

*Do not exalt yourself in the king's presence,  
and do not claim a place among great men;  
7 it is better for him to say to you, "Come up here,"  
than for him to humiliate you before a nobleman. (Proverbs 25:6-7)*

### **Do You Value Humility?**

“You’ve got to play with pride.” “Take pride in yourself.” “I’ve got a lot of pride.” Have you ever heard statements like that? Are they a good thing or a bad thing? Our society values pride. Coaches preach it incessantly. Counselors regularly tell our kids to take pride in themselves. How do you feel about pride? Do you want to see it in yourself? Do you like to see it in other people? I’ve heard plenty of Lutherans speak of pride as a good thing. And if that’s your perspective, what about humility? Is that a good or a bad thing? If it’s a good thing, how does it relate to pride? Can you be humbly proud or proudly humble?

In the end, pride and humility are values. What is a value? Isn’t it something we adopt as a life goal? It’s saying, “This is a good thing, even when it doesn’t seem to pay.” Honesty is a value. Integrity is a value. Hard work is a value. We strive for these things and we teach them to our children. So which of these do we consider to be a value: pride or humility? Many Americans would say pride. While they would accept modesty as a value, humility is not nearly as popular. That seems like letting people walk all over you and we Americans believe that we should stand up for ourselves. But can you hear God’s view of these values in the portion of his Word we have before us this morning? In the midst of endless exhortations to take pride in yourself and your abilities and your accomplishments, can we Christians see things from another perspective? My friends, **do you value humility?**

#### **I.**

Another way of asking that question is, **do you see pride as a sin?** That’s the perspective of the Book of Proverbs. Most of the Book of Proverbs is a collection of sayings written by King Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived. He wrote these proverbs to provide guidance for living in this world. Now, every culture I know of has sayings and proverbs. I regularly quote a Polish proverb to my wife: when a Pole is hungry, he’s angry. Since she’s been married to me for twenty years now, she can attest to the truth of that proverb. But the proverbs that God had Solomon record for us in the Bible are different from the proverbs and sayings that accumulated in every language and society. All human proverbs are the result of human reflection and experience. But Solomon’s proverbs come from the Holy Spirit. The fear of the Lord – faith in Christ – is the beginning of wisdom. So even when they deal with every day kinds of things, Solomon is trying to show us how a child of God interacts with the sinful world we live in.

Today’s proverb should sound at least a little familiar, because Jesus was obviously thinking about it when he spoke the words in our gospel lesson. Solomon said, **“Do not exalt yourself in the king’s presence, and do not claim a place among great men; it is better for him to say to you, ‘Come up here,’ than for him to humiliate you before a nobleman.”** What is the point here? The obvious point is that no one likes a braggart. I was reading a few weeks ago about an executive who took over a bank in the 1950’s. He brought a take no prisoners attitude and he had a lot of success. But his co-workers, even the owners of the bank, didn’t like him very much. Someone observed that he told a lot of stories when he was trying to “be one of the guys.” But the point of the stories was always to make him look good. It rubbed people the wrong way.

Solomon and Jesus do make that point. When you’re in the presence of kings and powerful people, you should know better than to brag about what you’ve done. You should be humble. You should know your place relative to them. The Hebrew translated as “Do not claim a place among great men,” literally says, “Do not stand among great men.” In Hebrew society, you bowed down to the ground before great people. Certainly, you don’t have to be a Christian to see that nobody likes people who are full of themselves and who seize honors and positions that they don’t seem to be entitled to. But there is a deeper concern here. Why would someone push themselves forward? Why would someone be full of stories that make himself or herself look good all the time? Jesus and Solomon were concerned about more than just how to get ahead in society. They

were concerned about living a life of faith. They saw that one of the greatest threats to living our faith is sinful human pride.

So Solomon uses external actions to speak of deeper spiritual truths. Pride is a sin. So why didn't he just say that? If I talk only about attitudes of the heart, it's easy to think, "That's not me!" We're all heroes in our own minds. Solomon talks about actions that show the attitudes underneath them. It takes pride to presume that you belong at the center of attention and in the front of all the action. It takes pride to boast and brag. When I need to be popular, to be recognized, to be chosen, that's pride, too.

So Solomon points out that you would be better to wait for the king to honor you, than to force yourself forward and be humiliated publicly. But of course, he doesn't mean that we should do what so many people do today – put ourselves down so that we can hear other people compliment us. If anything, that's an even worse form of sinful pride. Solomon is calling us to real humility that waits for honor to come naturally when and where God sends it.

Do we have that Christian humility that simply trusts in God and doesn't need to be honored or complimented or even recognized? Do we value humility – not just modesty, but true humility? Do we strive to be humble ourselves, or are we really the person Solomon was telling us not to be, the person who always has a story that makes us look good, the person who can't stop climbing to the top of whatever pile we find ourselves in? God's Word is very clear: human pride is sin. It's the sin the devil himself committed and it's the sin he used to get Adam and Eve to think that they knew better than God whether they should eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Every time we sin, human pride says that we know better than God how we should live, or it says that what we want right now is more important than what God says, or it simply says, "It's all about me." And we don't think any farther. That pride deserves nothing but death and hell.

But that is why our Savior came. Jesus had no sinful, human pride. That doesn't mean he was a marshmallow who let other people walk over him. Jesus trusted his Father perfectly and he had confidence in what was true and false, right and wrong. He was fearless and never hesitated to do or say what needed to be done or said. Yet, he was totally humble. He was the King of the Universe and he chose to be born in a stable and to grow up in a carpenter's shop and to live as an outcast to the temple and the religious organization that he himself had founded at Mt. Sinai. He let himself be arrested and falsely condemned. Even though he had the power to stop it, he let sinful brutes torture and kill him. He was perfectly humble in our place. And he died in our place. He paid for all our pride and sin and then he rose and God has forgiven us. God now calls us holy and perfect – and that means also that he see us as humble, just like he commands us to be. God does not see our pride anymore. He sees only Jesus and he says we are his.

## II.

So now, God calls us to have a humble attitude like Christ showed. He calls us to wait for God to give us whatever honor and glory we need in this life. But for us to have that attitude, we have to trust that God will work in our lives. My friends, **do you value humility? Do you trust in God to give you true glory?**

Pride is all about me. It's all about what I want, what I feel, what I think will make me happy. It depends on me to make that happen, either because of my natural gifts or because I manage to manipulate people to do what I want. And pride is always ready to justify whatever I do. Faith is the exact opposite of pride. Faith is all about Christ. It waits for him to do what he is going to do, when he is going to do it. Can we trust like that? Do we ever find ourselves getting impatient with God? That's pride.

Just like pride shows itself when we push ourselves forward, trust in Christ shows itself in a life of patience and love and kindness. It shows itself in joy in the gospel. It shows itself in service that doesn't worry about why I have to do this stuff. It sees that people need it to be done and it does it. I always think of taking care of babies in this regard. As much as I love small children and as cute as they can be, they can also be pretty disgusting. Changing diapers, cleaning oatmeal out of their hair, picking them up when their clothes are soaked with juice and probably something worse – people who've never cared for children are sometimes horrified by what's involved. But most of the time, their parents, especially their moms, simply pick up those children and do what needs to be done. They are humble enough to serve. That's Christian faith in action.

Christian faith finds contentment in the role God has called me to play when he calls me to play it. In Solomon's example, the person who presumes to brag to kings clearly wants to move up in the world. And it's not wrong to work hard and to set goals. But Christian faith is still content while I'm on the way. It trusts that God knows what's best for me and he will decide how far I'll get. If I never achieve the ambitions of my youth,

faith trusts in my Savior to guide me to where I should be. It trusts that all those things I don't have must be bad for me, because my God has not given them to me today.

Real Christian trust knows that God sees all that I do, even if no one else does. Even if no one else appreciates my efforts, it trusts in God to do right by me. It trusts that God knows how it's all going to come out and even in this life, he takes care of me, giving me honor or lack of honor, according to what my faith needs. And Christian faith trusts that whatever I miss out on in this life, Jesus will more than make up in heaven. That's the real glory we have coming. Faith understands that. The honors and the glory of this life, the popularity here, the excitement of being in the middle of things, none of that lasts. You don't have to be a Christian to see that. We've all seen the pathetic spectacle of the washed up sports hero who won't retire, or the has-been entertainer trying to restart his or her career, or the child actor engaging in the most appalling behavior because nobody's paying attention anymore. Even people of this life know that glory passes here. But what we know is that better glory is coming. Even if we never have any glory here, we will have the glory of Christ in heaven.

When I was describing the humble life of faith, did it make you feel guilty? That's a natural reaction for sinners to have. None of us lives that life perfectly. But every time we hear that Christ has taken our failures away, God works in our hearts to teach us to live a more Christian life. Jesus has washed away all your failures to live a humble, joyful life of service. You are forgiven. Knowing his love is the key to living a life of trust and humility here. God sees me. God knows what my life is like and what I'm doing. God knows my sin, but he also knows the faith he gave me. God has a special place in heaven just for me. You and I will share the glory of Christ for all eternity. Until we get there, our God will watch over us and give us all that is best for us here. Glory, honor, and disappointment and even failure all serve our spiritual good. God gives them to us to keep us on the road to heaven.

Many years ago, I was talking with a woman about pride and I made the point that humility is the Christian virtue. She said to me, "I've always thought that was one of the problems with Christianity." Does that sound familiar? God calls us to be humble. God calls us to trust in him and to live for Christ knowing that we have a greater glory coming than anything we can achieve here. Trust his promise and live humbly. Amen.