

"HEAR YE HIM"

A Devotional Series For Radio

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The Sermon: THE GREATEST SHALL BE YOUR SERVANT

Scripture: Matthew 23:1-12.

Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples, Saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not. For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments, And love the uppermost rooms at feast, and the chief seats in the synagogues, And greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi, But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and ye are all brethren. And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven. Neither be ye called masters, for one is your Master, even Christ. But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.

Whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister, and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant.

Humility is taught by nearly every great world religion. Yet the dividing line between pride and humility, even in religious worship, is so fine that it is difficult to distinguish between one and the other. Some men are proud of their humility. They make a parade of it. They want to be sure that everyone will see it. And for that very reason their seeming humility becomes pride.

In his teaching Jesus was frequently concerned about the problems of pride and the need for a sincere and becoming humility. In the Sermon on the Mount he cautioned that we should not sound a trumpet before us as we go through the streets to give alms or do our good deeds. He cautioned that we should not pray standing conspicuously in prominent places in synagogues or on street corners; that in public prayer we should not use flowery language or vain repetitions intended for the ear of man rather than the ear of God; that we should not fast with sad, soiled, or disfigured faces so that all men might know of our deprivation. Even religiously inspired humility must be watched continually lest it become pride. In another teaching Jesus said, "Whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased, and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted."

In the scripture from the 23rd chapter of Matthew selected for today's les-

son, Jesus points to the scribes and Pharisees as examples of this lack of humility. "They bind heavy burdens:" that is, they kept and required others to keep so many meticulous ritual observances of the written and oral law that no ordinary man could remember all of them -- let alone keep them -- and then the scribes and Pharisees themselves went about feeling very superior because they knew and kept the law. In order that men might make no mistake about their piety, the Pharisees enlarged their phylacteries -- little boxes containing portions of the law, and bound on the arm as near as possible to the heart and on the forehead between the eyes. They sewed extra long ornate tassels on their shawls. They liked the best seats at religious feasts, and the most conspicuous places in the synagogue. They were jealous of their titles, such as "Rabbi," and "Master." Jesus recognized that as successors to Moses and guardians of the law they had a certain legal authority to teach the law; and therefore bade his disciples listen to and observe what they taught. But he added, "Do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not." Theirs was an insincere religion and a proud humility.

The proud man, by his very pride, cuts himself off from his fellow-men, and from the contributions they might make to his learning, experience, and development.

The proud man cuts himself off from God, so that he no longer has access to those spiritual forces which could and should help to mold his life and his character. The proud man is content with himself; he desires no further growth. Shut up within himself, with no access either to God or to fellow-man, he becomes petty and small and mean. No truly great man is ever proud. True greatness is always humble.

On the other hand, true humility is not abject humiliation. It is not fawning upon those who know more, or who have more than you. It is not the obsequiousness of a menial waiting for a tip. It is not cringing servility. It is not a belittling of one's self and of one's gifts, talents, capacities, and abilities, or an excusing of one's self from active participation in life because of lesser talents. The humble man is one who recognizes his weakness and his dependence on God and on the loving charity of the many thousands of other men in the world whose work and skill make possible his continued life and happiness, no matter how strong or how skilled he himself may be. The humble man is the one who recognizes also his own strength, his own peculiar gifts and talents and abilities, and who in love dedicates all these to the glory of God and the service of humanity. If pride is the motivation, man does his work to be seen and applauded by other men. If love is the motivation, man does his work that other men might be served and strengthened and blessed; and the man who thus serves with love as the motivation is a humble man.

What are the marks of a great man? A man is not to be considered great because he has or possesses a fine education, or a huge store of knowledge, or an outstanding skill, or a fiery eloquence, or an outstanding piety, or untold wealth, or mighty power, or a high position with an impressive title. A man might have any one or all of these things, and still be a small, mean petty man, isolated and unhappy in his pride. A man's greatness is measured by the use he makes of the gifts God has given him. "Whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be the servant of all." A great man who is humble, and whose humility is motivated by love, can take a fine education, or knowledge, or skill, or eloquence, or piety, or wealth, or power, or position, or title, and with these things perform a greater service and be a better servant than the man who has them not. In that sense he will be a greater man. But in another sense, God

judges men's greatness in the light of the use men make of such gifts as they have. Humanity needs the services of men of genius, men of brilliance and outstanding ability, but most of the work of the world that supplies men's basic needs is done by men of lesser talents who because of their spiritual greatness minister devotedly to their fellow men with the humble gifts they have. "HE that is greatest among you shall be your servant." The man who serves to the utmost of his capacity, regardless of how great or how small his capacity may be, is in the eyes of Jesus, a great man. And the greater the service in relation to capacity, the greater the man.

In the church of Christ there are different offices, different functions. Some titles seem to be necessary for purposes of identification, and perhaps for pointing out differences of function. But the man who is primarily concerned about his title is not enough concerned about serving his brethren. He needs to be reminded that a man is not great because others call him "Master," or "Father," or "Rabbi," or "Reverend," or "Senator," or "Governor," or "President," or what not, but because he uses that office and calling as a means of service. All serve the same Master. All sit at the feet of the same great Rabbi or Teacher. All are sons of the same Father, and "Ye are all brethren."

Jesus himself set the example. If any man who ever walked the earth had a right to other men's adoration, and had a right to command their obedient service for his own ease and comfort, it was Jesus. But there are very few occasions recorded on which he allowed himself to be served by someone else. Rather, it was he who was always at the beck and call of everyone else who came to ask a question, to seek the answer to a problem, to plead for healing. It was to his leadership the disciples looked when they were tired and needed rest, when they were hungry and needed food. It was he who performed the most menial of all tasks -- washing their feet -- to demonstrate to them what humility and service meant. It was he who allowed himself to be crucified as only the lowest and meanest slaves and criminals were crucified, that through this act of sacrificial service and love men might be rescued from the bondage of sin and death. With him as our perfect example, can we do less? He that is greatest among you shall be your servant, serving all with dedicated skill and with the humility of love.