

Christ Community Covenant Church
The Power of Christ Revealed: The Request of James and John: Power!
Pastor Dave Scherrer - February 15, 2015

What have we learned so far?

We have been talking about the power revealed in Christ. The reason that Mark spends so much of his account on this subject is that he doesn't want us to miss the fact that Jesus is King of a Kingdom, the Kingdom of God. So he wants us to know that Jesus is Lord over demons, Lord over disease, Lord over nature, even Lord over death itself, the last and final fear of humanity. Everything bows before the power of Jesus Christ. Well, except the Pharisees and Sadducee, Mark tells us, who seek to put Jesus to death because of the threat that they feel to their positions of influence and power. We have seen His glory on display walking on the water and in the transfiguration. I think we could say along with love and truth, ***Jesus is power incarnate.***

We have also learned a couple simple truths carefully slipped into the Mark narrative:

There has to be growth in intimacy or it is not a true relationship
We do not worship a 'Designer Jesus!'

There has to be growth in intimacy or it is not a true relationship: As we get to know Jesus we see that if we have a true relationship with Him, we change. We are less like our old selves and more like our new improved self that takes on the image and character of Christ. We see it in the lives of honest searchers like Peter, and in lives of sinners like Zacchaeus. It is a good test for us. If we confess a relationship with Christ, we should never stop changing, being transformed from glory to glory. That is the nature of true relationship. It changes us.

We do not worship a 'Designer Jesus!'

And we have also seen that this Jesus does not fit the mold of the expected anointed one. We cannot pick and choose how we take our Jesus like a cup of designer coffee. A little bit of this but not that please. No, with Christ we must take Him in His fullness or not at all.

It seems that the disciples are still coming to terms with the power and authority of Christ as they all seem to battle over who is the most worthy disciple rather than lingering on the worthiness of Jesus. Let's look at our passage this morning:

Mark 9:33-37

And they came to Capernaum. And when he was in the house he asked them, "What were you discussing on the way?"³⁴ But they kept silent, for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest.³⁵ And he sat down and called the twelve. And he said to them, "If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all."³⁶ And he took a child and put him in the midst of them, and ***taking him in his arms***, he said to them,³⁷ "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me."

How to hold a child – Envelop

Let's keep going . . .

Mark 10:35-45

³⁵ And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came up to him and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you."³⁶ And he said to them, "What do you want me to do for you?"³⁷ And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory."³⁸ Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?"³⁹ And they said to him, "We are able." And Jesus said to them, "The

cup that I drink you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized⁴⁰ but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.”

⁴¹ And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John. ⁴² And Jesus called them to him and said to them, “You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. ⁴³ But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant,⁴⁴ and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. ⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

There is something about power or even the lack of power that makes a person want more! It seems sweet but is too often deadly, for yourself and others.

The sweet but deadly taste of power

Whether you inherit power from your father, wrest it from another by coup, or find yourself with it through hard work or even dumb luck, power seems to be difficult to manage. Remember the phrase, ***“Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely.”*** That was coined by the historian and moralist Lord Acton, who went on to say, ***“Great men are almost always bad men.”***

I looked at the list of several internet top ten lists of abuse of power and honestly, I could not read the evil and corruption that showed up on those lists. But lest we think this conversation is for others I have known far too many pastors of relatively small churches who have let power go to their heads.

“The measure of a man is what he does with power.” ~ Plato

***“Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man's character, give him power.”
~ Abraham Lincoln***

“The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand.” ~ John 3:35

But whoever would be great among you must be your servant,²⁷ and whoever would be first among you must be your slave²⁸ even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” ~ Matthew 20:26b-28

You have heard the term false humility:

False Humility

This is the idea that you are actually full of pride but pretending to be humble. Perhaps you have met these types, very difficult to be around. But there is another kind of understanding of humility a kind of understanding of humility that comes from the world view of humility that is false and it makes embracing gospel humility difficult. The world tells us that humility is a vice not a virtue, that is something for the weak or the outcast.

Lie #1. Humility makes a person gloomy, dismal, downcast, unhappy

Lie #2. Humility makes you fearful and timid

Lie #3: Humility makes you passive and removes the driving motor of achievement

Humility makes a person gloomy, dismal, downcast, unhappy

No, gospel humility frees you from the need to posture and pose and calculate what others think, so that you are free to laugh at what is really funny with the biggest belly laugh. Proud people don't really let themselves go in laughter. They don't get red in the face and fall off chairs and twist their faces into the contortions of real free laughter. Proud people need to keep their dignity. The humble are free to howl with laughter.

Humility makes you fearful and timid

No, the world thinks that, because they think the best source of courage is self-confidence. It's not. God-confidence is the best source of courage. And only humble people lean on God for confidence. "I, I am he who comforts you; who are you that you are afraid of man who dies, and have forgotten the LORD, your Maker" (Isaiah 51:12–13). In other words, fear of man is a sign of pride, not gospel humility.

Humility makes you passive and removes the driving motor of achievement

No, the world thinks that, because for them the driving motor of achievement is feeding the ego with accomplishments. But Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:10, "By the grace of God I am what I am . . . I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me." The power of God's grace in the heart of the humble believer who depends utterly on God produces incredible energy and industry.

Now that we know the evidence of false humility, or humility gone wrong, let's take a moment and look at something that might best be known as gospel humility.

Gospel Humility

I know that the best and humblest person who has walked the earth was tortured to death because he was accused of blasphemous arrogance. "This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him because...he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God" (John 5:18). So I don't expect his followers will ever be able to avoid the accusation of arrogance. If you are the humblest outspoken witness for Jesus as the only way to God, you will be accused of arrogance.

What I want to avoid is the *reality* of pride. I want there to be real humility in me, and in this staff and our Council of elders and this church—the kind of humility that God sees and loves and rewards.

So what I would like to do first is not start with a definition of humility but with three passages of Scripture and a brief comment about each. I think what will come out of these texts is a sense of what humility is.

1 Corinthians 1:26b–31

Consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth.

But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."

My point here is that true humility is glad that God gets all the credit for choosing us and calling us according to his purposes, not our merit. And he does this (v. 29) "so that no human being might boast in the presence of God," but that (v. 31) the one who boasts might boast in the Lord. Humility agrees and is glad that God acts in a way to take the focus of all boasting away from man and put it on himself. Are you happy about that? Are you glad God does it that way? Humility is glad about that. This creates a new definition of greatness based on who receives the praise – The Christian is great when God receives all the glory.

James 4:13–17

Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit"—yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that." As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. 17 So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.

Have you heard the phrase where a person has "finally arrived?" It means that a person has come into their own, having the power and influence and perhaps the money they have always sought. Gospel humility understands that God governs the beating of our hearts and our safe 'arrival' at every destination. If we get

'there', God got us there. And if we don't get 'there', God willed that we not get there. Humility gets down under this sovereign providence and nestles there gladly.

Humility is an attitude of the heart that does not care about outward achievement. Then finally this verse from Philippians.

Philippians 2:3-8

³ Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.

⁴ Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. ⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

In this passage we see an attitude of servanthood that chooses to be unseen and unrecognized by the world. ***Gospel Humility*** understands that God gets all the credit for choosing us so that we boast only in him and not ourselves. Humility happily admits that everything we have is a free gift from God, so that we can't boast in it. Humility is glad to affirm that God sovereignly governs our heartbeats and safe arrivals, or non-arrivals. The root of Christian humility is the gospel that Christ died for our sins. That's how sinful I was. That's how dependent I am. Humility gives itself away in serving everyone, rather than seeking to be served. And humility is glad to affirm that this service is true greatness.

Greatness, Humility, Servanthood

These words all fit together nicely in the same definition of Gospel Humility. When you are humble and prove it by being a servant of all you will be truly great.

Richard Foster wrote a book in the 80's entitled "***Money, Sex and Power***." Catchy title! It was written with an eye on the verse from 1 John 2:16 where the beloved disciple summarizes sin as "the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life." But here is the interesting thing, God is not against profit and influence and intimacy. The simple fact is God wants us to enjoy these things. Notice, Jesus does not say don't be great. What he does say is that if you want to be great – in the eyes of God - then you have to be great according to Kingdom rules, not worldly rules.

The same is true of wealth and intimacy. "Be as wealthy as you can" says Jesus in Matthew 6 in his wonderful sermon on the mount, just not of things that rust can destroy and thieves can steal. No lay aside treasure in heaven. Be rich in the Kingdom. You remember in the parable of the talents, there was never a question of making a profit; the master desired it and the servants understood. The point is about the nature of that profit. God desires Kingdom power and Kingdom profit.

Intimacy too is part of God's divine desire for humanity. He longs for us to know Him and to be intimate with Him. But that is a difficult understanding. So he designed marriage between a husband and wife so that intimacy could be felt and touched and known. But in each of these virtues of greatness and wealth and intimacy, the evil one has come and twisted them and perverted them. Now humility is the vice and coercive power the virtue.

Three times in chapter 9 and 10 of Mark Jesus tells of his upcoming death and the disciples misunderstand it and in the case of Peter, he rebukes Jesus from speaking in these terms. Jesus uses His impending death as the ultimate example of sacrificial service. He sets the pattern all of His people are commanded to follow.

⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

The word “*ever*” reminds us of who Jesus is. He is the Son of God. He is God in the flesh. If anyone who ever walked on this earth should have been served it should have been Jesus. He could have commanded legions of angels to do His every bidding. Instead, He walked dusty miles serving those around Him. He could have come to this world as a King and been born in a palace with servants and great wealth. Instead, He was born in a stable, in abject poverty. He did not come to be served, He came to serve. He healed and fed and touched and taught, all with an attitude of service and humility. If our God is willing to serve sinful humanity, we should be willing to serve as well.

The cost of service for Jesus was extremely high. It cost Him His very life. Jesus willingly went to His death to save those who cared nothing for Him. He suffered the shame, the pain, the humiliation, and the agony of the cross to serve lost sinners. He experienced the undiluted wrath of Almighty God to serve us. He took the place of a common criminal and was judged as rebel so that sinners could be saved. He willingly entered into death so that others might enter into life. Why did He do it? He did it because He loves me (Rom. 5:8). He did it because He hates sin (Heb. 9:26). He did it to please the Father (Isaiah 53:10). He did it to set me free. (1 Pet. 1:18-19).

“Oh to love the Savior with a passion that can never cool; Oh to believe in God with a confidence that can never stagger! Oh to hope in God with an expectation that can never be dim! Oh to delight in God with a holy overflowing rejoicing that can never be stopped, so that we might live to glorify God at the highest bent of our powers, living with enthusiasm, burning, blazing, being consumed with the indwelling God who worketh all things in us according to His will! Thus, Lord, would we praise and pray at the same time, confess and acknowledge our responsibilities, but also bless the free, the sovereign grace that makes us what we are. O God of the eternal choice, O God of the ransom purchased on the tree, O God of the effectual call, Father, Son and Spirit, our adoration rises to heaven like the smoke from the altar of incense. Glory and honor and majesty and power and dominion and might be unto the one only God, for ever and ever, and all the redeemed by blood will say, Amen.” ~ Spurgeon, 1890

Small Group Discussion:

Dave mentioned the idea of a “designer Jesus” – A Jesus where you kind of pick and choose what kind of character traits and purposes we allow him to have in our lives. It is a temptation to diminish the things of Jesus that make us uncomfortable or seem too severe (pick up your cross daily, be last to be first, etc.). Do you think we do this kind of thing anymore in our culture? What kinds of things do we tend to emphasize about Jesus and what sorts of things do we de-emphasize?

The disciples, right up to the last week, seemed to have a difficult time understanding Christ’s purposes? Do you think they were *not too smart*, or was it something else that kept them from ‘getting it?’

James and John asked for positions of power from Jesus, and the other disciples resented their efforts? What do you think was up with that? Why do you think James and John wanted these positions of honor and power?

Dave talked about humility as though it were a good thing and as though power was intrinsically dangerous. Do you agree with him?

How would you differentiate between humbleness as the world sees it and the idea of “Gospel Humility?”

Do you struggle with ‘power’ or pride issues? How does it impact your lives?

James has some interesting things to say about our lives. He seems to say that we really don’t have control over the things we do and where we go.

James 4:13–17

Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit”— yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.” As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. 17 So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.

Do you think this rubs our power and control desires the wrong way? Why is that?

How can we be “great?” Well, (if you desire to be great ... you must be a servant of all).