

Mark 1:29-39

1/21/2024

Last week we dug into Jesus' authority. He claimed divine authority over truth in his preaching, and he proved that he had divine authority when the demon fled at his command. We talked about how modern Americans don't like authority, but because Jesus is different, he lays his authority down in order to make us his own, he is someone worth submitting to- his authority is good. Today, we see a different side of Jesus. Not only is Jesus breathtakingly authoritative, he is shockingly humble. **Jesus is Humble**. And we are going to learn from his actions that 1. **Humility means serving people for *their* sake, and 2. Humility means *total* dependence on God.**

1. Humility means serving people for their sake.

Mark's original audience was Christians in Rome- gentiles who had converted to Christianity, but deeply influenced by Roman culture. One distinct thing about Roman culture: They were obsessed with honor. The whole goal of the average Roman was to gain honor for himself and his family or clan. There were ways to do that- and that often involved some sort of public service. You could serve in the military, serve in the government, or be successful in the trades, earn a great deal of money, and use that money to build or provide a public service to Rome- like a public bath, shrine, pay for an army's conquest, and that person would get honor and prestige among his or her people. The whole reason you did anything good, charitable, or respectable was for respect, honor, and reputation.

You can then imagine the shock Mark's original readers had when they heard about Jesus, immediately after he preaches with authority and casts out a demon, he goes to his friends' house. He doesn't bask in the glory, he doesn't wait for them to say, "great sermon!" He actually avoids fame. He then goes to Simon's (Peter's) house, and Peter's mother-in-law is extremely ill with a fever. Look how Mark describes this. Mark is typically so quick with his language, but shows how deliberately and tenderly Jesus approaches this sick, old woman, taking her hand, helping her up, that's how he heals her. Jesus could have just snapped his fingers, but he takes time to actually interact with her. He's not aloof or cold, he doesn't see anyone as a waste of time. He cares about her, even her, and saves her from death. And who saw it? *No one*. Jesus didn't heal her for his reputation. He healed her because he loved her. And Jesus, the Savior of the World, doesn't have a "savior complex." He doesn't get a rush of narcissistic pride from helping people- he gives her the dignity and honor of serving him back with the Sabbath meal. After Sundown, when the Sabbath is officially over and Jesus is likely exhausted after a day of preaching and healing, the entire village carries their sick, dying, and demon-possessed to their door because now the Sabbath is officially over. This is incredibly rude, but Jesus doesn't complain, he doesn't grumble, he isn't above these people. He heals them. And the demons that would shout out his identity as true God- he doesn't let them do it because at this point in his ministry, he doesn't want people to know exactly who he is yet. He doesn't need credit or fame or for people to know who he is. He serves people for their sake, not for his benefit.

Humility, according to Jesus' own actions, means considering the needs of others more important than yourself. Humility means serving people not so people notice and see how great you are, not so that person gives you something back, not even because it's "the right thing to do" and it'll make you feel good if you do it. Humility means going about your business and then going home- not basking in the praise.

Humility means taking the time to actually engage the people you serve because they are interesting and valuable to you. Humility means joyfully and willingly serving people even when it's deeply exhausting and inconvenient. Jesus is humble. This makes me think of a conversation I had when I lived in Reno. I went down to the workout room at our apartment complex and there was a couple about my age. The man had flash cards and was quizzing the woman for what appeared to be a psychology test. I introduced myself and asked about what they were doing. She explained that she was going for her PhD in Psychology and that she had an important exam coming up. We kept talking, and after she learned that I was a seminary student working toward my Master's degree, she said, "My recommendation is that you keep going to school, keep studying, keep writing papers. That way, you can start getting recognized in your field and you can build your brand and get your name out there! That's why I'm doing this!" I responded, "Wait, you aren't studying psychology so you can help people?" And she said, "Well, that too."

If you only do good, moral, obedient Christian works in order so that everyone can see how good, moral, obedient, and Christian you are, who are you doing it for? If you give to charity or work for the underprivileged, but make sure people know about it, who are you doing it for? If you only help and serve people so you get a pat on the back or a "thank-you," or so that you feel important, who are you doing it for? If you only participate and serve and worship in this congregation so that you feel good about yourself, or so that God will bless you back, who are you doing it for? You. God sees our hearts. He sees the motivation behind our good deeds. We all need to search ourselves and ask a difficult question: "Why do I do it?" If we do it for ourselves, it's not humble. Humility means serving people only because you want to serve them. It can't be out of obligation or ambition. It has to be joy. That's humility- that's Jesus.

2. Jesus also shows his humility in his total dependence on his father. With the whole village at Simon's door at night, that probably turned into a late, late night, and no one would have faulted Jesus for sleeping in. But there is something Jesus needs even more desperately than sleep: to pray to the Father. And so he goes off alone, no distractions, no people, no light, just him praying to God the Father. Why? Why is this so important to Jesus? Because although he is true God, equal to the Father in authority and power, he is also a human being and at this time dependent on God the Father like any other human being. And he's humble enough to realize that every breath he takes, every day he wakes up, every meal, every disciple, every blessing is from him and not in his control. And because of this, he is constantly in prayer because he is totally dependent on his Father for everything. The question I'd like for us all to consider is this: If Jesus himself, the Lord of all creation, deliberately takes time away from everyone to privately pray to his Father because he is humble enough to know that all things come from him, shouldn't we? .

"Woe unto that man whose devotion is observed by everybody, and who never offers a secret supplication. Secret prayer is the secret of prayer, the soul of prayer, the seal of prayer, the strength of prayer. If you do not pray alone, you do not pray at all. I care not whether you pray in the street, or in the church, or in the barrack-room, or in the cathedral; but your heart must speak with God in secret, or you have not prayed." This is a quote from English pastor Charles Spurgeon, and his words, confrontational as they are, are vital for us to hear. The reason that prayer is so important is not because we are earning God's favor through the quality or quantity of prayer, it's not that God wants to bless and keep you- but first you need to pray for it. Prayer is so important because it is a direct reflection of your relationship with God and your humility before him. If the only time you pray is when you are here at church, the dinner table, or when you need something from God, what does that say about your

relationship to him? Why is it that often, we pray only when we are in trouble, afraid, or in a time of uncertainty? Because, often, it is in our times of need and pain that we realize how dependent, how needy, how desperate we are for God's providence and protection. The difference between Jesus and us is not that Jesus is somehow more dependent on God for everything- he's just more in touch with reality, and therefore, more humble.

Jesus then displays even more humility when his disciples, who did not take their prayers as seriously, find him and say, "Everyone's looking for you!" Jesus doesn't stick with those who like him and bask in the glory. Instead, he keeps his mind on his mission. "Everyone here is looking for me? Great! Let's go somewhere else." Because Jesus' mission is not to be liked by everyone, it's not to attract a fanbase, it's not even to do great and glorious miracles. It's to preach the good news- and the miracles are simply there to prove that he has the authority to teach what he teaches. Everything Jesus does is done in humility- serving people for *their* sake, *total* dependence on his Father, and ultimately *total* obedience to his Father's will. Not for one second thinking about himself- only thinking about others. That's humility. *So how do we become like this?* Jesus' ultimate mission. Jesus came not to be served, but to serve, and give his life as a ransom for many. On the Cross, Jesus displayed the ultimate height of humility as he let people think he was weak, foolish, and immoral. On the Cross, Jesus served people, paying for the sins of the ones who were spitting on his face and nailing his hands, and then he prayed for them! On the Cross, he viewed all people, all sinners, as more important, more worthy, more valuable than his own life. He forgot himself, placed his eyes on you and me so that we could be forever cherished and forgiven- even though we aren't humble like him- we are credited and embraced as if we were.

The Cross makes us humble. The Cross firstly shows our sins- we aren't better than anyone! If that's what Jesus had to do in order to save me, I'm just as sinful as anyone else! At the same time, the Cross means that you are infinitely valuable, infinitely loved by no one less than the Lord God himself. Therefore, who do you need to impress with charity and religious behavior? No one needs to see the good things that you do, and you don't need to do it in order to make God like you or feel good about yourself- that's all yours in Christ. The Cross doesn't simply destroy our pride, it frees us from having to be prideful in the first place! Listen to CS Lewis: "*Do not imagine that if you meet a really humble man he will be what most people call 'humble' nowadays: he will not be a sort of greasy, smarmy person, who is always telling you that, of course, he is nobody. Probably all you will think about him is that he seemed a cheerful, intelligent chap who took a real interest in what you said to him... He will not be thinking about humility: he will not be thinking about himself at all.*" Lewis sums up Christian, Christ-like humility this way: "*Humility is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less.* Humility is not a worship of self, nor is it hating yourself. It's forgetting yourself and finding joy in serving God and people. Is there anything more liberating than that? Is there anything more sweet, joyful, and beautiful than serving God, each other, and our neighbors for their sake, not ours? Is there anything more liberating than embracing dependence on God for all things and therefore praying to him who is unthinkably good for all things? That's the kind of humility God desires, and works in us over time as we learn and grow and embrace the free gift of salvation that Jesus won on the cross. So, friends, as his people, let's join Jesus. Let's forget ourselves. Amen.