

**WISDOM FROM HEAVEN FOR LIFE ON EARTH - Practical Studies From Proverbs - Part twelve**

Teaching #1853 - Sunday, January 3rd, 2015 - 6:00 p.m.

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**PRIDE, HUMILITY AND THE ROAD TO THE GOOD LIFE**

Tonight we continue our examination of the good life from the book of Proverbs with an examination of pride, and its opposite, humility. And it's important that these two conditions of heart be looked at carefully because, when the good life is being considered, there are two paths that can be chosen. One of them, fueled by human pride, *seems* to lead logically to personal advancement. The other, the path of humility, would appear to go against the grain of upward progress and self-momentum. We can't imagine the humble coming out on top.

But this is to base our choice only on *immediate appearances* rather than the foundation of **God's Word**. The truth of the Word that goes against every natural fiber of our being is that *self-promotion* always works against the joy and presence of the Lord in the heart. So, in a sense, the Christian desiring to please the Lord and find the good life **on God's terms** will always have to turn against some of his or her natural instincts. This is made clear in an account of court etiquette from Proverbs that Jesus later turned into a parable about pride and humility in all of life:

1) **IN THE LONG RUN A PROUD HEART WILL LEAD THE LIFE INTO SELF-DESTRUCTION AND A FALL**

**Proverbs 25:6-7** - "Do not put yourself forward in the king's presence or stand in the place of the great, [7] for it is better to be told, "Come up here," than to be put lower in the presence of a noble...."

Apparently Jesus saw great teaching power in this specific account from Proverbs. Notice the similarity of the proverbs with Jesus' own parabolic story:

**Luke 14:7-11** - "Now he told a parable to those who were invited, when he noticed how they chose the places of honor, saying to them, [8] "When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in a place of honor, lest someone more distinguished than you be invited by him, [9] and he who invited you both will come and say to you, 'Give your place to this person,' and then you will begin with shame to take the lowest place. [10] But when you are invited, go and sit in the lowest place, so that when your host comes he may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at table with you. [11] For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

While Jesus' story is colored with more detail to flesh out the parable, you can see some of the key similarities:

- a) ***There is the obvious disaster that comes from not knowing your place.*** We are meant to see ourselves here. We all have the tendency to see ourselves as **deserving** of places of honor. True, none of us would **admit** that. But this is not a matter of the words we say. The person moved down at the banquet demonstrated his pride in assuming no one else was more deserving of the seat of honor than he was. If there are no place-cards the best seats are simply up for grabs - first come, first served.

For the majority of us, who do not **see** ourselves as proud - at least not as a rule - remember, Jesus wasn't making His story up. This exhibition of pride actually happened. He was **at** the feast and **saw** the people aiming at the best seats. It was the **activity** of the people that spawned this parable.

We may not act with such brazen, obvious pride in our own social circles. But that's not really the point. We all, in different ways, show even uglier pride **before God**. At every point where I refuse instant, joyful submission to His will, it's because my own pride has arrogantly viewed the whole created order upside-down.

- b) ***There is another kingdom coming where the proud will be abased.*** Jesus uses the way things frequently are in ***this*** world to show how different they will be in ***another***. The power of the parable is in the ***contrasting*** of the way things work in two very different kingdoms.

This is a key point. Jesus is ***not*** saying that human pride is always overturned so visibly in this world. It isn't. This world usually admires the man with a high opinion of himself, as long as he carries it off politely. But there is ***another kingdom coming***. And while not all exhibitions of pride and self get so publicly reversed in ***this*** age, the inevitable reward of the humble and rebuking of the proud is certain to come. And the wise will prepare their hearts ***now*** for that kingdom.

As is always the case, both the account in Proverbs and the parable of Jesus remind us that it is all but impossible to advance successfully in the eyes of both the proud of this world and the ruler of the glorious age to come. We must all make a wise choice ***between*** kingdoms. We can't have it ***both*** ways.

So pride leads to abasement while humility brings honor. There are at least two other Proverbs that summarize this message in even shorter, more direct statements:

**Proverbs 18:12** - "Before destruction a man's heart is haughty, but humility comes before honor."

**Proverbs 29:23** - "One's pride will bring him low, but he who is lowly in spirit will obtain honor."

## 2) **THE REASON PRIDE ALWAYS BRINGS ULTIMATE FAILURE IS THE PROUD PERSON SETS HIMSELF AGAINST GOD, AND GOD SETS HIMSELF AGAINST THE PROUD**

Pride heads the list of the things God hates:

**Proverbs 6:16-19** - "There are six things that the LORD hates, seven that are an abomination to him: [17] ***haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, [18] a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that make haste to run to evil, [19] a false witness who breathes out lies, and one who sows discord among brothers.***"

**Proverbs 16:5** - "Everyone who is arrogant in heart is an abomination to the LORD; be assured, he will not go unpunished."

That word ***abomination*** is the same word applied to those who commit homosexual acts, or acts of idolatry. God is not at all ***neutral*** about the proud heart. This is what makes their ultimate ruin certain - ***assuredly he will not go unpunished.***"

## 3) **HOW CAN I KNOW IF I HAVE A PROUD HEART?**

Because this is such a serious matter in God's eyes, He has left us some absolute guidelines - tell-tale signs of a proud heart:

- a) ***A proud person mocks truth - Proverbs 21:24*** - "Scoffer is the name of the arrogant, haughty man who acts with arrogant pride."

In this sense the proud person is much like the fool. The most dangerous thing about the peril of his soul is he has set himself against ever honestly facing his actual condition. Like the fool, he mocks those who lovingly try to straighten him out. The one thing he desperately ***needs*** to know about himself is his true condition. And that is the one thing he won't ***receive***. He scoffs and mocks those to whom he most needs to listen.

- b) ***A proud person is always a contentious person - Proverbs 13:10 - “By insolence comes nothing but strife, but with those who take advice is wisdom.”***

This is somewhat related to the last point. The proud person would rather fight than change. He will argue against what he knows is the truth. He just doesn't have the humility required to honestly embrace truth when it is going to cost him admitting he might be wrong.

For this reason, you can never show a proud person anything worth while about himself without him arguing against it, even before you have the words out of your mouth. Humility can honestly *listen* to even the harshest criticism *before* it responds.

- c) ***The proud person's words are bigger than his actions - Proverbs 25:14 - “Like clouds and wind without rain is a man who boasts of a gift he does not give.”***

It's better to *undersell* than to *oversell*. I know this doesn't work well in the world of advertising, but it is the rule of the kingdom. Dark clouds and strong storm winds may have the *appearance* of rain, but the appearance alone won't offer moisture to parched ground.

Sometimes we can forget our own limitations. We can forget that we can't last five minutes without fresh breath from the Father's hand. James addressed this same issue:

**James 4:13-16 - “Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit”— [14] yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. [15] Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.” [16] As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.”**

I don't take these words to mean that Christians must say the words, “**Lord willing,**” like some lucky charm, before everything they do. Rather, I think James is talking about an *antidote* to the natural growth of pride in our hearts. He's saying we all need to remember our *dependance* upon the Lord every day we live. We are to do nothing ***as though we had the capacity to accomplish it all in our own strength.***

In typical fashion, the New Testament takes the truth of the Old Testament (in this case about our proud *words*) and *deepens* its application to the level of the ***intentions and plans of our heart*** (as James does).

- d) ***The proud are marked by greed and refuse to make room for God in their thoughts and affections - Psalm 10:3-4 - “For the wicked boasts of the desires of his soul, and the one greedy for gain curses and renounces the LORD. [4] In the pride of his face the wicked does not seek him; all his thoughts are, “There is no God.”***

While this verse isn't from Proverbs, I picked it because of the profound insight it contains about the root of atheism. Atheism in the Scriptures isn't linked to *ignorance*. In other words, it's not that there is a shortage of legitimate evidence for God in this world.

Atheism has its root in greed and pride. The proud are so in love with themselves they can't afford to have their affections and pursuits distracted by anyone else - including God. The order of events in this verse is also important. People don't deny God, then, because they know God doesn't exist, turn to wickedness.

Quite the opposite. They love wickedness. Then they *reject* God (which is different from *disproving* God). In the end, they can't afford to give God room in their hearts. There simply isn't enough room for another god on the throne of their life.

#### 4) THE CREATION OF A HUMBLE HEART

If the Scriptures sound the warning about the dangers of unchecked pride, they also offer beautiful words of hope and promise for those who will trust God with their future enough to live life humbly in this pride-admiring world:

- a) ***Humility grows as we live life in the fear of the Lord - Proverbs 22:4 - "The reward for humility and fear of the LORD is riches and honor and life."***

Notice how humility and the fear of the Lord are linked together in this verse. You can't just *manufacture* a truly humble heart. Humility doesn't come from running yourself down or denying your talents and abilities. Humility comes from *God-consciousness*. It comes from living life with an awareness of our stature as God's *creation* and devoting our lives to *servicing* His purposes.

- b) ***Humility comes from devoting your energies to the greater glory of God - Proverbs 25:27 - "It is not good to eat much honey, nor is it glorious to seek one's own glory."***

Giving God glory involves much more than singing praise and worship choruses. It has to do with a life-style that is so far beyond selfish pursuits that people can't help but notice you are more passionate about God than about yourself.

This is the way Peter said people would want to know the reason for hope that was in us:

**1 Peter 3:14-15 - "But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, [15] but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect...."**

How you and I react when persecuted and intimidated shows whether we are devoted to protecting our own self-interest or love God and the spread of the gospel far more. This is only one example in the Scriptures of what it means to devote ourselves to the glory of God.

- c) ***True humility only comes to those who listen to God and others - Proverbs 11:2 - "When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with the humble is wisdom."***

Also **Proverbs 12:15 - "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice."**

Anyone can *say* he loves humility (who in his right mind would admit to loving pride?). But humility can only grow in painful soil. Humble people take correction. They *listen*. And because they *listen*, they become *wise*. There is no short-cut to wisdom. It only accumulates in the mind of the humble.

#### 5) THE PATTERN OF HUMILITY

**Philippians 2:5-11 - "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, [6] who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, [7] but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. [8] And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. [9] Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, [10] so that at the name of**

**Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, [11] and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”**

What wonderful words. How the course of this whole world has been eternally changed through the humble power of Jesus Christ. It makes you wonder if He didn't also have *Himself* in mind when he told our opening parable in Luke 14.