

## HOW TO WIN THE WORLD

I have to admit; sometimes being a follower of Christ is a real challenge. Anyone else ever feel that way? I mean, I don't remember our leaders back in UMYF or confirmation telling us that our walk with Christ was going to be a slow crawl to perfection. Somehow it seemed that being a new creation would be instantaneous and we'd all love Jesus as much as possible. So here we are at the end of another Lenten season, and I don't know about you, but I am still waiting for my Christlikeness to really take shape.

Apparently this is a plague among all Christians, otherwise why would Paul have written so many words of instruction and encouragement and reproof? We should at least be better at discipleship than those in the early church. We have so many more years of theological wisdom and preaching and study than they did. Or maybe it was they who had the advantage over us. After all, they were merely one generation away from the actual disciples who knew Jesus personally, in the flesh, alive, dead, and alive again.

Should we do away with all study, commentaries and preaching and spend our time permanently attached to the New Testament with no outside influence? It may indeed be all we need, but there is an important element Paul advocated as a cure for the mundane and lifeless faith. *"Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus."* Can you believe this guy? That's asking quite a lot from us sinful humans, to have the mind of God as our goal. How do we know what goes through God's mind? His thoughts are not our thoughts; He said so Himself!

Ha! Take that Paul. It can't be done. But wait a minute now. He didn't say the mind of God. He said the mind of Christ Jesus. He was God and man, and as a man He had the same experiences we have. He had the same range of emotions, the same physical sensations and capabilities and limitations. He just didn't let them control Him as we do. Instead of letting our emotions, sensations, capabilities, limitations, and most crucially, our expectations lead us, we are to let the mind of Christ lead us.

The key word there is let. As in allow yourself to be led by the mind of Christ, not try to replicate His mind inside your mind. His mind thought up the universe, but was also willing to put aside His rights and privileges in order to experience something truly remarkable; life and death. So if that's the mind we aspire to have, the attitude we need to adopt, we had better figure out how we need to react like Jesus reacted to the events of life. We should study His life very closely, if we would follow in His footsteps.

C. S. Lewis wrote, "True humility is not thinking less of yourself; it is thinking of yourself less." Part of the reason Jesus told us we would have to deny ourselves in order to be disciples is because in order to be our true selves we **have to** deny ourselves. To live in an intimate relationship with Christ is to begin to act like Christ, to think like Christ, and to be Christ-like in

all of our living. We cannot live that way unless we have submitted mind, body and soul to Him.

Jesus existed in the form of God long before He came to earth to live among His fellow human beings. However, He did not cling to that status as though He might resign all His privileges and power. He merely set aside His privileges for a time. Let this mind be in you. But what do we know about having the privileges and power of a divine being?

We have egos the size of Texas, so we should start there. How do we have the same mind which is in Jesus? Is it a process of surrendering first or is it something we acquire from God? The answer is yes. We first surrender so that we are capable of receiving anything from God. Our free will must be in agreement with what God desires for us. So the word **let** refers to striving for or seeking something. We have to seek the mind of Christ for our very own.

We need to acquire the mind of Christ, who shrugged off His status as God and put on human skin in order to teach us all a lesson about love. What a great challenge we are facing, to have the mind of Christ. Again, how can we know another's mind? We could if we are willing to listen and pay attention and observe and imitate. In *The Imitation of Christ* we read, "If it seems to you that you know many things and thoroughly understand them all, realize that there are countless other things of which you are ignorant."

It pays to know your own limitations, and if that's not enough, then remember what they say in sports, "Attitude is everything." Christ lived out an attitude that colored everything He did and taught, right up to the day He died. It was an attitude of humility allowing Him to be right there with those He desired to save. Jesus never had a pulpit; He had a hillside. What does that say about the church?

He had an attitude of service, using common occurrences like illness or death or poverty to show God's love to the least and the lost. One author said "Christians are not called to great places of leadership until first they have humbled themselves in places of service."<sup>1</sup> He had an attitude of obedience. In everything He did His Father's will, kept to His Father's plan and accomplished His Father's purpose.

The brother of Mother Teresa was preparing himself to become an officer in the Albanian army. Just before his graduation he visited with his family. His seventeen-year-old sister, Gonxha, later to become Sister Teresa and then Mother Teresa, was present at the family meal. He told of his appointment upon graduation to be a junior officer at the palace of the king of Albania and what a good step for his career that would be.

He turned to his sister and said, "What will you be doing?" She said, "I have chosen to follow Christ to India and give my life to serving the poorest of the poor." He was enraged. He said,

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<sup>1</sup><http://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/3672/sermon-options-palmpassion-sunday-2016>

“To have a sister doing such an unworthy thing will be a great embarrassment to me and an impediment to my career. Are you out of your mind?”<sup>2</sup>

We have to out of our own minds in order to make room for the mind of Christ. We have to get out of God’s way and let Him work. We won’t have a parade of palm-waving people shouting praises at us. If we want one, we should know how it will end. There is a natural progression from status to humility that ends in death to self. For Christ it ended in death to sin. It was how He won the world.

All the time He spent on earth Jesus was fair but not timid in His dealings with others. He was honest but took His truth from the one source. He was generous but without wealth. God cannot contradict Himself, so Jesus was who God is, always. His actions were God’s actions. His reactions were God’s reactions. He was led by God and so should we be.

Do you ever wonder what went through His mind when they were shouting “Hosanna”? When Judas kissed Him? When they arrested Him with swords and clubs amid sleeping disciples? When the disciples then fled? When they whipped Him? When Peter denied Him, then looked Him in the eye? When the same crowd who cried “Hosanna” began shouting “Crucify Him!”? When they put the thorns on His head? When they hit Him and spit on Him? When the hammer hit the nails? When they taunted a dying man? When a dying man taunted Him? When He died knowing He had done all He could do?

So how will we react when it’s our turn? To be betrayed by a friend. Or let down by a family member. Or ridiculed. Or hurt. Or rejected. Or left alone in a time of crisis. How will we react when the opportunity comes to be humble and set aside all thoughts of privileges or entitlement or rights in order to do something worthy of the glory of God?

As I researched this sermon I stumbled across a verse in 1 Peter chapter four that began to speak to me and at the same time disturb me because I’m as human as anyone and I don’t like to be inconvenienced or made to suffer. The verse says *“Since Christ suffered while he was in his body, strengthen yourselves with the same way of thinking Christ had. The person who has suffered in the body is finished with sin.”*

We can find the subject of suffering throughout the New Testament, even in Jesus’ own words. Suffering in life is a given. Life is hard, bodies are fragile, and pain is almost inevitable. So what does this have to do with our Christian faith? What effect does it have on our discipleship?

The late Anglican minister John Stott wrote, “Biblical teaching and personal experience thus combine to teach that suffering is the path to holiness or maturity. There is always an indefinable something about people who have suffered. They exhibit the meekness and gentleness of Christ. Peter seems to be saying that physical affliction actually has the effect

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<sup>2</sup> Duduit, Michael, editor, *The Abingdon Preaching Annual*, 1999 Edition, pg. 123-124

of making us stop sinning. This being so, I sometimes wonder if the real test of our hunger for holiness is our willingness to experience any degree of suffering if only thereby God will make us holy.”<sup>3</sup>

Let me share with you some of the alternative gospel reading for this Sunday. You see, if you focus only on the so-called triumphal entry into Jerusalem and then come again next Sunday without hearing the message of Good Friday, you will have a hero's view of Christ. You need a humbled view of Christ.

*But they were adamant, shouting their demand that Jesus be crucified. Their voices won out. Pilate issued his decision to grant their request. He released the one they asked for, who had been thrown into prison because of a riot and murder. But he handed Jesus over to their will. They also led two other criminals to be executed with Jesus. When they arrived at the place called The Skull, they crucified him, along with the criminals, one on his right and the other on his left. Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they're doing.” They drew lots as a way of dividing up his clothing.*

*The people were standing around watching, but the leaders sneered at him, saying, “He saved others. Let him save himself if he really is the Christ sent from God, the chosen one.” The soldiers also mocked him. They came up to him, offering him sour wine and saying, “If you really are the king of the Jews, save yourself.” Above his head was a notice of the formal charge against him. It read “This is the king of the Jews.”*

*One of the criminals hanging next to Jesus insulted him: “Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!” Responding, the other criminal spoke harshly to him, “Don't you fear God, seeing that you've also been sentenced to die? We are rightly condemned, for we are receiving the appropriate sentence for what we did. But this man has done nothing wrong.” Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” Jesus replied, “I assure you that today you will be with me in paradise.”*

*It was now about noon, and darkness covered the whole earth until about three o'clock, while the sun stopped shining. Then the curtain in the sanctuary tore down the middle. Crying out in a loud voice, Jesus said, “Father, into your hands I entrust my life.” After he said this, he breathed for the last time.*

Are you going to let the mind that was in Christ Jesus be in you, and remain in you? Or would you like to revert back to a state of resentment or hostility or an attitude of feeling put out or put upon or put in your place? There is glory coming for you, in the end. You don't have to have it now. It doesn't have to come from human hands. That's empty praise. It fades. Jesus played for an audience of one. So should you.

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<sup>3</sup> Stott, John R. W., *The Cross of Christ*, pg. 311