

Humility Factor Week 1 – - March 9,10

Today is the first Sunday of Lent, and we're beginning a new message series that we're calling the Humility Factor. We're going to be talking about humility—that wonderful virtue that none of us is very good at. So, what is humility? I don't pretend to hold "the" answer, but maybe I do have a good place to start.

There is a story that is told of a Jewish rabbi who walks into a synagogue with two pieces of paper. The first says, "The world was made for you."

The second says, "You're nothing but dust and ashes. This, I believe, summarizes humility. Humility is actually a virtue. A virtue is a habit of high moral standard. And this virtue is, in a certain sense, the most important virtue, the most fundamental virtue of all. And over the next five weeks, we're going to look at its application when it comes to living out the Christian life more successfully.

What we're talking about could be called the most important, the most fundamental virtue because it stands before, it lies beneath every other virtue. While most of us think we know what humility is, I would say it is often misunderstood. See, many people think of humility as weakness, low self-esteem, lack of ambition, a conscious effort to minimize or downplay our accomplishments, a low opinion of yourself, or maybe even a bad opinion of yourself.

None of that is humility. Neither is that a virtue. It is also not a mark of spiritual maturity. It's a mark of insecurity that we have to work our way out of. Humility is not a low opinion of yourself. - It's a clear opinion of yourself. It values self and minimizes ego.

Well, to begin to unpack this important topic, we are going to look at that first reading from the Book of Deuteronomy. The Israelites had been in the desert for 40 years. God's intention had been to bring them directly to the Promised Land, which was a matter of only several days' journey from Egypt. But in their impatience and ingratitude, in their arrogance, they sinned before God. And so, as a penance, they were forced to wander around, literally in circles, for decades. They wandered around until everybody in that sinful, prideful, arrogant generation had passed away.

And at this point in the story, God is calling the next generation of Israelites, and Moses is preparing them, teaching them about the past, and shaping a vision for their future. Moses reminds them what God has done for them and at the very end of the reading we hear Moses conclude, how they should proceed? **"They should bow down low in His presence,"** even as they experience the triumph of their entrance into the Promised Land and the complete defeat of all of their enemies, they are to do so with abject, utter humility. They are to bow down, physically bow down, as further physical proof of their humility.

Well, as we begin this series, it might help to be honest. We know that humility—being humble—isn't exactly popular in this day and age. Honestly, humility is difficult. It's difficult for most, all of us, it's difficult for me. It's challenging to be humble even when we want to be.

Our pride, our ego get in the way. We don't like to look bad or lose control. We do not want to admit when we're wrong. We do not like to say we're sorry. It's hard to be humble even when we want to be. And a lot of the time, we don't want to be. If we've been disrespected, if I've been disrespected, I don't want humility, I want an apology. If I've been offended, I don't want humility, I want payback. If I've been hurt, I don't want humility, I want revenge.

These are all reasons why we need to work on humility so that we can have our minds transformed into the mind of Christ. We need to learn to see humility, not as something that lessens or diminishes or weakens us, but something that strengthens us, something that builds us up to be the person we want to be, the person that God calls us to be. And we see this, we see humility in at least three basic ways.

First of all, humility grounds us in the basic reality that there is a God and it's not me. Our tendency is to look at what we have, especially if we've worked hard, especially if we've been successful, and think we have it because of us. In fact, our achievements at work or school, our finances, even our family, they're all gifts from God. Don't get me wrong, your efforts matter a lot. They're incredibly important. But they must be recognized and understood in the context of what God has given you, of what God has done for you, of what God is doing for you right now.

Second, humility grounds us in the basic reality that we are made for relationships. Humility doesn't separate, segregate, or draw lines. Humble people recognize their flaws. They need others to fill in the gaps and correct their errors. They learn from everyone, especially those with a differing perspective. We need one another. And humility is a basic ingredient. It's incredibly helpful for success in any kind of relationship. If you can be humble, then you can be kind, because you're able to put the needs of others before yourself. If you can be humble, you can be merciful; you can more easily receive and extend forgiveness because you can recognize your own faults and failures first. If you could be humble, you can be compassionate, because you have the ability; you take the time to understand someone else's situation. Because it is so useful, because it is so helpful, because it is so attractive, humility is incredibly powerful in all of our relationships.

Third, humility grounds us in the basic reality that God insists on it before he's willing to act in our lives. You can be successful with God without being highly intelligent, clever in business, outstanding in finances. You can be successful with God and not be graceful in appearance or skillful in athletics. You don't need any of that to be successful with God, but you cannot be successful with God without humility. God humbles those who exalt themselves but lifts up those who humble themselves. Just ask Moses, Samson, Jacob, and David. And when he does you will be in a position to receive some of the greatest blessings God can give. That's just the way things work. Humility is the soil - it's the ground on which God can work in our lives, growing, blessing, and favoring.

I'm reminded of an awkward situation that happened last year at the Oscars. I don't normally watch awards shows, because the self-congratulations of multi-millionaires isn't something that I really am interested in. But the stage setting was so elegant and there was nothing else on, and I soon found myself sucked-in and watching to the very

end. In order to boost ratings, the biggest awards of the night—"Best Actor", "Best Actress", and "Best Movie" as you know are kept until the very end. As the very last award was being announced -"Best Movie"—everyone in the room held their breath. And then, it was announced as "La, La, Land". The cast, directors, crew-men, people who bought donuts—everyone who had any hand in making the movie traipsed up on stage, ready to make their 30-minute speech thanking "Grandma, their Dog, and their 8th grade English teacher". The director stepped up to the mic, and began to drroll on. And then the excitement began...Turns out that there was a mix-up, and the wrong movie was announced. "La, La, Land"—with its hundred cast members standing on stage with proud, "Of course we won" smiles—**was not the winner**. A movie called "Moonlight" was the winner. You could almost see the pride draining from their faces as the reality sunk in *Ooo...embarrassing. This is what Jesus was always talking about.*

So, for all of those reasons I just shared, over the next few weeks, we're going to take time to look at the virtue of humility in our lives. Next week, we're going to look at the importance of prayer in growing humility. The following week, we're going to look at some of the obstacles, including the biggest obstacle of all to humility. In week four, we're going to look at how humility helps us turn certain areas of our life around when they're headed in the wrong direction. And then we will wrap up this series, just before Easter, by looking at how God lifts up and blesses and favors the humble.

So as you continue your Lenten journey make humility something you pray for. Ask the Holy Spirit to move mightily in your hearts, to transform you into a humble servant of Christ.