

Text: Luke 9:46-56

Title: Love and Humility

Truth: Jesus wants us to exhibit loving humility instead of harsh zeal.

Date/Location: Sunday May 5, 2024 at FBC

Introduction

We have been reading a lot of the Lord's miraculous works. Let us review why He did such things as healing the sick, walking on water, and casting out demons:

1. To point people to the majesty of God (9:43).
2. To show that Jesus has power to forgive sins (5:24).
3. To show His divine power over nature and thus identify Him (8:25).
4. To demonstrate His divine power over demons and thus identify Him (4:34-35).
5. To glorify God and show His power over death (7:16).
6. To authenticate Jesus as the Son of God and Messiah (Acts 2:22).
7. To confirm the message of salvation (Heb. 2:3-4).

These all serve as checkpoints for faith in Him. Are we of little faith, or do we genuinely believe in Him who died and rose again?

We move on now to three additional episodes. I do not perceive that these segments of Luke's gospel are primarily about children, or a lone-ranger exorcist, or the Samaritans rejecting Christ. It is about the disciples of Jesus needing a serious upgrade in their humility.

I. True Greatness: Who is Truly a Great Person? v. 46-48

A. Disciples dispute. A dispute is sometimes necessary, but *never* about who is the greatest. In doing this, the disciples gave evidence of how unlike Jesus they still were. They should have immediately shut down the conversation and gone about doing something productive to serve the Lord! This event also shows how much they did not understand (9:45) about the Lord's upcoming selfless sacrifice. Had they understood it, they would not have been talking about who will be greatest.

B. Example of a child. What is the example? The Lord wants the disciples to receive a child in the name of the Lord. It takes a person who is not self-centered to do this, a person who cares more about others than about herself or himself. Loving insignificant people is an important character trait that demonstrates a person is overcoming the inherent sinful tendency toward self-centeredness.

Another time the Lord speaks about humbling oneself as a little child and having child-like faith (Matt. 18:1-5) alongside receiving children in His name. Both are characteristics of a truly humble person. Note that this includes being “converted” to be followers of the Lord. You can try to be as humble as possible apart from Jesus, but without Him working in you, yours will be a selfish kind of humility.

C. What does it mean to receive a child and thus receive Christ and God the Father? First, we must understand what the little child represents. The Lord’s illustration helps us to understand that it is a young person, a small young person, an insignificant, un-great person.

The appropriate action is to receive a child “in My name.” It is to extend all the kindness, help, care, and provision that a situation may demand, and do so to honor Christ and see Him honored. Helping a young one who is lost physically or spiritually, bringing a foster or adopted young person into your home, bringing them to church, providing food and education of all sorts, especially spiritual education, etc. This is one of your individual ministries as a good Christian citizen. It *may* be at times a special ministry for the wider church if several people want to combine efforts.

(Benevolent activity is *not* the primary mission of the church as an institution; but teaching the gospel and seeing young people grow in the faith *is* core to the ministry of each local church.)

Giving this support to a lowly person *in the name of Jesus* rather than seeking greatness is, in effect, receiving Christ. Jesus considers Himself in a kind of solidarity with the lowly because He is meek too. And in turn, receiving Jesus means you receiving God the Father.

- D. Notice also the explanation in v. 48 “For he who is least among you will be great.” The explanation Jesus gives is that the humble, lowly person—the person with a low opinion of himself, the one who would receive a little child and bless him in the name of Jesus Christ—this person will be great in the future kingdom. The thing that greatness-minded people think lowest of is actually the thing that is most rewarded by God. Greatness does not come from seeking greatness for yourself, but rather seeking what is better for others.
- E. This echoes Jesus’s teaching in 9:23 to deny oneself. This sort of person is one who does not desire to compare himself *to* others but extends himself in sacrifice *for* others.
- F. Comparing to others is unwise (2 Cor. 10:12) and unprofitable, besides being unspiritual and un-Christlike. Such a person is one with a lowly view of himself, not low self-esteem but a realistic view of his importance in the big picture.
- G. Consider carefully that you do not cleverly “humble” yourself in an un-genuine attempt to earn greatness while at the same time seeking your own glory. Jesus deserves glory, not us (Psalm 115:1).

II. Sectarianism: The Error of Wrong Division, v. 49-50

- A. John and the other disciples observed someone casting out demons in the name of Jesus. This is remarkable: the Lord had given other people the faith and power to do this.
- B. But this individual was not among the twelve apostles, nor was he regularly traveling with Jesus in His itinerant ministry. We have no idea who this person was. Because of this, John in his youthful zeal thought it best to “forbid” the man from doing this ministry.
- C. This is an error in several ways.
 - 1. John and the other disciples tried to stop the man from doing good works! We should not be keen to *stop* people from doing good! Instead, we should encourage them to continue doing good.
 - 2. The disciples should have been *happy* that someone believed like them, was helping others, and was (almost certainly)

promoting their same message of repentance toward God and faith toward the Messiah. Like Paul in Phil. 1:18, Jesus's disciples should have rejoiced.

3. The disciples were acting in a sectarian manner. What this means is that they were seeing themselves as the only ones who could do the Lord's work. They were narrow in mind and could even be called bigoted. They were schismatic even though this was at the very beginning of Jesus's mission and there were not very many people from which to separate. They could not see beyond their short visual range or outside of their poor peripheral vision to see others legitimately helping in the cause.

D. Notice that I entitled this section "the error of wrong division." But not all divisions are wrong. There are right divisions—witness 1 Cor. 11:19, Romans 16:17 and 2 Thess. 3:6.

E. If John had been characterized at this time in his life by humility, he would not have rebuked their unnamed remote co-worker.

F. Jesus answered with a proverb, and there are similar proverbs in other passages:

Luke 9:50 "he who is not against us is on our side."

Luke 11:23 "He who is not with Me is against Me."

Matt. 11:30 "he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad."

These phrases are all true. The combination of them ensures that we do not fall into the error: **first, the error of ecumenism** by misusing 9:50. Someone might claim, "I am not against Jesus." But if they preach another gospel or another Jesus, they are against Jesus (11:23). The combination of these truths also protects against a **second error: unnecessary sectarianism**, like what John was doing. Just because the person was not "with" Jesus in terms of being in the same itinerant group does not mean that man is bad. He was not "with" in terms of physical proximity, but he was "with" in terms of doctrine and practice.

G. Another facet of the truth we are pondering is this: there is no fence-sitting. There is "against Jesus" and "on Jesus's side." There is "with me" and "against Me." There is "gathering" on the one hand, and "scattering" on the other. You are either with the Lord

or against Him. There is no middle ground. You may like in your mind to carve out a niche of neutral territory, but the reality is that it is a no-man's land that is impossible to inhabit. You are either saved or not; for Christ or against; receive Him or deny Him; acknowledge Him as Lord or acknowledge yourself as Lord; admit you are a sinner and need Jesus, or think you are a fairly good person on your own.

I hope this will help you to see where you are and humbly accept the truth, and if you are on the wrong side of the fence, to trust in Christ.

III. Love: How to Treat Those Who Reject Jesus, 51-56

Might you be like John in his youthful but misplaced zeal? Do you want to zap those who are sinners and see them gone—because that would make your life easier? But do you really wish on them an immediate departure to Hades with all its torment and woe?

- A. Luke notes that Jesus now became focused on going to Jerusalem. This is something of a literary hinge point in the gospel of Luke, mainly because it was an actual transition in the ministry of Jesus. The time was becoming full, the hour was drawing near, when he must accomplish His decease at Jerusalem (Luke 9:31). Because of this single-minded focus and devotion to His assigned mission, He sent disciples ahead of him to prepare the way as He went.
- B. The Samaritans were not keen on Jesus because they knew He was heading to Jerusalem, a place of competing worship to their syncretistic version of Judaism that centered on Mt. Gerizim and their modified Samaritan Pentateuch (to the exclusion of the remainder of the Hebrew Bible = Old Testament).

How does this fit with John 4 with the apparent kindly reception of Jesus by some Samaritans? We are reading in Luke about “a” village of the Samaritans, probably not the same village (Sychar) of the woman at the well.

The Samaritans were the descendants of Jews who intermarried with foreigners imported by the Assyrian empire after 722 B.C. Jewish people despised them—wrongly so.

C. It should not have come as a surprise to the disciples that people reject Jesus. They had experienced it before and would do so again. The penalty for such rejection is not immediate death. God is much more gracious and longsuffering than the disciples. The power of the sword *cannot* under any circumstances be used to redress religious grievances. God allows people to believe what they want to believe for a time.

The power of the sword rests with the civil authority, not with the church. Note that I did not say the power of the sword can never be used against people who are religious. If they have committed a crime such as murder, the sword is legitimately their destiny. God does not permit “belief” that produces criminal behavior—He requires civil government to restrain such behavior.

D. James and John wanted to rain the wrath of their thunder (Mark 3:17) down on the village, as Elijah did. His fire did not consume the people on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18:38-40), but fire did come down and destroy military messengers in 2 Kings 1:10-12. It is safe to assume that James and John at this time did not believe in “second chances.”

E. John is on a roll, along with his brother. Over-zealousness struck again. Humility would have come to his rescue and he would have recognized that the destructive spirit he exhibited was not right. It was not his business to punish. God would take care of the Samaritan village in due time (see Song of Moses, Deut. 32:35, and 2 Peter 3:9). Perhaps He would even save some of them in the upcoming months and years!

F. The Lord rebukes James and John. He tells them that they were ignorant about what their spirit was like. They did not know how bad their own depravity was. They were self-deceived. That is a humbling statement. But they also did not know the Lord as well as they should. He did not come to destroy, but to save. He came to heal (Luke 5:31) and help and save (Luke 6:9). He did not come to condemn (John 3:17).

The combination of these two things—not knowing how bad they themselves are, and not knowing the Lord’s purposes—was embarrassing and should drive them to their knees in confession

and humility. It should do the same for us. Do we know the Lord as well as we should? Do we know ourselves as well as we should? I suspect not...and if we did, we would be very meek!

Conclusion

John and the others learned here from the Lord the character traits of sacrifice, love, gentleness, and meekness. Jesus dealt with their hubris and put it into its place three times.

Humility yields a true kind of tolerance—a compassionate love for those who are victims of sin and slaves of darkness. Godly meekness ignores slights, leaves vengeance to the Lord, uses power and strength to serve others instead of destroy them.

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