

Sermon

The Quest for Humility

Philippians 2:1-8, James 4:1-8, John 13:3-10

Jeff Jackson

“Living For the One Who Branded Us...Jesus”

INTRODUCTION:

John Newton

I am persuaded that love and humility are the highest attainments in the school of Christ and the brightest evidences that He is indeed our Master.

Ravi Zacharias

To speak truth without love becomes obnoxious to the hearer!

In the ancient world pride was a virtue and humility was shameful. Listen to historian **John Dickson** in an article from the Centre of Public Christianity explaining this:

“When Sir Edmund Hillary conquered Mount Everest with Tenzin Norgay in 1953 he reportedly took with him a symbol of his achievement. It remains buried somewhere up there at the top of the world. A small crucifix.

I don't know why. As far as I know, Hillary wasn't an overtly religious man.

Perhaps it was a token of his own humility, trying to honour a “higher power” at the moment of his greatest triumph. Then again, maybe it was just the one token of Western civilization small enough to squeeze into his pack.

Whatever Sir Ed was thinking, I have often thought that his choice of symbol provides an insight into the curious influence of Jesus of Nazareth on our culture. In antiquity, the cross was an instrument of Rome's brutalizing power to humiliate. Now it stands as a symbol of true greatness. Whereas the ancients draw a straight line between greatness and honour, the West draws a line between greatness and humility.

It is well known that “humility” was not a virtue in Graeco Roman ethics. In fact, the word meant something like “crushed” or “debased.” It was associated with failure and shame. The eminent Roman historian Edwin Judge recently put it this way:

“Humility in Greek and Roman ethics would be a degrading thing. To put yourself down to a level that you were not born to, or that your standing in life did not require you to be in, was disgraceful and debasing. There was no virtue in it at all.”

Humility before the gods, of course, was appropriate, primarily because they could kill you. Humility was advisable before the emperors for the same reason. But humility before an equal or a lesser was morally suspect. It upset the assumed equation: merit demanded honour, thus honour was the proof of merit. Avoiding honour implied a diminishment of merit. It was shameful.”¹

¹<https://www.publicchristianity.org/how-christian-humility-upended-the-world/>

Then Jesus in this historical context of Graeco-Roman culture shows up on the scene and turns everything upside down by what he teaches. As **Dickson** later writes that Jesus taught:

““Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Here, Jesus as good as says that true greatness consists in self-sacrifice – his impending martyrdom being the prime example.”²

The Bible teaches that humility is the virtue and pride is the root of all evil.

C.S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity*

According to Christian teachers, the essential vice, the utmost evil, is pride. Unchastity, anger, greed, drunkenness, and all that, are mere fleabites in comparison: it was through pride that the devil became the devil: pride leads to every other vice: it is the complete anti-God state of mind...it is pride which has been the chief cause of misery in every nation and every family since the world began.

Philippians 2:1-8

If then there is any encouragement in Christ, if any consolation of love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by thinking the same way, having the same love, sharing the same feelings, focusing on one goal. Do nothing out of rivalry or conceit, but in humility consider others as more important than yourselves. Everyone should look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

Make your own attitude that of Christ Jesus,

**who, existing in the form of God,
did not consider equality with God
as something to be used for His own advantage.
Instead He emptied Himself
by assuming the form of a slave,
taking on the likeness of men.
And when He had come as a man
in His external form,
He humbled Himself by becoming obedient
to the point of death—
even to death on a cross.**

² Ibid

James 4:1-8

What is the source of wars and fights among you? Don't they come from the cravings that are at war within you? You desire and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and don't receive because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your evil desires.

Adulteresses! Don't you know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? So whoever wants to be the world's friend becomes God's enemy. Or do you think it's without reason the Scripture says that the Spirit who lives in us yearns jealously?

But He gives greater grace. Therefore He says:

**God resists the proud,
but gives grace to the humble.**

Therefore, submit to God. But resist the Devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you.

I. The Person of Humility, Jesus: From Sovereign to Servant

Notes: _____

John 6:38

For I have come down from heaven, not to do My will, but the will of Him who sent Me.

Matthew 26:50-54

Then they came up, took hold of Jesus, and arrested Him. At that moment one of those with Jesus reached out his hand and drew his sword. He struck the high priest's slave and cut off his ear.

Then Jesus told him, "Put your sword back in its place because all who take up a sword will perish by a sword. Or do you think that I cannot call on My Father, and He will provide Me at once with more than 12 legions of angels? How, then, would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen this way?"

Rick Warren, author of the *Purpose-Driven Life*

It's not about you!

John C. Maxwell

The greatest day in your life and mine is when we take total responsibility for our attitudes. That's the day we truly grow up.

II. The Path to Humility: Response to the Temptation of Pride

Notes: _____

John Wesley

Humility and patience are the surest proofs of the increase of love

Psalm 149:4

For the Lord takes pleasure in his people; he adorns the humble with salvation

Dwight L. Moody

Let God have your life; He can do more with it than you can.

III. The Picture of Humility: Christ Washing the Disciples Feet

Notes: _____

John 13:3-10

Jesus knew that the Father had given everything into His hands, that He had come from God, and that He was going back to God. So He got up from supper, laid aside His robe, took a towel, and tied it around Himself. Next, He poured water into a basin and began to wash His disciples' feet and to dry them with the towel tied around Him.

He came to Simon Peter, who asked Him, "Lord, are You going to wash my feet?" Jesus answered him, "What I'm doing you don't understand now, but afterward you will know."

"You will never wash my feet—ever!" Peter said.

Jesus replied, "If I don't wash you, you have no part with Me."

Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, not only my feet, but also my hands and my head."

"One who has bathed," Jesus told him, "doesn't need to wash anything except his feet, but he is completely clean."

Matthew 20:28

just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life—a ransom for many

Luke 19:10

For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save the lost."

CONCLUSION:

Augustine

If you plan to build a tall house of virtues, you must first lay deep foundations of humility.

Henri Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus: The Temptation to be Relevant*

“The first thing that struck me when I came to live in a house with mentally handicapped people was that their liking or disliking me had absolutely nothing to do with any of the many useful things I had done until then. Since nobody could read my books, the books could not impress anyone and since most of them never went to school, my twenty years at Notre Dame, Yale, and Harvard did not provide a significant introduction. My considerable ecumenical experience proved even less valuable...

Not being able to use any of the skills that had proved so practical in the past was a real source of anxiety. I was suddenly faced with my naked self, open for affirmations and rejections, hugs and punches, smiles and tears, all dependent simply on how I was perceived at the moment. In a way, it seemed as though I was starting my life all over again. Relationship, connections, reputations could no longer be counted on.

This experience was and, in many ways, is still the most important experience of my new life, because it forced me to rediscover my true identity. These broken, wounded, and completely unpretentious people forced me to let go of my relevant self- the self that can do things, show things, prove things, build things – and forced me to reclaim that unadorned self in which I am completely vulnerable, open to receive and give love regardless of any accomplishments.

I am telling you all this because I am deeply convinced that the Christian leader of the future is called to be completely irrelevant and to stand in this world with nothing to offer but his or her own vulnerable self. That is the way Jesus came to reveal God’s love. The great message that we have to carry, as ministers of God’s Word and followers of Jesus, is that God loves us not because of what we do or accomplish, but because God has created and redeemed us in love and has chosen us to proclaim that love as the true source of all human life.”⁴

⁴ Nouwen, Henri. *In the Name of Jesus*, 27-30.