

INTRODUCTION

Maybe you’ve seen Jeff Foxworthy’s “Redneck” list. He says, “You know you’re a Redneck if...”:

1. Directions to your house include, “Turn off the paved road.”
2. You take your fishing pole to Sea World.
3. You have flowers planted in a commode in your front yard.
4. Your Dad walks you to school, ‘cause you’re both in the same grade.

You’ve got to be from the country to even laugh at those statements! In East Texas, we aren’t rednecks, but we are country folks, and because Green Acres is in a small city, I think of our church as a country church. I read a similar list the other day. It says, “You know you go to a country church if...”:

1. The church votes not to buy a chandelier because nobody knows how to play one.
2. The opening day of deer season is a church holiday.
3. A member requests to be buried in his 4-wheel drive truck because “It ain’t never been in a hole it can’t get out of.”
4. Folks think the “Rapture” is what you get from lifting something too heavy.
5. The pastor asks “Bubba” to take up the offering and five guys and two women stand up!

If you understand the New Testament, you realize Jesus grew up in Galilee, which was considered the country. The followers of Jesus were labeled, “unlearned and ignorant men.” The sophisticated city folks in Jerusalem looked down on Jesus and were constantly looking for an opportunity to embarrass Him. In our passage today, He is only a few weeks away from the cross and we see the opposition against Him growing stronger. Let’s read beginning in Luke 14:1:

One Sabbath, when Jesus went to eat in the house of a prominent Pharisee, he was being carefully watched. There in front of him was man suffering from dropsy. Jesus asked the Pharisees and experts in the law, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?” But they remained silent. So taking hold of the man, he healed him and sent him away. Then he asked them, “If one of you has a son or an ox that falls into a well on the Sabbath day, will you not immediately pull him out?” And they had nothing to say.

In Chapter 13, I discussed their hang-up with rules being more important than hurt people, so we won’t say much about this interchange. Instead, we will focus on the following parable:

When he noticed how the guests picked the 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.”

Once again, notice the brilliant way Jesus taught. He told a simple little parable of people sitting down at a wedding feast, and then He applied the spiritual principle. Look again at the spiritual principle in verse 11: “For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” This is one of the wonderful paradoxes of Jesus that is totally contrary to the way the world thinks. The world says if you want to climb higher and be somebody you must push, fight, claw, and work your way to the top of the heap. The world says the way up is *up*! But Jesus says just the opposite. He says the way up is *down*. In other words, if you try to promote your prideful self, you’ll end up humbled. And He also says the way down is up. The Bible says specifically in James 4:10 “Humble yourself before the Lord and He will lift you up.” So, contrary to what the world is teaching you, the way up is down and the way down is up. As we consider pride and humility I want to speak on “Have a Slice of Humble Pie.”

I. THE PROBLEM WITH PRIDE

Pride is basically the attitude that says, “I am the center of my universe.” As Jesus watched these Pharisees, He noticed they all jockeyed for position to sit in the best seats at the dinner. It is still true in both the Middle East and the Far East that seating positions are a clearly defined part of their dinner protocol. Since visiting Asia, I have learned the host always sits in a certain place at the circular table, and the guest of honor sits to his right. The next most important person sits to his left, and so on. Everyone has a “place” and everyone knows his or her place. It’s like our concept of sitting at the “head of the table” or having a head table at a banquet. As Jesus observed the maneuvering of these men, He detected the poison of pride in their lives. Pride wasn’t just a problem back then, it’s a problem today. Let me mention two things that make pride such a problem. First:

A. 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. In the Catholic list of the seven deadly sins, pride used to be called vanity. The Dutch painter, Bosch, painted a picture of each of the seven sins and for pride and vanity, he painted the picture of a woman looking at her face in a mirror held by the devil. We can see pride and vanity in others, but 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 walked into the party like you were walking onto a yacht.
Your hat strategically dipped below one eye; Your scarf it was apricot.
You had one eye in the mirror as you watched yourself gavotte. [That’s a French dance where the dancer pranced around]
And all the girls dreamed that they’d be your partner—

They’d be your partner, and...You’re so vain, you probably think this song is about you.
You’re so vain, I’ll bet you think this song is about you. Don’t you? Don’t you?

Some of you are so vain you probably think this sermon is about you, don’t you, don’t you?
Well, if you *don’t* think it’s about you, it probably IS!

Have you heard about the terrible fires in Colorado? The newspaper said one of the worst fires started at Storm King Mountain between Vail and Aspen. The article said coal had been burning below the surface of the mountain for 30 years, and finally it came to the surface of the mountain. Pride is the same way. It lurks just below the surface of your life and you aren’t even aware it’s there until there is some sudden example of it. To help you determine how much pride you are carrying, let me administer a PQ test. The question you should ask yourself is “What’s my P.Q.?” (Pride Quotient) Just check yes or no if any of these statements applies to you:

1. I enjoy being the center of attention. Y N
2. I think I deserve the best. Y N
3. Much of my conversation is filled with “I.” Y N
4. I find it difficult to admit that I’m wrong Y N
5. I seldom pass a mirror without looking at myself. Y N
6. I’m stubborn—I don’t like to be corrected or change! Y N
7. My feelings are easily hurt. Y N
8. I am impatient with other people’s mistakes. Y N
9. I don’t get enough appreciation for all that I do. Y N
10. I’m offended if I render a service and don’t receive a “thank you.” Y N
11. I seldom ask for help, because I can do the job better myself. Y N
12. I feel pretty good that I didn’t check “yes” to every question! Y N

If you have one or more “yes” answers, it reveals the presence of pride in your life. If you don’t have any “yes” answers, it simply reveals you are lying to yourself about yourself! Pride is hard to see in ourselves, but we can easily see it in others. Another problem with pride is:

B. It leads to ruin

The Bible says in Proverbs 16:18, “Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall.” Jesus was saying the best way to guarantee you’ll fall is to let pride take over your life. I heard the funny story about a frog that wanted to go south with the birds for the winter. It was too far to hop and he couldn’t fly, so he thought about it and came up with a solution. He got a couple of his bird friends to hold each end of a stick in their beaks and then the little frog clamped down on the center of the stick with his mouth. The birds took off and the frog was hanging from the stick they were carrying in their mouths. They flew over a couple of farmers who observed the scene. One farmer said to the other, “What a brilliant idea! Whoever came up with that idea is a genius. I guess it was one of those birds who had the idea!” When the frog heard that he just couldn’t let the birds get the credit for his good idea, so he said, “I...I...I...” as he fell to the ground. The moral of that story is: If someone else gets the credit for your good idea, just keep your mouth closed!

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 have fallen from heaven, Oh morning star (KJV: Lucifer) son of the dawn! You have been cast down to earth you who once laid low the nations! You said in your heart, "I WILL ASCEND to heaven; I WILL RAISE my throne above the stars of God; I WILL SIT ENTHRONED on the mount of the assembly...I WILL ASCEND above the tops of the clouds; I WILL MAKE MYSELF like the Most High." But you are BROUGHT DOWN to the grave, to the depths of the pit. Satan makes four boasts and each of them is driven by "I" and what "I" is planning to do. Satan wanted to take God's place. He wanted to sit in a throne above the stars, 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 the way *down* is up and the way *up* is down. That attitude is still the strategy Satan uses to drive a wedge between man and God.

In the Garden of Eden, Satan slithered up to Eve and said, "If you will eat that fruit, you will be like God." That was a lie, but Eve swallowed it. People today are still swallowing Satan's fib, that 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 with God the way down is up and the way up is down. Pride always leads to ruin.

Mohammed Ali claimed to be the greatest boxer of all time. He loved to shout, "I'm the greatest!" Once he got on an airliner and the flight attendant asked him to buckle his seat belt. Ali said, "Superman don't need no seat belt." The flight attendant said, "Superman don't need no jet, so buckle up." It's sad that this vibrant, vivacious athlete who used to love to talk and brag about being able to float like a butterfly is now reduced to a state where he can hardly move and speak at all. He is a humble man today—by no choice of his own! That's just a couple of reasons why pride is so dangerous. But now, let's talk about:

II. THE HONOR OF HUMILITY

We all need a few slices of humble pie. The term "humble pie" is interesting. Back in medieval England, the nobility were able to eat the good cuts of meat from a deer, but the poorer people had to eat a meat pie filled with the less desirable cuts of meat: the heart, liver and intestines. These parts of a deer were called "umbles." A nobleman never stooped to eat umble pie, and if he was served umble pie, it was a humiliating experience. So to eat "umble pie" became synonymous with being humiliated. That's why some people in England still pronounce humble as "umble." It's much like our American phrase "to eat crow."

Before I moved to Texas almost twelve years ago, I thought every Texan was a loud-mouthed, "braggadocious" big-shot, who thought he was better than anybody else in America. Since moving here, I've had that impression confirmed! Suffice it to say, when someone told me there was an entire town near Houston named Humble, Texas, I thought they were joking. I later learned it was named after Humble Oil, *not* the attitude of humility!

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 of the heap?" Go into a Barnes and Noble or a B. Dalton Bookstore and ask to be directed to the section on "how to be more humble." They will look at you like you're from another planet. Yet the Bible speaks over and over about the value of humility. Humility is actually a wonderful honor. Proverbs 29:23 says, "A man's pride will bring him low; but the humble in spirit retains honor." Let me share with you three characteristics of true humility so you can understand it better:

A. True humility is seeing myself as God sees me

Humility is *not* having a poor self-image of thinking you are a worthless wimp. 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. What a picture of a failure! 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. Read it for yourself. He wrote, "I know that nothing good lives in me...those who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God." (Romans 7:18; 8:14) Another way to look at it is to remember Jesus said, "Without me you can do nothing." (John 15:5) That will prevent pride. Yet the Bible says, "I can do *all things* through Christ who loves me." (Philippians 4:13) That keeps you from being an emotional failure who never attempts anything great for God.

Someone once said, "God has wisely designed the human body so that you can neither pat yourself on the back, nor kick yourself in the seat." I read a fascinating short story some time back 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 and the ardor 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.

The great Christian writer, A.W. Tozer, wrote about humility: "A humble man is not a human mouse afflicted with a sense of his own inferiority. He has accepted God's estimate of his own life. He knows he is weak and helpless as God declared him to be, but paradoxically, he knows at the same time he is in the sight of God of more importance than the angels. In himself, nothing, in God, everything."

B. True humility is revealed by how I treat others

Humility is not some kind of badge you wear. The only way to reveal your humility is if you treat others more highly than yourself. It’s the old formula for joy, J.O.Y., which is **J**esus first, **O**thers second, and **Y**ourself third. It is pride that makes you want to rush to get the best seats at the table. It is pride that makes you rush to the front of the line so you can eat before anyone else. It’s pride that makes you reach into a loaf of bread and get the soft piece in the middle so someone else can take the stale one at the end. Pride keeps “I” at the center of the universe and it constantly is looking out for #1. Humility has replaced “I” with “Christ.” And Jesus Christ was the most humble man who ever lived. The Bible 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 rest of this passage talks about how far Jesus humbled Himself. 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 became as a servant. He took a towel and wrapped it around Him and went to the disciples and washed their dirty, dusty, stinking feet. He further humbled Himself and became obedient unto death—He died the death of a common criminal. He kept going down, down, down until He died on a cross and was buried. What did God do? The scripture says, “Therefore God has highly *exalted* Him and given 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.

Two of the greatest preachers in England in the 18th Century were John Wesley and George Whitfield. They disagreed over a point of doctrine concerning salvation. Whitfield embraced Calvinism, which says God saves those whom He will and we have no choice in the matter. Wesley leaned toward the Armenian side, which said we have to choose to accept Jesus to be saved. Their disagreement and debate was a matter of public record. There was great animosity between their followers over this debate. Once a newspaper reporter wanting to stir up the religious debate, so he asked George Whitfield the following question. “Do you expect to see John Wesley in heaven?” Whitfield replied, “I don’t expect to see Mr. Wesley in heaven.” The reporter gleefully wrote those words down knowing it would fan the flames of controversy even higher. Then Whitfield continued. “No, I don’t expect to see John Wesley in heaven because He is such a faithful servant of God that he will be so close to the throne of God and I will be so far away, I don’t expect to see him.” That was an answer that revealed Whitfield was a humble man.

Martin Luther said, “We need goat sense.” He tells of seeing two goats meeting on a path on a mountain ledge. Instead of butting one another, one of them laid down and allowed the other one to pass over him. How are you treating others?

C. 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 had such amazing visions he was transported to the third heaven and saw things too wonderful to even talk about. In that context he wrote, "To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, 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.

CONCLUSION

Jim Henry, pastor of First Baptist Church Orlando, tells the story about the time a few years ago when he was invited to Georgetown College in Kentucky to receive the award for outstanding alumnus. 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 get 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. Some of you remember ten years ago not long after I came as pastor, there were a few folks who were attacking my family and me. It wasn't fun, but as I look back on that chapter, I really think God knew I had too much pride and arrogance in my life, so I could use a little humility. He didn't *cause* the trouble, but He used the trouble to refine some humility in me. You see when trouble comes some people raise their face to heaven and become bitter. Others bow their knees before God and become better. Which one are you? Sometimes, God serves us up a good slice of humble pie. It may not be your favorite, but eat it anyway: it's good for you!

OUTLINE

I. THE PROBLEM WITH PRIDE

A. It's hard to recognize it in it yourself

B. It leads to ruin

How you have fallen from heaven, Oh morning star (Lucifer) son of the dawn! You have been cast down to earth you who once laid low the nations! You said in your heart, "I WILL ASCEND to heaven; I WILL RAISE my throne above the stars of God; I WILL SIT ENTHRONED on the mount of the assembly...I WILL ASCEND above the tops of the clouds; I WILL MAKE MYSELF like the Most High." But you are BROUGHT DOWN to the grave, to the depths of the pit. *Isaiah 14:12-15*

II. THE HONOR OF HUMILITY

"A man's pride will bring him down low; but the humble in spirit retains honor." *Proverbs 29:23*

True humility is:

A. Seeing myself as God sees me

"I know that nothing good lives in me...those who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God." *Romans 7:18; 8:14*

B. Revealed by how I treat others

"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*

C. Refined through adversity

"To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given to me thorn in my flesh..." *2 Corinthians 12:7*



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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes