

June 29th, 2008

“The Last Year of the Life of Christ, Part 5”

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Matthew 18:1-14, Mark 9:33-50, Luke 9:46-50

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He sat down and called the twelve together and said, **“Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and a servant of all.”**

Then Jesus called a young child to His side and placed him before them. **“I tell you the truth,”** He said, **“unless you change your attitudes and become like little children, you will not be able to enter the kingdom of heaven. The people who humble themselves as this little child are the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever is least among you will be great.”**

Thank you very much for coming to hear the message for today. Before we begin our next lesson, let us reiterate our reason for attending Church.

We attend Church to obtain the mind of Christ, meaning, to have the Bible illuminated in our minds so that we can clearly understand the principles that Jesus taught and base our daily personal decisions on those principles.

We come to Church because we want to be obedient to the Bible, which is the doctrine of Jesus Christ, in an informed, insightful and intelligent manner.

Let us briefly recap the episodes from the Gospels which we have reviewed in this series of lessons from our text by Johnston Cheney, [Jesus Christ, The Greatest Life](#).

Jesus began the last year of His ministry by revealing to the disciples, through the divinely inspired declaration of Peter, that He, Jesus, is the Messiah, prophesied in Isaiah 9:6 to be the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father and the Prince of Peace. This revelatory reinforcement of Jesus’ true identity prepared the disciples for the pronouncement that Jesus made in our second sermon in this series, that anyone that wants to be a follower of Jesus Christ must deny himself and pick up his cross to do so. This was a much more literal statement for Jesus’ disciples than it is for us, as we live in a society in which Christianity is the dominant religion, but the disciples lived in a time in which Christianity was seen as a sect of heretics, and the disciples faced literal execution for holding to their confession of Jesus as the Christ under questioning by political authorities.

In the third sermon in the series, Jesus took Peter, James and John up on the Mountain of Transfiguration and showed them His deity. Moses and Elijah, two of the greatest Israelites, appeared on the mountain with Jesus to discuss Jesus’ impending sacrifice on the Cross with Him. God the Father Himself joined the conversation, enveloping them all in His Glory and

testifying to the fact that Jesus is His Beloved Son, with whom He is pleased and to whom they, the disciples, should listen.

After all of these preparatory experiences to cement His identity in the minds of the disciples, Jesus then came down the mountain, and, in the fourth sermon in the series, delegated healing power to the disciples, sent them on a successful healing tour, and then watched as they came into contact with opposition. Despite Peter's confession of Jesus as the Christ, Jesus' declaration that the disciples would have to pick up their crosses, Jesus' display of divinity on the Mountain of Transfiguration, and the disciples own healing experiences, the arguments of Jesus' own family and of the scribes shook the faith of the disciples to the point to which they were unable to continue their healing ministry when asked to heal a boy possessed by a demon. Jesus then came on the scene, cast the demon that the disciples failed to command out of the boy, and in so doing, bolstered the faith of the disciples, the boy's father and those in the crowd who were open to believing in Jesus.

Jesus performed these great miracles and taught both the people and His disciples the dynamic power of the truths of God, but even as the disciples began to bask in the glory of being associated with Him, Jesus once again dropped the bombshell about His death on them to keep this truth in the forefront of their minds. **Matthew 17:22-23, Mark 9:30-32 and Luke 9:43b-45** tell us:

While everyone was amazed at what Jesus was doing, [Jesus] said to His disciples, "Listen carefully: the Son of Man will be betrayed into the hands of men!"

They left that place and traveled through Galilee, but He didn't want anyone to know about it. During their time in Galilee, He continued to teach His disciples, saying, "The Son of Man will be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill Him, and after He is killed He will be raised up on the third day."

They were filled with grief, even though they didn't understand what He meant. They were kept from understanding and were afraid to ask Him about it.

Throughout Jesus' ministry, from beginning to end, Jesus' focus was on His death. Jesus' first miracle was recorded in the second chapter of John, at the wedding in Cana in which He turned water into wine. After that miracle, the Bible records, in **John 2:11-22**:

11 This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him.

12 After this He went down to Capernaum, He, His mother, His brothers, and His disciples; and they did not stay there many days.

13 Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

14 And He found in the temple those who sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers doing business.

15 When He had made a whip of cords, He drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changers' money and overturned the tables.

16 And He said to those who sold doves, "Take these things away! Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise!"

17 Then His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up."

18 So the Jews answered and said to Him, "What sign do You show to us, since You do

these things?”

19 Jesus answered and said to them, **“Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”**

20 Then the Jews said, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?”

21 But [Jesus] was speaking of the temple of His body.

22 Therefore, when [Jesus] had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said.

Jesus’ resurrection is the singularly most significant event in the history of the world, and the main purpose of His ministry to the disciples was to give them experiences so that they could fulfill the Great Commission, given in **Matthew 28:18-20**:

18 And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, **“All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.**

19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

20 teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen.

Although the disciples couldn’t comprehend the ramifications of Jesus’ resurrection at the time of this prophecy, Jesus kept the prophecy of the Resurrection before His disciples throughout His ministry so that, after He rose, they would remember and record in the record that Jesus’ Resurrection was part of the plan of God.

The next episode in this review of Christ’s last year deals with the half-shekel Temple Tax, collected annually by the Jews in the month of March. This voluntary tax, which was half a day’s wages for a laborer, was collected from all Jewish males over the age of twenty and taken to Jerusalem at Passover to support the work of the Temple. **Matthew 17:24-27** and **Mark 9:33** tell us:

When [Jesus and the disciples] came to Capernaum, the collectors of the half-shekel tax confronted Peter. “Doesn’t your teacher intend to pay the half-shekel?” they demanded.

“Yes,” Peter replied, “He does.”

When he entered the house, Jesus brought up the matter first. **“What do you think, Simon?”** He asked. **“Do earthly kings collect customs and tribute from their own children or from strangers?”**

Peter answered, “From strangers.”

“Then the children go free,” Jesus replied.

Based upon this thinking, Jesus actually did not owe the tax for the temple because He, as the Son of God, was the son of the owner of the Temple. But Jesus, along with being the Son of God, also humbled Himself to be known as the Son of Man. **Philippians 2:7-8** tells us that He: **7** made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men.

8 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.

So Jesus humbly decided to pay the tax, but He did so in a most divine way, as **Matthew 17:24-27** and **Mark 9:33** tells us:

Jesus replied, [to Peter] “But in order to keep from causing offense, go to the sea and throw in a fishing line. Take the first fish you catch and open its mouth. There you’ll find a silver coin. Take it and give it to them for Me and for you.”

Jesus was giving Peter and the disciples a lesson in being humble and obedient by paying the Temple Tax, but the disciples did not want to discuss humility, as our text for today, **Matthew 18:1-14**, **Mark 9:33-50**, **Luke 9:46-50** tells us:

At that time the disciples came to Jesus in the house and asked Him, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”

The disciples were not having a philosophical discussion concerning the identity of the greatest person that ever lived, as the text goes on to tell us:

Jesus knew what they were thinking and asked them, “What were you arguing about on our trip?” They remained silent, because they had been arguing with each other about who would be the greatest.

Their argument was actually over which of the disciples was the greatest. Jesus recognized that the disciples missed His lesson on humility, and so Jesus gave them a demonstration designed to reorient their reality and make His point. The text says:

[Jesus] sat down and called the twelve together and said, “Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and a servant of all.”

Then Jesus called a young child to His side and placed him before them. “I tell you the truth,” He said, “unless you change your attitudes and become like little children, you will not be able to enter the kingdom of heaven. The people who humble themselves as this little child are the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever is least among you will be great.”

Jesus uses an interesting word to describe the attitude of little children, and the word is humble, discussing the attribute of humility. Jesus is pointing out that the characteristic of a good child is that he is humble enough to recognize that his parents and elders know more than he does and that he needs to listen to his parent’s instructions and follow them. We send children to school because their main responsibility is to learn and to mature, and we least want to see a child with the attributes of arrogance and disobedience. **Proverbs 3:1-4** says:

1 My son, do not forget my law, But let your heart keep my commands;

2 For length of days and long life And peace they will add to you.

3 Let not mercy and truth forsake you; Bind them around your neck, Write them on the tablet of your heart,

4 And so find favor and high esteem In the sight of God and man.

Jesus makes the point that we should have the humility to listen to the wisdom and the advice of those that know more about the Word of God and understanding it better than we do and that we should learn from the knowledgeable to receive favor in the sight of God. **Proverbs 16:18-20** reminds us:

18 Pride goes before destruction, And a haughty spirit before a fall.

19 Better to be of a humble spirit with the lowly, Than to divide the spoil with the proud.

20 He who heeds the word wisely will find good, And whoever trusts in the LORD, happy is he.

Two quick formulas for life: Arrogance = Sin and Humility = Godliness.

Arrogance is the opposite of humility. The dictionary definition of arrogance is having a feeling of superiority that shows or is inclined to show itself in an overbearing attitude or in claiming more consideration than is due to one's position, dignity, or power.

When we disobey those that have authority over us, we are displaying a feeling of superiority and the overbearing attitude of arrogance. The reason that we disobey is that we arrogantly think that we know better than the one that has the position of authority over us, and rather than discussing the situation with them and getting their agreement to our proposed action, we just ignore their instructions and do that which we want.

Think back to our first parents and their arrogance as they failed to heed and obey God's instructions. God told Adam that the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was poison, but Adam arrogantly decided to ignore God and listen to Eve, his peer with less knowledge, wisdom and experience than God, but who arrogantly contradicted God by declaring to Adam that the fruit was actually good to eat and would produce wisdom in them.

Isaiah 14:12-15 tells us the arrogant nature of the one that initiated this first sin by watering the seed of arrogance, rebellion and disobedience in the woman's heart.

12 "How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, You who weakened the nations!

13 For you have said in your heart: 'I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation On the farthest sides of the north;

14 I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.'

Isaiah prophesied the end of Lucifer, whom we now also call Satan, in the next verse.

15 Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol, To the lowest depths of the Pit.

As we have already read in **Proverbs 16:18**, destruction comes after pride, which is another term for arrogance.

Jesus distinguishes the little child from the disciples by the child's obedient nature. Jesus uses this example to say that it is impossible to be considered great unless you are humbly agreeable to obeying the instructions of God, rather than arrogantly determined to do that which you wish to do, regardless of the instructions of God. The ability to practice the self-control needed to remain humble is one of the most important abilities that we have to develop. God gives us free will and the responsibility to choose our actions, and at the same time, God advises us to choose to do that which He instructs us to do. However, our free will is our outlet for our sin nature, which is the arrogant part of us that wants to rule rather than obey that which God instructs us. Our responsibility is to take control of our free will, separating it from our sin nature and humbly yielding to the authority of God rather than the arrogantly sinful suggestions of the evil one. The Holy Spirit, speaking through the Apostle Paul, explains to us, in **Romans 6:16-23**:

16 Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?

If we are slaves of sin, we are voluntary slaves, because we present ourselves to sin by obeying it. To be frank and honest, we like sin, because sin generally has immediate gratification attached to it.

The reason that there are commandments against sin is that although sinful things are generally antisocial from God's perspective, sinning usually solves a problem for us or provides us with a pleasant sensation. Unfortunately, problems solved by sin usually don't stay solved, but escalate into greater problems as a result of the sin. Pleasant sensations caused by sin generally develop into negative consequences, as Paul tells us that the wages of sin is death. Paul goes on to say:

17 But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered.

18 And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.

When we accept Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit makes us slaves of righteousness by giving us a new nature, a new spirit, meaning, a new way of thinking that allows us to overcome the arrogance of our sinful nature. This humble new nature allows us to recognize that the instructions that God gives us are ultimately for our benefit rather than our detriment, although we may suffer short-term grief for being righteous. Although God gives us this new way of thinking, we still have to consciously decide to follow that which the new nature suggests to us. Paul goes on to say:

19 I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness.

20 For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness.

21 What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death.

22 But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life.

23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

God's plan for our lives is to give us experiences that will produce holiness in us. Holiness is produced in the same way that muscles are produced, and that is by exercise. Jesus Christ is a case in point. One of the reasons that Jesus publicly communed with God on the Mountain and did powerful miracles was to make sure that His disciples knew that He, Jesus had the power of God available to Him. Jesus raised Lazarus, a man who had died and been buried in a sealed tomb for three days from the dead. If you can do that, there is literally nothing that you cannot do. When those that planned to execute Jesus came to arrest Him, Jesus made it clear to Peter, the disciple that used physical force to defend Him, that He had twelve legions of angels at His disposal. Do you know what twelve legions of angels could do? Well, I don't either, but I do know that two angels destroyed the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah as though they were never there. Jesus had the power at His disposal to handle anything that His enemies could develop, but Jesus' plan was not to defeat His enemies using any earthly force. As we have already read, **Matthew 17:22-23, Mark 9:30-32 and Luke 9:43b-45** tell us:

While everyone was amazed at what Jesus was doing, [Jesus] said to His disciples, "Listen carefully: the Son of Man will be betrayed into the hands of men!"

They left that place and traveled through Galilee, but He didn't want anyone to know about it. During their time in Galilee, He continued to teach His disciples, saying, "The Son of Man will be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill Him, and after He is killed He will be raised up on the third day."

Jesus' definition of holiness was to voluntarily die on the Cross, despite the fact that He had access to all power in Heaven and on earth. God's plan was to use Jesus as a sacrifice for our sins, that He would die in our place so that we could be forgiven. Had Jesus chosen to defeat His enemies and avoid the cross, the wages of sin would still be death, and there would be no gift of God through Jesus Christ.

Was the Cross fun for Jesus? By no means. Jesus had another moment in solitude with Peter, James and John, like His experience on the Mountain of Transfiguration, except this time, rather than shining raiment, the men had the chance to witness Jesus in the throes of agony, crying out to God in terror, with the sweat falling from His brow like great drops of blood. Nevertheless, Jesus was resolute in His determination to carry out the mandate of God, as **Matthew 26:37-42** and **Luke 22:43-44** records:

37 And [Jesus] took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed.

38 Then [Jesus] said to them, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me."

39 He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will."

43 Then an angel appeared to Him from heaven, strengthening Him.

44 And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.

40 Then [Jesus] came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, "What! Could you not watch with Me one hour?"

41 Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

42 Again, a second time, [Jesus] went away and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done."

Your will be done. This is the humble, obedient, childlike faith of Jesus. He knows that there is agony ahead, but if His Father wills that He suffer the agony, Jesus has faith that His Father knows best, just like an obedient child. Jesus is known as the Son of Man because of the humility that He is teaching us in today's lesson. Since God is our Father and all members of mankind are His children, all of us need to humbly trust Him and obey Him just as Jesus did, as the Son of Man, a humble, obedient child that would trust and obey his father rather than arrogantly second guess his father's pronouncements.

The interesting thing about the relationship between the Lord Jesus Christ and His Father is that when trouble rises, the two of them turn to each other, rather than on each other. God tells His Son that the plan is that the Son will go to the Cross, and the Son turns to the Father for comfort, not away from the Father in anger over the Father's decision or the sacrifice that the Father requires of Him. True love turns us to one another rather than away from one another in times of trouble. The key to this type of true Christian love, in which we turn to one another

rather than away from one another is oneness. Jesus says, in **John 10:30**

30 I and My Father are one.”

Since God and Jesus are one, there is no confusion between them about the plan of salvation. Jesus says, in **John 17:20-23**:

20 “I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word;

21 that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.

22 And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one:

23 I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.

The oneness of Jesus and the Father is based upon Jesus' obedience to the Father. We know that God sent Jesus because Jesus is one with God's plan of salvation, even as an obedient son is one with his father's plans for him. The Christian paradigm is that the Father makes the plan, the Son sacrifices Himself to execute the plan and we are all the beneficiaries of the plan. We benefit from the plan because the Father and the Son are one, meaning that there is no disagreement between the Father and the Son, even when the Father asks the Son to give Himself, and then we become one with the plan as we receive the Holy Spirit, which allows us to give of ourselves to execute the plan, even as the Son gave of Himself to execute the plan. **John 3:16-17** tells us:

16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

17 For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

The world can only be saved through the voluntary sacrifice of the Son. The voluntary sacrifice of the Son comes because the Son is one with the Father. Once we receive the sacrifice of the Son, we become one with Him, as a child born to good parents, and must, in turn, emulate the Son and sacrifice ourselves by following the Son's commandment to us that the life-giving circle of sacrifice might not be broken. Jesus commands us to keep the circle going in **John 13:34-35**, which says:

34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.

35 By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Let us resolve, as we go down from this place, to be like the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven, Jesus Christ, to be like little children, to follow the instructions of the Father, and sacrifice ourselves in the circle of love to love one another as He has commanded.

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