

The Influential Christ: His Personal Humility

In their book, *The Top 10 Most Significant Figures in Human History*, Computer Science professor at Stony Brook University in New York, Dr. Stephen Skiena and Dr. Charles Ward, research analyst for Google, analyzed the online encyclopedia Wikipedia to determine the 1,000 most influential persons in history. Number 10 was Thomas Jefferson, 9 Alexander the Great, 8 Aristotle, 7 Adolf Hitler, 6 George Washington, 5 Abraham Lincoln, 4 Muhammad, 3 William Shakespeare, 2 Napoleon Bonaparte and the most significant figure in human history was Jesus Christ. Dr. Skiena said, “We would call Jesus ‘The most significant person ever’. With over 2 billion followers 2000 years after his death, Jesus is an incredibly successful historical figure.”

We would all agree of course. The question we are considering in our series, “The Influential Christ” is why? Why was, why **is** Jesus influential? What qualities about Christ drew people to him, led people to sacrifice everything for him? This is an important question for us to consider because as Christians, the purpose of our life is to become like Christ. The apostle Paul wrote to the Galatians that his purpose in working with them was so that they could become like Christ or as another version says *until Christ’s life becomes visible in your lives* (Gal 4:19).

Why is it so important that the life of Christ be formed in us? Is it just so that one day we can live in heaven? That's part of it. No less important however is so that the life Christ brought from heaven can continue to be lived here on earth now. Christ must be formed in us so that his influence can continue in this world, in us!

As Christians we are to be influential people, not influential in the ordinary sense of the word which means "having the power to sway or affect people based on our prestige, wealth or ability." Rather the influence we are to have is better described by the original meaning of the word from the Latin, *influere*, which means to flow into. Or as John put it in his gospel, *Whoever believes in me, rivers of living water will flow from within them. By this he meant the Spirit* (John 4:38,39). Christian influence is to be people in whom the life of Christ flows from Heaven through us to Earth.

I'm not sure we think of our influence in this way. We think of it more like the title of Dale Carnegie's famous book, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. We see influence as a strategy to get others to do what we want them to do. Sometimes we use the phrase "soul winning" or "winning people to Christ." Those phrases suggest that influencing someone for Christ is like a salesman influencing someone to buy a product. There is nothing wrong with wanting to sell people on the idea of believing in God. But if we

understand influence as Christ's life flowing through us, then to be influential for Christ is not just learning a way to persuade people to believe in Christ, it is being persuaded to learn the way Christ lives in people who believe.

And so in this series we are looking at the *Influential Christ*. We are looking not so much at what Christ did as who Christ was, what was he like, what kind of person he was and we have already looked at many of those qualities: his individual integrity, his situational agility, his missional audacity and his scandalous sanguinity. Today we want to look at another quality which is key to understanding the influence of Christ. We read of it in John 13:1-5. It's an amazing scene in the life of Christ and it gives I think an important insight into what kind of person Christ was. Read it with me.

It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love. The evening meal was being served, and the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. 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. After that, he poured water into a

basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

Imagine this scene. In a tiny little upstairs apartment the one who created the universe is scrubbing 24 dirty feet. Emmanuel, Messiah, Prince of Peace, the Alpha and the Omega, the King of the Universe is carefully removing the grit and grime caked between the hairy toes of 12 ordinary, common, mundane men who he passionately loved. And imagine those same disciples, years later when they understood who it was that had washed their feet. One of those disciples, John, would later write, *“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched.”* He could just have easily added, *“and whose divine hands washed our dirty feet.”*

Why did Jesus wash their feet? Jesus explains in vs 13, *You call me ‘Teacher and Lord’ and rightly so. Now that I, your teacher and your Lord, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set an example for you. No servant is greater than his master.* So what is Jesus saying? Is he showing how they can become influential leaders? *“Look guys. If you want to lead people, the best way is not to emphasize your authority but to get down on their level, meet their needs. I call it servant leadership. Trust me, it works every time.”* Is Jesus showing them a way to be persuasive

leaders? Serving others is certainly a good strategy for persuading people but this upper room moment is much more than a lesson in strategic leadership.

Jesus is not so much teaching them a way to do leadership as he is revealing to them the character of their leader. Serving people is not just what I do; it is who I am. If you want to be great in the kingdom you must become the servant of all. Not because serving others is a strategy that brings great success but because serving others is at the heart of Jesus' greatness. Remember Jesus said, *The Son of man came not to be served, but to serve.*

We think greatness is something that exalts a person over others. I am greater than you if I am smarter than you or stronger than you or more popular than you or richer than you or funnier than you. That is a greatness that is based on us. But when our idea of greatness is based on us, we become insecure people, people who continually need to prove ourselves to others. This is called bragging and all of us do it. Sometimes obnoxiously, sometimes smoothly, but all of us wrestle with a sense of insecurity, unimportance and a need to be esteemed by others. But if our focus is not how great we are, but how great is the life God has given that flows through us, then we are freed from the need to prove ourselves; we are no longer fearful of what others might think of us if we were to lower ourselves, humble ourselves, humiliate ourselves by washing the feet of those who are around us. We are free to be influential as Christ was.

My Dad worked at Tech in Holden Hall. One day there was a fire in Holden Hall. There was much smoke damage to the building, including the rotunda in which was a beautiful mural of Lubbock's history created by legendary painter Peter Hurd. Every morning dad passed through that rotunda and saw the images of the movers and shakers in Lubbock history, men and women for whom so many of our schools and parks are named. Smoke from the fire had damaged these priceless images.

One morning dad arrived for work and entered the rotunda. He saw a man on a step ladder, wearing white overalls, carrying a bucket of water, washing the walls, trying to remove the black of the smoke. Dad was concerned, thinking the man might damage the painting. He didn't want to insult the man but he also didn't want to see any further damage done, so he stopped and made small talk with him. After visiting with him awhile, dad decided the man was being very careful and probably wouldn't do any harm.

You can imagine how dad felt the next morning when he opened the morning paper and read the headline, "Peter Hurd in Town to Repair Painting." Dad had spent thirty minutes talking with Peter Hurd, worried that Peter Hurd might damage Peter Hurd's masterpiece. Never once did Hurd feel the need to tell Dad who he was. Hurd had no need to prove himself to Dad. He felt no compulsion to say, "I know you may think I'm

just an ordinary maintenance man scrubbing a wall, but really I'm one of the greatest painters in America repairing one of my many great paintings.”

When life is not about you; when the world no longer revolves around you, then you are free from the burden of proving yourself to others; you are liberated to become a servant to others. This is what Jesus is trying to get his disciples to understand. He wants his disciples to have an influence in this world, not based on how great they are, not on how many great things they accomplish. He wants an influence that comes when we humble ourselves and allow our glory to be eclipsed by the greater glory of God. He wants us to get over ourselves and allow God's self to flow through us to others.

The disciples struggled with this. Part of the reason they followed Jesus was so they could be seen by others as great. They got into arguments about which one of them was the greatest. “Let one of **us** sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory.” When a Samaritan village refused to let them enter they indignantly asked, “Lord, do you want **us** to call down fire from heaven and destroy them.” Another time they smugly announced to Jesus, “Teacher, we saw a man driving out demons in your name, and we told him to stop because he was not one of **us**.” Do you see the focus? Let one of **us**...Lord do you want **us**...he was not one of **us**. The disciples

wanted to be influential people but they wanted their influence measured by what they could do, what they had done, what they were planning to do.

But Jesus did not measure greatness by what he did but by what God was doing through him. The focus of Jesus' life was not on himself but on God. Look again at what John writes about Jesus in that upper room. *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.*

Jesus' life was centered on God. Jesus' knew he came from God and he was going back to God and that in the meantime God was in control of his life. His life was all about letting God's life flow into him and through him to others. He had no need to prove himself because he did not attribute to himself any of the greatness in his life. Listen to what Jesus said.

John 5:30, *By myself I can do nothing.* John 6:38, *I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me.* John 7:15, *My teaching is not my own. It comes from the one who sent me.* John 7:18, *Whoever speaks on their own does so to gain personal glory, but he who seeks the glory of the one who sent him is a man of truth.* John 8:41, *I have not come on my own; God sent me.* John 12:45 *The one who looks at*

me is seeing the one who sent me. John 12:49 I did not speak on my own, but the Father who sent me commanded me to say all that I have spoken.

Do you see Jesus' focus? We hear so much about self-confidence, self-assurance, self-sufficiency. But the confidence, assurance and sufficiency we crave is not to be found in our selves. Was Jesus self-confident, self assured, self-sufficient? Apparently not. *By myself I can do nothing.* Jesus was God-confident, God-assured, God-sufficient!

My point is this. Jesus calls us to be influential people in this world, not by proving ourselves but by emptying ourselves and letting the life of Christ flow into us and then through us so that our lives testify to the glory of Christ. Just as Christ emptied himself of all his glory, and became a servant to all, if we would call ourselves Christians, we too must empty ourselves of all our glory and become a servant to all. Just as the Father sent Jesus into his world to be an expression of God's love for all, now Jesus sends us into our world to be an expression of that same love. Jesus once said, *My food and my drink is to do the will of the one who sent me.* If we would be Christians, we too must resist the temptation to make life about us, doing our will; instead we commit to do the will of the one who sent us.

That is hard because we are selfish. We live for our own pleasure. We do what we want. We don't like to sacrifice. We don't mind following

God as long as we get something out of it. But if being a Christian means saying no to ourselves, denying ourselves, giving up our glory and living for his, we hesitate. We are not sure living for God's glory instead of our own is worth it. We make Christianity a self-help religion, a religion that promotes our success, a religion that makes us look good. We are uncomfortable with a religion that strips us of our outer garments, that bends our knees, that humbles us to the lowly status of everyone else's servant. We are tempted to make our religion more about us than about God.

Jesus faced the very same temptation. At the beginning of his ministry, hearing Satan's offers in the wilderness, and at the end of his ministry, hearing the taunts of the crowd at Calvary, Jesus resisted the temptation to influence people by showing them what he could do. Satan and the crowds enticed Jesus to use his power to impress the world and to escape all pain and suffering. But Jesus chose instead to bless the world by embracing pain and suffering, not because that was what he wanted but because that was what God willed. He is the Influential Christ, not because he had the power to exert his will over others, but because he had the power not to. If we could live a thousand lifetimes, we still would not even begin to fathom the magnificence of Jesus' words, *Father, not my will, but thine be done.*

Oh how the world needs to see that heavenly life, and if they are to see it today they must see it flowing through us, Christians who know their life comes from God, their life ends with God, and in the meantime, whatever comes, it is okay because God is in control. Christians whose love for God and whose faith in God leads them to say with Christ, *Not my will but thine be done*. Christians like the German pastor Benjamin Schmolck. His ministry was difficult; his life filled with great disappointment. One night he and his wife went to pray with a sick friend only to come back and find his church and home burnt to the ground and also his two young sons. Years later he would suffer a stroke, become paralyzed, and then become blind. Life dealt Schmolck many heartbreaking blows but through it all this good man remained faithful to his God. Toward the end of his life, despite his great trouble, he was able to write these words, *My Jesus, as Thou wilt! O may Thy will be mine. Into Thy hand of love I would my all resign; Through sorrow or through joy, Conduct me as Thine own, and help me still to say, "My Lord, Thy will be done."* Oh how desperately our world needs to see the *Influential Christ* in us, people who empty themselves of their own glory to make way for the glory of Christ to flow into them and out through them to bless their world. May we have such an influence in our world.