

# 10. Be the greatest in the Kingdom of God

3/5/2006

Who would ever thought that a mild-mannered geek Bill Gates who used to put together personal computers in his dorm room of Harvard University and sold them from the trunk of his car had an enough vision to purchase an operating system called "Windows" for a mere \$50,000 from a man who invented that software but didn't see a whole lot of value in it?

If somebody asked that original programmer of Windows if he could do it again, would he do differently? The answer would a resounding "NO, D-U-H!" Yes, he would do it differently, so that he could be a great billionaire, not Bill Gates.

Many people in Christianity want to be the greatest in the Kingdom of God for a godly reason or a selfish reason. I guarantee you that those who have selfish motives will not tell you that they want the highest position for their own, but they would give you pious reasons with that holy look on their faces.

Actually, Jesus wants all of us to be the greatest in the Kingdom of God. He even tells us how to do that. That is what we are going to study this morning.

## A. THE TRANSFIGURATION OF JESUS

*Mark 9:1-8 And He said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you that there are some standing here who will not taste death till they see the kingdom of God present with power." 2 Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John, and led them up on a high mountain apart by themselves; and He was transfigured before them. 3 His clothes became shining, exceedingly white, like snow, such as no launderer on earth can whiten them. 4 And Elijah appeared to them with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus. 5 Then Peter answered and said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; and let us make three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah"-- 6 because he did not know what to say, for they were greatly afraid. 7 And a cloud came and overshadowed them; and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!" 8 Suddenly, when they had looked around, they saw no one anymore, but only Jesus with themselves.*

Most people assume that Jesus took these three guys on this and other occasions because they were special favorites of the Lord. It could have also been because they were the three most likely to get themselves into trouble. I believe that He kept them close so He could keep a close eye on them.

*2 Cor 11:14 And no wonder, for satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. -NIV*

How did this transfiguration happen? This was not a new miracle, but the temporary pause of an ongoing miracle by Jesus. The real miracle was that Jesus, most of the time, could conceal displaying His glory.

Jesus took the servant position in His atoning sacrifice to show His example for His disciples and us to follow.

Jesus shows this transfiguration to His disciples in a dramatic way that cross bearers will be glory receivers. However, the goal isn't the cross. The cross is the path to the goal, and the goal is the glory of God.

In v5, we find Peter's comment should be considered as a contempt against Jesus. Peter puts Jesus on an equal level with Elijah and Moses - one tabernacle for each! But Jesus isn't just another Moses or Elijah or even a greater Moses or Elijah. Jesus is the Son of God. It is no wonder why the Father God in heaven had to shut Peter's mouth with His voice from heaven, "Shut up, Pete."

When we don't know what to say, it is best not to say at all. Peter always seemed to want to fill the silence. Silence is sometimes most appropriate. I've never regretted because I kept my mouth shut.

## **B. THE CONFUSION ABOUT THE COMING OF ELIJAH**

*Mark 9:9-13 Now as they came down from the mountain, He commanded them that they should tell no one the things they had seen, till the Son of Man had risen from the dead. 10 So they kept this word to themselves, questioning what the rising from the dead meant. 11 And they asked Him, saying, "Why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?" 12 Then He answered and told them, "Indeed, Elijah is coming first and restores all things. And how is it written concerning the Son of Man, that He must suffer many things and be treated with contempt? 13 But I say to you that Elijah has also come, and they did to him whatever they wished, as it is written of him."*

The coming of Elijah before the Messiah is clearly prophesied in Malachi 4:5-6. So the disciples wonder, "If Jesus is the Messiah, then where is Elijah?"

*Malachi 4:5-6 Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. 6 And he will turn The hearts of the fathers to the children, And the hearts of the children to their fathers, Lest I come and strike the earth with a curse.*

While it is true that Elijah is yet to come in reference to the second coming of Jesus as one of the Two Witnesses during the 7 year Great Tribulation, there is also a sense in which Elijah has also come – in the person of John the Baptist.

John was not a reincarnation of Elijah according to his own words, but he did minister in the role and spirit of Elijah. John the Baptist was a type or a picture of Elijah.

## **C. CANNOT CAST OUT THAT DEMONS**

*Mark 9:14-29 And when He came to the disciples, He saw a great multitude around them, and scribes disputing with them. 15 Immediately, when they saw Him, all the people were greatly amazed, and running to Him, greeted Him. 16 And He asked the scribes, "What are you discussing with them?" 17 Then one of the crowd answered and said, "Teacher, I brought You my son, who has a mute spirit. 18 And wherever it seizes him, it throws him down; he foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth, and becomes rigid. So I spoke to Your disciples, that they should cast it out, but they could not." 19 He answered him and said, "O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring him to Me." 20 Then they brought him to Him. And when he saw Him, immediately the spirit convulsed him, and he fell on the ground and wallowed, foaming at the mouth. 21 So He asked his father, "How long has this been happening to him?" And he said, "From childhood. 22 And often he has thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him. But if You can do anything, have compassion on us and help us." 23 Jesus said to him, "If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes." 24 Immediately the father of the child cried out and said with tears,*

*“Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!” 25 When Jesus saw that the people came running together, He rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, “Deaf and dumb spirit, I command you, come out of him and enter him no more!” 26 Then the spirit cried out, convulsed him greatly, and came out of him. And he became as one dead, so that many said, “He is dead.” 27 But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose. 28 And when He had come into the house, His disciples asked Him privately, “Why could we not cast it out?” 29 So He said to them, “This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting.”*

From the context, it is reasonable to assume that scribes criticized the disciples for their inability to help the demon-possessed boy. But they were not willing and could not cast out the demon out of the boy by themselves either.

This boy displays signs that many today would regard as evidence of epilepsy, but Jesus knew that this one was caused by demonic possession.

Jesus had given His disciples authority to cast out demons, but their ministry to the boy was ineffective. No wonder the Lord was grieved with them! How often He must be grieved with us when we fail to use the spiritual resources He has graciously given to His people.

The authority that Jesus has given to us is effective only if exercised by faith, but faith must be cultivated through our spiritual discipline and devotion to Jesus.

#### **D. I AM BETTER THAN YOU**

*Mark 9:30-37 Then they departed from there and passed through Galilee, and He did not want anyone to know it. 31 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.” 32 But they did not understand this saying, and were afraid to ask Him. 33 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?” 34 But they kept silent, for on the road they had disputed among themselves who would be the greatest. 35 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.” 36 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, 37 “Whoever receives one of these little children in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me, receives not Me but Him who sent Me.”*

Again Jesus explained about His impending death and resurrection to His disciples. While they nodded their heads in understanding, but their hearts were in a complete confusion.

However, they were not grieved enough to set aside their personal dispute over which of them was the greatest. Perhaps the fact that Peter, James and John had gone on the mount with Jesus had added some fuel to the fires of competition. They might even have said, “Jesus told us not to tell you guys. But we know something you don’t know because we are special.”

It seems that this was the favorite debating topic among the disciples. They all agreed that Jesus should take over the world as “King Messiah.” The debate was about who was going to be Jesus’ second-in-command.

In v35, Jesus clearly tells us that to be the greatest in the Kingdom of God, we must be the servant of all. This is opposite of what the world tells us. In the worldly idea of power, the great man is distinguished by how many people serve him. But Jesus declares that true greatness is shown not by how many serve us, but by how many we serve.

It is not that Jesus hates ambition. Rather he teaches us to have the right kind of ambition. It is the ambition to serve others.

True humility means knowing ourselves, accepting ourselves, being ourselves – our best selves – and giving of ourselves for others.

## **E. THE START OF DENOMINATION**

*Mark 9:38-41 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." 39 But Jesus said, "Do not forbid him, for no one who works a miracle in My name can soon afterward speak evil of Me. 40 "For he who is not against us is on our side. 41 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.*

John wanted to start the first denomination of Christianity, If anyone is ministering in the name of Christ with right doctrines, they should be blessed.

Obviously, this person made the disciples look bad since he could cast out demons which they couldn't.

Again this falls into what Jesus was trying to teach these disciples and us. Pride incubates our selfish desires of sins. When a Christian has pride in his heart, he wouldn't serve anyone. He expects others to serve him.

I see this kind of things every time Christians get together. The same people who work so hard to put the things together end up with cleaning up the mess other Christians leave behind. I just cannot understand how those Christians can walk away or standing around while others working so hard. Maybe they have insensitive hearts or prideful hearts which our God doesn't care to see in us.

I heard a story about one of the Calvary Chapel Senior Pastors Conferences in Murrieta, CA before I became a pastor. After a meal at the dining room, all the senior pastors got up and left their dishes on the tables. Pastor Chuck Smith, the founder of Calvary Chapels started to collect the dishes without a word. Finally, all these senior pastors got a que and joined him in picking up dishes. Why do we have to have such thick heads? Jesus wants us to be servants to one another, not a bunch of Indian chiefs.

## **F. SEVERE MEASURES FOR SOLEMN WARNINGS**

*Mark 9:42-50 "But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea. 43 If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed, rather than having two hands, to go to hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched-- 44 where 'Their worm does not die, And the fire is not quenched.' 45 And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame, rather than*

having two feet, to be cast into hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched-- 46 where 'Their worm does not die, And the fire is not quenched.' 47 And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire-- 48 where 'Their worm does not die, And the fire is not quenched.' 49 "For everyone will be seasoned with fire, and every sacrifice will be seasoned with salt. 50 Salt is good, but if the salt loses its flavor, how will you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace with one another."

This solemn message about hell carries a warning to all of us to deal drastically with sin. Whatever in our lives makes ourselves stumble, and causes others to stumble, must be removed as if by surgery. The hand, foot and eye would be considered valuable parts of the body, yet they must be removed if they are causing sin.

Of course, the Lord is not commanding literal physical removals, since He had already made it clear that sin comes from the heart. What He is teaching is that sin is to the inner person what a cancerous tumor is to the body, and it must be dealt with drastically.

Some people are shocked to hear from the lips of Jesus such frightening words about hell. Jehovah's Witness people believe that the Bible never talks about hell, nor hell is existing. Since this Jesus who supposedly was former Michael the Archangel to Jehovah's Witnesses says that there is hell for those who sin, I guess their Jesus must be a liar.

If you believe that God is real, heaven is real and hell is real. There is only one way to avoid hell. It is through accepting Jesus Christ into your heart as your Savior and Lord and believe that He died for your sins and rose again from death.

## **G. APPLICATIONS**

### **1) Our pride incubates the sinful desires within us.**

The only way we can deal with our pride is submitting ourselves to the will of God instead of ours.

### **2) If Jesus took the lowest position and became the servant of the mankind and died for our sins, is there any reason why we should not follow His example by serving one another?**

Christianity is not about coming to church and reading the Bible. That is only a part of it. It is becoming more like Him.

*Romans 12:1-2 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.*