

## "Not Really About You" - Mark 9:30-41

We live in a culture that celebrates self-promotion. It seems like everyone is shouting, "Look at me!" In the world of sports, seasoned professionals celebrate every good play by calling attention to themselves. Every time they score a touchdown or hit a 3-pointer, you would think it was the first time in their life to do so.

I don't blame them, because it is what our culture values. You can read books about how to "improve your brand." It's all about marketing. Not just about marketing products; it's about marketing self. I'm better than the next guy. You should be celebrating me! Buy my jersey, buy my books, buy my shoes, buy the kind of car I drive.

But it's not just our culture. This thing is hard-wired into the DNA of fallen humanity. We are dominated by a quest to feed our pride, to increase our self-esteem. We've even manipulated ourselves into believing that all our social malignancies are caused by a lack of self-esteem. In other words, "I engage in destructive behaviors because I just don't feel good about myself." That's so backwards! Listen, you don't feel good about yourself because you engage in destructive behaviors, because you refuse to listen to your Creator.

I really saw this when I worked in public education. There was, and is a concerted effort to artificially boost kids' self-esteem, to insulate them against the possibility of failure. As a result, we have a whole bunch of kids who have been transformed from being proud of their accomplishments to being proud despite their lack of accomplishment. Every kid is a winner. Every kid gets a trophy. Kids don't fail; the system fails kids.

That is not the Biblical model. As Christians, we are not to call attention to ourselves; we are to call attention to Jesus. We are not to boast in our accomplishments; We are to glory in what He accomplishes in and through us.

*But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.  
(Galatians 6:14)*

God is looking for humble people, people who understand they would be nothing without Him.

*He has shown you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you But to do justly, To love mercy, **And to walk humbly with your God?** (Micah 6:8)*

And so, Jesus teaches us humility. He does so by precept and God's word is filled with exhortations to humility. Here is just a few:

*For You will save the humble people, But will bring down haughty looks.  
(Psalms 18:27)*

*The humble He guides in justice, And the humble He teaches His way.  
(Psalms 25:9)*

*For the LORD takes pleasure in His people; He will beautify the humble with salvation. (Psalms 149:4)*

*Surely He scorns the scornful, But gives grace to the humble. (Proverbs 3:34)*

*"Blessed are the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.  
(Matthew 5:3)*

*Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up. (James 4:10)*

*Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, (1 Peter 5:6)*

I could go on and on with precept after precept.

Jesus also teaches us humility by example. Understand; Jesus is the eternal Son of God. Yet He set aside His glory to be born as a human baby. It's what we celebrate this time of year! And then He took His perfect, human life to the cross to pay the penalty for our sin. Can you begin to understand how humiliating it is to be stripped naked and hung on a cross to die? Everyone can see your suffering, your agony; you are totally exposed. It is humiliating for any human, but Jesus is God incarnate! Our Jesus,

*... who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. (Philippians 2:6-8)*

So Jesus teaches us humility by precept and by example, but He also teaches us humility through experience. Have you ever gone through a humbling experience? Of course you have; we all have. They can be really, really painful, but it is only when you come to the end of yourself, where your latent pride is flushed down the toilet, that you can truly trust God.

This is a lesson that Jesus' disciples had to learn too. As we pick up the story, they had already become absolutely convinced that Jesus was the Son of God and the promised Messiah. But they were clinging to the expectation that Messiah would be a conquering King, that He would throw off the yoke of Roman rule, that He would establish Israel at the head of the nations, that they, as His closest disciples, would be given positions of power, wealth and honor in His administration. That was their expectation.

But Jesus was getting closer and closer to the cross. His death was only a few months away. So, He was focused on teaching them, getting them ready ... even though they would not really be ready until after Pentecost. He needed to teach them that it wasn't really about them. And it's not really about you, either!

So let's go to the Word.

*Then they departed from there and passed through Galilee, and He did not want anyone to know it. (Mark 9:30)*

Remember, Jesus and His disciples had been way up North around Caesarea Philippi. They are now traveling South through the province of Galilee. The reason He didn't want anyone to know it was because He was focused on giving intense instruction to His disciples. He didn't want the distraction of the crowds anymore. His public ministry in Galilee was over. His Apostles needed to understand what was about to happen, even though they wouldn't actually get it until after His death, resurrection, and after Jesus sent the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

*For He taught His disciples and said to them, "The Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of men, and they will kill Him. And after He is killed, He will rise the third day." But they did not understand this saying, and were afraid to ask Him. (Mark 9:31-32)*

Could Jesus have been any more explicit? "I'm going to be betrayed. I will be delivered into the hands of men and I will be killed, but after three days, I will rise again."

They didn't get it. They didn't understand the saying. They simply couldn't process it because this was so far outside of their understanding of Messiah. Everything they had been taught pointed to a conquering King. They could not process the idea of a suffering Servant, even though Scripture clearly predicted it.

*But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed. (Isaiah 53:5)*

I'm pretty sure none of their rabbis spent much time with that part of scripture.

Not only didn't they get it ... they were afraid to get it. They were afraid to ask, overcome by fear. Sometimes, when faced with a really difficult, unsavory event, we might all go into denial. I've seen it happen so many times, that mother who refuses to believe that her son has died in an automobile accident. "It can't be," she cries. It is a defense mechanism, protecting us from overwhelming grief. But facts are facts.

*Then He came to Capernaum. And when He was in the house He asked them, "What was it you disputed among yourselves on the road?" But they kept silent, for on the road they had disputed among themselves who would be the greatest. (Mark 9:33-34)*

Remember, Capernaum had been their headquarters during the Great Galilean ministry. And this very well could have been Peter's house. Scripture doesn't say this explicitly, but it would make sense. The point is, they were by themselves, and Jesus spoke to them privately.

Apparently, the boys had been engaged in a bit of self-promotion. They were arguing about which of them would have the greatest honor when Jesus came into His kingdom. "I'm going to be Chancellor. I'm going to sit at His right hand. No, that will be me. Maybe, but I'm going to sit at His left."

We know that James and John were involved in this nonsense. Not too long after this, they would get their mother involved. I'm sure Peter presumed he would have a high rank. And probably Andrew. But to some degree, all of the disciples were trying to position themselves and apparently, the dispute became quite heated. Jesus called them on it.

Clearly, they were embarrassed, and convicted. Because they wouldn't answer Him. They kept silent. Of course, Jesus knew exactly what they were talking about. It is a fool's errand to try to keep anything secret from God. So Jesus, used the occasion to teach this very important lesson.

*And He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, "If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all." (Mark 9:35)*

That's not the way of the world, is it. But it is the way of the kingdom. It's not about you! It is not about achieving a position of power so you can lord it over everyone else. It is about becoming the servant of all. As Paul writes to the Philippians:

*Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. (Philippians 2:3-4)*

And Jesus provides the perfect example. Remember, He was God, clothed in immaculate glory, but He set it aside to walk the earth among us. Then humbled Himself even to the

point of death. To serve us! To take our filthy sin upon Himself. To grant us an entrance into His kingdom.

Do you want to be great in the kingdom of God? Look for ways to serve others. Look for ways to extend the grace of Jesus to those who need it, even when they don't deserve it because, well, you didn't deserve it!

*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, "Whoever receives one of these little children in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me, receives not Me but Him who sent Me." (Mark 9:36-37)*

Jesus continues to teach us about humility and, of course, is using this little child as an object lesson. In the culture of that day, children really didn't have that much value. They were considered the property of their fathers. Pretty much, they were to be seen, but not heard. That's not to say that their parents didn't love them. They were nurtured and cared for. But little children have no portfolio, no resume, no list of accomplishments. They are not owed anything.

But Jesus said, when you receive this child in My name, you receive Me. When you bless this child, you bless Me. Jesus is telling his disciples to forget all about rank, forget about pre-eminence, forget about your own glory. Get over yourself! Instead, focus your attention on the needs of others, even the needs of someone like this little child, who cannot return anything to you except love and gratitude.

How tender Jesus is with children! It is obvious that kids were clearly comfortable with them.

*But Jesus said, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 19:14)*

And ...

*Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it." (Mark 10:15)*

The lesson must have hit home, at least a little bit. Because John speaks up. And John recalled an incident that must have happened sometime previously. I think he was feeling just a little uncomfortable about it, maybe even a little guilty.

*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." (Mark 9:38)*

Some commentators treat this as a completely different incident, a completely different lesson, but I don't think so. I think it flows logically from this lesson about humility. John, and some of the other disciples had rebuked some guy for casting out a demon. He was thinking, "Hey, this guy isn't one of us! He's not one of Jesus' chosen twelve. What right does he have to do anything in Jesus' name?"

Remember, Jesus didn't just send out the twelve to minister in His name. He also sent out 70 guys, two by two.

*Then the seventy returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name." (Luke 10:17)*

I don't know for sure, but maybe it was one of these 70 that John had forbidden to cast out demons. "Lord, he wasn't part of our in-group!"

*But Jesus said, "Do not forbid him, for no one who works a miracle in My name can soon afterward speak evil of Me. For he who is not against us is on our side. (Mark 9:39-40)*

Jesus is saying, "Look, it's not really about you."

There should never be any spirit of jealousy between servants of Jesus Christ. Canyon Community Church is not in competition with the other churches in our community. As long as they are accurately preaching Jesus Christ and Him crucified, they are not against us; they are with us. They are on our side, the side of Jesus Christ. We might disagree on some doctrinal details and it's okay to discuss those differences with them, like Aquilla and Priscilla did with Apollos, to more accurately explain the way of God. But if people are coming to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ, that is a miracle done in the name of our Lord. If they understand that it is by God's grace we are saved through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone, then we are fellow laborers in His vineyard. They are not against us.

And that is true even if their motivation not completely pure. While Paul was in prison, he wrote this to the Philippians:

*Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from goodwill: The former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains; but the latter out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel. **What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice.** (Philippians 1:15-18)*

Wherever the cause of Jesus Christ is advanced, we must rejoice. It is not about who gets the credit because it is not really about you!

*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. (Mark 9:41)*

You see, when you serve others in the name of Jesus, it isn't about you. It is about glorifying Him, but that doesn't mean you are giving anything up. No! In fact, you will gain more reward than you possibly can imagine. It's why James exhorts us:

*Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up. (James 4:10)*

Pride will cause you to forfeit the very thing the prideful one seeks. Pride seeks honor. Pride seeks self-promotion. Pride focuses on self. Pride rejects God. Pride can cause us to reject the very one who comes to us in the name of Jesus.

You know, I've actually had people tell me not to pray for them, because there are others in far worse shape than they are.

Really?

I've had people refuse benevolent gifts because they were too proud to accept charity ... even though they were in desperate need. Folks, let people bless you in the name of Jesus. Refusing to let folks help you robs them of their heavenly reward.

Pride is devastating. Pride creates exclusivity and destroys unity, but humility gains great heavenly reward. Oh, and be careful about being proud of your humility. As soon as you feel humble, you've blown it. You fail!

*Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by*

*being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. (Philippians 2:1-4)*

It's not really about you; it's about Jesus!