



HICKORY GROVE

BAPTIST CHURCH

Lived Truth

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Mark 9:30-37

Clint Pressley

³⁰ They went on from there and passed through Galilee. And he did not want anyone to know, ³¹ 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." ³² But they did not understand the saying, and were afraid to ask him. ³³ And they came to Capernaum. And when he was in the house he asked them, "What were you discussing on the way?" ³⁴ But they kept silent, for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest. ³⁵ 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." ³⁶ And he took a child and put him in the midst of them, and taking him in his arms, he said to them, ³⁷ "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me."

(Pastor prays)

In January, I will have been here at Hickory Grove 14 years. So a lot of you know by now that I like all kinds of cars. I like Porsche 911s, but I'm a preacher. You can't drive a 911 unless you're Joel Osteen. But I like Porsche 911s. I like an old Mercedes with the beautiful big grill and the pretty lines. I like BMW's 3 Series and 5 Series. They invented the sport sedan. The inline 6-cylinder motor is what made them famous. I like Jaguars just because of the way they

look. They don't run good, but they look good. I like Aston Martins, because James Bond had one. I like the Triumph TR 60s. It is the quintessential British sports car, with the long front end, with the 600 in it. It's built low to the ground. On safe days, I like Volvos. I had one in college. It's a very safe car. In fact, it was so safe, I could take that car, and in Spartanburg there's a certain railroad track, I could jump that car and get all four wheels off the ground. It never hurt the car. It's an indestructible car. I like old Dodge Challengers and Chargers with the 440 big block. I like cars like the Chrysler Imperials. I like that secret muscle car, the Plymouth GTX that nobody knows about. It's a beautiful car. Buick's are okay, and the Oldsmobile 442. I like Chevrolets. I like the old Chevrolet 1955 or 1957. I like the Chevrolet Chevelle. I like the Chevrolet Impala, it's a beautiful car. I might take a look at the Corvette knowing I can't have one of those either. I even liked the Camaro. I like Ford. Ford was late to the muscle car game, the Galaxies and the Fairlanes. And finally, in '65, they built the Ford Mustang. I like a Mustang.

But my all-time favorite car of any is a 1965 Pontiac GTO. It is a stand-alone car. In '64, they came out with it as an option for the LeMans with the headlights side-by-side. But in '65, it was a stand-alone car. They stacked the headlights in '66 and '67. They made it so beautiful. I have read about the Pontiac GTOs and looked at Pontiac GTOs, studied Pontiac GTOs. I have knowledge, and I would love one day to restore either a '65 or a '66 Pontiac GTO, with a 389 cubic inch motor and three two-barrel carburetors, a 4-speed with a cue ball shifter. I only have one problem: I know a good bit about a GTO, but I don't know how to fix one. I don't know how to work on one. I can't take my knowledge and put it into action. I'm not a mechanic. You see a good mechanic has two things. I have one thing, knowledge. A good mechanic has two things. He knows the car, and then has the ability to actually put what he knows into action. Look, I probably have enough knowledge that I might even be able to tell you what's wrong with your car. I just can't do anything about it. A good mechanic can listen and look and feel to determine the problem. And then they can actually do something about it. A good mechanic has two things, knowledge and action.

Like a good mechanic, a solid Christian has two things: solid doctrine and action. But for our purposes here today, we are going to say that we need good doctrine and devotion. And in the passage before us, Jesus is walking with the disciples. He is teaching two things. He's teaching doctrine and devotion. Let's put it in context. Here we are at the end of chapter nine. So much has happened in the eight chapters before. We've come off the Mountain of Transfiguration, He's done healings, He has preached, people have gathered, and He has fed thousands. But at the end of chapter nine, the public teaching ministry of Jesus is over. There will be no more standing in front of big crowds, no more things like the Sermon on the Mount. No more of that. He's moving on now. He's headed in one direction. The journey He is on is taking Him all the way to Jerusalem. And there at Jerusalem, Jesus will die on the cross.

And here is the gospel of Jesus Christ. He will die on the cross in the place of sinners. He will take the wrath of God away from us so that we might have forgiveness and live. That's what He does. He's not there yet, so as He walks along with His disciples, Jesus is teaching the disciples as they head back to a place called Capernaum. That's where Andrew and Peter are—their brothers—and that's their hometown. They are probably in Andrew and Peter's house. They sit down in a private setting, all 12 of the disciples and Jesus. And Jesus teaches the Twelve in this radical way. Now, I didn't know how else to say it today, other than...

Doctrine and Devotion Are Always Hand in Hand

You have to have them both. If all you have is doctrine and you know a lot of stuff then you are a legalist and a Pharisee. Nobody wants to be around you. If all you have is devotion, then you are a really nice, loving heretic. You need both doctrine and devotion. Let's go back to the passage and point out a couple of things, and then come here and make a few points. Join me there in verse 30. Let's just walk through it with a little bit of running commentary. *They went on from there...* They're headed into Galilee and through Galilee. And for the first time in His ministry with the disciples, Jesus did not want

anybody to know He was there. They're not drawing crowds, they're not doing miracles. He didn't want anybody to know because, as you see in verse 31, He was spending time privately teaching the disciples. It's not all action. There has to be some teaching. For the first time, He's narrowing it down with the Twelve and He is pouring into them. Verse 31 tells us what He's teaching. Look at it in verse 31. He's teaching the gospel, and they don't have it yet. This is the second time He's teaching this. The first time, they didn't get it and it was a terrible disaster. The third time, they still won't get it, but right here, He's trying to give them the content of the gospel. And He says that the Son of Man is going to be delivered. If you don't mind marking in your Bible, you might mark that word, *delivered*. If you have the NIV, it may say something like *betrayed*. *Delivered* means *handed over*. It's an important phrase. He was delivered into the hands of men who would kill Him. Here's a genuine death. They will kill Him. He says it again, that when He is killed, after three days, He will rise. So here is the second time Jesus is giving us His life, death, and resurrection—that's why He came. Not just to teach, not just as an example, but for the atonement.

So after hearing this, the disciples—who have been with Jesus all this time—in verse 32 still do not get it. It was brought back up last time, and it was a disaster. So this time, when they still don't get it, they're afraid to ask, so they don't bring it back up. After He's told them that He's going to die and be raised from the dead, come down the page to verse 33. There, we find out that when they get into Capernaum, they're at a house—probably Andrew and Peter's house. We have some children in the house; we're going to see them in just a little bit.

But when Jesus was in the house, He said to them, "Hey, I heard you guys having a conversation, what were you all talking about?" And amazingly enough, we find out that it's like a couple of schoolboys who are caught doing something wrong. In verse 34, they kept silent because they knew they were wrong. The teacher walked into the classroom, and you know something's happened. You ask somebody what's happened. Everybody's quiet. That's what they're doing here. Everybody kept silent because they knew what they

were talking about, and it was inappropriate. After Jesus had said, “I’m going to Jerusalem to die, they were arguing with one another about who’s the greatest. I mean, they’ve been in this movement. Jesus is going to die. They don’t understand that He is the Son of God yet. They don’t understand that He’s going to be raised from the dead. They think He’s the political leader. He’s going there to die, and there’s got to be a second in line. Who’s the greatest here? James and John will have this conversation privately with Jesus. Anyway, they’re having a debate. Who’s gonna be the next one in charge? And Jesus, at that moment, decides that they’re not getting the doctrine with devotion. In verse 35, He sat them down and He called them, the Twelve. and He said to them—here’s the lesson—If anyone would be first—Peter, you want to be the leader? John, you think because I love you so much—If anyone wants to be first, he must be last of all. He must be a servant of all. Jesus still knows they are not getting this, so here’s what He does. He calls a little child to come over to Him. He took this child and put the child in the middle of the circle. This is the only time in the entire Bible we see Jesus do this. What a beautiful picture. This is not what it’s about, but it is a beautiful picture. He took the child, He put him in the midst of them, and, taking that child in His arms, we see the visual. Here’s a parable. He said to them in verse 37, *Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me.*

Okay, there’s the story. I pointed out some of the details. Now let’s go back and see if we can learn some lessons. There are just two lessons. Here’s the first one, #1.

We Must Have Solid Doctrine

Must have it. In verses 30-32, that is what Jesus is doing. He’s teaching. Let me just give you a few sub-points.

Part of Discipleship

Part of discipleship is the transfer of information. Discipleship is a lot of things. Discipleship is learning by example. Discipleship is having one life impact

another life. Discipleship is accountability. Discipleship is praying with someone. But discipleship has to have information. Notice where I get that in verses 30 and 31. Jesus is walking with them, and He is teaching them in verse 31. He's teaching them a body of beliefs. It is the faith once and for all delivered to the saints. It's important for us to grow. We grow by pursuing holiness. We grow by praying for one another. We grow by the discipline of the faith. But we grow when we have information. What are some things we can do to grow as a Christian in 2024? There are a couple of things that I would do if I were seeking to grow deeper in my faith and taking my faith seriously.

Here's the first thing I would do. I would commit to reading the Bible through this year. Maybe you've already done that. It's going to take you three to four chapters a day. You could do that. That's about 25 minutes in the morning. Read the Bible through this year.

If you have done that, then I would start memorizing things—a couple of key pieces of information. One is the Lord's Prayer. I would memorize the Lord's Prayer. A lot of you already have that. You grew up in a liturgical church. You already have that. Use that as a template for your prayer life. Not only that, I would memorize the 10 Commandments. Know that the 10 Commandments are the law of God. These are the expectations of God. On top of that, if you want to go a little further, then I would memorize the 23rd Psalm. Or let's step outside of what the Bible teaches. I would come a few centuries later to the Apostles' Creed. In the Apostles' Creed are the essentials of Christianity. I would go and find, in Matthew chapters five through seven, The Sermon on the Mount and learn from it.

Here at Hickory Grove, we will have a recommended book every month to read. I would read it. If you want to grow in your faith, we must have solid doctrine, and part of discipleship is information. Let me give you something else. Discipleship is not just information.

Discipleship Is Christ-Saturated

Let me show you what I mean. It's in verse 31. Listen to the different pieces as Jesus teaches His disciples about Himself. He was teaching His disciples, and this is what He said. Let's just break it down *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.* Here we have Jesus teaching of His humanity. He is not just fully God. He is fully God, but He is also fully man. We trust His perfect life. When you and I are saved from our sins, we are covered in the righteousness of Jesus. But it is a righteousness that he earned on Earth as a man.

The way we understand it is that God created us in His image—He created Adam and Eve. The first Adam fell into sin, but Jesus comes as the perfect Adam, the second Adam, as the Son of Man. We are delivered by His perfect life. But not only that, you look at that verse again: *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.* The son of man must be delivered. Look at the word *delivered*. I could also say *betrayed* or *handed over*. I don't normally spend time with verb tenses, but it's important to see this. This shouldn't be a Greek class but let me just give you the verb tense here; I think it's important. Here in the text, when Jesus says that the Son of Man is going to be delivered, it is in something called the present-future tense. The present-future tense means it's going to happen in the future, in Jerusalem, but it is already a reality. This phrase, *delivered up* or *handed over*, is used to describe Judas. We know that Judas is the betrayer, that he delivered over Jesus. It's what the Sanhedrin did when they gave Him up. It's the same word. Or what Pilate did when he delivered Him over. What Jesus is saying here is the future course of events is already in motion and decided. The process has begun.

Now, it's good for us to get a grasp on what has happened to Jesus. It is several things. One, it is the divine plan of God. When Jesus dies on the cross, that is the divine plan of God. It is also the destructive plan of man. Why? Because Pontious Pilate did that. The Sanhedrin, Judas, all of them were wrong. So how do you reconcile the plan of God, which is perfect and good and without sin, and the destructive, sinful plots of man? Well, when Peter

stood to preach about Jesus in Acts chapter two, he brought these two together: *This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.* So the point is that, although it happened with humans on Earth, behind that is this beautiful, perfect, divine plan of God. Ultimately, it is God giving over His only Son to die in our place. It brings another word to write down, which is *atonement*. In verse 31, Jesus says, *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.* Here is the scandal of Christianity. Here is the stumbling block of the cross. Here is the flashpoint of history. It's called the doctrine of atonement. Why atonement? The Bible teaches that the wages of sin is death. A wage is what you earn when you work. Your life, because of the sins in it, has earned death. That's what God told Adam and Eve in the Garden. The wages of sin is death. It's what we deserve. What we deserve is death. Christianity must stand there in that before it moves on to the light. We must stand on what we deserve, death. Substitutionary atonement teaches that there is a substitute who took what we deserve. That's Jesus. He's dying on the cross here. That's what He's saying. Here is Jesus standing as our substitute so that the judgment of God falls on Jesus. This is what happens at the cross. This is why the cross is so important to us. The judgment of God falls on Jesus, and the righteousness that He earned is given to me. And the way you appropriate that for yourself is you believing that Jesus died for you. When that happens, your sin is paid for. When that happens, guilt is removed. When that happens, new life begins.

There's another word here that Jesus brings to the table. The word is *victory*. Look what the text says in verse 31: *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—here is the victory—after three days he will rise.* Victory. What are the things we celebrate as Christians? The incarnation—that's what we are celebrating at Christmas, when God became man born of a virgin. We celebrate that. And then we think about the cross of Jesus. We think about what He suffered under Pontius Pilate. Here's the Apostles' Creed, that He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead.

We look at that and think, *Jesus did that for us*. But it doesn't stop there. We go to Easter. Easter tells us after three days, God raised Him from the dead. He ascended into Heaven, and He sits at the right hand of God.

Now, listen, why is this important as a Christian? Why does the resurrection make that much difference? If He died for my sins on the cross, why do I need the resurrection? I'll give you a couple of things. One is that the resurrection reminds us of the absolution of our sins. It means that our sins are absolutely absolved.

Here's the second thing: the resurrection tells us that Jesus not only took our sin, He defeated sin and death. Death couldn't hold Him down, He comes out of the grave. The resurrection tells us He defeated death. That means we don't have to fear death. The resurrection tells us that He wasn't just a man, He's fully God. This is the power of Jesus. If you have a terminal illness, or you've lost someone close to you who's a believer, the resurrection gives us hope for eternity. This makes it so that, as Christians, we can hear these terrible things that are coming down the pipe at us and we can take it because this is not our home.

I got a text from a preacher today who is older than me. This week he's been texting me and praying for me and I've appreciated it; it came out of nowhere. I don't know if he knows something that's going on with me or what, but he sent me all these texts and one of the texts he sent to me said, "Be encouraged, we're almost home." I thought, well, you're a little older than me so you're a little closer than I am. But the truth is, if it's ten years closer, what does it matter? We're almost home, and the resurrection tells us we actually have a home to go to. So Jesus gives them the life, death, and resurrection, and you see their deliberation in verse 32. They've heard for the second time, and they just don't get it. They don't get it. But they *will* get it. Peter will get it. He'll preach it until he can't preach anymore. Legend says they crucified Peter upside down. John will get it. John will give his life and preach it until they exile him somewhere on a rock of an island. They *will* get it. Brothers and sisters, sometimes you hear something that's so hard you don't get it. You

travel on the page of the Bible and it's not registering. You stay there. You *will* get it. You stay in there. The Spirit will take that and He *will* put it in your heart. Look, if you have a wayward child who knows the right things, you've taught him all your life, and you think he has it, the Spirit, one day, might take that truth and drive it deep into his heart. His eyes would be opened to see the goodness and the beauty of Jesus. But not yet. In verse 32, not yet. Don't ever abandon good doctrine. We must have good doctrine, especially now in 2024. We live in a world that is increasingly evil with things that we would never dream of. We've got to drive these pilings deep. Good doctrine. Let me give you something else, point #2.

We Must Have Real Devotion

Remember, if all you have is good doctrine, you're lopsided. That's from verse 33 all the way to the very end. What do you see here? Well, in the first two verses of this passage, in verses 33 and 34, you find out the disciples are still very prideful. They came to Capernaum, and when He was in the house, Jesus asked them, "What were you discussing on the way?" And they were ashamed. They clammed up in verse 34 because, on the way, they were arguing with one another about who is the greatest. What you find right there in verses 33 and 34 is that pride is poison. Pride keeps you from admitting sin. Pride keeps you from helping people. Pride keeps you from seeking forgiveness. Pride keeps you from apologizing. Pride keeps you from seeing that you need God to save you. Pride keeps you from thinking that you're in the wrong. It's a poison, and it has poisoned the relationships of those disciples.

There have never been any other humans on this planet that have ever been closer to Jesus. They're close to the Son of God, and they're still fighting about who's the greatest. Not only that, they've just heard Jesus say that He is going to Jerusalem to die. It's a poison. It's something we all fight with. It's a poison, and you should ask God to help you to remove that pride, to help you to fight that. The Bible says that God is opposed to the proud. I don't want God opposed to me.

There's something else you find here, not just that pride is a poison. You find that we are to die to self. Here's a radical, convicting passage. Verse 35 is completely upside down. He sat down and He called the Twelve and He said to them, If any one of you, Peter, you want to be first? If anyone of you would be first, he must be a servant of all. If anyone wants to be first, he must be last of all and a servant of all. That is completely upside down from everything you've learned about leadership. But here, Jesus has said that the radical nature of being a follower of His is dying to self. What does it look like in the economy of Christianity, in the economy of following Christ, to be a leader? It means you are last of all. You're not worried about your rights or protecting your reputation. You are last of all. You're not gonna walk around with the "What about me?" attitude. Why? Because you are last. This is Jesus saying, "You are to be last of all, a servant." Here is the picture of what it means to succeed as a Christian: it's to serve other people. What other people? All the other people.

He presses it even further now. It's not enough to be first in the Kingdom of God, you are to be last. This is a theme that goes throughout the Bible. He then brings it to a deeper level in verses 36 and 37, and that is a sacrifice of status. Look what He does in verses 36 through 37. It is unprecedented. He took a child—maybe it's Peter's son or daughter, or Andrew's. He took a child, and He put him in the midst of them, in the circle of the 12 men. Jesus puts the child in the middle, let's just say it's a little boy. Now for us, we'll conjure up the picture of a child. We have this sort of built-in sentimentality. We think you do everything for the children. But back then, it was not that way. They did love their children, but they didn't bring anything to the table. The child doesn't contribute anything. And so Jesus has pulled this little child into the circle. What a picture Mark gives to us. Nobody else does. Jesus wraps this child up in His arms. It's a living parable for them to see. And then He teaches them in verse 37: *Whoever receives one such child, in my name, receives me.* Whoever takes this child who can't bring anything to you, that's not gonna give you anything, that can't pay rent—when you give importance to someone who is unimportant, somebody who has nothing to offer to you, who can't contribute to your life, when you care for all of those that nobody else cares

for, that is cross-centered ministry. So there's doctrine up in verses 30-32. And how that is lived out is in verses 33-37.

Look, here's the Christian impulse. The Christian impulse is to help. The disciples, they're aspiring for greatness. Jesus says, No, you get your eyes down here. There are a couple of things we do here. At Hickory Grove, every week, we have the Food Pantry. They're several people that come through the Food Pantry, but not everybody who comes through will be thankful. Not everybody who comes through deserves that food. That's not our business. Be the last of all. You are servants of all. You receive somebody who can't give you anything. Every week, our Hearts & Hammers ministry goes out and they build ramps for people who are not church members and who will never come to this church. They will forget our church. Jesus says, If you receive people like I'm receiving this little child and you do so in my name, it's the essence of a God-centered ministry. This humble service that happens to people who can actually do nothing for you, it's the whole point of Christ-centered, cross-centered devotion. You understand that, for Christians, that goes hand in hand. Doctrine and devotion. They're always hand in hand. Solid doctrine takes us to the cross of Jesus, where sinners are saved, where we all have been saved. After being saved, what happens is that devotion ends up in selfless serving. It's how you know if Christianity is real. The doctrine of Jesus Christ is that He lived perfectly, died on the cross for your sins, and God raised Him from the dead. He ascended into Heaven. He is interceding right now. He is our only hope. That's the doctrine that has changed me so much. I want you to serve sacrificially. I want you to give mercy to people who can't do anything for you. The doctrine of Jesus says, I'll serve Him. Do you have both? Has the doctrine of the cross gripped your heart so that devotion to Christ makes you live for Him? Today, I hope it will.

(Pastor prays)