

06/17/12

A Father's Strength

- this morning I'd like to begin our time together by asking you to think with me about the question – what is the appropriate role of the church in culture and how does that dovetail with what we're trying to accomplish on Father's Day?...
- most of us have been amazed the past few weeks at how our simple bond request before the West Lafayette City council took on a complete life of its own...
 - there are obviously some very deep-seated and emotionally charged issues in our community that are barely under the surface that these events revealed...
 - in fact, I said to one of the city leaders – we certainly didn't come to WL to cause trouble – and he responded (wisely I think), that "Faith didn't cause trouble, you revealed trouble that already existed.)
- if you're new to the conversation – the background is that there's a financial instrument known as tax exempt bond financing – it's used by municipalities to build sewers and roads, it's often used by hospitals when they'd like to construct new facilities, and it's available to religious non-profits under certain circumstances as well...
- the catch is that a non-profit cannot directly issue the bonds – the project has to be certified by a government entity – so they serve as the pass-through, or the conduit issuer...
 - there's no public money involved...the government has no responsibility for repayment or default and the city's credit rating is not affected in any way...
 - the city also isn't expressing agreement with the entity's mission and message...it's a simple pass-through...
 - these kinds of transactions are done routinely without controversy all over the country all the time...and we did it through the county council 6 years ago for our community center...
 - the reason we would do it is first financial stewardship – it's the best rate available...
 - but also because we always wanted the project to be collaboration between the neighbors, the city, and the church...and through approving this bond – the city was stating that they saw this as important economic development to a blighted site...
- the amount of attention that this simple request received was shocking...
 - our attorney from Indianapolis who does this as a living has never seen anything like it in his entire career and their firm has done hundreds of these for other religious groups...
 - the final city council meeting had to be moved to the West Lafayette High School to accommodate the crowds...
 - I can't remember the last time that happened...
- many people used that as an opportunity to talk about gay rights, and gay marriage...
 - others teed on our view of science someone and our view of women...
 - some saw it as a referendum on our approach to biblical counseling...
 - others somehow tied it to federal funding for Planned Parenthood...
 - there was an article that connected our request to domestic partner benefits at local companies
 - another person even believed the request should be denied because of Faith West's impact on global warming and climate change...
- some of the controversy also involved whether the government should be involved with a religious group out of appropriate concerns about separation of church and state...
- so some people started referring to the housing aspect of Faith West as being secular...in an attempt to help us I think...but still quite inaccurate...

- on the other hand were those who were saying that the only people who would be allowed into the community leagues, or the meeting rooms, or the housing, or the fitness center, or the pre-school...would be people who believed exactly the way we do on every last point of doctrine and culture...
 - both extremes were incorrect in terms of the law with regard to this case...
 - but more important, they're incorrect with regards to what we believe our mission is in culture...
- we can't do things that are purely secular...or we risk our non-profit standing with the IRS...
 - we're a religious charity...so our housing has to be connected to our exempt purpose and it is...
 - on the other hand – it can't be pervasively sectarian...meaning in this case that people who don't believe the Bible in the same way we do on every point are still welcome...
 - there are pervasively sectarian aspects of the project – our counseling – our worship services – in those endeavors we are definitely trying to encourage individuals to believe God's Word in certain ways--but those portions of the facility are being paid for by our church's money – not bond proceeds...
- now, here's why I went through all of that...
 - I honestly believe that there are people, perhaps many people who believe we think our primary role is to change the culture...and therefore we are very uncomfortable being around individuals who believe differently than we do...
 - and that could not be any more incorrect...
 - our goal is to change the church...and then to love those God has placed around us and if they in turn want to hear what God's Word says about their lives and ours – we will be happy to show them...
 - that is a crucial aspect of what it means it means to be a Baptist...it's called individual soul liberty...
 - believing that every person has the right and the responsibility to study the Scriptures if they choose to, and then live by their interpretation...
 - in other words, we would never force our opinions or convictions on someone else...we will seek to live them out ourselves, and share with them with anyone else who wants to know, and love those who don't...
- so how does that affect our mission at Faith West...the same as it does here at this campus...
 - how our neighbors choose to live their lives is none of our business...we're not going to judge them, or look down our noses at them...we'll called to love them regardless of who they choose to be and live...
 - what about our opinion on whether local companies should offer domestic partner benefits to their employees?...
 - has anyone here ever heard me raise that topic?...that's really not my business...
 - the Bible's purpose isn't to tell a secular company how to function...
 - what about all the political questions swilling around right now regarding gay rights, gay marriage, etc...
 - you may not like to hear me say this – but our country is not a Christian country...
 - we're not a theocracy, and the day we tried to make it that, I think we would be in trouble...
- and I'm glad for men and women who will serve in political office...
 - as individuals we should seek to be good citizens...

- but if we're not careful...we could very easily be perceived as just another political action committee trying to impose our views on others by force...
- our fundamental mission is not to clean up the culture...it's to clean up the church...and in so doing be a bright light for the glory of God and the service of any person around us who might be attracted to the light...
- so what does that have to do with Father's Day?...
 - a lot...because the last thing we need to do is talk about how bad the world is when it comes to failing fathers in our culture...
 - the real issue is – what does God's Word say about the kind of people, and for those to whom it applies, the kind of fathers...the Lord wants us to be?...
- God's Word answers that question – in some ways that are both challenging and sobering...
- with that in mind, please open your Bible now to Luke chapter 9...page 54 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you
- last week we talked about Understanding Your Source of Power...
 - Jesus took his disciples to the very end of themselves--on purpose--to show them they had access to strength and resources in Him that were not readily apparent unless they had eyes of faith to see beyond what they could accomplish on their own...
 - the passage also alluded in several ways to his pending death, burial, and resurrection...
 - information that should have humbled them -- because He had to die for their sin, and ours
 - and information that should have sobered them...every word and action should have been selected with extreme care in light of what was about to transpire...
 - information that should have matured them...as they came to recognize the significance of the ministry Christ was entrusting to them...
 - regrettably--their response didn't meet any of those tests...
- read Luke 9:46-62
- we're talking this morning about A Father's Strength...and let's organize the rest of our time around Four characteristics of a father who wishes to follow Christ.
- now, I should probably say before we go any further -- none of this is easy or automatic...
 - it's not so for the fathers who are here...or for any of us for that matter....
 - and some of it is downright upsetting...
 - but sometimes we have to be challenged--we have to be upset in order to be in the best position to grow...
 - but please remember this -- God's Word will never hurt you...
- the first characteristic of a father's strength is that he's...
 - I. Humble
 - it's sad but this section begins with the disciples having...

A. The disciple's argument.

- you're probably getting tired of hearing me say this...but this is another great example of why it's so important to study verses like this in a Harmony of the Gospels...
- where you have what all the gospels explain about these various events to have a fuller understanding of what is occurring...and what we learn from the Gospel of Mark is...
 1. Started apart from Christ's presence.

- Mark 9:33 - They came to Capernaum; and when He was in the house, He began to question them, "What were you discussing on the way?"
- have you ever been caught red-handed in a conversation you wish the other person didn't know you were having?...or maybe aught "red tongued..."
- ...and it's interesting that...
- 2. They didn't want to admit it.
 - Mark 9:34 - But they kept silent, for on the way they had discussed with one another which of them was the greatest.
 - are you picturing this?...they're kind-of looking up at the sky...whistling...hoping Jesus will change the subject...
 - because they didn't want to admit that in their pride, they were talking about who was the greatest among them, and that it had actually led to an argument them...
 - here's the team that is being entrusted with the proclamation of the most important message ever given...and their ability to proclaim it in a powerful and unified fashion is already being tested by the cancer of human pride...
 - that's especially sad because they were doing it at the very same time Jesus kept telling them about what was going to happen in Jerusalem...

B. The disciples' disconnect.

- we saw several times last week that Jesus had repeatedly tried to help them understand what was about to happen to Him...
- 1. Jesus was talking about His pending suffering.
 - Luke 9:22 -saying, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed and be raised up on the third day."
 - Luke 9:31 - who, appearing in glory, were speaking of His departure which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.
 - Luke 9:44 - Let these words sink into your ears; for the Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men.
- but what about the disciples?...
- 2. They were talking about their personal glory.
 - Luke 9:46 - An argument started among them as to which of them might be the greatest.
 - in commenting on these verses, John MacArthur said...
 - "This was a disturbing and potentially disastrous development. These men were the first generation of gospel preachers, and would be the leaders of the soon to be founded church. With so much riding on them and so much opposition from the hostile world, they needed to be unified and supportive of each other. The danger here is that pride ruins unity by destroying relationships. Relationships are based on loving sacrifice and service; on selfless deferring to and giving to others. Pride, being self-focused, is indifferent to others. Beyond that, it is ultimately judgmental and critical, and therefore divisive. Because of that, pride is the most common destroyer both of relationships and of churches. It plagued the Corinthian church, causing Paul to ask, "For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men?" (1 Cor. 3:3). Knowing that pride is the wedge Satan uses to split churches and splinter relationships, the Lord stressed to the disciples the crucial necessity of humility" (John MacArthur, p. 301).
- well, what was...

C. Jesus' antidote.

- Luke 9:47-48 - But Jesus, knowing what they were thinking in their heart, took a child and stood 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 the one who is least among all of you, this is the one who is great.
- now, why in the world did the Lord do that?...
- perhaps this comment from Darrell Bock will help -- "In Judaism, children under twelve could not be taught the Torah, and so to spend time with them was considered a waste" (Darrell Bock, Luke, 894-95).
- a child was the picture of humility...and therefore the polar opposite of their pride...
- Mark explains that at that point Jesus actually picks the child up and holds him in his arms, and then Matthew explains that Jesus said -- Matthew 18:3-4 - Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.
- that image is intended to destroy our pride in two ways...
 - to recognize that our stand before God is never by our works, or our greatness...it's by acknowledging our sin and coming to Jesus in childlike faith...
 - and then secondly being prepared to serve and minister to people -- not on the basis of who can make us look and feel important or enhance our resume and standing in the community...
 - but to those who also are like children -- they have little to offer us and we're perfectly OK with that...
- that's why it's so delightful to see a father suiting up their child to go swimming in the pool over at the community center...or taking his son or daughter out to one of these athletic fields for t-ball or soccer...or walking their child into Sunday school or to Wednesday night kids of faith...
- that dad is probably not going to get a whole lot of immediate return on that investment...but a father's humility doesn't care about that...
- that's why some of us have used some of these community discussion to point out that our goal isn't to talk about how sinful some other group of people might be -- that's not our concern--that's not our business--that's not our message...
 - we're about acknowledging--humble we hope--how sinful we were, and are...and how our only hope is in Christ and we're happy for anyone who would like to voluntarily join us on the journey of knowing Christ and his Word...
- now, the very next event shows why Jesus had previously used the phrase "let these words sink into your ears" because so often that's exactly what didn't happen with the disciples...
- but it illustrates a second characteristic every father needs, and every person needs...and that is be...

II. Secure

A. The disciples' concern

- Luke 9:49a - John answered and said, "Master, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name..."
- now, this wasn't some sort of a false teacher or the response would have been different...this was just another follower of Christ but not part of the twelve...

B. The disciples' solution

- Luke 9:49b - and we tried to prevent him because he does not follow along with us."
- and it's the same kind of pride...God can only use us, and He can only work our way...
- that's the same spirit that drove the prophet Elijah to a bout of depression because he concluded he was the only one serving God the right way -- and the Lord had to help see -- I have hundreds of servants who have not bowed the knee to Baal...
- so what is...

C. Jesus' solution

- Luke 9:50 - But Jesus said to him, "Do not hinder him; for he who is not against you is for you.
- strong people can be secure in the fact that God might gift other people differently than you...and use people different than you...and many times, by learning from them, and working with them, the entire team advances...
- that's why it's so refreshing to see a dad who says -- I realize I need help...
 - so I'm going to surround my children with other people who are going to help my wife and I learn the Scriptures...and apply the Scriptures...and live the Scriptures...
 - the older I get -- the more thankful I am for Sunday school teachers, and VBS workers, and Wednesday Night Kids of Faith workers, and FCS teachers...who had a profound impact on our children...
- so strong fathers are humble, and strong fathers are secure...thirdly...
- III. Merciful
 - we turn right around and we read about...

A. The disciples' "next problem"

- Jesus is now heading toward Jerusalem...and He is going to go through Samaria...
- and the imagery is obvious -- the Samaritans are the arch-enemies of the Jews...a dispute that goes back hundreds of years that has overpowering religious and ethnic undertones...
- the Jews hated the Samaritans and vice-versa...orthodox Jews would often take a longer route to avoid even having to set foot in that land....
- but Jesus is going to make a point and so He sends a couple of men ahead to make arrangements
- and not surprisingly...
- Luke 9:33 - But they did not receive Him, because He was traveling toward Jerusalem.
- now that detail is very important -- Luke isn't saying that these people had completely rejected Christ and His message -- it was simply a matter of acting on the age old prejudices they always had -- very similar to the woman at the well...
- they were raised to hate the Jews and anyone heading to Jerusalem was not going to be shown any hospitality by them...

B. The disciples' proposed solution

- Luke 9:54 - "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?."
- do you hear the pride?...do you hear the judge-mentalism?...
- now, we have to be careful here because there are times when judgment has to be meted out by those in authority...and we're going to read about some of that in the very next chapter...

- that's why it's so important to note that there is no evidence that these Samaritans had even been exposed to Christ's message yet...which is why James and John, two of Christ's closest associates, were the recipient of...

C. Jesus' rebuke.

- But He turned and rebuked them, and said, "You do not know what kind of spirit you are of; for the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them." And they went on to another village.
- that's why, in ministry, we don't want to carry ourselves as being harshly judgmental of others...the last thing we would ever want to hear from the mouth of Jesus would be the words "you don't know what kind of spirit you are of."
- this is why Jesus said -- Mathew 5:7 - Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.
- many of us had fathers who showed their strength in part by the way they showed mercy to us...
- it would be interesting to go around and ask everyone to complete this sentence...the day my dad really showed me mercy was...
- observations...
 1. requires having received mercy -- gospel
 2. requires the power of Christ to respond mercifully when you don't feel like it
 3. people who are not merciful can change (cf. James and John)
- now the passage ends in a way that might be upsetting -- but remember, God's Word will never hurt you if it's properly interpreted...

IV. Focus.

- in verse 57 we read about a man who comes who wants to follow Christ which certainly sounds laudable...
- Mark explains that the man was a scribe--from a group that had rejected Christ, so his presence as a disciple would have been a marvelous addition to the team...
- but Jesus knew his heart, so he said...Mark 9:58 - And Jesus said to him, "The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head."
- and we all know that a godly father has to have a focus on following Christ....

A. Instead of worshipping comfort.

- because there are a lot of aspects of beings God's kind of father that are anything but comfortable...
- then another man comes along and Jesus says...
- Luke 9:59 - And He said to another, "Follow Me." But he said, "Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father."
- and Jesus' response is shocking...Luke 9:60 - But He said to him, "Allow the dead to bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim everywhere the kingdom of God."
- and you read that and say -- what?...
 - the issue is -- the man's father wasn't dead yet...his concern was there to collect his inheritance and then following Christ wouldn't require such singular focus and faith...

B. Instead of worshipping wealth.

- then the last man comes, and says...
- Luke 9:61 - Another also said, "I will follow You, Lord; but first permit me to say good-bye to those at home."
- and while we're still reeling from the shock of the previous story, Jesus says,
- Luke 9:62 - But Jesus said to him, "No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."
- those are hard words...and sure they have to be balanced...but the idea is that Jesus apparently knew in this case that if the man went back home and became comfortable again in those friendships and relationships he would never follow Him...
- the truth is that while following Christ opens you up to all sorts of marvelous friendships...some others may not be given the attention you or they might like...

- if you're going to be merciful to Samaritans...you may not have as much time for those with whom you share a more common affinity...
- if you're going to be accepting of people that God is using outside of your group, that may stretch you in ways that take you away from your comfort zone...
- if you don't care who's greatest -- and you're willing to receive the spiritual children around you -- you may be putting all sorts of time into people who might not be your first choice of companions or associates...

C. Instead of worshipping relationships with those who are your closest natural companions.

- I understand that this can be overstated in a million ways -- but we dare not fail to let the Bible be the Bible...one of the greatest gifts a father can give his children is a singular commitment to Christ...
- and anytime that service can be done as a family -- that's often best...
- and keeping all priorities in place is a gigantic challenge which requires the wisdom of Solomon...but discipleship does involve replacing time with those you might want to spend it with with those God wants you to spend it with...