

It's Hard to Be Humble

Luke 14:7-11

August 6, 2023

Please open your Bible to Luke 14. What do you call a humble miner? A really down to earth person. My late grandpa used to hate looking in the mirror. Humble man, terrible driver. A student asked his teacher what the word condescending meant. He replied, "I'd tell you're not bright enough to understand it anyway." Why was the cannibal lion so humble? He swallowed his pride.

We're going on a hunt today. A safari through the Scriptures to discover not a lion nor a rhino, but a key Christian virtue that, perhaps more than any other, will reflect Jesus in our world and stand out like a shining star in the very darkest night. If you are able, please stand as we read Luke 14:7-11 When he (Jesus) noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them this parable: 8 "When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. 9 If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, 'Give this man your seat.' Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. 10 But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, 'Friend, move up to a better place.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all your fellow guests. 11 For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

How many of you knew someone in school who thought they were all that? Unfortunately, many still do. All through life we encounter individuals both inside and outside the church and too often in our own mirrors who live with a spirit of superiority. Who think they or we deserve the best seats at every feast. There are lots of terms we use to describe this **demonic** characteristic. Conceited, big, arrogant, proud, superior, stuck up, snobbish, haughty, condescending, etc. I'm better than you, I'm smarter than you, I'm richer than you, I'm more athletic than you, I'm prettier than you, I'm holier than you, I'm whateverer than you. And God despises it all.

Time and again throughout the Bible, this quality is consistently condemned and its opposite commended. It is sometimes identified as the original sin that caused Lucifer to try to ascend higher than God and that caused Adam and Eve to think they could achieve equality with God. And it has poisoned our relationship with Him and with every other human being ever since.

Say pride. The desire to be recognized. To be honored. To be first. To sit in the best seat at the feast. And to believe that we really deserve it. We may not engage in trash talk like football players on the field, but we engage in trash thinking. The attitude that others can smell on us from 100 yards or more. Just as dogs can smell fear, humans

can smell pride on each other and it stinks to high heaven. Speaking of heaven, God can indeed smell it from there and he abhors it. He hates it with a passion. And we do too when we smell it on somebody else, but are often nose-blind to it in ourselves.

We may have many other wonderful godly virtues. Honesty, compassion, generosity, kindness, gentleness, etc. But pride stains them all. It's like washing a new red shirt with a whole load of white towels. Pride permeates everything. And sadly, it is the color we cannot see. We are colorblind to our own pride. The one who thinks he or she doesn't need this message is the one who needs it most because, as Mac Davis sang, "it's hard to be humble, when you're perfect in every way." Conceit's a fault and I don't have any. We may never say these things out loud, but deep down we believe them or live them.

Say Moses. We had a great trip this week to sight and sound. Thanks to Becky for organizing it. We all consider Moses as one of the greatest men in the Bible and of all time. A great leader and courageous prophet at times standing against Pharaoh, at times against his own people, and at times even pleading before God. Through Moses, God performed great miracles several of which have never been duplicated. Moses had every reason to flout his miracles, his intelligence, and even his relationship with God. He had a lot to brag about and be proud of. And yet, Num 12:3 says, "Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth." That was stated when his own siblings accused him of being proud. But he wasn't always humble. God had to knock him down a notch or two or 20.

Down in Egypt, it seems that Moses was proud, self-assured and attempted to deliver God's people by his own power. But forty years on the backside of the desert with sheep helped him realize that everything he had or did was a gift from God, not his own doing. Thankfully, he never forgot that. And God has to knock us down a notch or two from time to time. Not to be harsh or cruel, but to help us see the truth about ourselves and about Him. That we are truly nothing without Him. That we have no good qualities and no wisdom of our own. We can do nothing that is really good. We are hopelessly lost and evil. Until we understand this, we can never be or do what He desires us to be and do. Which is why Jesus said, take the lowest seat.

Say humility. Humility comes from knowing who we truly are before God. From understanding that we are nothing before Him. Lower than the tiniest ant, than the smallest flea. More sinful and dirty than raw sewage. Understanding who we are before God is the first step in acquiring or developing this vital Christian virtue of humility. As we realize who we really are before Him, we can begin to appreciate His great mercy in taking notice of us and then in loving us and then in saving us! And we begin to have confidence not in what we've done or who we are, but in Christ. We can then be as bold as Moses or Elijah not because we are much but because Christ is much! As soon as we

trust our own ability or depend on our own strength or righteousness, it all collapses. But as long as we remember who we are before God and who He is, He supplies the power to do all He's asked. So we must humble ourselves before Him. Not in words only, but in sincere penitence of heart and soul. Not in false humility that Paul warns us about in Colossians 2 but in true contrition and self-abasement. The best definition I've ever heard of humility is not thinking less of yourself than others, it's not thinking of yourself at all. It's thinking of God and of others.

God knows the difference between false and true humility and He can certainly humble those who refuse to humble themselves. Isa 26:5 He humbles those who dwell on high." He not only humbled, but He humiliated Pharaoh who refused to humble himself and let God's people go. He humbled the Israelites as they traveled through the desert. You would think slaves would be humble, but after they were delivered, they got puffed up with pride. Nothing a few years of manna couldn't take care of. He knows how to take us down a notch or two. In Daniel's time, He humbled the mighty Nebuchadnezzar and made him eat grass like a cow for 7 years. In response, he said (Dan 4:37) "Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble." Sadly, one of his successors, Belshazzar, didn't learn this lesson from Neb and lost the kingdom in one night because of his lack of humility.

Instead of focusing on the negatives of pride, however, let's turn and focus on the positives of humility. Say humble. Humility is one of those words that's hard to define, but we know it when we see it. Like nice car or good food. Instead of arrogant bragging, humility quietly trusts in God. It is a quiet confidence, not self-confidence, but God-confidence through Whom all things are possible. We like to brag but my dad told me years ago, "Self-brag is half scandal." Prov 27:2 tells us, "Let another praise you, and not your own mouth; someone else, and not your own lips." We don't have to constantly blow our own horns. Just obey Jesus. And as we do, we acquire another Christian virtue we've talked about before, contentment. Being content with whatever seat God assigns us, at the head of the table, at the foot, or somewhere off to the side. In prison as with Joseph and Paul, or in the palace like with Esther and David.

But if we're constantly convinced of our own merit, ability, or worthiness, we'll continually be frustrated and angry unless we always get the best seat, and even if we do, we still won't be happy. Pride not only sickens those around us, it makes us sick too. In another instance, Jesus told about a Pharisee and a tax collector both of whom prayed to God. In Luke 18:11-13, He said, "The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men — robbers, evildoers, adulterers — or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.' 13 "But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' 14 "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God." Humility gets God's attention!

Some of us who are utterly disgusted by Pride Month, and rightfully so, utterly disgust God with our own self-righteous pride. Pride is pride. We're supposed to be holier than nonbelievers, but we're not supposed to elevate ourselves over them. In fact, that is unholy. Pride has this tendency to sneak up on the back of us and bite us just when we think we're humble. We become proud of our humility and just like that, we're not humble.

But Jesus ended the story about the two praying men by repeating what He said earlier in our Scripture from Luke today, "For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." He said the same thing in "Matt 23:11-12 The greatest among you will be your servant. 12 For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted." I think He's trying to get a point across. James adds in 4:10 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

In Eph 4:2 Paul tells us to "Be **completely** humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love," and in Col 3:12-13 he says, "...clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience." Someone said you're never fully dressed until you wear your smile, but the Bible says we don't have our Christlike garments on until we're wearing our humility. Peter echoes this same thing in 1 Peter 5:5-6 "... clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." 6 Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time." How many of you want God to lift you up? Arguing with God and telling Him how much you deserve it is not the way for that to happen. Rather humility before the King of Kings and Lord of lords.

If you want to really get God's attention, humble yourself before Him! Isa 66:2 God tells us ... "This is the one I esteem (or value): he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word." God revealed incredible prophecies to Daniel because he humbled himself before God. (Dan 10:12). Later, Mary's humility is highlighted in Luke 1:48 as one of the virtues that qualified her to be the mother of our Lord. How much does God value humility? In Matt 18:4, Jesus said, "Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the **greatest** in the kingdom of heaven."

Over and over again, the Bible tells us that God honors humility and promises to do several things for he or she who is humble. Ps 18:27 says, "You **save** the humble but bring low those whose eyes are haughty." Psalm 25:9 "He **guides** the humble in what is right and **teaches** them his way." Psalm 147:6 "The Lord **sustains** the humble but casts the wicked to the ground." Prov 3:34 says He **gives grace**, (not to the proud) but to the humble." Prov 11:2 and 18:12 both say, "When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes **wisdom**." Prov 15:33 says that humility comes before honor. Not in Webster's book, but in God's book! Prov 22:4 even promises that, "Humility and the

fear of the Lord bring wealth, honor and life.” Nearly 100 verses of Scripture command Jesus’ true followers to be humble. God is trying to get this through our thick proud heads.

In 2 Chron 7:14 He promises, “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** will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.” Repentance starts with humility! Zeph tells us to (2:3) ... Seek righteousness, seek **humility**; perhaps you will be sheltered on the day of the Lord's anger.” God had mercy even on some of the most evil kings ever including Ahab and Manasseh when they truly humbled themselves after they had sinned and He will do the same for us.

Humility was one of the chief qualities of our Lord Jesus and if we are going to be like Him, **we** must be humble. We see Him demonstrating it as He stooped to wash His disciples’ feet. But Paul describes it best in Phil 2 where he says, (3-11) “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. 4 Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. 5 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: 6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, 7 but **made himself nothing**, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, he **humbled** himself and became obedient to death — even death on a cross! 9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

Jesus humbled Himself. Made Himself nothing. The King of the Universe became a servant. He humbled Himself to the lowest place and the Father exalted Him to the highest place, in keeping with His eternal principle, whoever humbles Himself will be exalted. And so, at Jesus Name, indeed, we ought to humble ourselves. And bow our knees. If you are able, for our closing prayer, I invite you to not only humble your hearts, but if you are able, to kneel and humble yourself before God today, as did our forefathers in the faith did. Turn and face the chair is fine. If you can’t get down and back up, that’s OK, but humble your heart and confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God the father.