

“PROUD OR JUSTIFIED”  
2 Samuel 22:26-34, I Corinthians 4:1-7, Luke 18:9-14  
February 19 & 20, 2022

“An energetic young man entered the office of the personnel manager of a large corporation. As he entered the room, he approached the desk and plopped his resume onto it. ‘You need look no further for candidates for this position. I am just the right person for this job,’ he stated boldly.

“During the course of their conversation, the young man proceeded to tell the personnel manager what was wrong with that corporation and how he would be able to fix those problems - probably within his first year of employment! As the young man concluded his presentation, he stood up and said, ‘But you had better hurry with your decision. Remember, I have other irons in the fire!’

“With that the personnel manager stood, picked up the man’s resume, handed it back to him, and said, ‘If you have other irons in the fire, I would suggest that you put this resume in with them!’”<sup>1</sup>

Sounds like this young man needed a good dose of humility in order for him to find just the right job. While he may have thought himself to be the perfect one for the position of that corporation, his pride went before him, and it was his undoing. Rather than present himself in a light of being a contribution to the workings of that organization, this young man built himself up bigger than life, and it set him out the door looking for employment in another business.

Pride is that character in life that always gets us into trouble. Bud Robinson has accurately stated that “**Pride is the only disease known to man that makes everyone sick except the one who has it.**” And Benjamin Whichcote says, “None are so empty as those who are full of themselves.”<sup>2</sup>

Pride is so very visible in our world today, and it doesn’t take us long to become aware of the terrible side-effects that follow - vanity, egotism, immodesty, smugness, conceit and superiority. When people think of themselves more highly than they ought to think, they begin to lift themselves up higher than others and they begin to consider others as much less important than they are. They care only about themselves, they think only about themselves, and they talk only about themselves. Pride makes a

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<sup>1</sup> (Michael Hodgin, *1001 More Humorous Illustrations for Public Speakers*, [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998] pg. 178-179)

<sup>2</sup> (Robert J. Morgan, *Stories, Illustrations & Quotes*, [Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000] pg. 633)

person completely blind to those around them to the point that the individual begins to believe that the whole universe revolves around them, and that they are so important that the world could not possibly live without them. Some leaders in our world today even make themselves into gods, and demand that all the people within their country worship them as the only divine being of the universe. Seriously!

But there is a little test that we can quickly administer that guarantees a result as to how important we really are. A. Dudley Dennison Jr. states it like this:

“Sometime when you’re feeling important, Sometime when your ego’s way up;  
Sometime when you take it for granted That you are the prize winning ‘pup;’  
Sometime when you feel that your absence Would leave an unfillable hole,  
Just follow these simple instructions, And see how it humbles your soul.  
Take a bucket and fill it with water, Put your hand in it up to your wrist.  
Now pull it out fast and the hole that remains Is the measure of how you’ll be missed.  
You may splash all you please as you enter, And stir up the water galore,  
But STOP and you’ll find in a minute, It’s back where it was before.”<sup>3</sup>

I know this always works for me. I just wish this test could be used more often in our world today. Maybe it would bring a little civility back into our culture and help people see that their importance just really isn’t that great. Oh, their position may put them into the lime-light, or they might have some skills that help them to stand out a bit more than most, but **the importance factor is not based upon what they think of themselves, but rather upon how they relate to one another and the difference they make in those around them.**

And that’s the key to our Scripture lessons today. In the Old Testament Book of 2 Samuel (especially chapters 11-21), David came to the realization very quickly that he was not perfect, that he could make huge mistakes in life that would adversely affect the lives of those around him. He tried to go above the Law, had an adulterous affair with the wife of one of his 30 Mighty Men, and then tried to hide the whole incident by having that faithful and devoted warrior killed in war. He killed one of his best friends. Then in a feigned attempt to show compassion for Uriah’s widow, David took Bathsheba

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<sup>3</sup> (Charles Swindoll, *Swindoll’s Ultimate Book of Illustrations & Quotes*, [Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998] pg. 467)

to be his wife. And that sent a whole slew of inappropriate messages to his family and the people of Israel. It messed up David's children, causing them to think they were also above the law, and gave them permission to do horrendous things. **David's one prideful act of indiscretion turned the whole nation of Israel up-side-down for years**, creating a revolt, a civil war, and the devastation of many. It almost destroyed David, himself.

But having come to his senses, having repented of his sin (Psalm 51), having turned back to the Lord God Almighty, David realized that he was not really all that important on his own, but that it was God who worked through him when he was faithful to the ways of the Lord God. The Old Testament lesson for today (2 Sam. 22:26-34) tells of David's recognition of the need for humility before the Lord. He says, "***You** are my lamp, O Lord; the Lord turns my darkness into light. With **Your** help I can advance against a troop; with **my God** I can scale a wall*" (22:29-30).

**You see, it is the Lord God who lifts up one person to do great things, while at the same time makes another person low.** That does not make them better than another, but rather makes them different than one another. One person is skilled in business management, while another is skilled in medicine. One person is skilled in operating a train engine, while another is skilled in helping others with the law. One person is skilled in ordering the books in a library, while another person is skilled in ordering parts and tools for a manufacturing company. One person is skilled in accounting, and another person is skilled in preparing food for the residents in his nursing home. One person is skilled in dramatic oration, and another person is skilled in counseling students in her high school. One person is skilled in teaching the people about the Lord God Almighty and another person skilled in making decisions for a nation. So many different abilities, so many different skills, each one important in keeping our society going, but none more important than another. Each one is a part of the whole, and together we compliment and support one another. **But when we begin to think that we are better than another based upon the skills given to us by God, then pride begins to divide and demolish our society, and we begin to classify one another based upon what we do, rather than whose we**

**are.** And when we do that, as we can see in our own culture today, we begin to demonize some people and then we magnify others to the point that persecution and oppression becomes a common part of that society.

Pride brings destruction to many if left unchecked and uncorrected. It can lead us into world war, as it did in World War II, and it can destroy any economy, and it can bring devastation to any nation. Straight out, pride destroys from the inside-out and it eliminates any need for the Lord God Almighty, because through pride, we become the one that is to be worshipped.

Therefore we have a stern warning in I Peter 5:5-6, “...*clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because **God is opposed to the proud, but He gives grace to the humble.** Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, so that He may exalt you at the proper time.*”

And this is one aspect of our Gospel lesson today when Jesus gives us the Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector. Listen to it - this is Luke 18:9-14. (READ Luke 18:9-14).

Verse 9 gives us the setting - “*To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable...*” Pride has always been an issue throughout human history. It was certainly prevalent in Jesus’ day, as much as it is today. This parable is addressed to those who are sure of themselves, to those who are self-righteous, to those who feel completely just in all that they do and say, to those who need no one else in their life. And as a result of them thinking of themselves this way, these individuals begin to treat others with disrespect seeing them as lower than they are. And they no longer seek the mercy of the Lord God because they feel they don’t need it.

So Jesus gives us the situation of two different people who have come into the Temple to pray: A Pharisee and a tax collector. The Pharisees “took their religion seriously. They were devout persons who upheld the Law. The Pharisee in this parable was a super-believer. He did more than was expected of a faithful Jew. He lived an exemplary life. He fasted twice a week, every week, when he was required to fast only one day of the year on the Day of Atonement. Fasting meant neither food nor drink for the entire day. He also paid tithes on everything, even on items for which the tithe had already been

paid. **Who can fault a man like this?** Every pastor would be delighted to have members like him. He would be called the salt of the earth. **But, he spoiled it all by his pride.** His good words were for finding acceptance with God. Though he said, ‘I thank you,’ he did not really give God the credit for activating and enabling him to do those good works.”<sup>4</sup>

You see, He prayed about himself, to himself, leaving God completely out of the picture. In a prayer of 33 words, he uses the pronoun “I” four times. His eyes were on himself. He’s telling God how great he is! He’s saying, “Hey, Lord, look at me” as if he had done all things on his own. **Though his position and his good works make him look like the best of men, he is really the worst of men because of his pride and self-righteousness.** He is pleased with himself and he has no need for God to be in his life. He is a self-made-man, making an idol of himself.

The tax collector, on the other hand is “a renegade Jew who went to work for the Romans, Israel’s hated conqueror. Tax collectors were quisling, traitors, collaborators who were despised by every patriotic Jew. And tax collectors were thieves, because they exacted for personal profit more taxes than the Romans demanded...The only good thing about this ‘bad’ man was that he knows he is rotten, a good-for-nothing person.”<sup>5</sup>

He stands at the back of the Temple because he knows he is unworthy to present himself before God. He cannot even look up because he is so ashamed of who he is and what he has done. He is so aware of his sinfulness that he beats his chest out of remorse. He throws himself at the mercy of God Almighty - no excuses, no defense, just a seven word prayer, “*God, have mercy on me, a sinner*” (18:13). He recognizes his wicked life, and pleads to God for His mercy.

**Jesus tells us that the huge difference in these two men is that the one knows how bad he is and asks God for forgiveness, while the other thinks himself to be so good, but asks for nothing.** The “bad” man receives forgiveness while the “good” man receives nothing because he asks for nothing.

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<sup>4</sup> (John R. Brokhoff, *Preaching The Parables*, [Lima, OH: C.S.S. Publishing Company, 1988] pg. 228-229)

<sup>5</sup> (Ibid. pg. 229)

Why would Jesus lift up the despised man, and at the same time despising the respected man? It all came down to the content of the prayers that came from their hearts.

Now, while it is appealing to Christians to want to be counted as “good” from God’s perspective, there is always the danger of letting that exceptional living go to our heads and then into our hearts, making us believe that we are better than other people. We want clean living, we want to be outgoing with our good works that help others, and we want to stay true to our faith in God through Jesus Christ for the benefit of the Church. **But we come into dangerous territory when we compare ourselves with others and think that we are better than they are based upon our good works.** As I said earlier, being good does not make us better than anyone else.

When we begin to compare ourselves with those around us, it is easy to become prideful that our life looks better than the others. **When we begin to think that we are better than others, we fall into the deception that we are better than others,** and that begins to influence the way we treat others. And then we begin to say with the Pharisee, “*God, I thank you that I am not like others...*” (18:11).

God desires that we practice our faith every day. He calls us to be living witnesses to the world of the marvelous work of God in us and for us. God wants us to be righteous and faithful people following all of His commandments and teachings. The spiritual disciplines of tithing and fasting and devout worship are great at growing our faith and trust in the Lord. But to use those same spiritual practices as a weapon to divide one another, in order to be better than another, is always the danger.

But another danger of being “good” is that we compare ourselves with those who are “better” than we are, and we begin thinking to ourselves that we are not being good enough. And because others seem to be better than we are, we begin to feel guilty that we’re not like them. And because of the comparison, our drive for greater works to prove ourselves to be better, leads us into thinking that it is by good works that we are approved by God. As long as the cycle continues, our focus becomes more on the works than on our devotion and obedience to the Lord. **We can never do enough good to make God accept us into His kingdom. We can never find our way into heaven by doing good works.**

Even though we are challenged to “*outdo one another in love,*” and called as Methodists to “Do all the good you can, to all the people that you can, in all the ways that you can, for as long as you can,” we are not to base our salvation on the good works that we do. Our Salvation is based upon our faith in Jesus Christ, our Savior, who died in our place to take away our sin so that we might be free from the penalty of that sin. Salvation comes to us as we accept Jesus Christ into our lives as our Savior, and we dedicate our lives to serving Him in all that we do and say. Good works are to come about as a result of our faithfulness in order to help others find Jesus Christ as Savior of their lives. Good works cannot replace faith and trust in Jesus Christ!

**And as Jesus transforms our lives from the sinful to the redeemed, our lives are to reflect that change.** The way that we live is to be a reflection of all that has taken place in our hearts. But if we become prideful that this transformation has changed us into “better” people, and begin to treat others with disrespect because we’re better than they are, has a real transformation really taken place in our lives? Or are we just using Jesus in a way that increases our “value” only in our own minds? When a person is truly transformed by Jesus Christ, they begin to follow Jesus as a servant, willing to give of themselves for the benefit of another, enabling them to see the true benefit of having Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord of our lives.

Yes, it is good to thank God for all His provision and all His blessings in our lives! But the problem comes in as we start thinking ourselves to be greater than we really are because of those blessings and provisions. And then we begin reclassifying people based upon “haves” verses the “have-nots” and the “good ones” verses the “bad ones.” And that cycle spirals downward out of control until we experience the demise of our society, and we end up like David’s Israel in 2 Samuel 11-21. We must “*humble ourselves before the mighty hand of God so that He may exalt us at the proper time*” (I Peter 5:6) to bring about His glory and His kingdom.

You see, in the Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector, **the religious leader did not consider himself in need of God’s forgiveness because he was “so good.”** He did not ask for God’s

mercy because he saw himself already righteous enough to earn God's acceptance and love. He did not ask for forgiveness because he thought of himself as being completely in the right with no need for repentance. His religious practices made him righteous in his own mind. But that did not exonerate him from his sinfulness. He was still in need of God's grace, but he never felt he needed it because of his own self-righteousness.

**The tax collector, on the other hand, was overwhelmed by his sin and felt that he was totally unworthy to even be in God's presence.** How could God even look at him, he was so filthy. Yet, the realization of his sinfulness brought him to the point of understanding that it was only by God's grace that he could be forgiven. In that recognition of the need for the mercy of God, this sinner put himself before God in desperation, seeking the transformation that only God can provide.

**So the true question for us today is, "Is Jesus speaking to us through this parable?"** This parable was not only for the Pharisees, not only for scribes, not only for the disciples. Jesus was addressing all those who "*were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else*" (Lu. 18:9). Could Jesus be speaking to us? Do we trust only in ourselves, or do we rely upon the saving mercy of our Savior, Jesus? Do we look down at others because they are different than we are based upon their race, or nationality, or religion, or morality, or education, or gender? Do we "thank God that we are not like 'them'?"

The tax collector received God's forgiveness and went home justified because he humbled himself before the Lord and asked for mercy. The religious man went home neither forgiven nor justified because he didn't seek the mercy of the Lord our God because of his pride. Which one do we want for our own lives?

Let's pray. Father, thank You for Your mercy and grace available to each one of us through Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord. Help us focus on following Him in our daily lives rather than comparing ourselves to others. Help us to see that none of us are above the Law, but that we are all in need of Your forgiveness, because we are all sinners in need of Your grace. As we seek to follow Jesus,

help us not to judge others as being less than we are, but help us to consider others as more important than ourselves so that we might live in such a way that they may see Jesus through us. Give us a heart of love and compassion toward those around us, that we might see them as valuable in Your sight, just as we are valuable in Your sight. Give us Your eyes to see, and Your heart to love so that we might complete Your work of salvation for the world. This we pray in Jesus' Name. AMEN.