

Holier Than Thou

By Pastor Greg
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Mark 9:33-37

Bunkertown COB

(Sermon begins with cartoon *Robin Hood Daffy*)

Here's what I find impressive about Daffy Duck. Although he made a fool of himself repeatedly, he eventually did learn a lesson; he was, after all, a teachable duck.

Teachers tell me that one trait they love to see in children is the desire to learn, or even better, a willingness to be taught. Some of the most frustrating students are those who either don't want to learn or who think they know it all. Some of the most frustrating Christians are those who don't want to learn or worse, those who refuse to be teachable.

Listen to the lesson Jesus has to give His disciples shortly after the transfiguration. ³³ *They came to Capernaum; and when He was in the house, He began to question them, "What were you discussing on the way?"* ³⁴ *But they kept silent, for on the way they had discussed with one another which of them was the greatest.* ³⁵ *Sitting down, He called the twelve and said to them, "If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all."* ³⁶ *Taking a child, He set him before them, and taking him in His arms, He said to them,* ³⁷ *"Whoever receives one child like this in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me does not receive Me, but Him who sent Me."* ¹ (Mark 9:33-37)

It's interesting that the disciples begin discussing who was the greatest. We don't see this happening before. But Peter, James, and John had just witnessed something amazing upon the mountain. Now, in Matthew 17:9 Jesus had commanded these three to tell no one about what happened (*As they went back down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, "Don't tell anyone what you have seen until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."* ²). But apparently, it was very difficult for them to keep the secret. Oh, they may not have said exactly what had happened, but their new spirituality was sure causing divisions among the group.

¹*New American Standard Bible : 1995 update.* 1995 (Mk 9:33-37). LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

²Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation.* "Text edition"--Spine. (2nd ed.) (Mt 17:9). Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

After this mountaintop experience with Jesus, we hear the topic of Rank in the Kingdom discussed among the disciples repeatedly. We see James and John coming to Jesus asking that they be seated next to Jesus in places of honor (Matthew 20:21). And the whole feet washing lesson was taught during the Last Supper because they sat in that upper room arguing about who was the greatest (Luke 22:24). Apparently, the men who had shared this intimate experience with Jesus began letting these things go to their heads. We see creeping into this group the feelings of superiority and authority. And it was causing division and conflict.

You can almost hear Peter, James, or John correcting the others on their knowledge of the Kingdom (“But Judas, if you were as close to the Lord as I am you would think differently). Perhaps they never said it, but it appears they were thinking it. “I’ve been to the mountain with Jesus and have seen and learned things that you have not.” And because of their spiritual growth, they developed this attitude of spiritual superiority. Now I know the scriptures do not indicate these words were spoken, but by the attitude and power struggles among the disciples, and by Jesus’ rebuke, it’s not too hard to imagine that these thoughts entered their minds.

In response, Jesus sets a kid on His lap and points out that in the Kingdom of God, a person needs to have the attitude of a child. These disciples needed to remain teachable.

I think there are times when we struggle with this as well. Sometimes we are no longer teachable, especially after learning or experiencing something deeper than others have. Now there is nothing wrong with being educated or doing things that deepen our spirituality. The problem arises when we assume then that we alone have all the answers and that the depth of our experience with Jesus is greater than the next guy.

A child’s heart is teachable and willing to learn. So even though we have filled our minds with knowledge, our hearts with the Holy Spirit, and have been to a mountaintop experience with Jesus, we need to realize that there are still things we need to learn, and that we do not have all the answers. We remain teachable. And

what's unique about this lesson from Jesus is that there's a way we can test ourselves to find out whether we are teachable or not. If your mind began to think of a person you know who needs to learn this lesson, then you are not teachable. You think others are the ones who need to learn a lesson, but not you. When Jesus tries to teach us a lesson, we need to be focusing on what we need to learn, not on Sister Better-than-you.

Unless we remain teachable, we risk developing the attitude that says, "I've seen all and experienced all". And the moment these thoughts enter our minds, there is a tendency for a person to elevate their importance in the Kingdom of Heaven; to think, "I must really be important."

The kind of attitude Jesus is looking for in His followers is a heart that is humble and teachable. Later on, Jesus says, ²⁵ *"In this world the kings and great men lord it over their people, yet they are called 'friends of the people.'* ²⁶ *But among you it will be different. Those who are the greatest among you should take the lowest rank, and the leader should be like a servant."* ³ (Luke 22:25-26).

In a Kingdom perspective, a person does not rise to power because of education or depth of spirituality. Instead, the person who has been to the mountaintop with Jesus needs to return more humble and more eager to serve others than they had before. And I find it interesting that according to Jesus, the more we learn about God's Kingdom and the closer we draw to Christ, the more humble we should become. But this will never happen unless we remain teachable.

³Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. "Text edition"--Spine. (2nd ed.) (Lk 22:25-26). Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.