the other 10 were "indignant with the two

Sermon Title: How To Be First
Scripture Text: Mark 9:30-41

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 3-3-19

brothers" for pulling that stunt. I think that the reason the other 10 were mad is that, *they* didn't think of sending *their* mommies to ask Jesus. That argument, indeed, went on right up until the night before the Cross (see Lk. 22:24).

Now, in last week's passage, we saw how Jesus began teaching them a series of very important lessons, and that one was about faith. This lesson is about humility, and it's triggered by the disciples arguing over the wrong issue. What matters is *not* who will be greatest in the kingdom. What matters is that we understand and proclaim correctly the *message* that gets people *into* the kingdom!—about the death and the resurrection of Christ (see Rom. 4:24-25).

So, don't miss the big issue. Don't argue the wrong issue. And here's the main part of this passage: Practice humility. Now, again, by harmonizing the gospels, we can put together what happened as this situation developed. And probably more than any other passage that we've studied in Mark, I think we *need* help from Matthew and Luke to fill in the whole picture. Those 12 guys weren't pinned in a car with their undignified backsides hanging out; it was a *whole lot* worse than that. They were caught by the omniscient, perfectly holy Son of God, with the sin of their hearts exposed. And Jesus ended that conversation pretty quickly, about who was the greatest.

As if to cover over their pride that they had been indulging in, they made up a question to ask Jesus. They knew they were busted, and in Luke 9:47, it's interesting that Luke says that Jesus knew "what they were thinking *in their heart*." Now, interesting—"heart" is singular. He wasn't talking about their "hearts"—it was like they were *fully of one mind* devoted to trying to figure out which of them was the greatest, and completely missing the most important point. I can imagine a certain strain in their voices when they asked Him this question. It's in Matthew Chapter 18, Verse 1, before we get to Mark 9:35. "At that time the disciples came to Jesus and said"—and, you know, they were probably sweating; they may have been stammering. But He had busted them for arguing over who is the greatest, and they said [coyly], "Um, who then *is*, uh, greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" Must've been really hard to try to pretend that that was a serious question, when they knew that they were wrong for asking it.

So, Mark 9:35—"Sitting down, He called the twelve and said to them, 'If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all.' " The point is that, when it comes to the kingdom of God, everything is *radically* different from how we are in this world. In the reward system of the kingdom of heaven, greatness is *not* determined by how many people you have under you; greatness is determined by how many people you get under so that you can lift them up, by serving them for the glory of your King. *That's* "great" in the kingdom of God.

Back in the seventies or eighties, Maranatha Music was making up simple little songs, putting a lot of songs to Scripture, and then they plucked from this situation—made up a song; it was probably one of the least sophisticated, least well-done the Christian songs of all time—but it was *very* Biblical. And I remember, Marsha and I would drive down the highway and play this, and I could belt this one out because it only has about five notes, they're all in my range, and usually I could even get them in the right order. The song goes, "If you want to be great in

Sermon Title: How To Be First
Scripture Text: Mark 9:30-41

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 3-3-19

God's kingdom, learn to be the servant of all." There's a second verse: "If you want to be great in God's kingdom, learn to be the servant of all." There's a chorus: "Learn to be the servant of all, learn to be the servant of all, learn to be the servant of all" (Ryan, Michael. "If You Want to Be Great in God's Kingdom." Maranatha Music, 1974). That's the *whole song*, but, you know what? You know a passage of Scripture when you know that song!

The argument over who is the greatest among them slammed headlong into the convicting omniscience of Jesus. He listened to their phony question of, "Well, who then *is* greatest?" And now that He has their full and contrite attention, it's a moment that He really could have ripped them for their pride, for being insensitive to Him—here He's talking about, "I have to go be killed, and you're worrying about who's greatest?" That's probably how I would have handled it. But that's not what Jesus did. As usual, He did something rather spectacular. He turned that very awkward situation into a powerful teaching time. He took charge, and He gave them very important instructions, and He used a brilliant visual aid: a child.

What we have here in Mark is powerful; it's convicting. But again, I'm going to weave it together with Matthew 18 to get you the fullest possible understanding of this. But let's look at Mark first: 9:36 and 37—"Taking a child, He set him before them, and taking him in His arms, He said to them, 'Whoever receives one child like this in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me does not receive Me, but Him who sent Me.' "

Now, remember, we just heard, they're in a house. We just heard that they're in Capernaum. They spent a lot of time in Capernaum during the Great Galilean Ministry. Whose house did they stay in when they were there? The house of Peter and Andrew. It may very well be that this was one of Peter's children. We know, among the disciples, that at least Peter was married, because he had a mother-in-law, and there's only one way to get a mother-in-law (see also 1 Cor. 9:5). So He might have taken Peter and Mrs. Peter's little boy; I don't know...year old, two years, maybe a toddler, maybe even a baby—it says He held him "in His arms"—that's quite a picture. Really helps us see what He meant.

But now, look what Matthew 18 adds to this, in Verse 3. Jesus said, "Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven." You guys are arguing over who's the greatest? Let's make sure you *get in!* Before He entertains *any* discussion of greatness, go back to the whole issue—and He gives the requirement in two parts: Number 1—"Unless you are converted." Something has to happen to you to *radically* change your direction. That's conversion, the word "repentance"—changing your mind such that it changes your behavior.

"Unless you are converted"—going a whole different way—"and you become like children." Children—especially little children—really need help; they really need their parents, or they would die of exposure, starvation...it would be horrible. You have to be *totally dependent* like a child, going a whole different direction. So He's giving, here, the explanation: When He puts the child in front of them and says, "You've got to be like this," what He means is, "This is what it means to be saved from your sins by faith. This is what it means to be born again. This is what it means to be a Christian. This is what it means to receive Christ. This is what it means

Sermon Title: How To Be First
Scripture Text: Mark 9:30-41

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 3-3-19

to become a believer. This is what it means to become a saint. This is what it means to become a child of God. This is what it means to have a righteousness which is not of yourself (see Phil. 3:9). This is what it means to have a righteousness that exceeds "that of the scribes and Pharisees" (Matt. 5:20)—who, by the way, were the ones who shamelessly regarded themselves to be the greatest in the kingdom of God.

You've got to be *converted!* You've got to be *changed!* The root meaning is, "to turn," or, "to change direction." If you happen to have a New International Version, this is a verse that needs to be crossed out and rewritten correctly. They translated the phrase, "Unless you change," and that's a whole lot different from, "Unless you are converted"—the difference between passive and active. The one says, "You can do it! *Try really hard* and change!" And the other one says, "You *can't* do it! There's no hope, unless you *are* changed by coming in childlike faith to the only One who can change you." You have to allow God to change you from the inside out—*that's* what it means to have childlike faith. You can't make the changes all on your own (see Prov. 20:9; Rom. 10:2-3).

Now, it's true: You work at it; that's for sure. You make decisions; that's for sure. You decide to go the right way; that's for sure. You *are* accountable to God for your choosing; that's for sure. You are commanded to repent; that's for sure. But it is the grace of God and His Holy Spirit working in your life *through* the Word of God that does the actual changing, that gives you the actual new life (see Acts 16:14; cf. Rom. 10:9 with 1 Cor. 12:3b).

That's emphasized by that second description: "Become like children." Picture the dependence of that child on his parents; he trusts them for absolutely everything. His life is simple: "Just let mom and dad take care of me." He's frank, he's obedient, he's unpretentious, he's humble, and he's *utterly* dependent. For you to be a Christian requires you to trust God for *everything*. You've got to learn how to walk by obeying His words, like a child needs to learn that your parents have your best interest, and so, *do what they say*. You take in His Word every day like food for your soul, like the baby needs milk from mom (see 1 Pet. 2:2). You trust your Heavenly Father to know what is best for you. You tell Him what's on your mind; you tell Him what weighs on your heart, and you let Him lead you (see Ps. 55:22; 62:8; cf. 1 Pet. 5:7).

And notice the emphasis that that's what's necessary to "*enter* the kingdom of heaven"—*exactly* the opposite of what the Jewish spiritual mucky-mucks were telling them: "Look how great we are! Be like us!" (see Matt. 23:2, 6-7). He says, "No, no, no." Remember when He went to Nicodemus? He said, "Unless you're born again, you won't even see the kingdom of heaven" (see Jn. 3:3-5). And Nicodemus was pretty sharp; he said, "Born again? What? You want me to crawl back into my mother's womb and be born again? That's impossible!" He understood! Jesus was saying, "Nicodemus"—who was a leader of the Jews, who was a Pharisee—He says, "You have to do something that is *utterly impossible* for you to do!" In other words, *it has to be done for you!* You didn't play a role in your *first* birth; you don't play a role in your *second* birth (see Jn. 1:13). You come and receive a free gift. For you to be a Christian means: Trust God like a child trusts his parents.

Sermon Title: How To Be First
Scripture Text: Mark 9:30-41

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 3-3-19

Paul Anka, way back in the days of my youth, he wrote a very famous song; it wasn't famous until Frank Sinatra sang it. And I have actually been to a funeral where I was so embarrassed that somebody had this song played. You know what it is: "I Did It My Way." If that song is your testimony at your funeral, you'll be in hell. You don't do it your way! Your way doesn't work! There's one way—*only* one way. And so, Jesus says, "You're worried about 'greatest'? There's one way to *even get in*, and it's because of what *I'm* going to do when I die the death that you deserve so that you can have the righteousness that I give you, that you don't deserve (see 2 Cor. 5:21; cf. Is. 53:5-12).

This isn't a passage about how to treat little children. Now—treat little children well, alright? Take care of them. But this is not a passage warning against abusing a child. The child here is an illustration of a Christian. So, next verse in Matthew—Matthew 18:4—reads like this: Jesus says, "Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." If you want to be great in God's kingdom, learn to be the servant of all. Mark's version, 9:37—"Whoever"—hold onto that word for a moment—"Whoever receives one child like this in My name"—meaning, on account of who I am—"Whoever receives one child like this in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me does not receive Me, but Him who sent Me."

Now, let's start with the word "humbles." It literally means, "to make low." It's used in the New Testament in the sense of realizing your lowliness before God. If you cling to one last shred of thinking that you have something of value to offer to God that should cause Him to want to save you, you don't understand Christianity. He did that while you were His enemy (Rom. 5:10). You can't be saved until you let go of any such thought, and you repent, and you turn to Him in childlike faith. It's all received by *grace*. It's a matter of *not* getting what you deserve, and getting what you *don't* deserve (see Ezek. 18:4 with Jn. 5:24).

And would you look there at who can be greatest in the kingdom? It's "whoever"—Whoever! There's not going to be one greatest; there's not going to be a famous Top 10. There's going to be *anybody*. You can manifest the perfection of what the kingdom of God is all about, *whoever you are*, if you will humble yourself. You don't want "fairness"—you don't want what you deserve. You want grace, and you want mercy (see Jas. 4:6).

Let's just say you're driving down the road, about 85 miles an hour, when you run through a stop sign in a residential area, while you're passing in a no-passing zone, by a school, on an icy road, in the fog. A police officer pulls you over, asks you for your paperwork, and looks at your driver's license and discovers it's expired, as is your insurance certificate, as are your license plates. He says, "Just a moment," goes back to his car. He walks toward you with papers in his hand. And you're guilty, and you know it, and you're feeling lower than low. You know you're going to jail; you're trying to figure out who you're going to call. You wince as he comes back up and asks you to open the window. And he says, "I used my own credit to pay for the fines for these tickets I wrote you. Please renew your license and registration and insurance at your convenience. Oh, and, here are four tickets and airline vouchers and hotel reservations and expense money for you to take your family to the Super Bowl. Have a nice day!"

Sermon Title: How To Be First
Scripture Text: Mark 9:30-41

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 3-3-19

Listen: Your sins are *far worse* in the sight of God than anything I just made up. And the goodness of God is *far better* than an imaginary policeman sending you to the Super Bowl because being, even in the *front door* of the kingdom of heaven is *infinitely* better than going to the Super Bowl. But *one question* is crucial: Do you have childlike faith?

And the next thing that Jesus says is that greatness in the kingdom of heaven is status that is open to "whoever." "Whoever" can include you! \What's the *one thing* that makes you great in the service of the King in the kingdom of heaven? It is *humility*. The way to ascend in the kingdom of heaven is to serve other people as if you are serving the Lord Himself. Did you see that? "If you receive a child in My name, you're receiving *Me!* That's how you show what you think of Me" (see Matt. 25:34-45). You serve the other people as if you're serving the Lord Himself, and you do it joyfully, and you do it tirelessly, and you do it faithfully, without caring if there's any recognition for you. The way to climb to the top, in God's eyes, is to fight for the bottom of the pile here on Earth, so you can lift up somebody else.

Now, it doesn't mean depreciating yourself. It doesn't mean verbally putting yourself down so that you put other people in the awkward position of building you up. It doesn't mean that you ignore the fact that God gives you gifts for serving Him, by His grace. It means that you *use* those gifts for the Lord, and you want the credit to go only to Him—it *doesn't matter* about you. It means demonstrating that you're willing to follow Jesus by obeying His Word, even if it should cost you your life—see two paragraphs above what we're studying in Mark 9.

I scoured the Bible on this idea of "greatest in the kingdom of heaven." It was pretty easy to come to the conclusion that the whole idea of "greatest in the kingdom of heaven" is *bogus*, because if you're *in* the kingdom of heaven, *you don't care* about "greatest," except for Jesus! And you're so glad that He brought you there (see Ps. 115:1)! Having to measure people relative to one another is something that *we* do in our pride (see 2 Cor. 10:12), but it's not something that'll be part of the kingdom of heaven. Whenever you see anyone in the Bible mentioned as "greatest," it's always a matter of, as *man* views it. Now, you do see things like, people will be there "from the greatest to the least of them"—there will be people who are wealthy and people who are not; people who were powerful on Earth and people who were not. But the idea of a greater or lesser citizen in the kingdom of heaven is just—it's *irrelevant!* We'll be there with all of our differences, and it won't matter to us at all (see Matt. 19:30). The only thing that matters for the child of God is the joy of being part of the kingdom of heaven, and the *further joy* of being privileged to *serve* the "King of kings and Lord of lords" (1 Tim. 6:15) while we live in *this* upside down kingdom in which we live.

Did you hear what Jesus said is the one and only sign of being the greatest? "Whoever then *humbles* himself as this child...Whoever *receives* this child"—the whole thing has to do with how you relate to others who believe in Jesus Christ. In *any* interaction with *any* Christian, you can be greatest...by serving. And by the way, don't be proud of being humble about your serving. That's a slippery thing! "Do I want to do it so I will look humble, so they'll think I'm humble?" As soon as you think you have humility, you *haven't* (see 1 Cor. 8:2; 10:12). So you better repent and become like a little child.

Sermon Title: How To Be First
Scripture Text: Mark 9:30-41

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 3-3-19

My friends, don't carry on a feud with someone else in the body of Christ, and try to convince me you're a Christian. That's *foreign* to the *whole concept* of the kingdom of heaven! Don't get snooty about certain Christians you won't have anything to do with, and then try to tell me that you're walking with the Lord. If there is another child of God—pictured in this incident by the child that Jesus put in their midst—and you refuse to accept that one as a brother or sister, you belie your own claim to be a Christian (1 Jn. 3:15).

Don't miss the big issue: The big issue is the gospel—what Christ did about our sins. Don't argue the wrong issue—about who's the greatest in the kingdom. But, practice humility. Now, I've got another point, because it's in our text. I figured out how it relates; I called it, "Embrace your teammates," but the truth is, Verses 38 to 41—this little section is enigmatic. It refers to an event that isn't recorded in the Bible. Only the Apostle John mentions it; he brings it up to Jesus. I think he brought it up because his conscience was bothering him, from Jesus rebuking the pride that he shared with the others. But there's no other mention of this; just something that had happened. Look at it with me, and we'll see if we can make the connection: Mark 9:38—"John said to Him, 'Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name, and we tried to prevent him because he was not following us.' " Now, you see how there could be just a little bit of guilty conscience there? "He wasn't among the greatest, so we tried to stop him!" But he was doing it in Jesus' name.

Now, what *do* we know? Well, not much, but we know a few things. Whoever this man was—never named, no other explanation—he was *truly* "casting out demons." He wasn't a fraud; what he did was *in Jesus' name*. He wasn't like the sons of Sceva mentioned in Acts 19—they were *fraudulently* claiming to cast out demons. He's not one of the phonies that Jesus refers to in Matthew Chapter 7, and then says, "I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness' (vs. 23)." So, John and the others should have realized that this guy was doing something like what they did when Jesus sent them out to preach. And by the way, remember the previous paragraph? I can tell you one other thing about this guy: I bet he had a good prayer life. Remember when the 9 of the 12 Apostles couldn't cast out the demon, and Jesus said, "You've got to pray"? So I think that John is showing that, he's starting to catch on a little bit, by bringing up this situation.

But, look what Jesus says—and here's where I think it connects to our text, and this is why I called this, "Embrace your teammates." Verse 39—"But Jesus said, "Do not hinder him, for there is no one who will perform a miracle in My name"—so, Jesus, again, is validating that it really was a miracle—"and be able soon afterward to speak evil of Me." He's saying, "This is a true believer." And then He says this: "For he who is not against us is for us. For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because of your name as followers of Christ, truly I say to you, he will not lose his reward." I call it "Embrace your teammates" because, you've got to understand: There are only two religions—Christianity, and everything else. "And if he's not opposing us, and he's doing it in My Name, he's with us." There's no such thing as neutrality about the gospel and the kingdom of heaven. You're in, or you're out. You're on this team, or you're on the other team (see Col. 1:13; 1 Jn. 3:10). You serve yourself, or you serve the Lord. True believers are the kind of people who never would "speak evil" of Jesus (see 1 Cor. 12:3).

Sermon Title: How To Be First
Scripture Text: Mark 9:30-41

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 3-3-19

So, you want to be great in the kingdom? How's your faith? That's the issue. Is it like a little child—totally dependent for everything on your loving Father?

Let's pray:

Father, we thank You for putting this in Your Word, that we could, as it were, be included in that little circle taught by our Savior that day. Lord, it comes so naturally to us to want to be first, to want to be greatest, to want to be most powerful; and we realize that we need to be converted, and be like little children. You know the needs of every heart here today, and I pray that, if the need is to call out to You to say, "Lord, forgive my sins. Make me Your child," then do that work in that heart, I pray. If we've been swept away and become a little callous to the things of the world around us, and we're seeking our own position rather than seeking to lift up the others—rebuke us, Father, and in Your grace, make us useful once again. Have Your way with us, for Your glory in Your service, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.