

Swedenborgian Sunday School Notes for the Revised Common Lectionary

Mark 10:35–45 • The Request of James and John

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Mark 10:35–45 . . . The request of James & John
Psalm 104:1–9, 24, 35. God’s greatness

Overview

We return this week to the theme of who is the greatest—and what it means to be great. Teachers may refer back to the notes on Mark 9:30–37 for more on this topic. Today we will review one of the points from that lesson (the first Key Point below), and then move on to discuss who really is great: God. The issue of our own greatness versus God’s greatness is a core issue of our spiritual growth—well worth spending more than one class session on.

Key Points

- From a spiritual perspective, being great means greatness in loving and serving other people.
- The Lord God, the creator of all things, is the only truly great being—all others derive from God.
- Since all greatness is in God, any greatness we may have comes from living in God’s spirit.

Example for Teaching Children

Do you remember the lesson we had last month where the disciples were arguing about which one of them was the greatest? Let’s think about that story for a minute. What are some of the ways of being great that we sometimes think about? (*Wait for answers, and/or suggest some of your own. Here are some examples:*) Being really fast and strong and great at sports? Being the smartest in class? Being someone who can tell other people what to do, like a king or queen or President or Prime Minister?

When the disciples argued about who was the greatest, does anyone remember what the Lord told them? He said, “If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all.” In other words, true greatness means greatness in loving and being kind to other people. This is *spiritual* greatness—and it is far more important than being strong or powerful or great in any other way.

Do you think that the disciples got that lesson? I don’t think so. Because today, two of the disciples, James and John, came to Jesus and asked him if they could sit at his right and left hands when he became a glorious, powerful king. You see, even though the Lord had taught them that true greatness means

loving and caring for other people, the disciples still thought they were going to have lots of worldly power. They just didn’t get it!

There’s another way to think about greatness. I’d like to read part of a Psalm to you. (*Read Psalm 104:1–9, or fewer verses for younger children.*) We sometimes think we are pretty great, but just think how great God is. God made the entire universe—something we certainly can’t do! God also made each one of us. This means that anything great we may have actually comes from God.

Compared to the huge, amazing greatness of God, we are very tiny. But there is a way we can be great. If we realize that everything great and good comes from God, we can decide that we want to live the way God wants us to live. We can live by God’s law of loving each other as much as we love ourselves. Then God can be great in each one of us.

Basic Correspondences

James = kindness

John = acting from kindness

right hand = acting from love for the Lord

left hand = acting from the Lord’s wisdom

Thoughts from Swedenborg

When we are being spiritually reborn, at first we imagine that the good things we do and the true things we say come from ourselves. But the fact of the matter is that all goodness and truth come from the Lord. So when we imagine that they come from ourselves, we do not yet have a life of genuine faith—though we may receive it later on.

Arcana Coelestia #29

“James” means kindness, and “John” the good of kindness in action. These two things—or people who are involved in them—are at the right and left hands of the Lord in heaven. In heaven, south is to the right and north is to the left. People who are in the light of truth from clear goodness live in the south, and people who are in the light of truth from less clear goodness live in the north. . . . Because of this, no one can possibly live in those areas unless they are involved in those kinds of truth from goodness. This is what the Lord means when he says that to sit at his right and left hands is only for those for whom it has been prepared.

Apocalypse Explained #600b.9