The Mark of True Greatness, Part 2
Luke 9:49-50
42-131

Let's return in our study of the Word of God to the 9th chapter of the gospel of Luke. We began last Sunday a look at verses 46 through 50, Luke 9:46 through 50. And we'll complete that this morning.

Let me just read this again to set it in your mind, Luke chapter 9 beginning at verse 46. "An argument started among them," that is among the twelve apostles," 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 the one who is least among all of you, this is the one who is great.' John answered and said, 'Master, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name and we tried to prevent 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.'"

Now as I said last time, this is a lesson on humility, really a full lesson on humility, and though there are just brief verses in the lesson, there's an awful lot of very important truth here. We as Christians are called to live lives of humility in a world of self-promotion. It goes against the grain of all that fallenness avers and affirms. Nothing, as I said last week, is more characteristic of a sinful fallen heart than pride and selfishness and self promotion and self centeredness. It is also true that the very heart of the Christian gospel, the very heart of regeneration, the very heart of sanctification is humility. So we are at odds with what is natural to us and to the world around us. Throughout all of Scripture the people of God are commanded and called to be humble. And you can find those passages for yourself. You can look up a concordance, find the word "humble" or the word "humility" or some kind of dictionary and you will see an almost endless listing of passages where humility is enjoined upon us and described and defined for us. We are called as the children of God to be humble.

You do remember our study of Luke 9 where Jesus said, "If any man come after Me, let him deny himself." That is the essential element in saving faith, self-denial. You're literally putting your trust in Christ for your salvation, recognizing that there's nothing in you commendable, nothing in you worthy, nothing in you of value, nothing in you in terms of achievement, nothing to commend you to God whatsoever. It is in that attitude of spiritual bankruptcy, spiritual poverty, that attitude of self suicide, Jesus even called it hating oneself, that attitude of denying oneself that true salvation can occur. You come into the kingdom of God humble.

Now that is not because you get yourself there. And I want to point this out because through the years some have said that if you call people to self-abasement, if you call people to humble themselves, if you call people to repentance, you are asking the unregenerate person to do some work to prepare his own heart for God to save him. And nothing could be further from the truth. To say it simply, you can no more humble yourself than you can awaken yourself from the dead. You

can no more humble yourself than you can give your blind heart sight. You can no more humble yourself than you can make yourself to understand the things of God which are foolishness to you. You can't do any of that. You can't bring yourself to repentance. You can't bring yourself to humility. You cannot bring yourself to spiritual life. You cannot bring yourself to saving faith. All of it is the work of God. It is God who by the convicting power of the Spirit of God breaks down pride. It is God, who using the Word of God, penetrates the stubborn and proud heart, crushes it and humbles it and breaks it and makes it contrite and penitent. That is part of the work of God, not apart from the human will, but through the means of the human will. That is to say an unaided human will cannot give itself life or sight or understanding or bring itself to humility or penitence. It all is the work of God. So at least at that moment in the life of every person who is justified, every person who is regenerated, there is that great moment, that great reality of humility wrought by the Spirit of God at which point we enter the kingdom like a child, that is with no achievement, no accomplishment in utter weakness and absolute dependence, having accomplished nothing. We are saved in that sense of personal, spiritual emptiness. And at that moment, regeneration takes place, justification, conversion, redemption, adoption all the glorious realities of our salvation.

But as mighty a work as that is, and it is a mighty work, it is the mighty work of the Spirit of God crushing natural pride. In that mighty work of bringing us through conviction to the end of ourselves, the Spirit of God has exhibited His power to save us. But after that moment, pride still remains in our flesh. It's still there. It's a part of our fallenness. It's a part of our being human. It's remaining sin. It's residual sin that is in us because we're still in our human form. So, though our pride was utterly crushed at the time of our true salvation, follow this, it didn't die. It didn't disappear. It wasn't dealt a fatal blow. It will be at our glorification when we leave this flesh and we enter into a new glorified humanity, like unto the resurrection humanity of Jesus Christ. But until that time, as long as we're in this life, remaining pride is there and so the battle goes on and on and on to bring our self-will and our pride and our selfishness back to the point where it was when we were redeemed. The Spirit of God continues to work toward that end but our will does not always cooperate, as it did at the time of the great miracle of our redemption. And so there goes on in the life of the believer a battle to keep remembering that we are nothing, that we are but children, that we have no achievement, no accomplishment. We are the weak and the ignoble and the nobodies and the nothings that we are described to be by the New Testament.

And so, Jesus understands that while the disciples of His, the apostles of His may have had their pride crushed at the time of their salvation, the battle still goes on and that's very apparent because it is on the occasion of this exhibit of their remaining pride that Jesus teaches us lessons of humility. These are critical lessons because the Bible says God gives grace to the humble. Scripture indicates that God blesses the humble, that God honors the humble, that He lifts up the humble, that He exalts the humble, that He uses the humble, that He instructs the humble. And you can go on and on and on. So, humility is the ground in which all the rest of Christian virtue grows and humility is the soil that receives the rain, the refreshing rain of God's richest blessing. We then must engage all of our powers and dependency upon the Holy Spirit to gain the humility that the Lord would have of us in order that we might truly represent ourselves as the children of God and that we might be in the position to be most blessed and to produce the most virtuous fruit. It's not an easy battle because we are still human and pride is part of being human.

There are three areas in which we are assaulted sinfully. One... These are according to 1 John 2:15 to 17. One is the lust of the flesh, the other is the lust of the eyes, and the third is the pride of life. It's still there. We still have lusts of the flesh, lusts of the eyes and we still fight the battle on the front of

the pride of life.

Our Lord then needs to teach us, and isn't it wonderful? We are really now embarking for the next huge portion of the gospel of Luke on Jesus' training of the twelve. We have the very best teacher. Somebody might question whether Jesus is an adequate teacher of humility since He's God, and it's awfully hard for God to be humble. But just the opposite is true. There is no greater teacher of humility than the one who humbled Himself most. No one has ever been higher and no one has ever gone lower. No one could be higher than to be looking face to face into the very presence of God because He is one with God in trinitarian essence. You can't go higher than that, and no one could ever go lower than to bear the full wrath of God for the weight of all the people of all the ages who would ever believe. No one higher could ever go lower and no one lower could ever go higher for having gone to the very bottom to receive the wrath of God for our sins, He was exalted to the right hand of God to reign forever and ever and given a name, the name “Lord,” that every knee should bow. This is the greatest picture of humility possible. There's none anywhere close. And so He teaches not only from the vantage point of precept, but He teaches from the vantage point of example. He is the one who was humbled beyond all comprehension, beyond the experience of any other person.

To see that, I want you to look at Philippians chapter 2 and this is an important passage to relate to our look at Luke 9. In Philippians chapter 2, the apostle Paul addresses this subject of humility, using Jesus as the supreme example. But the way he begins is very helpful. He starts with motivation. If we are going to be humble and that's the idea here, down in verse 3 you'll notice in the middle of the verse, "With humility of mind." You can sort of take that as the premise. He's after humility of mind. That's what he wants. He wants us to be humble. Now he wants to motivate us to that humility and then he wants to teach us the elements of that humility and then he wants to give us an example of that humility. But notice how he motivates back in verse 1: "Therefore, if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love." Let me just say that those two phrases both relate to the person of Christ and the work of Christ. And we could sum it up by saying this: If the encouragement you have received from Christ, if the salvation and the goodness and the grace and the mercy and the forgiveness that is yours in Christ, if...if the love that has provided to you this truth means anything, that's his motivation. If Christ and all His encouragement and consolation of love has any value to you, if pleasing the one who has given you so much matters to you, be humble.

In other words, it comes back to a question of saying to yourself, “If I choose not to be humble, it is then to spurn Christ and all of His goodness, encouragement, consolation, and love poured out toward me. In spite of that I choose to be disobedient to what He asks of me.”

Then he moves to the second. He says, "If there's any fellowship of the Spirit,” if any affection and compassion coming from that. If the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit in your life has any value, if having partnership, living union with the Spirit of God whose temple you are means anything, if having received the affections, the sympathies and the compassions of the Spirit of God in your life has any value, be humble. And then in verse 2 he says, "Make my joy complete." If my joy means anything to you...Paul is saying if...if you care at all about me, the one who brought you the message of the gospel, the one in whom God used to be the preacher, if my joy means anything to you, if the Holy Spirit means anything to you, if Christ means anything to you, then humble yourself. It is to say in a sense that if you don't humble yourself, then Christ's work in your behalf and the Holy Spirit's work in your behalf and the effort of those who brought you the gospel and were the human instruments that God used are of little significance to you. If you care at all about Christ, if you care

about the Holy Spirit, if you care at all about me, be humble. And he defines it by being of the same mind. That is thinking the same things, maintaining the same love, loving everybody the same; in other words, no hierarchies, being united in Spirit, intent on one purpose. That's all language about unity. It's all language about unity because humility produces unity. As we saw last time, pride destroys unity. If Christ, who wants His church to be one, means anything to you, if the Holy Spirit, who wants His church to be one, means anything to you, if my joy and I want the church to be one, if that means anything to you then be one. Think the same thing. Love each other the same. Seek unity. Focus on one purpose.

How do you do that? Well how you do it is described in verses 3 and 4. Here are the principles, "Do nothing from selfishness." That's the first thing, don't be selfish. That's... That's personally ambitious. You've got to get rid of self, and here we are back at this same thing we said about salvation, you've got to get rid of self to come into the kingdom. Now that you're in the kingdom you have a battle to keep suppressing your remaining pride. And this word selfish here has to do with internal, personal ambition. Get rid of personal ambition of wanting to be superior to someone else, more successful than someone else, to achieve more than someone else.

Secondly, he says, "Do nothing from empty conceit." The first word, selfishness, is that internal attitude. The second one: empty conceit, looks at how others view you. Don't seek external glory, empty self-glory, [???] *kenodoxia*, useless glory, accolades from others. If we're going to have unity and there's going to be humility, and you've got to deal with the selfishness in your heart, the desire for personal achievement, ambition, and you've got to also get rid of that desire to receive glory from those around you, just does not belong in the kingdom.

Further, verse 3: "With humility of mind, regard one another as more important than yourselves." Consider everybody else more important than you. Consider yourself as the least of the least. And verse 4, "Don't look merely for...look out merely for your own interests, things that are personal to you, but also for the interest of others."

This is really all about what we saw at the very beginning of our salvation, self-denial. It's not just the way to be saved; it's the way to live as a Christian. And in verse 5 he then turns to the example, "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus." Jesus, he says, is the perfect illustration of this kind of attitude. And what is the attitude? Humility of mind, humility of mind is the attitude, thinking humbly about yourself, because that's what Jesus did. And he describes that in verses 6 and following, "Although He existed in the form of God, He didn't regard equality with God a thing to be grasped" or clutched or held onto, He was willing to give it up for the purpose of redemption, so "He emptied Himself." He divested Himself of all of his divine prerogatives and made Himself submissive to the will of the Father and the work of the Holy Spirit. Came into the world, took the form of a bondservant, He didn't come down as a king to reign the first time, He came down as a humble servant, a bondservant. He became in the likeness of men. He was found in appearance, or the form of a man. He humbled Himself not only to become a man, and a serving man, but all the way down obedient to the point of death and not just death but the ignominious, shameful death on a cross. As I said, no one was ever higher, no one ever went lower.

So when you hear Jesus teach about humility, He knows what He's talking about. He had to put aside concern for Himself on behalf of concern for others. He had to be looking out for the interests of others. And that's exactly what He did. And He was rewarded, as verse 9 says, because when it was done, God highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name

which is, I said a moment ago, is the name “Lord.” He is the supreme example of humility. Let's go back to Luke chapter 9 and hear from the lips of the supreme example the lesson on humility. It wasn't something He didn't know about, it was something He knew very well.

Now you remember the background. The disciples had been on the road with Jesus. They had been returning to Capernaum, the city at the northern tip of the Sea of Galilee which was the headquarters for the Galilean ministry of Jesus. When they arrived there, the argument had apparently been going on along the road. When they got there, it surfaced. Verse 46 says, "An argument started among them." It had been going on actually along the road. When they finally got the house at Capernaum, then the whole thing surfaced. Jesus drew it out and the following discussion took place.

Now we went into the detail last week on the setting, so, we won't do it again. But we began to look at the destructiveness of pride. Jesus teaches the lessons on humility off of this background of pride. The first thing I said to you about pride is that pride ruins unity. And that's essentially what we were just learning from Philippians. Pride ruins unity. Verse 46: "An argument started among them." It wasn't enough that they had enemies in the political structure of the land, the religious leaders of Israel, it wasn't enough that they had enemies in the supernatural realm, demons, they had to turn themselves into enemies of each other. How self-defeating is that? That's what pride does. We all remember what they were arguing about, right? And they were arguing about the pecking order, the rewards, the glory that each of them felt that they were worthy to receive. And pride always creates an argument. It always separates. This is still the most common destroyer of spiritual ministry. Pride, it ruins unity, it generates arguments as people pit themselves against each other.

Secondly we saw that pride raises relativity, and this is really critical because they were arguing as to which of them would be the greatest, which of them was going to rank the highest in the kingdom when the Messiah established His kingdom. Was it going to be one of the three, Peter, James and John, because they had the inside track, they were the inner circle, they had been to the transfiguration? Was it going to be Peter? Who was it going to be? The others may have had a case that when they were sent out to do miracles everywhere two by two, they had done some powerful miracles that may have equipped them to at least be as high in rank as Peter, James, and John though they hadn't been to the transfiguration. Maybe they had been used to do some resurrections, maybe they ranked higher. Who knew? And they were debating about all these silly things. This is what pride does. It generates relativity, it ranks people against each other, it pits people against each other and it fractures the body of Christ into imaginary levels. This is contrary to the kingdom of God all together. There are no such things in the kingdom of God, absolutely none. There is no ranking, there is no pecking order.

People say, "Well, what about my rewards in heaven, my rewards in heaven?" When you get to heaven the Lord will give you the reward, but every one of us will get the reward of eternal life with all of its fullness and its riches. There will be certain things that you have been faithful to do in this life that won't make you more honorable in heaven, but will define in some ways the duties and responsibilities that you have there; but they in themselves will be absolute. And if I read my Bible right, when you do receive your crown, you're going to turn around and cast it at the feet of Jesus anyway and we'll all be back to receiving the same glorious eternal life. There's no sorting out and ranking people. That's why I just...I resist that in any framework within the body of Christ. I understand it in the world and that's why it's counterintuitive in the church.

Now you say, "Well wait a minute, aren't you...aren’t you in charge here?" No. I'm the teacher and

the preacher, but I am a man under the authority of the Word of God, under the authority of Christ. And I am a mutual member of a fellowship of men who have been given the responsibility to teach the Word of God and shepherd the flock, and who are no more important than anybody in the flock. It's just that our duty is different perhaps than yours and our responsibilities are different than yours and we have to be obedient to that responsibility and that giftedness which God has given us. We don't rank any higher. That's why I don't like titles. People say, "What should I call you?" And I say, "My name is John. That will do." Nobody called Jesus, "Dr. Jesus." And nobody called Paul, "Dr. Paul." I don't mind that in an academic realm. I don't mind that in a medical realm. I don't mind that with the Ph.D. world. That just doesn't have anything to do with the body of Christ. We don't have any pecking order in the body of Christ. We don't have any ranks. The least in the kingdom, Jesus said, is greater than the greatest in the past. John the Baptist is the greatest man that ever lived, Jesus said, and yet the least in My kingdom is greater than John. There is no relative ranking in the kingdom. That's why I don't like awards and honors and all of that that go on within the kingdom.

Third thing we learned, pride not only ruins unity, raises relativity, but it reveals depravity. We learned that, didn't we, in verse 47, "Jesus knowing what they were thinking in their heart," that was the problem. The problem, whenever you get into this kind of dispute, this kind of debate, whenever you start wrangling and hassling over who is superior to whom and who is supposed to be in the limelight and who is supposed to get what they want, etc., etc., all you're doing is manifesting the corruption of your heart. That's all you're doing.

I remember one time many years ago I was fairly new at Grace Church and there were some things I wanted to be patient about, although I've never been a particularly patient person, as my wife would give testimony to. I hope I've learned a little through the years. But there are some things I'm not very patient with, and that's error. And there was a class here at the church, and someone was teaching what was not accurate teaching of Scripture, and so I removed a teacher from a class, Sunday school class. Well, this was a situation where these people who were in the class, "That's our teacher. He's always been our teacher." And so they were very upset. And so what they did was they had a parking lot protest. They sat in their cars in the parking lot through the whole service on Sunday morning. These were... These were older people sitting in the car all during the service in a parking lot protest, followed the next week by a patio protest in which they sat in the patio during the class.

So I said...I said to the leader, "I want to meet with you and I just...I just feel it's important that we meet."

He said, "Absolutely."

So I remember in my brash young years, I walked in the room and I said, "Thank you for meeting with me. I want to read something to you." And this is what I read. "I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, not solid food for you are not able to receive it, indeed even now you're not able for you're still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly? Are you not walking like mere men?" I said, "Now, are you willing to repent?"

Oh, it got just like it did in here, really quiet.

This is an issue of repentance. I'm not even asking anybody to submit to me at that point, I'm asking that people submit to the truth, whatever the relationships are.

Well that class came around wonderfully well and continued to flourish under other leadership. And that was kind of a stark approach but then I was, as I said, young, but it was right. What... What happens when you have conflict in the church is it's surfacing depravity. It's just like opening the window and saying, "You want to see what I'm like inside, here it is." Pride reveals depravity. And Jesus knew what they were thinking in their heart, the heart is the problem.

Now comes the lesson in verse 47. "He took a child and stood him by His side." Here's going to be Jesus giving a lesson to move them away from the conventional wisdom that still pervades in their minds and the residual remaining pride that still lives in their fallen flesh. And He takes a child. Now why? I'll just remind you of what I said last time. Because a child... This is, by the way, a very small child, a child that He stood by Him, probably a little toddler, and then lifted up and held in His arms, according to Mark 9:36. So this is a tiny little child and Jesus is going to say, "This is how you all are, folks, you're like this child. You're not like some graduate student. You're not like some accomplished person. You're not some adult. You're not even a teenager. You're not even a child who's learned to play the scale on the piano. You haven't accomplished anything." In other words, you've come into the Kingdom with nothing to commend you. And that's consistent teaching that Jesus did. Consistently He said this, He taught this. You see it in Matthew 18. You see it in Mark 9. Jesus said to them, "Look, everybody comes into the kingdom broken, humble, unselfish with no achievement, no accomplishment." In Matthew 18:4 which is parallel to this, He takes the child in His arms, He says, "Nobody comes into My kingdom unless they come in like this." None of you brought credentials into the kingdom. The only thing you had to get you in the kingdom was the mercy of God. You had nothing. You came through the narrow gates, stripped absolutely bare and naked, overwhelmed with your sin, broken, crushed, as it were. Your selfishness, your pride was crushed at that time by the powerful work of the Holy Spirit and you came in empty and bankrupt. That's the way you came in. And that's still the way you are. You still have nothing to commend yourself.

So Jesus is saying, "Look, in My kingdom, everybody's a child. Nobody ranks in My kingdom." A child is the best human illustration of a believer in the kingdom because we have no rank. We're there by grace and the goodness of God. No greatness belongs to children, they're dependent. They have achieved nothing. They make no significant contribution to a conversation. Toddlers, they just interrupt. Shh-Shh. I'm not saying we don't love them. We love them. We adore them. We cherish them. But they're without achievement, without accomplishment, without merit.

In the 18th chapter of Luke, we remember again in the 15th verse, they were bringing babies to Him and He would touch them. The disciples saw it, they began rebuking them. Why? Because that was conventional wisdom; the Jewish rabbis didn't pay any attention to children. Many of them never lived to be adults anyway and the rest of them were not able to engage in a meaningful conversation, therefore they weren't able to be taught. And so the disciples just picked up on the conventional wisdom, said, "Get the kids out of here." Jesus said, "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 won't enter it at all." They're a perfect illustration of the kind of person you need to be if you come into the kingdom. God isn't interested in your accomplishments and your achievements. You come in as a bankrupt sinner like the rest of us. And Jesus is saying to these disciples, and to us, have you forgotten that? It's never been about your merit. It's never been about your accomplishment and your achievement. You came in as a child. You're still a child. You need to

conduct yourself like a child and defer. There are no relative rankings in the kingdom, it's all absolute. You're a child and yet you're great. If you're in the kingdom, you're great. Whoever comes in the kingdom is equally great to everybody else who comes in the kingdom. It's not greater and greatest, it's anybody in the kingdom, in the sphere of salvation is great.

"Whoever," Matthew 18:4, "humbles himself as this child; he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." When you humbled yourself like a child and came in the kingdom, you became the greatest, and we're all the greatest because there are no ranks. It's an absolute greatness, we all receive the same righteousness of Christ imputed to our account, the same greatness. Don't forget that, you're a child. And as a child, you defer and you have no selfish ambition and you seek no external glory.

Let me give you three other points, just quickly. And that was... That took longer than it should have. Number four, pride rejects deity. This is an important point. Pride rejects deity. It not only ruins unity, raises relativity, and reveals depravity, but it rejects deity. Verse 48, "He said to them, 'Whoever receives this child in My name receives Me. Whoever receives Me receives Him who sent Me.'" Now I've just turned that around. What pride does is reject Christ and if you reject Christ you reject God.

You say, "Wait a minute, I would never reject Christ, I would never reject God." Well ask yourself, "How did you receive the last believer? Did you pick a fight with another Christian? Did you pick a fight with a fellow Christian? Did you rank yourself above and beyond some other Christian? Then in a sense you're ranking yourself above Christ. Whoever is Christ's is one with Christ. "He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit," right? First Corinthians 6. So much are you one spirit with Christ that Paul says if you join to a harlot, you join Christ to a harlot. What a horrifying thought that is. Jesus said, "Look, if you do the deed of kindness to someone who believes in Me, you do it to Me." Right? You give them a cup of cold water in My name, you've done it unto Me. If you've gone to visit them in prison, you've done it unto Me. The Lord is not separated from His people. He's one with His people. So how you treat fellow believers is how you treat Christ. And the appropriate thing would be not to be selfish, not to be ambitious, not to be filled with empty conceit about your own need for glory. The important thing, not to be consumed with your own interests but rather to look at every person as Christ and to say, "I defer to You. I defer to You."

Turn to Matthew 18 because we need to look there in this respect because the teaching is really unique and memorable. In Matthew chapter 18, verse 5 we have the same statement, "Whoever receives one such child in My name receives Me." He's not talking about little children here, although as I pointed out last week, I think He is especially concerned and holds in unique care the little ones. He's talking here about believers who are like children. I do believe that, as you know, and I've taught this, that the little children before the age when they can understand the truth and receive it or reject it are the special care of the Lord and should they die, they go into His kingdom. And I think Jesus makes that clear. But they're an illustration of the emphasis here. "Whoever receives one such child." What kind of child? The child who believes in Me, the child who has entered the kingdom of heaven. When you receive one of those children, when you open your arms and embrace those, you're embracing Me. And He said in Luke 9, "And when you embrace Me you're embracing My Father." So when you defer to and when you love and when you seek the good of and the well-being of and the benefit of another believer, you are embracing Christ and you're embracing the Father for Christ is in the believer and the Father is in the Son, profound, profound truth. And to make it important, verse 6 gives a warning. "If you ever cause one of these little ones who believe in Me," and that tells us we're not talking about physical children, because physical children can't believe, not talking about infants

here because infants cannot believe or not believe. But if you cause one of these little ones who believe in Me, that is one of the children in the kingdom, one of the believers to stumble, that is to fall into sin, it would be better for a person who did that to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.

Now I think Jesus... That is the strongest thing Jesus ever said in regard to life in His church. That is just absolutely powerful. I don't know how you could say anything more frightening than that. You'd be better off to die a horrible death. The Jews associated drowning... The rabbis used to talk about the fact that God was going to drown the Gentiles, the pagans. The Jews hated the idea of being taken way out to sea and the thought of having a massive millstone, a grinding stone that was pulled by an animal put around your neck and having that stone send you to the bottom fast was a horrific thought. And Jesus grabs the most extreme and frightening kind of death to let those people know how serious it is that you would ever cause another believer to stumble, that you would ever do anything to offend another believer. You would be better off to die a horrifying death in the depths of the sea, plummeting to the bottom with a millstone around your neck. You're much better off than to start an argument that leads another believer into sin, to start a conflict that leads another believer into sin, to defer, to do anything from selfish ambition, anything from personal pride, seeking personal glory, anything to argue about ranks that causes people to get caught up in debate and discussion and strife and jealousy and discord. You'd be better off dead. I don't know how you could say it any more seriously than that.

And we can cause others to stumble by direct temptation. You literally solicit them to do evil. Or by indirect temptation, you irritate them and so that they get angry. You know their hot buttons and they react because that's what you tried to get out of them. You can generate that both directly and indirectly. You can cause people to stumble in sin...into sin by a sinful example that you set. They see it and follow. You can cause people to stumble into sin by failing to lead them into paths of righteousness. And it does happen. Verse 7 says woe to the world because of stumbling blocks. I mean, we live in a world where it's going to happen. We expect the world to do it and what Jesus is saying is woe to the world because of it. And it is inevitable. Stumbling blocks come, but woe to the man through whom the stumbling block comes. We understand the world is going to try to lead us into sin directly and indirectly. The world is going to set a bad example. The world isn't going to lead us in the path of righteousness. But Jesus is sort of asking the rhetorical question. You don't expect it to come from the family of God. Parents, you be careful what kind of example you set for your children. You don't want to cause them to stumble. You'd be better off dead, Jesus said. And verses 8 and 9 are sort of a proverbial saying that Jesus said on a number of occasions. "If your hand or foot cause you to stumble, cut it off, throw it away. Better for you to enter life crippled or lame than to have two hands, two feet and be cast into the eternal fire. If your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out, throw it from you. Better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be cast into the fiery hell." I don't think Jesus expected us to exegete every element of that. He was just saying, you know that proverb that you need to take drastic action if what you're doing causes somebody to stumble. It's not literally saying hack yourself up and yank your eyes out. He's saying deal drastically with anything in your life that's causing another believer to stumble because you'd be better off dead.

And verse 10 sort of sums it up. "See that you do not despise," [???]*kataphroneo*, look down, belittle, think little of one of these little ones who believes in Me. Don't ever think of someone else as lower than you and someone else in the family of God because their angels in heaven are very concerned about them. They're so concerned about them it says in verse 10 that they're always watching the fact of their Father. The Father cares for all His children and His holy angels, Hebrews 1:14 says, are

ministering spirits to His children, are there watching the Father's face so that they can immediately hear His concern and be dispatched to the aid of His children. If the Father's caring about His children, if the holy angels are caring about His children, if all of heaven is set for the care of His children, you better be careful how you treat them. Humble yourself because it's pride that causes us to lead others to stumble, that causes discord and disunity. So there is no rank in the kingdom. And all pride does is reject deity. It rejects Christ in rejecting others who are Christ's.

Number five in our little list. Pride not only ruins unity, raises relativity, reveals depravity, rejects deity, but it reverses reality. Pride reverses reality. Notice the statement in Luke chapter 9 and verse 48, the end of the verse, "For the one who is least among you of all, this is the one who's great." While you're there trying to push yourself up in your agenda and your notoriety and your fame and trying to fulfill your own ambition and get glory from everybody around you, you're going in the reverse from spiritual reality. What you ought to be doing is deferring, deferring and seeking the back place and the lower place because the one who is least is the one who's great. Greatness is equated with lowliness. Greatness is equated with humility. It's the opposite. It's counterintuitive. It's the opposite of the way people think. It turns the conventional wisdom on its head. Instead of fighting for your rights, you defer and you defer and you defer and you defer and you then... You're cultivating humility in your heart which God graces and honors and blesses and lifts up and uses.

Well finally, one last point. Pride reacts with exclusivity. Pride reacts with exclusivity. John answered in verse 49 and said, "Master, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name and we tried to prevent him because he doesn't follow along with us."

Now what does John jump into this thing like that? I'll tell you why. He's feeling conviction. He's thinking to himself, "Oh boy, we could be in some serious trouble." He...He remembers an occasion, probably not long before this, when he rebuked, probably the rest as well, not just him, we saw someone and we tried to prevent him because he didn't follow along with us. They all ganged up on this poor guy. And he now feels the sting of being rebuked because he has virtually gone out there and said, "Hey, buddy, you don't rank with us. What are you doing?"

There was a guy — we don't know anything about him — someone casting out demons in Your name. He was out there and he had believed in Jesus, we can assume that. He was functioning in Your name. In other words, he wasn't violating that. There are people, you know, who speak in the name of Jesus but they don't truly represent Him. That's like Jeremiah, how many times in Jeremiah does the prophet Jeremiah say there were prophets who spoke in my name but they weren't giving you my message? And we've got them all over the place today, don't we? On television, everywhere in the cults and isms and spasms and all the rest of the things that go on in the name of Christianity; we've got all these people who say they represent God and they speak in Jesus' name and they don't. But this man apparently really did. And, in fact, in the gospel of Mark, Jesus even said...and maybe it's worth reading, it's in Mark chapter 9 because it is an important thing to know exactly how the Lord described this man. Verse 39, "Do not hinder him for there's no one who will perform a miracle in My name and be able soon afterward to speak evil of Me." My assumption is then that the man was actually able to do what he was attempting to do in the name of Jesus Christ. The Lord actually let him do it. This is somewhat of an anomaly because it was only the twelve, according to chapter 9 verse 1, had been given the power to cast out demons and heal diseases. But here is...is a guy who is not among the twelve, very possible he could have been later among the seventy who were commissioned with that ability, chapter 10 verse 1. The Lord sent seventy out two by two to do these kinds of miracles. And maybe this was just a little bit of a preview of the seventy. It was

certainly important for the Lord to let this man do it to teach the lesson the disciples needed to learn, and that's the lesson that pride tends to drive you toward exclusivity. And if this man had been a false prophet, if this man had misrepresented the name of Jesus, Jesus never would have answered the way He answered. Verse 50: "Jesus said to him, to John, 'Don't hinder him, he who is not against you is for you.'" And that is to say he's for you, he's with us.

I think John was feeling the conviction. We...he's really honest. He just blurts it out. "Lord, we...we might have done something terrible in our...in our little pecking order arguments about who's the greatest, certainly collectively we're greater than anybody else and nobody else can do what we can do." And so the Lord just allowed one loose guy to be roaming around who had the same power that the apostles had to show them that they didn't rank any higher, or at least they didn't rank as high as they thought they should. The Lord could give that ability to anybody He wanted, even a stranger that wasn't in their group.

Pride tends to drive us into exclusivity, doesn't it? I will not embrace those who name the name of Christ but don't preach the truth of Christ. But I must embrace all those who both name His name and preach His truth, whatever their organization. You know, ranking in the body of Christ comes not only individuals against individuals, but groups against groups, churches against churches, organizations against organizations. That's just so sinful. It doesn't mean we don't assess what people teach and discern truth carefully, but once we know someone's faithful to the truth, then we embrace them. The apostle Paul said, "Even if they preach Christ of contention, even if they preach Christ hoping to add affliction to my chains, even if they're anti-Paul, even if they're unkind to me, even if they speak evil lies about me, I rejoice that Christ is preached and I will rejoice." Paul never stooped to the personality conflicts that are so rampant in the church. Jesus said, "You shouldn't have done that. You're right, you're right to bring it up. I'm glad you felt convicted enough to say that. You shouldn't have done that." And then He gives that...again that axiom at the end of verse 50, "He who is not against you is for you."

Now I just want to end with this. More... Much more could be said but I want to end with this thought, listen. That little statement, "He who is not against you is for you," is really a potent statement. Jesus said something similar to that many times, "He who is not with us is against us," is another way it was said. It appears in a number of other portions of Scripture. But what I want to draw out of it is just this. Keep this in mind very carefully. There is no middle ground. You're either for Christ or against Him. You either have it right or you have it wrong. There is no middle ground between the truth and error. There is no middle ground between sound doctrine and heresy. There isn't anything in the middle, OK? It's either true or it's not. That is lost to our world today. It's even lost to the evangelical world today. It's lost among evangelical theologians today. There's some kind of new gray area where something is neither right or wrong. It's just there. There is no middle ground. There is either the worship of God through the acknowledgment of the truth, or is the blasphemy of God through the failure to acknowledge the truth. Something is either right or wrong, true...truth or error, sound doctrine or heresy, there is no middle ground. There's nothing in the middle.

People say, "Well, you know, you're so doctrinal, you're..." This is the reason why. You're either for Him or against Him and there isn't anything in the middle. Jesus said this, as I noted for you, in a number of different places in a number of different ways. Look at verse 23 of the 11th chapter of Luke. "He who is not with Me is against Me. He who does not gather with Me scatters." There's no middle ground. And if you're not in the truth, you're out of it. And if your gospel isn't right, it's wrong and there isn't any middle ground. This truth needs to be affirmed, needs to be affirmed.

So listen, while we are affirming, listen, while we are affirming diversity, we are also affirming that the only people that we embrace in that diversity of ministry are those who are faithful to be for Christ, right? We can't just embrace everybody in the diversity because they claim Christ. They have to be for Christ, with Christ, gathering together with Christ or they are against Christ, they are scattering abroad. There is no middle ground. And when people are faithful to Christ, praise God that they are. He always has His faithful people in every generation. We want to love them, we want to embrace them, we want to wrap our arms around them for he who is not against us, Jesus said, is for us. And even though we might not agree with methods, we might not agree with style, if they're for Christ, we're for them, but with the proviso that they're really for Christ because they're committed to the truth.

Pride is a terrible thing. It is so pervasive in our world and so pervasive in our fallen hearts that we need these lessons repeatedly taught. And may God help us by the grace of the Holy Spirit operating in our lives in understanding of these truths to pursue humility to His glory and honor.

Father, thank You for the Word this morning. And somewhat frustrated we are because there are so many other ways in which we can enrich this but we trust for another time and another text to come back again. We have to admit that this lesson is going to be taught several more times in the life of the apostles and we'll cycle back again to hear it because we need it as well. Thank You for Your grace to us. Thank You for humbling us in our justification. Now humble us in our sanctification, we ask, in order that we might receive the fullness of the grace you give the humble and be useful to You. For Your glory we pray. Amen.

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