

Mark 9 36-41

What humility looks like.

³⁶ **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,** ³⁷ **"Whoever receives one of these little children in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me, receives not Me but Him who sent Me."**

³⁸ **Now John answered Him, saying, "Teacher, we saw someone who does not follow us casting out demons in Your name, and we forbade him because he does not follow us."** ³⁹ **But Jesus said, "Do not forbid him, for no one who works a miracle in My name can soon afterward speak evil of Me."** ⁴⁰ **"For he who is not against us is on our side."** ⁴¹ **For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink in My name, because you belong to Christ, assuredly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward.**

Last week we looked at the problem of pride. We saw just how devastating its effects are in the church. And we saw that it should have no part in the motivation of Christians to do anything.

This week we are going to look at pride's opposite. We are going to look at humility. Humility is not having a low opinion of ourselves. It is not having a high opinion of ourselves. It is truly and simply **seeing ourselves for who we truly are**. That is humility.

Jesus is about to teach us what humility looks like.

Let's take a look at the parallel passage in Matthew in order to gain more context on what Mark is saying.

Matthew 18:3-7

³ **"Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven."** ⁴ **Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."** ⁵ **Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me."** ⁶

"But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea." ⁷ **Woe to the world because of offenses! For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes!**

So Mark emphasized Jesus's focus on **receiving** one of these little children.

Matthew emphasizes Jesus's focus on **becoming** like one of these little children. That helps us to understand what he is saying.

Then notice that Matthew says whoever humbles himself like this little child is the **greatest** in the kingdom of heaven.

This helps us immensely in our interpretation of the passage.

This is one of those passages that are misused to say **any number of things**, when **only one thing** is meant by it.

Some will say we must become innocent like a little child. Another might say we should be harmless, or transparent, or sweet, or whatever positive traits we might assign to a little child. But clearly that is not what Jesus was talking about. And oddly enough, scripture doesn't assign many wonderful traits to children. They are not innocent, or sweet, or harmless. Scripture says that we are all born in a state of sin. It says in **Proverbs 22:15**

¹⁵ **Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; The rod of correction will drive it far from him.**

Our culture expects children to be basically and intrinsically good. That explains why parents are so shocked that their children will not stop doing evil selfish things when parents give them long lectures about why they **should** stop doing them. Parents approach the task of raising children with very wrong expectations. It is no wonder that their methods produce a world like we are now experiencing.

The Bible teaches that children are born with **sinful desires** that will bear fruit in **evil actions** if actions aren't taken to nip them in the bud. So parents that understand **scripture** expect the job to be **hard and relentless**. And they know they bear the responsibility for shaping that behavior when the child is young. Good behavior will not come from that child by nature. As that child becomes older, he can choose his own way. We cannot determine that child's eternal destiny. But we can shape the child's behavior when the child is young, and are completely responsible to do so.

So Jesus is not, in any way, idealizing childhood as if it has some kind of virtue. What He is clearly talking about is their position in life. They are at the very bottom of the pecking order. It takes humility to become like a child.

Think about this. We want to be first. We want to be respected. We want to be preferred. We want to be invited to parties and meetings. We want to have our voice listened to. We want people to shape **their behavior** in conformity to **our preferences**. We want to be spoken well of. We don't want to be maligned. That is our nature. Carla used to joke when we were young that she really didn't want much. She just wanted to be the queen. At least I think she was joking.

That is what we are up against. We **don't want** to take up the position of a child. We **don't want** the zero status chair. Our natural inclination is to take the stance scripture describes of the rebels of God. We are naturally prone in the direction of the people of Assyria in Zephaniah

Zephaniah 2:15

¹⁵ **This is the rejoicing city That dwelt securely, That said in her heart, "I am it, and there is none besides me."**

We, by nature, want to be free from God's control. And ultimately **we want the position of God**. It is interesting that as people gain more and more power, they

begin to expect what only God has the right to expect. After a while these people want more than respect. They demand worship. Remember Herod and the event that caused God to kill him? That is typical. Yet look what God says.

Isaiah 45:22

²² **Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else.**

We want to say **I am, and there is no one else.** But God says, no, you have that wrong. **I am and there is none else.** There is only one king for that throne, and it isn't us.

It is interesting in Zephaniah's passage to see what Zephaniah says **is the remedy** to this proud condition that the city's people were in.

Zephaniah 2:3

³ **Seek the LORD, all you meek of the earth, Who have upheld His justice. Seek righteousness, seek humility. It may be that you will be hidden In the day of the LORD'S anger.**

The answer to the problem includes seeking humility. In order to find God's favor these people had to adjust their view of themselves to the glass through which **God** sees them. That is always part of the repentance process.

So Jesus is talking to His disciples. He is explaining to them something that they HAD TO GET! He is talking about a core tenant in the Christian life. They are all jockeying for the highest position in Christ's kingdom cabinet. They are using earthly strategies to get those spots. They are using earthly wisdom for evaluating who should get them. And they are dividing their fellowship with this pursuit.

Christ brings forth a child, likely one of Peter's. And He says, you want to be top dog? You want to be a big shot in my kingdom? You want to even BE in my kingdom?

Well it is like this. First you must be converted. In this passage it appears to mean to change one's mind. It could be Christ is talking about this specific change of mind of which he is speaking. Christ is essentially saying, you can no longer think and act and be motivated like the world. You must change that thinking and accept the kingdom rules. And the kingdom rules are that **you follow Christ's leading and example.** You become **the least** and **serve everyone else.** You regard your life is such a way that you are a servant to everyone else because Christ has regarded them as worthy of service. We regard them for Christ's sake. We take on the same mind as Christ. Ultimately we are serving **Him** when we **serve others.**

So both Matthew and Mark are displaying the same quality when they discuss it in two different ways.

Matthew says we **become like** a child **and receive** the lowliest child. Mark simply says that **we receive the child**. Both actions require the same degree of humility. Both show that we have accepted the fact that we are not too good to be placed in the lowest position. And we not only **don't fight it**. **We welcome it**.

Let's think a little more about this status of a child.

I like what the New International Greek Testament Commentary says:

The child represents the lowest order in the social scale, the one who is under the authority and care of others and who has not yet achieved the right of self-determination. To 'become like a child' ([Mt. 18:3](#)) is to forgo status and to accept the lowest place, to be a 'little one' ([Mt. 18:6](#), [10, 14](#); [10:42](#)).

..... To 'receive' the child, is to reverse the conventional value-scale by according importance to the unimportant.

The New International Greek Testament Commentary - The New International Greek Testament Commentary – The Gospel of Mark.

Jesus is clearly trying to change the disciples' whole view of life as they knew it. And He did it by painting a clear and touching picture of how Christ's kingdom functions. Have you ever had someone try to correct you by **only pointing out what you did wrong**, but not painting a picture of **how to do it right**? My brother used to tell me to grow up when I was young. He was accurately assessing the problem, but was not overly helpful at the time of pointing me in a better direction. We have probably all had things like this happen to us.

Well Christ did not do that to His disciples. In fact, what he did was heartwarming. At first he stood that child in the midst of them. So here are all these big men and the child is placed in the middle. They are all looking at him. Most of us know how a little child would respond to that. The child would be nervous and uncomfortable. The child wouldn't know what to do and would be afraid. Up until now Christ hasn't said anything. I am sure he had aroused the disciples' curiosity. They are probably thinking, so what, a little kid, what does that have to do with anything important.

Then Jesus takes that child and draws him into his arms. It is not difficult to imagine him giving the child a hug the way we do to the children we favor. He has just taken the child out of an uncomfortable situation and He has **received** that child. He has brought him close. He has provided protection and fellowship. He has given the child a sense of importance and belonging. In so doing, Christ demonstrates what he says next.

He said to them,³⁷ **"Whoever receives one of these little children in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me, receives not Me but Him who sent Me."** By doing what He did and saying what He said, He just turned the disciples' world

upside down. **Their definition of importance** is getting the most power and status and influence. Their definition is getting the best of what this world gives. They are thinking through their flesh.

Christ turns it all around. He is saying that what stands out as great in the kingdom of God is inclusive, self sacrificing love.

The word used for receive here doesn't mean to formally greet. What it means is to receive into ones' family in order to bring up and educate. That really helps us to get to the meat of what Christ is saying. He is talking about **a costly commitment to that person's welfare**. It is an adoption of that person into our lives. What Christ is talking about is church. He is talking about bringing a person into the community of believers, the family of believers.

So let's paraphrase this.

Whoever commits himself and his resources to the benefit of someone without status, in Christ's name, is committing himself and his resources to Christ. And if he is committing himself to Christ, he is also committing himself to God.

Wow. Put yourself in the disciples' shoes here. They have got to be thinking, how is **that** going to free us from the Romans rule? How is **that** going to build a political machine? How is **that** going to get Christ front and center in Civil Government? How will **that** overcome the corrupt religious leadership? In fact, how will **that** do anything important at all?

And **that** is the problem. The disciples are focusing on all the problems that the kingdom of Christ on earth **wasn't sent to solve**. They are trying to repair a car that is on the salvage truck heading to the salvage yard. They don't know what the kingdom is for.

The kingdom is for using earthly resources to prepare fellow humans for eternal life with Christ. It is for using time, energy, money, and things money can buy for the good of those headed to heaven. It is about appealing to God to accomplish those things through His power and through His people. It is about teaching others these same things. And ultimately it is about glorifying Christ and God our Father.

Christ directs the disciples here to the most important service on earth. It is to fellow humans. And He is displaying the attitude that must be present for us to do such a service. It is humility. By sweeping that child into His arms, He gives us a tiny picture of what He is talking about. Christians are to be continually looking for opportunity to welcome **anyone who is willing** into the fellowship of believers. So we speak the truth to all, no matter what their position in life, and we look for the movement of God on their lives. And if we see God drawing them, we commit ourselves and our resources to their benefit. That is the mainstay of how the church of God grows.

Let's take a little side road here and look at some scriptures about humility.

Let's get a look at our lives from God's perspective.

Have you ever been taught that God needs you? Have you gotten the idea that you should do some things because God could really use the help?

Isaiah 66:1

¹ Thus says the LORD: "Heaven *is* My throne, And earth *is* My footstool. Where *is* the house that you will build Me? And where *is* the place of My rest?

God is basically making the point, what do you really hope **to do for me**? Are you going to provide for my needs? What, are you going to **build a house** for me?

Then let's look at the book of Job. This is one of my favorites. Job had been making his point about how God had been unfair to Job. And this is what God says in return.

Job 38:1-10

¹ Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said: ² "Who *is* this who darkens counsel By words without knowledge? ³ Now prepare yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer Me. ⁴ "Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell *Me*, if you have understanding. ⁵ Who determined its measurements? Surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? ⁶ To what were its foundations fastened? Or who laid its cornerstone, ⁷ When the morning stars sang together, And all the sons of God shouted for joy?

⁸ "Or *who* shut in the sea with doors, When it burst forth *and* issued from the womb; ⁹ When I made the clouds its garment, And thick darkness its swaddling band; ¹⁰ When I fixed My limit for it, And set bars and doors;

The Lord went on and on in his explanation about how Job is completely unsuitable to evaluate God. But God is perfectly suitable for evaluating Job. This truth is **the foundation** of true humility. It is the recognition of the difference between us and God. One cannot truly be humble if he does not use a perfect standard.

2 Corinthians 10:12

¹² For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.

Humility does not stem from comparing ourselves to each other. Pride uses that tool. But true humility only comes from seeing ourselves from the view of our maker, from a truly objective view. We are told things about ourselves that we could not know by mere human observation.

We see some interesting things about humility in the Exodus from Egypt.

Exodus 10:3

³ So Moses and Aaron came in to Pharaoh and said to him, "Thus says the LORD

God of the Hebrews: 'How long will you refuse to humble yourself before Me? Let My people go, that they may serve Me.

We see here that Pharaoh was proud. He stood against God. He did what He wanted to do. He didn't care what God wanted. He thought he could contend with God and win. He did not see himself as he truly was. Had he humbled himself, had he seen himself as he truly was, he would have adjusted his plan to God's plan. But he did not. Now how about Moses? What did God think of him?

Numbers 12:3

³ **(Now the man Moses *was* very humble, more than all men who *were* on the face of the earth.)**

It is interesting that this was said when Miriam and Aaron had risen up against Moses. They were saying, essentially, we are just as qualified as Moses to lead this people. They were displaying the same mentality as the disciples. They wanted to be first. They wanted the prominent seats. But they had no idea what the kingdom of God is all about.

In contrast, God's man, Moses was very humble. Even though Moses was the biggest shot among the Israelites, he limited his view of himself to only God's perspective. He didn't get full of himself.

Now, how about the people of Israel? How did they fare in the humility scale?

Deuteronomy 8:2

² **And you shall remember that the LORD your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what *was* in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not.**

Evidently the children of Israel weren't faring very well in their humility. So God humbled them, put them in a low unfortunate position, to see how they would do. And we know that they did not do well.

So Pharaoh was the top dog in Egypt. But he was proud.

Miriam and Aaron wanted to be the top dogs in Israel, but they were proud.

Moses was the top dog in Israel, and he was humble.

And the Israelites were proud and needed humbled.

Let's look at a few more passages from Psalms, and a couple more.

Psalm 9:12

¹² **When God avenges blood, He remembers them; He does not forget the cry of the humble.**

I would say this is important. God remembers with favor those who adjust their view of themselves to His view of them.

Psalm 10:12

¹² **Arise, O LORD! O God, lift up Your hand! Do not forget the humble.**

Psalm 10:17

¹⁷ LORD, You have heard the desire of the humble; You will prepare their heart; You will cause Your ear to hear,

Look at the wonderful promises directed toward those who submit themselves to God.

Psalm 18:27

²⁷ For You will save the humble people, But will bring down haughty looks.

We will see that this is a common theme. The proud will ultimately suffer. The humble will ultimately be rewarded.

Psalm 25:9

⁹ The humble He guides in justice, And the humble He teaches His way.

Do you want to be taught by God. Remain humble.

Psalm 34:2

² My soul shall make its boast in the LORD; The humble shall hear *of it* and be glad.

The humble are always glad when that position is shared by others. It is a wonderful like-mindedness.

Psalm 147:6

⁶ The LORD lifts up the humble; He casts the wicked down to the ground.

Psalm 149:4

⁴ For the LORD takes pleasure in His people; He will beautify the humble with salvation.

And just for good measure, two more passages:

Isaiah 57:15

¹⁵ For thus says the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity, whose name *is* Holy: "I dwell in the high and holy *place*, With him *who* has a contrite and humble spirit, To revive the spirit of the humble, And to revive the heart of the contrite ones.

1 Peter 5:6

⁶ Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time,

All of this was to make the point, humility is not some optional trait that self-effacing Christians might someday reach. Humility is a condition of one's heart that is foundational to one's salvation. A person in their pride will never see or admit their true need of salvation. It is only in humility, only as we see ourselves from God's perspective, that we can cry out for salvation and humbly receive it as the wonderful gift it is.

Now, back to our text in verse 37. There is just one more point.

Notice the wording Christ couches this in.

³⁷ "**Whoever receives one of these little children in My name**

Now just like in prayer, **In Christ's Name** isn't like some kind of stamp that we use to assure we will get what we ask for. In Christ's Name means in his stead, according to His purpose, according to His plan, according to His designs and restrictions. So what He is saying is that we must be doing **this inclusion of those without status** in the way that **He wants it done** and for **His ultimate glory**. In other words, the only reason we are doing evangelism and ministry to believers is because it pleases **Him**.

We aren't doing it because it sure would be nice to have another tithing member. We don't do it because we have some idea of what a growing church should look like. We aren't doing it because this gives us another person we can somehow use to look better or gain strokes for our flesh.

Remember, everything about the kingdom of God is ultimately about the Glory of Christ. It is by Him and through Him and to Him. And that is why our humility is so necessary and so fitting.

So, how about us? Are we humble? Do we regard it as our lot in life **to serve others** for Jesus sake, or do we regard it as **our right for them to serve us**? How do we react when we are not dealt with as if we are the most important? How do we respond when we are overlooked and even treated as if we are not so very important? That is really how we find out where we stand on the humble meter. We usually learn about pride when it spews out of us in reaction to a slight. We display pride when we **take everything personally**, instead of realizing everyone has their issues to deal with. We display pride when we know what God says but we choose to do it **our way**. We display pride when we use words like, **how dare you**, when others criticize us. We display pride when we want the top seat. We display **humility** when we deal with each other with a genuine concern for their best interest, even when that will cause us to sacrifice. We display humility when we are treated like a servant and it doesn't offend us. We display humility when we realize that any slight done against us only has importance at all because of God's perspective. None of us can say that we do not deserve bad treatment. We know how badly we have treated God. We deserve God's judgment. We can only say that another human doesn't have the right to dish it out.

What we have seen these last two weeks is what it takes to **enter** the kingdom of God and what it takes to **excel** in that kingdom. And it isn't at all to flesh's liking. It is living in congruence with the real truth about ourselves. It is humility.