

“God Exalts the Humble”
(James 4:10)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation.

There are two things clearly taught in Scripture:

We are all accepted and loved in Christ.

But we are all not the same in God’s eyes.

There are some distinguished in Scripture

As particularly close to God –

As His friends.

The same appears to be true in history –

Some were used more powerfully in His kingdom.

God appears to hear and answer some more quickly.

What makes difference?

Is it merely election?

Is it predestined to happen?

Not entirely.

There are virtues that God particularly prizes,

That He values more than others in us,

Those that make us more like His Son,

That He singles out

And promises to bless.

B. Preview.

Tonight, we're going to look at one of these virtues –

And a few more in the coming weeks –

With the goal that we might be reminded

What God sees as excellent, as precious.

We don't want to focus merely on not doing

Things we know He doesn't like,

Or on merely doing the things He commands;

But on trying to put on those virtues

We know He loves,

And in doing so

Becoming more useful to Him

Because we're more like His Son.

Tonight, the virtue we're looking at

That He particularly loves is humility.

James writes, "GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT *GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE*" (James 4:6),

And, "*Humble yourselves* in the presence of the Lord, and *He will exalt you*" (v. 10).

Let's consider,

1. What humility is.
2. The blessings God promises to the humble.
3. And how we can become more humble.

II. Sermon.

A. First, what is humility?

Humility is just the opposite of pride.

It means to be meek, lowly, gentle, mild, unpretentious.

Nehemiah Rogers writes, “Humility is the repentance of pride.”

And Bernard of Clairvaux called it “self-annihilation.”

Since it is a virtue, it shouldn’t surprise us

That our Lord Jesus Himself possessed it.

He says of Himself,

In one of His most affecting Gospel calls in Matthew,

“Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am *gentle and humble in heart*, and **YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS**. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light” (Matt. 11:28-30).

This shows us that when we offer the Gospel to others,

We need to do so as our Lord –

In a humble and gracious way.

Paul writes, “Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity. Let your speech always be with grace, *as though* seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person” (Col. 4:5-6).

And Peter writes, “But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, *you* are blessed. **AND DO NOT FEAR THEIR INTIMIDATION, AND DO NOT BE TROUBLED**, but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always *being* ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, *yet with gentleness and reverence*” (1 Pet. 3:14-15).

What does humility look like?

How can we know whether we possess it?

Or how humble we really are?

We can use the following to examine ourselves:

1. First, we need to understand that it's a matter of the heart

And not something that only has to do with what we do.

In other words,

The outward appearance of humility,

Without genuine inward humility

Is only hypocrisy –

It needs to be real.

God said to Samuel

When Samuel went to Jesse's house

To anoint the next king of Israel,

And thought the strapping young man he was looking at

Must surely be the Lord's anointed,

“Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God *sees* not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but *the LORD looks at the heart*” (1 Sam. 16:7).

The heart is where the Lord will be looking for humility in you.

2. On the other hand,

It will work itself out in the way we live.

a. The first thing it will do

Is give us a realistic opinion of ourselves –

Of who and what we are –

We won't think we're better than we are,

Nor worse –

If that were possible.

Paul writes, “For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment as God has allotted to each a measure of faith” (Rom. 12:3).

When we look at ourselves,

How should we do it?

As in Christ, or outside of Christ?

In Christ, we're perfect –

As perfect as He is.

But we're not outside of Him –

Or as we are in ourselves.

How did David view himself

When he wrote in Psalm 22:6, “I am a worm and not a man”?

John Gerstner, when once lecturing on this verse

Said this was an insult to the worms.

At least the worms do what God made them to do,

But man doesn't.

Clearly, David was looking at himself apart from God's mercy.

What about Paul,

He writes in 1 Tim. 1:15, “It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom *I am foremost of all*”?

He was looking at himself apart from Christ.

If you would be humble,

That’s how you need to view yourself.

You were born in sin,

Guilty and deserving of hell.

You’ve done nothing but sin since you were born.

That’s what you and I deserve: Hell.

The only reason we will ever see heaven

Has everything to do with what Jesus has done

And nothing to do with us.

Yes, we believed,

We trusted Christ,

But only because He gave us the ability to do so.

And now that we’re in Christ,

Now that we’ve received His righteousness and His love,

Now that we’ve been made new creatures by His Spirit,

How well are we doing?

We still fall short –

We still don't do it right,
Or with the right heart.
There's still so much self –
So much sin,
So much of the old man –
That gets in the way.

John Hooper once wrote, "Oh, this evil heart of unbelief! Lord, I am hell—
but you are heaven."

Unbelievers often tell themselves how good they are,
Believers, how bad.

When Isaiah was lifted up to heaven,

And saw God's glory,

The first thing he said was,

"Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live
among a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the
LORD of hosts" (Isa. 6:5).

And because he humbled himself,

The Lord removed his iniquity (vv. 6-7).

But even if we could do it perfectly,

We would still have every reason to be humbled,

Because we'd only be doing our duty.

Jesus says, "So you too, when you do all the things which are commanded
you, say, 'We are unworthy slaves; we have done *only* that which we
ought to have done'" (Luke 17:10).

b. When you're humble

You don't have a problem accepting the fact that you do sin –

You even welcome those who are willing kindly to point them out:

David writes, "Let the righteous smite me in kindness and reprove me; it is oil upon the head; do not let my head refuse it" (Ps. 141:5).

You can even accept it from those who don't mean well –

Even from those who hate you –

Knowing that this is what the Lord intended.

When Shimei cursed David when he was fleeing Absalom,

Abishai offered to kill him,

But David said to him and to all his servants,

"Behold, my son who came out from me seeks my life; how much more now this Benjamite? Let him alone and let him curse, for the LORD has told him" (2 Sam. 16:11).

c. When you're humble,

You don't take credit for what the Lord does through you.

Paul writes, "What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?" (1 Cor. 4:7).

Instead, you acknowledge what Jesus says is true, "Apart from Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5),

And you give Him all the glory.

You take the crown off your own head,

And place it on His.

d. When you're humble,

You don't view others as you view yourself –

You see them as better.

Paul writes, “Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind *regard one another as more important than yourselves*; do not *merely* look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others” (Phil. 2:3-4).

Isn't that exactly what Jesus did

When He set aside His own needs,

His own pleasure,

And lived and died for you?

e. When you're humble,

You rejoice that others are better than you.

When John saw Jesus,

He realized it was time for him to move aside

And let Jesus take the center stage.

He said, “He must increase, but I must decrease.”

f. When you're humble,

You're willing to spend time with the lowliest of believers –

You would rather sit at the gate with Lazarus

Than eat at the table of the rich man.

James writes, “My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with *an attitude of* personal favoritism. For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes, and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, ‘You sit here in a good place,’ and you say to the poor man, ‘You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool,’ have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives? (2:1-4).

When you're humble,
 You treat all men the same.

- g. When you're humble,
 You don't compete with others
 To try and come out on top.
 You're happy when the Lord uses someone else
 To bring greater glory to Himself.

Thomas Watson writes, "A humble Christian is content to be laid aside, if
 God has any other tools to work with which may bring him more glory"
(Godly Man's Picture).

The only area
 Where we may compete with another believer
 Is in the honor we try to show each other.
 Paul writes, "*Be* devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to
 one another in honor,"
 Or more literally, "try to outdo one another in showing honor" (Rom. 12:10).

- h. When you're humble,
 You don't blame God for your difficult circumstances –
 You blame yourself.
 When Nehemiah considered what the Assyrians had done to Jerusalem,
 He *didn't* blame God –
 He blamed himself and Judah.

He prayed to God, “You are just in all that has come upon us; for You have dealt faithfully, but we have acted wickedly” (Neh. 9:33).

When you’re humble,

You know that no matter how bad things get,

You still deserve worse.

On the other hand,

You’re also thankful for every blessing the Lord gives,

Because you know you don’t deserve them.

Jacob, when he returned from Paddan-aram, prayed, “I am unworthy of all the lovingkindness and of all the faithfulness which You have shown to Your servant” (Gen. 32:10).

The *proud complain* that they don’t have more; the *humble wonder* why they have so much.

i. When you’re humble,

You won’t take into account the wrong things others do to you.

When you’re humble,

You will be willing to love even your enemies.

We could likely go on all evening,

But let’s move on now to the second point:

B. The blessings God promises to the humble.

I’ll just read the verses –

Since they’re fairly plain.

We can look at these as so many incentives

To seek to be the kind of person

The Lord wants us to be –

Like our Lord Jesus.

James 4:6 is a good summary, “God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”

What is this grace?

He will exalt you:

Verse 10, “Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.”

He will answer your prayers:

The Lord said to Solomon in 2 Chronicles 7:13-14, “If I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or if I command the locust to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among My people, and My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land.”

He will lead and teach you:

The psalmist writes, “He leads the humble in justice, and He teaches the humble His way” (Ps. 25:9).

He will prosper you:

He writes, “But the humble will inherit the land and will delight themselves in abundant prosperity” (Ps. 37: 11).

He will save you in trouble:

He writes, “You caused judgment to be heard from heaven; the earth feared and was still when God arose to judgment, to save all the humble of the earth” (Ps. 76: 8-9).

He will honor you:

Solomon writes, “A man’s pride will bring him low, but a humble spirit will obtain honor” (Prov. 29:23).

He will watch over you:

“But to this one I will look, to him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word” (Isa. 66:2).

Could this be why those we read of in Scripture,

Or those we read about in Church History,

Were able to do the great things they did for God’s glory?

It certainly has much to do with it.

Humility is much more important than we may think,

Which is why Thomas Watson writes, “It is better to lack anything, rather than humility. It is better to lack gifts rather than humility. No, it is better to lack ‘the comforts of the Spirit’ rather than lack humility. ‘What does the Lord require of you—but to walk humbly with your God?’ (Mic. 6:8).”

C. Finally, how can we become more humble?

If humility is the path that leads to these blessings,

How can we humble the pride that’s in our hearts?

The Bible gives us two main ways:

The Law and fasting.

First, compare yourself with the standard

And take a good look at where you fall short.

The standard is perfection.

Jesus says, “Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect”
(Matt. 5:48).

If you want to know what that looks like,

Read about Jesus in the Gospels.

Then look at yourself –

How much like Him are you like?

Where do you fall short?

What we looked at in the first section

Would be very helpful here –

Let your failings in each area humble you:

The pride in your heart,

Your unwillingness to accept your shortcomings and sin,

That you want credit/glory for what you do,

Rather than giving it to the Lord,

That you view yourself as better than others,

That you get angry when others do better than you,

Especially in what you consider your areas of strength,

That you don't want to spend time

With the lowliest of saints,

That you get angry with God

When He sends trials.

Let your sins humble you.

Let your lack of Christ-likeness humble you.

Let your lack of faith and trust in God humble you.

Let the fact that you fall short of what others have obtained,

And short of what you might have obtained, humble you.

In addition to your self-examination, fast.

Fasting is another way the Lord has given us to humble ourselves.

When we fast, we see how much we depend on what God provides.

When we fast, it allows us to see the sins of our hearts more clearly.

The important thing is that you humble yourself –

James writes, “Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you” (4:10).

If you want to be a friend of God,

Someone He can use,

Someone He will use,

You must humble yourself. Amen.

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