

Message #43

Luke 9:46-48

A man who is credited with making a major contribution to children's learning was Edgar Dale, a professor at Ohio State University, who died in 1985. He told a story of a teacher in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, who had each of her students stand up and tell the class what they wanted to be when they grew up.

Most of the children in the class gave answers like doctor, lawyer, nurse, farmer, teacher, police officer or fire fighter. She was almost finished when the superintendent of the school dropped in to observe what she was doing in the class.

The teacher became somewhat upset because the only student left in the room to answer the question was a student named Johnny. Johnny was not a good student. He sat in the back row of the class and he was a little slow in learning. He was the only one who had not said what he wanted to be. Now that the superintendent was in the room, the teacher figured he would give some embarrassing, ridiculous answer. But she was a fair teacher and she said, "Johnny, what is it that you want to be when you grow up?" Johnny said, "When I grow up, I would like to be a person who leads blind people."

The class sat silent. No other student had even considered a career of helping blind people and the one student in the class who appeared to be completely out of touch with reality, turned out to be the most compassionate, caring student in the entire class. That day Johnny impressed everyone, including the teacher and superintendent, because his goal in life was to serve helpless people.

Thank God there are Johnny's in this world. Thank God there are those who choose to help those who cannot help themselves. They help the sick and the handicapped. They help those who are slow and simple. Thank God for those kinds of people and **thank God there is a God who chose to help those who were sinful and lost.**

Truth is, we are the ones who were blind. We are the ones who were sick. We are the ones who are slow and simple and handicapped, and in amazing grace, God chose to help us and save us.

This gospel is being written by Dr. Luke, who is laying out a lot of truth about real Christ-like discipleship. If you were to ask most people what is it that you really want to do for God, I am sure most would say, "I want to do something big and great." "I want to evangelize millions." "I want to preach to thousands." "I want to teach hundreds." "I want to sing before big congregations." "I want to build a cathedral and be known as a great speaker." But I doubt that too many would say, "I want to minister to the lowly, the sinful and the hurting." Not many would say, "I want to communicate God's grace to broken down, fallen, guilty sinners."

In this text, the disciples got into a heated discussion over what they wanted to be when they grew up and each one of them wanted to be the greatest disciple ever.

Every one of them wanted to be the best disciple. Now that is not a bad goal. Whatever it meant to be the best disciple, they wanted to be it.

Now contextually there are five historical events that would have triggered this discussion:

Event #1 - Only three disciples had been selected to witness the transfiguration of Jesus Christ (Luke 9:28). The other nine were left out and somewhat jealous.

Event #2 - There was a belief that the Kingdom of God was very near (Luke 9:33). Time was running out to make a name for one's self.

Event #3 - The inability of the disciples to accomplish what they should have been able to accomplish (9:40/9:1). These guys could not cast out the demon and they probably all felt inept.

Event #4 - Christ had given a stinging rebuke to His disciples (9:41). How long should He put up with these guys? They wanted to do better in the future.

Event #5 - They did not understand the Word and program of God (9:45). They didn't know what Jesus was talking about, but they sure wanted to do better.

These events left these disciples somewhat paranoid and out of this paranoia and out of their insecurity and out of their jealousy and envy, they got into an argument over which one of them would be the greatest disciple.

What Jesus says to them is this:

THE GREATEST DISCIPLE IN GOD'S SIGHT IS THE MOST HUMBLE DISCIPLE ON EARTH WHO BROUGHT SEEMINGLY INSIGNIFICANT PEOPLE TO A RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS CHRIST.

When we get to heaven, we will discover that the disciple who was willing to minister to, fellowship with and assist those that most of the religious and social world would write off, will have been the greatest disciple.

Greatness is not determined by focusing on the achievements of self, but on ministering to the needs of the lowly. Proud discussions and comparisons are not God's way to greatness, but humble service is God's way to greatness.

Some of the most honored believers in eternity will have been:

- 1) Faithful S.S. teachers.
- 2) Those who called on the sick and the elderly.
- 3) Those who quietly ministered to the needy.
- 4) Those who helped the lonely.
- 5) Those who shoveled sidewalks and went to grocery stores.
- 6) Those who made and took a meal to someone who needed it.
- 7) Those who took the time to encourage the downhearted.

They did jobs that were not glamorous and they did them solely for the glory of God. Those will be great disciples in heaven. It would not surprise me in heaven if a kid like Johnny was more honored than most preachers.

According to **verse 46**, the disciples got into an argument. That word “argument” (**v. 46**) and the word “thinking” (**v. 47**) are the same word. The Greek word is dialogismos (διαλογισμος), which refers to an inward questioning and debate; it was inward thinking and reasoning that was not necessarily verbalized (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 109).

Mark informs us that some of the argument had become verbal (Mark 9:33-34), but most of it was silently taking place in the disciple’s minds. These disciples were mentally brewing and stewing and inwardly plotting over which of them would be the greatest.

Here they were traveling with Jesus Christ in life and they are simmering over which of them would be the greatest disciple. Now Luke brings out three important facts:

FACT #1 – Jesus Christ knew the thoughts of every disciple. **9:47a**

Put this in the context. **Jesus Christ is thinking about the fact that He is on His way to the cross (9:31, 44) and these disciples are arguing about which of them will get the most crowns. Instead of them focusing on what Christ was about to do for them, they were arguing who would get the most from Him.**

Now apparently, they still had not come to full terms with who Jesus Christ actually is. They must think that their silent thinking is not known or noticed by Him. But the text clearly shows us the Omniscience of Jesus Christ, “Jesus knowing what they were thinking in their heart.”

The tense of the participle “knowing” indicates that Jesus Christ knew in the past what they were thinking in their heart, He knows what they were thinking in the present and He would know what they would think in the future. Jesus Christ always knows what people are thinking in their hearts and minds.

He knows why people do what they do. He knows whether or not they love Him and want to serve Him and He knows who is motivated by wanting limelight honor. No one fools Jesus Christ, ever! He knows exactly what is going on in the mind and heart of every single individual all the time.

No one is going to fool Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ knows exactly and precisely what is going on in the minds and hearts of every person. Now a person may pretend to be the most spiritual person on the face of the earth. A person may project himself or herself to be one who really walks close with God. Christ knows the real heart of the matter. No one ever fools Him.

Now this is a critical point because the more we recognize this truth about Jesus Christ, the more we will be working on our own lives and not worrying about how great we think we are.

Frankly, when we realize that Jesus Christ knows every thought and everything in our heart, we will not be thinking about how great we are, but how far short of His glory we are.

FACT #2 – Jesus Christ illustrates the humility needed to be a great disciple. **9:47b**

The text says that Jesus Christ “took a child and stood him by His side.” The word “child” (παιδιον) is a word that refers to a young child. This child would have been one who was at a very young and very instructable age. We must assume that the child was old enough that the child could understand that Jesus wanted him to come to Him

The specific preposition that Luke uses in saying He stood the child “by” Him is one that emphasizes this is a very privileged position. This is a position and location of great honor. This child is literally standing by Jesus Christ. This young child is near Jesus Christ. What an honor.

Now it is important to realize that in this ancient culture, out of all of the people who could have been near Christ, the most insignificant would have been a little child. In fact, I. Howard Marshall, in his commentary, said that in this ancient world this child would have been of “no importance” in both the religious and secular world.

In fact, according to Judaism, a child who was not twelve could not even be taught the Torah. So for the religious leaders to spend time with a child was a total waste of time in their minds.

Jesus specifically picked this most humble, least esteemed, seemingly insignificant person to use as His object lesson. These disciples were arguing about who would be the greatest and Jesus is reaching out to the most humble, least esteemed person in society, a little child.

A person does not have to be publicly impressive to be very close to Jesus Christ. The person who actually is close to Jesus Christ will often be the most insignificant person in the world.

FACT #3 – Jesus Christ teaches the humility needed to be a great disciple. **9:48**

It is quite obvious that the key verb of this verse is the word “receive” that shows up four times in this one verse. The word (δεχομαι) is one that refers to a kind, hospitable, willing, receptive acceptance. This word speaks of totally embracing someone.

What Jesus is saying here is that if you want to be a great disciple, you will totally and completely embrace nobodies. You will welcome them and bring them to Me.

What Jesus is saying is that one who will reach out to bring seemingly insignificant people to Me will end up being My greatest disciples.

When He says whoever “receives...in My name,” He is referring to the fact that you care for this kind of person because of the name of Jesus Christ. Christ died for these people.

When He says, “whoever receives Me, receives Him who sent Me,” He is not referring to the salvation of the disciple, but the ministry of the disciple.

What Jesus is saying is the disciple who reaches out to the least esteemed people and points them to Me, that one is a great disciple.

Frankly, most religious places like successful people. Jesus says the great ministry presents My grace to struggling people.

Greatness in God’s sight is not determined by eloquence, or persuasiveness or numbers; it is determined by ministering to people sent by God into our world.

Greatness does not come by comparing ourselves to someone else. It comes by reaching out to lowly nobodies and sinners and pointing them to the grace of God found in Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ came to this world to save sinners and we are all sinners. We are not great; Jesus Christ is great.