



“But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant,” Matthew 23:11.

Jesus Speaks on Humility

Lesson Aim: To promote the grace of humility.

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Topic: Humility.

INTRODUCTION

Humility is a priceless virtue. But it is a virtue which is not greatly admired today. Western civilization is enamored with the fast-talking, got-all-the-answers, dominating, aggressive type of man. Not so with God's estimate. He evaluates men differently.

Jesus put a great deal of emphasis on the quality of humility. Though most people overlook it, or minimize it, Jesus taught that true humility is absolutely essential in a man of God.

But a distinction must be made between true and false humility. What is humility? It is a spirit free from pride, arrogance, conceit or vanity. It never insists on its own privileges nor demands praise for its merits. It never exalts nor parades itself. It never calls attention to itself. Its spirit always is “You first, I follow.” It is a spirit like that of the Lord Jesus.

Colossians 2:18-23 alludes to a false humility which was a misguided, self-conscious asceticism. This is not a Christian grace but a fleshly error. Beware of the supposed humility which is merely a covering for weakness or pride.

The person who is most truly humble is likely to be unaware of this praiseworthy quality. He who speaks of his humility is not humble at all. He who is pleased with his humble spirit has just lost it and is filled with sinful pride.

Humility is not self-abasement. It is never found while looking at one's self. Humility comes from a vision of God. Any honest person who meets

God will be humbled by the experience whether he intends to do so or not. God wants us to be humble. He will use this study to promote the grace of humility in you if your heart is open to Him. Are you available to His instruction?

EXPOSITION

I. THE EXAMPLE OF HUMILITY

As in all matters of spiritual import, Jesus is the perfect example of true humility. He exercised power, manifest wisdom, showed authority, and executed judgment, but not to the exclusion of humility. In Him is revealed a personal portrait of a truly humble person,

1. The prophets foretold the Messiah's humble spirit. They announced where He would be born, why He was coming, and what He would do. In describing His character one outstanding quality mentioned was His humility: “. . . **behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass. . .**” Zechariah 9:9. How many wonderful things they could have said about His person. But God inspired the prophet to write, “**He is . . . lowly.**” Behold the humble Saviour!

2. The words of Jesus bore witness to His humility of spirit. He spoke often of His total obedience to the Father. In the Gospel According to John, Jesus testified He was sent from the Father (20:21), did the works of the Father (5:30), spoke the words of the Father (8:28), drank the cup given of the Father (18:11), honored the Father (8:49), and was the vine of which the Father was the husbandman (15:1). His whole life was marked by the attitude, “. . . **I do nothing of myself. . .**” John 8:28. If this was the spirit of the Son of God, second person of the divine trinity, how we mere mortals should be humble before God.

3. The attitude of Jesus toward men indicates His humility. He could have demanded all as sovereign Creator: “**All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made,**” John 1:3. But as the humble Saviour, He demanded nothing. “**Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many,**” Matthew 20:28.

How this spirit puts to shame all those who call themselves “Christian” (which means “like Christ”), those who insist upon their own rights, are proud of their attainments, are arrogant toward those of lesser talents, and are insistent that they receive public credit for their accomplishments.

4. The actions of Jesus demonstrate His humility. Jesus and the apostles ate the Passover and He instituted the Lord's Supper in an upper room of a

house in Jerusalem. Jews knew full well that in a matter of hours He would be betrayed, tried, and crucified. Before that same hour tomorrow, He would be dead and buried.

During that dinner period the apostles got into a dissension over which of them would be greatest in the Kingdom. Jesus did not rebuke them by calling attention to His personal grief of spirit. Instead, He arose and washed the feet of each one—the task of the lowest servant in a household. Their ambition and pride was thus rebuked in the visual aid by which Jesus taught them, **“But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant,”** Matthew 23:11.

5. All the life of Jesus manifest the same spirit of humility—absence of pride, selfishness, or conceit. He took no pride in appearance or worldly success, Isaiah 53:2-3. He took no pride in reputation based on the prejudices of men, Matthew 2:13. He took no pride in rank, being content to be called “the carpenter's son,” Matthew 13:55. He did not insist upon His rights as Master of the disciples and King over believers, but ministered to them as the lowest servant, John 13:5.

Such a spirit in Jesus shames our selfish insistence upon our own rights. He points up just how un-Christian the self-sufficient, boastful, demanding spirit is. He calls us to see ourselves in the light of our Lord's example and to become “meek and lowly in heart” as was He.

II. THE PRINCIPLES OF HUMILITY

1. True humility is unselfconscious. That is, it is humble without being aware of its humility. Thus it is in no wise conducive to selfish pride.

Jesus revealed this truth about humility by pointing to a child as an example. On their journey to Capernaum, His disciples got into another discussion about who would be greatest in the Kingdom. Jesus gave them this principle, **“... If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all,”** Mark 9:35. Then He answered their question about greatness by setting a child among them and saying, **“Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven,”** Matthew 18:4.

Why is the humility of a child so worthy of emulation? Because a child is humble without being conscious of it. He is never pleased with—never prides himself in—his humility. The purest humility is the most unconscious of self.

2. Don't glory in personal attainments. Read that story Jesus told which

is recorded in Luke 17:7-10. When a servant has finished one assigned task (such as plowing in the fields all day) he does not claim merit for his faithfulness and expect to be served as a consequence. No, he comes in from the field, girds himself, and serves his master's dinner. He is still a servant doing his duty.

Jesus said this is the spirit which is to characterize believers. **“So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do,”** verse 10. That is the spirit of true humility. An old adage says, “There is no limit to the good a person can do if he does not care who gets the credit for it.” How does that relate to true humility?

3. Never seek personal advantage or advancement over another. In Luke 14: 7-10 a story is told which warns against a man seeking honor to himself. Jesus said that when you are invited to a feast, do not seek to sit in the place of honor. Someone more worthy than you will enter and you will be asked to move. On the contrary, sit in the lower place and you will be honored by being invited to move up higher. Here is the principle He sets forth: **“For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted,”** Luke 14:11.

He who seeks personal advantage over others will have most men set against him. But he who is willing to take a lower place will have many men ready to promote him. Think about it! Humility pays.

4. Always serve others freely whether they deserve it or not. Ambition for advancement and praise is the spirit which motivates unregenerate men, Matthew 20:25-28. It must not be so among believers. They are to serve others without thought of merit, personal profit, or anything other than the person's need. This is humility in action. It manifests the spirit where ambition, conceit, pride, or vanity is entirely absent. Is this the way you serve others in Jesus' name?

5. Be humble when you approach God in worship. Luke 18:9-14 records a story Jesus told about two men who went into the house of God to worship. One man trusted in himself that he was righteous, and despised others. He stood and prayed “with himself” recounting to God all the good qualities to be found in him. The other man was a sinner and knew it. He cried out to God for forgiveness. Which man was heard?

Jesus declared the sinful man “went down to his house justified” while the self-righteous man did not. What was the difference? Humility! **“For every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; but he that humbleth himself shall be exalted,”** Luke 18:14. Which way do you worship?

6. Remember this Christian paradox: “The way up is down!” Four

times the gospels state, **“But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first,”** Matthew 19:30; 20:16; Mark 10:31; Luke 13:30. Three times it is read, **“And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased, and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted,”** Matthew 23:12; Luke 14:11; 18:14. And one time the Gospel record states, **“Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in we kingdom of heaven,”** Matthew 18:4.

Yes, it is a paradox, but it is true. In spiritual matters, “The way up is down.” This is not man's way, but God's way. If you desire His approval you must follow His pattern.

III. THE NECESSITY FOR HUMILITY

1. Believers are to be like Jesus and His spirit shrank from ostentation and pretense. When a woman praised Jesus as “blessed” His reply was, “. . . **Yea rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it,**” Luke 11:28. When a man came running, kneeled to Him, and called Him “Good Master,” Jesus replied, “. . . **Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is God. . .**” Mark 10:17-18.

This was the spirit of Jesus. He did not come to be praised of men but to bring praise to God. This is also to be the spirit of those who belong to Jesus.

2. There can be no spiritual growth without a humble spirit. One of the beatitudes reads, **“Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled,”** Matthew 5:6.

To “hunger and thirst” suggests a sense of inadequacy and consciousness of need. It identifies a humble spirit. This is the person who has the promise of being “filled.” He who is self-sufficient, proud of his progress, feeling no call to a higher plane, will never grow in grace. Those who are aware of emptiness will be filled. Only they. Blessed, therefore, are those of humble spirit.

3. Believers are not to seek the praise of men, but of God, who is perfect, and this makes humility imperative. If God were requiring each man to be better than his fellow, there might be room for the superior to take pride in attainments. But His call is, **“Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect,”** Matthew 5:48.

What man can feel pride when he compares himself with the perfections of God? To look at Him arouses deepest sense of humility for it shows we have nothing in which to take pride or feel superior. Even when we fail our failure is a blessing if it causes acknowledgment of our need of

Him. This is true humility: “. . . **I count not myself to have apprehended. . .**” Philippians. 3:13.

4. Religious service has true meaning only when accompanied by a humble spirit. Jesus relates this truth to almsgiving, fasting, and prayer, Matthew 6. Be careful of the motive in religious activity. If the most solemn thing is done to be seen of men and to gain the praise of men, it means nothing before God. Only that which is for the good of men and the glory of God, whether you ever get credit for it or not, is accepted of Him.

Be careful, too, that you do not take pride in having done religious service. To look back on such service with pride is the same mistake as to perform it with the evil motive of pride.

CONCLUSION

Jesus demanded humility. But He did not demand self-abasement. True humility is self-forgetfulness. It is possible only when self has died and Christ Jesus lives on the throne of the heart. See Luke 9:23!

“Christian humility is based on aspiration rather than despair— aspiration combined with honesty. The eye is on ahead. It does not say, 'I abase myself,' but rather with Paul, 'I have not yet apprehended' . . . It sees clearly one's shortcomings and feels deeply one's personal need. From the root of such humility there comes the loveliest flowers: modesty, sympathy, charity of spirit, aspiration for the ideal, constant gratitude for the goodness of God.”—Branscomb.

If you have ambitions to be great for Jesus' sake, here is how. “**But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant,**” Matthew 23:11. Are you available?

QUESTIONS

1. What is humility?
2. What shows Jesus' humility?
3. Why do we need to be taught humility?
4. What is it to be unconsciously humble?
5. How does Luke 17:7-10 illustrate humility?
6. How is true humility distinguished from false?
7. Why is humility essential to worship?
8. How does humility relate to religious service?
9. How does Luke 9:23 relate to this study?
10. How can you become more humble?

