

TITLE: "Walking Humbly with Your God"

TEXT: Luke 18:9-14 (NT p. 81)

[Jesus] also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt: "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.' But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted."

#### Introduction – My responsibility

I shall begin with a story from my *Burt and I* CD.

Rev. Forbes addressed a single person in his congregation one Sunday mornin', Henry Treat, a farmer of 78. The hymns sounded reedy with only Henry, the reverend and Miss Trombley the organist a singin'. The Psalms didn't do so bad though because Henry liked the SHOUT the responses right out.

Then the reverend scratched his head and peered over the edge of the pulpit and asked Henry in a whispa if he should deliver the sermon with only Henry and Miss Trombley there to hear it. Henry replied that when only one calf appeared at feedin' time, he fed it. ...The reverend delivered a SPIRITED sermon lastin' 2 hours.

After the service, when the reverend shook Henry's hand at the door, Henry confided that though he would feed only one calf, he wouldn't feed it the whole load.

I will not preach for 2 hours this morning. In fact, I will only spend about 15 minutes. I will be preaching about humility. Why is humility important to anyone this morning? Because in the end, when we meet the Lord face to face, it will NOT be the rich, or the successful, or the powerful who will be praised by the Lord. No, in the end, it will be the humble who the Lord exalts. So, I guess you could say this morning's sermon is sort of like studying for finals.

## 1. What humility is not

First, I want to explain what humility is NOT. ...Being humble does NOT mean sacrificing your self-esteem, self-respect or self-confidence. God MADE you, God LOVES you and God has a wonderful plan for your life. If you have faith in Jesus Christ, you are a daughter or a son of God, a sister or a brother of Jesus who IS the King of Heaven.

Amy Grant related this about herself when she was a young teen:

“One day I got up early, came downstairs and set up the ironing board. First, I put my head down, stretched out my hair as far as I could and ironed out all those curls. Then I got a razor and shaved off the front of my hairline so I wouldn’t have to struggle with those cowlicks anymore. Finally, I would look like everybody else. Wrong! You can imagine the mess I had made. From a distance, I looked fine, but up close the razor had left its mark. I had a half-inch strip of sandpaper for a hairline. And I had to go to school that way!

As I look back on this escapade it sure seems like a silly thing to have done, but I thought that lonely empty feeling would disappear if I could just look and feel like my buddies. What I hadn’t figured out yet was that God made each of us to be unique. At the beginning of time [God] planned that each of us should be as different as the patterns of a snowflake. ...It wasn’t just my cowlick that was different, it was me. My own lack of self-esteem made me think of my “differentness” as bad, and that caused my loneliness.”

Having low self-esteem is NOT how God defines humility. As a matter of fact, do you know what happened to this shy, lonely girl? She became a Christian. ...This is what Wikipedia has to say about Amy Grant now:

**Amy Grant**, born November 25, 1960 is an American singer-songwriter, musician, author, media personality and occasional actress, best known for her Christian music. She has been referred to as "The Queen of Christian Pop". As of 2009, Grant remains the best-selling contemporary Christian music singer ever, having sold over 30 million units worldwide. Grant has won six Grammy Awards, 25 Gospel Music Association Dove Awards, and had the first Christian album ever to go Platinum. She was honored with a star on Hollywood Walk of Fame in 2005 for her contributions to the entertainment industry.

God MADE you, God LOVES you, and God has a wonderful plan for your life. If you are humble, who knows what wonderful things the Lord will do with you!

## 2. Acquiring humility requires confessing our pride

When he was governor of New York, Mario Cuomo gave a news conference and a reporter asked if he had undergone plastic surgery. His reply? ...”If there’s a plastic surgeon who claims to be responsible for THIS face, then New York State will decertify him immediately.”

How do we ACQUIRE humility? In the book *Mere Christianity*, C. S. Lewis writes:

If anyone would like to acquire humility, I can, I think, tell him or her the first step. The first step is to realize that one is proud. And a biggish step, too. At least, nothing whatever can be done before it. If you think you are not conceited, it means you are very conceited indeed.”

The Pharisee in this morning’s parable prayed:

“God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.”

I’m sure, if asked, that Pharisee would have categorically denied being conceited. So would I, but I am just as conceited as that Pharisee.

If you want to know how much pride you have, observe how you judge others.

Do you judge by how a person wears her hair?

What kind of car they drive?

How they speak?

Their sexual orientation?

What their home looks like outside or in?

Do you judge a person by their education, or lack thereof?

Their political views?

I am constantly amazed at how FULL of pride I am. Check out your own thoughts. Then I encourage you to do: I confess my sin of pride to God and beg forgiveness. I have to do this every day, every day.

Again, why do we need to be humble? Jesus says (Mt. 7:1,2):

“Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. <sup>2</sup>For with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get.”

If I am going to be judged at the Final Judgment by the same standards that I use to judge others now, you and I can’t AFFORD to judge anyone about anything.

### 3. Humility means walking humbly with God

A wealthy, high powered CEO was admitted to the hospital for tests. He ordered nurses and technicians around left and right and, knowing how important he was, they all meekly submitted. After the tests, as he was being admitted to a room, his gurney rolled by the nurses' station and a small, mild-mannered nurse typed his name on a band of paper and started to put it around his wrist.

He jerked his wrist away and demanded, "What the heck is THIS for?"

"THAT," replied the nurse as she looked him straight in the eye, "is so we won't give you to the wrong mother when it's time for you to leave."

Important as it is to stop comparing others to ourselves, it is even MORE important to be humble before God. In our parable for today: "...the tax collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!'" Jesus says, "I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other."

Many successful people spend their lives justifying their behavior to others and themselves, but in the end, what will count is how we justify ourselves before God. And in Micah 6:6-8, God says what is expected from his followers:

- <sup>6</sup> 'With what shall I come before the Lord,  
and bow myself before God on high?  
Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings,  
with calves a year old?  
<sup>7</sup> Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams,  
with tens of thousands of rivers of oil?  
Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,  
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?'  
<sup>8</sup> He has told you, O mortal, what is good;  
and what does the Lord require of you  
but to do justice, and to love kindness,  
and to walk humbly with your God?

How DO we walk humbly with our God? ...We must be OBEDIENT to God. And to be obedient to God means that we take the time to listen to God so that we know what God is asking us to do. Then we must be willing to sacrifice our own will for God's will.

Why DOES God want us to be obedient?

The Bible says: "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that God may exalt you in due time. Cast all your anxiety on [God], because [God] cares for you" Father, Son and Holy Spirit (I Pt. 5:6,7). God wants us to walk humbly and obediently with Him because his plans are the best possible plans for us and those we love.

Let me tell what I mean. ...Last spring I was not able to go fishing out on the ocean with my sister Liz and nephew Jesse. So, without checking it with the Lord, I said I would go out with them over Columbus Day weekend and I planned a vacation the week before.

As the time approached, I had the sense that I was not to go. I ignored it. Then I started having back spasms for the first time in years. Then, for the first time in 24 plus years, we were unable to get someone to fill the pulpit. So, I said, "OK God, you win, I won't go." But I was angry with God and I prayed angry and stayed angry for a whole day before my anger simmered down to simple resentment and self-pity.

The Tuesday I would have been on vacation, I called the car dealership because we had been having some electrical problems with the used 2008 Ford Taurus we had bought. The Ford warranty is for 36 months or 36,000 miles, so I thought I had plenty of time. It turned out that the warranty period began the day the car was manufactured, which was 10-6-2007. The day I called? 10-5-2010. They are STILL trying to determine the problem, but because I stayed around, it will be covered under warranty.

Then Carol became quite ill Wednesday evening and I was VERY glad I was here.

Thursday, Christine Slocum took a turn for the worst and I was able to spend time with her and Robert at the nursing home before she died later that evening.

With still some ragged remains of self-pity, I called my sister last Monday to hear the tales of all the fish they had caught, she said that it had been too windy for them to go out, so had I gone I couldn't have fished anyway.

God wants us to walk humbly and obediently with Him because his plans are the best possible plans for us and those we love.

Conclusion – All who humble themselves will be exalted

Let me close with a poem by Carol Wimmer titled “When I Say I Am A Christian”

When I say, "I am a Christian," I'm not shouting, "I've been saved!"  
I'm whispering, "I get lost! That's why I chose this way"

When I say, "I am a Christian," I don't speak with human pride  
I'm confessing that I stumble - needing God to be my guide

When I say, "I am a Christian," I'm not trying to be strong  
I'm professing that I'm weak and pray for strength to carry on

When I say, "I am a Christian," I'm not bragging of success  
I'm admitting that I've failed and cannot ever pay the debt

When I say, "I am a Christian," I don't think I know it all  
I submit to my confusion asking humbly to be taught

When I say, "I am a Christian," I'm not claiming to be perfect  
My flaws are far too visible but God believes I'm worth it

When I say, "I am a Christian," I still feel the sting of pain  
I have my share of heartache which is why I seek His name

When I say, "I am a Christian," I do not wish to judge  
I have no authority - I only know I'm loved

And if we strive to be humble, if we confess our pride, if we try to walk humbly and obediently with God each day, we will experience the love of God, now and forever and ever and ever.

Amen.