

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Mark of True Greatness, Part 1

Scripture: Luke 9:46-48

Code: 42-130

Humility: The Mark of True Greatness

Well, we have a little bit of an abbreviated time, this morning, in the Word of God because I said so much earlier. So let's get right to the ninth chapter of Luke. We return to our study of Luke chapter 9 verses 46 through 50. This is a brief portion of Scripture and yet an important one. I had hoped to be able to get through these verses this morning, it didn't work in the first service, so we'll...we'll get into this, at least halfway through, and I think you'll be greatly encouraged by what the...we learn together.

This section, Luke 9:46 through 50, is a critical juncture in Luke's gospel. Let me just give you a little bit of the sort of big picture setting here. These are the last two incidents that Luke records of Jesus' ministry in Galilee. You remember when He began His ministry He was baptized by John the Baptist and then He went down into Judea, the southern area around Jerusalem and He ministered for a while and then He came up to Galilee and was up there for the bulk of a year and maybe a little more ministering in Galilee. And we have been in that Galilean ministry for a couple of years ourselves. It's been a tremendously rich time. The Lord Jesus transversing all of the Galilee, calling His Apostles, sending them out two-by-two in ministry there.

Well that comes to an end in verse 50 and in verse 51 we read that He resolutely set His face to go to Jerusalem. Starting with chapter 9 verse 51 we have the journey to Jerusalem. And it goes all the way to chapter 19 and verse 44, I think it is. So we're going to be on the journey to Jerusalem for a long time. But it's a great trip we're going to take because it is also the time of the training of the Twelve. So from chapter 9 verse 51 as we begin there next week, right on through to chapter 19 verse 44, you're going to go to the school that the Apostles went to and Jesus is going to be your teacher. You're going to be disciplined by Him. This is a tremendously rich portion of Scripture. And, of course, eventually gets to Jerusalem where He's crucified and raised from the dead and ascends back to the Father. So this is a kind of final glimpse of the ministry in Galilee. And at the same time, although the official training of the Twelve sort of starts in the journey to Jerusalem, there's been plenty of training going on before and this passage is an illustration of that training. Let's read it.

Verse 46, "An argument arose among them, that is among the Apostles, the Twelve, as to which of them might be the greatest. But Jesus knowing what they were thinking in their heart took a child and

stood him by His side and said to them, 'Whoever receives this child in My name receives Me. And whoever receives Me receives Him who sent Me, for he who is least among you, this is the one who is great.' And John answered and said, 'Master, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name and we tried to hinder him because he does not follow along with us.' But Jesus said to him, 'Do not hinder him for he who is not against you is for you.'"

This passage is about humility. It's about humility against the backdrop of blatant pride. There's an argument indicated in verse 46 among the Twelve about which of them is the greatest. It's about individual pride. And then you'll notice down in verse 49 John tries to hinder a person who is casting out demons in Jesus' name because he doesn't belong to their group about group pride. So you have matters with regard to individual pride, matters with regard to group pride and Jesus off of these two incidents gives us lessons on humility.

Now nothing is more natural to fallen human beings than pride. Pride frankly is the defining sin of fallenness. And you want to get in touch with what it means to be fallen, it means to be self-centered, self-love, self-satisfaction, self-promotion, self-exaltation, self-fulfillment, those are the passions of a fallen heart. Now in our world they are considered virtues because we live in an upside-down world. Society has come to terms with its fallenness and relabeled it as virtue. We have exchanged, as the prophet said, sweet for bitter and bitter for sweet; good for bad, bad for good. We've reversed everything.

But the reality is that all expressions of sin flow out of dominant pride in the human heart. Pride then is the core corruption. Self-worship is what real fallenness is all about. Every other sin rises out of the soil of pride, everything grows in the ground of pride. Pride is the damning sin that produces rebellion against God. Every kind of rebellion and all sin is lawlessness, all sin is rebellion against God, all of it produced by pride. Pride seeks to dethrone God. It seeks to ungod God. It seeks to strike a fatal blow at His sovereignty and His majesty and to replace God with self. Pride grips the sinner's heart. And that's why it's so hard to believe, it's why it's so hard to be saved, that's why it's so hard to repent because pride is dominant. And when the sinner comes to Christ, comes to salvation, he has to be characterized by self-hate, self-denial, self-abasement. As we learned in Luke 9:23, "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me." Utter and total self-denial. We talked about self-suicide, Jesus said you have to hate yourself.

You come to the place where your desire for true goodness and true fulfillment has to go through the path and the route of self-hatred. And when Jesus said, "Let a man deny himself," you remember the Greek language really says that you had to refuse to any longer associate with the person that you are. Self-hate, self-denial is essential to true repentance and therefore to salvation. That's where we go back to the Beatitudes where you are bankrupt in your spirit, mourning, meek and hungering for a righteousness you don't have. It's like the publican who beats on his breast and says, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner," that's the guy that goes home justified. Only when pride is overpowered

with conviction of one's sinfulness and wretchedness can a person be converted.

The Apostle Paul is a great illustration to that. In Philippians 3 he was...he was an Israelite, he was of the tribe of Benjamin, one of the most noble of the tribes, he was a Hebrew of the Hebrews, kept all the traditions, he was kosher, he was passionate for his religion to the point of persecuting anybody who was against his religion, namely Christians. He was zealous for God's law, so much so that he was a Pharisee and as far as the outward manifestation was concerned, he was righteous. And so he was pleased with himself until he met Christ and when he came to the point of Holy Spirit conviction, he saw all of that as manure, rubbish. And he came to an appropriate self-rejection. That is the product of the Holy Spirit's convicting work, tearing down pride.

So when you become a believer, you come to the point of seeing your pride overpowered by the triumph and work of the Holy Spirit bringing conviction upon your heart that you're a wretched sinner, worthy of nothing. Another way that we see that in the experience of Paul and it's good for us to look at it is turn to Romans chapter 7 and this is by way of getting a grip on this issue of pride and humility, just as we begin to look at the passage. But in Romans chapter 7, Paul gives a testimony very similar, of course, to the testimony in Philippians chapter 3 only from a different perspective. He is here talking about his experience of conversion. In Philippians 3 it was when he saw that everything he prided himself in was nothing and when he came to that bankruptcy of heart, when he came to that realization that all of that added up to absolute nothing, it was all loss, in fact, it would send him to hell, he then embraced Christ.

Well here he comes at it not from the standpoint of seeing Christ but the standpoint of understanding God's law. Verse 9, "I was once alive apart from the law." Before I understood the reality of the law of God, I was alive, I, *ego*, I was running my life, I was the main thing. I thought I was doing fine. I thought I was doing well. I was satisfied with myself. I was seeking self-fulfillment, etc. Apart from the law...I had never really come under the conviction of living in violation of God's Law. But when the commandment came, when I was brought under the Law and I understood it, sin became alive and I died. This is the moment, this is the moment when the Spirit of God has brought you to spiritual bankruptcy, utter self-denial and self-hate at which point saving faith embraces Christ as your only hope. All said before, I understood that I had violated the Law of God, that I couldn't keep the Law of God, that I was condemned by the Law of God, I was alive, I was doing fine. But when I came under the power of conviction that I was living in violation of God's Law, my sin became alive to me and at that point I died. It's the death of self.

Verse 10, he says, "This commandment which was to result in life proved to result in death for me." It killed me. That's what has to happen. Before you can come alive in Christ, you have to be slain as to your own self. And in verse 11 he follows it up, "For sin taking opportunity through the commandment deceived me and through it killed me." I died, verse 9, death for me, verse 10, it killed me, verse 11. We talked about that, didn't we? About self-suicide, self-denial when we were looking at 9:23 in Luke, it's about self-denial. Well that's what happens when a person is saved, the Holy Spirit comes in and overpowers pride and shadows the sinner's confidence in himself and self-will and brings him to the point where he's willing to abandon everything, even take up a cross. That is to say even volunteer to give his life if need be for the cause of the gospel. That is the marvelous miracle, that is the powerful invasion of the Spirit of God that comes into the heart of one that is being regenerated. And it's a divine miracle because the only way your pride could ever be broken to that degree would be if God outside of you came in and overpowered that pride, which is natural to the fallen heart. You can't do it on your own, that's why we believe that salvation is of the Lord...of the Lord, cause you could never overcome your pride, you could never overcome that which is natural to your corrupt soul. But the Holy Spirit comes in with conviction, brings the Law of God to bear upon you, the sinner begins to see the violations of the Law of God and whereas he thought he was alive and free, pursuing all of his dreams and ambitions, all of a sudden he sees himself in the light of the violations of the Law of God and he dies. That's the great miracle of conversion.

So we can say this, beloved, at the time of your regeneration, at the time of your conversion if you're a Christian, at the time of your redemption and your salvation, your pride was broken and you came with that Old Testament broken and contrite heart because the Spirit of God crushed your pride, shattered all your hopes and your achievements. And you stood before God willfully acknowledging your spiritual bankruptcy and emptiness and crying out, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." That was the miracle of your regeneration.

But have you noticed? Now that you're a Christian, pride isn't gone permanently, have you noticed that? It remains although in that moment of regeneration, in that miracle of salvation, it was overwhelmed by the power of the Spirit of God, miraculously the dead was made to live, the blind was made to see, the prisoner was set free all by the sovereign and supernatural power of God. And God granted you faith to embrace Christ and that glorious miracle. At that moment pride was overcome. But you know what? Pride has been severely wounded, it has been given a death blow but it's still kicking in the throes of death, it hasn't yet died and it's flopping around in you still, isn't it? Sure it is.

Now let me tell you what sanctification is. I just told you what justification, or salvation is, let me tell you what sanctification is. Sanctification is the triumph of humility over remaining pride. Sanctification is a process that goes on through your whole life and one simple way to understand it is that it is the triumph of humility over pride. You still have a battle, don't you? Paul did. He said, "Look, the Law came and I died," you just heard him say that. And yet right after that he says, verse 15, Romans 7, "That which I'm doing I don't understand, I'm not practicing what I would like to do, I'm

doing the very thing I hate." What's going on in me? I do what I don't want to do, I don't do what I should do. And he says in verse 17, "There's sin in me and the root of it is this pride." Down in verse 24 he calls himself, "a wretched man." Pride is still there, residual pride is still in our fallen flesh. And the Holy Spirit is constantly having to subdue that pride. And the spiritual growth process, the process of sanctification is the progressive triumph of humility over pride. That's how you can measure your spiritual development by the measure of triumph your humility has over your natural pride. Humility comes very, very hard, very hard. In fact, it can't come apparently just through the teaching of Scripture. You can have lesson after lesson after lesson after lesson on humility, but that's not enough.

That's important, that's critical, that's essential, that's why the Lord gives a lesson on humility here, and there will be...there will be opportunity for us to learn from that and to apply that, but to show you how really hard it is to get the message, here we are just at the end of the Galilean ministry, Jesus gives this very direct message on humility, and fast forward all the way to just about the time that Jesus is to be crucified, months ahead, and the chief priests and scribes are about to put Jesus to death, we're getting close to the cross. Months have passed. And we read in Luke 22, a long way from chapter 9, this is at the end of the journey to Jerusalem, verse 24, "There arose a dispute among them," that is the Twelve, "as to which of them was regarded to be the greatest." Oh come on, that's the same problem months later. Pride does not easily become defeated. Here they are again, the same argument. Jesus even told them a parable. He said there was a man who needed workers in his vineyard and so he went out to hire them and some worked 12 hours, some worked nine, some worked six, some worked three and some worked one. They all got the same reward. And Jesus was talking about equality in the Kingdom. He was saying to them, "Look, it's going to be the same for all of you, you're all going to come into the Kingdom, you're all going to receive the same magnanimous reward of eternal life, there isn't a pecking order. There aren't any ranks there." And even with that parable, the lesson in Luke 9, the question still comes up months later in the twenty-second chapter again. Why is that? Because pride dies so hard...so hard.

Well if it's not the teaching that defeats pride, what is it? It's a combination of the teaching and the experience that the Lord brings into your life. James says, "Count it all joy when you fall into various trials." Why? "Because trials have a perfecting work." Peter, 1 Peter 5:10, he knew this from personal experience, "After you've suffered a while, the Lord make you perfect." Peter knew his own maturing, his own sanctification was not just related to information, it was related to being crushed to suffering.

So, in this process of sanctification, two things are at work...the input of the Word of God working and refining, and the providential working of God as He brings trials into our lives to break our pride. In 2 Corinthians 12, most notable illustration, Paul had a thorn in the flesh, literally it was a stake, a spear

rammed through his flesh, painful horrible experience. He prayed three times for the Lord to remove it. The Lord said I'm not removing it. And Paul confessed there that the Lord had given it to him to keep him from exalting himself. So whatever the Lord needs to do to keep exalting yourself, that's what the Lord will do because that's part of the progression of your sanctification. Pride dies a hard death and it is basically defeated by continual understanding of the truth of God working in you, mingled with suffering and experiences defeat and distress and trial that break our self-confidence.

So again I say, sanctification is the process of humility triumphing over pride so that the more humble a person is, the more sanctified they are. It's essential then to learn these profound lessons.

Now these disciples, as you'll notice in verse 46, we can go back to the text of Luke 9, they're...they're into this subject about who is going to be the greatest. This was a part of their culture. This is what they saw with religious leaders. This is what they saw with the rabbis and the Pharisees. Everybody was in this kind of spiritual self-promotion mode. They were very used to this. And so here they are caught up in this really disgusting and embarrassing debate about which of them was going to be the greatest. This manifestation of their pride, however, becomes the opportunity for the Lord to do some teaching on the subject of humility, which is very, very important for us. And we're going to be immensely benefitted by this teaching.

Now the setting is Capernaum. Capernaum, a city in Galilee at the northern tip of the Sea of Galilee where Jesus had made His headquarters during His Galilean ministry. It was also the home of Peter. This happens in a house in Capernaum. We compare Matthew 18 and Mark 9 and we can pretty well reconstruct the scene. The house may well have been Peter's house, the little child that Jesus picks up may well have been one of the children in Peter's family. So here we are in Peter's house in Capernaum at the very end of the Galilean ministry. The disciples have just come off the road. They've been walking on the road where Jesus has been teaching and preaching and doing miracles. They're returning after this traveling. Now while they're on the road, as we put the picture together, they're having an argument and they're arguing about who is the greatest of them. Which of them is going to be the greatest in the Kingdom the Lord is going to set up. It was as if His statements about suffering and death had just gone right on by. He said you're going to follow Me, you have to deny yourself, take up your cross, that is be willing to die. And as it turns out, you know, they all died except John who was exiled. But they didn't hear that.

That's why...look back at verse 44, just a couple of verses back. He says to them, "Let these words sink into your ears for the Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men." Delivered meaning handed over as a criminal to those who would punish Him. Get it, guys, He's saying, I'm going to suffer and you too are going to have to deny yourself and take up a cross as well. There's going to be suffering for you. They didn't hear it. It didn't register. They didn't hear the part about the

cross, they just looked at the crown. They saw the glory and not the suffering. And so they're having this argument, boy, the Kingdom's going to be coming, He's going to be setting up His Kingdom pretty soon, I think I'm the person who should have the highest rank. No, I'm the person. And they started haranguing with each other.

Where did this ever come from? Well we'll see that in a minute. But anyway, when they get into the house Jesus asks them what they were discussing. As we put the gospel accounts together and Mark chapter 9 says they kept silent. They probably looked at each other like, "Don't anybody say a word. We don't want to admit what we've been doing." They were so embarrassed, they were so ashamed of their sinful selfishness that they just said nothing. They knew their sin. Their conscience has condemned them. They knew they were inconsistent and disobedient to the command to follow Jesus in self-denial and cross bearing. They were ambitious. They were competitive. They were self-willed. They expected to be ranked over each other. And so they're having this argument. And we see here in these men who believed in Jesus, that confessed that You are the Christ the Son of the living God, who had said, you know, "To whom shall we go, You have the words of eternal life." They had made their commitment to Christ. But we see remaining pride in their hearts and here we see their immaturity, how...how meager their sanctification was at this point. But Jesus uses this as a great way for us to understand pride and humility. We see here six characteristics of pride...six characteristics of pride Jesus uses and Luke provides for us in order to help us understand His lessons on humility.

Let me give you the first one. Pride ruins unity...pride ruins unity. Verse 46, "And an argument arose among them." Now that's just pretty disgusting. Here are the first generation of preachers, twelve men who have been given the commission to preach, they have been commanded to preach, they've been empowered to preach, they've been given the ability to do signs and wonders, to raise dead people and to give healing to sick people and to cast out demons, they are a band of men who have this unique commission. They need to be together. They need to be unified. They need to be supportive of each other because they're going against a hostile world. They need to yield their hearts to one another, to strengthen one another, to build up one another, to hold up one another. And instead in this...this is the first sort of pre-church, you know, the church doesn't come into existence until Acts 2, but pre-church, this is the original band of preachers and they can't even get along with each other. There's an argument. How petty. How ridiculous.

In the midst of seeing all the signs and wonders that Jesus did and being with Him and sitting under His teaching and learning and experiencing what they were learning and experiencing, all they can do is fight over petty matters. So ironic. Jesus spoke of His own personal suffering and they argued about their own personal glory. They're dense.

This is very destructive. And I say what I said as the first point, pride ruins unity by destroying relationships. Proud people just shatter relationships all over the place cause relations are built on sacrifice and service, giving yourself away. Pride is not just indifferent. It never stops there. Pride never stops with indifference. It is indifferent to others, it is so self-absorbed. It never stops there, it can't stop there. It is ultimately judgmental and critical and therefore divisive. It is very, very destructive in the Christian church, very destructive. I think it's the most common destroyer of churches, pride. Just as it's the most common destroyer of every relationship. The Apostle Paul said this, "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself. Do not merely look out for your own personal interest but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which is also in Christ Jesus." Be like Christ, be concerned about others. Give your life away for others. Love enough to sacrifice yourself for others. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man...Jesus said...lay down his life for his friends." Consider others better than yourselves. That's what humility does. Pride just destroys relationships, devastates them.

In 1 Corinthians chapter 3, the Apostle Paul acknowledged this problem in the Corinthian church, he said, "You are fleshly, for since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly? You're not walking like mere men. For when one says, 'I'm of Paul,' another, 'I'm of Apollos,' are you not mere men?" You're too fleshly, you're babes, your spirituality is at an immature level. Your sanctification is meager and it's manifest in your divisiveness...I am of Paul, I'm better than you.....Well, I'm of Apollos and we're better than you. It just rips and shreds relationships.

Pride is what fights and argues and demands its own space and its own personal exaltation in its own way and its own will. Humility seeks to defer to everyone else. In 2 Corinthians chapter 12, toward the end of that letter, and verse 20, Paul said he was afraid to go to Corinth because, he said, "I'm afraid when I get there I'm going to find strife and jealousy and angry tempers and disputes and slanders and gossip and arrogance and disturbances." Oh, in the church? You better believe it in the church...all over the place, ripping and shredding and tearing up the church. And whenever you see that going on, you say, "Well, you have to understand the issues." No, I don't even need to understand the issues. There's only one issue here and that's pride...that's pride. Somebody isn't getting what they want. Pride ruins unity and therefore the Lord knows how destructive it is and how critical it is to teach His disciples, and us, the lessons of being humble.

Secondly, pride races relatively. It ruins unity and it raises relatively. It elevates thinking in relative ways about people. Pride always has a pecking order. Back to verse 46, the argument was about which of them might be the *meizon*, the greater one. And you can hear the argument. Back in chapter 9 at the beginning, the Twelve were together. They had power, authority over demons and over diseases and they went out preaching the Kingdom and healing. So here they are. "Hey, guys, we were over in this village over here...I was over on the south side of town and I healed three blind

people, how many blind people have you healed?" "Well, I had three deaf ones. Trade you my three deaf for your three blind," that cancels us out. "Yeah, but I was used to raise somebody from the dead." You can just hear the ugliness of this argument. And then all of a sudden, out comes Peter, James and John. "But we were on the mountain for the transfiguration." Oh brother. I mean, this is so petty. This is so evidently the manifestation of spiritual immaturity that you can't miss it.

Isn't it amazing that Jesus chose these ordinary men? Not only were they ordinary, but they were also unsanctified because there's no other way. You've got to start where they are. And so this is what they're fighting about. And they were used to that because that's the way it was in the world in which they lived. They saw the religious pecking order that existed in Jerusalem, all kinds of ranking of people. That always goes with false religion. You know, in some of the false religious systems you see the more important you are the bigger your cone-hat is, you know. Or the more junk you have around your neck, or the longer your robe is. I mean, that's just part of the religious stuff. And they were used to that. They were used to the rabbis having enlarged tassels and enlarged little boxes on their heads, and elevating themselves above everybody else. That's part of their culture, just like it is part of our culture. I mean, really, folks, I've long enough to see the transformation in our culture. I mean, does it ever end? Is there ever any end to the award ceremonies? And the honor ceremonies? I mean, it really is disgusting. You say, "Well it's nice to give people awards." Yeah, you know, so they can say I'm better than you, that's the bottom line. You put some silly thing on your bumper about your kid being the best kid in school. What are you saying to everybody else? Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah! That's what you're saying. I saw one bumper that said, bumper sticker that said, "My kid can beat up your honor student." Oh I guess the people who watch WWF have to fight back, I don't know any other way to explain that. But, you understand what I'm saying. I mean, honor to whom honor is due, respect to whom respect is due. And when something has done...somebody has done something worthy of respect, then we give him that respect. But this endless relative sorting out of people in petty fashion to make some feel superior to others is pouring gas on the fire of pride.

But that's just the way it is in the world. People are proud and so they feed their pride. And we now have turned pride into a virtue and so every way possible we want to make people feel proud. This is absolutely contradictory to what the Lord wants us to feel. So what you get when you get pride is destroyed relationships. If this society keeps pumping pride the way it is, it will be impossible to imagine any marriage that could last, any family that could stay together, any relationship that could survive because selfishness just destroys everything by ruining unity and by raising relativity so that there's this pecking order and people feel inferior and superior to each other.

Third thing, and now you're getting to the core of the deal, pride reveals depravity. Proud people are manifesting their core depravity. Look at verse 47, "Jesus knowing what they were thinking in their

heart," and we'll stop there for a minute. You know, you say, "You're getting a lot out of this." I am because there's a lot here. Jesus knew the problem was a heart problem. He knew that. Back in chapter 5 verse 22 there's the similar insight of Jesus with regard to the Pharisees there. In chapter 5 verse 22 He said...Jesus aware of their reasoning said, "Why are you reasoning in your hearts?" Jesus in John 2:25 said He didn't need anybody to tell him what was in the heart of man, because He knew it was there..omniscience. And the problem is always a heart problem. You show me a person who manifests pride and I'll show you a proud heart. That's why the Old Testament says, seven things God hates, a proud heart. It's what they were thinking. And by the way, it says there in verse 47, what they were thinking, but it's the same word as the word argument in verse 46, exactly the same word, *dialogismos*, they were arguing and He knew the argument came because of what was in their hearts. And it's a heart...it's a singular heart. I think that's so interesting. What was in their heart, they were thinking in their heart like collective heart. And it is a collective heart, that is to say all human beings have a depraved heart. There's sort of a universal heart in that sense. The problem Jesus recognized was in the heart. The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. Romans 2:5 says, "The heart is stubborn and unrepentant." The heart is self-exalting, self-lifting.

In fact, if you turn to Mark 7 for a minute, I think it would be edifying for us to recall some teaching that Jesus gives in this context. In the seventh chapter of Mark, I'll just pick it up in verse 14 where Jesus began to say, "Listen to Me, all of you, and understand," here's something you need to know. "There's nothing outside the man which going into him can defile him." What's wrong with us didn't come from the outside. It's not our environment, it's not what's around us. "But the things which proceed out of the man are what defile the man." The problem is inside of us. It's our fallenness. And then in verse 18, He further said, "Are you so lacking in understanding also? Do you not understand that whatever goes into the man from the outside cannot defile him because it doesn't go into his heart but into his stomach and is eliminated?" And here He's talking with regard, sort of an analogy, you eat something but it goes through the bodily processes and is eliminated. That's not what defiles you, it comes in, it goes out. It's not what's on the outside, Jesus is saying by analogy, that defiles you, it's what comes up from the inside. And that's exactly what He says in verse 20 and following, "That which proceeds out of the man is what defiles the man for from within out of the heart of men proceed evil thoughts, fornication, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting, wickedness as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man." So wherever you see pride, you're simply seeing the manifestation, the revelation of depravity...depravity.

So what are we saying here? Well pride destroys relationships...destroys unity by creating conflict. It creates pecking orders. It creates rankings. It creates hierarchies. These are things that I have given my attention to through the years with I hope great vigor. And then it also pollutes because it

simply lets the depravity of the heart flow out. Pride is an ugly thing. It's a destructive damaging thing.

Well, to those first three points, our Lord responds with a lesson. And it's a lesson on humility, go back to verse 47. "Jesus knowing what they were thinking in their heart took a child and stood him by His side." Now it's time for a lesson and He's going to give that lesson with a child as an illustration. The child, it says, stood by Him, so the child was big enough to stand. Mark 9:36 says He picked the child up and folded him into His arms so he was small enough to hold. So it was a very little child. And as I said, it may well have been a member of Peter's family if this indeed was Peter's house, as is possible. Why does He do that? Why does He pick up a little child? Because a little child was the lowest ranking person in society. Still children are. I don't mean by that that we don't love them in a special way, we do. But as far as making a contribution, they make the least. As far as achievements, they have none. They have accomplished nothing. It's a good thing God made them cute or we might pay no attention to them. They take, they don't give. The rabbis used to say that they would teach no child under the age of 12 the Torah because it was a waste of their time. The Jewish rabbis at the time of Jesus disdained children, didn't bother with them, considered children accurately the weakest, the most unaccomplished, the most vulnerable, the least in value, those who made virtually no contribution and wouldn't waste their time with them since most of them wouldn't even survive until adulthood because mortality rate was so high. It is in that framework that Jesus does what He does.

So He takes a little child and if you can get past the cute part and just see what Jesus is saying, He takes the child because the child is of the least rank with virtually no achievement whatsoever. And He sets that little child before them and then He picks that little child up in His arms because that little child is going to become an illustration for His lesson on humility.

Now as I said, Mark 9 is a parallel passage and so is Matthew 18. And I want you to turn to Matthew 18 for a moment because I want to fill in what Matthew records of the words of Jesus on this same occasion. The disciples finally came out with the question, "Who then is greatest in the Kingdom of heaven?" At first they were silent, Mark says. Jesus knew they had been arguing about it. They became aware that He knew and so they wanted Him to answer their question. They had been arguing about it and so, "Hey, let's settle it, who is it, Lord? Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven? You render Your verdict." I suppose they might assume that He would say, "Peter..." knowing that Peter had put his foot in his mouth a few times, He might have deferred to John, and hope against hope, somebody down the line with real kind of quiet character like Philip and Andrew might have thought, "Well maybe it will be me, I'll sort of slide in. I'll be the surprise nominee." So who knows what was going on in their minds. And Jesus did something amazing, called a child, set him in the midst. So there we are up to the speed of where Luke is and He takes the little child and

the first thing He says is in Matthew 18:3, "Truly I say to you, unless you are converted...unless you turn and go a different direction, men, and become like children, you're not even going to be in the Kingdom." You've got to realize that you're nothing. You have no rank before God. You have no achievement that would rank you over anybody else. You are anything but great. You are the lowest of the low, having, like a child, virtually achieved nothing. Your value is minimal. That's what He's saying to them. You've got the wrong idea here, guys. This pride that destroys unity, that shatters relationship, that creates a pecking order, this pride that pollutes because it manifests heart depravity, this has to be dealt with. And the way you deal with it is to start right here, you're nothing and you need to know it. You're absolutely nothing. You have nothing of achievement to commend yourselves. And looking at the disciples He could be saying, "I don't care if you're in your twenties, I don't care if you've done this, done that, done the other thing. I don't care how many mighty works you've done. I don't care about the healings you've done and know all of that through the delegated power I gave you, in yourself you are nothing...nothing." And they needed to understand that.

So in verse 4 He then says, "Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he's the greatest in the Kingdom." Listen to this, greatness in the Kingdom, are you ready for this one? You're going to like it, is not relative, it is absolute. Everybody in the Kingdom is the greatest...everybody. In fact, on another occasion Jesus said that John the Baptist was the greatest man who lived up until his time, but nevertheless the least in the Kingdom is greater than John. Greatness is not relative in the Kingdom of God, there's no such thing as a pecking order in the Kingdom of God. Greatness is absolute. You're great because, if I can borrow from another theological category, your greatness is because God sees you covered with the righteousness of Jesus Christ and all believers covered with the same righteousness are therefore equal before God. So there's no pecking order here. That's why I don't wear a silly backwards collar and a cone hat and a robe and call myself, "Holy, Reverend, Dr. Somebody or even Father, or seek to sit in a chief seat somewhere." There's no such order in the Kingdom of God. And so Jesus is saying to them, "You've got to be...you've got to be converted, and I don't mean salvation converted, you've got to turn and go another direction, guys, you're going the wrong direction here...the wrong direction."

In the...turn over to Luke 18 for a minute. And we'll wrap it up with this one. Luke 18:15, because this teaches the same thing and I want to make a comment or two about it. Luke 18:15, they were bringing even their babies to Him. Jesus had been saying, look at verse 14, "Everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, he who humbles himself shall be exalted." All the people who exalt themselves are going to wind up being humbled. And what He's talking about is in judgment. All those people who are into pride and self exaltation, He's talking about the religious leaders of Israel, self-righteous, they're all going to be humbled by God in judgment. But all of those who humble themselves are going to wind up being exalted. Listen again, I say it, there are no relative rankings in the Kingdom of God, we all will be equally exalted, we all will receive the same denarius wage, we all will be great. Okay? Because it's all imputed to us, it's all granted to us and then given to us in our glorified form so that there's equality in that sense.

Then in response to that, they were bringing babies to Him so that He might touch them and the disciples saw it and they began rebuking them. "Get those babies out of here. Get those babies out of here." See, they were taking...they were sort of following the rabbinical pattern, this is what was done in their religious environment. Get those babies away, doesn't have time to deal with babies. They don't have any rank, they don't have any importance. You can't be taking up His time with these babies. Jesus called for them saying, "Permit the children to come to Me. Don't hinder them for the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I say to you, whoever doesn't receive the Kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it at all." First of all, He says...Look, bring that child here because that child..those babies make a good illustration of what you need to be. They give Me the opportunity to remind you that it's only when you see yourself as this valueless, this void of any achievement that you'll come into the Kingdom.

But I think there's something else here, too. I don't think Jesus could do this, say this and use these babies this way if in fact those babies weren't the special care of God and had a place in His Kingdom. And that's what I've tried to point out in this book that will be coming out in a couple of months called Safe In The Arms of God, words from heaven about the death of a child. I am convinced that Jesus was affirming here that God has special care over those little ones when they're little and unable to believe or reject or understand the truth. Our Lord upset the conventional wisdom of the Apostles which had been picked up because of the culture by saying, "I care about children, you might not care about them. You might not want to bother with children, I care about children." Actually in Mark 10 it says, "He actually picked them up and blessed them." So He's saying to them, "I care about these little children. They may not care about them, I care about them."

But also, the primary point is I care that you understand that it's only when you become like these little children and not counting on your own achievements that you'll even come into My Kingdom. Sanctification then is maintaining the mentality that I am before God a child with no achievements and no credentials and no accomplishment and it is by mercy that He has made me great. Right? That's the lesson. He used the weakest of all to teach what it really is to be the greatest of all. Greatness in the Kingdom is not relative, it is absolute and it belongs only to the humble who come as the old hymn says, "Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to Thy cross I cling." Next time, three more characteristics of pride and more of Jesus' teaching.

Lord God, we know the reality of remaining pride in our lives. This is not a mystery to us. This is a reality in which we struggle. We ask that You would do whatever You need to do by the purging purifying work of the Word and through Your providences in our lives to bring the necessary trials to keep us from exalting ourselves so that we having entered the Kingdom humbly, may live humbly and walk humbly before our God so that we may be most useful to You, most blessed and bring most

honor to our Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.

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