

The Need for Humility

Betty Jane and I got back home from our vacation travels Monday night and unpacked and got our house back in order on Tuesday. When I got back to work on Wednesday I knew almost right away that it was good for me to have been away. Before we left my energy was depleted. I was feeling depressed and defeated. It wasn't so much that I wanted to get away; I wanted to run away!

But, when I came back to the office on Wednesday morning after our vacation and spent the afternoon visiting, I noticed that I was enjoying it again. When I was greeted by a full room of men at our Promise Keeper's meeting I was encouraged. When I heard of your ministry to the Ramstad family, in our absence, I was blessed. I want to thank Paulette, Leann, Midge, Deb, Karen, Ruth, Nikki, and anyone else who helped, for preparing and serving the meal after Carol's funeral. I want to thank Gary, Peggy, Bob and Dave for caring for other business of the Church while we were away. It brings me great joy to hear of and to see the fruit of your ministry. Our work in the Lord is not in vain. God's love still abounds at Fourth Street.

I know it was good for us to be away because I definitely feel better now that we are back. It was also good to have some time for quiet reflection in which I experienced a bit of an attitude adjustment. While we were away I sensed the Lord saying to me "Your pride is your problem. The reason you have been dealing with negative feelings is that your pride has been wounded. You fancy yourself as a church growth pastor and since attendance has been going down and church income has been running behind expenses, you are feeling like a failure. Your focus on nickels and noses has been keeping you from seeing the deeper work I am doing among my people. You need to quit worrying about your reputation and remember that it's not about you; the buck stops not at your desk but at My Throne!" Would you say, **"Sometimes" "We all need" "an attitude adjustment."**

As we read from Micah, chapter 6, this morning, we see that the people of Israel also needed an attitude adjustment. Micah 6:2b says, ". . . the Lord has a case against His people; He is lodging a charge against Israel."

Reading down over the next 5 verses in chapter 6, we can discern some problems God has with His people. First of all, the people have

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offended God by failing to remember Him as their strong savior and deliverer. In verse 4, God says through Micah: *"I brought you up out of Egypt and redeemed you from the land of slavery. I sent Moses to lead you, also Aaron and Miriam."*

In verse 5, God reminds Israel of two other instances of His care for them. When Balak king of Moab wanted and offered to pay the regional shaman, Balaam, to curse Israel, the Lord wouldn't allow it. He went so far as to give human speech to Balaam's donkey, warning him to prophesy only what the Lord gave him to say. God also reminds Israel of how He blocked the Jordan river, allowing the people to travel from Shittim to Gilgal, from the wilderness to the promised land over dry ground.

The second charge God brings against His people is that they misunderstand what He wants from them. As we look at verses 6 and 7 we see that the people of Israel seem to think that God wants impressive sacrifices from them and that the giving of these sacrifices will atone for their sins. In other words the people apparently think they can please God with religious acts and elaborate religious ceremonies, but this is not what God wants. What God wants is both simpler and much more radical.

God doesn't want their stuff and God doesn't want their religion. God wants their hearts, their obedience and, most of all, their intimate fellowship. Micah 6:8 says, *"He has showed you, O man what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."* Justice, mercy and intimate fellowship with God: These are the three essentials God is asking of us.

It seems to me that we need to ask the Lord to show us what we might be trying to substitute for these three essentials. Might it be the fact that we are law abiding citizens of the United States of America? Might it be the fact that we see ourselves as being morally superior to some of the people we read about in the paper or hear about on the 6:00 o'clock news? Could it be our church or Sunday School attendance or the fact that we read our Bibles in the morning and say grace before our meals? Maybe we could say that we took some classes or went to Bible School or Seminary? What answer might we Give if someone asks us why God should allow us to enter His

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Kingdom?

Think about that question for yourself right now. Say you're standing at the Kingdom of heaven's door. St. Peter answers the doorbell and asks you "why should I let you in here?" What answer could you give? What would you say? We need to give that some thought because sooner or later we all need to respond to that question.

But before we try to formulate an answer, lets look at our scripture passage from I Corinthians 1:18-31: Verse 18 begins, "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us it is the power of God." Continuing to read at verse 22, Paul says, *"Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength."*

The question is: What shall we offer God to please Him and for our salvation? Shall we offer Him good deeds? Shall we offer Him religious observance? Shall we offer Him our best stab at moral purity? Shall we offer Him our belief in miracles? Shall we offer Him our philosophies, the best labors of our minds? Not according to the Apostle Paul. Would you say: **"It is not" "what we do for God" "but only" "what God does for us" "that saves us."**

Continuing in I Corinthians 1 at verse 26, Paul says, *"Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before Him."*

Verse 29 is key: *"so that no one may boast before Him."* You see, if we could offer God anything of our own making we could brag on it. For good deeds, works of art, great thoughts published on paper, creative worship services, clean lives and clean homes, even for hours spent in prayer we may claim bragging rights. But these have nothing to do with

our salvation. They can flow from our salvation but never lead us to it.

Look at I Corinthians 1:30-31: *“It is because of Him (i.e. God) that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: ‘Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.’”*

On what basis then may we gain entrance to the Kingdom of God? No excuse or human reason will be accepted. No human sacrifice sufficient. The only thing one can say is this: “Jesus said, ‘Come,’ and I came. Jesus said, ‘Follow Me,’ and I followed. Jesus said, ‘the work God requires is this: to believe in the One Whom He has sent,’ and I believed in Him. Jesus said, ‘A new commandment I give—that you love one another,’ and I surrendered to His love.”

In other words, it’s all about what God has initiated, set in motion, in the gift of His Son, Jesus. It’s not about me; it’s all about Him. As the Lord continued to deal with me this week about the need for my pride to be crucified, He showed me something else. What have I been trying to offer God as a substitute for what He offers me in Christ? It’s my ministry, my pastoral service. What do you think—will that work? Can I come before His kingdom’s gate and get in by showing my ordination papers? Can I point to the number of people who professed faith in Christ, the list of those I baptized or the number who joined the church during my pastoral tenure? Will that get me into His Kingdom? Absolutely not!

Anything I can boast about doesn’t count. We all get into the Kingdom of God by the same merit and it is not of ourselves; it is the gift of God. It’s not of works, lest anyone should boast. The Kingdom’s door is held open by the outstretched arms of Jesus, crucified. Our redemption is found in the cross alone. Or, as the old hymn puts it:

*Rock of ages, cleft for me Let me hide myself in Thee.
 Rock of ages, cleft for me Let me hide myself in Thee.
 Let the water and the blood From Thy riven side which flowed
 Be of sin the double cure, Cleanse me from it's guilt and pow'r.
 Nothing in my hand I bring; Simply to Thy cross I cling.
 Nothing in my hand I bring Simply to Thy cross I cling.
 Naked, come to Thee for dress. Helpless, look to Thee for grace.
 Vile, I to the fountain fly, Wash me, savior, or I die.*

*Rock of ages, cleft for me Let me hide myself in Thee. Rock of ages,
 cleft for me Let me hide myself in Thee.*

Modern man, in particular, finds the message of the cross offensive and preposterous. He finds it unreasonable, claims that it’s unfair. It offends his pride. In his great arrogance, he thinks he can come up with something better, something more enlightened. But for anyone who has been captured by the Holy Spirit, we know there is nothing but the blood of Christ that can truly cleanse from sin and make us whole.

We all need the answer to the question, “Why should God let us into His kingdom?” What shall we say? “I’ll do it my way?” “Just look at all the good I’m doing?” “Just listen to my reasoning for why You should let me in?” “Graded on a curve, I live better than the average person?”

At the last motel we stayed at before we got home from vacation, we were given key cards that were improperly programmed. I stuck the first one in the door slot the way you are supposed to and pulled it out again and the door refused to open. I repeated the procedure several times with the same result. Then I tried the other key card and it also lacked the proper programming. It was dark. It was pouring down rain and we couldn’t get into our room. I had to use my cell to call the desk to get another set of key cards to get in out of the storm.

It may be helpful for us to imagine the Kingdom of Heaven’s door protected with a keycard lock. Swipe in your excuses; the door remains shut. Swipe in your own version of being good enough; the door remains locked. Swipe in your merit badges and giving record to the church. Swipe in your reasoning. Swipe in your awards and diplomas. The door will not open. In fact, there is no keycard that will open the Kingdom’s door. But if you will look at that door lock more closely, you will make an interesting discovery. The keycard slot does nothing, but there, within the outline of a cross there are two indentations for human fingers and another large enough for a human hand. As Jesus once said to Thomas: “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”

“Nothing in my hand I bring Simply to Thy cross I cling. Jesus Christ and Him crucified. He and He alone is the key to the door to the Kingdom of God. There is no other name given among men by which we must be saved.

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Micah 6:1-8; I Corinthians 1:18-31

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