

“A Humble Heart”  
Luke 14:1, 7-14

A Sermon Delivered by  
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Jesus grew up in Galilee, which meant some might have called him a hick. The sophisticated city folks in Jerusalem looked down on Jesus. On one particular Sabbath, Jesus went to eat in the house of a prominent Pharisee. When Jesus noticed how the guests worked their way to places of honor at the table, he told them this parable: “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. 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. 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. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

This concept is totally opposite of the way the world thinks. The world says if you want to be successful and be somebody you've got to push, fight and work your way to the top. But Jesus says just the opposite. He says if you try to promote yourself, you'll end up humbled. James 4:10 says “Humble yourself before the Lord and He will lift you up.” So, on one hand we have pride. On the other hand, we have the concept of humility.

Let's talk about the problem with pride. Pride is basically the attitude that says, “the world revolves around me.” As Jesus observed these men, He detected the poison of pride in their lives. Pride wasn't just a problem back then, it's a problem today. Two things that make pride such a problem.

First, it's hard to recognize it in yourself. Someone once said pride is the only disease that makes everyone sick except the one who has it. We are usually blind to it in our own lives.

Those of you of my generation will remember the song by Carly Simon, “You're So Vain.” Carly Simon never revealed who she was talking about when she wrote it, but she did date Warren Beatty, who dumped her. And he did call her up after the song and thanked her for writing it about him! The words say: “You're so vain; you probably think this song is about you. You're so vain...”

And you can thank me later for singing this to yourself all afternoon. Apparently Carly Simon never revealed who the song was about, but rumor has it that she dated Warren Beatty and he dumped her and after she released the song, he called her up and thanked her for writing a song about him.

Pride and vanity lurk just below the surface of your life and you aren't even aware it's there until someone or something brings it to your attention.

Another problem with pride is that it leads to ruin. The greatest warning about the danger of pride can be seen in the devil himself. Before the creation of the world, Satan was a beautiful angel named Lucifer. He let pride and ambition take over his personality until he rebelled against the Most High God. We read about it in Isaiah 14:12-15: How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground—mighty though you were against the nations of the world. For you said to yourself, "I will ascend to heaven and rule the angels. I will take the highest throne. I will preside on the Mount of Assembly far away in the north. I will climb to the highest heavens and be like the Most High." But instead, you will be brought down to the pit of hell, down to its lowest depths.

Satan wanted to take God's place. He wanted to be his own little God. He said, "I'm moving on up!" God said, "No, Satan, you're going down." God kicked Satan out of heaven and he's been going down ever since and one day, he'll be cast into the pit of hell. Why? Because he exalted himself and tried to misplace himself above God and he continues to do it every day.

In the Garden of Eden, Satan said to Eve, "If you will eat that fruit, you will be like God." That was a lie, but Eve swallowed it. People today still believe the lies of our spiritual enemy: "you don't need God, you don't need Jesus; just be your own God!" By eating the fruit, Eve thought she was moving upward to a higher stage of consciousness, but it led to being kicked out of the beautiful, perfect environment of the Garden of Eden. Why? Because pride always leads to ruin.

You don't find a lot of people who are asking the question, "How can I be more humble?" They are asking, "How can I succeed?" Or "How can I climb to the top?" I did a search on Amazon recently for "how to be more humble." The first two books that came up were "How to Stay Humble When You're Smarter Than Everybody Else" and "The Know It All: One Man's Humble Quest to Become the Smartest Person in the World." The Bible speaks over and over about the value of humility. Proverbs 29:23 says, "A man's pride will bring him low; but the humble in spirit retains honor."

There are three characteristics of true humility:

First, true humility is seeing yourself as God sees you. Humility is not having a poor self-image and thinking you are a doormat. It's having an honest evaluation of who you are—as the Bible describes you. On one hand I am a sinner who deserves death and hell—yet I am a child of God. Humility is found in the tension and the balance between those two realities. Paul writes in Romans 7 about what a wretched creature he is who cannot refrain from sin. He says the good things he wants to do, he doesn't do them. And the bad things that he doesn't want to do, he does them. That's messed up. But in the very next

chapter he writes about how we are deeply loved as children of God—heirs of God with Christ. Was he confused? No, he understood the balance.

There's a short story about the donkey Jesus rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. The donkey was so overjoyed at being chosen, he held his head high as they entered the city. He drank in the songs of praise and enjoyed walking on the palm branches underneath his hoofs. He relished the attention directed toward them. A week later, the little donkey wanted to enjoy it again, so he pranced out to retrace his steps—but this time, the people didn't pay him any attention. He said, "Where are the palm branches, don't you know who I am?" The people who heard him threw rocks at him instead. The donkey neared the city of Jerusalem, and said, "Where are the songs of praise for me? Don't you remember me?" Inside the city, nobody paid him any attention, they just shooed him away from their stalls in the streets. The little donkey went home dejected and humiliated. When his mother saw him she said, "Foolish child. Don't you know without Jesus you are nothing?" That's true for each of us. Without Jesus we are nothing, but in Christ, we can do all things. That's humility.

Second, true humility is revealed by how I treat others. Humility is not some kind of ribbon or medal you wear on your uniform. The only way to reveal your humility is if you treat others more highly than yourself. Scripture says, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves...your attitude should be that of Christ Jesus who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very form of a servant..." (Philippians 2:3-6) Jesus humbled Himself to step down from the throne of heaven to become one of us—a human being.

The night before Jesus was crucified, all of the disciples were too full of pride to perform the slave's job of washing feet. Jesus humbled Himself and went to the disciples and washed their dirty, dusty, stinking feet. He humbled Himself again and became obedient unto death—He died the death of a common criminal. What did God the Father do? Scripture says, "God highly exalted Him and gave Him a name that is above every name." That's still the way it works. The way down is up and the way up is down. May God teach us to humble ourselves and treat others with kindness and respect.

Third, true humility is refined through adversity. I think sometimes when God sees we are getting a little proud, He allows some humbling experience to come our way. That's what Jesus meant when He said, "everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled." Paul knew that. He wrote, "To keep me from becoming conceited, there was given me thorn in my flesh..." (2 Corinthians 12:7). God allowed Paul to suffer some ailment to keep him humble. I believe God still does that today.

A pastor of a very large church in Florida tells about the time a few years ago when he was invited to his alma mater to receive a prestigious award. He said he was sitting on a stage outside as part of the graduation exercises. He was dressed in his finest black suit, and just before he was called up to

receive his award, he began to think about how important he had become. He said, “I was remembering that when I went to college there nobody even knew me very well. I washed dishes in the cafeteria to pay my way and couldn’t be involved in many activities, but now look at me! They know who I am today!” He said he was feeling really good about himself, and just at that moment—splat! A bird flew overhead, and covered him with droppings, all over his shoulder and nice black suit! He was horrified for a moment, then he began to laugh as he realized he was full of pride and to this day, he thinks God sent that bird to give him a little humility!

Has God been sending some birds your way? Have you been going through a time of adversity and struggle? Maybe God is trying to teach you some humility. When trouble comes some people become bitter; others pray and bow before God and become better. Which one are you?