

Mark 9:34

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But they held their peace: for by the way they had disputed among themselves, who should be the greatest.

Analysis

But they held their peace (οἱ δὲ ἔσιώπων, hoi de esiōpōn)—the imperfect tense indicates they kept silent, remained speechless. Their silence expresses shame and conviction. They recognize the shameful contrast between Jesus' teaching about His impending death (9:31) and their selfish debate about status.

For by the way they had disputed among themselves, who should be the greatest (διελέχθησαν...τίς μείζων, dielechthēsan...tis meizōn). The verb διελέχθησαν (dielechthēsan) means "debated, argued"—this was contentious discussion, not friendly conversation. The question "who is greatest" (τίς μείζων) uses the comparative form meaning "greater, more important." They argued about relative rank in the coming kingdom, revealing how thoroughly worldly ambition infected even Jesus' closest followers. This dispute anticipates James and John's request in 10:35-45 and illustrates the human heart's persistent craving for status and recognition.

Historical Context

Ancient Mediterranean culture was intensely honor-focused. Social status determined seating at banquets, synagogue positions, public recognition. The disciples' assumption that Messiah's kingdom meant elevated social positions reflected this culture. Jewish apocalyptic literature depicted righteous Israelites ruling with Messiah over nations (Daniel 7:27; Psalms of Solomon 17-18). The

Twelve likely expected positions corresponding to Israel's twelve tribes, ruling from Jerusalem.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. Why does Jesus allow the disciples to feel the full weight of their shame rather than immediately correcting them?
2. How does the contrast between Jesus' path to crucifixion and the disciples' debate about greatness expose the radical difference between kingdom values and worldly values?
3. What contemporary 'greatness disputes' occur in Christian circles—competition over church size, influence, positions, or recognition?

Interlinear Text

οἱ	δὲ	ἐσιώπων·	πρὸς	ἀλλήλους	γὰρ	διελέχθησαν
G3588	But	they held their peace	G4314	themselves	G1063	they had disputed
G1161		G4623		G240		G1256
ἐν	τῇ	όδῳ	τίς	μείζων		
by	G3588	the way	who	should be the greatest		
G1722		G3598	G5101	G3187		

Additional Cross-References

Mark 9:50 (Peace): Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his saltiness, wherewith will ye season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace one with another.

3 John 1:9 (Parallel theme): I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not.

