**UPSIDE DOWN & INSIDE OUT**

***Paradoxes Christians Must Live***

***#5 – Serving Is Leading***

Take a pencil. Drop it into a clear glass of water. Stand back and look at it. What do you see? Does the pencil look crooked? Weird, isn’t it? You *know* the pencil is straight, yet it *appears* from your viewpoint that it is bent. Your mind knows it is not curved, but your eyes tell you it is. That’s a paradox. A seeming contradiction that is verified as true upon further investigation.

When Jesus came down from heaven He broke the mold and recast a new one based on the Truth, the whole Truth, and nothing but the Truth. Everything He said and did proved His claim to be “*The Way, The Truth, The Life*” (John 14:6). He completely shattered how man should think and live. Virtually every sermon, parable, and teaching flipped man’s wisdom on its head. The world has its standard of right and wrong, but God’s is 180 degrees opposite. Like Paul said, *If anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God”* (I Cor. 3:18-19). In you want to read a paradox, read I Cor. 1-3. Paul turns wisdom upside down, inside out. Truly, God’s ways and thoughts are lightyears beyond man’s (Isa. 55:9). That’s not theory, that’s fact. Let’s see an example.

Losing is Gaining. Slavery is Freedom. Weakness is Strength. Last is First. Serving is Leading. All who live by those great three-word mottos know for certain that they are true. One who does not sit at the feet of Jesus reads those words, shakes his head, says ‘tsk, tsk, tsk,’ and mumbles “poor, foolish Christians.” Don’t let them intimidate you with their condescending attitude. Today let’s examine that last one: *Serving is Leading*.

Leadership, like that pencil in a glass of water, can be an illusion. The paradigm of leadership from the world’s wisdom insists that a leader must meet certain qualifications as set forth at Harvard, Yale, Princeton and Dartmouth. To run Microsoft, Apple, Amazon, Wal-Mart, FedEx or Exxon Mobile you have to have certain degrees in management, finance and have 25 years experience as a CEO.

But then look at Christ’s church. The pencil in the glass appears. It looks so … so … so … crooked. That will never work, right? Mark 10:35-45 reveals a standard of leadership like no other in the world. James and John, “*the sons of thunder*” (Mk. 3:17), using their mother to work the feminine angle (Matt. 20:20), requested top cabinet posts in Jesus’ coming Kingdom administration. When the other apostles got wind of this coup they were “*indignant*” (v. 41), not for seeking privilege, but for simply breaking in line ahead of them. I’ll give them this, they sure had chutzpah, a Jewish expression for gall or nerve.

Who would have such boldness to ask such a request? Answer – look in the mirror. Think about it. If Jesus, who could read the hearts of men (Jn. 2:25), hand-picked these twelve to help Him change the world, including Nathanael “*in whom there is no guile*” (Jn. 1:47), would we not also have jockeyed for position too? Competition can bring out the best, or worst, in humans. We compare our position, our material possessions, our education, our looks, our relationships with others to see where we “stand.” We want to be “leaders” by being ahead of others. Leadership by power or position is the world’s standard. Jesus destroys that myth in Mk. 10:42-45. Let’s read it, very carefully.

*“You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. 43 Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become* ***great*** *among you shall be your* ***servant****. 44 And whoever of you desires to be first shall be* ***slave*** *of all. 45 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to* ***serve****, and to give His life a ransom for many.”*

Secular leaders use position, power, or domination to move people to do things. Look at just about any institution, military, or corporation to know this is true. There is always a pyramid structure with one man at the top (Chief, President, General, CEO, Headmaster, Pope, House Speaker, Godfather, Playground Bully, Big Cheese, Top Dog). In descending order the pyramid widens out until the lowest people populate the bottom. The leader at the top has power to dominate. It’s how the world has always worked… until Jesus showed a new and better way. Serving is Leading. The pyramid is flipped.

The greatest leader who ever walked the earth did so with a wet towel around His waist and blood dripping from His hands and feet. The inverted pyramid has the leader at the bottom serving everyone else.   
“*The great among you shall be your servant*.”   
“*The first shall be slave of all*.”   
“*The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and give His life*.”

James and John (and by implication all the apostles) were asked “*Are you able to drink the cup that I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with*?” They ignorantly said, “*Yes, we are able*.” Indeed they were, but not like they thought. Paul later described what this meant when he outlined the life of an apostle in I Cor. 4:9-13,

*For I think that God has displayed us, the apostles,* ***last****, as men condemned to death; for we have been made a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men. 10 We are fools for Christ’s sake, … We are weak, … we are dishonored! 11 To the present hour we both hunger and thirst, and we are poorly clothed, and beaten, and homeless. 12 And we labor, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure; 13 being defamed, we entreat. We have been made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things until now.”*

Yes, they became leaders that changed the world, but did so through suffering and service. Remember that: ***Suffering* & *Service***. In God’s paradoxical pyramid of leadership you must bear a cross and gird a towel. You must wash feet and live a sacrificial life. Others before self. Like James and John learned the hard way, I am not first or second in the kingdom, I am third. God first, all others second, me third (i.e. last). So, what does Jesus’ “*Service Is Leading*” look like? Not only washing feet, but washing dishes! Not only saying “Yes” when it makes others happy, but “No” when it is unpopular. It’s lonely at the top, just ask any parent who makes their child clean their room, or any eldership that leads in church discipline. Greatness in leadership is found at the bottom, not the top. It’s found in givers, not takers. So, if you’re a giver, you’re a leader in Christ’s School of Leadership. The King will say, “*As you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to Me*” – Matt. 25:40

Until next time… “Leaders don’t create more followers, they create more leaders”   
– Tom Peters

I love you. Rick