

“A Journey Toward Significance”

Text: Mark 9:33-35

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Oakland, California

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PRAY!

Muhammad Ali was born in 1942 in Louisville, Kentucky. As a young boy growing up he wanted to do something great with his life. As an amateur boxer (1954–60), he won 100 of 108 matches. He became the 1960 Olympic light-heavyweight champion. He won the world heavyweight title in 1964. Ali did do something great but a change came over him, from “I want to do something great” to “I want to be someone great.” One of his famous sayings was “I am the greatest”.

- There’s the story when Muhammad Ali was on an airplane the flight attendant asked him to put on a seat belt. He said, “I’m the greatest. I don’t need a seat belt.” She said, “Sir, it’s a rule. Everybody has to wear a seat belt.” Muhammad Ali said, “I’m above the rules. I’m the greatest. Superman didn’t need a seat belt.” And the flight attendant said, “Sir, Superman didn’t need an airplane.”
- What happened to Muhammad Ali is that in his search to do something great the virus of selfishness got into his system.
- The virus of selfishness becomes all about your feeling good and getting stuff and being number one; you want to be great and you want to sign autographs because you want to be Superman.

How do you know if this is your motivation in life? If your life is all about you, if it’s about your happiness and your goals and your dreams and your pleasure and your desires for greatness, you’re there.

If this is where you are at you’re not alone. 2,000 years ago this was true with some of Jesus’ disciples. Jesus and his disciples were traveling to a house. Mark 9 says, *“When they got to the house, Jesus asked them (His followers) ‘What were you arguing about on the road?’ But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest. He sat down and called them around Him and said, ‘Anyone wanting to be the greatest must be the least, the servant of all.’”*

- At that moment their jaws must have dropped. They must have felt uncomfortable like I’m guessing some of you will feel uncomfortable when I say that the quest for greatness is the life of serving. We don’t want to think of greatness like that. We want to think of greatness like Muhammad Ali thought of greatness. He went through life saying, “I am the greatest!”

The reality that we are facing this morning is what the Bible says. The path to greatness is not paved with our narcissistic ways. It's not paved with egocentricity; where it's all about you. It's paved with serving. Jesus brought that message. He said greatness is about serving. He not only taught it but He modeled it, and it took Him all the way to the cross. Luke 9:48 says, "*Jesus said, 'Your care for others is measure of your greatness.'*"

The road paved with serving gives us what we want to go after. This is significance. That's all we want. Every person wants significance in their life. Nobody wants to wake up one day and go, "What happened? I wasted my life. God gave me 80 years to live here on this playground we call earth and I wasted them!" Nobody wants to wake up that way. We want a life of significance.

- And Jesus says to us, "You want greatness? You want significance? Serve."

'Serve' seems so big. What does it mean to serve? Serve at church? Yes. And no. I'm talking about serving everywhere. I'm talking about 24 hours, seven days a week. I must have that mentality that if I want greatness. If I want significance, Jesus said I need to serve.

- I need to serve at home.
- I need to serve at work in the marketplace.
- I need to serve in my community.
- And I need to serve in my church, the body of Christ.
- I need to serve.

Every time you serve, God takes your life and He begins to mold you and change you into the likeness of Jesus Christ, which is ultimately a life of significance. Mark 8:35 Jesus says, "*If you want to try to keep your life for yourself you will lose it. But if you give up your life for My sake and for the sake of the good news you will find true life.*" That's one of the guiding principles of the faith. If you want to lose life, just hang on to it. If you want to find life, you give it up and you serve.

- You cannot grow spiritually without serving. That's the road to significance and to spiritual growth.
- Our church body cannot grow if people are not serving. I want to talk to you this morning about, 'How do you serve at your church?' How do you do that so you can move toward a life of significance? I'm going to give you four things I think you we need to do to serve.

1. If we're going to get in the game we've got to eliminate excuses.

- A. People have all kinds of excuses about using their talents. God is not new to excuses. If you grab your Bible and look at the very beginning you would see Adam and Eve. What did they do? They made excuses. They had all kinds of excuses about why they wanted to live their own way. Moses made excuses on why he couldn't lead the Israelites out of captivity.

- B. Folks, what's your excuse? What keeps you sitting on the sideline?
 - 1. How many would say that your number one excuse for not being able to serve had something to do with time or busyness? Everybody has a time issue.
 - 2. Sometimes what fuels our excuses is that our priorities are wrong or we've made bad decisions. Do an inventory of your life and you might see that you are spending some time doing some things that are going to have no earthly or eternal reward.
- C. We all have limitations, folks. We have limitations in terms of our time and our talents and our energy. But when you embrace your weaknesses this leads us to a biblical truth. In 2 Corinthians 12:10, Paul writes, *"For when I am weak then I am strong."* We say, "God, I'm going to operate in spite of my weaknesses." Because the less I have the more I depend on Him. Then you serve from your weaknesses.

Eliminate excuses.

2. Start small

- A. One of the amazing things about God is He has this incredible ability to take that which is small and to make it big. He has a history of doing that: He took a small amount of bread and fish and He fed thousands. Jesus pointed to the woman who gave two coins in the offering and he said to His disciples, *"She's giving more than anybody because she gave everything she had."* Jesus said in Matthew 10, "Let me tell you what is big: *'It's when you give a cup of water to one of the least of my followers, you will surely be rewarded.'*"
- B. Start small. It doesn't have to be big. One of my favorite things at this church is to see people serve in small ways that nobody even knows about (gardening, cleaning up, office help, visiting the sick).
- C. If we didn't have a lot of people doing the little things you know what would happen to this church? This church would crumble.
- D. You see a need and then you meet it.
 - 1. E. Washington

3. Keep looking.

- A. Somewhere, somehow you are going to feel like a 10 when you serve. If you don't feel like a 10 you keep looking. If it's not a good match and you feel like giving up, keep looking.
 - 1. My search
- B. If you are a Christian, God has gifted you. The Bible calls them spiritual gifts. You have at least one, maybe several. 1 Corinthians 12 says, *"Now there are different kinds of spiritual gifts but it is the same Holy Spirit who is the source of them all."* Every Christian is given a gift. You are given a spiritual capacity to use in service in the body of Christ. Those gifts are not given arbitrarily. God looks at your complex circuitry and he takes everything into consideration and He gifts you appropriately.

4. Rest and reflect.

- A. The reason I want to encourage you to rest and reflect is because as you get into serving, some people feel “This is what I’m created for, this is so great.” And they never stop. You know why? Because people have needs and where there are people there’s always more to do. I want to encourage you. You can’t meet everybody’s needs. Don’t trade your Superman complex for the Messiah complex. There are times when you need to stop and you need to reflect.
- B. Why? Because if serving is about God making me more like Jesus, I need to stop and reflect what’s happening with my heart? A lot of people serve at the expense of their heart. God’s more concerned about your heart than He is concerned about your task. So you need to stop and say, “What’s happening with my heart? Am I growing more like Jesus?”
- C. We see this with Jesus’ disciples. After 70 of them went out two by two, hear what Jesus does. Mark 6, *“The apostles returned to Jesus from their ministry tour and told Him all they had done and what they had taught. Then Jesus said, ‘Let’s get away from the crowd for a while and rest.’ There were so many people coming and going that Jesus and His apostles didn’t even have time to eat. They left by boat for a quieter spot.”*
1. Jesus understood that they were not supermen or the Messiah. He could have tapped into their desires for greatness and got more achievement out of them. But He wanted them to rest and go to a quiet spot, so they could reflect on what had just happened and what God was doing in their life.
- D. Serving is just one part of the plan that God has for your life. If you never stop and rest and reflect on what God’s doing in your life, your spiritual growth is going to begin to atrophy. Serving leads to significance. But some of you are so busy serving or will get so busy serving that you’ll miss what God’s doing in your life. Serving should never sacrifice spiritual growth. Serving enhances spiritual growth, not chokes it out. Rest and reflect.

I’d summarize everything by saying this: true significance comes from selfless serving and a surrendered heart to Jesus.

PRAYER

God, we are people with a lot excuses. We know that You’ve heard them all. Yet we’re also people who don’t want to waste the precious time You’ve given us with this life. We desperately want to live lives of significance. So, God, we beg that You’d give us the strength to serve. Especially when it doesn’t feel natural. And that when we do serve that You would change us. That You would mold ours into lives of significance. God, we will surrender our way to Your way. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.