

“THE HUMBLE SHALL BE EXALTED”  
Joel 2:23-32, 2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18, Luke 18:9-14  
October 26 & 27, 2019

“When I think about the sin of pride, the greatest sin of all, it reminds me of the army colonel. He had just been promoted to colonel. He was sitting in his office when someone knocked at the door and said, ‘This is Private Johnson. May I see you sir?’

“He said, ‘Just a minute.’ The colonel, wanting to look impressive, picked up his telephone and he said real loud, ‘Yes, Mr. President. I understand, Mr. President. We will take care of it right away, Mr. President.’ He wasn’t talking to the president, but he wanted to make it seem like he was talking to the president. He wanted to appear bigger than he really was.

“The colonel said, ‘Mr. President, just give me one second.’ Then he said, ‘Come in, Private.’

“The Private came in and the colonel asked him to talk quickly because he had the president on the other line. ‘What can I do for you?’

“Well,’ the private said, ‘I just came in to connect your telephone.’

“God has a way of making you look like a fool, because ‘pride cometh before the fall’”  
(Proverbs 16:18).<sup>1</sup>

That’s THE TROUBLE WITH **PRIDE**, it makes us think that we are bigger, or better, or more important, or more valuable, or more outstanding than we really are. Pride causes us to focus so much on ourselves that we lose track of who we really are and how really ordinary each one of us really is. Pride convinces us that the world just can’t go on without us, and when we buy into that understanding, we eventually find ourselves dramatically humbled, just as the colonel was that day in the office.

And we see that in the midst of our Scripture lessons today. Jesus confronted those who thought entirely too much of themselves, and He told them a great parable to help us to see the sin in pride. Listen to the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector. (READ Luke 18:9-12, will finish it later).

This Pharisee went to the Temple to pray, but his prayer was more of boasting to God how great

---

<sup>1</sup> (Tony Evans, *Tony Evans’ Book of Illustrations*, [Chicago, IL; Moody Publishers, 2009] pg. 237-238, #727)

he was and how little others were in comparison to him. While God had blessed him tremendously, this man took it as a sign that he was much better than anyone else. Even his position in the Temple tells us the condition of his heart – he “*stood apart by himself and prayed...*” (18:11). He didn’t want to come close to anyone else in the Temple for fear that the others might somehow “contaminate” him, or make him less than what he thought he was.

Then look carefully in the man’s prayer – “*I thank you...I am not...like everybody else. I thank you...I am not...I fast...I give...*” In that three sentence prayer he uses the personal “I” six times. It’s all about him. He is so focused on himself that he can’t see the needs of those around him. He is so self-centered that all he does is make himself look better, bigger, more important, and more valuable than everyone else in the Temple. Reminds me of the favorite saying of Cassias Clay turned Mohamed Ali, “I AM THE GREATEST!” While God certainly blesses us abundantly, pride brings us down in a hurry, often flat on our face.

Take for instance, King Uzziah in 2 Chronicles 26(16-21). “*When King Uzziah became strong, he grew arrogant, and that led to his downfall. He defied the Lord his God by going into the Temple to burn incense on the altar of incense.*” Why was that so bad? Well, it was the priest’s job to burn the incense on the altar of incense, and there was a cleansing ceremony that went along with that so that when the priest did offer the incense, he would not be struck down dead for being in the presence of the Holy God with his sins hanging out all over. Uzziah thought so much of himself that he didn’t think he needed to go through the cleansing, and when confronted by the priests, he got angry with them. His arrogance and pride brought him the wrath of God who punished him with leprosy. Never again was Uzziah allowed into the Temple. Pride puts us at odds with God the Father.

Not only does the sin of pride put us at odds with God, but Pride separates us from God and others. Take for example King Nebuchadnezzar, who was so boastful of what he had done that it got him into trouble, too. “*...while he was walking around on the roof of his royal palace in Babylon, he said, ‘Look how great Babylon is! I built it as my capital city to display my power and might, my glory*

*and majesty”* (Daniel 4:28-30). Though God had blessed him, Nebuchadnezzar claimed it all for himself as something that he had done all by himself. He made himself out to be god almighty, and was then “*driven away from human society, [to] live with wild animals and eat grass like an ox for seven years...*” The sin of his pride brought punishment from the Lord, and after seven years of insanity did he come to the conclusion that he wasn’t really all that great and powerful and glorious after all.

**THE RESULTS OF PRIDE** do not only impact the individual, but also whole communities and even countries. In Joel 2:12-14 we see how the country of Israel had wandered away from God and had done great wickedness and evil in His sight. They refused to follow or abide by the laws of God, but thought they knew better how to live and move and have their being than God did. So God gave them into the hands of their enemies, and used nature to humble the people in order to persuade them that the Lord was God Almighty, not their pagan idols and false gods. God called them back to repent of their sin of pride, instructing them to fast and weep and mourn for the sinfulness they had done and the calamities that had come to them because of that sin. Only after their repentance did God restore their land and bring freedom to the people.

You see, *God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble,*” as I Peter 5:5 tells us. Pride convinces us that we are more than we really are, and when we believe that, we begin to treat others with less respect, without dignity, and we begin to see them having less value or importance. And all kinds of horrible things have been done to people throughout the ages because one person or group begins to think themselves better than another.

Millions of people were murdered at the hands of the Third Reich before and during World War 2 because pride made the German people better than anyone else. Whole people groups were enslaved and put into forced labor because another group of people thought they were better than the others. Slavery due to the color of the skin, or because of religious beliefs, or because of political opinions have brought about the death of untold billions of people.

But God is not pleased with us when pride leads us to treating others poorly. Punishment and

retribution is always the result of pride, for God would have us treat each other with love, dignity, respect and honor. We cannot please God when we have prideful hearts. It only brings God's wrath to us, and only when we repent of the sin of pride do we find healing, restoration and salvation. Only as we "*humble ourselves before the Lord*" (James 4:10) that we find that we will be exalted by the Lord.

I like the way that Tony Evans puts this concept into reality for us. He says, "In football, they tell the offensive line, no matter how big you are, stay low. So that you can have leverage, stay low.

"No matter how big you get in life, stay low. No matter what title you have in front of your name, how much money you have in the bank, or how many people know who you are, stay low. The moment you use your knowledge, prestige, power, or resources to attempt to be like God, it will be made very clear, very soon, there is only one God. Humble yourself beneath His mighty hand."<sup>2</sup>

You see, God can't use us for His glory if we are full of pride in ourselves. If we are only looking at how great we are, we fail to see the desperate need of those around us, and we fail to touch their lives with the blessings that God has given to us. Pride blinds us to everything else except ourselves, and we begin to think that we can do without God, we can do better than by following His Laws, and we can have it all our way.

But **HUMILITY IS DIFFICULT!** When we are surrounded by people who want you to know how great they are, it is hard for us not to stand up and make ourselves equal, if not better, than they are. Humility means giving up on the need for recognition and publicity and fame and fortune. Humility means doing the most with what God has provided you with, and looking for ways to touch the lives of those around you who are not as blessed as you are.

The Apostle Paul was once in the roll of the Pharisees, and thought that he would do God a favor by wiping out all those who were a part of the sect called Christianity. He put himself as more important than those who believed in Jesus, and sought to put an end to the new religion. Yet, in all his arrogance and pride, Jesus humbled him with blindness until he repented and came to understand the

---

<sup>2</sup> ( Tony Evans' Book of Illustrations, pg. 158, #473)

value of having Christ Jesus as Lord. For the rest of his life, Paul submitted himself to the authority of God, and worked among the peoples of Israel and southeast Europe telling them of the greatness of God and the Salvation of God found only in Jesus. He humbled himself of all position, all power, all authority, and all fame in order to be a witness to the resurrection of Jesus. His remaining life was given to serve God through humble service to all people groups so that they could find the redemption of their souls and the reward of being in God's presence when this life was over.

Our Epistle lesson of 2 Timothy 4(6-8, 16-18) testifies to the fact that Paul spent his whole career giving salvation to all who would believe in Jesus Christ as the Savior of the world. He didn't force it upon anyone, but offered it freely. He poured out his life after the example of Jesus to complete God's call on him to take the Good News of the Gospel everywhere he was led to go.

So Humility looks beyond the self to see the needs of others. Philippians 2:3 tells us, *“Don't do anything from selfish ambition or from a cheap desire to boast, but be humble toward one another, always considering others better than yourselves.”* How many countries were reached for the Gospel of Jesus Christ because of arrogance or pride? None. How many were reached because of gentle, humble people going and sharing even what they had with those who were lost? Hundreds. Boastfulness and arrogance says, “Do it My Way, or else,” but humility and gentleness says, “Let me show you what God has done in my life when I was in the place where you are now.”

And Humility means doing your best before God. While pride says do it all for your own glory and honor, humility calls us to live for the Lord God. He is the One who has provided us with the means and abilities and skills to do the work that He has called us to do, yet not to call attention to ourselves, but to bring glory to Him. Humility is giving up on our own personal desires and giving in to the way that God wants us to live that makes us outstanding for Him, nor for us.

The Apostle Paul was sold out for Jesus and did everything he could to bring people out of the ways of the world and into the ways of God. He worked hard, traveled great distances and sacrificed everything to help others come to know Jesus as the true Savior of the world. He says, *“I have done my*

*best in the race, I have run the full distance, and I have kept the faith. And now there is waiting for me the victory prize of being put right with God...*" (2 Tim. 4:7-8). Paul understood that nothing he did on his own power would bring about the redemption of the world, but only through the power of the Holy Spirit working through him was he able to remain faithful to God's call. God is not interested in multiplying mediocrity. God wants our very best to be used for Him to bring Him glory.

And humility is difficult because Humility means often standing alone in the faith we have. Yet Paul was not afraid to make his stand for Jesus, even if he were the only one doing what was right. He learned the power of what even one person can do when the Holy Spirit works through them.

Let me share with you the testimony of what God can do with one person, or one family. This is Curtis Sergeant's witness to what happened on Hainan Island when he went as a servant of God to the people there. "From 1991 to 2002, I worked as a missionary in China. My family and I arrived on an island with a population of about 7 million and fewer than 100 known Christians worshipping in unregistered churches. Historically, this island was where the Chinese Government exiled criminals and those who had fallen out of favor. It was a poor, resentful and violent place. It was, literally, "the ends of the earth." It's here that we clearly see the power of multiplication and simplicity: I left the island in 1996 because it was already clear that the local believers did not need outside assistance. They were making disciples on their own – and transforming the culture in the process. By 2008, there were more than 500,000 followers of Christ."

Through the work of one family, the whole island was transformed and became a model of true Christianity. Was it easy? No! Was it safe? No! Was it Christian? Not until God used Curtis to help those who were Christian to multiply. Were they welcomed? Not much. But Curtis and his family lived among the people and lived their faith humbly and simply, and they prayed for God to begin a new work in the lives of the people. **AND GOD ANSWERED THEIR PRAYERS.** Humility allows open doors for sharing the faith we have.

**HUMILITY IS ESSENTIAL** if we are to be servants of God through Jesus Christ. Remember,

two men went into the Temple to pray. The Pharisee was the first one; now let's hear about the other one, the tax collector. Listen to the end of Jesus' parable to the people who thought too highly of themselves in Luke 18. (READ Luke 18:13-14)

The tax collector was at the bottom of society. He was counted with the enemy because he worked with the Roman government to exact taxes on the people of Israel. He was a Jew conspiring with the occupying forces to tax his own people, and make himself rich at the same time. Yet here on that day, he went into the Temple to pray. But his demeanor was radically different than that of the Pharisee. This man knew he was a sinner, that he deserved God's wrath instead of His grace. But he presented himself to God completely different than the other.

The tax collector also stood off by himself, but not so as to protect himself from the likes of the others. Instead he stood off to himself because he recognized his desperate need of God's mercy. Instead of lifting up before God all the great things he had done, he beat his chest and cried out to God, "*God, have pity on me, a sinner!*" (18:13). And Jesus tells us of the results of being humble before God. "*I tell you,' said Jesus, 'the tax collector, and not the Pharisee, was in the right with God when he went home. For everyone who makes himself great will be humbled, and everyone who humbles himself will be made great'*" (18:14).

You see, as We develop a proper concept of God, understanding that we are really nothing and that God is EVERYTHING, we come to the point of recognizing the need for God to be Lord in our life. When we find that we can do nothing without God's work in us, we come to know that it is only through God that our lives have meaning and purpose. If we make ourselves look great, then God allows us to come to understand that we are really nothing without Him.

1 Peter 5:6 gives us great instruction, "*Humble yourselves, then, under God's mighty hand, so that He will lift you up in His own good time.*" When we submit to God in all our ways, He acknowledges our humility and then uses us to bring Him glory at just the right time to make a great difference in the lives of those around us. He can transform those in our families; He can transform the

lives of the block we live on; He can transform the people we meet and work with; God can use us to transform the world.

But Only in humility are we able to work for the Lord. As long as we are full of ourselves, we're no good to God. Like trying to quench the thirst of a dehydrated person by putting water into an already full glass of rocks, God can only use us when we empty ourselves of ourselves, and turn to Him to use us as He wills. We are so much more useful to God when we are empty of self and full of Him. So James 1:21-22 instructs us, "*So get rid of every filthy habit and all wicked conduct. Submit to God and accept the word that He plants in your hearts, which is able to save you. Do not deceive yourselves by just listening to His word; instead, put it into practice.*"

Humility of mind is God's delight for us as His followers. Our minds control the rest of our bodies, so when we humble our minds first to God, the rest of our lives follows along. Our tongues no longer put others down for being "less than" we are; our hands begin to work for the needs of others; and our feet begin to take us to the places where the people need to hear about God's great love for us. Romans 12:3 guides us in this, saying "*Do not think of yourself more highly than you should. Instead, be modest in your thinking, and judge yourself according to the amount of faith that God has given you.*"

And lest you think that by humbling yourself you will be run over by the rest of the world and never have enough for your life, remember that Humility brings great rewards when we humble ourselves before the Lord. You see, when you are a child of the King of the Universe, you are loved, cared for and He knows what you need. God does not abandon His children, but is willing to supply their needs, even in great abundance, so that they might continue to do His work for His glory. Proverbs 22:4 says it rightly, "*Obey the Lord, be humble, and you will get riches, honor, and a long life.*" But that means that we submit ourselves before the Lord God and humble our lives before Him.

So I challenge you today to Be clothed with humility before the Lord. You see, "*You are the people of God; He loved you and chose you for His own. So then, you must clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience*" (Colossians 3:12). It is the humble who will

be exalted before the Lord. It is the humble who will do the great work God has called us to do. It is the humble that will bring peace to a hurting world. It is the humble that will transform our society. It is the humble who will bring honor and glory to the Lord our God.

Life is not about us striving to get everything we want out of life, or doing things our way, or stepping on others to get ahead. Real life is about humbly submitting ourselves before the Lord our God so that He might use us like Jesus to bring Salvation to the whole world.

Let's pray: Thank you, Father, for Your call to us to be Your servants. It is a tough call to answer and follow, but You give us the strength and courage we need to humble ourselves before You so that You might use us in a mighty way to accomplish Your Salvation of the world. Give us the wisdom to seek Your will and not our own. Provide for us the guidance to serve You wherever You would send us. Grant us the peace that goes beyond all our understanding so that as we trust in You, we will know of Your love and care for us. Use us, even today, for Your glory, in Jesus Christ our Lord.

AMEN.