

Lake Cities Community Church
July 12, 2009
Pastor Craig Schill
Series: On Your Mark

Israel's Got Talent!
Mark 9:30-50

NBC's #1 hit show "America's Got Talent" captures the American Dream. The show seeks America's most talented act, and promises the winner \$1 million dollars and a show in Las Vegas. The journey is from rags to riches; obscurity to celebrity. 27-year old hopeful magician Jay Mattioli said, "I want to see my name in lights."

The show is a collection of people celebrating themselves with little pretense of humility. "Joseph Maracina, a 32-year old impressionist, "I always felt my passion, my destiny was show business. I'm great at it." Debbie Victor, a 54 year old woman who makes animal noises said, "I've perfected my act - when I perform my act people are amazed. There is no one here who competes with me. I am in a class all my own." Tammy and I have observed, that most with this attitude are buzzed by the judges and booed by the crowd.

But, we all want to be great at something, don't we? I remember a recruiting brochure at Dallas Theological Seminary - it kept unfolding - panel after panel filled with famous graduates - J Vernon McGee, Jim Rayburn, Bruce Wilkinson, Howard Hendricks... and the last panel had a profile with a question mark. It said in essence, "Come play DTS has Got Talent!" Maybe you will be the winner and get your name in our brochure! Whether in ministry or in business - on a national or local stage. On the golf course, in a bunko club, on

our face-book page or at a chili cook-off. We want to be winners – and to have other people recognize us as being great and significant. That is the American dream.

This morning we are going to critically evaluate the American Dream. And we are going to see that the America dream was also the First Century Dream. In our text, the disciples were playing the game, “Israel’s Got Talent.” After all, they were the disciples of the most famous Rabbi in Israel, who it turned out it the Messiah! They had made the final cut and were ready to step into glory.

Turn with me to Mark chapter 9. We will finish chapter 9:30-50. This passage has four stories. Each story will teach us two things. First we will see what I will call, “The Dream.” The is what the disciples desired to happen – fame and glory. But Jesus is going to replace “The Dream” with something instead for them, and for us to “Embrace.”

#1 – Success vs. Suffering (30-32)

The first story begins in verse 30: [Mark 9:30](#) *From there they went out and began to go through Galilee, and He did not want anyone to know about it.* Two weeks ago we left Jesus and his disciples up in Caesarea Philippi at the base of Mount Hermon – northeast of Galilee. The text tells us they are now going traveling again - back through Galilee, and on the way he does not want anyone to know they are coming. The reason for this is because his ministry in the Roman Province of Galilee is now over. He is passing through Galilee – the preposition in the Greek is *dia* – through – to get to their final destination, Jerusalem , where Jesus will be killed, verse 31:

Mark 9:31 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.” Mark 9:32 But they did not understand *this* statement, and they were afraid to ask Him. The game that the disciples were playing required a successful leader. They continue to hold onto the dream that Jesus will rise up and throw off Roman oppression, like a good Messiah was expected to do. Even though this is Jesus’ second teaching about his death, the disciples are not ready to believe. The text says they didn’t understand this statement, and they were afraid to ask Him about it. They didn’t want clarification, because a suffering leader. A leader who fails – did not fit into their plans. They continue to hope that Jesus is perhaps speaking metaphorically, or using hyperbole. At this stage even the promise of resurrection does not outweigh the disaster of being handed over for death. The dream is success, but Jesus say to instead embrace suffering.

Let me remind us this morning - that if you follow Jesus, he will sometimes lead you to places of failure and suffering. He will, intentionally, bring things or allow things in your life to humble you and purify your faith. And, like the disciples, we don’t understand this. Even the promise of resurrection, or future exaltation doesn’t motivate us to embrace suffering. Paul said to Timothy, **“Join me in suffering for the gospel, according to the power of God” (2 Tim 1:8)**. And our response is “I appreciate the offer, but no thanks.” James said later: **“As an example of suffering, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord. Behold we count those blessed” (James 5:10-11)**. We are not sure we want that type of blessing. We want success – not suffering.

But, what should have happened, is that the disciples should have said, “Lord, we don’t understand, but we trust you completely. If you need to go to Jerusalem to die, let us die with you. We have seen you feed 5,000, cast out demons and raise the dead.” The disciple’s dream of worldly success should have been set aside for the road of suffering.

#2 - Lofty vs. Lowly (33-37)

The second story begins in verse 33. [Mark 9:33](#) They came to Capernaum; and when He was in the house, He *began* to question them, “What were you discussing on the way?” In Galilee, they stop one last time at what is probably Peter’s house, which had been their home base. Jesus continues his teaching by exposing a conversation the disciples had on the road. [Mark 9:34](#) But they kept silent, for on the way they had discussed with one another which of them was the greatest. The Greek word for great is “*Megas*.” They were arguing who was the mega-star among them. Perhaps Peter, James and John were flaunting their position as Jesus’ favorites? [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.” [Mark 9:36](#) Taking a child, He set him before them, and taking him in His arms, He said to them, [Mark 9:37](#) “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 what we need to understand about children is that they were viewed very differently in Ancient Israel than they are in American Culture. David Garland writes, “Jesus’ culture had no romanticized notions about children. They were not regarded as especially obedient, trusting, simple, innocent, pure, unself-conscious or humble. The point of the comparison is the insignificance of the child on the honor scale. The child had no

power, no status and few rights. A child was dependent, vulnerable and entirely subject to the authority of the father” (Garland, 367). Their Dream was to ascend to lofty positions – but Jesus replaces it with a call to embrace the lowly. To received those who “are forgotten and regarded as insignificant – those who have no influence, no titles, no priority, and no importance except to God” (Garland, 367-368).

There is a story about a cashier and a frycook who worked in a greasy spoon restaurant. Both were of very humble means and made low wages; but their attitudes were very different. The cashier dreamed continually about being famous, standing before adoring crowds. He was embarrassed by his job, and grew to despise it. Did the minimum necessary to get by. As his get-rich-quick plans backfired he became increasingly discontent, unhappy and angry. On the other hand the fry cook never sought fame or a higher station in life. He loved his job and put all his effort into it. He arrived early and stayed late. He had a good attitude. He embraced the humble and simple things in life and befriended many of society’s outcasts. To the cashier’s utter frustration – over time it was the fry cook who was given opportunities for exaltation and advancement. I am talking, of course, about the two cartoon characters Cashier Squidward and frycook Sponge Bob. Square pants! The Bible teaches that the arrogant are brought low and the humble are exalted. The disciples dream of lofty positions of power are replaced by Jesus’ call to embrace the lowly and the insignificant.

#3 – Exclusive vs. Inclusive (38-41)

The third story begins in verse 38: [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.” This is the only time in the gospel of Mark that John speaks, and I think it gives us a clue to this story. When Jesus came down from the mountain of transfiguration you will recall nine disciples had just failed to cast out a demon. But Peter, James and John had been with Jesus on the mountain and thus avoided the shame of failure. John is feeling pretty smug and superior to this rouge exorcist. James Edwards says: “Being in Jesus’ inner circle had some effects on John, for John’s elitist attitude toward the unnamed exorcist repeats a similar attitude on his part when he and James desired to call down fire on inhospitable Samaritans, (Luke 9:54) and again when he and James asked to sit on Jesus right hand.” (10:35). Edwards 289. John’s attitude is toward the exorcist is “Member’s Only” and you are not a member.

Mark.9:39 But Jesus said, “Do not hinder him, for there is no one who will perform a miracle in My name, and be able soon afterward to speak evil of Me. Mark 9:40 “For he who is not against us is for us. Mark 9:41 “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.

In understanding Jesus’ response, I think there is good reason to take the “someone” of 38 and the “whoever” of verse 41 - as young believers. They are anonymous yet working for the cause of Christ. Maybe they were among the crowd that listened to Jesus and they believed? Maybe they were healed by Jesus like the Gerasene man and are now evangelists. We really don’t know anything about them, except that they are not part of the 12 disciples. They do not have a degree from the Jesus’ Galilean School of Theology. They are unknown, lowly people - exactly - the - kind - of - people that Jesus just taught his

disciples to embrace and receive. John's Dream is to have an exclusive club. But Jesus wants to replace their exclusive dream with an inclusive attitude.

One of the things I love about all the different denominations is that it reminds us that God is a big God. He is bigger than any church or denomination. He is working down the road at First Baptist, at the Lutheran Church and the Methodist Church and through the Disciples of Christ. There is a powerful movement in all the new Anglican congregations. The Nazarene church has the Spirit working mightily, and a new Hispanic church is being born in Rowlett. God's work with his disciples was good and important, *but it was not exclusive*. Jesus replaces the dream of an exclusive club with an inclusive attitude.

#4 – Destructive vs. Instructive (42-50)

Now story four is rather interesting and is very intense. I will read it in two stages and then talk about it. Jesus says: [Mark 9:42](#) "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe to stumble, it would be better for him if, with a heavy millstone hung around his neck, he had been cast into the sea. [Mark 9:43](#) "If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life crippled, than, having your two hands, to go into hell, into the unquenchable fire, [Mark 9:44](#) [where THEIR WORM DOES NOT DIE, AND THE FIRE IS NOT QUENCHED.] [Mark 9:45](#) "If your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame, than, having your two feet, to be cast into hell, [Mark 9:46](#) [where THEIR WORM DOES NOT DIE, AND THE FIRE IS NOT QUENCHED.] [Mark 9:47](#) "If your eye causes you to stumble, throw it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, than, having two eyes, to be cast into hell, [Mark 9:48](#) where THEIR WORM DOES NOT DIE, AND THE FIRE IS NOT QUENCHED.

Let me begin to unpack this heavy-handed passage with four points. First, structurally it is best to take this passage as a summary of the three previous stories. It does not stand alone, but is the climax of the three previous passages we have studied – and so we must look to the previous passages to understand this one. Second, from a rhetorical perspective, Jesus is teaching in hyperbole, or exaggeration to make his point. In fact the Jewish law forbade self-mutilation. I remember watching a *Little House on the Prairie* TV episode where one of the characters was racked with fever and in desperation he opened his Bible and read this passage. He took it as a sign from God that he had to gouge out his eye. And so he took the knife and slowly lifted it to his face – and that is when Pa Engels came in to save the day. Third, though we take this as hyperbole – that does not mean we dismiss it. This is a real warning – the strongest words from Christ we have had so far in Mark. A warning against causing others to stumble. A Warning against harboring sin.

Fourth, the meaning of the warning is bound up in verse 42, “**Whoever causes one of these little-ones to stumble...**” It is to such a person that the warnings are given. Who are the little ones? Are they children? Perhaps. But from the context, who have we been studying about? The fragile new ordinary, unknown believers. The Greek word for little ones is *micros*. The *mega* disciples are causing the *micro* people to stumble. David Garland says, “God shows more concern for the little ones’ fragile faith than for great one’s fragile egos, which cause them to lord it over or ignore others.” Edwards says, “The saying clearly reinforces the supreme value Jesus places on common and ordinary disciples.” (292)

Now our text ends with a puzzling reference to salt. Look at verse 49: Mark 9:49 “**For everyone will be salted with fire.** Mark is the only place where this verse is located,

and it has been difficult to determine exactly what it means. It may be a reference to the sacrificial system - because both fire and salt were involved in sacrifices. In other words Jesus is saying – as a disciple of Christ – you must sacrifice what you want – your dream, for what Jesus desire you to have. If you don't – verse 50: [Mark 9:50](#) “Salt is good; but if the salt becomes unsalty, with what will you make it salty *again*?” If you don't embrace what Jesus calls you to – you will ultimately become ineffective and useless to God. Therefore, [Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.](#)” Preserve the body of Christ and stop fighting with one another. Be at peace.

What we learn from this final story is the dream is ultimately destructive. Arrogant, exclusive attitudes cause others to stumble. Such people offend and hurt. Such attitudes tear down the work of God. Jesus is saying be constructive. Preserve unity – be at peace with one another. Build up the body of Christ. Paul said: [Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs... \(Eph 4:29\).](#) Don't tear down, but build up the body.

Summary / Application

Let's review. The DREAM of the disciples was to have a successful Messiah who would grant lofty positions of power exclusively to those who were in the inner circle. But ultimately that plan is destructive causing people to stumble. Instead, Jesus calls his disciples to embrace suffering, and to willingly accepting lowly positions. To have an attitude of inclusiveness – that welcomes new people, even though they are different. This attitude is constructive – it builds up the body of Christ with peace. In other words – your application this week is to be a S.L.I.C. person – Suffering, lowly, inclusive and constructive.

Let me briefly apply this to two groups of people. **First, some of you are already successful in many ways** and even by the world's standards. You are leaders and have influence in your companies or community. God has granted a measure of success. You are like Peter, James and John - who Jesus did select for special responsibility and training. Your challenge is to remain humble, and not to be deceived into following the world's dream. Your job is to model godly values through your positions of power - promote a S.L.I.C lifestyle. Be the first to serve quietly behind the scenes. Praise and uplift others. Use your gifts to be an encouraging servant.

There are others here who are not in such a successful positions. You could be a teenager who has little money or status. You are overlooked most of the time. Or perhaps you are a stay-at-home mom, raising a family – you've given up a good career to take care of your children; but you feel that your worth was left behind. Maybe you have lost your job and are struggling with your self-esteem. To you – let me remind you that you are the apple of God's eye. He is your advocate and your champion. He wants to protect you from those who would make you think you are nothing special. On the contrary - you represent everything good in God's Kingdom. When we get to heaven, I have no doubt that the biggest rewards will go to people we have never heard of – people who have not written books, not held office or stood in front of thousands – just regular Christian women and men – living quiet lives - faithful to the responsibilities God has given them.

I heard Tony Campolo (1987, Urbana) preach a powerful sermon at Urbana 1987. I think this closing story sums up what we have been talking about this morning: "If there's anything that can be said about this generation, it's that you've got all the wrong dreams. I

was asked to be a counselor in a junior-high Christian camp. Everybody ought to be a counselor in a junior-high camp just once. If any Roman Catholics are here, you're right: there is a purgatory. We tried everything to get through to these kids what the gospel was all about. But nothing worked. Junior-high kids' concept of a good time is picking on people. And in this particular case, at this particular camp, there was a little boy who was suffering from cerebral palsy, and they began to pick on him.

They picked on little Billy. Oh, they picked on him. As he walked with his uncoordinated body, they would line up and imitate his grotesque movements. I watched him one day as he asked in his slow drawn-out speech, "Which - way - is - the - craft - shop?" And the boys, mimicking his speech and movements, answered, "It's - over - there, - Billy." And they laughed at him. I was irate. But my furor reached it's highest pitch on Thursday morning when it was Billy's cabin's turn to give devotions. They had appointed Billy to be the speaker. They wanted to get him up in front to make fun of him. And as he dragged his way to the rostrum, you could hear the giggles rolling over the crowd. And it took little Billy almost five minutes to say, "Jesus ... loves ... me... .And ... I ... love ... Jesus." When he finished, there was dead silence. I looked over my shoulder, and there were junior-high boys bawling all over the place. A revival broke out.

As I travel all over the world, I find missionaries and preachers everywhere I go who say, "Remember me, I was converted at that junior-high camp." We had tried everything. We even imported baseball players whose batting averages had gone up since they had started praying. But in the end God chose not to use the superstars. He chose a kid with cerebral palsy to break the spirits of the haughty. He's that kind of God."