

Humble Ambition – Matthew 20

Oxford dictionary has defined an alpha male as *“a man tending to assume a dominant or domineering role in social or professional situations.”*

Get ahead in life by being more aggressive, more powerful, more intimidating.

As influencers and the internet have picked up the word “alpha” and run with it.

Scientists and biologists have dropped it in regards to wolves.

The terminology arose from studies of wolf packs in captivity.

Scientists realized that what “alpha” was pulling its definition from was from studying the behavior of **isolated**, **scared**, and **insecure** creatures.

Our drive and ambition is often rooted in insecurities, and therefore misdirected to get ahead of everyone else as some kind of alpha.

But we’ll read tonight about how Jesus was absolutely secure in his identity, and his ambition drove him to become a servant of all.

READ **MATTHEW 20:20-28**

Do you want to be great?

In the Church because the correct holy answer would seem more like:

I want to be humble. I want to be a servant.

After all Jesus said – *“What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?”*

And didn’t Jesus also say that the meek will inherit the earth?

And this all begs another question: *how ambitious should a Christian really be?*

So with these young men who would later go on to build the early Church, Jesus clears this up in Matthew 20.

“You don’t know what you are asking...”

Jesus asks in reply:

“are you able to drink from the bitter cup of suffering I’m about to drink?”

James and John say **“we are.”**

They were willing to endure whatever hardship... as long as it came with personal advancement.

Sacrifice isn’t foreign to us or our culture at large. But the sacrifice our culture celebrates with maxims like *“no pain no gain”* is for the betterment of **yourself**.

And we read that when the other disciples caught wind of this, **they were indignant.**

They’re upset not because of the foolishness of the question, but because they didn’t ask first.

The Greek for the word Matthew uses for indignant here is related to the word *“to grieve,”* which speaks to anger over losing something.

The disciples were mad they would lose out on this position of power.

Jesus sees all of this.

He recognizes their ambition. Their desire to be first. Their desire to be great.

Like wolves in captivity, dealing with insecurities, they wanted to be the alpha. To be greatest.

Philippians 2:3-11

In the greater context, Paul is addressing the need for unity amidst the church in Philippi.

Philippians 2 affirms the incarnation, that Jesus was God in the flesh.

Mark chapter 9 is how we know beyond any shadow of a doubt that the disciples didn't yet understand greatness in God's kingdom. They were debating who was the greatest among them, all while walking directly behind God in the flesh.

He actively avoided the praise and prestige the disciples were seeking and fighting over again and again. So his greatness was totally overlooked by his own disciples.

Philippians 2 gives this picture of Christ's path of rising downward.

But Paul isn't speaking to specifics, but to Christ's "**attitude.**"

Paul never says don't do anything out of drive or ambition.

Philippians 2 specifically says do nothing out of "selfish ambition."

Jesus echoes these sentiments in **Matthew 20**.

You might think when James and John ask their question and express this desire to be great he would have rebuked them or told them they were out of line.

Jesus said I see you want to be great. Good.

I'm not concerned for you because you want to be great.

I'm concerned because you have the wrong definition.

In verses 26 and 27 Jesus says:

***whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant,
and whoever wants to be first must be your slave***

Being an effective servant doesn't even apply to us IF WE DON'T WANT TO BE GREAT.

Jesus doesn't say let go of this ambition we're observing, and pick up humility instead.

He says add humility to your ambition.

It's easy to create a false choice when we operate with false definitions.

Humility isn't low self esteem.

"Humility isn't thinking less of yourself, it's thinking of yourself less."

Biblical example of Daniel. He wrote of himself:

“young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king’s palace”

ROMANS 12:3- I give each of you this warning: Don't think you are better than you really are. Be honest in your evaluation of yourselves, measuring yourselves by the faith God has given us.

In a way, humility’s closest cousin is honesty.
There was no need for self deprecation. Just honesty.

Humility isn’t being a doormat

meekness by definition - strength under control.
Jesus was meek by all accounts. Yet he was weak by none.
“Think being meek is weak, try being meek for a week.”

Humility doesn’t downplay accomplishments

Daniel – he didn’t downplay his accomplishments.
He wrote a book about it. And God thought highly enough of it to put it in the Bible.

The church can’t buy into a false humility, or trade ambition for apathy. We should constantly be asking, how are we called in humble ambition to love and serve the world around us?

The witness of the Church in the public space as a result can become: **“help yourself, control others.”**

In this same chapter we’d seen the disciples want to control this man casting out demons in Jesus name. There was a hint of snobbish exclusivism. The desire to control others and help ourselves.

Jesus flips this... his teachings are instead a steady dose of control yourself and help others.
Discipline yourself. Serve others.

1 Thessalonians 4:11 – “Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life: You should mind your own business and work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.”

How ambitious should Christians be? Make 1 Thessalonians 4:11 your ambition.

This quiet life isn’t one that is closeted or shy... but **secure**.

John 13:3 - Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist.

29% of the American population is serving as a caregiver, be it part of full time.
And we all care for and serve our kids and loved ones.

HEART FOR THE CAREGIVER notes.

You're already walking in greatness when you serve others.

Charles Spurgeon who said *"No life can surpass that of a man who quietly continues to serve God in the place where providence has placed him."*

There's that word **"quiet"** again.

Not shy and closeted. But secure.

Not insecure and pushing to be a mythical alpha male.

Secure enough as Jesus was to get on your knees to serve.

MLK:

"you don't have to have a college degree to serve. You don't have to make your subject and verb agree to serve. You don't have to know Plato and Aristotle. You don't have to know Einstein's theory of relativity. You don't have to know the second theory of thermodynamics in physics. You only need a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love."

John's ambitious drive eventually helped him build the early church in Jerusalem.

James' ambitious zeal resulted in his martyrdom, the first of the kind which lit a fire of courage in that early church.

Solus Christus

The ultimate caregiver of a wounded bride.