

Humble Leadership

Luke 22:24-30

This morning, we are going to talk about humble or servant leadership. We regularly get a picture of the opposite of that in the fallen world in which we live. Right now there is a brutal power struggle going on in the country of Sudan. At the heart of the war are two generals “fighting for political control, military control, and to protect their extensive business interests.” (NPR interview with reporter Greg Myre). What is interesting is that at one time, these two generals were on the same side, fighting together. One reporter described it this way: *“What we are seeing is a mobster shootout. We're seeing two gang bosses shooting it out for control of the terrain in which they make their illicit money.”*

“Two Generals, General Abdel-Fattah Burhan, and General Mohamed Dagalo (are fighting for control). General Dagalo is widely known as Hemedti. He heads a powerful paramilitary group that's also part of the government security forces. Now, in 2019, these generals turned on the longtime president and helped him - drive him from power during a popular uprising. Since then, the two generals have been the most powerful men in the country, but their partnership became strained.”

This is what we see in seed form in this passage. There is in the disciples an inherent desire for power, and control, and greatness. All it takes is an occasion for the justification in their minds that they should get it and the kingdom would be divided. These disciples who are joined by a common loyalty to Jesus will turn on each other easily in a moment if they are left to themselves. Pride is brutal in leadership. Self-interest is destructive. Especially, dangerous is the narcissistic view that the people would be better off if I take control.

Regularly, in human history, we see the story of countries where leaders have decided that they need to grab the reigns away from the people and restore the former greatness or glory of a nation. I think Russia is a case in point right now. We watch with horror as a country tries to forcibly restore its former glory. Cruelty and capriciousness seems justifiable in the minds of tyrants. They are doing it for the good and the glory of the nation.

God opposes the proud because pride deceives, divides, and destroys. It is inherently Satanic. It is the opposite of God's very nature.

Inherent in all of us is this desire to have our way, to assert our authority, to take control. It is what divides two parents from one another, two partners in a business, a husband and wife. It is the opposite of what Jesus is doing in the cross and it is what all of us regularly need to keep in check through the gospel. The fight for control and respect.

The kingdom of God is not like that. In the kingdom of God, and in this passage, we are called to consider **humble leadership**. We are meant to be warned in and of ourselves, that pride is what drove Satan to fall. Pride is what the Lord opposes. Humility receives the blessing and grace of God. As Christians, we are warned that not many of you ought to be teachers for you will give a stricter account. In this passage of Scripture we are confronted with the temptation in the disciples to assume that they are qualified and needed to lead. They are the greatest. They are the most qualified.

JC Ryle said that the true tests of Christian greatness are "Usefulness in the world and the Church – a humble readiness to do anything, and put our hands to any good work – a cheerful willingness to fill any post, however lowly, and discharge any office, however unpleasant, if we can only promote happiness and holiness."

When we fail to recognize that only Christ is sufficient to lead, then we are in danger of doing ourselves and others great harm. No one should take the mantle of leadership in a proud and self-righteous passion and we should all tremble.

This is true in families, in marriage and parenting. It is true in the church. It is what has made Christians distinctly different. **Humility is a willingness to follow Christ and take the lowliest place in order to do the greatest good for others to the praise of the glory of God grace.**

- I. **The Disciples Shocking Attitude** “A dispute also arose among them, as to which of them was to be regarded as the greatest.” (Luke 22:24)

What ought to make us humble can actually reveal our pride. What ought to make us more careful can often trigger our presumptuousness.

Immediately following Jesus’ telling his disciples that he was about to become God’s Passover lamb on their behalf, giving his body and his blood for them, a dispute arises between the disciples. Here is how I envision this scenario arising. Jesus has just said that one of them would betray him. Instead of humbling themselves and asking God to protect them from doing something like this, they begin to think to themselves that they would never do such a thing and that they, to the contrary, ought to be regarded and to be rewarded for their faithfulness.

So – someone’s dreadful failure causes them to boast in their faithfulness.

“If one of them is the betrayer, it is not surprising that a debate breaks out about the other end of the scale, that is, which one is the greatest (cf. Matthew 18:1; Mark 9:33-37; Luke 9:46). As readers we are rather astonished to see such narcissism on the night Jesus is betrayed, but then we recognize that the Gospel writers honestly portray the faults and characters of the disciples.” (Tom Schreiner)

Luke 9:46-48 “An argument arose among them as to which of them was the greatest. But Jesus, knowing the reasoning of their hearts, took a child and put him by his side and said to them, ‘Whoever receives this child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me. For he who is least among you all is one who is great.’”

Notice in Luke 9 when this happened before there were several things that had happened:

- The transfiguration – that could have elicited pride in Peter and John
- The failure of the disciples to deliver a boy from demonic possession.
- The announcement of Jesus that “the Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men.”

Spiritual pride, ministry failure, and Jesus' ministry sounding like failure triggers a conversation about who is the greatest – that is – who is qualified to run this show?

Two stunning realities should have caused them to tremble and humble themselves:

- a. **Jesus' clarity that his sacrificial death was on their behalf** – This should redefine their understanding about what kingdom influence actually looks like. The cruciform life is the life of the Leader in the kingdom of God. Jesus at the Passover meal pointed to his sacrifice. This you would think would cause them to tremble but pride dies hard.

If Jesus had to die in our place for our sins, we ought to recognize our inherent fallenness. Prone to wander Lord I feel it. Prone to leave the God, I love.

- b. **Judas' betrayal** ought not to cause us to boast but to search our hearts and seek that God would keep us from the kind of pride and selfishness that would lead one to turn against Christ. Judas should have given them pause to consider their sin of self-will. Judas' exercise of self-will and idolatry ought to put them at the feet of Jesus' with gratitude and praise for His grace.

When Jesus reveals that Judas is about to betray him, you can just imagine the disciples beginning to feel the need to take charge. The conversation probably would go like "I never trusted that guy. The rails are coming off this kingdom thing. Well, I better take charge and manage this thing." Instead of servant-heartedness and humility, there is pride and presumption.

Disputes arise in leadership usually when there is a trigger event (something appears to be going off the rails even though God is on the throne).

Pride arises because we forget two humbling realities: Jesus really had to die for MY sin. The sin around us is what would happen to us if the grace of God alone didn't keep us.

“I have seen in my own life and witnessed in the lives of other leaders that spiritual pride leaves you exposed to spiritual attack. No leader is safe thinking he is impervious to attack. A spiritually healthy leadership community is always watchful and alert to the spiritual dangers of life in a fallen world and life as a church or ministry leader. Perhaps there is no better defense against spiritual attack than humility; that is, a sense of constant need for protective and empowering grace that then motivates us to watch for danger and cry out for God’s help and the loving help of fellow leaders.” Paul David Tripp

Servant leadership must see our deep need for Jesus in the fact that He had to become the lamb of God on our behalf and that apart from his grace, we all would follow in Judas’ footsteps. It should be us careful, slow to speak, willing to listen and to reflect. If we really think that we had it together, why was it necessary for Jesus to become the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Humble leadership has an inherent mistrust of self and a supreme confidence in the faithfulness and goodness and the grace of Jesus Christ.

This is why taking communion regularly is helpful. It reminds us of what we needed to be saved from and it causes us to rejoice in the One who took the lowest place to save us from our sins.

II. Contrasting Kingdoms:

“And he said to them, ‘The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you.’ Luke 22:25

Leadership in the World is very different than Leadership in the Kingdom of God. (Luke 22:22-27)

- a. **Worldly Leadership: Autocratic and Arrogant** - “An air of superiority: You need us.” Leadership in the culture is nothing like leadership in the kingdom. This is toxic when you sit in a position where you see others as in greater need than you. Be careful of this: This gets into us easily where we sit and think that we are the ones who really know what

everyone else needs and only if they did what we knew they needed then they would be better off. This air that we are people's "benefactors" betrays the reality that we need God's grace as well.

There is a tendency for these disciples to try to fill the gap and instead of humble leadership, servant leadership, they move to autocratic leadership.

Two parts to the deception:

- **Autocratic - Asserting Human Authority** - Making people serve us and having the posture that people must answer to us. We are the ones best put in charge. Rather than we are those who serve.

"And he said to them, 'The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them'"

I can imagine for the disciples the argument really is around who knows best on how to lead this thing. They assume that they know better than everyone else and therefore, they want to be in the place to give the orders rather than receive the orders. These are those who feel they need to step up in order to save the venture from the foolishness of others leadership. They aren't trusting God. They are proud and presumptuous.

That's not what the attitude of the Christian is. The attitude of the believer is not to be proud and presumptuous. We seek to submit to Christ and to others.

We exercise arrogant authority when we really don't trust God to work out his good purpose. We forget that unless the Lord builds the house, those that build it labor in vain. **We become God's Savior instead of waiting on him. This is inherently an act of pride and unbelief.**

Like Saul in 1 Samuel 13:8-14

⁸He waited seven days, the time appointed by Samuel. But Samuel did not come to Gilgal, and the people were scattering from him. ⁹So Saul said, "Bring the burnt offering here to me, and the peace offerings." And he offered the burnt offering. ¹⁰As soon as he had finished offering the burnt offering, behold, Samuel came. And Saul went out to meet him and greet him. ¹¹Samuel said, "What have

you done?” And Saul said, “When I saw that the people were scattering from me, and that you did not come within the days appointed, and that the Philistines had mustered at Michmash, ¹² I said, ‘Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not sought the favor of the LORD.’ So I forced myself, and offered the burnt offering.” ¹³ And Samuel said to Saul, “You have done foolishly. You have not kept the command of the LORD your God, with which he commanded you. For then the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. ¹⁴ But now your kingdom shall not continue. The LORD has sought out a man after his own heart, and the LORD has commanded him to be prince^[a] over his people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you.”

“We clearly see here top-down leadership, by which the greatness of a person is established by his position. Jesus does not follow the world’s conceptions and paradigms, however, but subverts and overturns what people what people consider greatness to be. The greatest do not advertise their power and influence but consider themselves to be like the youngest person, like those at the bottom of the social ladder.” (Tom Schreiner)

I have seen this on more than one occasion in my life and my ministry – and this take charge attitude – stops serving humbly and starts insisting on its way.

- Arrogant - Assuming Moral Superiority

They call themselves “benefactors.”

“Jesus implies that those who receive the title ‘benefactor’ bestow benefits on others to keep them subservient and to foster the myth that the elite are generous and therefore, praiseworthy.” (David Garland)

There is more than the desire for recognition. It is a form of deep self-deception. You take charge and make people follow because you believe that you hold the moral high ground. It is one of the worst forms of religious hypocrisy. It is self-deception that leads to manipulation and injury.

Here’s the danger of pride – In the mind of the disciples, they really think that one of them needs to run the show. They don’t trust God. They stop being humble servants. They believe their own lies but they don’t believe God.

b. The Kingdom Leadership: Humble Servant Leadership

Let the greatest become like the youngest, and the leader as one who serves.

“But not so with you.”

- a. **Humble - Embracing humility - Become as the Youngest** – You don’t assert one’s authority and right. You become like the youngest in a culture that honors the elder. You just assume the position of humbleness.

“Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves.”

This is choosing to lead and to serve regardless of recognition and even when facing false accusations. You put your pride aside and serve like Jesus washing even Judas’ feet.

- b. **Servanthood - Engaging servanthood - The Pattern in Christ:**
Christ the table waiter.

“For who is the greater, the one who reclines at the table or one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at table? **But I am among you as one who serves.**”

“Jesus Christ is the Greatest One of all. If you doubt this, just go up to heaven and talk to the angels who have been worshiping him without intermission since the beginning of time, and they will tell you that they have not yet given Jesus even one trillionth of the honor that he deserves... But Jesus said, ‘I am among you as one who serves.’” (Philip Ryken)

We are to position ourselves for anonymity, humility and service. The debate over who would be considered the greatest (22:24) is the exact opposite. The debate should be who would have the privilege of serving.

That’s always good for us – to see Christ as our chief example is really what Luke emphasizes here.

We are meant to think of passages like Philippians 2:3-11.

“Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore, God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

Two questions – Are you doing anything out of selfish ambition? Are you doing anything out of empty conceit (pride)?

Are you abandoning recognition and are you avoiding exerting your will? Are you willing to take the position of servant and sufferer?

Here is when it can be especially difficult to humble yourself – when you are in the midst of proud and selfish leaders. Isn't it amazing how Jesus keeps his tongue in check and goes to the cross while an arrogant and corrupt priesthood join with a capricious Roman governor to accuse him falsely.

This is when humble servanthood takes place. When you serve humbly and people not only don't appreciate it but malign your name. Yet, for the King and his kingdom you press on. This pleases Christ.

III. Jesus' Shocking Promise – I assign to you a kingdom.

“You are those who have stayed with me in my trials, and I assign to you, as my Father assigned to me, a kingdom, that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” (Luke 22:28-30)

What does Jesus' Humble Leadership Look Like In Eternity?

- **Jesus acknowledges and approves of their imperfect efforts** – “You are those who have stayed with me in my trials.” He is genuinely grateful for their ministry to him as

imperfect as it is. (Humility sees and acknowledges others who serve imperfectly and weakly.) If Jesus can do that, we sure must seek to do it. We don't stand in a position of moral superiority. That won't happen in heaven. We will be rewarded and applauded for what Jesus did in and through us.

Fighter Verse this week – “Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil. Hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. **Outdo one another in showing honor.**” (Romans 12:9-10)

- **Gladly shares the deserved rewards of His sacrifices:** He invites them into his eternal joy of fellowship and leadership.

Sharing the rewards and joys of ministry - “that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom.”

- **Genuinely entrusts us authority in eternity.**

Sharing the responsibilities of ministry - “and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”

One of the signs of humility is a willingness to allow others to share in the joys and blessings of kingdom ministry. Eating at his table at the kingdom will be a celebration that Jesus has earned by His cross for us all. However, without bitterness and begrudging, Jesus fully embraces these competitive disciples to his table one day and to eat the rewards with Him of His sacrificial ministry.

It will be stunning to see who Jesus acknowledges and with whom Jesus shares his kingdom reign. ***We are going to have to live with the reality that Christ sees things in us that we in our pride are unwilling to see in each other.***

That is one clear sign that you have a servant-leader's heart is that you are not competing for the praise and the accolades of ministry but you are wanting that reward and joy to be shared all the way around the team. (Whose praise are you seeking? Whose pleasure are you seeking?) If Christ who deserves all glory

invites us to feast at his table in glory as co-laborers, we ought to be willing to acknowledge and to invite one another to celebrate in the rewards of Christ's labors in our midst.

Another clear sign is that you are willing to share future ministry with others in the kingdom of God. Imagine that Christ will have his disciples reigning with him over the 12 tribes. Again, in heaven, that will be servant-leadership where Jesus will rule for our good and his glory forever. There will be a kingdom and in that kingdom there will be those who govern us for our good. Those who govern and shepherd and serve will do so for the joy of seeing our benefit. The 12 tribes of Israel, in my understanding, are the whole people of God, who make up the true Israel by faith.

Humble service is the way of heaven.