

## New Covenant Priesthood (Part Five)

### Humility, Continued

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From the last sermon of this priesthood series I think it's good to remember that faith, praise, thanksgiving, and humility all work together, supporting and reinforcing each other. Even though each of them is specifically different, each one of them plays an important role in molding and shaping a son-of-God's life and character.

Faith is by far and away the most important one, but right there—almost on exactly the same level - is humility. Faith and humility form or supply the foundation for the others. In turn faith and humility —especially the faith— are strengthened as the others become part of our relationship with God and each other. When they're all working in our lives, then they tend very strongly to center our activities, attitudes and thoughts on God.

We're going to begin in maybe an unusual place for this sermon. Turn to II Timothy 1:6-7.

**II Timothy 1:6-7** Wherefore I put you in remembrance that you stir up the gift of God, which is in you by the putting on of my hands, for God has not given us the spirit of fear: but of power and of love, and of a sound mind.

One of the elements that I especially want us to carry with us from the last sermon, is that humility cannot be characterized solely on the basis of a certain look or even a certain specific disposition. You might remember all of those terms that I gave you—actually a long list of them—in the way of a quote from that commentary on prayer. Just think of some of the characteristics that were given there. One's humility must be judged on the basis of one's relating to God.

A person with low self-esteem can be a horrid sinner, just as surely as one who is quite proud of himself, because neither is submitting to God as they

should. A person with low self-esteem is moved to be overly protective of himself, thus producing self-centeredness bereft of a right motivation for service and sacrifice. Humility may have a rather deceptive quality to it because it is very easy to judge it as being *weak*.

These verses in II Timothy 1:6-7 describe the spirit of God as being a spirit of power. Now does that fly in the face of humility being thought of as being weak? The powers of God's spirit are revealed in many areas, but there is one I want us to focus on here because it so frequently tends to be misjudged. Jesus is described as being a man in whom the spirit of God dwelt without measure. Surely Jesus was a humble man. On the one hand He is described as being *meek and lowly*. Some Bibles now translate that word "meek" as "gentle." "Gentle and lowly." On the other hand He is vigorous and burning with zeal. Would it have been possible to misjudge this man if you caught Him in a moment where He was being vigorous and zealous and bold, and so believe, "*that surely cannot be a humble man*"? But He was.

Let's look at what Solomon wrote in Proverbs 28:1.

**Proverbs 28:1** The wicked flee when no man pursues: but the righteous are bold as a lion.

Jesus spoke boldly of God, and so much so that it played a major role in leading to His martyrdom. Another example is that of Phinehas. In his zeal, he executed a prominent couple who contemptuously committed an illicit sexual act, and he was rewarded by God with an everlasting priesthood. His violent act was an act of humility. What I am getting at here is that one's humility must be judged against the right standard or the judgment will very likely be wrong.

Go now to James 4:7-10.

**James 4:7-10** Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double minded. Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.

Those things that are listed between verse 7 and including verse 10—the submitting to God, resisting the Devil, drawing near to God, cleansing your hands, purifying your heart, being afflicted, and mourning—all lead up to humility. All these are aspects of a humble-minded person. I especially want you to note that we are commanded to *choose* to be humble. Do you see the way that is stated? "Humble yourselves." That's a choice. Being humble requires that a choice be made.

We're going to look now at I Peter 5:5-9, and we're going to find Peter writing virtually the same thing as James did. Look at the way this begins.

**I Peter 5:5** Likewise, you younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yes, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility.

Again, every one of them is a choice: submitting, being subject, clothed with humility. He gives the reason why.

**I Peter 5:5-6** For God resists the proud, and gives grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time.

He is showing, in the way this is stated, that we are faced with a choice of either humbling ourselves, or exalting ourselves. We've got to choose to be humble.

**I Peter 5:7-10** Casting all your care upon him: for he cares for you. Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil [parallel this with James 4], as a roaring lion, walks about, seeking whom he may devour; Whom resist steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world. But the God of all grace, who has called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that you have suffered a while, make you perfect, establish, strengthen, settle you.

In both of these series of verses, we are charged with humbling ourselves. The word "humble" indicates a lowering of the self, of putting one's self down below that which we are submitting to. It indicates not letting pride exalt itself. I want you to notice the reference is always before God. This is because true humility only exists where the lowering of the self is in relation to God. The person may be humble in a human sense, but it is not humble in a godly sense. The relationship has to be with God.

These verses clearly establish that there are choices involved in humility, and that these choices are in relation to God. He is on the one side. On the other side we have the opportunity to humble ourselves to Satan, or to ourselves, or to the world, or our peer group. Even though the inclination—the quality of mind—to submit or to lower ourselves before God is in us, because of the knowledge that comes to us from His revelation of Himself, it nonetheless takes the making of the choice, and then actually carrying through for one to be considered humble. They go together. There has to be the inclination and the act.

The inclination, combined with faith, sets the stage, but pride can enter in so that we don't submit, and it will exalt itself against God. The result then is we won't be humble. It takes them working together. Regardless of what men give as descriptions of humility, we haven't actually lowered ourselves until we submit to God's will. I cannot emphasize strongly enough that it must be *God's* will we are submitting to

Go now to Philippians 2:1-8. I personally consider this section here to be perhaps the most important one in the whole Bible regarding humility. It is in the example of Jesus Christ. Of course we are encouraged very strongly here to follow His example.

**Philippians 2:1-8** If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the spirit, if any bowels and mercies, fulfill you my joy, that you be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vain glory: but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his

own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

Verses 1 through 4 contain the description of God's will regarding the attitude that we are to be in toward each other. Let's look at that again.

**Philippians 2:1-8** "If there be therefore any consolation [The word *consolation* here is an old-fashioned word. Today in a modern Bible that would be translated encouragement. "If there be therefore any encouragement in Christ".], if any comfort of love, [Again, old English. It means solace. "If there's any solace." It is actually closer to our English word encouragement.], if any fellowship of the spirit, [The word *fellowship* is one of those words that is translated two or three different ways in the Bible. In modern English it means sharing. "If there be any sharing of the spirit." Here it is implying the *gift* of the spirit. It's talking about the love, the joy, the peace, the help, the values, the service.], if any bowels, [Again, an old figure of speech or metaphor. We would use the word *affection* today.] and mercies, [This means *sympathy*.]"

**Philippians 2:1-3** If there be therefore any consolation [encouragement], if any comfort of love [encouragement], if any fellowship [sharing] of the spirit, if any bowels [affection] and mercies [sympathy], Fulfill you my joy, [Make it complete. Fill it up so that I can rejoice.] that you be like-minded [everybody being of the same mind and having] the same love, being of one accord [being united], of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife [or conceit] or vain glory [or ambition, but be done in humility]; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.

Even though God technically allows us to treat others as we would want to be treated, yet He is actually asking us here to make the other person higher, by making ourselves lower in our own eyes.

**Philippians 2:4** Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.

Be so aware of other's needs and other's concerns that we are thoughtful about them and doing what we can to relieve their burden.

**Philippians 2:5** Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.

Verse 5 is the charge to us to keep *on* thinking like this, to keep on choosing to conduct ourselves in this manner in order that there be a harmonious environment. As Richard said in his sermon last week ["Remember the Christians"], it is when we become like Christ that unity appears, that unity takes place. As each person becomes like Christ, there is nothing to fight against; there is nothing to be better than; there is nothing to create division. If each takes that on himself, then we will become like Christ, because he says this is the kind of mind that was in Christ.

The last part of verse 5—"which was also in Christ Jesus"—and then verses 6 through 8 are Paul's substantiation, his assertion that this is what Christ did as His example to us. In plain language, verses 6 through 8 are saying that even though He was God, He didn't consider living *as* God as something that should be selfishly guarded and protected. Instead, He assumed—that is, He took on Himself, He emptied Himself, He lowered Himself—the life of a servant even though He still was God. He chose a servant's nature all the way to the point of dying as a servant—as the slave of mankind. He laid Himself out.

Now how was He able to do this? It was because (1) He chose to do it, and (2) He chose the right characteristics to enable Him to do it. The characteristics He chose to follow were the ones that were listed in verses 1 through 5. If we are striving to be like Christ, disunity will disappear.

This isn't hard to comprehend once we begin to understand a bit about what God is, and how He lives, and the powers He has, and the mind that He has, and on and on. But Christ regarded sinners—you and me—as more

important than Himself. You see, being God was not a thing to have a strangle-hold on. He gave it up in order to become a man, to live as a man, and to be every bit as concerned—maybe more concerned—with our needs than His own affairs. He could have at any time said, "*I'm God. You can't do this to Me. I created you. I gave you life and breath. You live because of Me. You prospered because of Me. I saved you this many times.*"

He could have gone on and on with an endless stream of reasons as to why He should be bowed down to, but He didn't. Instead He served and He considered Himself as less than we. Of course the path of doing such a thing took Him on the course that lead to His death as a man—as the sacrifice for us. The attitudes, the characteristics that are expressed in verses 1 through 4 were the launching pad for all of His acts of service. What I want to get across is that He did *act* on them. So Paul's appeal to the Philippians and to us is to cultivate, within ourselves, these same attitudes and *express* them to each other—because it's only in the expression that the humility actually comes into existence as a reality.

I want you to notice that I said "cultivate." Think of gardening. Think of the cultivation that has to be done in order to bring forth fruit. Also I want you to remember, to recall from my previous sermon, I said that godly humility is not something that just appears suddenly in one's life. Neither does all the cultivation in a garden take place at one time. It is something that is done over a long period of time to bring forth the fruit.

It takes a long and serious relationship with God in order for this approach to relationships to be developed in one another's character. I mean these characteristics that are in Philippians 2:1-4. It is within the process of seeking God—not seeking to find Him, because He's already revealed Himself to us—but seeking to be like Him. To live life as He did as described in Philippians 2. And it is in coming to *know* Him that godly humility is cultivated.

Again, I think you will recall in my previous sermon I briefly explored that one of a priest's major responsibilities today is to draw near to God in prayer, and specifically for that sermon in *intercessory* prayer. Intercessory prayer is prayer in which we interceded with God on behalf of one another. Under the

Aaronic priesthood, the priests drew near to God by means of serving in and near the Temple. The Temple was perceived as God's dwelling place and also the place of His work.

Most specifically the priests did this by serving at the altars, offering animals and incense in sacrifice. Those sacrifices clearly dominated the physical works required of them, and they were easily seen by others. They did their work of sacrifice right out in front of everybody else, except for the incense altar which was done privately inside the building. What I am getting at here is that the physical was clearly seen. The spiritual aspects were clearly understated. We can look back on it now and see it, but it was not emphasized then.

Under the New Covenant, those two elements are completely reversed. The physical acts of sacrifice are unstated. In fact they are barely even seen. Where do you pray? You do it privately, don't you? You go into your closet. You don't stand out on the corner, raise your hands, and make your prayer. In fact, Jesus even forbid that. So under the New Covenant the physical aspects are hardly even seen, but the spiritual is moved front and center, and it becomes the most important.

Prayer is clearly shown in Hebrews 13:15 as a New Covenant sacrifice. This verse specifically states that praise and thanksgiving are a sacrifice of the lips. Much of the sacrifice offered for the sake of one's relationship with God—our prayers in behalf of another's needs—consists of the time and energy and thought in preparation, and then the actual carrying out or performance in prayer before God.

Today we're going to spend the rest of this sermon looking more closely at some of the elements that have previously been mentioned in sermons. We need to do this so that we can understand more about how they work together to produce the growth in humility we very much need to bolster our relationship with God. This is a reference to Isaiah 66:2: "To this man will I look, to him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and trembles at my word." This we very much want God to do, because He resists the proud. The humble are the ones who gain entrance into His presence. Those are the ones that He hears, so it's very important for a priest to be this way if he wants to be effective in the doing of his responsibilities.

We're going to spend the rest of the sermon in Luke 17 and Luke 18. These chapters are going to be the platform on which we will build. Much of the subject material in these two chapters appears to be linked by Luke as a continuous teaching. Perhaps it was all given at one time and in one place. I do not know that for sure. But the teaching does center on faith, prayer, thanksgiving, and humility, and then finally obedience. It is very interesting that all of these subjects should be linked together by Luke in two chapters.

Luke 16 ends with Jesus' concluding statement to the parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man. I'm going to read verse 31.

**Luke 16:31** And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.

That statement is a warning that hardheadedness, stubbornness, is not overcome by witnessing miracles, by even being an eyewitness to a resurrection from the dead. Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. It appeared to have been done before an awful lot of people. I wonder how many of those people actually became converted. Probably Martha and Mary, and probably Lazarus himself, but I wonder if there was anybody else converted, other than those—or any of the disciples—who actually witnessed it. There is no indication in the Bible that anybody else was converted because of witnessing that miracle. Instead, Jesus hints that overcoming hardheadedness and resistance to pleasing God, is linked to "hearing Moses."

I think that *hearing God's word*—because that's what he is referring to about "hearing Moses"—will be done in a manner similar to what we saw in David. Do you know what David did? He "**heard**" God in the creation. He consciously and continuously looked for and meditated upon reasons why he should believe, and what he should do as a result. That's what Jesus is referring to about "hearing Moses."

In other words, a person has to consciously make the choice and make the effort to drop his resistance to God. He has to choose to become like a little child. (Incidentally, we're going to get around to that in this series of verses.) This, then, at the very beginning of Luke 17, leads to instruction that on the

surface appears to be headed in one direction, but actually applies in another. Let's read verses 1 through 6.

**Luke 17:1-5** Then said he unto the disciples, It is impossible but that offences [causes to stumble] will come: but woe unto him through whom they come! It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones. Take heed to yourselves: If your brother trespass against you, rebuke him: and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to you, saying, I repent: you shall forgive him. And the apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith.

If we only read that far, I think we would be led to think that the subject here is in regard to being offended, and forgiving those who offended you. That indeed is part of the instruction, but it is not the main thrust of the instruction, because look at the way the apostles responded. They didn't say, "Lord, make us able to forgive." They asked for more faith. Or did they? I think you might be surprised. Because of the way Jesus answered them, it indicates that it could be either thing that I am going to give you.

Either they did not ask for an increase of faith, or they *did* ask for more faith and Jesus said "*You're asking for the wrong thing. Instead you should be asking for this thing that I am going to give you.*" Now He didn't say those words, but it is contained in the way that He answered them. It was one or the other of those. The real subject here is *faithfulness*. Now faith is indeed tied to faithfulness, but faithfulness is *faith in action*.

Faith, all by itself, is merely believing. Faithfulness is belief put to work. It's actually doing something. Here is the real link with the end of Luke 16. In order to do what Jesus said—to be able to follow through with what He said in Luke 16:31, and in regard to forgiveness—it is going to take some faithful labor. It's going to take work. It's not just going to happen. You can look up the word "faithful" in any English dictionary, and I guarantee you it's going

to tell you almost verbatim what I am going to say to you. The word "faithful" means "to show faith." It's to *show* it. It is to be *thorough* to one's duty. It is to be constant, reliable, precise, true and conscientious.

We can begin to come to a conclusion here from the way that Jesus answered. If they did just ask for faith, what Jesus is saying is that faithfulness *raises* the level of one's faith. Do you get that? It raises the level of one's faith, and therefore in this situation, because one's faith is raised, it gives them the power to forgive where they otherwise would not have been able to forgive.

Jesus recognized what they really were asking for was for *help* in being *faithful*, when the faith was more than what they anticipated they would need in this very difficult to-carry-out task. Just think of yourself. If there is something that you are fearful of doing—if there is something that you feel you cannot do—don't you know it's going to take more than what you have within you? Well, Jesus is giving the answer. All along the way we have to be faithful, and as we are more faithful, our faith to do these difficult things increases. Jesus' response has very little to do with directly increasing the level of their belief.

The answer to this parable here is not done, because Jesus then launches into a very important parable to give a further increase in understanding of faithfulness. I'll tell you, this one is a bomb! If you want your faith to be increased—and I know that I do—then we have to make what Jesus is saying here in these next three or four verses a part of our lives.

**Luke 17:7** But which of you, having a servant plowing or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when he is come from the field, Go and sit down to meat?

Does the boss-man say that? No.

**Luke 17:8** And will not rather [the boss-man] say unto him, Make ready wherewith *I* may sup, and gird yourself, and serve *me*, till I have eaten and drunken: and afterward you shall eat and drink?

That's what the servant does. He takes care of the master.

**Luke 17:9-10** Does he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I think not. So likewise you, when you shall have done all those things which are commanded you [and brethren we have an awful lot commanded by God, and He is the "boss" in this parable here], say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.

This is the answer to having the power to meet difficult circumstances. Understanding this has everything to do with understanding the attitude and conduct they in the parable and we are to have in our relationship with God. Now get this: We are to understand from this answer Jesus gave, that regardless of any work we are assigned by God—anything that we must perform in meeting the requirements of any duty God requires of us—our work never puts God into debt to us. Do you understand this? *Never*, under any circumstance, does God owe us anything. **NEVER** does He owe us anything. **NEVER** is He in obligation to us. **NEVER** is He indebted to us for anything. That is a *humbling* position to be in. Understanding this, recognizing it, and putting it into practice is the key to increasing our faithfulness.

When men do these things for each other, we always operate under the assumption that the laborer is worthy of his hire, and so we make deals. We enter into contracts that eventually say, "*You do this, and I'll do that.*" We do our part, and then we expect to be paid. But when we enter into this covenant—this contract with God—it must be understood that His part of the contract does not hold Him indebted to us in any way, shape, or form.

This does not mean that God will not bless. He may indeed bless, but it is always a blessing freely given on His part and is in no way a payment for services that we may have rendered. And God, because of who He is and because of who we are, is absolutely free to demand of us anything that He might require. Brethren, that is humbling. It so flies in the face of what we think of ourselves, there is no comparison.

We always think that we are *owed* respect by everybody, including God. Now, He may give that respect, but He doesn't owe it to us at all. We are to accept in our lives the position of absolutely being a slave—and a slave has no say in anything in his life. The owner tells him when to get up and when to go to bed, and what to do with his time all through the day. A slave's life is not his own.

When we fully come to grasp this, I'll tell you, brethren, it adds a dimension to faith that is precious beyond belief, because what it adds is the humility of a true slave—not a slave trying to break free of a master, but a slave who willingly does anything the master requires, and wants to stay there. I'll tell you, that will make you faithful! It's the understanding, acceptance, and the attitude that makes us faithful. This arrangement places obedience, and therefore faithful, conscientious, dedicated, reliable, and true performance of duty, at its very highest level. We're then working to please Him rather than merely obeying an order in an attempt to *get* something from Him. That's selfishness.

Faithfulness must be motivated by love for who and what God is, not for what we can get for our effort. This places the relationship in the correct position and makes possible real growth, because such labor is a labor of love. This paves the way for the next related subject that Luke has Jesus going into.

What in the world do you think could follow a bombshell like this? You might be surprised. It is *thanksgiving* that we are in this position. Let's turn to that in Luke 17:11.

**Luke 17:11-19** And it came to pass, as he went to Jerusalem, that he passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee. And as he entered into a certain village, there met him ten men that were lepers, which stood afar off: And they lifted up their voices, and said, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us. And when he saw them, he said unto them, Go show yourselves unto the priests. And it came to pass, that, as they went, they were cleansed. And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice

glorified God, and fell down on his face at his feet, giving him thanks: and he was a Samaritan. And Jesus answering said, Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine? There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger. And he said unto him, Arise, go your way: your faith has made you whole.

There is a broad generality contained here that again is not the main lesson of this parable, but is worth mentioning as a warning to us to be careful. The one who thanked Jesus is specifically identified as a Samaritan. The nine unthankful ones were, by inference, Jews. The inference is that these Jews, of course, had made the covenant with God. The reality is that the Jews were blessed far above the Samaritans.

The lesson is one that we're going to touch on in greater detail in a later sermon: Those who are blessed are also more likely to harbor ingratitude. They think that what they received is owed to them rather than it being a gracious blessing, and they are therefore less likely to give thanks. In my searches I found this quote that Shakespeare had King Lear say: "*How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless child.*"

In Psalm 103 David said, "Bless the Lord O my soul, and ***forget not*** all His benefits." What we are looking at is a side issue here, and is one of the major lessons of Deuteronomy 8, if you can remember the context of that chapter. Perhaps for us the most important lesson is contained in the phrase in Luke 17:19: "Your faith has made you whole." When we put it together, the man's gratitude drove him to give thanks.

It is interesting that when Luke wrote this, he used three different words to indicate *healing* in this brief parable. In verse 14 he used the word that is translated into the English "*cleanse*." This is Strong's #2511. In verse 15 he used the word that is translated "*healed*." This is Strong's #2390. Then in verse 19 he used the word that is translated into the English "*whole*." That is Strong's #4982.

All ten lepers were physically cleansed and healed, but the word "whole" in verse 19 indicates that only the tenth was cleansed, healed, and "made whole." Something extra was given to him as a result of his thanksgiving: his recognition of his indebtedness. His thanksgiving set the stage for him to

receive something beyond merely having the leprosy taken away. I think it revealed to Jesus a humble spirit within him that was going to play a major role in taking him far beyond the others in relation to God.

The Samaritan had made the first step to spiritual conversion that, if followed, would carry him all the way to "wholeness"—to completion—in the Kingdom of God. Verse 20 makes mention of the Kingdom of God. In other words, Jesus perceived that in this man there was the spirit to go on to perfection, as Hebrews 6:1 counsels to us. "Let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works." Thanksgiving toward God has very much to do with enabling us to fulfill this responsibility.

Luke 17:20 is important to you and me especially, because it brings the teachings that we have received to this point—Luke 17:1-19, and as we're going to see, those that follow—right up into our era, into the time that we live, because it's instruction regarding living in the end-time. Remember I said that the Kingdom of God is mentioned in the very next verse.

**Luke 17:20** And when he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God comes not with observation.

You will see terminology and wording used there that is very similar to what appears in Matthew 24, Luke 21, and Mark 13. What we have here is instruction regarding living in the end-time. Much of the central issue in Luke 17:20-37 is that the end-time will contain evidences that it is indeed the time just prior to Christ's return. I think we can all say that we are living in that time. We see evidence all over the place, don't we? Things are happening that match up with the events that are given especially in Matthew 24 and Luke 21. We see those evidences.

But one of the things that Jesus emphasizes here, in this section, is that this time is also going to be characterized as life going on pretty much as it always has. These things are happening. The people are still marrying and giving in marriage, people are being born, people are dying and business keeps going on. People are going to their churches and going to their social clubs. Athletic teams are playing. It's just like it's been, to some degree, as long as we've been alive—but, at the same time, we see events beginning to

happen that show us that we are in the end-time. The major portion of admonishment to us is contained between verses 31 and 33. Let's read that.

**Luke 17:31-33** In that day, he which shall be upon the housetop, and his stuff in the house, let him not come down to take it away: and he that is in the field, let him likewise not return back. Remember Lot's wife. Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it: and whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it.

And then He goes on to give some more of those things that will be occurring even though His return is quite imminent. Let's make this brief. He's saying, as a warning to you and me, not to be lulled into accepting the notion that life will always go on this way. *"Be sober. Stay alert. Don't become distracted by life's routines."*

I'm going to go back to the Old Testament to the book of Amos just to pick up one example.

**Amos 6:1-3** Woe to them that are at ease in Zion, and trust in the mountain of Samaria [the strength of the Israelitish nation], which are named chief of the nations, to whom the house of Israel came! Pass you unto Calneh, and see; and from thence go you to Hamath the great: then go down to Gath of the Philistines: be they better than these kingdoms? Or their border greater than your border? *You that put far away the evil day, and cause the seat of violence to come near.*

It's that part right there: "You that put far away the evil day, and cause the seat of violence to come near." These people were at ease in Zion. They weren't doing what the instruction said—to be sober, to be alert, to be on guard, to be aware of what now seems so solid but is not really so solid. Not to become distracted by life's routines. The people in Amos were at ease. That's the warning.

The warning to you and me is that if we are getting caught up in the world, then we are actually—by our attitude and actions—going to *cause* the seat of violence to come near to us. Let me put it this way: Is God going to give

protection to those who are laying back on the oars, who are taking it easy at a most critical time of their lives, not taking advantage of the opportunities to grow, not being alert, not being watchful, and spending their time doing things that have to do only with, let's say, the physical?

He is saying that the careless, complacent attitude of those people in the book of Amos, which is an outstanding example of their attitude, is going to bring the pain of suffering near to them personally. What incentive is there for God to save them when their attention is not on Him or His purpose, but physically on living in these rich days? And they are rich, and they are busy, and they are colorful, and they can be, in one sense, very comforting, but also deceptively so. What Jesus is saying here in Luke 17 is that wholehearted devotion to God—as opposed to loving possessions, or even life—will be the *only* refuge in these times.

One of the things we can say that almost becomes a cliché—but is a reality, and one of these days is going to be true—is that we're not going to live one second longer than God wills. Who is it that really has the power over life and death?

Those who have faith, those who are acting faithfully, those who are giving thanks, all have their focus in the right place. The focus of their attention is God. The world is a means to an end. It might be a very attractive means, and we can make use of it, but it all has to be within the framework of the focus of our attention on God, and that's what Jesus is saying. The world is here to use, but it is not here for us to abuse our relationship with God by paying too much attention to life itself.

Sometimes I get a small measure of guilt in myself for having given those sermons on health. I think that you will agree that I tried very hard to keep the emphasis in those sermons on *spiritual* health, and that I used the physical only as an analogous means to show how the two were related. But it is the spiritual health which is supremely important over anything that is physical.

The reason I get pains of guilt every once in a while is that I hear enough that makes me wonder if people aren't paying far more attention than they should to vitamins, minerals, and all of those things that have to do with physical

health. I'm not saying that they should be ignored. I'm only saying that they should be in the right place, and that our physical health is **secondary** to our spiritual health. We can meet that stewardship responsibility for our physical health without allowing it to overpower the spiritual.

Sometimes people's conversation is very much overrated by the physical—by vitamins, minerals, cleanliness, and white sugar. I think there is far too much emphasis on those things. Sometimes these things have even brought offense within the congregation and caused a measure of division. I won't go into that at this time, but maybe when I have a little bit more time I can go into that and show how these things have caused a great deal of offense. Our minds have to be on God, because He is the Giver of good health. Those other things have their place, but God is the One who can bless us with good health. Our life depends on Him and not on those other things.

I will go on to one more thing, because the instruction does not stop. Luke is still on the same basic theme, and when he gets done with verse 37, he goes into the very next subject that is important for those of us who are living in this end-time. It was important to those people then because they were facing the end of an age with the destruction of the Temple and the destruction of Judea. So they were facing an end, and so are we, of something far larger than that.

**Luke 18:1** And he spoke a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint [or give up].

Please pay attention to this because it's right in the context of the end-time. Don't give up praying. This is exceedingly important for those who live at the end of an age, which we do. Now here's the instruction:

**Luke 18:2-8** Saying, There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man: And there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of my adversary. And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man; yet because this widow troubles me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me. And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge said. And

shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man comes [this ties it directly with the subject directly at the end of Luke 17—the return of Christ], shall he find faith on the earth?

Faith is now linked together with faithfulness, prayer, thanksgiving, and now *persevering* in prayer. Don't give up! Jesus is saying that at the end, prayer cannot be ignored. We cannot allow the crush of the business of life to crowd prayer out from being the necessary part of every day. Notice that verse 1 says we are to "*always pray, and not lose heart.*" The emphasis is on "*always* ."

It's very human to think that God is not hearing, and that God is not paying attention. The very times that we are most likely to give up are the very times when we need to be the strongest in our resolve to keep on praying and not give up. One of the points Jesus is making is that if a human judge can be prevailed upon to act, how much more hope can we have in God. God's faithfulness, though, is not the main point of this parable. The main point is whether our persistence, patience, and perseverance will give out before Christ returns.

We must learn that God doesn't look at time the way that we do. We look at time and say things are getting out of control. We look at time and say this has got to be done by such and such a time, or then what? We're looking at it very humanly. But where is God in this picture? Brethren, there is nothing out of control with Him. The problem is in our faith toward Him. The problem is in our inability to think that He really hears us, that we are worth hearing, and that He is not hearing. But He is. So the tendency is for us to quit praying rather than keeping on praying.

We've got to learn this lesson that God doesn't look at time in the same way that we do. If we're ever going to live by faith, in peace, overcoming the stresses that cause others no end of emotional and mental problems, we must learn to look at the passage of time more closely to the way that God does. Persist in prayer. Don't give up.

When Jesus asked the question about finding faith—this is very important—He was not asking whether He will find any faith at all. Of course He will find people who will believe in Him. What it literally says in the Greek is: "*Will He find **THAT** faith [or **THE** faith]?" It is a specific **kind** of faith that He is asking about. What kind is it? It is the faith that perseveres and doesn't give up.*

Brethren, the times that we are living in propel us toward an impatient, immediate gratification that we must resist. When we lose our sense of faithfulness—the way we lose and give up—that's a pretty good indication that the world is impacting on us, because this world wants us to get things right away. It motivates us to be immediately gratified **NOW!** But those with **THAT** faith—**THE** faith—say, "*No, God doesn't owe me a thing. No, nothing is out of control. He has absolute control over everything. He can raise people from the dead. Even after they die, it's not out of His control.*"

Do we have that faith? Don't give up. Just keep asking in the right attitude. Keep saying, "*God, I know that You're going to answer. You're going to answer. I know that You're going to answer, and it's going to come at the right time and it will be exactly the right way.*" The quality of our prayer is not the issue here, but persevering and not giving up and losing our faith. When we lose the faith, we lose our faithfulness right along with it.

The next time, God willing, we're going to get into the **quality** of the prayer, because Jesus begins to address that in the very next series of verses. The quality of the prayer is very deeply impacted by the humility in which the prayer is given. We will see that the next time.