

## **“Humility: Part 3”**

**Mark 10:32-45**

~ Delivered at Central Baptist Church on September 3, 2017 by Pastor Barton Priebe

### **INTRODUCTION**

- **(SHOW SLIDE 1)** This morning we are concluding our three part series on humility. Last week we talked about humility before God. Today we are going to look at humility with others.
  - We need to hear this because it is our pride that is always ruining our relationships with others. This makes me think of the Peanuts cartoon strip. **(SHOW SLIDE 2)** There is one where Linus is sitting with Lucy and he says, *“Why are you always so anxious to criticize me?”* Lucy says, *“I just have a knack for seeing other people’s faults.”* To which Linus says, *“What about your own faults?”* Lucy replies, *“I have a knack for overlooking them.”*
    - Or this one: **(SHOW SLIDE 3)** Linus is curled up in a chair, quietly reading a book. Lucy stands behind him. *“It’s very strange,”* Lucy tells him. *“It happens just by looking at you.”* The innocent Linus looks up from his book and asks, *“What happens?”* Lucy answers, *“I can feel a criticism coming on.”*
- It is pride that ruins all our relationships. If you look over all your strained or broken relationships you will find pride – your own pride or the pride of others. Pride refuses to admit wrongdoing. Pride refuses to say, “I’m sorry.” Pride always finds a way to justify anger and bitterness. Pride is what causes us to think more highly of ourselves and look down on others.
  - We need to hear this message. We need to grow in humility. In Titus 3:2 Paul reminds us to *“Show humility to all men.”* Ephesians 4:2 says, *“be completely humble.”* Colossians 3:12 says, *“therefore as God’s chosen people clothe yourselves with humility.”*
    - How do we do that? In our text today Jesus does two things. First, he shows us what humility looks like. Second, he shows us how to grow in humility.
- In many ways today is a very simple message. Some messages inspire us or fill us with joy. This one is just a plain and simple message. It calls us to roll up our sleeves and get to work. It’s a stop-talking-and-gets-our-hands-dirty type message. There is nothing difficult to understand and yet how desperately we need this story to work itself into our lives.

### **THE PRIDE OF THE DISCIPLES**

- First then, **(SHOW SLIDE 4)** Jesus shows us what humility looks like (and does not look like). The story is told of a court painter who was doing a portrait of Oliver Cromwell. Cromwell was afflicted with warts on his face. Thinking to please him, the painter omitted the warts in the painting. When Cromwell saw it he said, *“Take it away! And paint me warts and all.”*
  - One thing I love about the Bible (and that points to its truthfulness) is how its heroes are always portrayed with warts and all. In this passage we see the disciples filled with pride as they each seek their own personal greatness. We are meant to see ourselves in them and we are meant to listen as Jesus redefines greatness.
- Before we see it here, turn back to chapter 9 and look at verse 33-34. **READ 33** - *And they came to Capernaum. And when he was in the house he asked them, “What were you discussing on the way?” But they kept silent, for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest.*
  - Isn’t this amazing, these men had followed Jesus over three years, watching his example of humility and servanthood and yet here we find them in an argument over who is greater than the other.
    - Jesus sits them down and in verse 35 redefines greatness. **READ 35** - *And he sat down and called the twelve. And he said to them, “If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.”* Clearly, Jesus’ teaching did not make it the 12 inches from their brains to their hearts. No, like us they were filled with pride. <sup>[1]</sup><sub>SEP</sub>
- Verse 32 tells us they were on their way up to Jerusalem. The disciples believed that Jesus was now going to establish his political kingdom by military force. The time had come to kick out the Romans

and Jesus was about to reign. Anticipating this, James and John see an opportunity for personal advancement and decide to strike while the iron is hot.

- **READ 35** - *And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came up to him and said to him, “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.”* Essentially they are asking Jesus for a blank cheque before getting even stating what they want.
  - But Jesus refuses to commit himself and asks them to be specific. **READ 36-37** - *And he said to them, “What do you want me to do for you?”*<sup>37</sup> *And they said to him, “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.”*<sup>[SEP]</sup> In ancient times, the right seat was for the second in command and the left was for the third in command.

## WHAT THEY GOT RIGHT

- Now before we show what they got wrong (and they did get a lot wrong), let’s be sure to point out what they got right. Notice that they know Jesus is destined for glory as a king. **READ 38** - *Jesus said to them, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?”* They believed that Jesus was the promised Messiah, that he would set up his reign over the earth, kick out his rivals, and sit on his throne to rule.
  - This is foundational and they got this right. They were on the right side, following the right man. There are some of you today who have not even got this far. You still need to bow the knee to Jesus, the Creator, Saviour, and Ruler of the universe. Why not today?
    - But that is all we can say for James and John. Their pride blinded them to everything that Jesus was about. Look at their pride. It is on full display.

## WHAT THEY GOT WRONG

- Notice, they do not ask that those seats be given to Philip or Bartholomew or Matthew or Thomas or Peter or Andrew. They want the recognition. They want to be seen as great and apparently John at least agrees that James is great enough James agrees that John is great enough. *“Just to be clear Jesus, we do not care who is on the right and left, but let’s settle this issue right here and now about who is greatest among your disciples. Appoint us to your right and left.”*
  - To be clear, hope for honour is not an evil thing. We are commanded, for instance, to honour our fathers and mothers. It is wrong to not use your gifts to work hard, to be respected, to aspire to great things, but there is something wrong with pursuing our own glory.
    - This is pride, not godly ambition. James and John are not asking Jesus to enable them to serve him in whatever capacity he deems best. They want recognition. They want position. They want power, respect, and glory. But it’s not just James and John. Look at verse 41. **READ 41** - *And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John.* Apparently they were upset because they did not think to ask for the great positions first. Permeated with pride, the debate over who was the greatest continued.

## WHAT WE GET WRONG

- Can you see yourself in the disciples? We may not outwardly argue about who is the greatest but we sure do it in other ways. We tell stories that subtly tell others how great we are but always in a way that comes across as humble. We drop hints on how much we spent to show off our wealth. We find ourselves befriending those whom others think of as great and generally ignore people whom others would not deem as great. We complain when others get recognized and we get passed over.
  - In our minds we are always thinking how we are greater than others. *“He is such a bad listener but I am good. They are such poor parents but we are great. She just doesn’t get it but I sure do.”*
    - We may not believe we are the greatest but we can certainly find enough people whom we believe are beneath us.

## PRIDE BLINDS US TO REALITY

- But just like the disciples our pride blinds us to the true nature of reality.<sup>[1]</sup> The disciples were so full of pride they totally missed the point of why Jesus said he was going to Jerusalem. In verses 32-34 Jesus says they are going there so that he can suffer, die, and rise again in three days.
  - But notice the first word in verse 35 – **“And.”** Right after being told exactly what was going to happen in Jerusalem, James and John come with their question. Their pride has blinded them.
- And look at Jesus’ response in verse 38. **READ 38-39a** - *Jesus said to them, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?”*<sup>39</sup> *And they said to him, “We are able.”* The cup and baptism are the experience of suffering that Jesus would be immersed in. Jesus says, **“if you want to rule with me in my glorious kingdom then you will have to suffer as I will. The way to such greatness in my kingdom is through suffering.”**
  - Then Jesus prophesies that they will experience suffering like what he will go through. **READ 39b** - *And Jesus said to them, “The cup that I drink you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized.”*
    - James and John will become the first and last apostles to suffer – the bookends of apostolic suffering. We read in Acts 12:2 that James was beheaded by King Agrippa. All the other disciples are also killed and John is last. He is exiled to the Island of Patmos where they were worked to death within a few years.
- Just like the disciples our pride blinds us to what others need, what we need, and what life is all about.
  - We are like the woodpecker in the old fable who was pecking on the trunk of a tree. Suddenly lightening struck the tree and splintered it. The woodpecker flew away unharmed. Looking back to where the tree had stood, he puffed out his chest and said, **“Look what I did.”**

## THE WORLD’S DEFINITION OF GREATNESS

- But look at how Jesus responds to this. Despite the tensions among each other and the pride that is boiling over in each person’s heart, Jesus does not scold them. He does not say, **“For three years I have taught you about my kingdom. How can you be so thick in the head?”** No, the Shepherd of our souls is gentle and merciful in his response to pride filled disciples.
  - In verse 42 we read, **“Jesus called them to him.”** It’s time for a team meeting. It’s time for a family conference. Pride is causing friction in relations and deluding them in their view of greatness.
    - He is going to instruct them, and us, in the true definition of greatness. He begins by setting before them and before us what is a common everyday occurrence that we have all experienced.
- **READ 42** - *And Jesus called them to him and said to them, “You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them.* Everyone in Jesus’ day knew what domineering authority looked like. The Romans ruled the world with a heavy fist and the disciples had grown up under this. Before them Greece had ruled, and before them Persia, and before them Babylon. But notice that Jesus is not correcting secular leadership models. He is simply stating an observable fact that worldly leadership tends towards domination and authoritarianism.
  - It’s a dog eat dog world. It’s a pecking order. Only the strong survive. Step on others to get ahead. Greatness is measured by how many people you control and how many you can impose your will upon.
    - In response to this Jesus says a short, and to-the-point, sentence. **READ 43** - *But it shall not be so among you. Jesus is saying, “This is not how my people are to live. My people do not dominate each other. Greatness is not measured by how many people you boss around. My people do not every lord it over others or dominate them. Not so with you.”*

## JESUS REDEFINES GREATNESS

- And now Jesus radically redefines greatness. **READ 43-44** - *But whoever would be great among you must be your servant,<sup>44</sup> and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all.* One author makes an interesting point here when he writes, “What I find <sup>[L]</sup><sub>[SEP]</sub> fascinating and instructive in His next words is that Jesus does not categorically criticize or forbid the desire and ambition to be great. Instead, He clearly redirects that ambition, redefines it, and purifies it.”<sup>1</sup>
  - Pay very careful attention also to that word “**must**.” This means it is required, demanded, and insisted upon. Jesus is saying, “**Do you want to be great in my kingdom?**” Here is how you must do it. Humble yourself and serve. <sup>[L]</sup><sub>[SEP]</sub>
    - This word ‘serve’ refers to one who waits on other people at tables. A slave is clearly one who is owned by a master. Both words indicate a person who is not at their own disposal but who serve their master’s needs, are at others beck and call. <sup>[L]</sup><sub>[SEP]</sub>
- What is Jesus calling us to? A life of unselfish living. A life that gives itself on behalf of others. A life that is not proud and lives for self but is humble and lives for others who will serve in ways that are irksome, undignified, and that cost us.
  - This kind of life does not hide behind gifts theology. I am not gifted at nursery duty. Let me ask you, “**who here has the gift of changing diapers?**” I am extremely proficient at it but let me tell you it is not a gift I take delight in. <sup>[L]</sup><sub>[SEP]</sub>
    - This is a total redefinition of greatness. One commentator says that what Jesus is teaching is “**the reversal of all human ideas of greatness and rank.**”<sup>2</sup>
- This reversal must happen in every one of our hearts. The person who is truly great in God’s eyes is the one who chooses an attitude of submission to others and shows it in action.
  - But how can we do this? How can we learn humility toward others and break away from the pride, which so often controls our relationships with others? In the second place Jesus shows us **(SHOW SLIDE 5)** how to grow in humility. As we come to the heart of this passage now we see that we need the example of Jesus and the death of Jesus.

## THE EXAMPLE OF JESUS

- **(SHOW SLIDE 6)** First we need the example of Jesus. In order to flesh out and enforce his point that “*whoever would be great among you must be your servant,<sup>44</sup> and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all,*” Jesus uses himself as the chief example.
- **READ 45** - *For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.* Do not miss that little word, “**for.**” Why should you sacrificially serve everyone around you? For this is the very reason why your Master, Jesus, came to earth.
  - What a statement! Here is Jesus’ definition of why he came to earth. He came for a purpose and with a plan. He came to serve humanity. This is the meaning of Christmas, Good Friday, Easter, and everything in between. He came to serve and to do it sacrificially, when it was hard, and to serve anyone no matter who they were.
- This is why Mark adds the next section on Jesus healing the blind man. Here is an outcast of society but Jesus, the great Rabbi, the coming king, says, “**what do you want me to do for you?**”
  - And remember him at the Lord’s Supper. There was no servant to wash their dusty feet. But did any of the disciples volunteer? No. After waiting some time Jesus gets up and washes their feet. He, the teacher. He, the Lord. This is not how most people think of leadership.
    - But Jesus then says, “**Now that I, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master.**”
- And his chief example of service was in his death, where for undeserving sinners he paid a ransom to God that we might be freed from the slave market of sin. Why should Jesus care for sinners when all

<sup>1</sup> C.J. Mahaney, *Humility: True Greatness*, 43.

<sup>2</sup> William Lane. Cited in Mahaney, 43.

they did was hate him, mock him, and kill him? And yet he goes to his death in order to buy their freedom.

- Do you see it? You are called to be humble towards others. What does this look like? It means serving them sacrificially. It means putting their interests ahead of yours. You are called this because your Master, your Lord, your God humbled himself in this way. You are not above him and are therefore called to follow in his footsteps.

## THE DEATH OF JESUS

- So we need to continually meditate on the example of Christ if we are to make this shift in our own lives. Having said that though we need far more than a redefinition of greatness. We need far more than Jesus' example to follow. In second place, **(SHOW SLIDE 7)** we need the death of Jesus.
  - His service is unique in that he gave his life as a ransom for us. C.J. Mahaney writes, *"He's telling them not only that true greatness is attained by emulating his example, but also that true greatness is not even possible for us apart from the Savior's sacrifice."*<sup>3</sup>
- A ransom was a common term in those days. Donald English reminds us that, *"It was the price paid to liberate a slave, a prisoner of war, or a condemned person."*<sup>4</sup>
  - This is what we need. We are prisoners to pride. We are prisoners to sin. We cannot free ourselves. Our situation is helpless. We need God to rescue us. This is what Christ came to do. To free us from sin and the cost was his own life.
    - It is only because of the death of Christ that true humility before God and others can be worked in us.

## APPLICATIONS

- So how can you put pride to death in your life and cultivate humility? Jesus answer is simple: serve others. You do not gain humility just by sitting around and waiting for it to fall on you. You don't grow in humility just by praying for it. You gain humility by practicing humility. You practice humility by serving others. In service for others we learn humility.
  - William Law in his book *"A serious call to a Devout and Holy Life"* says that if we want humility we should, **(SHOW SLIDE 8)** *"condescend to all the weaknesses and infirmities of your fellow-creatures, cover their frailties, love their excellencies, encourage their virtues, relieve their wants, rejoice in their prosperities, compassionate their distress, receive their friendship, overlook their unkindness, forgive their malice, be a servant of servants, and condescended to do the lowest offices to the lowest of mankind."*<sup>5</sup>
- The great thing about this is that you do not have to be smart or gifted to serve. Greatness in Jesus' kingdom is not given to the most competent. It is given to those who use the competencies God has given them to pour themselves out for others.
  - But do not let this message remain in the abstract. We grow in humility by serving. So let's roll up our sleeves. Let's get our hands dirty. Let me ask you, **(SHOW SLIDE 9)** *"what are two ways you can humble yourself and serve others? How can you do it here at the church? How can you do it at home? How can you do it at school or at work?"*
    - There are many opportunities to serve at Central this fall. We always need people to serve in children's ministry. Will you consider doing this?
    - What about working with Josh to serve the youth?
    - As you are approached about serving on committees, consider it.
    - We're looking for 2 people to take on Monday morning Toast Club at George Jay - less than one hour commitment to feed children who aren't getting a breakfast at home.
    - Serve in the parkade, serve with newcomers, serve in Fellowship committee to help with food.
- *"The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 47-48.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>5</sup> William Law, *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*, 26.