

Sermon for Sunday, May 19, 1974 by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Pastor  
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"HUMILITY HANG-UPS"

St. Luke 18:1-14

Text: "...for every one who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted." St. Luke 18:14b

We Americans have been taught to take pride in things. We are taught to take pride in our appearance, pride in our team, pride in our country. So when Jesus begins to talk about humility it seems strange and puzzling to us. As a matter of fact, humility does not come natural to us. It is something we have to work at. For example, James and John, two of the disciples of Jesus, had traveled so slightly down the pathway of humility even after being with him three years, that late in his ministry they were proud enough to ask him that one of them be allowed to sit on his right hand and the other on his left when his kingdom came.

Our habits of pride do not die easily. Some of them are like the hamster rat. The hamster rat is a ferocious animal and when it takes a grip, rather than let go it will allow itself to be beaten in pieces with a stick. It must be killed before it will let go. Our pride is often like that. Sometimes we have to beat it to death before it will let go. Since pride seems to be natural and humility unnatural, this raises the whole question of why we should be humble--that is, what is the value of humility, why is it a Christian characteristic, why is it something to strive for?

For an answer to those questions, look at the picture presented in our Scripture this morning of two men. The first man is a Pharisee. Undoubtedly he is an earnest and sincere man. We know this is true because he tells us that he fasts twice during the week and this is not required of the Jews. He tithed all of his income when the Jewish law required only a tithe of his agricultural income. The second picture is that of the Publican. He was a local tax collector, a pawn in the hands of Rome, a cheat, a thief, and a traitor to his own people. When he stood far off from the altar and called himself a sinner he was not making empty rhetoric. Yet, strangely enough, it is this second man, this Publican, who Jesus says will be justified before God. What was the most important difference between the two men? The difference was humility.

See how it works. Notice first that without humility you cannot see yourself as you really are. Listen to the prayer of the Pharisee: "God, I thank thee that I am not like other men...I fast twice a week, I give tithes of all that I get." He sounds as though he has bought stock in God's corporation and is expecting at any moment to be elected to the Board of Directors!

Now, when you get right down to it, this man had done a lot of fine things. He is the sort of man who would be in church on the front pew every Sunday; he would head up the financial drive and make a nice pledge himself. He could be counted on to teach Sunday School and would preach the sermon on Layman's Sunday. Yet, he would never see himself as he really was, a man seeking his own glory. Centuries ago a Pharaoh commissioned an Egyptian architect to build a lighthouse at the mouth of the Nile River. There, on an outcropping of rock, Cnidus the architect erected the monumental lighthouse. At the bottom, engraved in the covering of cement, was the name of the Pharaoh. However, in a few years time, the waves had washed the cement away. There, underneath, and carved indelibly in the solid stone foundation was the name of Cnidus the Architect! That was the sin of the Pharisee. Outwardly the glory of God was the

motive of the Pharisee, but underneath his good works his own name was written on the foundation of all he did.

So without humility you never see yourself as you really are. You never understand the real motives that impel you. I suspect a lot of us are going to be shocked and surprised when time and eternity have washed away the outward appearance of our lives and we stand exposed before God--our own names written on the foundation of all we have done. As someone has said, he who loves himself shall find no rivals. A little poem puts it this way: "I had a little tea party, This afternoon at three, 'Twas very small, Three guests in all, Just I, myself, and me. Myself ate all the sandwiches, While I drank up the tea. 'Twas also I who ate the pie, And passed the cake to me."

Notice secondly, that without humility you cannot see others as they really are. Listen again to the prayer of the Pharisee, "God, I thank thee that I am not like other men..." and then notice how he begins to enumerate the sins of others, "extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector." It is a matter of fact that people who have a grand view of themselves have a very low view of others. And the fact that we are conscious of the sins of others and not our own says something to us about the nature of sin. Most of us will go almost to any length to cover up, to excuse, and to rationalize our own faults until - lo! they become almost as virtues. We are like the man who was set upon by two thieves. The man put up a terrific fight, but at last was overcome and searched. The search revealed only one thin dime in the man's pocket. The thieves were amazed and asked the man why he had put up such a terrible battle for only a dime. The man replied, "Well, the truth of the matter is, I didn't want my financial condition exposed!" And most of us will go to great extremes to keep our own sinful condition from being exposed.

Without humility, other people are a threat to us. If we are not secure within ourselves, if we have not accepted ourselves as we really are, then we cannot accept others. And do you know, it is a strange thing but we project on to others all of our bad feelings, bad thoughts, and bad deeds. We tend to see in them those very things we dislike the most in ourselves and which we will not admit to ourselves. It is the self-righteous person who is often guilty of the worst thoughts.

Do you think that Pharisee was standing there bragging to God because he felt spiritually secure? I really don't think so. Isn't it a matter of fact that we brag because we feel insecure? Isn't it a matter of fact that we often make ourselves out to be something we really are not because we don't like what we are? And when we run other people down--when we fail to see them as they really are--isn't it because we are actually pointing at ourselves and saying, "Am I not much better in comparison?" If self-righteousness has become a problem with us, does it not indicate a really deep sense of spiritual inadequacy?

You see, it is the person who is desperately psychotic who thinks everyone else is crazy. What is it the old Quaker said? "Everyone is queer but thee and me and sometimes I think thee art a little odd." When a person sees himself as he really is, when he understands that God loves him in spite of who he is, when he understands that Jesus died for him because he is like he is, when he understands that he is loved, accepted and forgiven as he is, and then when he can accept himself because God accepts him--then, and only then, can he accept others as they really are for who and what they are. Humility is important because without it I cannot be honest about

myself and I cannot be honest about you.

But thirdly, and most importantly, without humility I cannot have an honest relationship to God. Isn't this what the story of Adam and Eve is all about? Without humility their relationship to God broke down. The serpent said to them, "You shall be as gods." That is, "Put yourself first. Make yourself number one." Picture the Pharisee standing there before God. Is he praying or bragging? Is he aware of his creatureliness before the Almighty or is he beating his chest? On the other hand, look at the picture of the Publican. Boy, was he ever a sinner! But the important thing was that he knew it. There in the presence of a Holy and Righteous God he had no illusions about himself or his place in the world. Not even daring to raise his eyes, he smote his breast and cried out, "Lord, be merciful to me--a sinner." His relationship to God was open and honest. The relationship of the Pharisee was closed and dishonest. Jesus said that only the Publican was justified before God.

Most of us are familiar with Holman Hunt's picture entitled, "The Light of the World." It is the picture of Jesus standing beside a closed door with a lantern in his hand. The other hand is raised as he is knocking at the door. The hinges of the door are rusted from lack of use and vines have grown across the top of the door. If you will look closely you will discover that there is no handle on the door. This is the sermon that the picture has to tell, for the latch--the handle--is on the inside. Only the one inside can open the door to Jesus who stands without. Humility begins when we dare to be honest with God about ourselves like the Publican was. Humility begins when we dare to open the door to self and let Jesus into our hearts and into our lives. There is a hymn we sing sometimes that goes like this, "O Jesus, thou art standing outside the fast-closed door, in lowly patience waiting to pass the threshold o'er." Humility begins when Jesus enters your life. But never forget that the latch to the door is on your side.