

## **“An Underhanded Serve”**

Matthew 20:17-27

*Sermon Series: Different Week 2. Don't Puff Up, Build Up*

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Basketball great Wilt Chamberlain holds multiple NBA records. Born in Philadelphia, schooled at Overbrook High and, for a time, a member of the 76ers, Chamberlain is widely considered one of the greatest players of all time. For example: he is the only player to average at least 30 points and 20 rebounds per game over the entire course of his NBA career. And yet when it came to free throws he only made 54%.

Another great player, Rick Barry far exceeded Wilt the Stilt in this one stat. During his 15 year career in pro ball he hit a remarkable 89.9% of his shots from the free throw line. What is the secret of Barry's success? An underhanded throw known as the “granny style” shot. Physics professors affirm the arc and backspin on the ball make this a superior method to the traditional overhead free throw.

Even Wilt Chamberlain tried it. On March 2, 1962, Chamberlain hit 28 of his 32 free throws using the granny shot. That was the game when he achieved the still unbroken record of 100 points in a single game. And yet after that game, Chamberlain gave up the granny shot. Why don't more players use this proven, effective free throw style? Rick Barry says the answer is simple: Pride. The players are too proud. It looks silly. Most players would rather miss shots and lose than win playing B-ball like a granny.

Pride – it's one of the strongest barriers that stands in our way if we want to be DIFFERENT like Jesus. If we want to think different we must change how we think about ourselves. So often we want to be served, but God wants us to serve. Our focus this week is

“Don't Puff Yourself Up, Build Others Up.” The Apostle Paul says,

For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. (Romans 12:3)

Let's pull that apart. He says, “Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought.” In other words: **Don't Over or Underestimate Yourself.** Pride drives you to do both. Now there is a good side to pride. You may be proud of a personal achievement, proud of your child's goal, grades or graduation, proud of your community, nation, ethnic heritage. Then there is the other side of pride. This is when joy for yourself or your child becomes boasting, patriotism becomes prejudice or partisanship. In this type of pride, selfishness reigns supreme. It's all about you. Ego is inflated. You become full of yourself, puffed up like a balloon. You overestimate yourself.

The world knows this is a weakness for all of us. So Renaissance Entertainment Inc. decided to make money on it. They created an amusement park ride called: “Ego Trip: A Ride About You.” The ride uses your name, photo and voice to create a totally personalized experience. You attend your own movie premiere as paparazzi snap away and adoring fans call

your name. You visit an art museum and view portraits of you by Picasso, Warhol and van Gogh. At a political rally you will be urged to run for president and at a sporting event you are praised for your athletic prowess. Finally, you'll enjoy a ticker-tape parade in your honor. After your ego is sufficiently stroked, you proceed to the gift shop—where you can buy all sorts of stuff with your image. Renaissance President Jon Binkowski asks, “What’s everyone’s favorite subject? Themselves. This is taking that to the nth degree.”

In truth, we don’t need an amusement park to send us on an ego trip. We create our own. Inside our heads we may imagine the victories we’ll win, the achievements we’ll gather and the opponents we’ll beat. We criticize and put down our neighbors, friends and family while we lift ourselves up. We love it when people talk about us and worry what people are saying about us. We want to be admired, appreciated and adored. We try to build a resume or leave a legacy people will remember when we are gone. We can never get enough. That’s why it’s hard to get off the ego trip. And the world is only too happy to take us for a ride. In my mail was an envelope which says, “Rev. Doug Hogle, your curiosity not only deserves to be respected, it deserves to be rewarded!” What was my reward? 45 issues of the Christian Science Monitor for \$11.99. Pride is the gas that fuels this ride. It puts you in the driver’s seat at the center of attention. It persuades you to run the show. It places you above everyone else.

That’s where she wanted her boys to be – at the top. I imagine her as a gray-haired dear with a homespun shawl over her head. With her calloused hands, she takes hold of her greatest treasures, her pride and joy, the most precious things she produced in her life: her two sons James and John. The three walk up to Jesus with a simple mother’s request. Yet before she speaks, this saintly woman falls down on the ground to worship Jesus, an honor Jews reserve for God.

While I’m sure He is touched by her devotion, Jesus knows there is a plan behind her praise. “What is it you want?” he asks the wife of Zebedee. “My two boys have been with you from the start Master,” she begins. “They passed out the bread and fish to the thousands. When you sent them to preach all over Galilee without so much as a bag, an extra shirt or two coins, they obeyed. They’re quick learners, good with their hands, strong and courageous. Their father is yelling for them to come back to Galilee and take over the family fishing business. But I don’t listen to him because I know you have a destiny. When you arrive in Jerusalem, you’ll be crowned our King.” “What is it you want?” Jesus presses her. “Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom.” (Matthew 20:21)

It is a classic, skillful, underhanded serve. Perhaps the boys, thinking Jesus could not refuse a mother’s request, put her up to it. Maybe it was Mom’s idea. No matter. The three of them wrap their selfish plan in a package of humble devotion and lay it at the Lord’s feet.

This is a perfect example of how pride and overestimating yourself get you into trouble. It reminds me of a warning my mother used to say, “Be careful what you wish for – you may get it.” I hear a hint of sorrow in Jesus’ reply. “You don’t know what you are asking. Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?” (Matthew 20:22) They eagerly reply, “We can.” James and John probably pictured themselves sipping from a gilded chalice.

Jesus said to them, “You will indeed drink from my cup, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father.” (Matthew 20:23)

The cup that awaits Jesus is filled to the brim with suffering and death. Their mother longed to see her two boys seated on glorious thrones flanking the King of kings. Perhaps Jesus knew, even

then, that two thieves would have the “honor” of being crucified on His right and left. No mother would ever wish that on her children. She didn’t know what she was asking.

Now there is another side to pride: underestimating yourself. We all know people who constantly put themselves down: “I’m no good at this,” “I’m not very good looking, smart, strong, athletic, \_\_\_\_\_ (you fill in the blank),” “I always seem to mess up.” We all know they are really fishing for attention, comfort, compliments. It’s the underside of pride. Whether you are pumping yourself up or putting yourself down, you are still focusing on yourself. That’s why “God wisely designed the human body so we can neither pat our own backs nor kick ourselves too easily.” So what’s the alternative?

### **Learn Your True Value from God.** Paul says

...but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. Romans 12:3

How do we evaluate ourselves, how do we know our true worth? By the gift of faith God places in you. The word “faith” has several meanings in the Bible. It can refer to our belief and trust in Jesus. That’s a gift from God and it’s called saving faith. Yet it can also mean the reverse – God’s belief and trust in you. God has faith in you. He calls you by name. He invites you to be His beloved child. He wants you in His family. He gave His Son’s life for you. He has so much faith in you, Paul says, He gives you spiritual gifts such a leadership, teaching, encouraging, compassion, giving to build up the Church, the Body of Christ. (Romans 12:4-8). He trusts you to lead His Church. He trusts you to share His Good News of salvation with others. He trusts you to be His voice, His heart, His hands, His feet.

Now Paul says, “Don’t get drunk on that. Don’t let it go to your head. Think about yourself with sober judgment.” Our response to this should not be pride and privilege but humble service. The world evaluates us based on how we look and what we do. God simply, unconditionally loves us. So our value depends on God, not us. Our achievements cannot make Him love us more and our mistakes and sins do not make Him love us less. He has so much faith in you that He places the life of His Son in you through the power of the Holy Spirit. That means when He looks at you He does not see your sins and imperfections which He forgives. He sees the face of His beloved Son. The God of the Universe sees you as His dearly loved child.

It was considered a poor copy, a dark and gloomy portrait of Jesus by a second rate artist. It sold in 1958 for a mere 45 British pounds. Yet a group of experts saw something hiding beneath the accumulated layers of paint. Through careful cleaning and restoration, they uncovered a lost original Leonardo Da Vinci. It is called Salvator Mundi – the Savior of the World. Leonardo’s only painting of Jesus as an adult. Eventually it sold for \$450.3 million dollars setting a new record for the most expensive painting ever sold. For centuries, its true value was hidden from the world. When God the Father looks at you, He sees the face of His beloved Son, the Savior of the world. To Him you are worth far more than a Leonardo. He wants to clean off all the accumulated grit and grime from the world so Jesus Christ can shine through you.

Once you know your True Value God then wants you to **Learn How to Build Others Up**. The world tells you humility is humiliating. That’s not true. Humility is not putting yourself down. It’s lifting others up. Later in Romans chapter 12 Paul says,

Honor one another above yourselves. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. Romans 12:10, 16)

The underhanded serve of James, John and their mom ignites a fiery reaction from the other ten disciples. They don't want these prideful brothers getting the good stuff ahead of them. The twelve disciples were not listening when, just a few minutes before, Jesus predicted what is about to happen in Jerusalem. They don't realize the "good stuff" awaiting Jesus is mockery, flogging and crucifixion. They don't know what they are asking. To silence His warring disciples Jesus says about Himself

...the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. (Matthew 20:28)

If we want to be different like Jesus there is no question we must serve others.

Yet like James, John and their mom, most of us don't know what we are asking when we sign up to be servants of Jesus. Sometimes we serve God for the wrong reasons. We are willing to help so long as others appreciate our sacrifice, acknowledge our contribution, applaud our efforts. Sometimes our service is motivated by guilt or because it makes us "feel good." Perhaps the subtlest, most underhanded serve is really manipulation and a grab for control.

"I'm working all these long hours so that you can have what you want."

"I guess I'll have to do it, since nobody can do it as well as me."

"This family, business, church, community would fall apart without me."

"Some day they'll appreciate all I've done for them."

"God, where's the reward for all my hard work?"

If that's the way you feel about serving, then who are you serving?

How do you improve your serve? Jesus teaches the disciples they must be **Available to**

**God.** He says,

You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave (Matthew 20:25-27)

'In this world,' Jesus explains, 'the goal is to gain dominion over multitudes, to subdue as many slaves as possible. That is their measure of greatness. But in my Kingdom, greatness is measured by how many you serve. If you want to be in first place, you must be a slave to all.' As Christians, we say we want to serve God. But often, we're just not available.

The Holy Spirit has given you one or more gifts to use in the church and the world. You may be sitting back with your gift unwrapped or it's possible you are serving in a ministry that is not God's calling for you. Or perhaps you are doing too many ministries and denying someone else the opportunity to use his or her gifts. In order to be available and to say "Yes" to where God wants you to be, you may have to say "No" to some other tasks. Make sure you pray and seek God's call so you don't say either "Yes" or "No" out of fear, guilt, or selfishness. The first question is, "Are you available to God?"

Second, true service **Gives Glory to God**. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says,

In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:16)

The purpose of our service must always be to point people to God and not ourselves. If you serve to draw attention to yourself, you'll be like a little candle flickering in the dark. The only things you'll attract are moths. Your goal and mine is to use our small lights to lead lost, hurting people out of the dark into the bright sun of God's Light until your small light disappears. Try a small secret service this week in which only God gets the credit and the glory.

The only way you can be available to God and give glory to God is if you are **Powered by God**. The only way you can serve as Jesus did is if you let Jesus serve through you. The Apostle Paul, one of the greatest servants of all time, once wrote,

We do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. We have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us" (2 Corinthians 4:5,7)

Paul confesses, "I may be just a plain jar of clay, a cracked pot. Yet inside me is the power of God that surpasses any power in all creation." Be available to God, give glory to God, and, most importantly, get your power from God.

Picture a place where there are no grocery stores, no paved roads, no schools, no churches, no hospitals or doctors, no electricity and no clean drinking water. There are many such places around our globe. One of them is the Tete Province in Mozambique. This past week I spent time with Rev. Nedson Zulu and Nurse Practitioner Sebber Banda. God called them to Tete, a province the size of Indiana with a population of 3 million. They could have stayed home in their country Zambia. Yet they heard Jesus' call to share the Good News and they do it in a way that heals body and spirit. They know they can't preach the love of God when the people are starving and dying of diseases, when pregnant women are dying in childbirth, when the rivers they drink from are used by animals and humans as toilets.

So they went to lift up the lives of the people. Today, Nedson and Sebber provide wells and schools. They train women to minister to other pregnant women so they don't have ride on a bicycle for thirty miles to give birth at a clinic. They train elders to lead the 84 churches which multiplied from original churches. They share the Gospel in word and deed, through work and worship. And they asked me to thank you Woodside for your financial support over the years. Your giving is making a difference in Mozambique.

But we can do more.

Who will give up the safety of suburbia and lift up the children of Trenton?

Who will give up the comfort of their homes and go on a mission trip?

Who will give up their selfishness and heal their marriages and families?

Who will give up their fears and start a Growth Group for their unchurched friends?

Who will give up their preconceptions and help the homeless, hungry and addicted?

Who will give up the ease of sitting in these seats and teach children the Word of God?

Who will give up their silence and share about Jesus?

Who will give up the security of Woodside and go start a new church?

Do you want to be on Jesus' right or left side? Find a place to serve, find someone to serve, find a community to serve, because that is where you will find Him.