

A True Picture of Humility

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Date: 01 February 2015

[0 : 00] Well, I would like you to turn this morning to John chapter 3.

! Give me just a second. My eyes filled up a little bit here. Do you know what makes for good singing?

Listen. What makes for good singing? Number one, people who are saved. Number two, people who are filled with the Spirit.

And of course, having encouraged you to pray ahead, right? And people who have prayed up and are ready to worship God in the Spirit. Well now, I want you to stop just for a second.

And I'd like you to say something at the very beginning. I am going to kill myself on these cords. Strangled or tripped, one of the two. Okay. Here's what I want you to do.

[1 : 09] I want you to say it out loud. Now, if you really want to take a pass, you go ahead. Don't have to. But here's what I'd like you to say out loud. I am struggling with pride.

I am struggling with pride. Oh, okay. Well, let's take it another step. Turn to somebody close to you and say, and I know you're struggling with pride.

Go ahead. It's all right. I mean, hey, everybody knows. You balked. Okay.

We're going to open up a passage of Scripture this morning that in the flow of the argument of John the Apostle about the supremacy of Christ is very significant.

And you will remember that one of the things about the gospel of John is that in John chapter 20, 31, he tells us what his theme is.

[2 : 24] He said this. He said, but these things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

And so this morning as we come to this passage, we are early in the flow of the logic of the book of John, and we have been reminded that God sent a forerunner, someone in front of Jesus, to announce the coming of the king, John the Baptist.

A man of unbelievably significant ministry. In fact, you'll remember that Jesus bore testimony to the significance and the exceptional nature of John the Baptist.

So understandably that somewhere in the flow, and this book is written to make it clear to us that Jesus is the Christ, it makes sense that we find out on more than one occasion what John the Baptist thought about Jesus.

And our lesson this morning really is going to touch on the question of whether or not Jesus being supremely significant, the one who deserves all adoration, whether or not that fact plays out in practical daily living in John the Baptist's life.

[3 : 50] It's one thing to be fairly enthusiastic singing about the testimony and the significance of Christ, but it's another thing to actually put shoes into that and really walk it.

Would you agree with that? And we find John the Baptist giving us a perfect illustration of what humility really looks like.

There's a poem that I'm going to just reference briefly that says this, I'd rather see a sermon than hear one anytime.

And what we are dealing with in John chapter 3, verse 20 through 30, is really a picture of John the Baptist as a perfect illustration of what real humility looks like.

And here's what I would pray. And it's been something that I have been praying about in my own life. I want to grow in my appreciation for the Lord Jesus Christ, and I want to grow in humility. And so as we look at this passage, I want you to understand this undeniable truth.

[4 : 54] You can't think much of Christ and much of yourself at the same time. And we're going to come to grips with that this morning as we deal with, first of all, the pride of the disciples.

And let's pick up as we find in verse 22. John also was baptizing at Aon near Salem because the water was plentiful there and people were coming and being baptized, for John had not yet been put into prison.

Now a discussion arose between some of John's disciples and a Jew over purification. And they came to John and said to him, Rabbi, he who was with you across the Jordan to whom you bore witness, look, he is baptizing and all are going to him.

Now, just by virtue of the amount of text that is given to the setting, we learn that this is an interesting piece of information that we need.

I don't want to belabor the point, but one of the things that we know is that the more attention that is given to something, the more instructive the intent is that we learn something from that context.

[6 : 09] And so here is the Spirit of God choosing to spend quite a bit of energy in helping us see the hearts of the disciples. Now kind of skip forward, if you will, go on down to what John has to say in verse 30.

And here's kind of the nut. Here's the end of the story. And John makes that unbelievably significant spiritual statement. He says, he must increase and I must decrease.

We'll get there later. But that abbreviated phrase, abbreviated statement, is one that really has a lot of background to it that the Holy Spirit wants us to pay attention to and allow that attention to have an effect upon our life.

So let's think with the passage here and recognize that when John took all the time that he did, he wanted us to really understand the hearts of disciples, not just for the sake of history, but so that we ourselves would also identify the nature that we have and that natural inclination we have of being obsessed with ourselves rather than the Lord Jesus.

So pick up, if you will. Well, we find there in verses 22 to 26, the play out of this. And in 20 through 22 to 24, we have the stage set that tells us that John and Jesus were baptizing.

[7 : 31] They were both doing that thing of identifying the characteristics of repentance and people making a public statement about that. And we do know that in John chapter 4, verse 2, it tells us that Jesus actually did no baptizing.

Remember, it says here in verse 22, it says they were baptizing, but it was not Jesus. It was his disciples. And I asked myself, so why would Jesus not actually baptize people?

Well, how do you think it would go off if people came out of the water and said, well, I've been baptized by Jesus. Who baptized you? Oh, no, I was baptized by John MacArthur. You know, ooh, that must be really special.

Did he get signed his Bible too, you know, or whatever. We get carried away with some of this. And Jesus, not baptizing people. Now, is baptism important? Yes. Does it get to heaven?

No. What is baptism? Baptism is a public indication. It's a testimony of faith of what God has done in saving you. It's important. And baptism was going on, a testimony of faith, a testimony of repentance.

[8 : 35] And so we find in that context that there was an argument going on as well. There in verse 25, now a discussion arose between some of John's disciples and a Jew over purification.

Purification had to do with the way in which you purified yourself from the common defilements of the day. And there are purifications that took part before you ate.

Washing of the hands. Purification that took part before you engaged in spiritual worship. There was a pattern that you were supposed to follow. And so here are John's disciples, John the Baptist's disciples, and a Jew arguing.

And so as arguments kind of play out, they thought, well, it would be appropriate to come and ask one of the superior authorities. I mean, after all, John the Baptist was who he was. Let's ask John.

And so that's what happens. They come. And when they come to John, a very interesting thing takes place. Instead of asking John his opinion or his understanding of the issue of purification, what happens?

[9 : 45] You can kind of imagine the conversation playing out. The disciples of John and this Jew having this back and forth about, well, you ought to let the water drip off your elbows.

No, you ought to let it drip off your fingers. No, off your elbows. There was a style to how you washed, okay? And they were having this argument. Well, let's go ask John. They walk into John's presence. And now the disciple changes the flow of conversation.

Have you ever been in a business meeting where something that seems relatively obvious and common, really not of significant importance, becomes actually the springboard for someone to launch on their personal attitude?

Thankfully, it's not the characteristic of our fellowship. But I have been in some business meetings where it's like, whoa, where did that come from? And that's what happened in this case. The disciple of John, in the presence of John, kind of lights up on the subject.

And we see that there is a deep sense of irritation at this moment. These are disciples who had sacrificed to follow John the baptizer.

[10 : 59] And they were people who were well-versed in Scripture. And yet we find their hearts were wrong. Well, how do we find that?

Listen to the subtle irritation in the voice. Go back there, if you will, to verse 26. Rabbi, that's the big kahuna, that's John the Baptist.

He. Now, how had Jesus spoken about the he? I mean, how had John spoken about the he? John had called him, what? Behold, the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.

And here they are with their little puffy spirits coming into John's presence and saying, you know what, that dude that was down there by the Jordan with you, I mean, you know, around you and all that kind of...

And furthermore, they say, he's not the one, but he's just, you know, that guy. And remember, after Jesus had been baptized, these disciples probably were there when that took place.

[12 : 05] After Jesus had been baptized by John the Baptist, what had happened publicly that gave an indication of who this was? Remember, there was a voice from heaven that said, this is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased.

Furthermore, we actually find that they refer to John's testimony. It says, you're the one who bore him witness. You know, you, John the Baptist, the spectacular preacher and wonderful mouthpiece of God, you're the one who actually kind of gave some cred to this guy and said, well, he's pretty important.

And he hadn't forgotten that you kind of lifted him up. He's out there. And you know what he's doing? He's taking disciples away from you. This is bad news. We're losing.

Do you know what the attendance was this morning? You know, that's John's disciples. And we don't have a snow problem either, John, just in case you're wondering. You see, what was happening here is that Jesus' crowds were getting bigger and bigger, and John's were getting smaller and smaller, and the disciples were really upset.

I want you to mark. Here, the Holy Spirit puts a lot of attention on the subject of the shallow and proud hearts of these disciples.

[13:34] There are a couple things that I want you to glean from this passage. For one, a proud person thinks diminishing others is reasonable. That's what they were doing when they came to John the Baptist. And by the way, they thought John would partner with them.

They were very subtly putting Jesus down. Remember what I said earlier? You can't make much of Christ and make much of yourself at the same time.

It doesn't work. There's only one person who gets to be the hero in the story, and it's not you. It's not me. It's Jesus. And here were the disciples having an attitude, and they were all upset by the fact that this Jesus, this guy, this Lamb of God, the one that John bore testimony to, he was drawing a bigger crowd.

I thought it was reasonable to put him down, subtly. There's another thing that I am struck by. The disciples, when they came to John, you know, a proud person thinks everybody is equally proud and vulnerable to pride's afflictions.

What do I mean by that? When John's disciples came to him, they fully expected John to partner with them with their irritation.

[14:47] Do you follow that? How many of you have ever been struck by someone's flattery?

Do you know what I mean by flattery? Oh, you're the smartest guy. Well, I was last in my class. You know, whatever it is. You know, we just, we go off. And how many of you, when you hear that stuff, it's like, people who are flatterers generally are greatly affected by flattery.

They think it's the coin of the kingdom. It works everywhere. And here were John's disciples coming to him, and they were irritated with what was going on with Jesus.

And they expected John to partner with him, with them. Now, as you're thinking about this, you probably ought to ask yourself, so how few me am I about things?

And do I have the right kind of people around me that kind of tamp down my pride, or do I have people that partner with me in being stupid? How many of you heard what I just said?

[15:50] Okay, here we go. Howard Hendricks, something I read several, a month ago or so. Howard Hendricks is noted to have commented to his, is this going to cause you a problem, John?

I'm getting these cowards out of the way here. Strangle somebody. Okay, Howard Hendricks, in one of his classes at Dallas Theological Seminary, towards the end when he was dealing with the final year students, he said, I will be able to tell how your lives will play out according to two things.

Who you choose to remain friends with and the books you read. Let me say that slowly. Who you choose to remain friends with.

How many of you know that being friends with people takes time and effort? I mean, it's actually work. There is no such thing as a jerk-free relationship. I mean, everybody's in them. They're messy.

They're difficult. Well, the person that you are closest to actually has tone of voice issues. I mean, there are things that go south. Howard Hendricks said, I will be able to tell how you're going to end up by paying attention to who you retain as your friends and who you read.

[17:11] So here are these disciples coming to John the Baptist, and they thought John the Baptist was going to pile on, and John says, what's the deal with you guys? I mean, we'll get to that part. One more thing.

A proud person really doesn't like moving away from the center. They were no longer the end group.

They were counting noses and kind of whooping it up. Hey, hey, hey, did you know we had a 4% increase this year? I mean, more people coming to hear John than ever. And, you know, we're part of that.

We're really important, too. And John was losing people left and right, and Jesus was gaining people, and they're all just, I tell you what, it's all about size. So let's just stop for a minute and let you chew on some of the attitudes that the disciples had by asking some questions to your own soul.

How do I show my pride? How do you show your pride? Well, a couple things. How often does anger get the best of you? Let me say that slowly because I think we live in a culture in a day and age where actually being angry is something that is marginally respected, not in the Bible.

[18:31] How often does anger get the best of you? Now, you may have learned that it could create some civil discord. You could even end up in jail. But I'm talking about the fuming attitudes that some of us have.

I mean, God forbid it has no place in the life of a spirit-filled and enabled believer. And all of God's people said, amen. Am I the only one who's said that loudly, or is there other people that?

Just, okay, check it. How often does anger get the best of me? Here's another one. How often do I think the worst of others rather than the best of others?

I want to say that very slowly because it's a real kicker. How often do I think the worst of others rather than the best of others? I remember a time in my life when I was younger.

I still have a ways to go. But I remember when someone would call me, whoever it was, my first thought is, oh, I'm in trouble. I've done something wrong. Usually it was true, but, you know, it's like, they're not going to be happy with me.

[19:36] There's something wrong. Now it's like, oh, praise the Lord. We've got an opportunity to ministry. I don't know what it is. It might be something with me. But, you know, how often do you think the worst of others? Third, try this one.

How moody and irritable am I? Let me say that again real slowly. How moody and irritable am I? I've shared with you before that a number of years ago I said to my wife, in the future when you find that I'm being moody and irritable, don't ask me if I'm tired.

That was code in our family for you're going left of center. And I said, don't do that anymore. Here's what I want you to do. When I am being moody and irritable, and for a person who's a melancholy, how many of you understand melancholy?

It is not an excuse for being a boor. And I said, in the future, here's what I want you to say. Say, Tim, why are you being proud? Now, any of you know that Judith, she has no problem inviting me to that party.

God help me marry a take-no-prisoners girl. She's homesick with the flu, but I love her to death, and she is better than I deserve.

[20:45] So anyway, how irritable am I? Here's one more, and I'll quit. How sarcastic am I? I've heard Christians say that sarcasm is their love language.

That's a lie from hell. I say that. That is a lie from hell. You know, whatsoever is pure, whatsoever is good, whatsoever is true, whatsoever is honorable.

And here's another passage I've had to memorize for my own conscience' sake. It says, let no corrupt communication, let no sarcastic, critical communication come out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace to the hearer.

Anyway, here are the disciples, and they are all about pride. So what's the Bible's remedy for pride? What's the Bible's remedy?

Because remember, when we did that little exercise at the beginning, I just wanted to be sure whether or not all of us here probably needed to listen to the sermon, or some of you could go home early. Okay, what's the Bible's remedy?

[21:51] Let's start with this. It's the Bible plan, a right view of God. John chapter 3. John answered. And this answer is profound, and it's instructive.

A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven. Let me say two things in regards to that.

A wise answer to a spiritual need always begins with God. A wise answer to a spiritual need always begins with God. All you have, all you are, every fiber of your being is his doing.

The scope of your impact, the reputation that he has given you, the ministry, the success, the giftedness, whatever it is, it all comes back to something that God has done and is doing in your life.

So ask yourself this question, and it's important. When I am challenged, where does my string of logic begin?

[23:00] Do you follow that? Where does my string of logic begin? In John's string of logic, he started with God.

I want you to look at one passage just for a moment over in 1 Corinthians 4.7. 1 Corinthians 4.7. Here is, by the way, the apostle Paul, he was both profoundly gentle, but also he was pretty pointed with the people at Corinth in particular.

In verse 7, for who, let me read the second part. What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?

He's talking to the people there at Corinth. So what gives you such a big head? Where did you get what you have from? It's from God. And when you remember that God's the one who gave it to you, it ought to tamp down the arrogance of your heart.

Why are you the way you are? Believe me, only God is the one who gave you what you have. And so it's important for us to recognize, John gives us an illustration, when you're going to deal with the spiritual, you start with God.

[24:22] Secondly, there's a right view of self. You look there in verse 28, going back to John chapter 3. You yourselves bear me witness that I said I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.

So when you think about that, it wouldn't hurt to go back just for a moment to John chapter 1, verse 23 and 27. John chapter 1. Here is John. He has a right view of God. That's where we should start as well.

And John chapter 1, verse 23. Here is John. John says, well, I'm glad you showed up because I wondered if anybody would recognize just what a spectacular preacher I am.

I mean, you know how many people I baptized in the last week? Would you like to see my corporate jet? John the Baptist, he says, hey, let's get this. Verse 23.

I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness. Is there any hint in that of John being caught up with himself?

[25:30] What's the answer? No. Verse 27. John 26. It says, I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know.

Even he who comes after me, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. How many of you have ever driven past a hog farm?

I knew Tom would raise his hand. Something about northeastern Ohio and northwestern Ohio is where you live, wasn't it? Northern India. That's right. I meant to say that.

I did. When you're driving along, isn't it Route 30 that goes across? Yeah. And you go through these different, there are little pockets of methane gas that are created by tens of thousands of hogs.

And you can have your air going. You can have the cabin filtration just on its max. And guess what comes through? Hog manure permeates everything. And so, you know, just imagine that you are the servant of a hog farmer.

[26:40] And he comes in after he's been out slopping the pigs. And he walks in and says, would you help me with my boots? You know, I mean, here's John the Baptist saying, I'm not even, it's below, I don't have the right of taking off Jesus' hog boots.

You know, I'm not up to it. He says, I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord.

That's all. John saw himself as an absolutely insignificant announcer to the supremacy of Christ.

And if you and I are messengers of Christ, we're no more significant than John, isn't that right? And our grasp of our unimportance will protect us from pride.

I am no one special. Can you say that to yourself? Just go ahead. I am no one special. Okay.

[27:42] Third, let's deal with the results of truth. Here we are. John chapter 3. Look at verse 29. The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom who stands and hears him rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice.

This, therefore, this joy of mine is now complete. John points out that it was not his place.

I want to say this and have you accept it and understand it. It was not his place to receive any of the affection or the respect of the bride. I mean, our weddings are relatively insignificant in comparison to a Jewish wedding back in those days.

I mean, they were seven-day events. But I just want you to imagine that, you know, we're having a wedding here and we're all witness to it. And the groom is standing up here and the best man is over here.

But as the girl starts walking down the aisle, the best man just scampers down right here in the front and stands here. I mean, you would think, what would you think? Kill the guy.

[28:49] I mean, you know, what is this about? Okay. It's inappropriate. And John says, you know what? The thing that makes me happy, the thing that lifts my heart up, is the fact that Jesus is the one who justly deserves the adoration and the affection and the joy of the bride.

It's hers to give to him. And John says, I find my pleasure in seeing him connected with her. You know, it would be a profoundly proud, ugly parental attitude to have your son walking across the stage getting his Ph.D.

and he graduated magna cum laude. And you have the mother somewhere out in the crowd with this sign saying, I'm the mom of that guy. And I'm the one who gets the credit for all of his genes.

And I'm the one who taught him. We were sitting at the dining room. I knew this was going to happen. You'd think to yourself, stop. You follow that? John says, here's what makes me happy.

It is seeing him get the credit and the glory. I want to come to one other little piece, and I want you to hold on to this. It is joy in the absolute supremacy of Christ.

[30 : 27] There in verse 30. And you know, for the most part, I don't overplay the significance of the Greek grammar, and I don't want to do that today.

I'm reminded of one of the things that David Jeremiah said. He said, give people the cake, not the recipes. I'm going to try to do that. He must increase is a statement that relies upon the active voice.

Here you go. You're glazing out. I need Jared in here. Someone wave at me, Jared. Where are you? Okay. The active voice means, I'm doing it.

Do you follow that? I'm making it happen. John says, he's the one who's going to make himself elevated and lift him up, and justifiably so. Why is it that Christ is the one who will glorify himself?

It's because it's supremely righteous in the glory of eternity. He deserves it. And it's right for him to do that. He cannot bide the arrogant and the stubborn fool.

[31 : 32] Because the righteousness of all eternity rests upon the dignity of the office of Christ. He must increase.

And John says something pretty sweet. He says, and I must decrease. By the way, that's in the passive voice. That means he's doing the smackdown in a sense. Now, I shouldn't say smackdown, but remember, here's what had happened.

History had played out. John had big crowds. Now he had small crowds. And John was saying, he's doing that. And it's okay. Okay. I'm reminded of something Charles Spurgeon said.

Mostly true. He said, a man must humble himself beneath the mighty hand of God, or God will humble him. And that's true.

But as I read the text, I understand something more than that. The fact of the matter is, is that because of who Christ is, there is this progressive glorification of the Son of God, the Lamb of God, the Savior of the world, who we will worship and adore forever.

[32 : 59] And there is a holy and a righteous diminution, a getting smaller of the person who knows Christ.

Because as we march resolutely towards the day that we will see him face to face, when we are in his presence, we will be consumed with his glory and satisfied with his person.

And we will enjoy that like we can't imagine.

Isn't that true? Let me close by having you look at 1 John 3. Well, I'll tell you one thing about John the Apostle.

He was all about Jesus. And I love John 3 in particular. I can't adequately communicate the sweetness of the opening statement, but it's like he is just saying, Wow!

[34 : 10] He says, See! He says, Look! What kind of love the Father has given to us that we, me, undeserving, you, undeserving, determined rebels against the glory of Christ, should be drawn to become his own children by his work and his grace.

And he says this, And so we are. And that's the reason why the world does not know us, in that it did not know him.

Beloved, we are God's children now. And what we will be has not yet appeared. Do you ever find yourself a little frustrated the way things are in your life?

I do. I do. But I remind myself that there is the day coming that I am going to see him face to face, and I will be supremely satisfied.

We know that when he appears, we shall be like him because we shall see him as he is. Close with this in verse 3. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.

[35 : 46] If your hope is in Christ, if your ambitions and affections are in Christ, then here's what happens as a result of that.

Your thought life is being reoriented with the supremacy of Christ taking its rightful place. Your possessions are being measured according to the rightful place and glory of Christ.

Your ambitions, the way in which you spend your time, all come back with a Christ-focused interest.

And so when we look at John, we ask ourselves the question, Am I like him? Am I like him? And that's a pretty sober question to ask with humility and say, I'm probably not going to do very well at being truthful with myself, but I want the Spirit of God to help me to be Christ-focused as I ought.

Let's close in prayer. Our Father,