

Message 39 -- JOHN 1:19-28

Passage:

19 And this is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who art thou?

20 And he confessed, and denied not; but confessed, I am not the Christ.

21 And they asked him, What then? Art thou Elias? And he saith, I am not. Art thou that prophet? And he answered, No.

22 Then said they unto him, Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us. What sayest thou of thyself?

23 He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias.

24 And they which were sent were of the Pharisees.

25 And they asked him, and said unto him, Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not that Christ, nor Elias, neither that prophet?

26 John answered them, saying, I baptize with water: but there standeth one among you, whom ye know not;

27 He it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose.

28 These things were done in Bethabara beyond Jordan, where John was baptizing.

Exposition:

My subject today is humility. We who belong to Jesus remember that he said that those who would be the greatest among us must be the servants of all.

Life is like a game of tennis;
The one who serves seldom loses.

But, some people feel that they must help balance the scales of justice. They nurse personal injuries; they harbor resentment and accept every opportunity to denounce and criticize. They are never great. Great men and women have a calm superiority to resentment. Great men and women are too busy.

If biography and history teach us anything, it is that great men have almost always refused to poison their spirits with vindictiveness and hate.

Abraham Lincoln amazed the nation by putting into his Cabinet his foremost political enemies. As Secretary of War he chose Stanton, who had characterized him as a clown and gorilla. He made Seward

Secretary of State, knowing that Seward regarded himself as much the abler man. Chase, his Secretary of the Treasury, used his Cabinet influence to promote his own chances for the presidential nomination. It meant nothing to Lincoln so long as Chase kept the confidence of the country, and did his work well. When McClellan snubbed him brutally, and Lincoln was urged to replace him, he replied: "I will hold McClellan's horse if only he will give us victories."

Disraeli had the same calm superiority to personal resentments. During his short tenure of power in 1868, he granted a pension to the children of John Leech, the Punch draftsman, who had mercilessly attacked him for thirty years. Now, in 1874, his first action was to offer the highest distinction within his power to Thomas Carlyle, who had formerly asked how much longer John Bull would suffer this absurd monkey to dance on his chest. When a partisan of more vindictive turn expressed his astonishment at his meekness, he replied: "I never trouble to be avenged."

(Pause)

19 And this is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who art thou?

20 And he confessed, and denied not; but confessed, I am not the Christ.

(Pause)

When John the Baptist was confronted by the priests and Levites, he said that he was not the expected and hoped-for Messiah. He could have claimed to be somebody important, but he didn't. Instead, he humbly glorified his Lord.

He had a real right to claim that he was important. Because He WAS important. He was the FIRST prophet to arise in Israel in over 600 years! AND, he was sent by God to prepare the way for Jesus. Other than Jesus himself, John was the most important man alive.

But he chose to glorify Jesus instead of himself.

(Pause)

The late Dwight David Eisenhower had the distinction of being the only American President to have been baptized and received into church membership upon confession of faith while in office.

When he died, the memorial service in the Washington Cathedral witnessed strongly to his faith. - there could be no mistaking it. The simple service, the hymns sung by the choir and congregation, the Scriptures read, the prayers given, the Apostles Creed recited; all these bore witness to Ike's faith in his Lord.

The leaders of one hundred nations were present and they heard the witness. More than that, national television brought the witness before the American people.

We were not only reminded of Eisenhower's faith, but of his humility. There might have been much pomp and ceremony. Eisenhower was the Commander of the Allied forces for the invasion of Europe in World War II. He was one of the world's most decorated military men.

Many honors had been heaped upon him in life. In death, the services were simple. It had been planned that way. He was buried in a casket just like those used for common soldiers. This was a clear demonstration of his humility.

With all the honors bestowed upon him, and having been the 34th President of the United States, and having enjoyed a personal popularity seldom matched in America, he chose the common lot.

(Pause)

He also chose to glorify Jesus Christ instead of himself.

(Pause)

21 And they asked him, What then? Art thou Elias? And he saith, I am not. Art thou that prophet? And he answered, No.

22 Then said they unto him, Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us. What sayest thou of thyself?

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(Pause)

Notice that John the Baptist refers to himself as the "voice," not as the "word". Jesus is the Word! John was the voice by which the Word was being introduced to the world.

John was full of the Spirit of God! And yet he remained humble. Why is it so hard for us to be like that? Well, Vance Havner says

that some are not filled because they first must be emptied. Even God cannot fill what is already full!

And my Grandmother used to say that if we're full of ourselves, we can never be filled with anything else.

(Pause)

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27 He it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose.

(Pause)

Do you see the true humility of this faithful servant of Jesus Christ? John the Baptist did not dream of putting his own name side-by-side with his Master's Name.

The unloosing of shoe latches was work that slaves performed. But if we are privileged to perform such work for Christ, we are given a great reward indeed. John 1:12 tells us that, "As many as received him, to them gave he the power to become the sons of God..." As we love Him and serve Him, we are in the process of becoming princes (and princesses) in His Kingdom: His brothers and sisters; the sons and daughters of God.

And, to do anything in service to Jesus, to have even a menial servant's place in His palace, is far better than being an emperor among men. May we have our portion among those who are not ashamed to unloose the latchet of Christ's shoes.

(Pause)

Once there was a little donkey.

The donkey awakened, his mind still savoring the afterglow of the most exciting day of his life. Never before had he felt such a rush of pleasure and pride. He walked into town and found a group of people by the well. "I'll show myself to them", he thought. But they didn't notice him. They went on drawing their water and paid him no mind.

"Throw your garments down," he said crossly. "Don't you know who I am?" They just looked at him in amazement. Someone slapped him across the tail and ordered him to move.

"Miserable heathens!" he muttered to himself. "I'll just go to the market where the good people are. They will remember me."

But the same thing happened. No one paid any attention to the donkey as he strutted down the main street in front of the market place.

"The palm branches! Where are the palm branches?" he shouted. "Yesterday, you threw palm branches!"

Hurt and confused, the donkey returned home to his mother. "Foolish child," she said gently. "Don't you realize that without Jesus, you are just an ordinary donkey?"

(Pause)

28 These things were done in Bethabara beyond Jordan, where John was baptizing.

(Pause)

In one of his books Bruce Larson gives a remarkable example of humble service in telling about Gert Behanna, who was converted at age sixty and became one of the great evangelists of our time, speaking to groups all over the country.

She told Bruce this story: "You know I travel around speaking for God and in the process I'm forced to use gas station restrooms which are almost always filthy. I used to complain about that to God. I'd say, 'Lord, if I'm your servant, how come I've got to use these dirty restrooms?' One day in the midst of this kind of complaint, He seemed to say, 'Gert, I come into this restroom too, right after you.' Somehow, I've never thought about that."

From that moment on, she said she never left a public restroom without cleaning the mirror, wiping the tile sink and picking towels up off the floor. After all that, she'd say, "There You are, Lord. I hope it's clean enough for You." Thereafter, instead of bemoaning the mess she found, she began to think of the person who would be coming after her.

(Pause)

To be humble is to recognize our sin and need and then permit the riches of Christ to take effect in our lives. We are humble when we admit our inability to make ourselves acceptable to God and rely upon what he has done for us in Christ. It is pride that so often keeps us from the kingdom of God. We feel, because we have succeeded in one area of life, we are qualified in all areas of life.

The late, famous actress and comedienne Rosalind Russel told of an incident which happened to her. Between films one summer, she was taking an ocean cruise. One day on the liner's deck, she happened to be sitting next to a man who was suffering with a terrible cold. This star of Broadway and Hollywood leaned over, commented on his cold to the man, and then proceeded to advise him: "I think if you will go to bed early, drink a lot of fluids, and take two aspirins, you will feel much better in the morning."

The man did not say a word; he just looked at her, obviously unimpressed. So the actress gave her credentials for this advice-giving. She said, "Uh, my name is Rosalind Russel. You know, I make movies."

The man thanked her and said, "And my name is Charles Mayo. You know, I run a medical clinic."

In like fashion, we do often present ourselves to God as those who are superior. It is not poverty of spirit we have, but we feel we have earned God's love.

(Pause)

Peter Marshall, for many years the Chaplain of the US Senate, had this prayer: "Lord, when we are wrong, make us willing to change. And when we are right, make us easy to live with."

Hallelujah. Amen.