

IF MY PEOPLE
Humility
Scripture: Job 40:1-14

INTRO: I was to begin on the book of Amos this morning, but Amos said he would stay around, if I needed to I could speak on something else. But, though Amos may stay around longer, I never know how long I will. And if I should not, I sense I should rather give the message I am planning to give this morning first. I have given this message once before and some of you may remember it, but you will not remember all of it, and may it come as a reminder to all of us of an important matter. And so, for the rest of this message, with only minor changes, I will give word for word what I have given once before. And so here is the message.

A verse of Scripture that becomes common to almost every believer who attends church regularly for any amount of time is 2 Chronicles 7:14. It says, "...if my people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will forgive their sin and heal their land."

Now this is one of the greatest verses on revival there is in all the Bible. One could do a message on every phrase in this verse. I believe I need revival. I believe this church needs revival. I believe the Christians in this community need revival. And this verse speaks to the people of God, "...if My people..." These are God's people. And it is God's people that are in need here. These are God's people who are called by His name, "...if my people who are called by My name..."

Now these people, who are God's people, stand in need. And the very first need they have is the need for humility. "...if my people which are called by My name shall humble themselves..." There is the great need of mankind. This past week, as I sat in my office, the power flicked off. As I sat there trying to figure out what to do, I made some phone calls I needed to make. And then my eyes fell on a book I had not yet finished written by Andrew Murray called, "Humility." I had been sent this book by a cousin from Manitoba but had not finished reading it in over a year, though I was almost done. So I picked it up and finished it. Now through the week I had worked on the first message on a number of messages I want to do on God. But through the week something else wanted to crowd into my

mind. And as I put those thoughts together, this message began to formulate.

"...If my people who are called by my name will humble themselves..." I want to point out why the need for these words in Scripture. Very few people are as familiar with the verse before this one as they are with the one I read. As a matter of fact, 2 Chronicles 7:14 starts in the middle of a sentence. The verse before this one, the first part of the sentence reads like this: "When I shut up heaven and there is no rain, or command the locusts to devour the land, or send pestilence among My people..." Then he goes on to say, "...if my people..."

You see, the setting is a time that is one of drought and grasshoppers in the land; a time of blight and blasting. God has allowed a hard time to set in because of the hardness of the people. We find ourselves in such circumstances spiritually sometimes because the soul has grown hard and callous.

John R. Rice writes of people, when their hearts are like this. In his writings he quotes B. H. Carroll like this: I have witnessed a drought in Texas. The earth was iron and the heavens brass. Dust clouded the thoroughfares and choked the travelers. Watercourses ran dry, grass scorched and crackled, corn leaves twisted and wilted, stock died around the last water holes, the ground cracked in fissures, and the song of birds died out in parched throats. Men despaired. The whole earth prayed: 'Rain, rain, rain! O Heaven, send rain!' Suddenly a cloud rises above the horizon and floats into vision like an angel of hope. It spreads a cool shade over the burning and glowing earth. Expectation gives life to desire. The lowing herds look up. The shriveled flowers open their tiny cups. The corn leaves untwist and rustle with gladness. And just when all trusting, suffering life opens her confiding heart to the promise of relief, the cloud, the cheating cloud, like a heartless coquette, gathers her drapery about her and floats scornfully away, leaving the angry sun free to dart his fires of death into the open heart of all suffering life."

I wonder if you say this morning, "Pastor Phil, the picture those words painted describe how my heart feels. I am in a time of drought. I need God like that land needed rain." The very first thing God says we need to do is humble

ourselves, and before we humble ourselves we must see our need for humility. We must come to desire humility.

Andrew Murray writes, "Is it any wonder that the Christian life is so often feeble and fruitless, when the very root of the Christ life (i.e. humility) is neglected or unknown? Is it any wonder that the joy of salvation is so little felt, when that in which Christ found it and brings it, is so little sought? Until a humility which will rest in nothing less than the end and death of self; which give up all honor of men as Jesus did, to seek the honor that comes from God alone; which absolutely makes and counts itself nothing, that God may be all that the Lord alone may be exalted, until such a humility be what we seek in Christ above our chief joy, and welcome at any price, there is little hope of a religion that will conquer the world" (10).

I want to ask you, dear brother or sister, is your soul dry. Do you want rain? Let me continue this quote, "I cannot too earnestly plead with my reader, if possibly his attention has never yet been specially directed (to) the lack of humility within him or around him, to pause to ask whether he sees much of the spirit of the meek and lowly Lamb of God in those who are called by His name. Let him consider how all want of love; all indifference to the needs, the feelings, the weakness of others; all sharp and hasty judgments and utterances, so often excused under the plea of being outright and honest; all manifestations of temper and touchiness and irritation; and all feelings of bitterness and estrangement have their roots in nothing but pride, that ever seeks itself, and his eyes will be opened to see how a dark, shall I not say a devilish pride creeps in almost everywhere, the assemblies of the saints not excepted. Let him begin to ask what would be the effect if in himself and around him, if towards fellow saints and the world, believers were really permanently guided by the humility of Jesus; and let him say if the cry of our whole heart, night and day, ought not to be, Oh for the humility of Jesus in myself and all around me! let him honestly fix his heart on his own lack of the humility, which has been revealed in the likeness of Christ's life, and in the whole character of His redemption, and he will begin to feel as if he had never yet really known what Christ and His salvation are" end quote (11).

When we are dry and fruitless and loveless, what is likely the chief cause? Pride! And do we say, "Oh for rain. Oh my soul is dry. It is parched and dry cracks are everywhere. Everything seems so hopeless." Let me take a brief moment to show you how helpless we are when we are stuck in our pride. It is some time ago now that I preached through the book of Job. I believe, as you know, that the book of Job describes to us how God removed the tumor of pride from a very righteous man, a man now in great danger of being destroyed by pride.

So I want to show you from this book what kind of a job it is for God to remove pride from us. In Job 40, God is done with revealing to Job that he has a tumor, and that it must be removed if he is not to be ruined. Now it will be Job's turn to respond. (Let me insert this here. Could it be that God has permitted into my life or your life some very hard circumstance. And maybe it is to root out some thing out of our lives we have never yet mastered. Could God be seeking our attention in this hard circumstance?) So let us read 40:1-2. Then Job responds in 40:3-5 (read). In other words Job says, "I am a very wicked sinner and I have no answers." Job has been reduced to nothing. You see, God likes to create out of nothing. When we are still something, He cannot make much of us. So we must be reduced to impotence, to nothing.

Now let us read verses 6-14. As I see it, God is saying, "Job, I will give you the job of humbling man, and if you can do it, you can just say good bye to Me. You then do not need me any more. Any man with the power to humble people, can save himself. He does not need Me any more."

Now let me summarize verses 15-24 for you. God is saying, "Job, I want you to consider the largest dinosaur there is on land, behemoth. Catch him, and put a ring through his nose and tame him down, and if you can do that when he is awake, then you can humble man. Then Job, find the largest dinosaur in water, leviathan, and cast a fishing line out, hook him and pull him in, and if you can do that I will acknowledge that you can humble man. You see, Job, pride is so forcibly bound in every human being, that you, as a mere man, have not even the slimmest chance of rooting it out. And Job, it is growing in you, and if I do not remove it, you are finished." And now I want you to see, what it took 42 chapters in this book to bring about (read 42:1-6).

Now Job's pride was of the very worst kind. Pride of righteousness or spiritual pride is the very worst, and of course, truly spiritual people stand in the gravest danger of this kind of pride. Is it therefore best not to become truly spiritual? Of course not. So one must learn to achieve greater spirituality in the midst of greater danger.

Murray says, "Let all teachers of holiness, whether in the pulpit or on the platform, and all seekers after holiness, whether in the closet or the convention, take warning. There is no pride so dangerous, because none is subtle and insidious, as the pride of holiness. It is not that a man ever says or even thinks, 'Stand by; I am holier than thou.' No, indeed, the thought would be regarded with abhorrence. But there grows up, all unconsciously, a hidden habit of soul, which feels complacency its attainments, and cannot help seeing how far it is in advance of others" end quote (45).

Now let me make a point I have made in other messages. God does not humble us. We are commanded by God to humble ourselves. Therefore Scriptures says, "If my people which are called by my name shall humble themselves..." But since pride is so bound in the heart of man that we are incapable of ourselves to deal with pride, God has to bring us to the point of humbling ourselves. So, we ask, what does God use to bring us to the point where we humble ourselves? Well God says in 1 Chronicles 7:13, "When I shut up heaven and there is no rain, or command the locusts to devour the land, or send pestilence among My people..." What does He use to bring us to where we pray? What does He use to bring us to where we seek His face? What does He use to bring us to where we turn from our wicked ways? Various hard circumstances in life. Various trials and testings. That is why He sent grasshoppers and drought to Israel. Through these things he sought to bring them to the point where they will humble themselves before Him.

And how is true humility revealed? It is revealed in how we deal with each other. Murray writes, "The humble man looks upon the feeblest and unworthiest child of God, and honors him and prefers him in honor as the son of a king. The spirit of Him who washed the disciples' feet, makes it a joy for us to be indeed the least, to be servants of one another. The humble man feels no jealousy or envy. He can praise God when others are preferred and blessed before

him. He can bear to hear others praised and himself forgotten, because in God's presence he has learned to say with Paul, 'I am nothing.' He has received the spirit of Jesus, who pleased not Himself, and sought not His own honor, as the spirit of his life."

So let me take you to an instructive passage in 2 Corinthians (read 2 Corinthians 12:1-4). Here Paul reveals a tremendous spiritual experience he has had but he does it in such a fashion as to not draw attention to himself. Now look at verses 5-7 (read). This messenger of Satan is a demon. The word 'messenger' is the one usually translated 'angel'. And Satan's angels are demons. We do not know what the thorn in the flesh was that God allowed to come into his life, but I suppose that it could be one of many and various things that God allows. And God allowed this for one purpose; to keep Paul humble. Because of the great experiences God allowed Paul to have for God's own benefit, and because these might cause him to become puffed up with pride and ruined, He allowed this messenger from Satan to buffet him.

Well, this did something for Paul. It caused him to pray. The other day my wife and I were burdened with a new bit of news and right there we poured out our hearts to the Lord and asked Him to intervene. And my wife wondered why God allowed such things to happen. And I said, "Well, if it had not been for this, we probably would not have prayed like this." The water of God's power always fills the lowest places. Have you noticed that about water? And when we are too high, He cannot fill us. So Paul prayed, and he prayed three times.

Now look at verse 9a, what God said to him (read). God's strength is made perfect in man's weakness! Let that flow through your mind and wrestle with it. It is not in human strength, or man's giftedness that God shows Himself. We have to be reduced to the lowest before He can use us the most. God's strength is made perfect in weakness.

Now consider Paul's response to God's denial of his prayer request (read 9b-10). I have pondered these verses for years. Can I boast in my infirmities? Can I take pleasure in my weaknesses? In my reproaches? I can take pleasure in being well spoken of. Can I take pleasure in being evil spoken of? Can I take pleasure in my needs? I can take pleasure in bountiful supply; a good crop; a good garden; a

good paycheck. Can I take pleasure in my needs? A poor crop? A poor garden? A poor paycheck? Can I take pleasure in persecutions? I can take pleasure in support and help, but can I take pleasure in persecutions? Can I take pleasure in my distresses, those things that pull me down? I can take pleasure in the good things that happen to me, and bring me up, but what of the other? And why could Paul rejoice in these? Because when he was weak, then he was strong, then the power of Christ rested upon him.

You see, what Paul had taken as a problem, God said was actually a blessing. Andrew Murray says that in the weakness and humiliation the trials brought, the grace and strength of the Lord could be better manifested. Now, instead of asking God to remove it, he took pleasure in it. Now, instead of wanting to get rid of this thing, he wanted it to continue for here he learned that the place of humility brought power and blessing and joy.

Andrew Murray says that every Christian passes through these two stages in his pursuit of humility. In the first, he fears and flees and seeks deliverance from all that can humble him. As my wife and I sat at the table that day when we prayed, she said, "I have no use for mediocre Christianity, but I don't like this either." How do you like mediocre Christianity? Is it not disgusting? Is that not why God says, "I will vomit you out?" But if we do not like mediocre Christianity, are we willing to pay the price for power? The fivefold price is spelled out for us here: infirmities; persecutions; needs; reproaches; distresses. How would you like to pray like this: *Lord, if You deem it necessary to root some pride out of my life, please allow into my life some infirmities or some persecutions or some needs or reproaches or distresses into my life. I do not like mediocre Christianity, and I love humility and I am willing to pay any price for this. Please answer my requests as You see fit.*

Could I pray like that? But if we love humility, and have learned to boast in these things and take pleasure in them, might we not well pray like that? But rather we pray for prosperity and blessing in every physical way. We pray for rain and snow and so on. But who or what is it for?

So Murray says we go through these two stages, first we fear and flee and seek deliverance from such things as can humble us. We have not yet learned to seek humility. We

pray for humility. We admire humility. We want to be humble like Jesus was. And then the means to humility comes and we run and hide. I am reminded of when God told Moses to cast his rod on the ground and he did so and it became a snake and he turned and ran from it in fear. We ask God to teach us humility, He does so and we turn and run. Murray says such a man is not yet so in love with humility as the beauty of the Lamb of God, and the joy of heaven, that he would sell all to procure it (68).

Murray then says this: "But can we hope to reach the stage in which this will be the case? Undoubtedly. And what will it be that brings us there? That which brought Paul there—a new revelation of the Lord Jesus. Nothing but the presence of God can reveal and expel self" (68). Murray repeats this saying as a necessary fact for us to know, "The danger of pride is greater and nearer than we think, and the grace for humility too."

Now you may say, "I do not want these kinds of things in my life. Is there no other way to humility? Is there no easier way?" Let me quote from Murray again, "To every Christian the command comes from the throne of God Himself: humble yourself. The earnest attempt to listen and obey will be rewarded, yes, rewarded with the painful discovery of two things. The one, what depth of pride, that is of unwillingness to count oneself and to be counted nothing, to submit absolutely to God, there was that one never knew. The other, what utter impotence there is in all our efforts and in all our prayers, too, for God's help, to destroy the hideous monster." In other words, all our efforts and prayers are helpless unless we humble ourselves by our actual actions.

So here is the inexorable law of Scripture: We must humble ourselves, and when we have done so, God will exalt us. Now, you see, when God exalts us, then we are again in danger of pride. So we must learn to grow spiritually and learn to overcome pride at every turn.

It is not until we truly learn humility that we see pride as a hideous monster. And the deepest humility, according to Murray, is the secret of the truest happiness, of a joy that nothing can destroy. I think I would not be wrong to reword 2 Chronicles 7:14 like this: "If any believer, who is called by My name will humble himself, and pray and seek My face, and turn from his wicked ways, then I will hear

from heaven, and will forgive his sin, and put joy back in his soul."

Let me close by quoting, "A Prayer for Humility" found at the close of the book from which I have quoted so much. Here is what Murray writes, "I will here give you an infallible touchstone that will try all to the truth. It is this: retire from the world and all conversation only for one month; stop all the former workings of your heart and mind; and with all the strength of your heart, stand all this month, as continually as you can, in the following form of prayer to God. Offer it frequently on your knees; but whether sitting or walking, or standing, be always inwardly longing, and earnestly praying this one prayer to God: (Now Murray is hard to understand and I have reworded the prayer as I interpret it so it is more understandable to our way of speaking today)

"Lord, I pray that You would make known to me of Your great goodness, and that You would take from my heart every kind and form and degree of Pride, whether it be from evil spirits or my own corrupt nature. And I pray that You would awaken in the deepest depth and truth of that Humility, that which can make me capable of Your light and Holy Spirit."

Reject every thought, but that of waiting and praying in this matter from the bottom of your heart with such truth and earnestness, as people in torment wish to pray and be delivered from it...If you can and will give yourself up in truth and sincerity to this spirit of prayer, I will venture to affirm that if you have twice as many evil spirits as Mary Magdalene had, they will all be cast out of you, and you will be forced with her to weep tears of love at the feet of the holy Jesus" (81).

Pride, how big of a problem is it to man? Well, it is huge. If you or I could make people truly humble, we would not need Jesus as our savior, we could save ourselves. If we but recognize how powerless we are to save ourselves from one little sin, we will begin to see how huge pride is. We are hopelessly bound. But it is also this great potential to pride, that gives us the opportunity to bring the greatest glory to God. Every time I bow my stiff neck and repent and turn to God; every time I choose to do something in humility I bring great glory to God, and this is what He made me for.

If the Lord spoke to you this morning, and you will know it by whether He brought conviction to bear on your heart, I want to give you opportunity to humble yourselves. You see, you do not have to do this. You have the choice. I will give you the five areas to which you may respond and then I will give you opportunity to stand to indicate God spoke to you and you want to do something about it. If you don't want to do something about it, no need to stand.

First, if you say, "God has spoken to me about something I have to go make right. This will be extremely hard, pray for me." That is called humbling yourself. If you do so God will exalt you in due time.

Second, you may say, "I have never seen my infirmities, or my weaknesses, or reproaches or needs or persecutions or distresses as opportunities to become humble." Pray for me that I will be able to begin to glory in these things as Paul did.

Third, maybe you say I did not realize that all want of love; all indifference to the needs, the feelings, the weakness of others; all sharp and hasty judgments and utterances, so often excused under the plea of being outright and honest; all manifestations of temper and touchiness and irritation; and all feelings of bitterness and estrangement have their roots in nothing but pride. I want to acknowledge my need and ask you to pray for me in this area.

Fourth, maybe you say, "I am ready to surrender myself entirely to God in this and I want Him to do whatever He deems necessary to release me from my pride. I am ready to pray this prayer: *Lord, if You deem it necessary to root some pride out of my life, please allow into my life some infirmities or some persecutions or some needs or reproaches or distresses into my life. I do not like mediocre Christianity, and I love humility and I am willing to pay any price for this. Please answer my requests as You see fit.*"

And last, if God spoke to you in some way other than this and you wish prayer, I invite you to stand along with others who wish to indicate God spoke to them and they want to change some area or deal with something.

We're going to sing, "Spirit of the Living God" twice, and during that time you may stand.