

“A Lesson in Humility”

Companion Paper to the Sermon Delivered at Firm Foundation Christian Church, Woonsocket, RI, on October 2nd, 2022, By James Moriello

“And He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, “If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all.”” (Mark 9:35, NKJV)

Nothing that is said is said independently of anything else. When reading such statements recorded in the Bible, we do well to bring in the immediate and overall context in which the statement was made. In today’s vernacular, we call this the “back story.”

The back story in the immediate context is that of the two verses which precede our text. **“Then He (Jesus) came to Capernaum. And when He was in the house He asked them, “What was it you disputed among yourselves on the road?” But they kept silent, for on the road they had disputed among themselves who would be the greatest”** (Mark 9:33-34). The disciples had seen Jesus transfigured on the Mount. They knew by faith that they would receive a place in the Lord’s heavenly kingdom. That they would, save one, have an honorable place in the Messianic Kingdom was further validated by the words of Christ, **“Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel”** (Matthew 19:28). Yet it was not enough. Each desired to **“be the greatest.”** When Jesus called them out for their selfish and ambitious thoughts, **“they kept silent.”** The disciples had been exposed for seeking their own self-exaltation. They had taken their eyes off the Savior, and were focusing on their own glory. They had forgotten that it is written that the humble say, **“The secret of the LORD is with those who fear Him, And He will show them His covenant. My eyes are ever toward the LORD”** (Psalm 25:14-15). If each of us here has the singular goal of glorifying our great Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ, we shall do much for His kingdom today. It is human ambition, self-exaltation, and agendas that wreck our fellowship and limit our witness.

There is likewise a back story to this from the Old Testament Book of Proverbs, which has much to say about pride and humility. Consider these seven sayings.

1. **“By pride comes nothing but strife, But with the well-advised is wisdom”** (Proverbs 13:10).

2. “Pride goes before destruction,
And a haughty spirit before a fall” (Proverbs 16:18).
3. “Better to be of a humble spirit with the lowly,
Than to divide the spoil with the proud” (Proverbs 16:19).
4. “Before destruction the heart of a man is haughty,
And before honor is humility” (Proverbs 18:12).
5. “By humility and the fear of the LORD
Are riches and honor and life” (Proverbs 22:4).
6. “He who is of a proud heart stirs up strife,
But he who trusts in the LORD will be prospered” (Proverbs 28:25).
7. “A man’s pride will bring him low,
But the humble in spirit will retain honor” (Proverbs 29:23)

Jesus told a parable at a later point in His earthly ministry on this very same subject (of humility). As the sin of pride is common to every man, it is necessary to allow God to keep it in check. “So He told a parable to those who were invited, when He noted how they chose the best places, saying to them: “When you are invited by anyone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in the best place, lest one more honorable than you be invited by him; and he who invited you and him come and say to you, ‘Give place to this man,’ and then you begin with shame to take the lowest place. But when you are invited, go and sit down in the lowest place, so that when he who invited you comes he may say to you, ‘Friend, go up higher.’ Then you will have glory in the presence of those who sit at the table with you. For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”” (Luke 14:7-11).

Let us now refresh our text in its context. “Then He came to Capernaum. And when He was in the house He asked them, “What was it you disputed among yourselves on the road?” But they kept silent, for on the road they had disputed among themselves who would be the greatest. And He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, “If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all.”” (Mark 9:33-35). And let us now continue to the object lesson, contained in the following two verses. “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.”” (Mark 9:36-37). These children were pleased to simply be received by Christ. They had no desire to raise up themselves or diminish the standing

of others. We have a saying in our church that children are God’s favorite people, and this is because they are presented in the Bible as relative innocents. “**Moreover your little ones and your children, who you say will be victims, who today have no knowledge of good and evil, they shall go in there (the promised land); to them I will give it, and they shall possess it**” (Deuteronomy 1:39). And again, “**And all Israel shall mourn for him and bury him, for he (the child) is the only one of Jeroboam who shall come to the grave, because in him there is found something good toward the LORD God of Israel in the house of Jeroboam**” (1 Kings 14:13). Let us learn to be childlike in our faith, and to be willing to associate with those that the world esteems as lowly. Then we shall be set in our proper place. We shall know humility and its rewards.

Do you need more proof? Further examples to teach you humility? We suppose none of us would need further evidence, but Jesus knows better. In the upper room, on the eve of His crucifixion, Jesus did the unthinkable. “**Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God, rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself. After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded. Then He came to Simon Peter. And Peter said to Him, “Lord, are You washing my feet?” Jesus answered and said to him, “What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this.” Peter said to Him, “You shall never wash my feet! Jesus answered him, “If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me.” Simon Peter said to Him, “Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head!” Jesus said to him, “He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you.” For He knew who would betray Him; therefore He said, “You are not all clean.” So when He had washed their feet, taken His garments, and sat down again, He said to them, “Do you know what I have done to you? You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them”**” (John 13:3-17).

And so today we that the most humble Man to walk the earth is now the most exalted. “**Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem**

others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:1-11).