

Loving the city. We do love Liverpool, this it is a great place to be, large number of people who have chosen to come and live here.

Feeling good about the city.

Serving everyone to make the city a better place: that's really key for us as church – because we think it is the mark of being a Christian.

Planting – reservations about the language of starting new churches as if we are brilliant, serving other churches who ask – sounds interesting, make sure you come to the church AGM.

Values are about doing – all about grace, key to living as a Christian is that Jesus has paid it all for me, what am I supposed to do?

Let's go back to square one:

Most important person in the Christian faith, most important thing he did.

Jesus. **Jesus is better than everyone.**

Amazing, remarkable truth, that same Jesus, most important, most honoured, only to be worshipped person gave everything he wanted and needed for the sake of other people.

What is the essence the heart of becoming a Christian?

All the things I think make me good – proud of, cannot make me right with God, trust in what Jesus has done instead.

All the things I would love to be proud of, to build myself, sense of self on, make myself important, significant pointless– cannot be used as a platform to draw attention to how great I am because the point of Christianity is that what I do is not great, I became a Christian by admitting that, trusting Jesus death instead.

I am better than no-one.

Hold those thoughts.

Sound basic, different from what most of us functionally believe: most important thing is that you must be free to express yourself, I find where I am comfortable, what happens when I express myself in a way that limits you.

Work out who has more right to express themselves. I am a better race than you, I am cleverer than you, for some reason you ought to do what I want.

Remote control – football versus Coronation street.

Worked harder, did more, deserved it more than you – hence the argument.

Passage is about why Christians shouldn't engage in this type of discussion.

First, because we are all signed up to the idea that the most Jesus is better, more important, than everyone. And He gave his very life to serve others. The most important, significant person, did not serve his own needs but others.

Second, I am better than no one. I have admitted that really there is nothing more important or better about me than anyone next to me. I needed to trust Jesus, so did you! Whether I lived a life of God-ignoring religious observance or a life of living it up sex drugs and rock and roll, if I am a Christian it is on the basis of Jesus work for me and nothing else. Leveller, and means that, apparently, as

a Christian I am no longer in the business of trying to prove that I am better or more important than you, demanding my rights or saying I'm, more deserving of honour and recognition.

Section of Jesus life, disciples are very slowly learning that lesson. Like with us, learn to be Christians, begins with Jesus death as the thing they need to understand

Now, this passage begins with Mark telling us that Jesus after explaining to the disciples that following him will not be an easy thing to do, and God confirming from heaven that Jesus is his Son and therefore worth listening to, takes his disciples into a place where they wouldn't be interrupted to teach them. God has just said that he should be listened to. What does Jesus want to talk about: death.

Interesting set of priorities. Jesus is aiming his whole life and ministry towards this death, this ultimate act of service to the whole of humanity, give his life to take the punishment we deserve.

But the disciples did not, Mark tells us, understand. Master of understatement. And that becomes very apparent by what happens next.

Misunderstanding 1 – I'm better than everyone

As they are walking along, and Jesus has been teaching them that he the great Lord of glory, the Son of God with whom God is pleased is going to go to his death, the disciples embark on a discussion about which of them is the greatest.

I mean, you could not make it up could you. Amazing experience of seeing Jesus glory revealed from heaven, Peter saying they should stay there and worship, short time later when Jesus explains the amazing truth that he will use his glory to serve, to die for others, they are having a discussion about which one of them is the greatest.

I mean, please, get with the programme! Type of chat Jesus has with them, you can just imagine it, "sitting down". Let's sit down and have a chat.

You want to be first? The thing that will make you genuinely first, that is, the thing that will actually mark you out as first in the way that matters, is being the very last, and the servant of all. Consider it, actually astounding how sweeping Jesus is – very last, and the servant of everyone if we want to be great, first, in the way the things that matter to God.

Just in case we start to water it down, obviously Jesus doesn't want us to be doormats, wouldn't want us to be unhappy because we let someone walk all over us, Jesus models it doesn't he? In order to serve the very people who spat at him, abused him, nailed him to a cross, in order to serve them, he gave up his life, his glory as the eternal son of God, everlasting relationship of love with the Father to humble life and awful death.

Yes folks, he really does mean, making ourselves the very last, and the servant of all.

To illustrate his point, Jesus welcomes a child, quite literally hugs the child. Different culture, children seen as insignificant and unimportant, whoever welcomes someone seemingly insignificant and unimportant in my name, welcomes me, which is the same as welcoming God!

Raises the stakes service of all is not optional – this is the way Jesus knows your attitude to him, and to God, is how much you serve everyone, make yourself a servant even to those who seem least significant and unimportant, can do nothing for you.

Serving others radically, that is making yourself the lowest of all, and giving all that you have to serve even those who seem totally insignificant is not an option in the Christian life: it is, Jesus says, the way to measure what your attitude to Jesus (and to God) is.

What Jesus did, we think he is better than everyone.

I am better than no one. Someone who is no longer self important would understand that means that they serve others.

I don't think we are very good at this, frankly. Being first is not serving, but others serving me. Treat church – come along as long as I get what I want, not give myself to other people – what's in that for me? Other important things to do for myself. Treat friendships: that person didn't behave the way I wanted them to, didn't serve me in a way acceptable to me, not going to be their friend. Lives, seek out people we like make us comfortable, don't at all seek out give ourselves to unpopular weak socially excluded.

Jesus visual model of the Christian life is taking someone, a person, who may seem insignificant, nothing to offer and welcoming them, he embraces them. Serving is actually relationally loving the people who cannot offer me anything. How we are "first" in the things that matter to God? By loving, welcoming, serving, when it is painful and costly the people who no one else cares about, we don't get anything from.

Think that through: want to be first in God's eyes, Jesus model of serving all quite literally throwing your life away to serve the least of all, nothing back from. Throwing other things away:

Welcome strangers into your home instead of saving it to look nice. Weird strangers.

Use your annual leave to do a summer mission rather than two weeks in the sun.

More radical than that:

Someone hurts me, not base my treatment of them on how they treated me, they are my servant, continue to do what is best for them – I am their servant. Why do that? Christian you worship someone who did that.

Fill your life not with people who will make your life fun, people who need your love, acceptance. Painful to do that. Worship someone who did that.

Kicks in: Risking friendships, do not get affirmed with people's respect (they serving me), lose respect and they do hear about Jesus. (me serving them)

College lunch table. Put off they think badly (serving us) put off is that they might never listen to Christian again (serving them)

Church it may mean not creating a place where Christians comfortable, get to see our friends, serving city by sending out best people to reach other places, miss them very much.

If I say I don't want to serve people, I want to make decisions based on my own preferences and comfort. Saying you are more

important than Jesus, who came not to be served but to serve, valid question about whether you accept what Jesus says about himself at all.

Second story shows that even after that amazing picture of welcome, this has not really sunk in.

Misunderstanding 2: At least I'm better than other Christians

John issue with this. Horror of horrors finds someone else who was following Jesus. One might have thought that he would greet this news with great joy!

But no, he stops him, because he was literally not one of us. Jesus stops him – and throws the door as wide as he possibly can for people to come and follow him – anyone who is not against us is for us, you should be glad even if someone gives you a cup of water for following Jesus!

Jesus is like – John, there is no inner circle. There is no hierarchy based on who has known be the longest or has hung out with me the most. Nothing, John, about you – closest disciple or not makes you more important than anyone else who follows me, whoever is not against us is for us!

Jesus death is the great leveller you see. If I am a Christian today, it is because of Jesus death for me. The amazing truth of the Gospel is this: that through Jesus dying I can be once for all totally and utterly as accepted by God and qualified to serve him as is possible. Also true about everyone else who trusts Jesus.

Please don't build a way of living or thinking or acting towards other Christians that is based on the idea that you might be more worthy than them, more important or significant because of things you can do.

Background or your experience, abilities to do things, they do not qualify you more, all equally qualified because of Jesus.

Don't need to think of those things: no one can threaten my perfect standing Jesus death. Or yours.

My arguments with other Christians – don't respect me, make me look bad, not appreciating wonderful things I do, how do they think that makes me feel.

Jesus says, you are accepted, loved, safe – really doesn't matter. Wonderful security, freedom. Means I actually can serve, love give myself. Not doing things for people to get something back.

Eye opening moment: where I get annoyed because I don't think I'm being treated right, saying to the world. Serve me, make me feel good, if you don't I will withdraw my wonderful presence. Security of Jesus death means I'm free from all that. Free to actually give and serve, not use people as pawns in my games of self esteem.

Little ones, next passage, normal Christians. People we might use to promote ourselves. They may not have had John's amazing mountain top experience with Jesus but they are children who belong to Jesus, and Jesus now says, don't dare anything to put them off following me.

You're not and it matters

If anyone causes one of these little ones quite literally to stumble, that I, I think, gives them the impression that they can't quite cut it to follow Jesus, and hence risk them giving up, it would be

better for them if they were thrown into the sea. Concrete wetsuit would be better for you if you are going to treat other Christians like they don't belong and cause them to stumble,

In fact, Jesus says, don't even risk it. God takes it seriously, so if there is something in your life causing you to act supersciliously and look down on other Christians, give it up. Cut it off. He uses three different examples 3 times to get the point across.

Thing about thinking your great, expecting everyone to treat you well, other people, often struggling Christians get hurt. Pick up the impression they are inferior, if I can't be like you, can't trust Jesus. Truth is because of Jesus death anyone can trust him.

Come to church having heard about God's grace, self important person uses them to make themselves feel good, they leave.

Nebulous, example. Two people in a church date. One is a stronger well respected Christian, other not for such a long time. Break up, rather acrimoniously. Happens is that the stronger Christian thinks, can't have everyone thinking bad stuff about me here in my church. Blame the person. Not serve them by taking the sting of this, I'm too important. They need to serve me, fall guy. Bad things about them, people still respect me. Happens – weaker Christian, really needs the church's help leaves. Sometimes the church, sometimes being a Christian.

Something in your life as a Christian, makes you treat other Christians as less important than you, cut it off.

What's this stuff about being cast into hell – why so serious Jesus? Chill out man, why such a big deal.

If we are using other people as a means to justify ourselves and prove our own goodness, comparing or competing, shows we are not trusting Jesus at all.

Either Jesus death justifies us and we are right before God, OR I am justified get closer, improve my relationship with God by what I do. Latter, every reason to compare – see who is the closest, who is the best.

But it isn't the latter. Suggesting it is, suggests that you may not really be trusting Jesus at all, so chop out anything that makes you think that way.

Can you see with nothing to prove, no pressure to show that I am important, no reason to care whether people are better or worse than me at something, I am free to really serve, to love, All the things that stop me authentically loving, are gone, because I have nothing to prove, you have nothing to prove to me. Not, for once, about promoting myself to you, or you to me.

I actually can give up everything to serve all because I have been given everything for free! All the reasons I have for putting myself first are gone by the cross.

Loving the city: Jesus is better than everyone, and he served. I believe because of his death, not better than anyone, so I serve. Worst jobs, especially least valuable people. Start now – people in your workplace no one likes, least influential most annoying, use what you have to relationally welcome them?

Only the communities of Jesus death that can take on this other person centred service. That's why we're committed to planting

churches, strengthening our church so that we can resource and start other churches, communities that are outposts in this world of people who see themselves as less important than everyone else.

We love you to get on board. Good for people who do serve to do stuff for people who don't. But not good for you.

There is no place in Christian life between conversion and serving others, Jesus says your welcome to other Christians, commitment to them is measure of where you are with Jesus – what Christians do.

Coming for a while, excited by what makes us tick, please get on board. Not, that's totally fine, look longer, please, get into a church where you are part of not just being served, but serving.