

The Virtue of Being Last

Mark 9:30-41

41-46

Mark chapter 9 is our text, and we'll be looking at verses 30 through verse 41...Mark 9:30 through 41.

I told you last time that we are now embarking over the next couple of chapters, chapters 9 and 10, on a series of lessons that the Lord taught His disciples. His public ministry in Galilee has ended, essentially, and now He has a private ministry a little while longer in Galilee with the disciples. And then He progresses to travel down to Jerusalem. Through these months the final months prior to His death, the focus of Mark is on His instruction to the Twelve. He repeats to them continually about His death and resurrection.

But in addition to telling them that and trying to prepare them for that coming event, there are things they need to know. And so He is their teacher and the lessons are private, not public. We have the privilege of joining those lessons.

One of them is on humility and that is the one before us in the text here. Now at first reading, from verses 30 to 41, you might think that these are somewhat disconnected, but the whole passage actually fits around the theme of humility. So let me read it to you and then we'll look more closely at it.

“From there, they went out and began to go through Galilee and He didn't want anyone to know about it, for He was teaching His disciples and telling them, 'The Son of Man is to be delivered into the hands of men and they will kill Him, and when He has been killed, He will rise three days later.' But they did not understand this statement and they were afraid to ask Him. They came to Capernaum and when He was in the house, He began to question them. 'What were you discussing on the way?' But they kept silent, for on the way they had discussed with one another which of them was the greatest. Sitting down, He called the Twelve and said to them, 'If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all.' Taking a child, He set him before them and taking him in His arms He said to them, 'Whoever receives one child like this in My name, receives Me. And whoever receives Me does not receive Me but Him who sent Me.' John said to Him, 'Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name and we tried to prevent him because he was not following us.' But Jesus said, 'Do not hinder him, for there is no one who will perform a miracle in My name and be able to soon afterward to speak evil of Me, for he who is not against us is for us. For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because of your name as followers of Christ, truly I say to you, he will not lose his reward.'”

All of that relates to our theme of humility. And you will see that as we work through it. If I were to title this section and the lesson, I might call it, “The Virtue of Being Last...The Virtue of Being Last.” That title would seem offensive to the culture in which you and I live because everybody wants to be first, number one. And that's the whole idea.

Humility is not viewed as a virtue in our culture, and it wasn't viewed as a virtue in ancient pagan culture either. And it's not just a cultural issue. Humility is foreign to fallen DNA. Humility is alien to the human heart. The human heart, every human heart, every fallen human heart is a relentless worshiper of itself. It is the nature of man to be dominated by pride in a bizarre, convoluted emphasis.

In our society, to diagnose people's ills because they lack self-esteem, our culture has poured gas on a fire. Nobody lacks self-esteem. That's a lie. People are dominated by self-esteem, dominated by pride. It just comes in many forms. And in those forms people manipulate the things around them and the people around them the way they want to manipulate them and using the means they use. Nobody lacks self-esteem, everybody is consumed with himself, or herself, in one way or another.

To then diagnose all human ills because people lack self-esteem is to really cry out for people to be more proud when they're already dominated by deadly pride. It is alien then to human life to talk about being humble, to be content to be last. And so I say, if we put a big banner out in front of the church and said we're going to have a conference on how to be last, nobody would show. We wouldn't attract a crowd at all.

But learning to be humble is essentially finding the foundation of sanctification because this is the very bottom line in what it means to be a Christian. In the wonderful sixty-sixth chapter of Isaiah, God exalts Himself, the Lord says, "Heaven is My throne, the Earth is My footstool. Where then is a house where you could build for Me and where's a place that I may rest, for My hand made all these things. All these things came into being," declares the Lord. God exalts Himself and He has a right to exalt Himself and He's the only one in the universe who has a right to exalt Himself. But what He's looking for in verse 2, "To this one I will look is the one who is humble and contrite of spirit and trembles at My Word."

God is looking for humble people. Micah 6:8 says, "What does the Lord require of you but to walk humbly with your God." Luke 14:11; 18:14, our Lord says, "Whoever exalts himself will be humbled and he who humbles himself will be exalted." That is a spiritual principle. Ephesians 4:1 and 2 where we are enjoined to walk worthy of the calling to which we are called is followed by, "Walk with all humility." Colossians 3:12, "Put on a heart of humility." James 4:6, "God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble." Verse 10, "Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord and He will exalt you."

Now humility is hard to learn. It is mandated but it is hard to learn. Just when you got it, you lost it. As soon as you've said to yourself, "I have finally attained humility," guess what? You can go back to square one, do not pass Go, do not collect \$200.00. We need to be taught humility and there are a number of ways in which the Lord has deemed to teach us humility. One is by precept, principle, and we're going to see that in the passage as our Lord instructs His disciples and us. A second is by example, to show us what humility does so we can understand it. That's why He washed the disciples feet and then said, "Do this..."

But even more so, in this passage, verse 31, He described His death which is the greatest illustration of humility ever. So He gives to us both precepts that teach us humility, and He gives us a pattern, or an example of His own self-emptying, His own humiliation. The third way that we learn humility is by

experience. And when I talk about experience, I mean painful experience. I mean humble experiences, devastating suffering. That's the kind of thing that teaches us humility.

Now these disciples needed to learn humility just like we do, even though we are believers, we still have resident pride powerfully exalting ourselves and we fight against that all the time. They needed this lesson, and we need it.

They needed it because they were battling normal human pride. They needed it because they had a kind of messianic, triumphalism, and they were expecting the Messiah to enter into His glory any time, any moment, and, of course, they were going to enter into His glory with Him. They were excited about the glory. They were excited about the exaltation. So their triumphalism needed to be knocked down a few notches and their normal human pride needed to be assaulted as well.

Additionally they had some terrible examples of what spirituality looks like. What they had grown up with was Judaism and the dominant features of Judaism were essentially spiritual pride, in every imaginable form, symbolically and practically. The spiritual leaders of their nation were men who called attention to their spirituality by artificial and exterior means and exalted themselves as above the people. They wore enlarged phylacteries on their hands, they wore enlarged tassels on their robes, symbols of their spirituality...like some people even wear today in religious garb as if that was some kind of testimony and symbol of real spirituality.

They also went to give money in the temple and in wanting to make sure everybody do that, they had a trumpeter blow a trumpet to call people's attention to their giving. When they wanted to appear humbling themselves and fasting and praying, they threw ashes on their heads and sat in a public place. When they wanted people to know how diligent they were in prayer, they prayed in public out loud long prayers with endless repetition. These are the spiritual models.

Now remember, there's no church. There's no alternative. This is religion as far as they know at its very best. The Pharisees, the scribes, the rabbis, they had all exalted themselves and they paraded their exaltation. So with that as the background experience, the only religious leaders they knew were men who exalted themselves, caught up in the triumphalism of being the followers of Messiah, knowing that He is the Messiah, and that they have been chosen elevated their pride and made it difficult for them to be humble. In fact, they were so caught up with pride that, as you just read, they were all the time arguing about which of them was...what?...the greatest. They needed this lesson badly. And every time the Lord talked about suffering and death and cross bearing and self-denial, they pushed it away. It was just alien to them. It was a foreign language that they didn't interpret.

So here comes the lesson on humility. And it begins where it has to begin, I think, with a reminder of the coming cross because this is the greatest of all humiliations... the greatest of all. Our Lord promises His suffering and His death, that's where we begin and then He begins to teach them the lessons concerning principles and precepts.

Let's start then with Christ, the supreme example of humility. Verse 30. "From there," that is from the region of Caesarea Philippi, the foot of the mountain, likely Mount Herman where the transfiguration had taken place. They had come down to the foot of the mountain, the Lord had been instructing them on the power of faith and the power of prayer in the prior passage and they left that region up in the north, the northernmost part of Galilee, Caesarea Philippi, it's called. They then began to go

down through Galilee. So they're moving in the direction of Capernaum. They will arrive there, in verse 33, and a little more private time in Galilee and they'll be on their way south into Judea and finally to Jerusalem where the Lord will be killed and rise again and from where He will ascend.

So we're now progressing in the direction of the cross. That's what's on our Lord's mind. This is time with the Twelve. This is not public ministry anymore, so even though He's going through Galilee, which He had done many times for well over a year, He didn't want anyone to know about it. This is the private ministry. This is the time for Him to spend with His disciples. There will be a little more public ministry in Judea when He gets into the south and Matthew and Luke tell us about that, Mark really doesn't tell us about that. Mark jumps right through the teaching lessons here, right to the arrival in Jerusalem. But for Galilee, public ministry is really over. They have made their decision concerning Him and it is confirmed by His absence.

He was teaching, verse 31 says, His disciples. You'll find that again in chapter 10, it flows through the tenth chapter, one lesson after another, after another, after another, given to His disciples. He is preparing them for their future. Not only does He remind them all the time about His death and prepare them for that, as much as good be done, but He instructs them on matters related to the Kingdom and life in the Kingdom so they'll be able to know and instruct others. But He begins where He seems always to want to begin, with His own coming death and resurrection. This is the main thing they need to understand. So He says, "The Son of Man," that great messianic title drawn from Daniel 7, "is to be delivered into the hands of men and they will kill Him. And when He has been killed, He will rise three days later."

Now remember, they have said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." They know He is the Messiah, the Christ. They also know He is the Son of God, God the Son, deity. In spite of the fact that they know that that is the case, He tells them He's going to die. They can't process that. They can't handle that. They can't comprehend that. You remember in 1 Corinthians 1:23 and following, Paul says that the cross is to the Jews a stumbling block, right? To the Jews, it is a stumbling block. It is a stumbling block to the Jews to whom Paul writes and identifies but it was also a stumbling block to these Jews, a crucified Messiah didn't make sense. They now know He is the Messiah. They know He is the Son of God. They can't...they don't even know the cross is the way He will die. But death, the death of the Messiah is unacceptable to them. So he that is convinced against his will is unconvinced still. They just don't process it.

In Luke 9:44, Luke has a parallel account as does Matthew. And in Luke 9:44, Luke records our Lord as saying to them, "Let these words sink into your ears." This is an evidence of the difficulty that they had in accepting it. It just never got very down into their minds, down into their consciousness because it was so objectionable, so impossible.

But nonetheless, the Son of Man is to be delivered. Now I want to stop at the word "delivered," *paradidomi*, it's a really important word because it's repeated many times with regard to Christ. It is a word that is the technical word used for a criminal being handed over to judgment and punishment, and perhaps execution. It is a legal term and the use of it here even hints at the fact that the execution of Jesus will be in some measure a legal act. It is bigger than that, broader than that, but it is the word that does refer to that kind of legal act of turning over a guilty criminal for judgment. Matthew uses that same term and so does Luke. Now the question is, who delivers Him over? Who does that? Who is responsible for that? Who is guilty of that?

Well, we already know the answer to the question. We already know from chapter 8 verse 31 that He will be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed. Is it the scribes and chief priests that constitute the Sanhedrin, the ruling body of Judaism? Are they the ones that deliver Him over? Yes. Certainly they do. According to Acts 3:13, the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, the God of our fathers has glorified His servant Jesus, the one whom you... speaking to the Jews... you delivered up... you delivered up and disowned in the presence of Pilate. And according to Matthew 27:2, it was the Jewish leaders who delivered Him to Pilate. They are there and they're part of that delivering up.

But it isn't just them, how about Judas? Yes, according to Matthew 26:24, "The Son of Man is to go just as it has been written of Him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is delivered," or betrayed is another way to translate that word, and that's referring to Judas. Judas played a role in delivering Him up. And the Jewish leaders played a role in delivering Him up. How about Pilate? Pilate played a role. Matthew 27:26, Pilate delivered Him to be crucified.

It starts with Judas who delivers Him up, to the Jews. The Jews deliver Him up to Pilate. Pilate delivers Him up to the executioners. But the real story is not understood until you read Acts 2:23 where Peter on the Day of Pentecost says, "This man," meaning Christ, "delivered by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God." God delivered Him up. Judas delivered Him up. The Jews delivered Him up. The Romans delivered Him up. And after all of that, He is crucified. He was delivered into the hands of men. Judas put Him in the hands of the Jewish leaders. The Jewish leaders put Him in the hands of Pilate. Pilate put Him in the hands of the Roman executioners.

And at the end, they killed Him. However, He says when He has been killed, He will rise three days later. They struggled with that. They struggled with the dying part and I think they struggled with the rising part.

You say, "Well that's a little strange, because hadn't they seen Him raise dead people?" Yes, yes they had. They had seen Him raise the dead. But that still begs the question because He's alive. He has the power to raise the dead, but if He's dead, who raises Him? That's the issue. Even though He had said to them that He would build His church and the gates of Hades, which is a euphemism for death, could not overcome Him building His church. They could understand that as long as He was alive that He had power over death, but if He's dead, who's going to raise Him?

First of all, they can't understand the theology of a dead Messiah, and they can't understand where the power is going to come from. They're really overcome by fear. Verse 32, "They didn't understand the statement and they were afraid to ask Him." They certainly didn't like what they had heard up until that point and they really didn't want any more information. They didn't want any details. Matthew adds they were deeply grieved... deeply grieved. They were in pain. They were in sorrow. They were in sadness even to think about this. And so they just rejected it, which is a defense mechanism that we do, don't we, when perhaps someone that we know about and we care for and love has some terrible disease or some terrible accident and we get the initial word about death and we say, "I can't really believe it."

Well this was kind of a permanent situation for them. He accepted the cross as from God, to accomplish the plan of redemption from before the foundation of the world, designed, promised by the Old Testament prophets, foretold from His own mouth. His words were sensible. They were reasonable. They were intelligible. But the reality of it was just beyond their belief. Messiah? Killed by

the religious leaders? The Messiah delivered over in some legal fashion to be executed? This is impossible. The whole idea is so foreign to their messianic expectations, so alien to their personal affections, so disturbing to their faith in Christ, so opposite all the hopes of Israel, so sad, so grievous, so painful, they just could not accept it, but it was true. The sovereign Lord would become a sacrifice.

The pain of this is really very, very deep and there's a wonderful statement made by our Lord that Luke records at the same incident, Luke 9:45, let me give you what he said. Luke 9:45, "They didn't understand the statement," Luke says that, then he says this, "And it was concealed from them so that they might not perceive it." Wow, it was concealed. It's a compound word, *parakalupto*, passive, something acted on them to conceal this issue in its fullness from them.

What's going on here? The Lord protected them. The Lord Himself is the concealer so that they weren't literally devastated to the bone by this reality. This is a beautiful mercy, by the way. This is too sad. This is too devastating. You can only understand that if you had lived with Jesus for a couple of years. This is way more than they could ever handle.

Some day it will all come back. They would remember all the things that He said and they would then know His Word was infallible. But they just couldn't deal with the theology of this, with the implications of this nationally, with the implications of this personally. And the Lord spares them, it says, by concealing it from them so they might not perceive it. The little bit of shock that these words gave was all they could bear. They didn't want more information and the Lord didn't give them any more.

You know, one of the Lord's sweet mercies, I think, is that we can't see the full future. People say, "I wish I knew the future." No you don't. You don't want to know the future. You don't want to know the future. You say, "Wouldn't it be great to know the future?" No thanks. It would be the worst curse that could ever be pronounced on anybody. It would eliminate anticipation of anything. It would eliminate surprise. It would eliminate the blessing of planning and preparing and hoping. It would eliminate all joy. It would engulf us in constant agonizing pain as everything backed up to be a present disaster. You don't want to know that. We've been given enough to know the sketch of the future, but we don't need to know anymore. All the excruciating details aren't necessary.

The Apostles couldn't handle anymore than what they had been told. They couldn't even handle that. This is the Lord protecting them. He always promises to be near us and to be a sympathetic and merciful high priest and never give us more than we can bear, never more than we can endure, never more than we could handle. That's part of His care over us. That's a wonderful thing to see. They have their limitations and He knows what they are. The Lord will never take your faith to the bottom and devastate you.

So the Lord then, Himself will be the great illustration of humility. They don't understand that now, they will understand it in the future. They will understand it in the future.

And now let's turn to the disciples. Verse 33 to 41, these needy students like us, and we're going to look at the Lord's lesson on humility. It's going to have four negatives and a positive. I'm just kind of breaking it down this way for you... 4 negative effects of humility, and then a positive look at humility.

Verse 33, "They came to Capernaum," familiar place, the center of the Galilee ministry. "And when He was in the house...in a house," we don't know what house, maybe the house of Peter who lived there. "He began to question them, 'What were you discussing?'" By the way, the parallel to this is in Matthew 18, it's a rich, full account of all that goes on here. We'll see parts of it in Mark.

So they're in this house and they're confronted by the Lord. Verse 33, "What were you discussing on the way?" By the way, this is the most effective entry into teaching. What's on the mind of the students? What do you want to know? What's going on? What are you talking about? Let's go from there to what we need to learn.

Well they had been having a discussion. They'd been walking for a long time, we don't know exactly how long, but it would be a significant journey from...for miles, 20, 30 who knows miles, up Caesarea Philippi, coming all the way down to Capernaum. And on the way, they were having a discussion, it was a prolonged discussion. It was a heated discussion. It was, frankly, a really ugly discussion. They were hassling with each other all the way down the trail. It was an embarrassing discussion. And our Lord exposes that. They didn't want to admit what they were talking about. But it related to this whole idea of death and self-denial and taking up a cross and suffering and persecution because they're still ambitious. They're still self-seeking. They're highly competitive. And they're following, sort of their lifelong models of self-glorification.

Very hard to overcome this. The Apostles were struggling with it, even preachers in the modern world struggle with this. And what they were struggling with was which of them, verse 34, was the greatest. Now is that an ugly discussion?

You know, if you got together with a group of your friends and had that discussion, you just wouldn't do that because you would say that's not appropriate, that's... even though in your heart you go around thinking you're better than other people, you're not going to have an open discussion about the fact that I'm better than you are... if you're past eight-years-old, or ten-years-old, very immature thing to do. But you have to remember what their models were like. Spiritual competition for prominence, wanting chief seats, names in the marketplace, honors. But they still knew it was wrong. So we now move in to the lesson and the first thing I want to say is this, "Pride destroys unity... Pride destroys unity." This is the first implication here. He says to them, "What were you discussing on the way? But they kept silent."

Why were they silent? They were ashamed. They were embarrassed. They knew those kinds of attitudes were wrong. They knew those were sinful expressions. Their consciences would tell them that. They were silent because they had been discussing with one another which of them was the greatest. The Lord has just spoken about His own humiliation and all they can think about is their own exaltation. They're all proud, self-seeking and pride is not really able to be contained. Pride is not a private thing. It comes out like all other sin, it is conceived in the heart but it shows up outside. It is critical. It is judgmental. It is comparative. It belittles. It demeans. It pushes others down for the sake of self-elevation. This is absolutely destructive of unity.

When the Lord goes with these guys in the upper room, and says, "Look, they're going to know you're My disciples by your love," having just washed their feet and told them to humble yourselves and do the dirty work on behalf of each other, they were getting their last lesson before His cross on humble love, humble service, for the sake of unity. You want to have a unified front, you have to humble yourself. Only humble people love. And there is no unity apart from humility.

Paul writes to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 3 and he says, "The problem with all of you is that you're carnal. You're carnality shows up, I'm of Paul, I'm of Apollos, I'm of Christ. You're at each other's throat trying to rate yourselves and rank yourselves by whoever is your hero." Paul says in Philippians 1:27, "Strive, please with one mind together for the gospel in one spirit." You can't have a great impact for the gospel with discord and disunity. This attitude, this competitive attitude is so strong in them that even after this lesson, and probably many other lessons along the way, you come over to chapter 10, verse 35, Jesus again in 33 and 34 talks about His death. Again He brings up His death, which, of course, again is the model of humility. And immediately after that, James and John, the sons of Zebedee came to say, "Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask of You." What do you want Me to do? He said. "Just grant that we may sit one on Your right and one on Your left in Your glory."

I mean this is... the brashness of this, this is mind boggling. This was deep into the fabric of their fallenness and of their religion. Pride just devastates unity. They actually brought their mother with them to ask on their behalf. Pride destroys unity and unity is critical. Again, the wonderful testimony of the worthy walk, according to Ephesians, is humility and humility preserves the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace because there's one body, one spirit, one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all. The unity of the people of God is a critical reality for the testimony of the gospel. Disunity is a destructive thing. You've got to get rid of all that competition. Pride destroys unity and they were at each other's necks, climbing on each other to elevate themselves.

Secondly, pride forfeits honor. It not only destroys unity, it forfeits honor. Just the very thing that proud people seek is not available that way. Proud people battle for position. They battle for self-promotion, self-elevation in ministry even, just like these men, even now, today, and always. And they get not what they want but the opposite of what they want. Verse 35, "Sitting down," now He's taking up the rabbinical teaching position, "Sitting down, He called the twelve and said to them, 'Anyone wants to be first, he should be last of all and servant of all.'"

So you want to be first, do you? You want honor? You want elevation? To borrow the words of James and John, you want to be on the right hand, the left hand in glory? Is that what you want? And by the way, Luke 9:47 says, "Our Lord knew what they were thinking in their heart," singular, in their heart, singular. They were one heart on this issue. All of them had the same thoughts. You're thinking about being first, being first, being first and you think the path to being first is to elevate yourself. And I'm telling you, the way to be first is to humble yourself because pride will forfeit the very thing you perceive you want. You can't get it that way.

Spiritual pride appeared to them in their culture to be a desirable thing and legitimate. But our Lord continually denounces this and finally in Matthew 23 He just blasts the religious leaders of Israel who love the chief seats, and love the honored greetings in the marketplace and love to be elevated. And He says, "You hypocrites," over and over, "You hypocrites, you hypocrites, you hypocrites. All you do is produce sons of hell." "Now God, who gives the rewards, gives grace to the humble," James 4:6. So pride will forfeit honor.

Yesterday I was speaking at a conference up in the Bay area and very kindly someone got up to give me an introduction. It was really a very grandiose introduction. It was really very unnecessary. And when I got up, I just simply said, "There goes my eternal reward." I said that kiddingly, of course. But

the point is, if what you want is the accolades and the affirmation and the exaltation of men, you forfeit the real reward. You find true honor when you are willing to be last, not when you have to be first.

In the tenth chapter again, if we can borrow a little bit from what's coming, verse 43 shouldn't be among you the way it is even with the Gentile rulers who lord it over everybody, verse 42, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all. And there's the model again. "Even the Son of Man didn't come to be served, but to serve and give His life a ransom for many."

It always goes back to Him as the model. And it's all about serving. It's about being last. Find the path to being last. And what does it mean to be last? To be the servant of everybody, the servant of all. Pride will forfeit that. Pride is when you have to have everybody serve you.

Thirdly, pride rejects deity. And now it gets really serious. It destroys unity, it forfeits honor, but it rejects deity. And the lesson on this is clear in verses 36 and 37. "Taking a child, He set him before them and taking him in His arms He said to them," this is a small child, a child small enough to be held in His arms and Luke says also, "The child was by His side." So small enough to carry and old enough to stand up, a little child. This little child is going to be the best illustration of humility, for the lesson. This child is an object lesson, a visualization, if you will, a picture. A child has no power, no achievement, no accomplishment, no greatness, a child is weak, dependent, ignored, vulnerable, nothing to offer. This is a perfect illustration for a believer.

"Whoever receives one child like this in My name." We're not talking about an actual child, talking about a spiritual child of God, a child like this, "In My name, receives Me."

What is He saying? When a believer comes to you, Christ comes to you. How you treat another believer is how you treat Christ. What a profound lesson this must have been if those men got any inkling of what He was intending them to understand. Here you are stepping on each other's necks, here you are trying to promote yourselves above each other, and instead of opening up your arms to become the servant of each other, because I come to you in each other, you've rejected Me. This is serious stuff.

Look at Matthew 18 because Matthew 18 gives you a little more insight into what He said. This is the same teaching, Matthew's account of it. "At that time, the disciples came to Jesus and said, 'Who's the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven?' He called a child to Himself and set him before them." Again, they're always talking about who's the greatest. We're expecting the answer to the question to be "You, you're first, you're second, you're third, you're a close fourth, you guys are tied for fifth."

"He called a child to Himself and set him before them and said, 'Unless you're converted and become like children, you're not even coming in to the Kingdom. You better get something straight. You all come in as children with no portfolio, no accomplishment, no achievement. You're weak, totally dependent.'" Verse 4 makes it clear. "Whoever humbles Himself as this child, He's the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven." And then He says, "Whoever receives one such child in My name, receives Me." How you treat other believers is how you treat Him because Christ comes to you in His children. Just an amazing truth. Christ comes to us in every other believer.

What comes next is even more amazing. Look at verse 6. "If you cause one of these little ones who believe in Me a believer to stumble, get in a fight with them about who's the greatest and you're leading him into the sin of pride, for example, if you cause one of these little ones who believe in Me, not children, but spiritual children, Kingdom citizens who are always going to be children in a sense. "If you cause one to stumble into sin, it would be better for him, the person who does that, to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck and be drowned in the depths of the sea." That is a pretty serious crime. You'd be better off to die a horrible death by drowning with a millstone around your neck, than to ever cause one of the little ones who believe in Me to stumble. Why? Because I live in that little one. "He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit. And when he comes to you, I come to you."

"Don't you know," verse 10, "that you are not to despise one of these little ones? Don't look down on *kataphroneo*, belittle, think little of one other believer because their angels in heaven continually see the face of My Father who is in heaven." What does that mean? That God looks out for His own children and the angel surround His throne and watch His face because Hebrews 1 says they're ministering spirits sent to minister to the saints.

The angels are watching the face of God to pick up His concern over one of His children who is being harmed, and so that the Father can send the angels to protect that one. All of heaven is watching how His children are being treated. And they... the bottom line is you better be careful how you treat other believers. Our Father, according to verse 14, doesn't want any of His little ones to be devastated. You've got to change the way you think, Jesus says, then in verse 37, instead of thinking you're better than everybody else, you've got to become the servant of everybody else and realize that every other believer is a child of Mine in whom I live and dwell.

This would indicate to me, as a footnote, that even before the cross and even before Pentecost, there was residency in the life of a true believer. God dwelt in the true believer. Pride is devastating. It devastates others because it destroys unity. It devastates self because it forfeits honor. And it devastates God because it rejects Him when He comes to us in other believers whom we belittle.

Two more. Pride creates exclusivity, it creates exclusivity. This is very interesting. I can't tell you any more about it than what you can read for yourself. I have the same Bible you do so the details are what they are. John said to Him, "Teacher, we saw someone..." let me stop right here. John is beginning to have his conscience bug him, super-sensitive John, smitten in his conscience, remembers an incident. We don't know when it happened. We don't know anything about it. But John remembers it. And so he says, "Teacher, Master," He says both those things, Master in Luke, "We saw someone casting out demons in Your name and we tried to prevent him because he wasn't following us."

Look, they were competitive with each other, trying to be the greatest, and they certainly didn't want anybody else succeeding outside their group. And here they were somewhere on an occasion and they ran into someone who was actually casting out demons in Your name. Not trying to, not the sons of Sceva who couldn't pull it off, and not the phony people in Matthew 7 who say we did this, we cast out demons in Your name and we did these things. And He says, "Depart from Me, I never knew you." Not those kind, this is someone who is a true follower and a true believer. We don't know anything about him. In Luke 10 verse 1, our Lord ordained 70 to go out two-by-two and He gave them power over demons. And verse 17 of that chapter, it says they came back and said, "We had power to cast out demons." There were others that the Lord had given this power to. Perhaps this is one who became a part of the 70. We don't know. But what he was doing was legitimate, God was

doing it because he was a true believer in Christ and he was doing it in the name of Christ. But they were telling the guy to stop because he wasn't a part of their group. This is not Simon Magus, folks. This is the real thing here. But they were exclusive.

Jesus said, "Don't hinder him. There's no one who will perform a miracle in My name," and here Jesus affirms that He actually did it in His name and it was a miracle. "And no one is going to be performing a miracle in My name and be able soon after to speak evil of Me."

What happens with pride is that you begin to become exclusive. You've got your own little club and there's nobody else in it. And then Jesus makes the principle clear. "For he who is not against us is... what... is for us. Just be glad." Like Paul, he was in prison and people were preaching and they were saying terrible things about Paul and they were saying that he was in prison because he botched his ministry, because he had a secret life of sin. He was in prison because God put him on the shelf and Paul says in Philippians 1, "They were hoping to add pain to my chains. They were hoping to make me suffer more. They were building their own career and their own reputation by pushing me down and elevating themselves." And Paul's response is, "I rejoice and will rejoice if Christ is being preached, whether in pretense or in truth."

Wow! There's diversity in the Kingdom. There's diversity in the Kingdom. And just because somebody doesn't dot every "i" and cross every "t" exactly the way you do and I do is no excuse for us to shut them down. They're either for us or against us. And if they're for us, they're for us. And if Christ is being preached whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is being preached, Paul says, I'll rejoice in that and continue to rejoice. There aren't any competitors, is what that's saying. There are no real competitors among believers. They're all preaching the same gospel, true believers stop competing even with people who are outside your group.

A final word and a positive note. Humility gains reward. Humility gains reward. "For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because of your name as belonging to Christ, literally, truly I say to you, he will not lose his reward." They got reward on the brain. Greatness equals glory, equals reward. They want the payoff, *misthos* is the Greek word, it means wages. They're looking for the payoff, the big payoff. Life's tough... life's tough in that part of the world in that time in human history, very tough. Kingdom glory, nothing better than that. They want it, they want it now. They want the payoff, the big payoff... glory, exaltation, elevation.

Well pride wasn't going to get them that. But humility would and humility here is demonstrated. It looks like this. You give a cup of water to drink to someone who belongs to Christ, that's humility. You don't have any psychoanalysis of what humility feels like. Forget that. Cause as soon as you feel humble, guess what? You're proud. And as soon as you feel proud, you have hope for humility. I'm not talking about feeling, we're talking about what humility does because that's the only way you can define it. It looks like this, it's basically kind, it's basically sacrificial toward those who bear the name of Christ. Whichever one of you goes to the other and gives a cup of cold water for the sake of Christ, you... you will not lose your reward cause the fear was, "Oh, if I humble myself, I'm going to lose the fight. This is a competition, we've got to win, we've got to be first, we've got to be first." So the fear is, if I end up at the bottom, I'm going to lose the reward, I'm going to lose the prize.

No, you're not going to lose it. You're going to gain it. The simple act of sacrificial kindness to one who belongs to Christ will result in what you will never achieve by elevating yourself. You won't lose your reward, you'll gain it.

I think Paul really got the lesson. Turn to Philippians 2, let's close there, just need to read it. Paul got the lesson and repeated it in his own words, inspired words. Chapter 2 verse 1, Philippians, "Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there's any consolation of love, if there's any fellowship of the spirit, if any affection and compassion make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose, do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit but with humility of mind, regard one another as more important than yourselves. Do not merely look out for your own personal interest, but also for the interest of others." That's a call to humility, isn't it?

And here's the model. Verse 5, "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped or held on to, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bondservant, or slave and being made in the likeness of men, being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself." How far? "By becoming obedient to the point of death, even the horrible ignominious death on a cross."

That's your model. That's your model. Did He lose His reward by becoming less? No, what happened? "For this reason," verse 9, "God... what... highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name. God gives grace to the humble. God humbles the proud and exalts the humble."

Father, we thank You again this morning for Your truth that enlightens our minds. The joy of learning it, the delight of it, as the Psalmist said, I delight in Your Law, O Lord, O how I love Your Law. That delight and that love, that affection for the truth overwhelms us and brings us joy as we learn these things. What brings us even greater joy is the application of these things in obedience and that even brings joy to You. Humble us, Lord, humble us under Your mighty hand and in due time exalt us as You see fit. Help us to know that we will never lose out on an eternal reward by being last. Those who seek to be first, they lose out. They have their reward, as Jesus said to the leaders repeatedly in the Sermon on the Mount, you have your reward, you have your reward. And what was it? It was accolades from men. But for those who seek to be last, You're the one who will give that final reward. We know there will be a great day when we can take our rewards, the rewards that You've given us by grace, and return them to You as an act of worship. May we be faithful, Lord, to apply these things to our hearts and give You the praise for what You will do as the Word finds life through us. We pray in the name of Christ. Amen. Amen.

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