

Lesson 1 in Advanced Servanthood: “Lighten Up!”

38 “Teacher,” said John, “we saw a man driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us.”

39 “Do not stop him,” Jesus said. “No one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, *40* for whoever is not against us is for us.” – Mark 9:38, 39

This exchange follows a relatively gentle rebuke of the Twelve from the Master. They had been arguing amongst themselves about which of them was the greatest. They thought they were being discreet, but Jesus seemed to know. When they sheepishly said nothing, He taught them that being first was a matter of being “*the very last, and the servant of all.*” Then, He placed a child before them and challenged them to welcome little children (something no important man in that culture would ever do), likening that gracious act to welcoming Him.

Was John just trying to change the subject when he reported that “an outsider” was driving out demons in Jesus’ Name (or by His authority)? Perhaps, John was conceding that the group should be less competitive within, but surely this mutual support did not apply to outsiders. This new exorcist was not one of them. He was just some guy tinkering where he should not be tinkering. John wanted to demand that the man cease and desist. Jesus said, “Do not stop him.” Demons were responding to the Name of Jesus, not the man using it.

We can suspect that John’s recently wounded ego contributed to this whole scenario. John needed to get his ego in check. He needed to “lighten up”. He must have been thinking:

“Driving out demons is serious stuff. It needs to be left to the experts. If someone wants to bring us cupcakes the next time Jesus conducts a public teaching session, that would be sweet. If he wants to trim the hedges at the synagogue before Jesus arrives, that would be helpful. But, leave the serious ministry to the big boys!”

Then, Jesus added . . .

. . . *41* I tell you the truth, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to Christ will certainly not lose his reward.

Nothing about passing out water would have threatened John or the others because, as Apostles, they had bigger things to which to attend. Now, Jesus is saying that any service rendered in His name is a big deal. In fact, any venue that advances the work of the Kingdom or the compassion of the King is a big deal. The key is that we intend to serve Him through our contributions to His work through other servants or in our acts of mercy to those around us who are hurting.

In God’s eyes, the difference between spectacular ministry or a spectacular kindness and those that are simply useful in the short-run is a matter of the heart. Who are we trying to glorify and serve through such gestures? Even tiny services are spectacular when the heart is right, and Jesus is the object of our service. God never asked anyone to serve Jesus spectacularly in the eyes of men, but only that we serve Him faithfully as the Spirit has gifted us. God brought all of creation into existence with a Word of command. It is He Who determines who serves how. Do you think that you mean any more or less to Him if you have been gifted to drive out demons or to simply man the water jug?

A young woman was applying to college. Her heart sank when she read one question on the application: “Are you a leader?”

With profound honesty, she wrote, “No.” She returned the form, expecting the worst. She received this letter from the college:

“Dear Applicant: A study of the application forms reveals that this year our college will have 1,452 new leaders. We are accepting you because we feel it is imperative that they have at least one follower.” (S. I. McMillen, in *None of These Diseases*)

Self-promotion is the path to the top of this world. God exalts those who wait to be exalted.