

Pentecost 15
Proverbs 25:6-7
September 5, 2010

You probably noticed the closeness of thought between these verses from Proverbs 25 and what Jesus said in Luke 14. Both tell us not to exalt ourselves, not to take honor to self. Both, on the other hand, encourage us to humble ourselves, to assume the lowest place and promise that the humble will be exalted by someone else.

Universally, pride and haughtiness are condemned. Universally, humility and lowliness are praised.

And yet every human being tends to praise, while real humility and lowliness seem almost to be pitied or abused. We, too, know that a proud spirit is bad and that genuine humility is good, but sin makes us proud and anything but humble. Sin makes a person full of self. May these words make us strong to resist pride and arrogance. May these words, again, show us the way to salvation.

We All Have Good Reason to Be Humble!

One reason to be humble is that it is realistic. Pride, arrogance, haughtiness is a lie. The proud, the haughty, the arrogant are self-deceived.

The Bible uses several words for 'the humble.' It uses the word humble. It uses 'lowly.' It uses 'meek.' It uses 'poor and needy.' Of these, which is the expression most often used in the Bible? It is 'poor and needy.'

That really tells us something. For example, there are four psalms in which are the words, "I am poor and needy," and a couple of other psalms using very similar thoughts. Who do you suppose wrote all of those psalms? Yes, it was David. And David wrote those psalms after he was the king.

What we learn from this is that to be poor and needy has nothing to do with a person's economic situation. And yet the words 'poor and needy' usually do fit in with a lack of money and resources. So, what's the connection here?

The connection is this. When people have little or no money and resources, they are dependent. They are also easily taken advantage of. They are often disregarded and ignored. They often are quite helpless against those who abuse, accuse, and disregard them.

Now David, in calling himself poor and needy, clearly was NOT talking about money and resources. He was talking about his spiritual situation. Spiritually he was poor and needy. That's who Jesus was talking about when He said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit."

Where David says, "I am poor and needy" – in Psalms 40, 70, 86 and 109, and a similar statement in Psalm 34 – he tells about his helplessness against enemies who accuse him and, in a way, kill him with those accusations.

This is all of us. It is especially dangerous for those who are not poor and needy in money and property to be proud and haughty in spirit. We foolishly equate having plenty of money and things with needing nothing from God either.

No, all of us, whether economically poor or rich or somewhere between, are poor and needy in God's sight, easily accused and helpless to defend ourselves. Our own consciences sometimes accuse us. We know guilt.

To a Christian congregation in the city of Laodicea, in modern west Turkey, Jesus dictated a letter using His apostle John as His secretary. Those Christians thought themselves rich, as not needing a thing. Jesus, however, told them they were wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. They were well off money-wise, but spiritually, they were utterly poor and helpless, like everybody else by nature.

You and I need to know that, of ourselves, spiritually speaking, because we are sinful, we are utterly wretched, pitiful, poor. We simply have nothing in spirit. We are penniless. We can give nothing to God. We have earned and deserve nothing but punishment and death from God. We have nothing but spiritual debt, and on our own, we do nothing but dig ourselves in deeper every day.

If a person is foolish to exalt himself in the presence of an earthly king or even of an ordinary host – as in Jesus' discussion – then we certainly have no reason to exalt ourselves in front of the King of kings, God our Savior.

Pride in God's face is utterly ridiculous. We've just seen why. We are sinful human beings. Sin is spiritual debt. We add more sins everyday. All of our deeds, words, and thoughts so easily get tainted by sin. That's why the prophet Isaiah says that even our own righteousness's are like stinky, filthy rags. When Isaiah used the word 'our,' he was including himself.

We have good reason to be humble because we are absolutely poor and needy in spirit. We have good reason to be humble because pride in the face of God, the holy, eternal, almighty, all-knowing King, is utterly ridiculous.

And we have good reason to be humble because it is better for the king to say to you, "Come us here."

We, who are spiritually poor and needy, will be humiliated if we foolishly assign ourselves places of honor in God's heavenly throne room. But God actually makes an astounding promise. He will exalt, lift up, honor, the poor, the humble, the lowly, the

meek.

God has worked on our behalf. God has worked off our whole debt. God has earned riches in spiritual wealth, namely, He has earned goodness, obedience, righteousness. Jesus did all of this. Jesus is God who came in the flesh in order to live, work, serve, even suffer and die for all people to earn the riches of God's gracious forgiveness and righteousness. Jesus humbled Himself, made Himself lowly and meek as our Servant. By His lowliness, humility, poverty, service, suffering, He has won for all people a wealth of forgiveness, righteousness and life. It's a gift to the world.

But if we think that we don't need Jesus' help, we are exalting ourselves, and we will be humbled on the Day of Judgment. But when we admit that we are poor in spirit, accused by satan and sin, killed by them, we know we need Jesus' merciful goodness and love, and we have it. Goodness and mercy will follow us all the days of our life and we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. He will exalt us. Amen.