

Sermon Series: “Christ at the Crossroads”—Lord of Life Lutheran, Westfield, IN—2/27/2005

Title: “Christ at the Crossroads of Ambition”

Text: Mark 10: 35-45

Intro.: *Ills.: Needed—followers*

Theme: Christians are not encouraged to be ambitionless people; rather to put aside their selfish ambition and to let the excellence of Christ’s nature direct them to higher accomplishments than what they could achieve by themselves.

The context and the story

- A pivotal point in Jesus’ ministry
 1. A misunderstood moment of glory (**Print Mark 9: 5**)
 2. A confusing monologue about impending death and rising (**Print Mark 9: 9-10**)
- A roadside conversation
 3. A childish argument of who was better (**Print Mark 9: 33-34**)
 4. A childlike admonition and example given to correct aberrant attitudes
- A brash power-play of one-up-manship (**Print Mark 10: 35-37**)
 5. Matthew, in his account even says that the brothers used their mother to make a *stealth snatch and grab* for them
 6. *The rest* of the disciples are incensed not so much that the two asked but that they *didn’t get there first*

How to tell when doing your best turns into selfish ambition

- Definition of ambition: *desire for rank, fame, power . . . strong desire for advancement*
- When it comes from *foolish arrogance*
 7. **Comparative arrogance** –thinking more highly of yourself than your others around you
 1. **Ills.: Reverse Humility**
 8. **Idolatrous arrogance** — “do for us whatever we ask” vs. 35 — an attitude of being on a peer-to-peer with God
- When it is driven by *greed*
 9. **Direct avarice**
 1. Looking to gain wealth, power, prestige, advantage for yourself at the expense of others (**Print vs. 42-43**)
 2. *The righteousness of the upright will deliver them, But the treacherous will be caught by their own greed. Prov. 11:6*
 10. **Indirect avarice**
 1. Using your children, your health, your company’s profit to take advantage of another for yourself
 2. *Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions. Luke 12: 15*
- When it is done for *personal glory*
 11. **Ills.: the story of the Tower of Babel (Gen 11)**
 12. Board room of your decision making is attended by *Me, Myself, and I* and you always get an unanimous decisions
 1. *It is not good to eat too much honey, nor is it honorable to seek one’s own honor. Prov. 25: 27*
 13. Seeking God’s glory begins with seeking his plan
 1. **Print and read James 4: 13-15**

Turning from self-esteem to Christ-esteem

- *Receiving the up-side down world of Jesus (Print vss. 43 and 44)*
 14. A striking mark of holy ambition is that it elevates Christ and not the ambitious striver. *Citation: James D. Berkley, Leadership, Vol. 11, no. 3*
 15. When Jesus gave of himself that way, we benefited for eternity
 1. *Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with*

Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Col 3: 2-4

2. We are freed from the scratching and clawing for temporary treasure and given in its place a lasting treasure

· ***Adopting the inside-out world of Jesus (Print vs. 45)***

16. Jesus always ordered himself and his agenda around the “others” need (physically and spiritually)

1. **Print and read Phil 2: 3-5**

17. Jesus says that we must be changed to service-acted and slave-minded (*deacon and bondsman*)

1. **Ills.: Someone Must Play 2nd**

Needed: Followers

S. I. McMillen, in his book *None of These Diseases*, tells a story of a young woman who wanted to go to college, but her heart sank when she read the question on the application blank that asked, "Are you a leader?" Being both honest and conscientious, she wrote, "No," and returned the application, expecting the worst. To her surprise, she received this letter from the college: "Dear Applicant: A study of the application forms reveals that this year our college will have 1,452 new leaders. We are accepting you because we feel it is imperative that they have at least one follower."

Citation: J. R. Love, Ruston, Louisiana

Reverse Humility

In our church kitchen, whoever drinks the last cup of coffee often fails to replenish the pot for the next person. Trying to motivate the staff to be more responsible, the secretary taped a neatly-typed plea to the pot: "If Jesus drank the last cup of coffee, what would he have done? Go thou and do likewise." The next morning she found this scrawled response:

"Jesus would have turned the water into wine instead of coffee." ***Citation: Mae H. Fortson, Black Mountain,***

North Carolina. Christian Reader, "Lite Fare."

Someone Must Play 2nd

Leonard Bernstein, the celebrated orchestra conductor, was once asked, "What is the hardest instrument to play?"

Without a moment's hesitation he replied, "Second fiddle. I can always get plenty of first violinists. But to find one who plays second violin with as much enthusiasm, or second French horn, or second flute, now that's a problem! And yet if no one plays second, we have no harmony." ***Citation: Ben Patterson, "A Faith Like Mary's," Preaching Today,***

Tape No. 87

Mark 10:35-45

³⁵Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. "Teacher," they said, "we want you to do for us whatever we ask." ³⁶"What do you want me to do for you?" he asked. ³⁷They replied, "Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory." ³⁸"You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said. "Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?" ³⁹"We can," they answered. Jesus said to them, "You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, ⁴⁰but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared." ⁴¹When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. ⁴²Jesus called them together and said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. ⁴³Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. ⁴⁵For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." [NIV]

Mark 9:5

Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters--one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah."

Mark 9:9-10

As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead. They kept the matter to themselves, discussing what "rising from the dead" meant.

Mark 9:33-34

They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the road?" But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest.

James 4:13-15

¹³Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." ¹⁴Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. ¹⁵Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that."

Philip. 2:3-5

³Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. ⁴Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. ⁵Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus