

Sermon Outlines
The Way Up With God is Down

Reading:

Mark 9:30-37

I like to follow the trail on which the Lord took His disciples. From Galilee, they went 25 miles north to Caesarea Philippi with its several villages. Remember its historic significance with the fountain of flowing water that was taken by many emperors and religionists as the world's source of life. It became a religious centre for cults and pagan religions.

Then the Lord led Peter, James and John into the Mount of Transfiguration, most likely Mount Hermon (v.2). It was at the bottom of the mount that they faced the need to expel the demon out of the boy (v.14). Then it was time to return to home-base in Capernaum on the edge of the lake of Galilee (v.33). That required they walk through Galilee (v.30). It was to be a private journey with only the disciples (v.30b). The topic of conversation on-route was the Lord's death and resurrection (v.31). This was a further emphasis on the real purpose of His coming into the world. He was to be crucified, offering Himself as a sacrifice for sin. The disciples, however, were clueless as to how this could be, and they were too fearful for some reason to inquire further into that strange matter (v.32).

Having missed the nature of Christ's mission, therefore missing the suffering and humiliation of the Lord in His death, they also missed the primary part of their own calling to be disciples of Christ. On their way back to Capernaum they discussed, "Who would be the greatest" (v.34). They did this "among themselves" so, as they thought, that the Lord would not notice, nor hear. The Lord faced the issue of the disciples' argument and promotion of themselves head-on. He opened up the conversation of their disputing with one another in (v.33b - v. 35). The Lord's counsel about man's pride comes down to us in Mark's gospel record of these things.

The problem of pride lurking in every heart

- ▶ It was a love of promotion. It is a worse problem when it is a demotion. That is like taking a bone from a dog.
- ▶ These disciples were followers of Christ, still they were plagued with pride. So is every Christian and each one must learn to deal with their own pride. See the apostle's teaching in Phil. 2:2-4.

"Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others." (Phil. 2:2-4)

- ▶ Note the context of the Lord's humiliation. He had expounded on His death and resurrection, but the disciples could not grasp it. We learn that until we grasp the message of the cross and the power of the gospel our hearts will rise up in pride. It is through the power of the cross applied to our lives that we can humble ourselves to take the place of a servant.
- ▶ This dispute was a cause of division among God's people. See "disputed" (v.33), and the issue of division in Phil. 2:3. We are commanded to esteem others to be better than ourselves. Are we doing this? Are we applying the cross of Christ to our hearts each day to deal with the plague of pride within?
- ▶ This pride of heart was a cause of distance from the Lord. When He asked of what they talked along the way, they were silent - "They held their peace" (Mark 9:34). We need to learn the solemn reality that if we allow pride to stir up fleshly thoughts and desires we will lose the fellowship of the Lord who delights in the fellowship of those who are lowly. His whole character is to take the lowly position and surrender to the will of God, as opposed to promoting ourselves.

*"Humility will save you from self consciousness. It will take away from the shadow of yourself..."
A.B. Simpson*

To serve is empowering. To offer help and show interest in the burdens of others leads to opportunities for service. The Christian virtue of serving is like the use of a muscle; it grows you. Serving others makes you stand tall among Christians though you may be despised before the world.

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There is a story of turkeys that were lured into a trap by corn. While their heads were down pecking the corn they were free to move, but when the corn was gone and they lifted their heads up they were caught in the net. Lowliness is our best posture in the Christian life. It saves us from temptation and we will find food for our souls.

The passion for service in every true disciple v.35

It's not wrong to be first in Christian service, as long as it is to be a servant to others.

- a) The psalmist wanted to be a doorkeeper in the house of the Lord.
- b) Isaiah said, "Here am I, Lord, send me," (Isa. 6:8)
- c) Saul of Tarsus, while humbled in the presence of the Lord's light and powerful voice to his soul, cried out, "What wilt thou have me to do." (Acts 9:6)

We must be ready to be last. We need to be ready for the lowest task. We need to be ready to obey. To illustrate the need for this sold out attitude in Christian service, the Lord used the living example of a little child - a little bony boy. The Lord brought him into the circle and then lifted him up into his arms - most likely while seated. Then the Lord enlightened all with a very powerful statement:

"Whosoever shall receive one of such children in my name, receiveth me: and whosoever shall receive me, receiveth not me, but him that sent me" (Mark 9:37).

At the heart of this statement based on this live illustration of a boy in arms is the lesson of selfless service:

- a) It is selfless because the child is helpless. This is a one-sided gain. We are not to expect gain.
- b) It is selfless because a child is guileless. There is no question as to motive.
- c) It is selfless because a child is payless. There are no instant rewards.
- d) It is selfless because to help a child is Christ-like. It is to be done in the Lord's name (v.37). It is something that the Lord Himself did and wants us to do in His name.
- e) It is selfless because it is well-pleasing to our Heavenly Father (v.37) "him that sent me."

Every Christian needs to pray for a surrendered life to God, to have a life of service.

- a) Stop being self-seeking. Stop waiting for others to serve you and commend you.
- b) Stop expecting God to bless your laziness.
- c) Stop the spirit of entitlement. We are nothing. No one owes us. Not even God, nor the Son nor the Holy Spirit.

The Christian's only lifeline is grace - spiritual strength to serve. Grace is not given for our personal pet agendas, but to empower us to do God's will in our lives. The disciples were to be known by their love for one another. They would be known for promoting one-another. They were to die to self.

What is the good Samaritan's name? He did not give it. It was not promotion he sought but opportunity to serve. Many years ago, Oberlin, the German philanthropist, was journeying through a snowstorm, near Strasbourg, and lost his way. He was rescued from death by a wagoner who came by after he had sunk in the drifts. The man refused any reward. "Tell me your name, at least," said Oberlin. Tell me," was the reply, "The name of the Good Samaritan." "His name is not recorded," said Oberlin wondering. "Then let me withhold mine," said the wagoner. The lesson is: Good Samaritans don't worry about their own name.

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