

## If My People - 9

### *Pride and Humility (2)*

Last week we began to look at the issue of humility and its opposing character trait: pride. This issue is so central to 2 Chronicles 7:14 and it strikes at the core of what it means to live a victorious, fruitful Christian life. So I want to spend some more time here as we allow the Lord to teach us, challenge us and transform us more into the image of Jesus.

As I am sure you know from personal experience, having pride revealed in our hearts by the Holy Spirit is not the most pleasant experience and that revelation itself is quite a humbling experience. Yet we are being reminded in this teaching that pride is part of the very fibre of our fallen human nature and unless we allow the Holy Spirit access into every dark corner of our heart – revealing hidden motives, attitudes, habits and behaviours - then pride will continue to glorify our flesh; it will continue to put self ahead of God, causing us to miss the mark and fail to fulfil our calling and our purpose in God.

Even worse than that, we may find God Himself standing against us, opposing us and resisting us in our pride because as the Scripture reminded us last week: *God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble*. I remember these confronting words from a Dennis Jernigan song many years ago:

*Oh, my children, don't you see - if you live your life like you need me  
Then all the pain, I would use to build you; and all the pain, I would use to fulfil your heart.  
For don't you see - I am the answer? I am all you'll ever need.  
I am the answer to the life you live. I am all you'll ever need.  
Live your life like you need me. Children, just live your life like you need me.*

What a powerful reminder of the need for us to humble ourselves before God. You may have heard it said more than once, **we don't need God until we NEED God**. There's an interesting thing that happens when you need someone - when you *really* need someone. Think about it. It's just not possible to need someone, to express that need and receive from that person, without humbling yourself.

When you get to the point of admitting that you really need someone other than yourself, for any reason at all, at that point of need - and certainly at the point of receiving from that person - you must humble yourself. You cannot exalt yourself and express a sincere need of someone else at the same time. You are either lying to yourself and them and you don't need anyone ... or you are shooting yourself in the foot as you desperately try to receive from that person without humbling yourself.

As I have shared this earthly pilgrimage with thousands of brothers and sisters in Christ, I have observed in the vast majority of them at least one time in their lives when they were forced to admit that they really needed God. One of the many tasks of the Holy Spirit is to bring us all to that point, not just once, but many, many times throughout our lives.

**Until we experience a deep, gut-wrenching need of God, we remain strangers to true humility.** The Holy Spirit is always slowly, but systematically moving within us, particularly those in leadership, uprooting things in our lives which have been entrenched and part of our whole being.

As the Holy Spirit is given permission to move within us, things that were once solid become fluid; things we thought we had worked out, we are not so sure about now; where there was once dry, firm, solid, predictable ground to stand upon, we now find ourselves floating in the river of God's kingdom purposes and the scenery is changing faster than we would really like. It's breathtaking for some and downright unsettling for others and we don't like to be unsettled, do we?

That prompts a question: who told us the lie which said we are supposed to be 'settled' in the first place? To settle down means to grow roots in one place and not to move. When we settle in one place we can set up house and organise everything and put this over there and that over here. Everything becomes familiar; routines develop; life becomes predictable; we feel at home; settled; comfortable and in control. By and large, we determine what each day will bring.

On one level that sounds very appealing to us. In that kind of scenario we are the king or queen of our own little empire. We are the ruler of our life and the master of our destiny. We call all the shots and after a while we get really good at it and we don't seem to need anyone. We especially don't need God, though we may still sing songs and utter prayers which indicate we need Him, the way we live says something entirely different.

That self-sufficient, flesh-dominated, prideful control of our lives is not regarded in a bad light in our world or even in many parts of the Church for that matter ... until the Holy Spirit breaks through. In the earthly realm, such 'settled' people are the confident ones who end up being leaders and they are the ones whom we think 'have it all together.'

The rest of the people - the ones who lack that confidence and trip and fall and fail and wonder what life is all about - they are seen as the losers; the ones who can't make it on their own; the ones who just haven't got what it takes.

The truth is, such people *are* the losers, they are the ones who can't make it on their own and haven't got what it takes – and that's the whole point! Enter: the gospel of God's amazing grace which transforms losers into winners and ... wait for it ... it transforms winners (in the flesh) into losers!

In actual fact we are all losers and none of us have what it takes and none of us can make it on our own. The only difference is some of us know that and some of us don't. Some of us are still deluded and blind and think that we can live without needing others and without really needing God. Whereas others have come to the realisation that without others and without God we will not survive very well and we will never come close to our God-given potential in this life. That illusive reality called 'The Abundant Christian Life' will continue to be a concept, an out-of-reach goal .. or even a myth to many people! But when the revelation of the Spirit comes - so does humility.

I have listened to people across the Church for many years talking and praying about humility and pride. But I also hear people expressing 'wishes' more than prayers ... longing for the kind of humility that will attract the real presence of God into our lives and our Church and our city.

God understands our current plight. God understands our heart's cry for humility. God will respond and answer us and speak life and truth into us. He will give us the tools we need to take this journey down the river. If we just listen to Him, learn from Him and trust Him with our whole life.

Hear the Word of the Lord now; listen to your God; hear what I believe He wants to say to us all right now, today and every day:

*Precious child .... much loved son / daughter ... I am here ... and I know your heart.*

*You are concerned about being humble because you know that I will draw near to the humble and pour out grace and power upon them. You want to be clothed in humility but you are not sure you know how. You know it represents the opposite of religion and works and pride, and that it's not something you can obtain by striving. So, how, you wonder, do you get it? How do you get this quality that is so vital if you want Me to abide in your midst?*

*Listen, precious child ... turn your ear to your God today and listen. I say to you, I will open the door to humility to those who ask. Ask Me to help you humble yourself and I will bring circumstances and give you certain keys so that you will know true humility, as my dearly beloved Son knew humility when we walked among you so long ago.*

*I will begin by showing you who I really am - that alone will humble your heart. For My mercy, when truly received, humbles and overwhelms the heart of a person. I will supply grace for all situations, unfailing love, ongoing forgiveness, lack of partiality in every case. As I reveal Myself to you, humility will follow that revelation - if you embrace it.*

*But what else? I will also reveal to you more about your own nature. For I will give you eyes to see your own inadequacy and the total futility of all humans. This will be painful at times because one always tends to think, 'I should have done better. I should have been more Christ-like. How could I have acted in such a way?' But I will begin to shatter such illusions of human ability and show you that you, and all people on this earth, are capable of very little. As I reveal this truth, this reality ... you will not be brought low in condemnation, but set free from all self-condemning thoughts.*

*Certainly, you will still want to be more Christ-like, but you will not be so surprised when you are not. You will only be surprised by My ongoing grace and My undying faithfulness to you – an undeserving, rebellious sinner. I will give you clear eyes to see Me and to see yourself. For that is the mark of the humble person - an absence of misconception.*

*Did not Jesus say to the Pharisees, "... because you say, we would not have killed the prophets, you indicate by your very words that you would have done so? For you inaccurately think that you are somehow different, somehow better than other men. You inaccurately believe that in you resides some basic good or superior knowledge. Yet this is not so."*

*Look at those in the Bible who walked in humility. Many of them did not begin on a humble path but, because of My great love for them, I brought them to it. Look at Peter, for his letter clearly speaks about humility. Perhaps he is clearest of all. He exhorts the pilgrims of the dispersion to be clothed in humility. Had they not been humbled enough by being scattered abroad for their faith?*

*Yet even to such as these, he urged further humility. 'You humble yourselves and God will lift you up.' This was a man who had been humbled himself and who knew it was the only road to take. Look for other examples of humility - in the Bible and all around you. For if you desire to be humble, I will show you how. I will clearly show you through the life of Jesus and many men and women of faith.*

*I long for you to understand humility. You may have mistaken it for other things. Humility is not self-abasement or refusal to accept praise. It is not setting yourself apart in an isolated place where you have no opportunity to receive recognition.*

*For I say, you can walk before all men in humility, you can even receive praise for your deeds and still have a humble heart. My own dear Son, your Saviour, received the praise of thousands on Palm Sunday ... yet the humble state of His heart was clearly revealed a week later when He allowed His worshippers to become His murderers. Follow Him, learn from Him. That is the humility I seek.*

Humility is found as often in the well-known as the unknown. It is found as often in the leader as the follower. It has nothing to do with position or standing. It is an attitude of the heart. Are you surprised by recognition, unaffected by it, unmotivated by it? These are the traits of the humble person. For the humble person is not focused on their own reputation, but on God's. Any credit they receive is a mere sidelight to the main story, the featured event, which is the glory of God filling the earth.

Everything revolves around God and His preferences. This, in turn leads to putting others first. What is in the best interest of my brother or sister? How can I promote him? How can I bless her? How can I help others to succeed ... and ultimately, how can I lay down my life for them?

The humble person knows that their life is in God's hands and that He will have His way. We need only to serve God with diligence, doing the work put before us. We are called to do whatever job God gives us, wholeheartedly. Then, when God so chooses, He will raise us up to a more exalted place. As we put others first, take the lowly job – we will be exalted in due time. God's hand will raise us to a much higher place than we could ever raise ourselves. God's hand will raise us to the place where we were meant to be, the place where we were created to be.

Do you want to be assured of the perfect place for yourself? The place fitted just for you? Do you want to be in the right place at the right time doing the right thing for the right reasons? The place which best utilizes your gifts and talents? The place where you will be enabled to give the greatest glory to your God? Then submit yourself to the hand of God and ask Him to show you the way of humility. Remember the words of Jesus and the Apostle Peter:

**Matthew 11:29-30** *“Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”*

**1 Peter 5:5,6** *“All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, I oppose the proud but I give grace to the humble. Humble yourselves, therefore, under (My) mighty hand, that (I) may lift you up in due time.”*

I am coming to realise more and more that humility and faith are more closely allied in Scripture than we might think. We see it in the life of Christ. There are two cases in which He spoke of a great faith. In the first instance - in Matthew 8:8,10 - the centurion said, *“I am not worthy that you should come under my roof.”* At this humility, Jesus marvelled and replied, *“I have not found so great faith, no, not in all Israel.”* In the second case - in Matthew 15:27-28 - the mother humbly spoke, *“Lord even the dogs eat the crumbs from the master's table.”* And the Lord answered, *“O woman, great is your faith!”*

It is the humility that brings a soul to be nothing before God that also removes every hindrance to faith. Humility makes the soul fear that it would dishonour Him by not trusting Him wholly.

Brothers and sisters, surely this is the cause of our failure in our pursuit of holiness? Is it not this that makes our consecration and our faith so superficial and so short-lived? The eyes of our heart must be opened by the Holy Spirit so we can know the truth about us and God ... as painful as that revelation might be sometimes ... we *have* to know the truth.

*Come Holy Spirit ... reveal the truth within us ... then reveal the Truth of God. Mirror of God's Word, reveal my heart, give me the courage to face the truth I see and humble myself under Your mighty hand as your transforming grace and power move in me through that revelation.*

So what is God revealing? Do you really want to know? What can we expect if we submit to His Spirit and yield to this powerful move in our midst? Let me suggest what is happening for some and what will happen for us all if we allow God to have His way in us.

- We will start to understand to what extent pride and self are still secretly working within us.
- We will see how God alone, by His indwelling Spirit and His mighty power, can cast them out.
- We will start to understand that nothing but a new, divine nature, entirely taking the place of the old self, could make us really humble.
- We will learn that absolute, unceasing, universal humility must be the foundation of every prayer and every approach to God, as well as every dealing with people around us.
- We will realize that we might as well attempt to see without eyes, or live without breath, as believe or draw near to God or rest in His love, without an all-prevailing humility and lowliness of heart.

Brothers and sisters, it is too easy to make the mistake of trying so hard to believe, while all the time our old self in its pride is seeking to possess God's blessing and riches. No wonder we cannot believe. We need to change our course. We need to seek first of all to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God: then He will exalt us in His time and in His way.

The cross, the death, and the grave, into which Jesus humbled Himself, were His path to the glory of God - and they are our path also. Let our one desire and our fervent prayer be: to be humbled with Jesus and like Jesus. Let us gladly accept whatever will humble us before God and men - this alone is the path to the glory of God.

Few of us who live under the western worldview which is built upon pride, hard work and human achievement, can truly appreciate the fact that there is such an awesome power in humility. Humility seems so contrary to greatness from a western Greco/Roman point of view and yet humility is the key to the fullness, wonder, majesty and power of the kingdom of God and all its riches and glory.

If we truly want more power and influence with God and with people, then humility should be our greatest desire. God will reveal specific areas in our lives over the coming weeks which need our attention, but first and foremost, we need to come to terms with the truth of what I believe God has said in this sermon. We need to get the point where we are ready to accept that humility is essential, not just desirable, if we are to live an abundant, fruitful Christian life and touch the pain and loneliness in this city and nation.

When God sees that we are serious about humility; when God realises that we are willing to be humbled, no matter how that happens; when there is no turning back for us and God knows that - then, and only then, will we be ready for the next leg of this journey as He takes us one step closer to the day when this whole city and this entire nation are on their knees confessing Jesus as Lord.

Do you want to see that day? Do you believe it is God's will? Well the great news is this: community-wide and nation-wide transformation begins right here with you and me - today - as we grapple with this foundational truth concerning humility. I don't say that lightly. I believe I say that with the authority of God today. The choices you and I make in response to this teaching will have a direct bearing on thousands of people embracing their salvation in Christ. That's how important this is. That's how urgent the need is. That's how desperate God is to bring His lost children home.