

THE HUMBLE BOSS

Today's Text: Matthew Chap. 3

Extracts:

In those days, *John the Baptist* came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!"... Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins. But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he *said to them,.... "I indeed baptize you with water... but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire." ... Then, Jesus came from Galilee, to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him, and John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?" But Jesus answered and said to him, "Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he allowed Him [Matt. 3: 1-2, 5-7, 11, 13-15]*

On Thursday, 16th October 2008, the world marked this year's "Boss's Day." In an article entitled, "Bosses We Love to Hate,"¹ Anthony Balderrama, a blogger for CareerBuilder.com, listed 7 "bad" bosses. The list included the beauty pageant organizer and real estate mogul, Donald Trump, the owner of the Dallas Mavericks basketball team, Mark Cuban, and the late real estate billionaire, Leona Helmsley. The buzz words that described his choice included "loves himself more than anyone else," "a miser," "angering (and) frightening," "always stealing the limelight," "harsh," or "(makes) rude demands." Yet, in their various ways, they were all 'successful' bosses in that they achieved what financial goals they had set out for themselves.

One word that was conspicuously missing among the selected bosses is humility. A humble boss is one who has the power and authority to get whatever privileges s(he) wants but elects not to exercise it. That boss can be a parent or pastor, a business owner or manager, a government official or a class prefect. Have you met such a boss? Are you such a boss yourself? This week's study has a great deal to teach all of us!

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http://msn.careerbuilder.com/custom/msn/careeradvice/viewarticle.aspx?articleid=1618&SiteId=cbmsnhp41618&sc_ex_tcmp=JS_1618_home1&cbRecursionCnt=2&cbsid=bdcd11a9d52e4a79a73c817c3d7b2ecb-278429720-w8-6

1. Identifying the humble boss

A boss is anyone that is occupying a *leadership position and has subordinates*. Such a position confers certain privileges on the incumbent. For example, by virtue of occupying that position, the boss has the power to reward and to punish subordinates. S(he) has physical control over resources at the disposal of the department or unit s(he) controls. However, the exercise of that power is limited by law or rules and regulations. For example, the boss cannot punish a subordinate without following the laid-down disciplinary procedure. S(he) cannot spend funds outside of approved budgetary limits. Nevertheless, in relation to self-interest, the boss enjoys enormous privileges. For example, the President of a country can close all roads to traffic along the route s(he) is driving through and it is not a violation of law. The boss in a factory can come late to work and nobody can give him/her a query! However, what bosses choose to do is a measure of their humility.

The Bible uses “humble” or “humility” to refer to several things. For example, speaking through the prophet Isaiah to idolatrous Israel, God said, “I dwell in the high and holy place with him who has *a contrite and humble spirit*. I will revive the spirit of the humble” [Is. 57: 15]. Here, humility refers to repentance. You can find a similar meaning in what God told Solomon after the dedication of the temple that he had built, “If My people who are called by My name will *humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways*, then I will hear from heaven, and *will forgive their sin and heal their land*” [2 Chron. 7: 14]. However, in another place, we are told that “the man Moses was *very humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth*” [Num. 12: 3]. Here, humility refers to the respectful relationship of Moses to other humans around him in spite of the privilege of speaking face-to-face with God. For example, when his father-in-law, Jethro, advised him to delegate responsibilities to his subordinates so that he could concentrate on dealing with the exceptional cases, Moses heeded his advice and “did all that he had said” [Ex. 18: 8-24]. That is the kind of humility that we shall examine in this study.

Who is the humble boss? It depends on what s(he) is looking for in the privileged position that s(he) occupies. Let us examine a few cases of bosses that we have come across:

a) *The Emperor!*

Some bosses behave as if everything begins and ends with them. Everybody else works for their benefit and at their pleasure. When things go well, they take all the credit. When they go bad, they shift all the blame to others. They will do anything, including breaking the rules, to win. Subordinates who insist on rule of law find themselves in their boss’s bad books. Such bosses can easily pass as emperors.

It will be difficult for emperor-bosses to be humble. They will hardly forgo any privileges due to them. They will not give respect to others to whom it is due but they expect everyone else to accord them the respect due to them. For example, when Moses first encountered the Pharaoh king of Egypt to tell him that the God of Israel had commanded that he should let the children of Israel go, he replied, “Who is the Lord, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, nor will I let Israel go” [Ex. 5: 1-2]. It took the total destruction of Egypt (through ten plagues) to bring him to his proud knees and he said to Moses, “Rise, go out from among my people ... and go serve the Lord as you have said ... and bless me also” [Ex. 12: 31-33]. Bless him also? How about his subjects that had been destroyed? In deed, the boss that behaves like an emperor cannot be regarded as humble.

b) *The Chameleon!*

The chameleon is a slow-moving animal that has the ability to change the colour of its skin to blend with the environment where it finds itself. The camouflage is a protective shield against predators but it enables it to easily catch its own prey! Chameleon-bosses are disguise experts. They may appear to be on your side on every issue but be careful that you can read their motives! For example, they can be very supportive over your personal or family problems. They know your birthdays and can send greeting cards or gifts. They do not seem to be looking for anything from you and that soon wears down your suspicions. Then, they make their moves. They expect your support and cooperation to cheat the system or hurt their rivals for their personal gain. You soon find yourself in a dilemma: not to cooperate makes you look ungrateful but to consent to illegal or immoral acts might make you feel guilty!

You recall the story of King Herod from last week’s study. The wise men from the East came to him in Jerusalem, looking for the new-born King of Israel [Matt. 2: 1-2]. We are told that when he heard this, “he was troubled, *and all Jerusalem with him*” [v. 3]. Why would a threat to Herod’s throne be a threat to all of Jerusalem? That suggests the history of his relationship with the Jerusalem power structure. His fears were their fears, his joys their joys. So, with their cooperation, Herod was able to know where Jesus was born [vv. 4-6]. The soldiers that went there to massacre infants two years and below did their duty but only to Herod’s benefit [v. 16]. That was a chameleon-boss at work.

c) *The Abdicator!*

Some bosses abandon their responsibilities under the guise that they have delegated to their subordinates. They may be popular among subordinates who enjoy or benefit from such an arrangement, especially as they see

their boss as very humble. But those who see something wrong with it cannot be happy. Rules and regulations are made but never followed. Activities are begun with flair and killed with benign neglect. There is indiscipline and the boss plays the ostrich that buries its head in the sand, seeing nothing and hearing nothing! Sooner than later, the organization or department begins to fall apart, and the boss's false humility is exposed.

There is the story of a professor who was on a speaking tour in a vast country. After speaking in so many places, he got tired and needed rest. However, he still had a few places to visit. His driver who had been with him for some time offered to read the professor's paper at the next venue. The professor gladly accepted the offer and exchanged clothes with the driver- he wearing the driver's uniform and the driver wearing the professor's suit. While the lecture was being delivered, the real professor nodded off at the back of the hall and was only aroused by the loud ovation after the long lecture. Then it came to question- time, and somebody raised a technical question which only the professor (now in the driver's outfit) could answer. The lecturer (the real driver) replied, "That's a very simple question," and pointing to the back of the hall, he added, "Even my driver there can answer that!" You cannot run away from your responsibilities!

d) *The Servant*

The servant is the one who *waits on* others. The servant-boss sees it as his or her responsibility to meet the needs of his/her subordinates, sometimes to his/her detriment. S(he) will sacrifice for others if that is what it will take for success. Consequently, servant-bosses see their role as enabling the system, organization or unit to achieve corporate goals or objectives. They show good examples in work and conduct. They choose last even when they are the ones distributing the largesse [**Josh. 19: 49**]. They are firm when it is necessary or compassionate when it is appropriate. Only the servant-boss can be regarded as humble.

After Jesus had washed the feet of His disciples, He said to them [**Jn 13: 12-17**]:

Do you know what I have done to you? You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet; for I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. ... A servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.

From the forgoing, it is obvious that only the servant-boss can be regarded as humble. The Bible text for today's study makes this point vivid.

2. John the Baptist baptizes his Boss!

John the Baptist was Christ's fore-runner sent to "prepare the way of the Lord (and to) make His paths straight." He came preaching repentance "for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" [Matt. 3: 1-3]. As soon as he began his ministry, people came from all over Judea and the surrounding districts to River Jordan where John was preaching. They confessed their sins and he baptized them in the river.

John made it clear that he was not the boss, that there was someone bigger. He told them, "I in deed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me *is mightier than I*, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. *He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire*" [v. 11]. As John was speaking, Jesus came forward and asked John to baptize Him [v. 13]!

Jesus as the Son of God had no sin to confess. He was also John's Boss. So, why did He come to John to be baptized by him? John was puzzled by similar thoughts. So, he said to Jesus, "I *need* to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?" John was asking why he a mere mortal should be baptizing the Son of God! Jesus replied, "*Permit* it to be so *for now*, for thus it is fitting for us *to fulfill all righteousness*." Then, John allowed Him to be baptized [vv. 13-15]. Let us pay attention to the following key issues:

- *Permit it to be so for now.*

At that hour, John was the baptizer and Jesus (God in human form) came forward of His own volition to be baptized even though He did not need it. Do you know the impact that it can have on subordinates when the boss encourages their work? By coming forward, Jesus legitimized John's ministry in the sight of all. That was why, soon after His baptism, the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus in the form of a dove and a voice (of His Father) said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" [vv. 16-17]. *A humble boss encourages and supports his/her subordinates.*

- *It is fitting to fulfill all righteousness.*

Remember that people did not as yet know who Jesus was. How did John recognize Him? It was by the power of the Holy Spirit, as shown in John's Gospel. John the Baptist said, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him (that is, Jesus). I did not know Him (as the Son of God even though they were cousins!), but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'Upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy

Spirit.' I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God" [Jn 1: 29-34]. So, it was the baptism of Jesus that attributed righteousness to the baptism of John the Baptist. The people that John had baptized received not only water baptism but the baptism of Jesus that comes "with the Holy Spirit and fire" [Matt. 3: 11]. *A humble boss empowers his/her subordinates.*

On account of His humility, Jesus was richly honoured by His Father. The point is well made by the apostle Paul when he wrote [Phil. 2: 5-9]:

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bond-servant, and coming in the likeness of men; and being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore, God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name

3. Conclusion: Anchor your conduct on God's purpose!

From today's study, it is clear that the key to humility comes from anchoring your conduct on the word of God. Therefore, when God asks you to repent and humble yourself before Him, He is actually reminding you that you have abused the privileged position in life that He has given you. You have behaved to those under and around you as an emperor or chameleon or abdicator instead of being their servant. You have not been humble.

Power intoxicates. Rarely will you hear rebuke or warning from subordinates and stakeholders who are looking for your goods, not your good! When you succeed, they will celebrate. When you fail, they will celebrate even much more as they await your successor! Therefore, humility is the key to your tenure and your legacy.

Be a humble boss.