

# Swedenborgian Sunday School Notes for the Revised Common Lectionary

## Mark 9:33–37 • Who Is the Greatest?

Prepared by the Rev. Lee Woofenden

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Mark 9:33–37 . . . . . Who is the greatest  
Psalm 1 . . . . . The righteous and the wicked

### Overview

Today’s lesson is about what it means to be great from two different perspectives: a materialistic one and a spiritual one. Our goal is to plant the idea in the children’s minds that spiritual greatness means much more than earthly greatness. Spiritual greatness involves serving others, and also innocence. And innocence involves not getting into harmful (evil) things.

### Key Points

- From a spiritual perspective, being great means greatness in loving and serving other people.
- Innocence is a goal worth working for.
- We should resist getting coaxed into things that we know are wrong.

### Example for Teaching Children

Wouldn’t it be great to be a powerful King or Queen? How about being the President (or Prime Minister) of the United States (or Canada)? If you said “Yes,” you are a lot like the Lord’s disciples! They thought it would be great to be able to tell people what to do.

In fact, they argued with each other about who would be the greatest. Have you ever argued with your brothers or sisters or friends about which one of you is the best? Imagine that you were one of the disciples, and you were arguing about that. If Jesus walked into the room, would you keep arguing? Or would you feel kind of silly and stop?

We *do* know that being better than other people isn’t the most important thing; but sometimes we forget. In our story today, Jesus reminds us that there is a much more important way to be great: we can be great in loving other people and doing kind and helpful things for them. This is *spiritual* greatness—the kind of greatness that the angels in heaven value.

To show what he meant by being least instead of greatest, Jesus brought a little child to his disciples and told them that if they were friendly to this little child, they were being friendly to him—which meant they were being friendly to God.

As we grow up, we usually try *not* to be like little kids anymore because we think of them as smaller, weaker, and not as smart as we are. But if we want to

be spiritual and good, we should try to be more like little children in at least one way: we should try to be innocent. That doesn’t mean we should be silly or naive; it means we should never hurt anyone (the opposite of “guilty”), and that we should always trust the Lord to lead us in the right direction.

I’d like to read part of Psalm 1 to you. It is about how to avoid doing bad things, and what we are like if we follow the Lord instead. (*Read Psalm 1:1–3.*)

Suppose some kids ask you to go do something with them that you know is wrong. If you *walk* along with them, you’re *thinking* about doing that wrong thing. If you get to where they’re going to do it and you *stand* around talking to them, you really *want* to do it. If you *sit* down with them, you have *decided* to go ahead and do it. Don’t even get started with them!

Instead, walk, stand, and sit with the Lord, so that you can be like a strong and fruitful tree. If we are innocent, we want to follow the Lord. And the Lord teaches us not to do bad and evil things, but to love and care for, people instead. Then we can be truly great by showing great kindness for each other.

### Basic Correspondences

- children = innocence
- walk = what we think about doing
- stand = what we want to do
- sit = what we decide to do
- fruitful tree = a person who does good things

### Thoughts from Swedenborg

Heavenly joy is not the joy that comes from being great and having power over other people; it is the joy that comes from being humble and loving to serve others. So it is not wishing to be the greatest; but to be the least. *Arcana Coelestia* #3417.2

In the Bible, “a little one” (a little child) means innocence, and also kindness, since there is no real innocence without kindness. *Arcana Coelestia* #430

In Psalm 1 the words “walk,” “stand,” and “sit” are used one after another. “Walking” relates to the life of our thoughts from our intentions, “standing” to the life of our intentions from our motivation, and “sitting” to the life of our motivation—meaning it has to do with the central reality of our lives.

*Apocalypse Explained* #687b.6