

HUMBLE AUTHENTICITY

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[0 : 00] I know a man who was convicted and sentenced to two consecutive life sentences for a double murder. He murdered a mother and her baby.

This was a number of years ago. At one point, this man was placed in the same section of Long Bay Jail as the guys who were involved, who were convicted for murder in the Milpere Bicy Bicy massacre back in Father's Day in 1984, I think it was.

I'm a bit vague. I was pretty young at the time. And in that massacre, I think six bikies were killed, but they gunned down a 14-year-old girl in the crossfire, an innocent girl.

And so one day in Long Bay Jail, these bikies grabbed hold of this bloke that I know, beat him up really badly, poured boiling water all over him and put him in intensive care.

And the reason they did that was because they considered him to be such a lowlife for having killed a baby. Now, I find it remarkable.

[1 : 13] It's a remarkable trait of the pride-driven human heart that no matter where we are, no matter what we're guilty of, we can always find someone who makes us feel morally superior.

Even in a supermax prison, surrounded by the worst of the worst, you will always find someone who makes you feel better. There will always be someone who will make our sinfulness and our lack of righteousness look positively praiseworthy in our eyes.

Much like the Pharisee in the parable that was read out to us in Luke 18, where he says, God, I thank you that I'm not like other men. And especially that tax collector over there.

What a scumbag. Jesus directed this parable, he says right at the beginning in verse 9, to those who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else.

And the parable has a really tough ending. And the tough ending of this parable tells me that our core value of humble authenticity that we're looking at tonight is a matter of life and death.

[2 : 37] This is how Jesus puts it. I tell you that this man, the tax collector, rather than the other, went home justified before God, for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled.

That is, God will humble them. God will, in effect, crush them. And he who humbles himself will be exalted. God will lift up the humbled.

So this issue of self-righteousness and humility is so crucial because it is ultimately about life and death and eternal life and death. And there is a stark contrast between the Pharisee and the tax collector and how they arrive at their self-evaluations.

The Pharisee assesses his righteousness by looking at someone that he considers a scumbag. His tax collector. The tax collector, humbled by his own sense of sin, calls out to God.

He doesn't even look up to heaven. He doesn't even look at God. He is so crushed by his sin and he calls out to God. John Calvin, bloke from years ago, said, It is certain that man never achieves a clear knowledge of himself unless he has first looked upon God's face and then descends from contemplating him to scrutinizing himself.

[4 : 02] For we always seem to ourselves righteous and upright and wise and holy. This pride is innate in all of us.

Unless, by clear proofs, we can stand convinced of our own unrighteousness, foulness, folly and impurity.

And so that's what we're going to do tonight. Take a leaf out of Calvin's book and we are going to begin with contemplating God first and having contemplated the majesty and holiness of God, we'll get an assessment of ourselves as human beings.

So let's have a look. Isaiah invites us to share his vision of God in Isaiah 6, verses 1 to 4, if you come with me on that one. Isaiah 6, 1 to 4. And this is obviously just one glimpse of God, but I think it'll be enough for us at least to start for tonight.

And then you can continue on from here, studying the attributes of God. One thing that I want to encourage you to do. Attributes of God and study your own human heart.

[5 : 07] Know your heart and know God. At least seven glimpses of God here in these first four verses. Firstly, in verse 1, it says we see that God is alive.

King Uzziah is dead, but God lives. Psalm 90, verse 2 says, That's two sermons ago I said that. God is ultimate reality because he existed before anything was made. God was the living God when this universe banged into existence. And that's not a sneaky reference to the Big Bang there. He was the living God in 1966 when Time magazine put on their front cover, God is dead. And he will be alive, living 10 trillion ages from now when all the puny human pot shots at his existence have dropped into oblivion like a pebble into the bottom of the Pacific Ocean.

Over 54 million people die each year. But not God. In a brief 120 years, this planet will be populated with at least 10 billion brand new people.

[6 : 35] And the 7.238 something or other billion of us right now will all be gone off the face of the earth just like King Uzziah.

But not God. He always has been and he always will be alive. Secondly, we see that God is authority.

Verse 2. Saw the Lord seated on a throne. God sits on his throne. And that is the picture that you see consistently throughout the Bible. God sits on his throne. He rules.

All is at peace and calm in his heavenly kingdom. You get no picture of God in the Bible at all, anywhere, of God needing to cut the grass, pull the weeds out, load a truck, or direct traffic, or anything like that.

He sits and he rules. The throne is his right to rule the universe that he has created. He has authority over our lives, whether we like it or not.

[7 : 38] And after him there is nowhere else to appeal. There is nothing beyond him. Thirdly, we see that God is all-powerful. The throne of his authority is not one among many thrones.

It says, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted. That throne is, God's throne is high and exalted, is that it signifies his superior power over every other throne, every other authority. No opposing authority can nullify God's decrees. He always fulfills and accomplishes what he purposes. Nothing can get in his way.

As God says a little later in Isaiah 46, verse 10, I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come, I say my purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.

And so to be gripped by the all-powerful sovereign God is either marvellous, because you know he's on your side, or it is terrifying, because you know that he is against you.

[8 : 56] I want to say indifference to the sovereignty of God, and he's all-encompassing power, means that you just haven't seen him. You can't be indifferent to the sovereignty of God, and he's all-encompassing power, just means you haven't seen him.

You haven't seen it for what it is. Let me tell you friends, if you're a person who trusts in the Lord Jesus, in this world of chaos and instability and sin, the sovereign authority of the living God is a refuge full of joy.

It is a refuge full of joy. It gets you out of bed in the morning. For me, the sovereignty of God is a matter of survival, day by day. Fourthly, we see that God is magnificent.

I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. Most of you, a number of you, weren't even alive when this happened. 1981, Diana, Princess of Wales, married Charles, and the wedding day was televised, it was live.

I was a young kid at this point, like I was 11 or something like that. And what happened was, we had sort of like a wedding party. So, that is not I did. A bunch of families got together, watched it all on this little TV.

[10 : 17] They weren't flat screens back in those days. This little TV, we're all watching this stuff, all the weddings happening. And I can remember it vividly in this person's lounge room. It's the middle of the night. And, what are we doing here?

At a wedding, for goodness sake. But the big moment was, when Diana copped out of the carriage, and started to walk up the steps of, of St Paul's Cathedral in London. And as she got out of the carriage, the train of her dress, just kept coming, and kept coming, and kept coming, and kept coming.

It was eight metres long. And I didn't care, but all the women in the room went, oh, wow, look at that.

And, really? That was my response, as an 11 year old boy, and frankly, it still would be now. But, what would it mean, if the train of her dress, not just filled the steps, as a ball's cathedral, but all inside cathedral, all the pews, and the, the choir loft, and the pulpit, and the, the balconies, and the whole lot, it was all made out of one piece of material.

I think the oohs, and the ahs, and the wows, would be even more, magnificent, because that's the picture, of the train, of the robe, of God's, fills, all of the heavenly realms.

[11:35] It, it, it, the picture here, is that God is incomparable, in his splendor. The fullness of God's splendor, shows itself, in thousands, and millions of ways, in what he has made, from the heights of the galaxies, and, you know, like, you go out there, in the middle of the darkness, I know you can't do it in Chatswood, but you go out there, in the middle of the darkness, and you just see the galaxies, and you just read the passages, where God says, I just placed that one there, and that one there, and that one there, and spoke them into existence, from the heights of the galaxies, to the depths of the ocean, right down in the darkest deeps, of the ocean, where there are strange little fish, that have their own headlights, and some of them have got these dangly lights, on the front of them, and some are attached to their chins, and some are at the bottom of their eyes, and the noses glow, and you can't even get your rod there, and you go, what are they there for?

I don't know, except, it's a display of the splendor, of God. You see, God is lavish in his splendor, and his creative fullness, spills over, spills over in excessive beauty, and if that's the way the world is, in all its, intricate detail, and beauty, and majesty, how much more spectacular, is the God who, thought it all up, and brought it all into existence?

Fifthly, God is revered, above him, were seraphs, each with six wings, with two wings, they cover their faces, with two they cover their feet, and with two, they were flying. For whatever is going on here, these six strange winged creatures, with feets, and eyes, and intelligence, they never appear in the Bible again, at least, not under the name of seraphim.

One thing is for sure, given the grandeur, of the, the scene, that we get a glimpse here, of the heavenly realms, and the power, of these angelic hosts, it's best for us, not to picture, chubby little babies, with wings, flushing around the ears of God.

That's not the picture here. These are awesome beings. Verse four says, that when one of these dudes here, speak, the, the foundations of the temple, the foundations of heaven, shake.

[13:57] So there's no puny, silly little creatures in heaven, only magnificent one. And even they, these magnificent beings, as great and as good as they are, as untainted by human sin, as they are, even they, revere their maker, with great humility.

Two wings cover their face, they won't even look upon the Lord, nor do they even feel worthy, to have their feet uncovered in his presence, two are covering their feet.

How much more, would we shudder and quake in his presence? We, who could not even bear to endure, the presence of one of these seraphs.

They, they, they would freak us out. Six, God is holy, verse three, and they were calling to one another. This, this is the seraphs, the ones who speak, and the whole foundation shudder.

Holy, holy, holy, holy, is the Lord almighty. The possibility of language, carries the meaning of God, and eventually, you get to a point, where it just runs out.

[15:10] I mean, what's left there to say? And the word holy, carries us to the brink. This is, this is kind of as far as we go. And from there, the experience of God, is, is beyond words for us.

And the reason I say that, is every effort that you have, in terms of trying to define, what the holiness of God means, it just keeps coming back around to say, God is holy, means, God is God.

That's basically it. God is one of a kind, in a class by himself. In that sense, he is utterly holy, but then you have just said nothing more, than he's God.

God is absolute reality, beyond which there is only more of God. There's nothing beyond God. There's nothing else that he answers to.

There's nothing else that he is separated from, to make him distinct in his being. He is incomparable. His holiness determines all that he is, and all that he does, and it's not determined by any person, or anything.

[16:16] The arrogance of human beings, to think that we can determine, what God is like. His holiness is what he is as God, which no one else will be.

His holiness determines, what it means is that, he's not me, and he's not you. He is other than us. Then the seventh and final thing about God, God is glorious. Verse 3, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty. The whole earth, is full of his glory.

And the best way to understand that, in this context, is probably to say, the glory of God, is the display, or the exhibition, of his holiness.

God's holiness, is the incomparable perfection, of his divine nature, and his glory, is when, that divine nature, is made public to us, so that we can see it.

[17:20] God is glorious, means, that his being, has gone public, so that we can understand, what he's like. In Leviticus 10 verse 3, God says, Among those who approach me, I will show myself holy, in the sight of all people, I will be honoured, or a better translation, in the sight of all people, I will be glorified.

When God, shows himself to be holy, what we see, is glory. And what we are meant to do, when we see glory, is worship. That's our response.

And so when the seraphim say, the whole earth is full of his glory, what they're saying is, the whole earth, displays him. We're meant to make the connection.

And the seraphim can say that, it's because from the heights of heaven, where they are in the throne room of God, they get to glimpse, all that God's made here, and they go, oh, oh, yeah, I get that.

I get the connection. I can see how this God, has made that. And this is a reflection of this God.

They see that. The whole created order reflects something of the beauty, and the character, and the worth, and the splendor, and the holiness of God.

[18:44] And so friends, that is the necessary first step, towards a life of humility. It is seeing something of God, something of his glory.

And can I say, it is a continual process of seeing his glory. And as I said in the first sermon on this series, in Christ-centered Bible saturation, the ability to see God, is the gracious work of God in our lives.

And without his help, we are blind to the facts about God. No, that's not what I said. What did I say? Two Sundays ago.

We're not blind to the facts about Christ. We're blind to the glory. We can't see glory. We can't, therefore, we cannot see God.

Because glory is what he's revealed. Without his help, we are blind to his glory. We can't even see God by our own strength, and that is humbling.

[19:52] But know this, when God graciously allows us to see him, when he reveals his glory to us, we actually, correspondingly, at the same time, we see our sin, our lack of glory.

Isaiah 6, 5, Woe to me, I cried, I am ruined. For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.

So to quote John Calvin again, Isaiah sees in this moment his unrighteousness, foulness, folly, and impurity. Impurity. And it's the same experience that Peter had when he'd been out fishing all night. Remember the occasion, he's fishing out all night, doesn't catch anything, so he kind of is about as good of a fisherman as what I am. And then Jesus comes along and says to him, cast your net on the other side of the boat.

And he's like, really? And so he does, and he gets this huge haul of fish, tries to bring it on the boat, huge haul of fish. And what happens in that moment? Peter goes, my goodness, look at all these fish.

[21:08] Retirement plan. This is fantastic. No, he doesn't. This is how Luke records his response. When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, go away from me, Lord.

I am a sinful man. You see, Peter had been walking with Jesus and talking with him and eating food with him for some time, and then in this moment, God allows him to see glory.

And the immediate response is, I'm a sinful man. God allowed Peter to see his glory in the face of Christ in that moment.

And when that happens, your own lack of glory, your own sinfulness is what's exposed. And Peter's experience is the same as Isaiah's experience because both of them got the same glimpse of the same God.

John 12, 41 says, Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus' glory and spoke about him. That's a reference to Isaiah, chapter 6, verses 1 to 4.

[22 : 14] When God allows us to see his glory, we also see how far short we have fallen of that glory. Romans 3, 23, for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

The Bible diagnoses sin as a universal deformity of human nature which is found at every point in every person. The phrase that gets brandished around is total depravity.

And it's commonly used to make explicit the implication of sin in our lives. It means that there is a corruption of our moral and spiritual nature which is total.

Not in the sense that we are all as bad as we could be because none of us, none of us are as bad as we could possibly be.

Not one of us. God graciously restrains our wickedness. If he did not, no two of us could be left in the same room at the same time.

[23 : 22] We would destroy each other. That's kind of a glimpse of hell when God takes his hands away. The only reason you are sitting here today or I'm standing here today and not in a prison cell is the gracious hand of God.

My friends, that is humbling. Total depravity means that no part of us is untouched by sin. There is no action of ours that is good as it could possibly be.

Even the good things we do are tainted by sin. I mentioned this morning at church this morning that a month or two ago, I can't remember exactly what it was, there was an elderly lady, she was up reading the Bible and then stepping down off the stage, I was up to preach and I grabbed, I put my hand out, she grabbed my hand and I helped her down the stairs, you know, help an old lady thing, you know, one good deed sort of stuff.

And in that moment, when I saw her coming down and realizing that she needed to help, it was no problem for me to stick my hand out and help her. And once she was down safely, she walked off and I started to ascend the stairs and before I even got to the lectern, the thought in my mind was, I wonder how many people saw me do that.

Just like that, just happened like that. Everything that we do is tainted by sin. You know, I don't just need the blood of Christ to cover the wrong things I do, I need the blood of Christ to cover even the good things I do because there's no such thing as a perfect performance.

[24 : 52] I don't ever get anything perfectly right. Nothing in us or about us ever will match God's perfect standards. Everything is tainted by sin. And like Isaiah, we are ruined unless something is done for us.

And there is only one solution. Isaiah 6.6 says that one of the seraphs flew to Isaiah with a live coal and touched his unclean lips. See, this has touched your lips, your guilt is taken away and your sin is atoned for.

The seraph came from God to Isaiah to deal with Isaiah's sinfulness. God atoning for our sin is our only hope.

The seraph and the live coal coming to Isaiah is simply a forerunner to God himself coming to us in the person of Jesus Christ to deal with our sin.

1 John 4.10 This is love. Not that we love God but that he loved us and sent his son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. 1 John 2.1-2 makes it explicit.

[25 : 58] Jesus Christ, the righteous one, the only one who's not sinned, he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

We are only saved from our sin by the action of God. It is all of God from first to last. And so Christianity is not about good people getting better.

It's not about good people getting better. If anything, it is good news for bad people coping with their failure to do anything good. Winston Churchill.

He was the master of the clever put-down. He once described a political opponent as a modest little man who had a great deal to be modest about. But the Bible consistently leads me to believe that I've got a great deal to be modest about.

I've got every reason to be humble. I'm finite, I'm weak, I'm limited, I'm sinful, I'm inept, I'm flawed, I have a beginning, I will have an end. And yet, the deceitfulness of sin means that I am not immune from the logic-defying effects of pride.

[27 : 15] When I first heard about that incident, about, a number of years ago, that incident about those guys in Long Bay Jail and what they did, I was amazed how self-righteous they were.

What right do murderers have to judge another murderer? What makes them think they're any better? You know, those guys, I mean, my goodness, filth, scumbag of the earth, you gunned down

an innocent 14-year-old girl, who gives you the right to say this guy, because he killed a baby, is worse than we are?

And yet, when I say that, I actually elevate myself over them as if they're worse than I am. How easy it is to put ourselves into this parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector and know and know and know that I must be the tax collector in order to be right with God and read this parable and go, God, I thank you that I am not like that self-righteous Pharisee.

The irony of sneering at the one who sneers. is so entangled in our hearts.

It's so easy for us to move from dependency in Jesus back into self-dependency. The key to living the Christian life is to never get up from the foot of the cross.

[28 : 57] You came to Jesus as an open handed beggar and nothing ever changes.

Nothing ever changes. When I see beggars in the street I used to think get a job. now I think that's me.

I might be wearing different clothes and I might be showered but that's me. You came as an open handed beggar and nothing ever changes.

I rediscovered this a fair bit recently in the last number of years in the life of Charles Simeon. he was a Christian minister suffered greatly and after you've been a Christian for 40 years he wrote this there are two objects that I've ever desired for these 40 years to behold.

The one is my own vileness he means his own sinfulness and the other is the glory of God in the face of Christ and I've always thought that they should be viewed together.

[30 : 16] You want to get a bigger bigger bigger picture of God and his glory what will happen is you'll discover your own lack of glory and to mine the depths of your own lack of glory and your own sinfulness you need to cling to the cross you go together.

He actually labored to know his true sinfulness. heart heart He wrote the tender heart the broken and contrite spirit are to me far above all these joys that I could ever hope for in this veil of tears. I long to be in my proper place my hand on my mouth and my mouth in the dust. I feel that this is safe ground here I cannot err for I'm sure that whatever God may despise he will not despise the broken and contrite heart.

To paraphrase him a little bit I think what he's saying is that the safest place in the world is at the foot of the cross of Christ with your face in the dust in humble submission in total dependency upon him.

Clinging to his righteousness not yours. And I think that he also gets that from Isaiah 66 2 that tells us what actually draws the approval of God.

[31 : 37] Not our ministry budgets not our building program not how many people are sitting here in church not what sort of good deeds you do or what money you give in church this is what gets God's attention.

He who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word. I am thoroughly convinced that there can be no effective life Christian growth or ministry or mission without the cultivation of humiliation in the heart and the weakening of pride in the life.

Living living out humbly in authentic way will look sort of like this. When you're confronted with the sin and the failure of another person you'll be more aware the humble person will be more aware of their own sin and their own failure towards God than another person's sin and failure towards them. That's humility. you'll be more aware of your own failure than another person's failure. Therefore you'll be less judgmental and less critical.

You'll also mean that you won't try and smooth over your sin to excuse it, make it less than what it is. You'll be real about it. I'll be frank with you. I'm standing here looking at all you right tonight and I think you're a bunch of rotten sinners.

[33 : 05] That is my assumption. My assumption with every single person sitting here right now is that you all have skeletons in the closet that you would be absolutely mortified if we jammed them up there on the screen right now.

The reason I know it's true is because that's me as well. I work on the assumption that you're all human and you've all fallen short of the glory of God.

reality and I believe that reality ought to be evident more and more in the church. When we present that we've got it all together and we present that to the world, it is anti-gospel.

Let me give you an example of authenticity. One episode of the TV show The Simpsons, Homer Simpson is being interviewed for a job at the nuclear power plant, Springfield nuclear power plant.

There's two jobs, three blokes going for an interview. The three of them were asked the question, what would each of you say is your worst quality? The first guy says, well, I'm a workaholic. [34 : 24] The second guy says, he responds in a similar kind of self-righteous, not really a weakness, more like a strength kind of way. He says, I push myself too hard.

Homer Simpson on the other hand answers, well, it takes me a long time to learn anything. I'm kind of a goof off and things start to disappear from the workplace. And he starts going on and the interviewer, that's enough, that's enough.

Somehow he got the job. Now, I want to say to you, I don't recommend it as an interview technique. But the honesty is refreshing. His authenticity is appealing especially against the self-righteous false humility of the other two.

Because that's what false humility is. It's actually pride in disguise. Designed to extract praise. My friends, we start the Christian life as beggars at the foot of the cross and we finish the Christian life as beggars at the foot of the cross.

As we sing, nothing in my hand I bring, only to the cross I cling. It never changes. We must labor to lay aside any remnant of self-righteousness that lurks in our hearts and it lurks there in every dark corner.

[35 : 52] At the cross is where we must begin and end if we have experienced the daily joy of living by God's transforming grace. grace. We need the spirit of God to help us to see our total spiritual bankruptcy and also to drink deeply from God's infinite grace to us in the Lord Jesus.

May we experience both deep humiliation for our sin and deep joy in Christ at the same time. And then in deep awareness of what we have received, looking only to Jesus and only having our comparison with him, may we extend that same spirit of grace to others as we authentically live out who we are, beggars, in daily need of grace.

Amen.