

So, You Want To Be Great?

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Well, if you have your Bibles, you can turn to Luke 9, where we're going to be looking at verses 46-50.

Recently, the elders had what is reasonably called a "brainstorming meeting." We have so much business to do in our big elder meetings once a month that we've been having extra elder meetings just to "brainstorm." That's what Pastor Tim Carns calls it. He selects some different topics that we can talk about, and then we go ahead and talk about them—how we can do things better, and ministry stuff so we can better honor the Lord. Recently, we talked about [the church's] perception in Burbank. How do other churches perceive us? We pretty much agreed that people see us as the Bible-thumper church. We kind of like that—that's an OK perception.

Others, though, perceive us as dogmatic, and inflexible, and intolerant, and condemning—things like that. Most of that's directed at me because I'm kind of the voice here. [The elders] talked about that, and [tried to determine] why this is. Some people have left [the church], [or have] come and visited, [and they] don't want to part with their sins, so [they've made our church into] the bad guy.

But some of [these impressions] we have to take responsibility for because sometimes when God gives you great blessings, you can think that you're special. We're the church that preaches the Word, and we're the church that has a lot of programs, and things are happening here. And you

know what? They are. I think we are preaching the Word, and I think we are doing a good job [of] teaching, and I think people are growing in the Lord, and growing in discernment, and coming to the Lord. All those things are happening. God is blessing this church in huge ways, but it's not an excuse to look down on others who aren't being blessed like God is blessing us. With great blessing comes great responsibility, and so the elders discussed how we can take our great blessing and, instead of using it [for] sin, how we can use [it] to encourage others, and build others up, and better honor the Lord with what He is doing among us.

This morning, in our text and, Lord willing, next week, we're going to be looking at the sin of pride, especially in the area of spiritual eliteness. In the last part of chapter 9, Luke finishes up what is called Jesus' Galilean ministry. That is, His ministry in the area up and around the Sea of Galilee. Jesus is going to be heading south toward Jerusalem, where He is going to die. These last few examples Luke gives [in this chapter of what the disciples are doing] are all bad. They're negative examples of what the disciples did wrong right before they left Galilee to go toward Jerusalem. So, in one way, it's kind of a downer section because they're messed up, and Luke is letting us know they're messed up. In the other part, [however], it's good because we get to learn from their mistakes so that we don't do the same things.

As we left [it] last week, [Jesus] had just healed the demon-possessed boy, [and He had] told [the disciples] He was going to die, [and] they didn't understand the statement. Mark, in his parallel account in Mark 9:33, tells us that then Jesus and the disciples traveled to Capernaum. If you know the geography of Israel a little bit, you probably know that just east of Jerusalem is the Dead Sea. Then there's a little river that goes straight up from the Dead Sea, and that is the Jordan River, [which flows through] the Sea of Galilee [and out the top]. To the west of that, the first town you come to is Capernaum, [which] was one of Jesus' bases of operation.

So, [Jesus and the disciples] traveled to Capernaum, and Mark tells us that the disciples got to the house where they were staying, and Jesus then

enters in. This is what he says: “And when He,” Jesus, “was in the house, He began to question them, and He asked this: ‘What were you discussing on the way?’ But they kept silent, for on the way, they had discussed with one another which of them was the greatest.” Now, think about that. These guys are the disciples, man. The whole church is going to be built off of their teaching. And along the way, Peter says to the nine: “Man, you guys should have been up there on the mountain! It was awesome! But, of course, you weren’t invited.” And then, they’re walking along a little bit, [and Peter continues, saying,] “Yeah, you guys don’t get to see a lot of the things that *we* get to see—you know, James, and John, and I. When Jesus comes and sets up His kingdom, I imagine that we’re going to have a little bit higher places than you guys.”

Then the nine say, “Are you trying to tell us that you’re better than us because Jesus has taken you along and you got to experience things that we haven’t gotten to experience?”

Peter kind of looks at James, looks at John, and says, “Well, it’s obvious [that] we *are* His favorites.” And then this argument ensues.

“Oh, yeah? But I was with Him when. . .”

“Oh, yeah? Well, Jesus had this private conversation. . .”

“Well, I was the one who got to see this miracle. . .”

And so they start boasting. They start talking about which of them is the greatest. It just seems almost impossible. But, whatever the conversation was like, [there is] one thing we know: they were arguing about who was the greatest. Keep that in mind and let’s look at our text [in] Luke 9:46 and following along as I read through verse 50.

An argument started among them as to which of them might be the greatest. But Jesus, knowing what they were thinking in their heart, took a child and stood him by His side, and said to them, “Whoever receives this child in My name receives Me, and whoever receives Me receives Him who sent Me; for the one who is least among all of you, this is the one who is great.”

John answered and said, "Master, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name; and we tried to prevent him because he does not follow along with us." But Jesus said to him, "Do not hinder him; for he who is not against you is for you."

Now, when you look at this text, you may think, "Well, maybe [verses] 49-50 should be a different sermon." No. It fits. Even more [verses] fit, but I couldn't fit [them] in. Just from this section, this section alone, you're going to learn three lessons about greatness. These are lessons you need to learn if you want to be great in God's sight, not the world's sight. The first is: Don't lust for worldly greatness. Look at verse 46: "An argument started among them as to which of them might be the greatest." This is Luke's summary of what Mark spends quite a bit more time talking about. It's kind of shocking [to read about], and it's obviously ungodly [behavior]. The Twelve have been with Jesus for *three years*. They've heard Him teach, they've heard Him preach on humility, on not seeking greatness, on being lowly, and He's been a *perfect* example to them. And here they are, almost at the very end of their training time, and they're arguing about who is the greatest.

In one way, it is encouraging to note that even the disciples, [whom] God used to turn the world upside down, had a long way to grow. So that's good: He still used them even though they were messed up. So we've got hope for ourselves because we're messed up, too. Everybody's messed up to one degree or another and yet God used [the disciples] and He changed them. As you go through the New Testament, you see that they became more and more godly. And so, we know that God's promise is true that when He begins a work in us, He "will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus" [Philippians 1:6].

Paul, when he is recounting what Jesus taught him, in 2 Corinthians 12:9, says: "And He has said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.' Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me." Now,

think about that. That is so twisted [in] the world's thinking. Weak? Those aren't the people who are great. That's not what you want to be. You want to "be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might" [Ephesians 1:19]. Yeah, in the strength of *His* might, not *your* might. And here, Paul is saying, "You know, when I realize my spiritual weakness, when I realize [that] I can't do anything to please God on my own, that I am totally reliant upon God and God alone to get me through, and to do ministry, and to live for Him, when I just see my utter spiritual poverty, then I know that Christ is going to be strong in me."

And you know what? The world does not want that. They don't like the whole "crutch" thing. Have you ever heard anybody say, "Oh, yeah, well, Jesus is just a crutch to you."

"Yeah? What's going to hold you up from hell? What's your crutch? I'm telling you, you need one." That's the whole problem: proud people don't see [that] they need a crutch. You know, God's standard is exactly opposite of the world's standard. Those who see themselves as great sinners, as the chief of all sinners [see 1 Timothy 1:15], as the dregs of the earth, as unable, as weak—those are the people who have great thoughts about themselves. This just goes so contrary to the world, which says, "Oh, man, you're a good person. You are great." You look in the mirror every morning and you say, "You are god!" You can be your own whatever, just think it hard enough and make yourself that.

[On the other hand,] a believer, after coming to Christ, after being saved by grace, and being broken by the Spirit, sees his sin, he sees his need for Christ, he knows he's headed for hell, he knows that he deserves to go to hell, he sees the gospel, God's Spirit helps him understand the gospel, he repents, he believes [and] his life is changed. [After all that] you would think, "Man, he's never going back there to 'I'm great' again." [However], R. Kent Hughes says Christians often get things totally upside down. He compares them to the dog and the cat. He says, "When a person first comes to Christ, they're like the dog. The dog is pet by his master, and the dog wags its tail, and says, 'My master is God!' But the cat, when the master

pets the cat, the cat says, ‘*I am God.*’ (You all know it’s true if you have a cat.)

What’s interesting about that is in order to be saved, you have to be like the dog. There is no way to get saved unless you’re like the dog—unless you see God for who He is, and see yourself for who you are. And yet, how often, and how quickly after being saved and supposedly growing in the Lord, do we become like the cat? We actually begin to think that we are great because God has given us grace we don’t deserve. Now, is that twisted or what? Yet here we are. That’s what happens.

We need to ask ourselves: Why do we want to be great? All of us struggle with this. You hear somebody sing who is just an incredible singer, and you think, “I wish I could sing like that.” Or somebody plays an instrument [beautifully, and you think], “I wish I could play an instrument like that.” Or somebody [does] some incredible work of art, “I wish I could do that.” Or [you see] some brainiac who invented some real complex thing, [and you think], “Man, I wish I could do that.” You want to be great like that person is great. Why? See, you can’t administer the cure unless you know the motive because motive is everything. Motives are what drive the action. You can have somebody who wants to be godly for a godly reason and somebody who wants to be godly for an ungodly reason because of the motive of the heart. You have to finish this sentence: “I want to be great because. . .” Why? Why is that?

Do you want to have the world and the devil fall in love with you? Do you want [to be] great so people [say], “Oh! You’re great! You are special. Obviously you’re more important than me. Your life is not a waste. I wish I could be like you”? And, man, if we could have some other great person say that to us, whew, we’ve arrived, because now we’re really great because somebody else who is great [said we’re great] and they know because they’re great. And that’s great. Or maybe you want to be great because you want riches so that you don’t have to really trust in God. When it gets down to it, you’re tired of scraping by because when you’re scraping by you have to keep going to God, saying, “Help me, help me, help me,” day after day

and month after month, and you know what? If you were rich you wouldn't have to trust God.

Or maybe you want to influence the world for Christ and you want to be really godly—a super-great preacher or a writer. Why? Why do you want to do that? Well, doing great things for Christ is great as long as your motive isn't, "I'm going to do these great things for Christ so other people will look at me and say, 'Man, you're great for Christ!' Thank you. Thank you."

You see, the Twelve *were* special, when you think about it. Out of all the people who were alive then, only twelve were chosen to be Jesus' apostles and they were the Twelve. That makes them kind of special. Only *they* were specially trained by Jesus, only *they* got to spend all that quality time with Jesus, only *they* got to witness some of His greatest miracles, like the calming of the sea [see Matthew 8:26 and Mark 4:39]. They were the first to receive miraculous powers. And so, that made them unique, and special, and great because of what *God* did, not because of who they were. The grace of God was great in them, we might say. But who called whom? Who chose whom before the foundation of the world [see Ephesians 1:4]? Who trained whom? Who gave whom the spiritual gifts? See, that was all God. That didn't have anything to do with them.

I mean, what if, after church, you saw two women arguing about who was the most beautiful. [One says,] "Look at my nose."

"Yes, but I didn't have mine operated on."

"Well, mine isn't either. But look at my complexion."

"Oh, yes, well obviously you had a choice of your genetics." See, that would be idiotic because you know what? You had nothing to do with how you look. God gave you your looks.

[Or], you're at school and you hear one student boasting, "Oh, yeah, I'm a better student than you [are]. I've got straight A pluses."

OK, so where did you get your brain from? Where did you get your family from, that family that supports you to be a good student? How come you aren't in Ethiopia right now, sitting on the dirt with a distended belly? Hmm.

[Or,] you're sitting at a coffee shop and you overhear someone say, "Yeah, you know what? I have the most awesome spiritual gifts. I think I am the best teacher in our whole church." Whoa! Well, that's something to boast about because obviously you did that, right? Anything we have worth boasting about comes from Whom? God.

Turn to 1 Corinthians 4. Just to give you a little background here, the Corinthian church was struggling with the sin of personality cults. There were two major figures: the Apostle Paul, who was no spiritual wimp, and a man named Apollos, who is described in Acts as a man mighty in word and deed [see Acts 18:24]. So we've got these two hard-core Bible guys. The difference was [that] Paul wasn't all that eloquent and Apollos was, but Paul was an apostle, and Apollos was not. And so, both of these men had some influence in the Corinthian church, and it had divided the church.

[Some would say,] "I'm of Apollos. He discipled me. I like his preaching better."

And somebody [else would say], "Well, I'm of Paul. And you know what? Paul's the one who led me to the Lord, and he's an apostle, he writes inspired books." This was the kind of thing that was going on. The church was being divided between Apollos and Paul. [But] Apollos and Paul were both on the same side. They weren't creating this; the *people* were doing this.

So, Paul says this in 1 Corinthians 4:1[-2]: "Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy." Paul just says, "Listen, you want to think a great thought of me? Think of me as a servant, a slave—a servant and a slave [who] is entrusted with a stewardship, a stewardship that requires faithfulness." Verse[s] 3[-4]:

But to me it is a very small thing that I may be examined by you, or by any human court; in fact, I do not even examine myself. For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord.

He [says], “Listen, you think I’m great, or [that] Apollos is great, [but] we’re just servants. We’re servants entrusted with a stewardship. I want you to know something: it doesn’t matter what you think of me, or anybody else thinks of me, or what I think of me. What matters is what God thinks of me because His judgment is perfect.” [Verse] 5:

Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men’s hearts; and then each man’s praise will come to him from God.

He [says], “You know what? [If] you want to find out who’s the godly guy, whose motives are correct, it’s not going to be [found by] looking at their outsides. There’s only one Person who sees men’s hearts, and that Person is God, so just chill out, wait until judgment day, and then we’ll find out who is really great.” Verse[s] 6[-7]:

Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes, so that in us you may learn not to exceed what is written, so that no one of you will become arrogant in behalf of one against the other. For who regards you as superior? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?

There [are] three questions here at the end [of the passage]. The first here is: “For who regards you as superior?” And the implied answer is, since he has just argued for it, [that] the only person [who] matters is whom? God. So, does God tell you that you’re superior? I don’t think so. And then [Paul] says, “What do you have that you did not receive?” And the implied answer is: nothing. Oh. “And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?” Oh. Huh. That is interesting.

[Imagine that] you're dirt poor, [and] some distant relative dies and leaves you a fortune. [Then] you walk around, going, "Look at this fortune that I've gained by my own power!" No, that was given to you, pal, and you're a bad steward of it. God is the One who gives us all the things that really make us great in His eyes. And you know what? God is doing some great things here at Calvary Bible Church. He has raised up some great people with some great gifts. People are coming to the Lord, people are growing in the Lord, we have some great programs. [There are] a lot of great things [happening]. But listen, all of that is given to us by the Lord, and not because we deserve it. [It's] not because we're good, it's because *He's* good. And so, let us not boast and think ourselves great because we have received that which we don't deserve.

The world takes what it receives by God's grace and then it boasts as if it had not received it from God. Have you ever [heard] an athlete say something like this: "I am the greatest!" when really that athlete is the athlete that he is because there was this Person who knit him together in his mother's womb?

You know, [someone may say,] "Our church is better than your church."

"Oh? Is this by *your* works? By your fleshly deeds?"

"Well, no, by the grace of God."

"Well, isn't grace undeserved?"

"Well, yeah."

"And unearned?"

"Yeah."

"And doesn't God give it to whom He wants?"

"Yeah."

"Not for any reason than because of His own free will?"

"Well, yeah."

"Well, then, be quiet because you don't have anything to boast for. You can't boast in something that someone else did unless you give that person the credit. That's fine—boast in the Lord."

So you need to check out the motives of your heart. You know, we sing all sorts of songs, [like], “All Glory, Laud, and Honor to Thee, Redeemer King,”¹ but the question is: Are we living it? Are we living that way?

The psalmist said in Psalm 34:2-3, “My soul will make its boast in the LORD; The humble will hear it and rejoice. O magnify the LORD with me, And let us exalt His name together.” That is what we are to be doing: exalting *His* name together. Jeremiah, the prophet, says this in Jeremiah 9:23-24. This is kind of interesting because [it] seems like a contradiction, but listen:

Thus says the LORD, ”Let not a wise man boast of *his* wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of *his* might, let not a rich man boast of *his* riches; but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things,” declares the LORD. [emphasis added]

Delights in what things? He delights in those who boast that they have come to know the Lord. And how does that happen? By works? [No.] It always happens by what? Grace. It’s the only way it has ever happened. No one has ever *worked* his way into salvation. So [if] you want to boast, you can say, “God saved me. I ran away, he lassoed me, tripped me up, hog-tied me, and [dragged] me back to Jesus.” That’s how it is. No one comes to the Son unless the Father draws him—pulls him against his will, really—Jesus says in John 6[:44]. And so, you can boast in the grace of God, you can boast in God, and His goodness, and what He’s doing. That’s fine, but don’t take what happens by God’s grace in your life or in this church and take that credit upon yourself. That is ungodly greatness.

So, what is the cure? The cure is—second [lesson on greatness]—[to] seek godly greatness. Look at [Luke 9:]47: “But Jesus, knowing what they were thinking in their heart.” Just stop there for a second. This is one of

¹See “All Glory, Laud and Honor” by Theodulph of Orleans, c. 760-821.

those great passages that really tempts me to preach a whole sermon [just on it]. Think about this: Jesus knew what they were thinking in their hearts. How many people fit into [the] category of people who can read other people's minds? One. God is the only one. And you know what? It's a good thing that only God knows what we are thinking because if we could ever know what somebody was thinking, we would hate him in a minute.

I mean, just think about this. [Do] you ever think about this? [I saw an episode of] *Star Trek*, and they had Betazoids on there who could read people's minds. I thought, "Sure, they'd be offended in a minute." Imagine just coming into church here, and you sit down in the pew and God [makes it so that] all of a sudden you can read the mind of the person next to you—that stranger. Think about that.

You kind of look over, and [think], "Man, what an ugly dress!" You don't *say* it, but you think it.

And they're eavesdropping in on your thoughts, and they think, "Well, you're no prize yourself, pal."

Pretty soon, your mental war escalates into this mental screaming match. And you know what? There's nowhere to go. You cannot hide, you can't pout. [With] every negative thought you think, they're [gasping], and you're [gasping at everything they're thinking, and you think], "I didn't know women thought thoughts like that!" [The other person hears everything, and] man, you're just laid open. And they're laid open to you, and you're just [gasping], and you just see each other's black, dark hearts and your black, dark thoughts, and you're just shocked.

You run away from each other, but you can't get away because you hear them running away, [thinking] "Oh! What a wicked person!"

And you're thinking, "Oh! What a wicked person!"

And they're thinking, "Oh, yeah?"

"Oh, yeah," [you respond]. And you just can't get away.

We are what Proverbs 26:23 says we are: "Like an earthen vessel overlaid with silver dross Are burning lips and a wicked heart." The picture here is [that] you've got this old, cheap mud pot, and then you get a little bit of

silver sludge, and put it on the outside so it looks silver, but it's dirt. [The psalmist] goes on to say, "He who hates disguises it with his lips, But he lays up deceit in his heart" [26:24].

[It's like saying,] "Oh, nice dress," [when you're actually thinking], "That's the ugliest thing I've ever seen."

[Or], "Oh, good day!" [while thinking], "I hope you drop dead." You know, "disguises it with his lips."

[Psalm 26:]25: "When he speaks graciously, do not believe him, For there are seven abominations in his heart."

[This is like someone saying], "Hi! I would like to give you a good deal," [but thinking]. "I really want to scam you." People are that way. We're wicked. Think about somebody knowing your pouting, knowing your thoughts, knowing your lustings after them or other people. It would be so scary.

We would probably stop and [say], "They're just like me!" And you know what? God sees all of your thoughts all the time. That is scary because God can do something about it—big time. He can see your thoughts all the time—twenty-four hours a day, He taps in and watches all your vain imaginations as your heart runs riot over the whole spectrum of wickedness.

Jesus knew what [the disciples] were thinking, which means He knew all their evil thoughts. So whenever He asked them, "What were you talking about?" He knew. He knew that, and He knew a lot more than that. He knew all their little angers and murderous thoughts toward one another along the way because of their bickering. To me this is one of the great arguments for God being all-powerful, for who but an all-powerful God could endure to tap in to the corrupt brains of all mankind and listen to that all the time? Especially a just and holy God who would be just in stomping us into dust because of our sin, and yet He holds back. I mean, that is omnipotence.

Now, look at [Luke 9:]47[-48]: "But Jesus, knowing what they were thinking in their heart, took a child and stood him by His side, and said to them, 'Whoever receives this child in My name receives Me.'" Now, what do you suppose that Jesus meant when He said, "Receives this child

in My name”? What does He mean by that? Is He saying we should all go out and find [that] child, and that child only? I mean, [he’s dead now, so should we] dig up his body, and find him? No, He couldn’t mean that. Do you think He means just find any little person and receive him? [Is that] what God wants us to do, just go find a kid, [or] get involved in the children’s ministry? (I think that’s Brock [Bolde]’s interpretation.) Or, are children here a picture of something? Yes, that’s the correct answer. When Jesus refers to “children,” He is usually speaking of those who are helpless, weak, humble, and trusting. That’s what children are like. Jesus, speaking of believers in a prayer to the Father, [says in] Luke 10:21:

At that very time He rejoiced greatly in the Holy Spirit, and said, ”I praise You, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants. Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in Your sight.”

Now, who are these infants He’s talking about? Well, if you look down at verse 23, [it says]:

Turning to the disciples, He said privately, ”Blessed are the eyes which see the things you see, for I say to you, that many prophets and kings wished to see the things which you see, and did not see them, and to hear the things which you hear, and did not hear them.”

Who are the infants? The disciples. Infants? “Little babies” [is the term] He uses there. They’re little babies. How could these grown men, these big, burly fishermen be little babies? Well, in a spiritual sense, that’s what they were. They were children of God because you have to become trusting, humble, broken, and weak in order to receive Jesus. If you don’t receive Jesus in that way, you don’t receive Him because those who come to Him must be that way.

Turn over to Luke 17. I'll just give you a couple of examples here of how [Jesus] uses this. Luke 17:1-2:

He said to His disciples, "It is inevitable that stumbling blocks come, but woe to him through whom they come! It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea, than that he would cause one of these little ones to stumble."

Is Jesus talking about infants and babies here? Little kids? No, He's talking about believers—to cause one of God's little ones, God's children, believers, to stumble. Turn over to [Luke] 18:15. Jesus says: "And they were bringing even their babies to Him so that He would touch them, but when the disciples saw it, they began rebuking them." Now, here are little babies, little infants, young children being brought to Jesus as [a time of] dedication. Jesus seems [to the people] to be a great prophet, [so they ask] "Would you mind blessing [our children]?" That's what's going on here.

Look at verse 16, though: "But Jesus called for them, saying, 'Permit the children to come to Me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.'" Now, notice [that] he doesn't say "It belongs to these," but "*such as* these." This is a simile [meaning] to those who are similar to these. Verse 17: "Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God *like* a child" [emphasis added], simile—in a childlike way—"will not enter it at all." This is the common way that Jesus refers to children. Believers are like children in that when God's grace comes upon them, they see themselves as sinful, as weak, as unable to save themselves, and they trust completely in Jesus to save them. That makes them a "child of God." It makes them one of His "little ones." And so, that's the only kind of person [who] comes to Christ. You must become like a humble, trusting child.

Now, go back to our text [in Luke 9:47]. Jesus says, "Whoever receives this child," little one, believer, "in My name." Now, what is that [phrase "in

My name”]? It means to invoke the name of Jesus, to say, “I’m doing this in Jesus’ name, I’m giving Him the credit, the glory, for what’s happening here.” In Matthew’s account in Matthew 18:2-5, we read:

And He called a child to Himself and set him before them, and said, ”Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever receives one such child in My name receives Me.”

Speaking of those who have been converted from adulthood—trusting in themselves—to childhood—trusting in Christ—the operative term [here is] “humble themselves.” That’s what it means to come to Jesus. Matthew’s account is crystal clear about what Jesus is saying.

Look at the middle of [Luke 9:]48: “Whoever receives Me receives Him who sent Me.” Notice the divine commission here that is alluded to, [which] says Jesus was sent. “Whoever receives Me receives Him who sent Me”—Jesus was sent by somebody else—the Father—to come into the world, to live that life, and [to] die for sinners. The sequence is pretty simple. If you receive a spiritually helpless, weak, trusting-in-Jesus person, i.e., a Christian, you are receiving Jesus because [that person] is His child. He dwells within [that person]. This is exactly what we see in the judgment of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25:34-40, where Jesus says to the sheep, the believers, who are on His right:

Then the King will say to those on His right, “Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I

was in prison, and you came to Me.” Then the righteous will answer Him, “Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You something to drink? And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? When did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?” The King will answer and say to them, “Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.”

All these texts talk about Christians loving other Christians. Jesus says [that] the world will know that you are My disciples by what? Your love for one another [see John 13:35]. Love is service, self-sacrifice, for one another. Look at the end of [Luke 9]:48: “for the one who is least among all of you, this is the one who is great.” Now, what is Jesus saying here? You have to be poor? You have to be physically ill? You have to be short? You have to be young? What is He after here?

Well, let’s just say you were someplace [like] McDonald’s, [and] you ran into a billionaire. You started talking to him, [and] you decided to have lunch together. You didn’t know the guy was rich, but you shared the gospel and the guy just totally broke down, gave his life to Christ, repented, and believed. Now, the guy is a billionaire. He owns property, he owns companies, he’s got employees, he’s got money. He is rich, he’s famous, and he’s powerful. But I’ll tell you this: spiritually speaking, he has been converted. He is now a child before God because he sees himself as a sinner who is unable to save himself. He has humbled himself and he has trusted in Jesus to save him. And so, even though on the outside, yes, he is a great, rich man, and yes, he has a lot of power in the world’s eyes, now he begins to have true spiritual greatness. Why? [It is] Because he has become the least and has entered into the kingdom of God. Jesus is talking about that. Don’t think He’s talking about a bunch of physical things because sometimes when we have a lot [of material wealth], we think that our riches somehow make us spiritually more important.

[Do] you remember the church of Laodicea? It was kind of like the church of Beverly Hills. In Revelation 3:17-18, Jesus says this: “Because you say, ‘I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing,’” this is their attitude. [They say,] “Listen, you know, Laodicea is an affluent place. We live in nice houses here, and we’re rich. And, God, we don’t really need anything from You because we’ve got it squared away.” Now, of course, they’re overlooking the fact that all that they had was given to them by God. Jesus goes on to say, “And you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked.” Now, obviously, they are not that way physically, they are that way what? Spiritually. You know what? Everybody is. Everybody is that way. We are all born that way, and we stay that way until we come to Christ. The only difference is [that] some realize it and get saved, and some don’t and never get saved.

So Jesus says:

I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see.

Of course, Jesus is the one who is offering all of those things to them. Physically they were rich, and powerful, and respected in the community and the world, and yet spiritually they were blind, wretched, and naked because they hadn’t become humble, trusting in Jesus. [They had not become] servants.

[In] Mark 9:35, the parallel text to ours [in Luke 9], says, “If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all.” You know, what is amazing is that here in our text, Jesus hits this pretty hard, but He does it again in Luke 14:11, after the disciples decide to all grab for places of honor at a dinner. He sees them all jockeying for position for the head of the table. The disciples! So He has to tell them a parable to try and teach them about humility. And then, four chapters later, in Luke 18:14, Jesus tells

another parable of the Pharisee and the publican [that spoke] against those who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and viewed others with contempt because they [thought of themselves as] great spiritual giants and others weren't. The punch line of both parables is directed at those seeking greatness, and it's this: "For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted" [Luke 18:14]. In other words, [if] you exalt yourself now, in this world, [and] you think you're something great in this world, I'm telling you, later on you're going to be low, low, low below the flames. But, if you see yourself as low in this world, and humble yourself in this world, and trust God in this world, [then] in the life to come, God will exalt you.

People, [these parables are given] two more times after our text. You would think, "OK, chapter 9, [the disciples have] got[ten] it. Chapter 14, they got it. Chapter 18, they got it." So, by chapter 22 they've graduated[, right?] Let's look there. This is in the Upper Room Discourse [at] the Passover, [after which] Jesus is going to die. He's on the threshold of being betrayed. Luke 22:24: "And there arose also a dispute among them as to which one of them was regarded to be greatest." And they're still arguing about who's great. "And He said to them," verse 25[-27]:

"The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who have authority over them are called 'Benefactors.' But it is not this way with you, but the one who is the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like the servant. For who is greater, the one who reclines at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at the table?"

They're all [saying], "Yeah, of course it is! Man, the great guy is the one that everybody is waiting on hand and foot." And Jesus [says], "But I am among you as the one who serves." Oh. You see, they just couldn't get it. We get so much wrong, opposite, negative, worldly input from the world about what it means to be great, that we just kind of don't get it. And, man, [the disciples] got pounded [with] it.

I distilled [these texts] down into four false motivations for being great. Here they are: 1) When you are great, you don't have to trust Jesus completely or even at all. That's false. Everybody needs to [trust Jesus] or they don't get to heaven. 2) When you are great, you don't have to humble yourself. Why? [Because] you're great! 3) When you are great, you don't have to associate with lowly people. You just associate with other great people, other rich people, other famous people. When do you see in the tabloids pictures of movie stars hanging out with people like us? [They would be] like, "Oh, man, get out of here. My bodyguard will kill you." 4) When you are great, you don't have to serve others, but they serve you. That's what the world thinks is great. You don't have to wait in line, you pay your way, get the best seats, the best attention. You buy everything you want. Everybody serves you. You're the center of attention. You get accolades. People want your signature. You've got everything. You're great.

Well, for a little, tiny bit you might be, but those who are proud and think they're too good—even in the church—to serve, or get involved, they have a problem. They're thinking, "My time is too valuable for Jesus. My resources are too valuable for Jesus. I can't be obeying Jesus in this area. I mean, I'm me." Those people don't get to heaven.

[The] third [lesson on greatness is]: Don't be jealous of others who aren't serving Christ. Look at [Luke 9:]49: "John answered and said, 'Master, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name; and we tried to prevent him because he does not follow along with us.'" Apparently, someone was having success casting demons out in the name of Jesus even though he was not following Jesus and the disciples around the countryside. Imagine that! Of course, you remember what happened the last time the *disciples* tried to cast out a demon: they failed big time. And so, here, the spiritually elite, the called, the trained, and the divinely bestowed disciples, who couldn't cast the last demon out that they tried [to cast out], are watching some guy who they don't even know, who isn't even following [Jesus], and that guy is [succeeding in casting out demons].

What do you think they're thinking? "Hey. What's going on? That's our job! Hey, hey, hey! Cut it out. We're the disciples, Jesus gave *us* the authority to cast out demons, not you."

"Well, why is it working, then?"

"We don't know, but we want you to quit because you aren't even following Jesus."

"Oh. Do you have to follow Jesus in order to cast out demons in His name?"

"Well, [we] think so. You better quit."

See, they're inventing laws now. Jesus never said, "Thou shalt follow Me to cast out demons." But they're kind of jealous and envious because this guy, who they don't even know, is having success, and they aren't.

So, Jesus says [in] verse 50: "But Jesus said to him, 'Do not hinder him; for he who is not against you is for you.'" Mark includes some interesting comments, where Jesus basically says, "Listen, there is going to come a time when nobody is going to be able to do any sort of miracle unless they're a true believer. But right now? Leave him alone." Which implies that during this time, before Jesus' death, anybody who invoked the name of Jesus could do certain things. Jesus wanted press from everybody. So, as long as [someone] invoked His name and gave Him credit, the guy was able to do the miracle.

But the point that Jesus is making is this: Listen, you're either for evil or you're against evil. If you're against evil, you're for Jesus because He's against evil. That's all He's saying. "Listen," He's saying, "He who is not against you is for you." This guy [who was casting out demons in Jesus' name] wasn't saying Jesus was a false teacher or [that] the disciples were wrong. He wasn't bashing them. He wasn't doing anything [negative toward Jesus or the disciples]. The only thing he was doing was opposing demons. And Jesus says [to the disciples], "Stop it! [Leave] the guy alone!"

Cicero, speaking to Caesar in 46 BC, captured the same thought when he said this: "Though we held all to be your opponents but those on our side,

you counted all as your adherents who were not against you.”² That’s kind of like the half-empty, half-full perspective, where some people, when they become spiritually elite, look at other people and think, “You know what? They’re half empty.” Instead of, “Man, they’re getting there—they’re half full.” It’s just an attitude thing. We need to be careful that we don’t judge others and have this intolerance because they aren’t doing certain things we’re doing. Now, I’m not saying that we need to tolerate sin, or accept false doctrine. The Bible is clear that we are to refute those who contradict [God’s Word], we are to expose the truth, [and] we are to correct those in error. That is crystal clear.

But when it comes to Christian libert[ies, whether it is music styles, worship service format, dress, hairstyles, we need to recognize that other people may have different views than we do]. [Take] modesty. What is that? Does anybody know [what] that [is]? You know, [it] would be a great thing to have [a] perfect standard of modesty. What [would] that [be]? A black cloak reaching to the ground, with two slits [for] the eyes? The Bible doesn’t say. It just says “be modest” [see 1 Timothy 2:9]. I’m sure that the way some of us are dressed now, if we were to go back in time, people would scream, “Prostitute!” because [certain people] don’t have a shawl on, or whatever, that reaches the ground.

You see, we have these standards, and when there is a liberty, when it’s personal conviction, then we need to cut other people slack. You know, hey, we preach for an hour here most of the time, [or]close to it. In some churches you hear the twenty-minute wonder. And, you can think to yourself, “Man, that church has it all wrong.” Well, maybe six months ago they were only preaching [for] ten [minutes]. They’re doing twice as [well] as they were! We need to be careful not to look down on other people because of things that they do differently, but which don’t fall outside the realm of biblical command and sound doctrine.

Hughes, in his commentary on Luke says:

²Taken from *Pro Qunito Ligario*, p. 33.

It has a telltale aroma, and others can smell it, especially those outside the church. Sometimes it is an acrid air of condescension or subtle, smiling hostility, or aloofness, or clubbish exclusivity, or doubt about God's blessing on all who are not in the approved circle. This stench has kept multitudes away from the church and, more important, a knowledge of Christ.

Yeah, that's true. It's kind of like, "Hey, we're sorry about *you*. Too bad you go to *that* church." And so, let us be careful to encourage those other churches. If God has given us resources, then let us use those resources to help other churches who want some help. And if they don't want help, then let's pray for them.

It's true that Jesus' words, "Do not hinder him; for he who is not against you is for you" [Luke 9:50] have been used by those who want to promote what is called "ecumenicalism." I'm sorry about the big jargon. If you don't know what that [term] means, I'm going to tell you. Ecumenicalism is kind of like this: as long as you call yourself a Christian, let's just set aside all doctrinal standards and get together [and] pool our resources to fight the ills of society. [We'll] fight world poverty, and fight abortion, and [when we] get together [we won't] talk about doctrine [or] sin. And don't be bothered by our homosexual pastor, and don't be bothered by the fact that we let people live together and we don't deal with it, and don't be bothered by the fact that we deny the resurrection.

No, that's not what [Jesus] is talking about [in Luke 9:50]. That's not what He's talking about. He's just saying, "Listen, if you have somebody who is doing good and he's not against the truth, then don't bother him just because he does something in a different way." But we know He's not saying [to] accept [that person] in his error because there are a lot of commands in the Bible that say [to] refute those who contradict [and] expose those who are in error. [There are] lots of commands about battling for the truth, and guarding the truth, and giving a defense.

Turn to Luke 11:17. Here, Jesus is defending Himself against false accusations by the religious leaders who are jealous, envious, and scared because they can't do what Jesus is doing. Jesus is telling them, "Listen, I'm not doing this by Satan's power. If Satan were against himself, his kingdom would fall. And so, if I'm casting out demons, fighting against Satan, by the power of Satan, then that means Satan is fighting against Satan, and that doesn't make any sense." And then, He says this in verse 23: "He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me, scatters." Now, how does that reconcile with, "He who is not against you is for you" even though he's not with you? Those are two antithetical statements. They are antithetical. Well, when you see things like this, we know that what is king? Context. Context is king. And in our text, Jesus is just saying, "All these people are doing is opposing demons, and that's fine. They aren't against us. They aren't overthrowing our truth. They aren't trying to say [that] what I'm teaching is wrong. They aren't promoting error. They're just casting out demons in My name. Fine." In this other text, Jesus *is* being opposed by those who hate Him and therefore hate the truth [and] hate the Father, and Jesus says, "If you don't gather to me, you will be scattered."

Turn to Ephesians 4. [There is] one more example [there]. Ephesians 4 is another text that those who want to promote unity at all costs will go to. They like to go [to] verse[s] 1[-2], where Paul says:

Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

They say, "Ah, ha! There you are: tolerance. You accept me and my aberrant view, and I will accept you and your aberrant view. Even though we're antithetical in the ways we believe you get to heaven, [we have] different gospels, different standards, [and] different beliefs about the Bible—all that stuff is different—it's OK. We need to tolerate one another." But,

you know what? That's not what that is saying because you need to read a couple more verses.

Look at verse 4, [where] Paul goes on to say: "There is one body" of Christ. Now, that's pretty exclusive, isn't it? One is the loneliest number. I think Lennon said that. "And one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling." There is only one hope of salvation. There is "one Lord," Jesus is the way, the truth and the life [see John 14:6] "one faith," that is, one body of doctrine, "one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all" [Luke 11:5-6]. Now, that is about as dogmatically narrow as you can get. [If] you fit into that, [then] be tolerant. If you don't believe that, you are outside the faith. So, Jesus and Paul are not advocating a free-for-all of "Let's get together and just ignore doctrine." Doctrine is what we are to be unified on. We are unified by the *truth* of the gospel, not the rejection of the gospel in order to do some sort of social good.

All right, what have we learned this morning? One: Don't seek worldly greatness. Why? For all those reasons we looked at, but basically because the only thing you have worth boasting of is something God has given you. And, if God hasn't given it to you, you conjured it up by your own wicked heart and it's not worth boasting about. [Two:] Seek heavenly greatness, which is to become like a child, trust[ing] God completely, liv[ing] for Him, and serv[ing] others. And, three: Don't be jealous of others who are doing ministry differently, as long as they fit within the pale of truth and sound doctrine. So they have a different style of music, or so they wear different clothes, or they're more casual, or they wear tuxedos every Sunday. [That's] fine. That doesn't make them ungodly. Rejoice in [those differences], encourage [them, and] say, "Way to go, brother. Way to go, sister. Get 'em!"

In about AD 300, a wealthy Christian couple in Cappadocia gave birth to a boy named Basil. They sent him to the finest schools in Constantinople and Athens. Basil graduated with honors. He was proud of himself and dreamed of being a great public figure, and he told his sister [that]. But his sister, who had led him to faith in Christ, counseled humility, saying, "You

need to be humble. It's better to be faithful before God, than famous before men." And he thought about that. And so, Basil, with his great intellect, and his great wealth, labored diligently all his life to set up orphanages, hospitals, [and other] places to help the needy. He served people, [and] labored until he basically killed himself at age fifty, serving other people. And you know what he's called today? Basil the Great.³

When we live our lives here on earth and we're serving people, and serving people, and serving people, and all the important people of the world just kind of look over our heads—they don't even notice who we are, they don't even know who we are, [they think] we're just religious fanatics, Bible thumpers—just remember, not too long from now, there is going to be the great reversal and those who are on the top in this world, most of them will be in the lowest dungeon of hell. And those who we [see who seem so destitute in this world, and we] think, "Oh, that poor old woman," [they are the ones who are] going to be on Jesus' right hand.

The disciples are going to go, "Who is that old woman up there?"

"Oh, that's the prophetess, Anna, who served in the temple day and night with prayers and fasting for forty-six years, never leaving" [see Luke 2:36-40].

"Oh." [People like that are] great because they saw themselves as lowly and because they served others diligently. So let's be known for that and not for spiritual elitence. Let's pray.

Father, we thank You for what we learned in this text. And, Father, I just pray that you would help all of us to trust You, to rely on Your grace, to live out this text. Father, we certainly need to improve in this area. I know I do. I just pray that you would humble us all and help us to trust in You, and help us to use the great grace that You have given us not as a means of boasting in ourselves, but in You. And, Father, that we might use those means to bless other people. Father, help us to do that for Your glory, Your honor, and Your praise. We pray in Christ's name, Amen.

³Taken from *On This Day*, Jan. 2.

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