

4. From Humility to Glory
Humility Is Not Jealous
Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32

This is the fourth Sunday of Lent. Our theme for this Lenten Season is “From Humility to Glory.” We will be glorified by God on the day of resurrection if we follow Christ’s example. Christ refused to glorify himself. He glorified his Father. Because he refused to lift himself up, he was lifted up to glory on the day of his resurrection. The way to glory is through humility.

Humility is not looking down on ourselves. That is self-abasement. And humility does not look down on others. That is pride. Humility looks up to God.

Last week and this week we are looking at forms of pride...looking down on others. Last week we saw that pride looks down on others when they are down, saying, “We all get what we deserve.” Humility says, “There but for the grace of God go I,” humbly thanking God for our blessings and seeking to share God’s blessings with those who are down.

This week we will see that pride looks down on people when they are up. We turn to the story of the Elder Brother in the story of the Prodigal Son.

The story of the elder brother is a story of jealousy. Jealousy has been with us since Cain killed Abel, because he was jealous that God was more pleased with Abel’s sacrifice than his.

There is nothing more galling than to know that you are a better person than someone else, but they are getting the accolades. The older brother knew that he was a better person than his little brother. He was the good son, the responsible one, the hard-working one.

And yet, he comes in from a hard day of work to find that his father is throwing a party for his worthless, good-for-nothing brother, just because he came home after wasting his inheritance in wild and riotous living.

In spite of all he has done to keep the family business going, to see that everyone’s needs are being met, it appears to him that his father loves his brother more than him. He is caught up in a jealous rage.

The older brother was angry because he looked down on his little brother, while his father was lifting him up, treating him like royalty, giving him jewelry, fine clothes and an extravagant welcome party.

Have you ever been angry when someone was lifted up? Have you been angry when someone else got the promotion you deserved? When someone else was elected the most popular? When someone else got the position on the team that you had earned? When someone else got the guy or the girl that should have been yours?

We all have. We are certain that we are the better person, because we can see our strengths, while we turn a blind eye to our weaknesses, while we see the faults and failures of others very clearly. That is what Jesus was talking about when he asked why we offer to take the splinter out of another’s eyes while there is a log in our own eye.

The elder son was blind to his own faults. He accused his father of never throwing a party for him. I can tell you why the father never threw him a party. The elder son would not have known what to do at a party. Sure, he was a hard worker, but he was totally lacking in social skills. He didn’t know how to party. His idea of a party would be standing in a corner waiting for people to come tell him what a wonderful person he was.

His younger brother, on the other hand, knew how to have a good time. He knew how to help people have fun. He was in his natural environment at a party. Life was a party when he was around. The father threw him a party because their home had been a dull, boring, funless place since the younger son left home.

Now, which is more important—to have the skills to produce the essentials of life or to have the skills to make life enjoyable? The answer—both are of equal importance. It takes all kinds to make a world. All of us have our strengths and our weaknesses. The world needs responsible, hard-working big brothers. But what would this world be like if that is all we had? It would be a sad, repressive, dull world.

When we recognize our own strengths and weaknesses and the strengths, as well as the weaknesses of those around us, we recognize that we are all of equal importance. Each of us has our contribution to make. We will do what we do well. We will appreciate what others do well. And we will remember that when we offer our gifts to others, the day will come when God will honor us for sharing what God has given us to make the world a better place for all God's children.

Humility is grateful for the gifts of others and generous in the sharing of one's own gifts, trusting that the day will come when God will honor all those who shared their gifts and lift us up to be recognized and celebrated by the hosts of heaven for all eternity.

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