

Humility Matters to the Master

From the Series, "The King and I – Matthew Tells Us About the King of the Universe"

By Phil Brainerd

Presented to Trinity Church of Teaneck, New Jersey

On Sunday, January 3, 2021

Introduction

We've just begun the new year. At this time of year, we always discuss classic topics. One is "new year's resolutions". Who am I to challenge popular traditions?

There's an organization called "Statista" that collects statistics about all kinds of things. They ran a survey about new year's resolutions. Here are their top new year's resolutions for 2021:

- Exercise more: 44%
- Eat healthier: 42%
- Spend more time with family/friends: 34%
- Lose weight: 31%
- Live more economically: 30%
- (Here's a sign of the times)***
- Spend less time on social media: 24%
- Improve job performance: 23%
- Reduce job stress: 20%
- Quit smoking: 19%
- Cut down on alcohol: 15%

(statista.com)

I've heard people talk about their resolutions over the years, and I think this list is pretty much standard. Sadly, it's standard because there are lots of people who make new year's resolutions and fail to keep them - That's why the list looks so similar year after year. And that's a topic for another day.

For now, imagine that you're with some friends, and someone asks what everyone's resolutions are. People start in. If you're in a normal group, it sounds like the list we just read. But imagine that one person stops to think for a minute. When they give their reply, they say this: "I think I need to be more **humble**. I'm going to work on humility this year." That would be a conversation stopper. Who in the world thinks they need to be more humble? Who spends significant time thinking about humility?

As it turns out, there are lots of people who should consider this. And just perhaps, you and I are among them.

We're in our series, "The King and I – Matthew Tells Us About the King of the Universe" Currently we're looking at chapters 5 through 7 of Matthews book - A section we're calling "the Christian Manifesto". In the first part of the manifesto, Matthew tells us "What Matters to the Master". In this session, we'll find that Humility matters to the Master.

Recall in our series that we follow a pattern: We learn that something is important to the Master. It has come under attack. We look at: 1) How it has come under attack in the past. 2) How it was attacked in Jesus' day and 3) how it is under attack today.

I. Humility is important to the Master.

So, today we're learning that humility is important to the Master. It matters to him. Let's start by asking, "What is humility?" As we often do, let's check the dictionary. Here's the definition offered by "Lexico", the online Oxford dictionary: "Having or showing a modest or low estimate of one's own importance."

"Low estimate of one's own importance". I'll mention that if you look at several different dictionaries, you'll get somewhat different definitions, but somewhere in those definitions you'll see something like this. This is likely the definition held by most people.

From a Biblical perspective, this isn't quite right. Let me offer my opinion on a Biblical definition of humility: Having an **accurate** view of one's own importance. That probably feels unusual to many of us. How does one get an accurate view of one's own importance? You get it from God. You get it when you understand your place in God's creation.

So, a full Biblical definition would look like this: Having an accurate view of one's own importance, based on our relationship to God and his creation.

We might ask, "Why does this feel different than what we've been taught?" **Part of the reason is that we confuse the definition of humility with its effects.** So, now that we know what Biblical humility is, let's see how it works.

The classic example of humility is found in Philippians, chapter 2:

3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, 4 not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. 5 In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: (Philippians 2:3-5)

So we see here the action of humility. The humble person does nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. The humble person values others more than self.

Why should we do these things? Because this is what Jesus does. We're told here to "have the same mindset as Christ Jesus." What is that mindset? Let's read on.

6 Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own
advantage;
7 rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.
(Philippians 2:6-7)

We just read that Jesus is "in very nature God." He and God the Father share the same essence. But more than that, Jesus and the Father are equal. That's why we believe in Trinity – statements like this appear in numerous places in the New Testament of the Bible.

God is the Creator. We are the created ones. A proper understanding of this would suggest that it is our job as the created ones to serve God, because God is more important than us. He is higher than us. But Jesus, we're told, did something different. You see, Jesus possesses humility. So, instead of seeing his equality with God as something to be used to his own advantage, he lowered himself. He made himself nothing. He had the nature of God, but he took on the nature of a servant.

So, here we see some of the effects of humility. Humility makes someone value others more than self. Thus, humility leads service.

What does that service look like? With true humility, the service can take extreme forms. Let's read more in Philippians:

And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross!
(Philippians 2:8)

Humility made Jesus value us so much that he was willing to give everything for us.

This is nothing new. God has been serving us since the creation of the world.

16 For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. 17 He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. (Colossians 1:16-17)

God created the universe. After creating it, he obligated himself to keep it all working. We read that in Jesus, “all things hold together.” So, from the time that the first few atoms of the universe were put in place, God has been serving the universe. He’s been doing that because he’s humble.

Let’s return to our definition of humility: Having humility, or Being humble, involves an accurate view of self. God has an accurate view of himself. He is important - He is the Creator. He is head of the universe. He never stops being those things. However, humility leads him to value his creation and the humans in it. So, he serves his creation and humans.

What does it mean for us to have an accurate view of ourselves? It means understanding that you and I are very important. God created a whole universe and gave it to us. More than that, God gave us the earth to that we could rule it.

Here’s where it’s important for our view of ourselves to be based on our relationship with God and others. We are also special. God created us in his image - He didn’t do that with anything else. Because we are created in God’s image, we are like him. He is humble. So, he encourages us to be humble.

Now, this is very important. I believe that when we do the things that God commands us, we are given a very special opportunity. We can participate in God’s divine nature. So, when he commands us to be humble, and we obey, we become more and more like him. We know him better. We enjoy him more. That’s been God’s plan for us since the beginning.

So, let’s get back to our pattern. We’ve just learned that something is valuable to the Master. It matters to him. That something is humility. We’ve said that things that matter to the Master have come under attack.

Let’s find out how this happened with humility.

II. Humility Came Under attack.

Humility is one of the things that came under attack in the Garden of Eden. God gave Adam and Eve one command in Genesis 2: Don’t eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. In Genesis 3 the serpent came along with this temptation:

5 “For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” (Genesis 3:5)

The core of the temptation in the garden was the idea that Adam and Eve could be like God. This was ironic, because God wanted Adam and Eve to be like him. However, God wanted Adam and Eve to be like him in character qualities like humility.

Humility involves an accurate understanding of who you are *in relationship to God*. God is the Creator of the universe and all its inhabitants. The humble person understands that. Humans are important, but God is much more so. So, the humble person serves God and others.

The serpent was able to get Adam and Eve to believe that they could be as important as God. So now, their understanding of who they were was distorted. Humility was replaced with its opposite: Arrogance. Whereas humility involves an accurate view of one's own importance, arrogance is a distorted view of one's own importance.

Earlier, we saw the effect of humility. Let's look at the effects of arrogance: Whereas humility values others, arrogance de-values others. Humility leads to service - Arrogance attempts to use others for selfish gain. Humility gives - Arrogance takes. Humility nurtures Arrogance harms.

We saw earlier that humility led Jesus to die for others on the cross. The first act of raw arrogance occurred in Genesis 4 where Cain murdered his brother Abel. Humility is only limited by how much you have to give. Tragically, arrogance is limited only by the number of people who can be hurt.

Because of this, two new concepts entered the human experience: Justice and revenge. Let's add those to our list: Humility seeks justice - Arrogance seeks revenge.

Justice and revenge are two very different things. Justice suggests that payment must be made in some form when someone is hurt. Justice is a goal of a society that is led by law. Revenge on the other hand is completely selfish. It is enacted by individuals. Revenge is determined not by laws and standards, but by feelings.

Revenge was first personified by a man named Lamech. We meet him in Genesis

I have killed a man for wounding me,
a young man for injuring me.
If Cain is avenged seven times,
then Lamech seventy-seven times."
(Genesis 4:23-24)

Here's the problem with revenge: It tends to get out-of-control. Lamech was injured. He responded with death. He said, "Someone stepped on my toe – I stepped on his head!"

That's why we have laws. Laws should come from a source that is impartial – a source that's not currently feeling pain from a crime. The best laws come from God. Here's an important point: True justice wants fair payment for a wrong. It's stops when the payment is complete.

Here are examples of the laws given through Moses:

15 One witness is not enough to convict anyone accused of any crime or offense they may have committed. A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. (Deuteronomy 19:15)

18 The judges must make a thorough investigation... (vs.18)

So, when a crime has been committed, there must be a proper tribunal. Judges must make a thorough investigation. Because of this, justice is ultimately a function of government.

In the law of Moses there had to be at least two witnesses. No one was to be convicted of a crime on hearsay or circumstantial evidence. Even having one person who claimed to be an eyewitness was insufficient. Two or three eyewitnesses were required. True justice was to be so respected that it would be better to let a guilty party go free than to have an innocent person convicted.

If these strict requirements were met, here was the penalty for arrogant people who hurt others:

You must purge the evil from among you. 20 The rest of the people will hear of this and be afraid, and never again will such an evil thing be done among you. 21 Show no pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot. (Deuteronomy 19:19-21)

In a broken world, where arrogant people hurt others, the legal system becomes an important deterrent to crime.

- Evil must be purged.
- An example must be made that deters others.
- And this is important: The payment must be equal to the crime.

If someone lost an eye, some kind of payment must be made equivalent to the loss of an eye - Nothing more, nothing less. If things get as far as a trial, the judges were to show no pity. If they did, none of the deterrents happened.

In a broken world where arrogant people hurt others, a working legal system can be used to deal with evil. ***But this has never been a vision of the best world.*** There was something even better - ***A society ruled by character and heart.***

21 If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat;
if he is thirsty, give him water to drink.
22 In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head,
and the Lord will reward you.

(Proverbs 25:21-22)

Is someone your enemy? Are they out to get you? Instead of figuring out how to hurt them, why not show them compassion? If they're hungry, feed them. If they're thirsty, give them water to drink. In fact, you need a fire to cook the food. Build a nice big fire for them - Heaping hot coals was a gesture of generosity in the days this was written.

If you do this, God will see and reward you. Why? Because wants you to be like him. And he is humble. The humble person values others. The humble person looks at even their enemy and says, "That person is made in the image of God. They have worth. Therefore, I will help, not hurt."

Friends, this is what God wants for us. Imagine living in a society where everyone did these things. That would be a society in which no one has need. That would be a society with no need for courts and a legal system.

Sadly, that's not what the world has. But understand this: ***God has always offered it on an individual basis to his children.*** God has always encouraged his followers to be humble - To value others - to show compassion and mercy even to enemies. It's can be hard to do. But God rewards those who do it.

So, humility matters to the Master. It came under attack in the Garden of Eden. It was under attack all the days leading up to Jesus. How was it under attack in the days that Jesus lived?

III. Humility was under attack in the time of Jesus.

38 "You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' 39 But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. 40 And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. 41 If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. 42 Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you. (Matthew 5:38-42)

Let's break this apart.

A. The Attack

You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' 39 But I tell you... (Matthew 5:38)

The people of Jesus day were short-changed by their leaders. They heard the "eye for eye" part of Justice. But they heard nothing more. They were given laws, but the laws had no soul; no deeper meaning. There were courts and judges to administer justice. But there was no opportunity to people to be something more. There was no opportunity to learn about character qualities like humility.

So, Jesus needed to correct the situation. He had to say, "but I tell you". That was the attack.

B. The Response to the Attack

Here's how he told his followers to respond to the attack. There were four things:

1) Humble people are willing to risk their reputation for others.

First, humble people are willing to risk their reputation for others.

But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. (Matthew 5:39)

In that culture, a slap was a powerful way to insult someone. It was not meant to hurt the body. There are much better ways to hurt someone's body if that's what you want to do. This is important because this sentence, along with the others that follow, are some of the most misunderstood in the Bible. I've heard people ask, "If someone breaks my leg, do I have to offer the other as well?" No. In another place, Jesus said this:

When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another. (Matthew 10:23)

If someone hurts you physically and you can get away, do it! At this moment, Jesus is referring exclusively to an insult - An attack on emotions.

And Jesus is trying to remind us about humility. When someone insults a humble person, how does the humble person respond? The humble person says, "That person who just slapped me is made in the image of God." "So, they have value". Jesus is telling us that the humble person does not immediately retaliate.

You think this is hard so far? Think about this: The original temptation suggested that Adam and Eve could be like God. What is one of the qualities of God? Answer: He's never wrong. Do you know people who are never wrong?

One time, I was stopped at a traffic light. I was thinking about something and didn't see the light change. In what seemed like an instant, I was treated to a long, loud horn honking behind me. You know what? I was wrong. Maybe I didn't deserve a honk as long and loud as what I got, but I deserved a honk. So, I waived and moved on. I've known people who would honk back louder and longer. That would accomplish nothing except high blood pressure for everyone.

Humble people are willing to risk their reputation for others. They work on the assumption that others have worth.

2) Humble people are willing to correct wrongs if they are at fault.

Next, humble people are willing to correct wrongs if they are at fault.

And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well.
(Matthew 5:40)

The important word here is "sue" - This is a court of law. Imagine that someone has taken you to court and charged that you have wronged them. Multiple witnesses have been brought in. A judge has thoroughly investigated. And you are found to be guilty. Jesus says that a humble person is willing to give anything to correct problems if they are in the wrong.

In that society, if you sued someone, you could take almost anything - but not a coat. For the poor, a coat doubled as a sleeping bag. It kept people warm at night. So, Moses made special provision: No one was to sue and take a coat. Jesus says that the humble person would give up even that. They're willing to give up their last possession if they've hurt someone - Because that other person has value.

3) Humble people see potential in everyone.

Next, the humble person sees potential in everyone.

If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. (Matthew 5:41)

The people of Israel in the days of Jesus had been invaded by the Romans. The Romans had a rule: Any soldier could ask a citizen of a conquered country to carry their pack. A Roman soldier's pack could get heavy with supplies. This was the proverbial insult added to injury. Imagine that your country has been invaded, and the invader can force you to drop everything to help them carry their tools of oppression. That would be exasperating.

Jesus tells us that the humble person sees potential even in an oppressor. If you agree to carry a soldier's pack, you can spend time with them. You can talk to the soldier. You can try to be friends. You can listen to their problems. Maybe you can even share your faith with them? Instead of complaining, maybe you can go twice as far? That's twice to time to try and make a new friend.

The humble person sees potential in everyone – even an oppressor.

4) Humble people help to alleviate the pain of others.

Finally, the humble person helps to alleviate the pain of others.

Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you. (Matthew 5:42)

The topic of giving demands an entire session. We can't hit all the implications here. For now, let's ask: Do people who have what they need ask for help? Usually, no. So, let's assume that Jesus is referring to someone who has a real need. Perhaps they're hungry. They're trying to feed themselves and their family.

The humble person assigns value to others. The humble person asks, "What's more important? That I have everything I want, or that another person goes hungry?"

The humble person tries to help others when they're asked for help.

Let's pull this all together.

Conclusion

We've learned today that humility matters to the Master.

Humility is an accurate view of our importance, based on our relationship with God. It makes us assign value to others. It causes us to serve God and others. We've learned that humility has come under attack ever since the Garden. It was under attack in the days of Jesus. It's under attack today. How is it under attack today? It's under attack in pretty much the same way it always has. In this passage of Scripture, Jesus has given us some practical ways to understand humility and its place in our lives.

Here are some quick notes before we close: There are other factors here. There's grace and wisdom.

Concerning wisdom: There are lot's of bad people out there willing to ask for generosity when they're not really in need. They really gum things up. We need to pray for wisdom that God will show us the difference between hucksters and people who have real needs.

Concerning Grace: We're learning a lot of challenging things here. I don't think Jesus is saying that if you fail at any point that you'll immediately be sent to hell. Instead, I believe that God is doing what God has always done - He's offering us himself. He's offering us a chance to be more like him. He's opening his heart and mind. He is humble. He wants us to be that way, too.

He knows this is hard, so being a humble being, God is there to help us. Just like he's always been.

Perhaps, as we consider our New Year's resolutions, we can look into the possibility that we need to be more humble. I can guarantee that the New Year will be different if we do.

If you want to learn more, come visit us. We're Trinity Church of Teaneck, NJ. Our website is:

<https://trinityteaneck.org/>

Or, you can visit my site:

PhilBrainerd.com

To start your walk with Jesus, visit Billy Graham's site:

PeaceWithGod.net

May the Lord richly bless you.