

Humility in Christ.
Mark 9:30

Matthew 25:31-46

Galatians 5:13-26

Responsive Reading Matthew 7:15-20

This morning we are going to be looking at the last half here of Mark chapter 9. The last section of this chapter taking place during Jesus and the disciples journey on to Jerusalem is a series of quick seemingly disconnected teaching moments. As Mark often does, he only gives the important information, quickly summarizing and going through the events that had happened and here we find the end of chapter 9 to be no different. It seems to be almost a whirlwind of different moments throughout their journeyed through Galilee on to Capernaum. But each of these teaching moments that Mark records here with these disciples journey with Christ has a connected and over arching theme. As we read this passage this morning see if you can figure out what it is. (Mark 9:30-41)

Did you catch it? The theme that runs throughout this passage is Jesus teaching his disciples about humility and servitude. This even ties in to last week somewhat with Jesus rebuke of the disciples who were trying to cast an evil spirit out of a boy but were unable. As I had said last week it would seem that the disciples at this point were starting to think rather highly of themselves, it is apparent in our passage this morning where they were debating who of them would be the greatest. All of this taken together seems to suggest that the Disciples were getting a little cocky, self assured, and prideful. After having a ministry of witness, and healing, and casting out demons I am sure that the disciples were feeling rather confident in themselves and their abilities. Then this father arrives with his son, teaching the disciples a very important lesson on humility, and reliance upon God.

Later they ask Jesus why they could not cast out this evil spirit and he tells them that this kind only comes out by prayer and fasting. Pointing not to their own abilities, but to God who had given them the ministry of preaching and casting out demons, and healing the sick. All of this ties together bring in a laser focus of the way that those who follow Christ should conduct themselves, being constantly reminded that it is not about us, but it is about God. It is pretty easy to fall into a trap of pride and arrogance when we start to think ourselves special or better than others. I had a friend once who was a good example of when talking about his own salvation. He would say, "Thank God I was smart enough to understand the gospel and be saved." Instead of thanking God for giving him the understanding, or granting him faith and repentance, it was an arrogant prideful response about his own ability and intelligence. And he took this idea into his witness, having salvation hinged on the intelligence of the ones he talked to those who rejected or argued against him were apparently just not smart enough to understand.

But what does the bible say? 1 Corinthians 1:17 "For Christ not to baptize but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words lest the cross of Christ be made of no effect." It is not our convincing arguments that bring people to Christ, it is not our charisma, our wise words, our knowledge or abilities, it is the cross that brings salvation. This is all related in Christ's teaching of humility and servitude of those who follow Christ. Continuing on, here verse 18. "For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness, but unto us who are saved it is the power of God." The gospel is foolishness, it is not accepted because some people are smarter than others able to understand it. It is foolishness, it sounds ridiculous to the wisdom and intelligence of the world.

"For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring the nothing the understanding

of the prudent. Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this world? Has not God made foolishness the wisdom of this world? For since in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom did not know God.”

Did you catch it? God designed it this way, it was God's purpose and design that he could not be found by the wisdom of this world, in fact it would seem that those who are wise in this world their wisdom, brings with it pride and arrogance making them unable to see and understand the gospel because to them it is nothing more then superstitious foolishness. “But it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness. But unto them who are the called, who have been given ears to hear, who have the gift of faith and understanding granted to them by God alone, both male and female, slave and free, rich and poor, Jew and Gentile Christ is the power of God, and wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser then men and the weakness of God is stronger then men.”

For you see your calling brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of this world to confound the wise and God has chosen the weak things of this world to confound the things which are mighty. And the base things of this world, and the things that are despised, has God chosen, yes, the things which are not to bring to nothing the things which are. For as he told the Pharisees back in chapter 2 of here in Mark, He had come to heal the sick, for those who are well do not need a physician, he did not come to call those who were righteous but sinners to repentance. And he has done this in his wisdom, so that no flesh should glory in his presence, and of him who are in Christ who God has made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption that according as it is written, He that glories, let him glory in the Lord.

So as we can see it is not about our ability, or us being intelligent, or even our own will and desire that we follow God, it is that we have been enabled to do so. And God in his wisdom has made it this way so that we have nothing in ourselves to boast about, but rather that we would completely rely upon God. This is not something that the disciples have yet grasped, because just like preaching and salvation is foolishness to the wise, so to is humility in ministry, and in our knowledge and strength in Christ. Our natural minds want to categorize things as those who have, and those who have not, as my friend had done, those who were smart enough to hear God's word and those who are not. But look at these disciples, fishermen, tax collectors, things that are despised of this world. Yet God had chosen them to be mighty witness' of the gospel of Christ, and it would seem that the disciples had forgotten where they came from and were now reveling in their station with Jesus, arguing among themselves who would be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

When Jesus confronts them about this debate born of our their pride and seeking recognition and who would be the greatest out of all of them, they remained silent and did not answer for they knew that this debate was one that they should not have. Their response is much the same as the response of the pharisee's back in chapter 3, which says. “ And he entered the synagogue again, and a man was there who had a withered hand. So they, (they being the pharisee's) watched him closely whether he would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse him. And he said to the man with the withered hand, Step forward, then he said to them Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good, or to do evil, to save life or to kill? But they kept silent.

They kept silent because knowing in answering that question they would incriminate themselves, they were guilty of plotting to kill Jesus as we see in verse 6. “Then the Pharisee's went out

and immediately plotted against him, how they might destroy him.”

Is it lawful to do good, or to do evil, to save a life or kill? Jesus knew their inner thoughts, that they were plotting to eliminate him one way or another because he was a threat to their authority. They were silenced before Jesus because of guilt and shame just like the disciples are here when called out on their debate on who would be the greatest. Both are guilty of hardness of heart, of pride and arrogance. This desire of elevation, of station was an attitude that was intrinsic in the Jewish faith, and society. Rabbinic writings frequently would comment on the seating order in Paradise, they would argue that those who were Just would sit nearer to the throne of God than even the angels. In their own society they had orders of seating at worship and meals, the authority within the community and dealing with those they believed inferior, and superior were all seen as a preparation for the eternal order to come.

They were journeying on their way to Jerusalem and likely believed that Jesus, now understanding and believing him to be the Messiah was on his way to set up his kingdom and to rule there, which is what likely brought on this debate. But they recognized that their ambitions did not line up with Jesus ministry and teaching on being a humble servant. So Jesus knowing his disciples thoughts and desires takes this time to teach them about humility. In verse 35 it says that Jesus sat down and called the 12 disciples to himself. To sit and instruct them, Jesus was taking an authoritative stance as their teacher, and confronts them in their secret debate saying “If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all.” The idea of being a servant to others is central to Jesus teaching on what it is to be a disciple and follower.

Jesus throughout his ministry has taught this, and this idea of those who are the least shall be the greatest stands in a stark contrast to the worlds understanding of greatness. That a servant, or one who is lowly should be elevated above one who is mighty is foolishness to the worlds wisdom. In this statement by Jesus he isn't saying that he despises prominence, and greatness but rather he redefines it. He is telling his disciples what is important is to be great in the things that matter to God, and nothing is greater in God's eyes then humility, humbleness, giving, and love. The concept of being a servant in Jesus teaching grows out of his context of love for ones neighbor and for one another. Laying aside our own desires and privileges in favor of another. Which we see Jesus teach them here in the next few verses. 36, and 37. “Then he took a little child and set him in the midst of them. And when he had taken him in his arms he said to them. Whoever receives one of these little children in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me.”

To understand how profound this action and statement would be to the disciples we need to understand the jewish understanding of children. They did not elevate children to the level that we do here today. Children and woman were largely seen as secondary members of society whos connection to the social mainstream was largely through men, either the fathers or husbands. So a child would stand as a very good example to being the very last in their society. The lesson of humility and service that Jesus teaches here, is not using this child as an example of being humble, but rather it is that he is little, and considered insignificant and Jesus says, whoever receives one who is insignificant as this little child, receives me, and if you receive me, you receive the father. Jesus shows that the disciples are not to be like children, but to be like Jesus who embraces them.

It is Jesus here, not the child who is demonstrating what it means to be a servant to all. In receiving these who are considered insignificant, is the selfless act of love that is expected of Christ's

disciples. Just as we read in Mathew this morning, our response to the hungry, thirst, loely, naked, sick and imprissoned is our response to God, for whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine you did for me.

Greatness in the kingdom of heaven is not about stature, or position, but it is about humble service in love in ministry and witness to God. Those who are great in God's eyes are those who are despised and hated by men because of their faith in God, and ministry of the gospel. whose faith is seen has foolishness, and whose love and kindness toward the insignificant as a waste of resources. Yet this is exactly what Jesus is teaching here, that his disciples are to have compassion on the little children, on the insignificant, for he has chosen the base things of this world to confound the wise, and he has chosen the weak things of this world to bring to nothing to strong.

Yet as we see in the following few verses, the disciples still did not fully grasp this lesson yet as we see in their response to the exorcist, verse 38. "Now John answered him, saying, Teacher we saw someone who does nto follow us casting out demons in your name, and we forbade him because he does not follow us." I find it interesting that this is Johns response to Jesus teaching. He hears what Jesus says about humility and receiving those who are considered small and insignificant in this world and he turns and reports, almost sort of brags about how they rebuked one who was casting out demons in Jesus name, but did not follow them. We need to be weary that we do not have such a small view of the Kingdom of God. John and the other 11 disciples by this point as we have seen are considering themselves to be quite special, they are the chosen 12 of the Messiah, and it seems that it is going to their heads. This is apparent in the tone of his statement, John says "he is not following us" not, "he is not following you" Which puts the emphasis on themselves and their group rather than on Christ himself.

By this time it is apparent that Jesus ministry has become much farther reaching then it appears the disciples were willing to accept. They were yet unable or unwilling to understand that Jesus must die, and be risen again even though by this point they have been told plainly 3 times. So ti is not out of the question that they would probably have such a small view of the effect and spread of Jesus ministry thus far. Only seeing it through themselves, that is, that Jesus and his 12 were the messengers. Not understanding that those who have come to believe have also been tasked by God to share his word and be a minister of the word as well. The disciples were likely taken back by Jesus response to John's statement, thinking they were reporting something great that they had done but he tells them that they should not stop him, for what is done in his name is empowered by God for no one empowered by God can say that Jesus is cursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the holy spirit given by God.

In other words those who are following God will be known by their fruits as Matthew 7 said we read this morning. It is by their fruits, their actions that they will be known to be disciples of God. And as Jesus says in the following verse, Whoever is not against us, is for us. Jesus is teaching his disciples here about the centrality of the gospel and that it is He who matters, and is He who it is all about. This becomes important when we are engaged with our brothers and sisters in debates, or disagreements over the faith. We must remember that Jesus and his death and resurrection is central to the faith and that many other things and areas of debate are secondary. There is a tendency to be like the disciples here, to circle the wagons sort of speak and insulate oneself from anyone outside of that circle. I think this is an inherently human response to many aspects of life. Our circle of friends are those who are likeminded, have the same interests and who we largely agree with on many things. It is the same in the workforce, Pastor Vic called it the Like me problem. Management usually hire people based on their likeness to themselves.

All of this I don't think is a fully intentional thing, it is just a part of our human nature, to surround ourselves with those who are like ourselves as a way to avoid conflict. But this is something that we need to be very careful to guard ourselves against. We have a perfect example here with Josh and his families ministry in Mexico. Listening to his reports on that ministry it is quite apparent that their bible study gatherings are different then ours, less formal. And even we conduct things different then others which caused some contention with some who have visited with us. But all of these things are insignificant in the face of Christ and his ministry. Those who gather in his name to worship, to praise and glorify God are brothers and sisters. But there is a flip side of his coin as we saw in Matthew 7, it is the warning against false teachers and those claiming God but do so for deception or their own gain.

These are to be known by their fruits, by their actions. And even here in this passage of Mark in verse 41 Jesus points to this fact. "For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink in my name, because you belong to Christ, assuredly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward." There are many false teachers and preachers today, people to peddle the gospel for gain, whether it be personal, or political. These are not those who minister for the sake of the gospel and of Christ, but minister for themselves. I had a good example of this come up this weekend on facebook. Someone I know posted a picture of a Quote of a pastor saying that "No one has shouted the name of Jesus Christ while murdering people." Obviously this has something to do with the Muslims crying praise alah as they kill those who oppose them. But following this quote was pictures of the crusades. Trying to prove atrocities done by Christians and that we really are no different.

But it all comes down to Jesus teaching here, they will be known by their fruits. Just because one claims God, or claims to be a christian does not make them one. Their fruits and their actions prove it. As Paul says in Galatians, the fruit of the holy spirit is love, peace, long suffering, kindness, patience, and against such there is no law. If someone is doing something in God's name that does not line up and match with who God is, and what he demands of his disciples then that person is false. So we must be careful that we walk this tight line between not casting out those who are truly God's people who may be just different from us, but also not be accepting of those who are false. It can be difficult at times, and ultimately it is God who judges such things but we are to be smart about it, guarding ourselves so that we are not deceived, led astray, yet we must be humble and hospitable, not being like John was here, not being high minded thinking that we have everything right and everyone who disagrees with us is wrong. But always remembering that it is Christ who is central, and we should be like him who in humility lays down our lives for one another, who acts in compassion and love. Having compassion to those who are the little children, the ones seen as being insignificant and unimportant.

Next week we will continue starting in verse 42, which says, BUT, whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to stumble, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea. We have touched on it a little already today talking about the false teachers, but next week we will dig a bit deeper as we look at the other side of this coin. This balance between accepting those brothers and sisters to differ from us, and calling out those who are false and seek to deceive.

