



## **Luke 9:43b–50**

While everyone was marvelling at all that Jesus did, he said to his disciples, 44 ‘Listen carefully to what I am about to tell you: the Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men.’ 45 But they did not understand what this meant. It was hidden from them, so that they did not grasp it, and they were afraid to ask him about it. 46 An argument started among the disciples as to which of them would be the greatest. 47

Jesus, knowing their thoughts, took a little child and made him stand beside him. 48 Then he said to them, 'Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. For it is the one who is least among you all who is the greatest.' 49 'Master,' said John, 'we saw someone driving out demons in your name and we tried to stop him, because he is not one of us.' 50 'Do not stop him,' Jesus said, 'for whoever is not against you is for you.'

## **Reflection**

I read an article recently entitled, 'Why you are the company you keep'. Perhaps

tellingly, it was published in the American online news platform, the *Elite Daily*. The article begins,

We have all heard the saying that birds of a feather flock together, meaning that the company you keep reflects your personality. A smart person surrounds himself with other smart people. If you hang out with trash, you will be perceived as trash. Surround yourself with the dreamers and the doers, the believers and thinkers, but most all, surround yourself with those who see greatness within you, even when you don't see it yourself. You really are only as good as the company you keep.

Greatness is determined by the company we keep. According to today's passage, Jesus would agree, although perhaps not quite in the same way as the 'Elite Daily' would advise. Let me read it to you, from Luke 9:43b–50,

While everyone was marvelling at all that Jesus did, he said to his disciples, 44 'Listen carefully to what I am about to tell you: the Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men.' 45 But they did not understand what this meant. It was hidden from them, so that they did not grasp it, and they were afraid to ask him about it. 46 An argument started among the disciples as to which of them would be the greatest. 47 Jesus, knowing their thoughts, took

a little child and made him stand beside him. 48 Then he said to them, 'Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. For it is the one who is least among you all who is the greatest.' 49 'Master,' said John, 'we saw someone driving out demons in your name and we tried to stop him, because he is not one of us.' 50 'Do not stop him,' Jesus said, 'for whoever is not against you is for you.'

Jesus' miracle in healing a demon possessed boy has had the desired effect. All were amazed at the greatness of God – the desired effect of all true ministry. And Jesus seizes this moment of awe, wonder

and worship to teach his disciples, verses 43 and 44,

While everyone was marvelling at all that Jesus did, he said to his disciples, 44 ‘Listen carefully to what I am about to tell you: the Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men.’

‘Listen carefully.’ Literally – ‘Put these words in your ears!’ And then Jesus predicts his death for the second time.

the Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men

This is the language of Daniel 7 and Isaiah 53, prophecy in the Old Testament that the Christ will suffer and die, bearing our

sin, before he is raised to reign in glory. But Jesus' words are lost on his disciples,

45 ... they did not understand what this meant. It was hidden from them, so that they did not grasp it, and they were afraid to ask him about it.

His words are lost on them, and are short lived. Before long Jesus' disciples are arguing again. Not with the teachers of the law this time (like in yesterday's passage), but amongst themselves. Perhaps it was the image of Jesus shining like the sun with Moses and Elijah beside him on the mountain where he was transfigured. Or perhaps it was that only Peter, James and John were chosen to accompany him there. But whatever it was that started it, we read in verse 46,

46 An argument started among the disciples as to which of them would be the greatest.

I wonder if you ever catch yourself thinking through your peer group and wondering which of you will be the greatest. I wonder if one of the hidden motivations of your heart is to be the greatest. It's hard to imagine how an argument like this would have played out without a great deal of boasting and belittling. The mouth speaks what the heart is full of and hearts that argue their own greatness are hearts filled with pride. The disciples undoubtedly thought (in line with their culture) that greatness is determined by the company one keeps, and they after all, are going around with Jesus. And so Jesus, always

one for a memorable illustration, makes the disciples line up in a row and places a tiny child alongside them. How about the company they are keeping now? To his disciples bemused expressions he says,

‘Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. For it is the one who is least among you all who is the greatest.’

By way of background, in the ancient world children had little worth until they reached working age; which fewer than 50% of them ever did due to high rates of infant mortality and disease. This placed them amongst the least desirable company in the ancient world. Even amongst

the Jews who loved their children, spending time with children was regarded as a waste of time. In the highly regarded *Talmud*, one rabbi of the era wrote, 'Morning sleep, midday wine, chattering with children, and tarrying in places where men of common people assemble, destroy a man.' Against this background, little children were the least in ancient society. Placing one of these beside his proud disciples, Jesus says,

Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. For it is the one who is least among you all who is the greatest.

According to Jesus greatness is deter-

mined by the company we keep. Only the company that determines our greatness is very different to the company envisaged by the *Elite Daily*. The little child represents the small, the powerless, the insignificant of our world – the hungry, thirsty, lonely, naked, sick and imprisoned.

‘Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me.

Elsewhere Jesus says,

whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.” Matt 25:40

Greatness is determined by the compa-

ny you keep. If you want to be truly great then love and serve and lay down your life for such as these. For whoever bends to serve the least amongst us will be considered great in the kingdom of God.

Chuck Colson former aide to Richard Nixon and a born-again Christian after the Watergate scandal writes this of the company that Jesus kept. Nixon had said to him, 'There's a certain aloofness, a power that's exuded by great men that people feel and want to follow.' That's worldly wisdom, Colson writes in contrast of Jesus,

Jesus Christ exhibited none of this self-conscious aloofness. He served others first; He spoke to those to whom no one spoke; He dined with the lowest members of society; He

touched the untouchables. He had no throne, no crown, no bevy of servants or armoured guards. A borrowed manger and a borrowed tomb famed His earthly life.

Kings and presidents and prime ministers surround themselves with minions who rush ahead, swing doors wide, and stand at attention as they wait for the great to pass. Jesus said that He Himself stands at the door and knocks, patiently waiting to enter our lives.<sup>1</sup>

## **Think & Pray**

According to Jesus our greatness is determined by the company we keep – the

1 R. Kent Hughes, Luke: That You May Know the Truth (Preaching the word; Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2015), 371.

lower, the greater. Meditate over Jesus' words and example this morning. Jesus came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. He made himself nothing, taking on the very nature of a servant, and humbled himself even to death on a cross. He welcomed little children, orphans, widows and the sick. He cared for foreigners, prostitutes, criminals, tax collectors and other notorious sinners. He went around with, trained and loved, fishermen, tax collectors, outcasts and single women all of whom lived on the margins of ancient life. It is right for us to seek greatness in the kingdom of God; Jesus would simply have us go about it in the right way. Think and pray over what his words mean for your life,

‘Whoever welcomes this little child

in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. For it is the one who is least among you all who is the greatest.'