

Humility In Wisdom: 4

James & John Learn The Secret of Humility

Mark 10.35-45; Matthew 20.20-28

In continuing this teaching on humility as an aspect of wisdom let me remind you of the inspiration for the topic by giving you an illustration.

A few years ago I was in a hotel and noticed something strange. In order to get to the upper floors you first had to go down a few stairs to get to the where the lifts and staircases were. In order to ascend you had to first descend – the first step up, is down!

So far we have seen that

- Jesus, our chief example, humbled Himself and submitted to His Father's will even when that meant the death of the cross.
- John the Baptist had to submit to Jesus. Jesus pointed him to the written word when he was facing doubts and uncertainty – submitting to the word raised him up.

Now we are going to see two more characters that had to learn this secret of submission – these are the two brothers that Jesus called the “Sons of Thunder” – **James and John**.

- James and John both worked with their father Zebedee in the fishing business – when Jesus called them they left the business and the boats to follow Him

“When He had gone a little farther from there, He saw James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, who also were in the boat mending their nets. And immediately He called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and went after Him.” Mark 1.19-20

- They were business partners with Simon Peter and Andrew (in the fishing business) “and so also were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, “Do not be afraid. From now on you will catch men.”” Luke 5.10

- It was these same two disciples, who in an angry outrage, wanted to call fire down from heaven to consume the Samaritans because they would not welcome Jesus. “And as they went, they entered a village of the Samaritans, to prepare for Him. But they did not receive Him, because His face was set for the journey to Jerusalem. And when His disciples James and John saw this, they said, “Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did? But He turned and rebuked them, and said, “You do not know what manner of spirit you are of.”” Luke 9.52-55

You do not know **what manner of spirit** you are of – this is not the spirit of humility.

- James & John had the spirit of revenge, intolerance and injustice over this village of Samaria.

- This was one of those “Get behind Me, satan” moments that Jesus encountered – they, like Peter, were not mindful of the things of God, even though perhaps they thought this was a holy anger.
- They needed to learn that their first step was a step down – instead of commanding fire to fall and consume the village they should rather submit themselves to the love and compassion of Christ. Jesus did not come to destroy lives but to save them.

On an earlier occasion (a few verses before) Jesus had to speak to John about his less than humble attitude toward another brother working for the kingdom – who was not part of ‘their congregation’

“Now John answered and said, "Master, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name, and we forbade him because he does not follow with us." But Jesus said to him, "Do not forbid *him*, for he who is not against us is on our side.” Luke 9.49-50

Mark 9.33-42

Here is another rendering of this occasion .

- These disciples have something on their mind – who is the greatest among them.
- This warrants a lesson from Jesus on the subject of humility.
- If you want to be first then be the servant of all – take a step down.

One thing that is evident on both occasions is the way James and John (and others in other Scriptures!) spoke out.

- shall we command fire from heaven and consume them
- we forbade him because he’s not one of us

Jesus went on to warn the disciples about the dangers of causing little ones to stumble (vs42) – it would be more preferable for them to be thrown into the sea with a millstone around their neck.

(The dangers of minor doctrines)

We all have our own individual beliefs on what we call the minor doctrines, depending on how we understand and interpret the Scripture. However some Christians spend too much time focused on these minor issues treating them as though they are major.

- the timing of the Lord’s return
- the issue of tongues as the initial evidence of Holy Spirit infilling
- the issue of prosperity
- ministers who interpret Scripture in a certain way labelled as false prophets
- consumption of alcohol
- wearing of hats/headcoverings for women

It is this attitude of I’m right, you’re wrong (that of James and John) which is dangerous. This can cause young Christians to be confused and stumble. This is not the spirit of humility, nor is it wisdom.

The spirit of humility is not quick to speak words or act – this was a mistake for James and John. We should be humble and wise even if that means we refrain from saying or doing something which may cause misunderstanding and another person to stumble.

“In the multitude of words sin is not lacking, But he who restrains his lips *is* wise. ”
Proverbs 10.19

Mark 10.35-45; Matthew 20.20-28

In this passage we see James and John coming to Jesus with a request – We want to sit at your right and left sides. They are still dreaming of greatness and position (*Matthew tells us it was their mother that asked the request on their behalf*)

Jesus' reply to them was similar to His previous response "You don't know what you are asking" - You don't know what manner of spirit you are of

Jesus taught them again that if they want to be first then they must learn the lesson of submission and become the servant of all. Take a step down in submission and humility and you will be exalted.

This was the example of Jesus, and we should follow His example:

"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" Mark 10.45