
Heart and Soul ... A Weekly Meditation

May 8, 2016

The Ultimate Source of Greatness

“All who lift themselves up will be brought low, and those who make themselves low will be lifted up.”

Luke 18:14b (Common English Bible)

Every culture holds up its ideal of beauty, success and power. Similarly, every culture is judged by what it values. The type of person on whom our culture bestows recognition and honor is not easily missed. Magazine covers celebrate beauty, Jennifer Aniston named most beautiful woman by People Magazine, those who epitomize success on the cover of Success Magazine and those who command power in leadership on the magazine cover of Fast Company. Bestsellers are indicative of the trends and tastes of the culture and advertisements of luxury items promise success, or the illusion of success, to those who can afford the purchase.

Jesus had a great deal to say about success and seeking status, “All who lift themselves up will be brought low, and those who make themselves low will be lifted up.” In these few words, Jesus questions the nature of our ambition; the character of the success we seek. Simply, Jesus asks, “What are any of us really after?” More deeply, Jesus questions where in our life plan does God come in? Do we imagine ourselves self-sufficient? Or do we recognize that God is the beginning and the end of everything, including our lives?

It is important to listen carefully to Jesus’ teachings, however, and notice that it isn’t human littleness that Jesus stresses but efforts of self-aggrandizement and grandeur. Often, we strive to go it alone, living our lives under our own power, making our own way, and if successful, grandly announce that we are self-made. All things, including other people, are subordinated to our own purposes and designs. There exists only one purpose in all our efforts – to get out of life all we can get. What we fail to grasp is that we are not here to live as we please, and to obtain all that we desire, but to live in a manner that pleases God and adds value to the lives of others.

Ours is an unspiritual culture. Though there may remain great numbers of people on church membership rolls, many of these same people speak and act in almost complete independence of God, as though God didn’t exist, or doesn’t really matter. They are led by their own desires to a shallow and superficial life. For Jesus this was not so. He was conscious of God each moment of the day, every decision made in devoted obedience to his heavenly Father. For Jesus, there could be no greatness apart from God, recognizing that God is the ultimate source of greatness. And it is that insight that Jesus most urgently wishes to convey here in these few words.

Doug Hood