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The Voice of Humility

John 3:22-30

Intro: Today, we're going to look at one of the most necessary and yet, most elusive of the Christian characteristics: humility. Why is humility necessary? Because it is the *opposite* of pride (self-confidence, self-reliance, self-esteem) and it *invites* the blessing of God's grace (**Jam 4:6**, I Peter 5:5, Prv 3:34). Who doesn't want that? Conversely, pride invites the resistance or opposition of God. Everywhere in Scripture, humility is seen as a necessary part of righteous character. In fact, Peter commands believers to **humble** themselves **under the mighty hand of God** (I Ptr 5:6a). It not only relates to how we treat one another, it affects how we as servants and children relate to our God.

If humility is so necessary, why is it so elusive? It is because humility is not a popular human trait in our modern world. It never comes up on any of the talk shows; it's not celebrated in valedictorian speeches; it's not taught in any of the business seminars and is never listed as a core value for any corporation or organization. If you were to search the massive self-help sections of any book store, online or otherwise, you'll never find a book on humility. A 17th pundit put it this way: "Humility is a virtue all men preach, none practice, and yet everybody is content to hear." This remark is not universally true but sadly, it's true for many people and it reflects much of human nature. While most folk praise humility, they are quick to lament the lack of it in other and equally quick to excuse or ignore the lack of it in themselves. They're like the guy in the comic opera who said of himself, "You've no idea what a poor opinion I have of myself and how little I deserve it."

We all recognize that humility is both important and desirable. It is one of the great Christian virtues. But, if it is so difficult to attain, where does it come from? How does one acquire it? Does anyone truly possess it? The answers to these questions can be found in part in the last words of John the Baptist recorded in John's Gospel, because the one thing that anybody could ever say about John the Baptist was that he was a humble man.

22-24- To understand the context for John's final words, we must recognize

that John had achieved great popularity through his ministry. Luke says that “**multitudes**” went out to hear him. Matt tells us that people came to him from “**Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan**” (Matt 3:5). Apparently those multitudes included all segments of the population—Pharisees, Sadducees, tax collectors, soldiers, the rich, and the poor. He had a visit from an official delegation from Jerusalem (ch1) and was praised as a reincarnation of Elijah or another prophet.

Eventually, John’s popularity brought him to Herod’s palace. Herod called for him and listened to John preach. Mark tells us that at 1st, Herod heard him gladly but once John started meddling in Herod’s private life, he lost his head! Our text makes it clear that that hadn’t happened just yet. Apparently, there was a brief window in time when the ministries of Jesus and John occurred at the same time, with the same call for a baptism of repentance. This was where the conflict arose – at least in the minds of John’s faithful disciples.

25- There was something else happening during those days of coinciding ministry. It appears that the crowds around Jesus started to grow larger with many of those who’d previously been following John now leaving him to follow Jesus. It seems that John’s disciples were the ones most worried about it, they didn’t want to see their beloved teacher taking a back seat to anyone else. These concerns of theirs may have been brewing for some time but didn’t come to a head until a dispute arose between John’s disciples and some unnamed Jews concerning purification. We don’t even know the gist of the dispute because the disciples use this as an opportunity to voice their real concerns.

26- This was the same as saying, “John, your star is sinking. What are we going to do?” It was an invitation for John to feel *injured* and *neglected*. As far as the disciples were concerned, John’s witness of Jesus had been a very generous thing, and it was unconscionable to think that Jesus would now be detracting from John’s great ministry! What they really wanted John to do was rebuke Jesus. “Stop Him.” Instead John’s reply is a clear justification of Jesus’ current success. Instead of feeling sorry for himself, John actually *rejoiced* in the popularity of the newcomer.

What does John say? The exact words are important; they don’t just reveal what John thought about his and Jesus’ ministries, they also show us the

necessary ingredients for acquiring this same level of humility in our own lives. There are 5 things that John says that are not just evidence of humility but allude to how it can be produced in us.

(27)- 1st) [Awareness of God's sovereignty in all things](#) - If Jesus was attracting and winning more followers than John himself, this was *not* because He was stealing them away from John or *acting dishonestly* in presenting His claims. It was because God was giving them to Jesus to be his followers. Wow! How many ministry leaders have that kind of attitude? How many actually see their congregation as a gift and a responsibility given to them by God and not as some kind personal possession or worse yet, as evidence of their “success” as a minister of the Gospel? In my early days of exposure to church life, I saw very few ministers that were actually humble. I saw plenty of them that could put on an air of humility in the pulpit but a very few that were humble in everyday life. But this isn't just for pastors.

Every believer has a ministry that God has called them to and our responsibility is to fulfill that ministry. That's what John did! After Jesus began His ministry, John continued to preach and baptize. He continued to do the ministry God had given him to do. Believing in God's sovereignty doesn't mean we can be lazy, but it does mean that we'll **see God's hand** in our efforts and *not* be jealous of those through whom God achieves more. All gifts come from God including the gift of serving Him in whatever capacity He deems fit for us and we must be content to simply fulfill that. Of course, this also means we *cannot* be proud of our own “*imagined*” spiritual insight or be jealous of someone else's level of insight. We must recognize that *even this comes only from above*. Bible reading and study are important for the believer but we must understand that this alone does not produce godly wisdom or spiritual discernment. These things only come from God thru His Holy Spirit. To know that all spiritual insight and success comes from God is to be freed from jealous efforts of comparison. It's to recognize that all Christ-centered service, whatever the results, ranks equally with God. Any job done for God faithfully and obediently is a *great work*.

(28)- 2nd) [Self-awareness](#) – John knew who he was and what God had called him to do! John wasn't upset in the least at the “problem” his disciples were so exercised about. He'd already told them plainly that he was **not** the

Messiah but merely the one who announced His arrival. The gifts and task of the Fore-runner would quite naturally be different from the gifts and task of the Messiah, although both were given from heaven.

Do we have the *same* self-awareness? Do we truly recognize ourselves to be nothing? That's God's actual appraisal of us, revealed in Jesus' famous sentence: "*Apart from me you can do nothing*" (Jn 15:5). If we accept that statement we can then go on to recognize the importance of what we are given to do by God. If a person will accept God's verdict of himself, he can become something for God. If he *rejects* that verdict of nothingness, he is, of all men, the most nothing! If a man will believe what God says about him; if he will admit to what he really is, he will then enter by faith into what he should be in Christ Jesus. (Rom 12:3) Paul admonishes us to be in our *right minds* as John was when he fixed his mind on the fact that God merely called him to be the fore-runner and witness of Jesus.

(29a)- 3rd) [Eyes fixed on Jesus](#) – John saw himself as the friend of the bridegroom, meaning: this is not my wedding!

The friend of the bridegroom was a highly honored position that had numerous important functions at the wedding but at no time does the "friend" supercede the bridegroom. His function was just to serve the bridegroom.

This applies to all Christians too. If our focus is on other people, we'll always find room for pride (or jealousy). No matter how well or poorly we are doing, we will always be able to find someone who does things better or worse and we'll either be jealous or proud. But, if we have our eyes *fixed* on Jesus, we'll have our attention riveted on One who is so infinitely above us that we will *at best* consider ourselves His unprofitable servants.

Back in the day, a favorite attraction at some amusement parks was the rolling barrel: a large barrel, 7 or 8 feet wide and about 30-40 feet long. It lay on its side and turned, the challenge was to walk through it without being rolled. Most people failed because the movement of the barrel overwhelmed their sense of balance. But there was a secret.

The operator usually had a small mirror at the end of the barrel to keep an eye on the customers trying to walk thru. If a person kept their eye on the reflection of the operator in the mirror, they could retain a true sense of vertical and make their way through the turning barrel with out a problem.

The *secret* of walking through the barrel was to keep your eyes on the man who runs it. It's the same in spiritual life. Who runs the affairs of this life with all its ups and downs, all its crises, joys, and disappointments? God! Who has it all under control? God! How are we to walk through this life without losing our balance spiritually? By keeping our eyes on God! Of course, we don't see God directly, we only see Him as He's reflected in the pages of His Word. The Bible's a mirror that shows us God. "**For now we see in a mirror, dimly; but then face to face**" (1 Cor 13:12).

(29b)- 4th) Joy in leading others to Jesus - This is implied in the bride and bridegroom imagery, for not only was it the function of the "friend" to serve the bridegroom; it was also the function of the "friend" to conduct the bride to the man she was about to marry. He would arrive at her father's house, make sure she was bathed, appropriately dressed and properly adorned and then he would publicly escort her to her new home. John said, "**This is my joy.**" Now, John had been rejoicing in Jesus, even before he was born (Lk 1:41) but now his joy was fulfilled because the One he had been preparing the way for was now beginning to be accepted by His people. The news John's disciples brought him was what he had been longing to hear all along. It filled his cup of joy to the full. It's not the reaction they expected!

Do you know that joy? Some think there's great joy in material possessions, but things do not satisfy. Others think that there is joy in worldly fame, achievement, or pleasure, but these are just as unrewarding. They satisfy for only a short time, at best. *Real joy* comes in being able to say to, "Here am I, Lord, use me," and then discovering that *out* of His grace He is able to use you to bring others into a saving relationship with Himself. We each have a ministry, a role to fill. God makes us for it, calls us to it and empowers us in it. God gets all the glory but we get the joy!

(30)- 5th) Jesus must increase – The last words of John recorded in this Gospel are one of the greatest utterances that ever fell from human lips. It seems John knew that that whatever might happen in this world, whatever glory the world might or might not give him, the ultimate outcome would be an increase of the glory given to Jesus Christ and the bowing of every human knee before Him. I don't know if John knew this instinctively or it was revealed to him by the Holy Spirit but what John says in vs30 is the inevitable end of all things (Phil 2:9-11). When we finally realize that

everything has both its origin and its conclusion in Jesus, it will be easier to let things go in this present life. Often the things that matter to us in life aren't usually the things that matter to God. How foolish it would be for a Christian to spend their entire life struggling to achieve or fighting to retain things that won't amount to anything in the end?

Why is humility so hard to find? It can only survive in the presence of God. Arthur W. Pink expressed it this way: "Humility is not the product of direct cultivation, rather it is a by-product. The more I try to be humble, the less shall I attain unto humility. But if I am truly occupied with that One who was '**meek and lowly in heart**,' if I am constantly beholding His glory in the mirror of God's Word, then shall I be '**changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord**' (2 Cor 3:18)." Humility only comes from spending time with Jesus. When God goes, humility goes because it follows God like a shadow. The cultural environment in which we live and move and exist knows nothing about true humility. The social atmosphere we breathe is hostile to humility. This attitude of John the Baptist is completely foreign to our times, not just in the secular world but, unfortunately, even in the church. But, while it is completely foreign, it is still utterly necessary. If the words of John the Baptist here do not become our mantra, if his humble attitude does not become ours; if what was said here does not take root in our lives, we will eventually cease to be a Christian church and we will not be the salt and light needed for a perishing world

Humility doesn't mean weakness; it doesn't mean you have to let people treat you like a door mat, nor does it mean you'll never achieve anything in life. That is a gross misconception of humility. On the contrary, to humble oneself before God this way will give you great boldness before men. The Bible says Moses was the most humble man who ever lived (Num 12:3). Yet the man who humbled himself before God, who took off his shoes at the burning bush, was the same man who was able to march into the court of the most powerful monarch of his day, the Pharaoh of Egypt, and thunder out God's warning: "**Thus says the Lord GOD of Israel, Let my people go.**" 😊