

Disciples Understanding Jesus

Luke 9:46-48

PW Emerson – 3/1/2020 – Ten:27 Ministries

Luke 9:46-50

⁴⁶An argument started among the disciples as to which of them would be the greatest. ⁴⁷Jesus, knowing their thoughts, took a little child and had him stand beside him. ⁴⁸Then he said to them, "Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. For it is the one who is least among you all who is the greatest."

⁴⁹"Master," said John, "we saw someone driving out demons in your name and we tried to stop him, because he is not one of us."

⁵⁰"Do not stop him," Jesus said, "for whoever is not against you is for you."

ASK

When you think of this piece, what comes to mind?

The disciples were quickly discovering life is not fair.

A little earlier in Luke 9 is the transfiguration.

Who was with Jesus for this event? Peter, James & John.

The other disciples recognize that they must be favorites.

So they start arguing about which disciple would be the greatest.

They all knew that the first step was to determine who is the greatest.

Then the others could position themselves to be better than that one.

So others could move up in stature.

In modern parlance, the other nine were chatting about forming an alliance and voting off the 3 that went up on the mountain with Jesus.

Then the other 9 would be positioned to have a chance.

It's important to step back and look at this from a somewhat higher perspective.

Taken by itself, the disciples look foolish to us.

- Arguing about who is the greatest?

Their pride, desire for position & power – is that would they should be arguing about?

Illustration - Wanting to be the greatest ... or close to it

They were acting almost like a couple of Richard Nixon's aides back in June 1974. Nixon's administration was falling apart due to the Watergate scandal so, to divert everyone's attention from that, he planned a trip to Russia and Italy and two of his closest aides came along... Alexander Haig and Ron Ziegler.

Even tho' Nixon's presidency was collapsing, these two men were concerned with which of them was the most important man in his administration. In fact, their rivalry became so intense that (during the trip) each of them had a team that actually measured, down to the inch, ... the distance from THEIR beds to President Nixon's! They figured that the closer they were to Nixon's bed, the more important they were.

Proverbs 16:18

Pride goes before destruction,
a haughty spirit before a fall.

Earlier in Luke 9 Jesus has already mentioned his upcoming death, twice.

So part of the rationale about arguing about who is the greatest may have been because they are thinking when Jesus dies, whoever is the greatest would be the leader.

They were also thinking that like so many others before, that Jesus, the messiah, would be king like an earthly monarch.

- So whoever is the greatest would have a good position in the kingdom with Jesus on the throne.

So we see the disciples are misunderstanding on many levels. What a shock.

This is reflective of a greater problem both back then and today

- People's lust for power
- Peoples' lust for control
- Peoples' desire to be on top

Why do you think so many people today are obsessed with titles?

It's a way of saying, "I'm something that you're not!"

That's why Jesus had so many lessons about this

- Luke 15 – Story of the Prodigal Son – the elder son was whining that the younger son got more than he deserved ... he wasn't thinking about love, rather he was focused on what he wasn't getting

- Luke 10 – Good Samaritan – Jesus told the parable in response to a question from a religious expert. The expert didn't care about love or his neighbor, rather he was more concerned with losing pull and power to Jesus

As I was working on this, I stepped back and thought ... is there something wrong with wanting to be the greatest?

- Teachers – The greatest teacher is able to better reach students
- Doctors – heal the most people, be successful at the most surgeries

These are not bad and there are plenty more examples where being the greatest is a good thing.

BUT

When we are talking about God's Kingdom, there is only ONE who is great – GOD.

Not only that, but Jesus, God's son, who people thought would come as a conquering king, came as a servant.

In this world there are a LOT of people who call themselves servants but aren't.

- Elected politicians say that they are servants of the people; they have been hired to serve their constituents. I don't quite see them that way.
- Corporate CEO's are servants of the organization, wanting the entire enterprise to be successful.

But Jesus came as a servant.

- He washed the feet of his disciples, something only a servant would do.
- He was likened to a shepherd, watching his flock.
- When someone had to be selected to die, the servant sacrificed himself.

There is only **one** that is truly great and that is God.

It says in Isaiah the angel Lucifer challenged God for the top spot in his kingdom.
He found out that God is on top and everyone else is below.

We're all familiar with the story the Lord of the Rings.
No matter the intention of the ring bearer, eventually, that person would be corrupted with power.
No one could control the ring.

No person can control power. Only God truly wields power.
We need to recognize that and not try for that ourselves.
Otherwise we're challenging God

The disciples were ...

- thinking of the kingdom like an earthly monarchy
- thinking ahead to when Jesus would be dead; they were preparing for who would lead them then.

It was all misunderstanding on the disciples' part.

RIGHT?

When I look around to churches/congregations today, most of the problems are caused by miscommunication & misunderstanding.

Such misunderstandings have been occurring since the beginning, as showcased by the disciples.

We've all played the game of telephone, where the message whispered in an ear on one side of the room comes out totally different on the other side of the room.

Jesus clarifies his position by referring to a child and saying

Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me

In this culture, children were seen as the lowest on the totem pole.

- Children were of no value.
- They were completely dependent on others.

One scholar of Luke, in describing children of that culture, said that they were “powerless and irrelevant”

At one church I know about, some of the church members complained about the wear and tear that the youth group activities was having was on the basement carpet.

- Why were they upset?

It was their money that paid for the carpet... not the kids.

Essentially – it was *their carpet*... it belonged to them, not the kids. The kids hadn't contributed anything to the purchase or installation of that floor covering. They were 2nd class citizens.

That's the way children were viewed at the time of Christ.

Children are completely dependent on others

Too often we want to do things ourselves. We want to show that we can do it, to

- Dad
- Mom
- Brothers & sisters
- Teachers
- The person who never thought we'd amount to much of anything

We'll show them all! We will be successful at whatever we want!

Children are completely dependent on others and the best way for us to be successful is when we are completely dependent on God.

Jesus said

Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me.

He went on to say

For it is the one who is least among you all who is the greatest.

God tells us that if we're going to impress Him, we need to be servants.

- Servants to people who can't contribute anything to make the church strong & influential.
- Servants to children who are too young to fix things or teach
- Servants to widows who are too poor to contribute to the church budget
- Servants to anyone who is too weak or crippled or handicapped to be able to repay the kindnesses of others

We see the same attitude in Luke 14:11

For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.

Although the disciples had the wrong idea, Jesus makes it clear that it's all about attitude.

Philippians 2:3-5

³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, ⁴ not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

⁵ In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus

The disciples had to have the right attitude.

Illustration on Attitude

The noted English architect Sir Christopher Wren was supervising the construction of a magnificent cathedral in London. A journalist thought it would be interesting to interview some of the workers, so he chose three and asked them this question, "What are you doing?" The first replied, "I'm cutting stone for 10 shillings a day." The next answered, "I'm putting in 10 hours a day on this job." But the third said, "I'm helping Sir Christopher Wren construct one of London's greatest cathedrals, all for the glory of God"

We can be doing the right actions, but with the wrong attitude, it's a sin.

You and I, as disciples for Christ, have to have that attitude too.

Illustration about Can-Do Attitude

1988 March edition of The Rotarian told a story of two hunters. When hunting season for wolves started, there were there, looking high and low for their prey. One night they went to sleep at a campsite near a campfire. One of the hunters awoke in the middle of the night to see that they were surrounded by about 50 wolves, all having fire in their eyes and showing their teeth. He immediately woke his friend saying, "Get up. We're Rich!!"

That's the can-do attitude God wants us all to have!

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Notice the contrast between Jesus and his followers.

Here he is describing his impending death; this is a serious moment.

He even tells them to listen carefully and they begin arguing about who is the most important one in the group.

He is foretelling of his sacrifice and they are thinking of their own status and self-importance.

Knowing their hearts, Jesus takes a child, and says whoever receives this child receives me. And as we mentioned earlier, children had NO status or value in that culture.

His point is that whoever welcomes and embraces the insignificant ones in society welcomes and embraces Jesus!

Ministry is not about demographics and embracing people like us – that is easy, that does not take God's grace.

Jesus embraced the outsiders and the outcasts.

He embraced the left-outs and left-behinds.

Jesus is talking about embracing those who are on the fringe of society, the ones others reject – that takes God's grace.

Status is not a virtue in the Kingdom of God. Yet we are a status driven people. This comes from thinking too highly of ourselves.

I think we can say all conflicts arise because of self, thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought.

True greatness comes from who you are connected to not who you minister to.

Neither does greatness come from comparing yourself to others. How did Jesus respond?

He gave a living illustration.

Jesus calls you and I to be that living sacrifice!