



FEED MY SHEEP

PUBLISHED BY DR. JAMES W. BRUGGEMAN
STONE KINGDOM MINISTRIES
P. O. BOX 5695
ASHEVILLE, NC 28813 U.S.A.

See my blog at www.stonekingdom.org

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Humility Exemplified

Part 3: And self-esteem in light of true humility

We are studying humility, one of the fruits of the Spirit. Fruits of the Spirit are virtues (good character qualities) which are being developed in Christians by the outworking of the grace of God. In the last issue we began examining the rewards and power of humility. To continue in that vein, we find another example of the rewards of humility in 2 Chronicles 12.

This is the situation where Solomon's son, Rehoboam, is facing a foreign invasion from Egyptian armies. In contrast to the case of King Ahab (discussed last month), this appears to be a case where the king's repentance was more sincere and genuine than we found in the case of King Ahab, and of course, there was not even a semblance of repentance from Ahab's conniving witch-wife, Jezebel. It is different here.

2 Chronicles 12:5 Then came Shemaiah the prophet to Rehoboam, and to the princes of Judah, that were gathered together to Jerusalem because of Shishak, and said unto them, Thus saith the LORD, Ye have forsaken me, and therefore have I also left you in the hand of Shishak.

6 Whereupon the princes of Israel and the king humbled themselves; and they said, The LORD is righteous.

7 And when the LORD saw that they humbled themselves, the word of the LORD came to Shemaiah, saying, They have humbled themselves; *therefore* I will not destroy them, but I will grant them some deliverance; and my wrath shall not be poured out upon Jerusalem by the hand of Shishak.

8 Nevertheless they shall be his servants; that they may know my service, and the service of the kingdoms of the countries.

9 So Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem, and took away the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king's house; he took all: he carried away also the shields of gold which Solomon had made.

Next, here are two other occasions where God rewarded humility in a similar manner. First, the story of how the Assyrian King Sennacherib came to conquer Jerusalem and how an angel of YHWH (Yahweh) caused the deaths of 185,000 of Sennacherib's armies in one night. Sometime after that mighty deliverance, King Hezekiah of Judah was terminally ill, but when he prayed to God, God gave him a sign that he would have 15 more years of life. But then look what happened: Paraphrasing 2 Chronicles 32:25 it says that Hezekiah began to take his blessing for granted and "his heart was lifted up," which means that he grew proud.

2 Chronicles 32:26 Notwithstanding Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart, both he and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the wrath of the LORD came not upon them in the days of Hezekiah

The second instance concerns the good king Josiah.

2 Chronicles 34:27 Because thine heart was tender, and thou didst humble thyself before God, when thou heardest his words against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, and humbledst thyself before me, and didst rend thy clothes, and weep

before me; I have even heard *thee* also, saith the LORD.

28 Behold, I will gather thee to thy fathers, and thou shalt be gathered to thy grave in peace, neither shall thine eyes see all the evil that I will bring upon this place, and upon the inhabitants of the same. So they brought the king word again.

We can discern a principle here that the prosperity or calamity of a *nation* is tied directly to the heart of the national leader—in our case, the president of the United States. Is he proud-hearted or is he humble? As we look at the likelihood of a President Trump or President Hillary Clinton, does this fact not give us impetus to pray for our leaders even when—*especially* when—they are wicked and the most vile of persons? I imagine that it was the understanding of this very principle that moved Paul to write to his protégé,

1 Timothy 2:1 I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men;

2 For kings, and for all that are in authority;

Why do we pray for them?

that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.

It is clear that we have a very important self-interest in praying that God would grant humility to our leaders. Let us remember to do so—and often!

In the New Testament (NT), we find a number of passages which deal with the rewards of humility. The paramount reward, of course, is rulership and/or entry into the kingdom of heaven. But aside from that, Jesus and the writers of the NT gave ample examples of rewards.

Jesus was no respecter of persons. He mingled in all the strata of society. He mingled with the high and low and everyone in between. He conversed with prostitutes, with the hated tax collectors (the IRS of His day), with rich young rulers, and in the following case, Jesus is at a sabbath meal at the home of one of the *chief Pharisees*—not His most friendly audience. As He came into the house, Jesus had observed how the guests took their seats at the dinner table.

Luke 14:7 And he put forth a parable to those which were bidden, when he marked [noticed,] how

they chose out the chief rooms; saying unto them,

“Chief rooms...” That phrase does not mean that there were several dining rooms. The word “rooms” is old English for “places.” There was always a pecking order as to where the chief seats were at the dining area. They actually reclined on the floor to eat, and the table was very low. So our Lord, after noticing how they scrambled for the most prestigious places at the table, Jesus says:

8 When thou art bidden of any man to a wedding, sit not down in the highest room; lest a more honourable man than thou be bidden of him;

9 And he that bade thee and him come and say to thee, Give this man place; and thou begin with shame to take the lowest room.

10 But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room; that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher: then shalt thou have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee.

11 For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

Pretty simple principle there, isn't it? Not too hard to understand. I was at a wedding one time and this parable came to mind, so I decided to actually put it into practice. I deliberately sought out what I would have considered the least prestigious seat at the wedding meal. Have any of you ever done that? It was great fun. You know what happened to me? Nothing!

I stayed right there through the appetizers, the salad course, the entrée, the wedding toasts, through the dessert course, through the whole meal, right to the end. Neither the bride nor groom nor best man nor anyone else came to me and said, “James, since you performed the wedding ceremony, you ought to be sitting at the head table.” But nope! That didn't happen. I had obviously found my place at the bottom. It was a great lesson for me! ☺

What was absolutely amazing, however, was that I absolutely **knew** by the end of the evening that I belonged right at the bottom of the pecking order. I **knew** that because of some incredibly astounding coincidences which occurred in my conversations with the person seated next to me.

I am not going to share those things because they were of a personal nature. But obviously, God had been “reading my mail,” and had I been seated anywhere else, it would have been like two ships passing in the night. Neither of us would have ever known anything about the other. What a sovereign God! He was really making Himself known to me on that occasion!

Let us pause to summarize: We have seen how humility is one of the chief requirements of God for man. It is a requirement for entry into the kingdom of heaven. Humility has its rewards both on a personal basis and a national basis. A humble national leader will result in God blessing the nation. Conversely, a national leader who refuses to humble himself before God will result in judgment and calamity upon the nation. Thus, we need to pray for our leaders.

Here are several other NT passages which promise rewards to believers for practicing humility.

James 4:10 Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.

1 Peter 5:5 Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all *of you* be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.

6 Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time:

Humility exemplified

Let us move on now to look at *humility exemplified*. Naturally, Jesus is the Pattern Son, our premier example of all the virtues, aka fruits. He is the only person who can say: “Look at me; I am humble,” and not lose His humility in saying so. ...Which is exactly what he said in Matthew 11.

Matthew 11:29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly [or, I am humble] in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

Jesus gave us the parable of the Pharisee and the publican in Luke 18 as an example of pride versus humility. Another example is in Matthew 15 where there is an incident recorded which we may not recognize immediately as humility exemplified. This is

where the woman of Canaan came to Jesus and asked Him to cure her daughter. The apostles said, Lord, get rid of her; she’s a pest, and so Jesus said to her:

Matthew 15:24 But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

25 Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me.

26 But he answered and said, It is not meet [appropriate] to take the children’s bread, and to cast *it* to dogs. [Literally: little dogs]

27 And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters’ table.

28 Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great *is thy faith*: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.

It may not be politically-correct, or religiously-correct to say this nowadays, but let us state the obvious fact: this woman recognized her place! Jesus was in effect saying to her that He came to bring bread to the Israelites, not to the Canaanites. Furthermore, He called her a name! (Gasp!)

Therefore, it would not be appropriate for Him to take that bread (spiritual food) and give it to a woman of Canaan. (Some translations say she was a “Syro-Phoenician” woman. Same thing: “Canaanite.”) Keep in mind that it was Jesus Himself, God in the flesh, who “labeled” her, who “called her a name.” Ironic how today, one gets smeared, called names and labeled by the Leftists, if one truthfully labels or calls names (i.e., identifies people as what they are)! It all depends upon who is “labeling” whom. It is a clear case of hypocrisy by the socialists and Leftists. In this case, Jesus clearly called her a dog!

And now, notice her response: She *humbly* acknowledged her place as a non-Israelite! And that she was therefore not to be given the same amount of spiritual truth from Him as were the Israelites, but she pointed out that even the little doggies get the crumbs which fall from their master’s table.

Notice that. She is calling Jesus her master! She acknowledges Jesus as her Lord! Jesus then heals her daughter from a distance, mind you, and commends her for her faith. Faith is also one of the major virtues, and remember how at the outset I stated that to be

pleasing to God, all the other virtues must flow through humility?

Supposing this woman had the same amount of faith, but did not have humility in her request. Supposing she had said: Look, Jesus, I know You were sent only for the lost sheep of the house of Israel and that I am not an Israelite, but so what? I've got faith! I believe that You have the power to heal my daughter, and so I expect and demand that You do it.

If this had been that woman's attitude, do you think the Savior would have been inclined to respond in the same way and heal her daughter? But this woman's *faith flowed through her humility*. Now, let me set forth a challenge: Can we who know we are Israelites be humble enough to learn a lesson from a Canaanite? Namely, to bathe all our prayers and supplications—our acts of faith—in humility?

One final point on this passage: I have not the space here, nor is it germane to the topic at hand, but I have taught extensively in many lectures that while Jesus was indeed sent to Israel, He later commissioned Israel to carry the good news to all the world. My studies show that the disciples did exactly that. They were greatly concerned to carry the good news of Christ to their fellow Israelites scattered in Europe and elsewhere, but they did not restrict the gospel to *only* Israelites because they understood that ultimately *all* people will be saved!

A wise man once said "Humility is the genuine proof of Christian virtue. Without it we keep all our defects; and they are only crusted over by pride, which conceals them from others, and often from ourselves." (—Rochefoucauld)

Self-esteem vs. humility

Let us now discuss a common term in pop psychology circles, self-esteem, and learn how we can avoid the pitfall of *false* humility. To begin our discussion of self-esteem, I recall there was once a notice printed in a church bulletin which announced that next Thursday would be the weekly meeting at the church of the Low Self-Esteem Support Group, and the announcement added. "Remember to use the back door."

In the past 40 years or so, there has been a lot of talk by pop psychologists and personal development gurus, and there have been hundreds if not thousands of books written about the importance of self-esteem.

Some of it is valid and a lot of it is just plain psycho-babble nonsense. The Bible counsels *moderation* in all things, and I think this applies to the area of self-esteem as well. There must be a balance between no self-esteem and inordinately high self-esteem. What does the Word of God say? The Holy Spirit-inspired apostle Paul counsels this in...

Romans 12:3 For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.

The general idea there is not open to question: we are not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to. Simple enough! But the question is: *how* highly ought we to think of ourselves? Not real high, but pretty high? Or real low? Just how high ought we to think of ourselves? Well, the answer is right there, but it is perhaps obscured by the word "soberly." How highly ought we to think of ourselves? Paul says we are to think *soberly*.

Today, that word is used almost exclusively in reference to drunkenness. That is, if you're not drunk, then you are sober. But Paul is not talking about intoxication here at all, so when we examine the Greek it becomes clear. The word given as "sober" there is G4993 σωφρονέω *sophroneo* {so-fron-eh'-o} for which one of the meanings given in the lexicon is: 1b1) to put a moderate estimate upon one's self,

In other words, it's like Goldilocks and the Three Bears. Don't think too highly of yourself. Don't think too lowly of yourself. Think of yourself just right: have a modest or moderate opinion of yourself. This means that it is an *honest* estimate of yourself. Mr. Tryon Edwards put it well when he said: "True humility is *not* an abject, groveling, self-despising spirit; it is but a right estimate of ourselves as God sees us."

(*To be continued.*)

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