

He Who Humbles Himself

(Luke 18:9-14)

I. Introduction

- A. George Carlin had a routine on oxymora— words that just don't go together
1. His talked about things like “*military intelligence*” and “*jumbo shrimp*”
 - a. We can add things like “*customer service*” or “*congressional ethics*”
 - b. Personally, I would add “*decaffeinated coffee*” and “*rap music*”
 2. What about someone who's “*greatest at humility?*” Listen to **Num 12:3**
Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth.
 - a. That's really interesting when you remember that Moses wrote Numbers!
 - b. Sounds like guy who's so humble, they gave him a “*I Am Humble*” button
 - c. He wore it, so they took it away! How are you best at being humble?
 3. **Point:** Even Moses' humility seemed to evaporate under pressure (**Num 20**)
 - a. Soon after Miriam's death, Israel again begins complaining—*no water*
 - b. God promises to bring water, but Moses blows his cool (**20:9-10**)
Moses took the staff from the Lord's presence, just as he commanded him. He and Aaron gathered the assembly together in front of the rock and Moses said to them, “Listen, you rebels, must we bring you water out of this rock?”
 - 1) Moses was supposed to speak to rock, but he struck it. *A big deal?*
 - 2) **Problem:** Moses forget who he was— ***and who God is*** (**20:12**)
Because you did not trust in me enough to honor me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them.
 - c. For a split second, Moses was so frustrated he forgot to be humble
 - d. And when he forgot humility, he forgot who he was before God
- B. Nothing is more important in the worship and service of God than is humility
1. One thing that you can't do and worship and serve God—BE PROUD
 - a. Kids used to tattle on each other if they didn't close their eyes in prayer
 - 1) You know what we said, “*How do you know if your eyes are closed?*”
 - 2) Their reply was, “*I was just checking to make sure they did it right!*”
 - b. If we humbly serve and worship God, won't look so harshly at others
 2. We never outgrow these two tendencies seen in worshippers through ages
 - a. We tend to take great pride in HOW we do worship—form and format
 - b. We tend to judge rather harshly those who don't worship right like us!

C. Jesus illustrates this for us in our daily Bible reading Thursday in **Luke 18**

1. Jesus doesn't always identify the intended audience of his parables
 - a. Peter asks, "Are you telling this parable to us, or to everyone?" (**Lk 12:41**)
 - b. But in **Luke 18**, Luke tells us exactly to whom Jesus is speaking (**18:9**)
To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable
 - 1) The villain/heavy in the parable is a Pharisee—likely Jesus' target
 - 2) The unlikely hero of the story is a tax collector
2. Luke has already brought these groups together earlier in his gospel
 - a. Pharisees complain that Jesus eats at Levi's with tax collectors (**5:30**)
But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and 'sinners'?"
 - b. Jesus continues to hang out with tax collectors—more complaint (**15:1-2**)
Now the tax collectors and "sinners" were all gathering around to hear him. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."
3. Now Pharisee and tax collector are point of parable (**Read: Luke 18:10-14**)

II. The Pharisee and Tax Collector

- A. Pharisees were the strictest of Jewish sects and were seen as paragons of virtue
1. The problem with the Pharisee is not in his works but in his attitude
 - a. Face it, this guy was doing a lot of religious things that weren't easy
 - 1) Not simple to give tenth "of all I get" (gross) or fast twice a week
 - 2) If ALL did that, church income would triple and we'd all be skinnier!
 - b. Don't discount the depth of the religious commitment of this Pharisee
 2. The problem was not his obedience—he was proud of all that he did
 - a. Worship is bowing down before God, but he was standing tall
 - 1) He did religion right—not like the miserable tax collector beside him
 - 2) **Irony:** Pride in worship (*prayer/fasting*) kept it from reaching God!
 - b. Worship is opposite of pride; we can't be proud and worship at same time
 3. That's a lesson that many forgot during the so-called "Worship Wars"
 - a. Some took pride in holding to old ways; we worship in the old paths
 - b. Some took pride in new expressions; we transcended tired old tradition
 - c. These perspectives were radically different... and **radically wrong!**
 4. The one thing that you can't do and worship God correctly—BE PROUD

B. Indulge me for a **quick** (I promise) word study to illustrate this point on pride

1. Greek word for “*humbled*” here (ταπεινώω) means “*to make low*”
 - a. It’s used of leveling a hill, “*every mountain and hill made low*” (**Lk 3:5**)
 - b. It’s simple, child-like attitude we must have to be in kingdom (**Mt 18:4**)
Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven
 - c. The ultimate example of what humility means is at the cross (**Phil 2:8**)
he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross!
2. The word most often translated “*worship*” in the NT is προσκυνέω
 - a. It is a derivative of the word “*kiss*” (*like a dog licking his master’s hand*)
 - b. It refers to prostrating before a king to kiss his feet, hem of robe or ground
 - 1) I saw some teen study material on worship entitled “***Suck the Rug***”
 - 2) You literally have to lower yourself to worship like that (**Neh 8:6**)
Ezra praised the LORD, the great God; and all the people lifted their hands and responded, “Amen! Amen!” Then they bowed down and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground.

C. Point of this scintillating word study? The connection of humility and worship

1. Humility is when we are “*brought low.*” Worship is when we “*bow down*”
 - a. “*Humility*” recognizes who WE are. “*Worship*” recognizes who GOD is
 - b. Before we ever worship God, we must be humble ourselves before Him
 - c. With apologies to Frank Sinatra, “*You can’t have one without the other*”
2. Pharisee missed that point completely; his worship was about himself
 - a. Several versions begin “*Stood and prayed about himself*” (NIV/NAS/NET)
 - 1) Can also be, “*Pharisee stood by himself and prayed*” (NLT/ESV/NCV)
 - 2) Maybe the Message splits difference, “*Pharisee posed and prayed*”
 - b. Regardless of translation, the Pharisee’s prayer was about Pharisee!
 - 1) He uses the personal pronoun “*I*” 4-5 times in two sentences
 - 2) This prayer was all about making sure that God knew all that he did
3. Tax collector, by contrast, was broken and contrite—wouldn’t look up
 - a. His prayer was simple—6 words. “*God, have mercy on me, a sinner*”
 - b. There’s no liturgy, no eloquence; his fellow worshipper wasn’t impressed
 - c. He spoke just from his heart— God heard and he went home justified
4. The prayer was accepted because it was offered in genuine humility

III. A View From the Psalms (Psalm 131)

- A. This psalm speaks of a childlike humility that bows down before the Lord
1. David pledges here that neither his heart nor his eyes will be proud
 - a. His appeal is to simplicity- *“I do not concern myself with great matters”*
 - b. David isn’t going to figure out all the mysteries of the cosmos
 - c. He approaches God as child and a poet, not as a philosopher/theologian
 2. David’s humility comes from a basic **contentment**—*like a weaned child*
 - a. Why weaned child? Why not imagery of a nursing child as in Isa 66:11?
 - 1) Nursing child sees Momma as basically lunch—gives nourishment
 - 2) Weaned child rests on Momma for another reason—comfort and love
 - b. David says that he is like a weaned child, contentedly resting in God
 - c. David trusts God simply and is satisfied by God only—David is **content**
- B. Notice in the superscription that this was one of the “*Songs of Ascents*”
1. These were the psalms that the Jews sang while on their way to worship
 - a. Jews made 3 yearly pilgrimages for Passover, Pentecost, Tabernacles
 - b. They travelled together in family groups (*how Mary and Joseph lost Jesus*)
 - c. On the way, they sang together in a festive worship procession (Psa 42:4)
How I used to go with the multitude, leading the procession to the house of God, with shouts of joy and thanksgiving among the festive throng
 2. In Psalm 131, the pilgrims on the way to worship sang songs of humility
 - a. They knew before you worship, you must empty yourself
 - 1) To sing praise to God, you can’t be singing your own praises
 - 2) To glory in God, you simply cannot take glory in yourself
 - 3) To bow down before God , you first must first lay down yourself
 - 4) To fix your eyes on God, you must first take your eyes off self
 - b. Before you can truly worship God, you must humble yourself before God
- C. Are we going to come before God more like the Pharisee or the tax collector?
1. Will we point to what we know, what we figure out, what we accomplish
 - a. Pharisee was righteous because he was right—looked down on others
 - b. Will we humble ourselves before God, bow before God, see only God
 2. It is only the one who will humbles himself that will be exalted... You?