

JESUS, HIS DISCIPLES ... AND HUMILITY (Mk. 9:30-41)

Jesus is approaching the conclusion of His ministry in Galilee. His ministry has recently been changing more to concentrate on teaching His disciples for in a matter of months He will be **Mk. 9:31** delivered into the hands of men, and they shall kill him; and after that he is killed, he shall rise the third day. This news will be repeated to them often because it was not easy for them to understand since it did not fit in with their understanding of the Messiah. Along with this, there are other lessons they also needed to learn ... and one of them was *humility*. Let's read ... **Mk. 9:30** And they departed thence, and passed through Galilee; and he would not that any man should know it. **31** For he taught his disciples, and said unto them, The Son of man is delivered into the hands of men, and they shall kill him; and after that he is killed, he shall rise the third day. **32** But they understood not that saying, and were afraid to ask him. **33** And he came to Capernaum: and being in the house he asked them, What was it that ye disputed among yourselves by the way? **34** But they held their peace: for by the way they had disputed among themselves, who should be the greatest. **35** And he sat down, and called the twelve, and saith unto them, If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all. **36** And he took a child, and set him in the midst of them: and when he had taken him in his arms, he said unto them, **37** 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. **38** And John answered him, saying, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name, and he followeth not us: and we forbad him, because he followeth not us. **39** But Jesus said, Forbid him not: for there is no man which shall do a miracle in my name, that can lightly speak evil of me. **40** For he that is not against us is on our part. **41** For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward.

Humility is not a priority in the 21st century. It is not how you advance for you have to push yourself forward and show you are better than the next person, otherwise you won't get on.

That is also how it was in Jesus' day, *even* in the religious arena because the Pharisees and the Scribes and the Sadducees and all the various religious groups were vying for top position and humility was definitely not on their agenda. ... Humility was 'a dead end street' that would get you nowhere! ... And that is how people, including the disciples, were accustomed to believe. So, it was time for Jesus to teach them, **35** And he sat down, and called the twelve ... this was how the rabbis gave instruction to their followers ... and saith unto them, If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all. ... That was the theme ... That was the subject of the lesson He was about to teach them.

Before we proceed any further though ... this is *Jesus* ... the same Jesus Who was and is the Second Person of the Trinity, Who for the years He was on earth, laid aside His Heavenly glory ... He was and is in every form equal with God for He is God, and yet, - for the purposes of doing His Father's will concerning our salvation, - He **Phil. 2:7** made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: **8** And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself ... No one forced Him do it ... He voluntarily made Himself of no reputation ... and if ever anyone had the authority to speak on humbling yourself and humility ... *This* was the same *Jesus* Who instructed these twelve disciples to sit down in front of Him in order to learn about humility. ... This is the Jesus Who was born in a manger, - the trough from which the animals fed, - to a young mother and a young father who was a carpenter ... This is the Jesus Who was brought up in a town in the back-hills of Galilee ... Who owned no home, and had no bank account ... there were nights He didn't even have anywhere to rest His head ... so there is no greater authority to speak on humility as Jesus.

Now, if we are to imitate Him, - if we are to be like Him, - humility is an essential attribute in what the Bible refers to as our sanctification. Sanctification is the spiritual process that begins when you become a Christian whereby the Holy Spirit is working within you so that you become more like Jesus. And when you become a Christian, your emphasis changes to become all about giving God glory in your life ... Isaiah explains, **Is. 66:1** Thus saith the LORD, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool ... **2** ... but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite [*humble*] spirit ...

... The proud person gets nowhere with God. As far as God is concerned, a proud Christian is an 'oxymoron', i.e. a contradiction in terms. ... He will not entertain it! The only type of person He has any time will receive is the person who comes to Him as a child to a father, as a servant to a Master. The Psalmist declared, **Ps. 10:17** LORD, thou hast heard the desire of the humble: thou wilt prepare their heart, thou wilt cause thine ear to hear. Solomon wrote, **Prov. 22:4** By humility and the fear of the LORD are riches, and honour, and life. Peter wrote, **I Peter 5:5** ... be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.

... I find this subject of humility one of the hardest subjects to speak upon because it is not natural to be humble ... No matter what anyone says, if someone comes along and belittles you, you don't be pleased! ... And that is natural, but it is not natural being humble! ... Am I right? Or, do you find it

easy to be humble? ... Are you humble? ... Be careful how you answer ... for I don't think it is a question we can answer for ourselves ... I think it is a question which requires others to give the answer. ... Humility, - God's kind of humility, - gets trampled over and mocked. Nevertheless, God requires His people to be a humble people, **Micah 6:8** ... to walk humbly with thy God ... Jesus said, **Lk 14:11** whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

So this was a big subject and extremely relevant for these servants of the Lord Jesus ... and Jesus began by referring to His impending sufferings and death and by explaining the purpose of His coming couched in suffering and pain ... humbled for a season. ... And their view concerning the Messiah precipitated the argument amongst themselves as to who would be the greatest in the Messianic Kingdom, and who would sit where ... They were vying for position! ... And every time Jesus broached the subject of suffering and death, they turned the conversation around to themselves and pushed His words away. It was like they did not want to hear! ... They wanted to advance themselves and be *exalted* ... while He was teaching them about humility.

So His disciples, - not the crowds, - needed to be taught ... and Jesus begins with the cross (v.31) ... and He referred to Himself as the *Son of Man*, which they would have recognised as the great Messianic title used in Dan. 7:13, **I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. 14 And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.** Jesus, therefore, identified Himself with God, and He told His disciples He had to die. But they could not understand what He was saying because how is it possible for God to die? Why would the Messiah for whom they had been waiting for centuries ... *why would He come to this earth to die!*

It was a real 'stumbling-block' to them, - it wasn't the way they had been brought up to believe. They know He is the Messiah but they cannot understand how He must suffer. What purpose would it serve?! ... It was totally incomprehensible to them!

However, the truth is the truth and it cannot be changed. Jesus persisted in telling them He would be *delivered* (v.31) ... and Mark uses a legal word (παράδίδωμι) which refers to the criminal being handed over to the authorities

for judgment and condemnation, - that is what Jesus said was going to happen to Him! ... He would be *delivered up* by the treachery of Judas Iscariot (Mt. 26:24) into the hands of the elders, chief priests, and the scribes. He would then be *delivered up* by the same elders, chief priests, and the scribes, - as He had earlier foretold (Mk. 8:31), - into the hands of the Roman authorities, to Pontius Pilate ... Judas delivered Him up to the Jewish leaders, and the Jewish leaders delivered Him up to Pontius Pilate, and Pontius Pilate delivered Him up to the executioners. ... They all 'had a hand' in it! ... And each of these stages would be gradually further introduced and confirmed in the times of teaching Jesus would have with His disciples.

But seven hundred years earlier the prophet Isaiah had already prophesied, **Is. 53:10** Yet it pleased *the LORD* to bruise him; *he* hath put him to grief ... and that is the message Peter would preach on the Day of Pentecost, **Acts 2:23** Him, *being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain*. In fact, the road Jesus took to the cross began with God delivering up His only-begotten Son to Judas, and Judas delivering Him up to the Jewish leaders, and the Jewish leaders delivering Him up to Pontius Pilate, and Pontius Pilate delivering Him up to the soldiers who crucified Him. ... But after His death, Jesus promised He would rise again, - ... and *that* was what the disciples struggled with ... How will You be able to do anything if You are dead?! If You are dead, You are dead ... and who is going to raise You from the dead?

It was a real hopeless and confusing situation for them, and they were overcome by their fear of the unknown, **32** *But they understood not that saying, and were afraid to ask him*. ... We genuinely cannot understand it! We cannot find a way of believing it! We want to, but we cannot accept what You are saying. ... God would be punished, - on the cross, - by God?! How could such a terrible and abhorrent thing happen?!

Luke adds a little more insight, **Lk. 9:44** Let these sayings sink down into your ears: for the Son of man shall be delivered into the hands of men. **45** *But they understood not this saying, and it was hid from them, that they perceived it not: and they feared to ask him of that saying*. ... That is why they could not understand, because it was *hid from them* ... Who hid what from them? God hid the understanding of Jesus having to go to the cross from them because, - at that time, - it was too much for them. They would realise it one day, - ... not too far into the future ... but not just yet. ... Is that not God's grace? He only gives us what we can cope

with ... and He gradually brings us along ... bit by bit, piece by piece until eventually we understand what He is telling us. This gentle approach of the Saviour illustrates how much He cared for His disciples, and how much He took their limited ability to understand into consideration. ... He did not burden them with a load of information they could not handle ... and would confuse them even more. Instead, He taught them gradually.

When they arrived back in Capernaum (v.33), - the centre of Christ's Galilean ministry, - they went into a particular home, and the discussion reconvened with Jesus asking His disciples, ³³ *What was it that ye disputed among yourselves by the way?* ... Nobody uttered a word ... silence ... even Peter! They had been having a lively conversation, but nobody wanted to say what it was about. They instinctively knew Jesus would not have approved of what they were discussing ... In fact, it wasn't a discussion ... it was an argument! ... In fact, it was more than an argument for it was actually a 'dispute' (διαλογίζομαι) ... They were disputing with each other as they made their way down from Caesarea Philippi to Capernaum. I suppose they thought Jesus had not heard them ... but Jesus let them know He *did!*

He had been speaking about how He would be humiliated (v.31) ... but there they were, talking about which one of them was going to be elevated to the greatest! ... It is as if they had not been listening. You are arguing against each other. You are all chasing your own ambitions ... but, said Jesus, as My disciples you are here to serve Me! ... That practical notion had escaped them though! ... They would have been better trying to understand together what the Saviour had recently been saying instead of using their own ideas to make up what they wanted to believe ... and which had become an obstruction to their faith. But what they wanted to believe was because of their pride, - the opposite of humility, - ... and pride causes division, and it is also affects our testimony and witness. ...

These weren't children ... these were *grown men!* They were ready to 'tramp over' each other to get to the top ... or at least, what they considered to be the top. ... And they had been walking behind Jesus arguing about all this ... not realising Jesus knew what was going on ... He asked them a question, nobody answered so He dealt with it ... and He sat down. He called them ... usually the word is *καλεω*, but on this occasion it was rather a more peculiar word, in the circumstances. It was the word *φωναω*, which means to make a sound, - He summoned them to come and listen to what He had to say ... as the rabbi

would summon his disciples. ... And He ‘pulled no punches’ with His opening statement, **35** *And he sat down, and called the twelve, and saith unto them, If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all.* ... He got right to the heart of the matter!

He told them, I know what you are at ... you’re trying to be one better than your brother-disciple. But, if you manage somehow to get it, you will be put ‘at the back of the queue’ as far as I’m concerned. ... That is not the way you succeed in the Lord’s work, for if you desire to be first, you will end up being last and serving everyone else. ... Being a Christian is about serving Christ ... and serving *Christ*, - the ‘clue is in the word’, - *servicing* Christ is not about how we lift up ourselves, it is about how we lift up Him ... as John said, **Jn. 3:30** *He must increase, but I must decrease.* ... He is the Master, and I’m the servant. ... He is to have the glory, mine comes later if I don’t take the glory from Him.

And something was happening as they argued ... they were setting to the one side what Jesus had said about His suffering and death. They would not have intended to ... but they were ‘making light’ of His Word by trying to advance their own position, and by doing so they were endangering their unity in the Lord. The Lord had called each of them to the same service, and yet they were undermining each other with their dissension.

At this point Jesus introduced a *young* child (παιδίον) whom He set in the midst of the twelve disciples. ... A young child ... what has a child to teach *us*? ... We are ‘men of the world’, men who have experience ... But a child ... a child has no power, no influence ... it’s only a child ... A child has nothing of any significance, no achievement yet, no greatness, ... and yet, through the child, the Lord Jesus illustrated humility. The child is weak, dependent upon others, he is ignored, he is vulnerable, and he is not recognised as having anything substantial to offer ... and yet Jesus said, **37** *Whosoever shall receive one of such children in my name, receiveth me.*

What He meant was ... Little children don’t look for differences ... they simply want to play together. Life is uncomplicated, simply believe ... Spiritually, Jesus was teaching His disciples ... don’t look for differences where there aren’t any because in Me you are all one and the same. As children, you serve Me ... and it doesn’t matter where you have come from, how much you have, or anything else for in the Lord’s service you are My children. ... He was telling them He is the first and He is the priority in their

life. He is why we are serving God, therefore, everything else has to ‘slide’ into the background. ... As disciples, get on together in the service of the Master, and believe.

And then John spoke up, **38** Master, we [*i.e. something they did agree upon*] saw one casting out devils in thy name, and he followeth not us: and we forbad him, because he followeth not us. ... He wasn’t one of us so ‘we told him off!’ ... Now, of course there were pretenders, for example, we read about the sons of Sceva in Acts 19:13-16 and Jesus also had referred earlier to the **Mt. 7:22** Many [*who*] will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? **23** And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me.

But John was referring to someone who was a true follower and a true believer, ... and there *were* many other truly faithful followers of Christ besides the Twelve ... For example, on one occasion Jesus sent out *the seventy* (Lk. 10), and some of those *seventy* came back and reported, **Lk. 10:17** Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name. So many of those seventy would have continued in the work ... and it would have been one of them John was referring to. Jesus would not have verified the ministry of anyone unless they were preaching and teaching what He was preaching and teaching.

And Jesus said, don’t become exclusive in your wee club, **Mk. 9:39** Forbid him not: for there is no man which shall do a miracle in my name, that can lightly speak evil of me. **40** For he that is not against us is on our part. ... Sometimes we fall into the trap that unless everyone agrees with us in everything, we won’t fellowship with them. Now, I know we need to be careful but ... a Pentecostal might like his idea of the spiritual gifts, a Presbyterian believes he in baptising children, a Methodist might talk about his doctrine of ‘perfect love’ ... these are issues which we might not see eye-to-eye on in every detail ... but if each of us knows the Lord Jesus Christ as our Saviour, *He* is what fundamentally unites us. We can afford to set our other issues aside in order to accept our oneness in Christ.

Pride does terrible damage and it was threatening to do the devil’s work amongst the disciples of Jesus, - it could have split them! ... We are not all the same ... there is diversity here, but I trust it is a healthy diversity which promotes the cause of Christ amongst us. Twelve different disciples, sometimes with twelve different opinions ... and yet united one in the Lord!

The word ‘disciple’ is spelt with a small ‘i’ ... and when I was printing that one little letter into my computer, it kept automatically making the small ‘i’ into a capital ‘I’ ... It is not just computers which do that for *we* have an awful tendency to do it too! ... And something else ... in ‘disciple’ there are two ‘i’s’ ... and as the disciples of the Lord Jesus our two eyes ought to be fixed on the Master.

We are as God has chosen us. We are not ‘competitors’ in His work, we are companions ... and we are not enemies, we are equals. We are not to set ourselves up against each other, instead we are to hold each other up.

The disciples show us, - to our shame, - that’s not always the way we do it. We ought to, but we don’t. And Jesus gave them yet one more simple illustration, **41** For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward. Nothing complicated, and nothing beyond any of them! It was simple ... You are all trying to ‘get to the top of the pile’ ... No, said Jesus, that’s the wrong direction. ... You are saved by the grace of God ... the same grace of God that saves *every* believer. You disciples would not be here today if it wasn’t for God’s grace ... and you would not be serving Him had He not applied that grace ... so really, you have nothing to boast about ... All your boasting is to be in the Lord Jesus, ... no one or nothing else ... only Him.

That is the model for serving the Saviour, for that is how He, - in humility, - served His servants. He is the perfection of humility for He is God’s standard. It was His humility that brought Him to the cross ... and we would not be saved if Jesus had not humbled Himself to come to this earth and to Calvary. Therefore, it is not only the disciples who are indebted to Him for each of us is equally indebted to Him also ... His love, His mercy, His grace, His sacrifice.

In closing, did the disciples learn? Well, yes ... they did, *eventually* ... for they both quoted from the same Source. James wrote in his epistle, **James 4:6** But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. **10** Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up ... And Peter also wrote something similar in *his* epistle, **I Peter 5:5** ... be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. **6** Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time.

May the Lord teach us through His Word! Amen.