

“Faith That Moves Mountains: Faith to be Humble”

Scripture: Luke 18:9-14

Graphics: mountains, prayer, temple

Big Truth: Faith is the bedrock of our relationship with God and with others. Faith impacts every part of our lives - or should. Jesus repeatedly calls his disciples to understand faith in the context of the mission to make disciples and transform the world. In this series, the people of Panama UMC we'll hear Jesus instruct the disciples about forgiveness, about being healed...faith to persist in prayer, and faith to humble ourselves before the Lord. Faith small enough to do incredible things but all we need to allow God to do them through us.

Focus Phrase: I have faith to be humble before the Lord and others.

1. Introduction

A. PRAY!

- B. In order to orient us a little this morning, let's look back at where we've been in this sermon series on Faith...called Faith that Moves Mountains.
- C. It's all based on **Matthew 17:20**, where Jesus said to his disciples, “For truly I tell you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you.”
- D. THAT kind of faith can move the mountain of **forgiveness** in our lives...as we repent and seek reconciliation. Because of the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, we (followers of Jesus) HAVE the **faith to forgive**.
- E. You and I also have the **faith to heal** - to BE healed and to heal others. And this isn't always - and maybe not even primarily - about physical healing. Our faith draws us into the healing waters of the Holy Spirit...to heal from any wound or hurt...if we allow the Spirit to move in our lives. That also causes healing in other people's lives.
- F. Last week, Jesus said that your faith opens the door to **persistent prayer**. This isn't about praying the same prayer over and over to nag God. But the faith to go to prayer always and often, in every season and circumstance, ASSURED that God hears your prayer and is answering them. Prayer is powerful because of the power of the ONE to whom we pray.
- G. Today, Jesus continues with His parables in Luke 18. This time, it's not aimed at the disciples - although they are no doubt listening in. This one was taught to, as Luke says in 18:9, “...some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt.”
- H. Jesus may have been speaking to the first century Pharisees...but we sometimes find ourselves in this same group. And Jesus gives us a clear path to take if we do...to be changed, freed, and filled with new life.

- I. Instead of regret, anger, and pain, Jesus' invitation to every one of us today is to be humble before the Lord...and have a right relationship with Him.
- J. Write this down in your notes or in the margin of your bible: **I have faith to be humble before the Lord and others.** (repeat)
- K. James 4:10 says, "Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up."
- L. That's where we're headed today...let's open our bibles to Luke 18, starting in verse 9...the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector.

2. Scripture

A. READ Luke 18:9-14

- B. Since we didn't get enough of Rev. E.M. Bounds last week, I think, here's his quote about this parable, "The Pharisee's proud estimate of himself and his supreme contempt for his neighbor closed the gates of prayer to him, while humility opened wide those gates to the defamed and reviled publican."
- C. Who are these two characters in this parable - the Pharisee and the tax collector?
 - i. Well, both were Jewish - we know that.
 - ii. The real Pharisees in Jesus' day were religious leaders. Men who studied and knew the Jewish Law. They were the leaders in the Temple and the representatives of God in the culture. Of the two characters in this parable, the Pharisee was the ones who **should know** how to pray to God. Yet, the real Pharisees were also accused by Jesus many times in scripture of having a form of religion without power.
 - iii. Or they would say one thing, because they knew the Law intimately, and DO something else, because they wanted to. Here are Jesus' words in Matthew 23:2-3, "The Pharisees and the teachers of the Law are experts in the Law of Moses. So obey everything they teach you, but don't do as they do. After all, they say one thing and do something else." Actions speak louder than words.
 - iv. What about the tax collector - or publican, as he's sometimes called? Throughout scripture, we read about real tax collectors like Matthew, and we know that they were despised by other Jews. Their job was to collect taxes from the Jews and give that money to the Romans, who were occupying the region. The tax collectors were often corrupted by money and would charge more than was required in order to skim money off the top and become rich.
 - v. So, you can imagine, they were not only despised, but were often sinners who were dishonest.

- D. That's why this parable is so shocking to those listening. It's upside-down for the target audience, which Luke told us was, "...some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt."
- E. The Pharisee was the good guy, right? The tax collector was the bad guy, right? Not according to Jesus, who doesn't care about your title or your status...but only your heart.
- F. The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed (dramatically), "O Lord, thank you (so far so good, right?) that I'm not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, and EVEN (gasp) like this tax collector!"
- i. Wow! And as if that wasn't enough, he went on to brag, "I fast twice per week and give 10% of all my income."
 - ii. Now, if we take those prayers and disconnect them from the parable, they aren't necessarily invalid prayers. "Thank you" is always a good start. Not being a thief is what God expects...or an adulterer...or rogue (whatever that means). Fasting twice per week is like Jesus who fasted. Giving 10% of your income is what God invites us to do.
 - iii. But if you put all that in the context of the Pharisee who stood with pride in the Temple, and proclaimed to God that he was thankful that he wasn't like other people (somehow better and more holy) and that he DID these things to prove he was righteous, this character becomes dubious very quickly.
 - iv. We, totally, get the sense that this character is filled with pride, is self-righteous, and has set himself above everyone else.
- G. But (my favorite word in all of scripture), BUT, the other man - the tax collector - standing far off (perhaps in the corner as far away from the Holy of Holies as he could get), **wouldn't even LOOK UP to heaven.**
- i. He was beating his breast. I found this on thecompassnews.com, "The practice of striking one's breast is profoundly human and humble. For some, it conveys great emotion, usually extreme sorrow or sadness. You may recall stories of people beating their chests at funerals. In the Old Testament the Book of Nahum 2:7, speaking of the city of Nineveh, states: "The mistress is led forth captive, and her maidservants led away, moaning like doves, beating their breasts. In the New Testament, we are told that after the crucifixion of Jesus many went away beating their breasts" (Lk 23:48). In a religious sense, beating one's breast is an outward sign of inward contrition or sorrow. In Jewish tradition, at any time during a confession, when words to the effect "we have sinned" are stated, the left breast over the heart is struck with the right fist. In doing this, one is "taking to heart" the words being spoken and turning to penitence."

- ii. And that's exactly what the tax collector said. He wouldn't look up, was beating his breast in penitence, and simply prayed, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." ...from Psalm 51.
 - iii. A simple prayer. A prayer for every person who ever lived. Nothing else needed to be said. No proving he was right. Or that he was even worthy or better or righteous or holy. Just a prayer for mercy...for sin.
- H. In verse 14, Jesus told them the outcome of someone who is like the Pharisee and of someone who is like the tax collector.
- i. The tax collector went down from the Temple and went home justified. Being justified means that he was in a right-standing with God. God was pleased. Despite his sin, the tax collector was justified.
 - ii. In John Wesley's order of salvation, justifying grace is the grace that, in a moment, is given to us by God for salvation. It is the moment when we enter into a saving relationship with God through Jesus Christ. The tax collector was justified.
 - iii. But the Pharisee was not.
 - iv. And, according to Jesus, all who exalt THEMSELVES will be humbled - in the end, when they stand before God is judgement - and ALL who humble themselves now will be exalted - in the end, when they stand before God.
- I. This parable is about having the faith in Jesus that, whatever we face today, we can be humble before the Lord and before others.

3. Application

- A. Mother Teresa said this, "These are the few ways we can practice humility:
 To speak as little as possible of one's self.
 To mind one's own business.
 Not to want to manage other people's affairs.
 To avoid curiosity.
 To accept contradictions and correction cheerfully.
 To pass over the mistakes of others.
 To accept insults and injuries.
 To accept being slighted, forgotten and disliked.
 To be kind and gentle even under provocation.
 Never to stand on one's dignity.
 To choose always the hardest." — Mother Teresa, *The Joy in Loving: A Guide to Daily Living*
- B. Pride is the posture of upright and self-righteous. Humility is the posture of heads bowed and often on your knees before the Lord, knowing that your only righteousness comes from God alone...not yourself or your status or title.
- C. Are there areas in your life right now that are suffering because you have allowed yourself to take the posture of pride?

- D. Are there areas of your life today in which you believe you deserve more, need something more, or that you need to prove yourself to someone else?
- E. If I'm honest, I'd have to answer yes to those questions. I've put faith in myself and not in God's power over me and my life. **"God, have mercy on me, a sinner."** (join me in saying that, if you can relate) (repeat)
- F. Our only response is to refocus our eyes on Jesus...always!
- G. Last week, we were challenged to pray persistently.
- H. This week, we're challenged to **pray submissively**.
- I. But how do you find faith to be humble when everything you feel is offense and trial and pride? You and I believe in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. But do you and I have such faith in Him that we are willing to risk everything to be humble in this life? Truly humble before the Lord and others?
- J. The tax collector showed his faith to be humble, and maybe you and I can too:
 - i. First, it starts with admitting that **you are nothing before God**.
 - a. That doesn't mean you are nothing. It also doesn't mean God doesn't love you, value you, and want His best for you.
 - b. This is about the faith to take a posture of humility. You are nothing **in the presence of our holy God**. That's just truth. God is all-powerful, all-knowing, is everywhere. You aren't any of those things.
 - c. But, truly, isn't that awesome?! Isn't that the best place to be? You can faithfully let God be God and you can give your life to Him, knowing He has the plan for today and the future.
 - d. The Pharisee thought he was everything before God. Jesus said the opposite is God's best plan and the only posture that pleases Him.
 - e. Have the faith to be small before God.
 - ii. Second, **trust in the grace and mercy God gives you**.
 - a. We must have faith that God is willing to give us what we don't deserve and willing to not give us what we do deserve. He wants to give us favor and abundant life. He wants to save us from our sin, our pride, and our thinking that we can do it all on our own.
 - b. Have faith to fall into the arms of the loving Savior - who willfully went to the cross and into that stone tomb. Have faith that on the third day He rose again, ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of Father. Have faith that, by his power, Jesus is running the show and His gift is mercy and grace.
 - c. Jesus offers you grace and mercy when you come to Him in repentance. You can't save yourself, but Jesus wants to. Will you let Him?

iii. Lastly, **follow the example of Jesus.**

- a. As we look back over this series about faith...**Jesus had perfect faith.**
 - i) He had the faith to forgive sin and even the criminal that hung on a cross next to him.
 - ii) He had the faith to heal people in miracles throughout his life.
 - iii) He had the perfect faith to prayer to the Father, in the Garden, when he fed thousands, and when he was dying on that cross.
 - iv) And, Jesus had the perfect faith to humble himself...giving up his power by becoming human and dying for us.
- b. Follow. Jesus. For Life. And give others the opportunity to follow Jesus for life by loving them...all of them.

K. Have faith to be humble before the Lord and others. Practice it today.

4. Conclusion

- A. When it comes to humility, posture matters, words matter, and actions matter.
- B. True humility is never easy to enter into, but it gets much easier when we bow before our holy God, speak the words of repentance, grace, and mercy, and then rise to go changed by having a right relationship with God.
- C. We may keep coming back to this faith in the weeks to come, as we learn more about what it means to have the faith to give our time, talents, and resources to the kingdom work God is doing.
- D. In a minute, we will welcome 4 new members into our church. Each of them has come before the church in humility to put their names on the line...to stand up as witnesses in this place and in our community for Jesus.
- E. They will promise to have faith...to forgive, to heal, to pray, and to be humble before the Lord.
- F. I can't think of a better way to grow in faith as a follower of Jesus. Let's pray and then welcome them together...
- G. Let's pray...