

True Greatness

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[0 : 00] Good morning. My name is Matthew Capone and I'm the pastor here at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church and it's my joy to bring God's word to you today.

A special welcome if you're new or visiting with us. We're glad that you're here and we're glad that you're here not because we're trying to fill seats, but because we're following Jesus together as one community.

And as we follow Jesus together, we become convinced that there's no one so good. They don't need God's grace and no one so bad that they can't have it, which is why we come back week after week to hear what God has to say to us in his word.

We're continuing our series in the Gospel of Mark. You'll remember that the gospels tell the story of Jesus and his life and his death and his resurrection. And the first half of the book, chapters 1 through 8, we were building up to this climax as we asked the question, who is Jesus?

And Peter finally confesses in the middle of chapter 8 that Jesus is the Christ. Now that we've established that the second half of Mark is Jesus' journey to the cross, and now the disciples are not so much asking the question of who he is as seeing what it actually means to follow him.

[1 : 14] Remember that Peter rebukes Jesus right after that confession for speaking about suffering, and yet we find out, we've seen in these last few sections, that that's a critical part of what it means to follow Jesus.

And so they're learning what it means to take up their cross and follow him. This morning we're going to take a look at the temptation and danger of success and power.

The disciples here are hoping and thinking that as they follow Jesus, their stars in this world are going to rise. But they're going to end up being terribly disappointed because Jesus has something far better for them.

And so with that, I'm going to invite you to turn with me. You can turn in your Bible, you can turn on your phone, you can turn in your worship guide to Mark chapter 9. No matter where you turn, remember that this is God's Word.

And God tells us that his Word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path, which means that he has not left us to stumble alone in the dark, but instead he's given us his Word to show us the way to go.

[2 : 22] And so that's why we read now Mark chapter 9, starting at verse 33. And they came to Capernaum, and when he was in the house, he asked them, What were you discussing on the way?

Oh, excuse me, starting at verse 30, not 33. They went on from there and passed through Galilee, and he did not want anyone to know, 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. But they did not understand the saying, and were afraid to ask him. Verse 33. And they came to Capernaum, and when he was in the house, he asked them, What were you discussing on the way?

But they kept silent, for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest. 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.

And he took a child and put him in the midst of them, and taking him in his arms, he said to them, Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me receives not me, but him who sent me.

[3 : 37] I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's word. Our Father in heaven, we praise you and thank you again that you speak to us in your word, that you cut through the lies that we're told by others, and the lies that we believe ourselves, and instead you show us

the truth.

We ask that you would show us the truth this morning about success and glory and power, that it's something that belongs to you and no one else. We ask that you would cast a spotlight on Jesus, that we would see him as more beautiful and glorious than we had before, that you would grow our love and our affection for him, and you'd grow our reverence and our awe for him.

And we ask these things in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen. As many of you know, Mark Mish goes to our church, and he keeps a pretty low profile, so you may not know who I'm referring to.

He wears the characteristic blue rain jacket when he's here, no matter the time of year, and he's tall because he's a runner. He's actually the running coach at UCCS.

He's out of town. He's out of the country right now. In fact, he's out of the country a lot because of his job. He doesn't just coach at UCCS. He's also the coach for the Estonia national running team.

[5 : 03] So he's in Europe right now. He's working with them, and they have a big race coming up in Berlin on August 15th, so we won't see him for a while. The first time I ever met Mark was at the Panera down on Southgate.

We got dinner. I think it was before he came to our church, but he was checking us out. By the way, Mark gave me permission to tell you all this story. I emailed him with this this week, so don't think that if you share a story with me, it's just going to randomly show up in a sermon.

Mark knows this is happening, okay? Fear not. So I had dinner with Mark. I'd never met him before, and as we were talking, he said, Matthew, you're going to really appreciate this. Do you know the loneliest place I've ever been?

I couldn't guess, so he told me. He said, the loneliest place that I have ever been is in the cafeteria at Olympic Village. Because when you walk into the cafeteria at Olympic Village, there are two kinds of athletes.

There are athletes who have competed and lost. And so as they sit there and they eat, they're thinking to themselves, what is next? Put all this work in.

[6 : 17] I've put all this effort in. It hasn't materialized. And then you have athletes who are sitting there and they have won. They have the medal that they've been working for and they're actually asking the same question.

What's next? Because they are learning the hard way that what they've done did not fill their spiritual hunger, their spiritual need.

Whether you win or lose, victory, Olympic medals are an empty hope. You can be the greatest in the world and be incredibly lonely.

Greatness and power and success do not and will not deliver on their promises because they can't. That's what we see this morning in this story, that the disciples are not beyond the allure of greatness and power.

And of course, neither are we. And so we pick up this story in verse 30. We find out they were in Galilee. Remember that Galilee is where Jesus was preaching in chapter one. And so in a sense, there's a homecoming here.

[7 : 33] But in the past, Jesus was doing these great miracles and telling people about the kingdom of God. But now as we meet him, he has this more private ministry. He doesn't want anyone to know, verse 34.

Instead, he is spending this private time alone with the disciples as he enters this period of instruction that they would know what it actually means to love him and to follow him.

But he's teaching them something they don't want to hear. Verse 31, the Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men and they will kill him. We find out verse 32, the disciples don't understand and they also don't want to ask.

One person says this is probably because they understand enough to know they don't want to know anymore. Jesus is talking about death here and they've heard everything that they're willing to hear. Remember back in chapter eight, Jesus was speaking about the same thing and Peter rebuked him there. Here, Peter is smart enough to stay silent, not bold or brave enough to ask for more information.

[8 : 45] It gets worse than that though. There's a tragic irony here, this great disconnect between what's happening with Jesus and the disciples. Jesus, verse 31, is telling them, he's teaching them about suffering and humiliation.

And we find out at the very same time, while Jesus is giving this instruction to them, the disciples are talking and thinking about something very different. They are talking and thinking about greatness and glory.

We discover that in verse 33, they get to this house that they're headed to, very likely the same house that we saw in chapter one, where Peter and Andrew lived.

And he asks them this uncomfortable question, what were you discussing on the way? Verse 34, they have no answer because of course they're incredibly embarrassed.

What they wanted to know was who was the greatest of all. Now comical, if it wasn't so sad, how much the disciples missed the point.

[9 : 45] Jesus is here telling them about suffering and they instead want power. And Jesus gives us a basic principle of the gospel in verse 35.

He tells them, if anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all. In other words, the way of the world is to push other people down so that you can go up.

The way of the world is to push other people down so that you can go up. The gospel actually works in the reverse, the opposite way.

The way of the gospel is to push others up as you go down. The way of the gospel is to push others up as you go down.

But we can understand the temptation the disciples have here. It's a temptation that we feel as well, that we want success, not out of a desire to serve God or others or the world, not to see God's purposes grow and expand, but instead that we would never have to feel shame and weakness and vulnerability ever again.

[10 : 55] That we could always be powerful and independent and never need others. We would be always wanted and never rejected.

And of course it comes from this place of great insecurity that they're grasping to find their significance somewhere. It takes a lot of security to push other people up.

You might say it takes a supernatural security to try to do that rather than fill a bottomless hole.

I'm going to do something I haven't done before and I'm going to speak to you all a little bit differently than I have in the past. There are certain things that you can't say until you've been with a congregation for four or five years.

And you know, I came here in the June of 2017, which is a little over five years ago. And some of us have been through a lot together. We've bled together.

[12 : 05] We've cried together. We've faced a lot of challenges together as a church. And so I say this out of my love for you. Some of you, many of you are working so hard to fill up, to make up for what did or didn't happen when you were a child, to fill up what you maybe didn't receive from your parents or your family.

And some of you are striving so hard inside and outside of the church, striving to fill something that you're not going to be able to fill, grasping for affirmation.

And I want you to know that that makes me sad and it makes me sad because I want you to know the love of God. The Bible tells us about how great the love of God is.

Romans chapter five says it was while we were still sinners that Christ died for us. So there's nothing that you did to earn God's favor or his approval.

Not only is there nothing that you did to earn God's favor or his approval, Romans chapter eight tells us there's nothing you can do to lose it. There's nothing you can do that will separate you from the love of God.

[13 : 33] Remember what we saw in Mark chapter three when Jesus first called the disciples, what did he call them for? What was the purpose? He called them to be with him.

And then he spends the next three chapters working with them before he ever sends them out. I've told you guys many times before and I'll tell you again once you have any power or wealth in this world you quickly know the difference between people who are interested in you and people who are interested in what they can get out of you.

Have you ever been with someone who thought your presence was enough? that it was enough just that you were there with them and they didn't need you to perform for them.

They didn't need you to deliver things for them. They just wanted you there. Remember I've told you many times before that the disciples got many things wrong and they got one thing right.

And the one thing right is that they kept following Jesus. The other side of that coin is that they got many things wrong and Jesus stuck with them which means that their presence was enough.

[15 : 01] Brothers and sisters when it comes to Jesus and his relationship with you your presence is enough. love. You cannot earn more of God's love.

You do not need more greatness or success. And you might be wondering why in a sermon about success and power we're suddenly talking about love.

And the answer is this. We are only safe from the temptation of power and success when we're secure in the love of God.

We are only safe from the temptation of power and success when we are secure in the love of God.

You have to find security or significance somewhere.

You're going to try to fill that hole somehow. and power and status will always be alluring until we realize there's a better source.

[16 : 15] We're going to go somewhere to fill that hunger and that emptiness and one of the sad realities of life is that people will eat poison before they starve. Know the love of God for you.

Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want. Thomas Chalmers, a Scottish pastor in the 1800s, wrote this book called The Expulsive Power of a New Affection, which is a fancy way of saying you can't get rid of an old love until you have a new love.

I'm going to translate this to you into single man speak. It's hard to get over your old crush until you got a new crush. Hard to get over power power and success until we realize we have everything we long for in Christ.

What power and success offer us, they cannot deliver. God, Jesus, can and does.

know the love of God. Let the love of God be greater and more alluring and powerful than power and success.

[17 : 38] Jesus doesn't just call them out on their conversation. He also gives them some positive teaching about what things actually look like in his kingdom.

Verse 35, he calls a family meeting and decides it's time for some teaching. He says this, if anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all. Then he decides to have an object lesson here.

He takes up a child. Some people think this child might actually be Peter's child. Remember there in Capernaum, which is in Galilee, we know from chapter one, this is the place where Peter and Andrew live.

We know that because Jesus raised Peter's mother-in-law from the dead. So there's a chance they're still in that house and he's taking up one of the disciples' children. He says to them, whoever receives one such child in my name receives me.

And whoever receives me receives not me but him who sent me. Now there are many places in the Bible that talk about being a child. This is talking about receiving children.

[18 : 41] They're related but they're different. What Jesus is saying here is that greatness in my kingdom does not come from caring about greatness. It comes from welcoming children. And children here are this symbol of people who can offer you nothing.

Welcome people who can't help you. Welcome people who can't do anything for you. Welcome people who might be a net negative.

Say no to the status games of the world. have room, have space for the people that the world finds awkward and inconvenient that they find to be a drain and in the way.

I said earlier I moved here in 2017 and when I did I was 27 and I turned 28 very shortly after.

I just turned 33 this past week and so I'm younger than most of you which proves that God has a sense of humor. But I want you to know while I'm younger than many of you if not most of you I brag about you and I brag about this church like a proud parent.

[20 : 11] Someone asked me recently what it is that I love about Cheyenne Mountain and I said what I love about Cheyenne Mountain is that Cheyenne Mountain is an island of misfit toys.

We are not a church of beautiful people. We are not a church I also said look if you come to our church there's going to be a place for you.

Our people welcome whoever comes in the doors. They welcome whoever. There's no cool kids club at least as far as I know. If I find out there's a cool kids club I'm going to be very offended because no one has invited me.

There aren't these highly curated friend groups where it's like we have figured out who the cool people are in the church and we're going to only hang out with them. Some of you all are super weird. Okay. And you have a super weird pastor. And God has brought us together as a family of blessings that he's given us.

[21 : 25] You be at churches sometimes right before the benediction the pastor will say something I've never said before which is make sure you greet someone new. You know why I never say that before the benediction? Because I don't need to.

I know that no matter who walks into our church you all are going to welcome them. I know and we could tell some stories okay. I'm not going to.

Some of you have been here for some things. I know just come up with whatever stereotype you want. Whoever doesn't fit in the most. I never have a question in my mind about whether Cheyenne Mountain is going to go and talk to that person.

I am so proud of you. When I think of that fills me with joy. Some of you are very wealthy.

Some of you are very successful. Some of you are both. I also told this person you know we have a lot of successful people in our church and they don't use their wealth and their success to hide their failure and their mistakes.

[22 : 46] I've watched you all over the last five years take care of people who can't offer you anything in return. I've watched it happen over and over. I say all these things to you not to pat us on the back, not as a place of self congratulation.

I've told you before there's no self congratulation when it comes to the gospel. We're never congratulating ourselves. We're never patting ourselves on the back. That's different though than encouragement.

It's different than saying I see God at work. Continue. Keep doing what you're doing. Our church has plenty of weaknesses. Believe me, I know about them. We've got our own things that we can grow and we've got our own sin patterns.

There are things we can learn from other churches. What I want to tell you today is when it comes to this, keep on keeping on. It is a biblical category to name what is good and to say, keep it up. Revelation chapter 2, there's the letter to the churches and as this letter comes from Jesus Christ, he names as a church has a strength. What it is. 1 Thessalonians chapter 1, one of the most underrated verses in the Bible, Paul is writing to this church and he says, I don't need to write to you to tell you about brotherly love because you already know.

[24 : 09] You're already doing it. And so he ends it with this important phrase, verse 10, we urge you brothers to do this more and more. In other words, Paul knows there's ways they can grow.

He knows there's probably ways the church has not fully lived up to it, but he doesn't come forward to them and say, hey, and here's the ways where you're sinning and you really need to level up. If you guys have been here, you know, you know that I'm always pushing us towards greater and more holiness.

I want us to be moving forward as a church and there's also times to say, 1 Thessalonians chapter 4, verse 9, concerning brotherly love, you have no need for anyone to write to you.

for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another. Cheyenne Mountain, I can say to you concerning brotherly love, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another.

And so I urge you brothers to do this more and more. Cheyenne Mountain, welcome children more and more.

[25 : 17] be hospitable more and more. Be concerned for those who have no status in this world more and more. Give to those who cannot give back to you more and more.

When I came here April of 2017 to sort of kind of interview, I spent a lot of time with Jim Franks and Paul Bishop.

We had this breakfast over at IHOP by Home Depot. and Jim was just like grilling me about small group stuff because that's what I was supposed to come and do. Joke's on you, Jim.

Paul Bishop told me about this church and he said the one thing that's always been true of Cheyenne Mountain is its welcome. That this is a church where people are embraced.

I can tell you this morning five years in this is a church where people are welcome. I've seen you all do it over and over. Do it more and more.

[26 : 24] Okay, I told you we have some life principles here. Principle one, hard to get over your old crush until you have a new crush. Principle two, you can't give away things you don't have.

You cannot give away things you don't have. How is it that you're able to give to those who can give you nothing in return? It's because you've been filled with the love of God.

It's because you've been filled with the love of God. Rich and powerful people have no appeal to you when you know that God will take care of you.

when you know the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. You're able to risk your social status by hanging out with awkward people when you know you're secure in the love of God.

You cannot give away what you don't have. So I say again to you what I said at the beginning, Cheyenne Mountain, know the love of God.

[27 : 37] Know the love of God. God's love is not based on your status. It's not based on your performance. In God's kingdom, you don't earn security and love.

You've already received it. That's the good news of the gospel. That's what allows us to give away to others. It is easy to give gifts when you know your father's rich.

It's easy to give gifts when you know your father is rich. It's when Jesus accepts you and you know it that you're able to be calm and present and offer that kind of security to others.

Know the love of God more and more. Welcome, children, more and more. The famous 1981 film Chariots of Fire tells the story of two different runners who are similar in many ways and also different.

They're competing in the 1924 Olympics. Their names are Eric Little and Harold Abrams. Abrams has this deep wound, this insecurity, this anger that he's trying to work out from growing up as a Jew in Judeo-Christian Britain.

[28 : 55] And he believes that winning the Olympics is going to be the solution to his problems. If he can only get that gold medal, it will finally resolve all of his angst.

So we see at the beginning of the movie, there's very different things going on with these two men. Abrams is wrapped in prestige. He's at Cambridge University. For the first time in 700 years, he's able to complete the challenge of the college dash.

And so he's going up in popularity and success. On the other hand, we see Eric Little, who's off in the middle of nowhere in the Scottish Highlands helping to run this children's race.

And so one is this worldly success and champion. The other one is hidden away in Scotland. Little has to be convinced to compete in the Olympics because he's not sure if it fits his life mission of following God no matter what.

But he loves to run. Abrams, on the other hand, actually confesses at one point that he doesn't love running at all. Instead, he says, it is a compulsion, it is a weapon against being Jewish.

[30 : 04] Little, on the other hand, says, God made me fast. When I run, I feel his pleasure.

Abrams believes that running is the way that he is going to, he says this, justify my whole existence.

Abrams. Now, if you're familiar with the movie, you know that the end, both of them get a gold medal. The problem is they respond very differently. Abrams receives the gold medal that he's been longing for.

He becomes, at that moment, the fastest man in the world. And what do we see after that? He's in the locker room with the rest of his teammates and he's not able to talk to them. He's depressed and morose and he walks out all by himself.

In one of the last scenes, he's standing with his coach, he's sitting in this bar and both of them are drunk. His success has not given him what he needed or wanted.

Doesn't know what to do. As he's racing, you can see his face is filled with anxiety and fear.

[31 : 13] little's face is filled with joy. And after he finishes, he goes and celebrates with his friends.

Brothers and sisters, we need to be freed from the power and the allure of greatness and success so that we can have joy as we run.

We can offer God's welcome to the least of these. If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.

Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me and whoever receives me receives not me but him who sent me. Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, we thank you again for your word that you've given to guide us.

We ask that you would grow us more and more, that your grace would continue to be at work, that we would be people who are tempted less and less by power and success, that we would love you

and your welcome more and more, that it would be truer and truer of this church and this community.

[32 : 26] We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen.