

## How to Respond to Humbling Circumstances 1 Peter 5:6

Richard Tow 04.26.15

A paradox is a statement that is seemingly contradictory or opposed to common sense and yet perhaps true.<sup>1</sup> Jesus stated a paradox in Matt 23:12 when He said, “...*whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.*”<sup>2</sup> The world does not believe that statement at all. People in the world may perform humble acts without, in fact, humbling themselves. A politician may bend down and speak to a child or kiss a baby with the motive of appearing humble so that he can win the election and ultimately be exalted. Down in his heart it is just one part of his strategy for exalting himself. So, superficial acts of humility are not guarantees of the real deal.

Most popular books in one way or another tell you how to exalt yourself, how to win friends and influence people so you will be successful; how to make your mark in the corporate world; how to win over the competition. We are inundated with a mindset that is the opposite of Jesus’ statement. The message of the world says “whoever exalts himself will be exalted: he will win out; he just needs to use the right methods and techniques to get it done.” Pride drives most activities in the world around us. The Apostle John identified three major motivations of the world: (1) lust of the flesh (2) lust of the eyes and (3) *the pride of life*. By far the most subtle and deceptive of these is the pride of life.

“...*whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.*” For us as Christians, we cannot allow that statement to just be a nice platitude that we quote. It has to be a principle that we live by. I will humble myself and I will trust God to exalt me as He chooses. And He has clearly said in His word that He would exalt-- anyone who would humble himself. God chooses to exalt you and me. In fact, His plan of salvation is designed to bring us into an eternal state of exaltation and glory. His part is to do the exalting; our part is to do the humbling. So how do we humble ourselves?

Let’s begin by looking at a few examples in the Bible.

In Phil. 2:5-8 Paul gives Jesus as the ultimate example of humility. I’m reading this from the Amplified translation because it makes the statements a little easier to understand. “*Let this same attitude and purpose and [humble] mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus [Let Him be your example in humility:] 6 Who, although being essentially one with God and in the form of God [possessing the fullness of the attributes which make God God], did not think this equality with God was a thing to be eagerly grasped or retained.7 But stripped Himself [of all privileges and rightful dignity], in that He became like men and was born a human being.*” (Here is where KJV says made himself of no reputation). “*8 And after He had appeared in human form, He abased and humbled Himself [still further] and carried His obedience to the extreme of death, even the death of the cross.*”

Most of us put energy into building a good reputation. We don’t want to be known as criminals, we want to be seen as responsible, upstanding citizens. We want people to like us. We want to be considered smart in something. It is natural to want to be respected and

---

<sup>1</sup> Merriam Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary (10<sup>th</sup> ed.) (Springfield, MA, 1993) p. 842.

<sup>2</sup> All Scripture quotes are in New King James Version unless stated otherwise.

esteemed. We were designed by the Creator to live in honor, not dishonor. And when God exalts us He gives us reputation.

The humiliation of Jesus was not the end of the matter as you well know. The next verse makes a distinct connection between His humiliation and His exaltation. Phil. 2:9-11 (Ampl.) *“Therefore [because He stooped so low] God has highly exalted Him and has freely bestowed on Him the name that is above every name. 10 That in (at) the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth, and under the earth, 11 And every tongue [frankly and openly] confess and acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”*

When God exalted Joseph, He gave Him a reputation as a wise ruler. When God exalted David, He gave him a reputation as a good king. But both of those men went through a valley before that happened. Both of those men were considered criminals first, and then exalted to a place of rulership. The valley was essential preparation for the mountaintop. There needed to be a right response in the low place before God could exalt either man. Put yourself in Joseph’s place. He was an upright man. He was faithful in Potiphar’s house. He refused to sin against God with Potiphar’s wife. That woman trashed his reputation and he went to prison as a criminal. What did Joseph do while in that place of humiliation? He submitted himself to God and trusted God with the outcome. He became a model prisoner. He worked hard and kept doing right. David did not deserve to be despised by King Saul. He had done nothing but help Saul. Yet Saul threw spears at him trying to kill him; and put David on the Most Wanted List in the kingdom of Israel. David was chased and hunted as a criminal. What did David do? He humbled himself in those circumstances; refused to take matters in his own hands; could have killed Saul but wouldn’t grasp the kingdom on those terms.

Are there humbling circumstances in your life at this time? It is humbling to be maligned and falsely accused. You can either fight & scratch or you can place the situation in God’s hands. It feels belittling to not have a job or not be able to pay the rent. And sometimes even when we have a job, we have to deal with demeaning experiences. Sometimes we’re treated unjustly; sometimes others take credit for the work we did. Some bosses are downright abusive. I remember one boss I had years ago. He wouldn’t even show me the respect of coming to me and telling me what he wanted me to do. He would stand at the front of the shop and scream, Richard get up here! I so wanted to get up there and knock him unconscious. But we all know that wasn’t God’s plan for me. Instead God had placed me there and was giving me the wonderful opportunity to humble myself under His mighty hand. Take it and take it with a smile.

What do you do when God has ordered your steps into humbling circumstances? 1 Pet. 5:6 gives the answer to that question, *“Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time.”* Notice the exact terminology Peter uses. Humble yourselves what? *under the mighty hand of God.* Sometimes God uses His hand to lift us up; but sometimes He uses it to hold us down. This is what people don’t always tell you. God can put His hand into your life to make you the head, not the tail. But He can also put His hand on you to make you the tail, not the head. Why would He ever do that? Because working humility in your soul may be more valuable for you that getting the job promotion, or being recognized for the faithful service you did, or people appreciating the gifts God has put in you. Getting humility worked in your life is a very big deal! Pride is our biggest problem—and God wants to free us from its tyranny. This week God has made me so aware of how limiting pride is for any of us. We think of how grosser sins disqualify for ministry; but nothing disqualifies like

pride. C.S. Lewis calls it “The Great Sin” and identifies it as the central moral issue. In *Mere Christianity* he writes, “According to Christian teachers, the essential vice, the utmost evil is Pride. Unchastity, anger, greed, drunkenness, and all that, are mere fleabites in comparison: it was through Pride that the devil became the devil: Pride leads to every other vice: it is the complete anti-God state of mind.”<sup>3</sup>

This is a fundamental issue God has with most of us—probably more than we realize. Pride will drive the presence of God away from a congregation as fast as anything will. Some churches begin with humble petition to God, and just a little success puts them in a tailspin of pride. God wants to establish us as a people rooted and grounded in humility so that He can safely bless us and use us for His glory. Right now our circumstances are rather humble. We do not own a facility. We carry our stuff in every Sunday and set up as best we can to worship our Lord together. Anyone looking upon us might even ask if anything good could come out of such small beginnings. Reputation: this is not about looking good; this is about doing the will of God? Are you willing to lay your reputation down to do the will of the Father? Jesus did! He went down, down, down in reputation. Down from the majesty of heaven; took upon Himself the form of a mere human being; even became a servant of men, was seen by the world as a criminal, and died a criminal’s death. There He was standing before a puny ruler named Pilot. He could have called thousands of angels to his own defense. He could have wiped out all of humanity with one word. Atomic bombs are nothing compared to the power of God the Son. But what does Jesus do? He humbles himself in obedience to the Father. He doesn’t even defend Himself before Pilot. He is the perfect example of how to respond to humbling circumstances.

Let me show you a contrast to that. In Isaiah 9 we have Israel’s response to God’s judgement on their land. To get their attention, to get them to humble themselves and turn to Him, God empowered Assyria to attack and tear down Samaria. The right response would be to come before God and ask Him what they need to do to get completely right with Him and to correct anything that He wants corrected. It was a time to humble themselves. But they responded by standing up to the challenge and saying, we will develop a plan and make it happen. We will build this thing bigger, and better than ever. And God’s hand just kept coming down on them.

Isa 9:8-13 “*The LORD sent a word against Jacob, And it has fallen on Israel. 9 All the people will know --Ephraim and the inhabitant of Samaria --Who say in pride and arrogance of heart: 10' The bricks have fallen down, But we will rebuild with hewn stones; The sycamores are cut down, But we will replace them with cedars.' 11 Therefore the LORD shall set up The adversaries of Rezin against him, And spur his enemies on, 12 The Syrians before and the Philistines behind; And they shall devour Israel with an open mouth. For all this His anger is not turned away, But His hand is stretched out still. 13 For the people do not turn to Him who strikes them, Nor do they seek the LORD of hosts.*”

For those who have read *The Harbinger* you know Rabbi Cahn applies those verses to the judgements that are happening on America today.<sup>4</sup> America is losing ground every day. As Americans we need to respond in humility. It’s tempting to point to the Supreme Court or the President and say you are responding wrong to God’s hand. But we want to make sure we’re not responding in arrogance. We are all part of this great nation and some of the blame (if not

<sup>3</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (Harper-Collins Publishers: New York, 2001) pp. 121-122.

<sup>4</sup> Jonathan Cahn, *The Harbinger* (Front Line: Lake Mary, FL, 2011) pp. 43-50.

most) lies at the feet of the Church—especially those of us in leadership. Let me take it a step further. The Church in America is losing ground every day. We have a few success stories here and there that may even blind us to that reality. But all indications are that the Church in America is on the decline. How are we responding to that? Are we saying, “*The bricks have fallen down, But we will rebuild with hewn stones*”? We will get bigger and better programs. We will tweak the music and make the sermons more relevant. We’ll improve our marketing plan. We will make it happen! Or are we saying, “God forgive us our arrogance and come down one more time. Turn our hearts from self-reliance to a genuine reliance upon You. Show us what You’re doing and let us get in perfect sync with it”?

Eccl. 3:4 says there is “*A time to weep, And a time to laugh; A time to mourn, And a time to dance.*” Just because something worked well in the 80’s does not necessarily mean it is the thing to do now. One thing I have to guard against as a pastor is the temptation to just do what has worked in the past. We can’t operate with a mechanical mindset of techniques and methods. We have to hear God; we have to discern the times and seasons; and respond accordingly. If this is a time to mourn, if this is a time to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God—gathering hewn stones and picking up the pace of the music might not be as good of an idea as it first sounds. God, what are you saying to us in the now? What do you want us to do today? In 2 Chron 7:13 God told Solomon, “*When I shut up heaven and there is no rain, or command the locusts to devour the land, or send pestilence among My people, 14 if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.*” That is humbling ourselves under the mighty hand of God: calling on the name of the Lord, humbling ourselves before God and one another, praying and seeking the face of God, and turning from those things that are offensive to God.

I have saved worship time for after this message because I want to explain the worship time for today. We will focus on humbling ourselves and waiting on the Lord. I have planned some time when we will almost have silence. The worship team will play gently during that time; but we will not be singing. That will probably feel a little awkward since it is not our routine. But I am trying to respond to something God spoke to me about last week. Our worship services, and I’m not just talking about Life Church, I’m not just talking about Charismatic churches, almost every Evangelical church has a certain ritual that is expected for the worship time. It usually includes a few fast song at the beginning and slower ones at the end. It’s as much a ritual as any Catholic Church has during Mass. I remember when it wasn’t that way. In the late ‘60’s and early ‘70’s there was a powerful freshness to that style of worship. Prior to that time congregations sang hymns. And with every change there were congregational battles about whether we should sing hymns or choruses. There were battles over putting the words on a screen instead of from the book. Eventually a certain style won out and that’s the way we’ve all done it for the last few decades.

Those changes were good, not because choruses are better than hymns or because words on a screen are better than words on a book. The real benefit was that it broke people out of a mindless routine! There are benefits inherent in singing hymns that are not there in choruses and there are benefits in singing choruses that are not there in hymns. We won’t take the time to talk about what those may be. What I am trying to communicate is that, the sacred cow of how we have done it for the last three decades might not be the all in all. Maybe there are some things that we’re missing. Not that what we’re doing is bad. Singing the hymns in 50’s was not

bad. But learning to sing praise and adoration directly to God added something that had been for the most part lacking. So, we're not talking about whether we should sing hymns or choruses or whether they should be fast or slow, etc. We're talking about what we learned from history—that there may be things God would lead us to do that don't fit the current mold. And those additions may feel a little uncomfortable at first.

Last week God had me almost on a vow of silence. Were it not for propriety and the danger of people misunderstanding what was happening, I would have probably been there—not because I wanted to but because the hand of God seemed to be pressing me into that. So I'm asking God what is going on here? And He is talking to me about humility and about the need to wait before Him in silence. And by extension, I felt He wanted me to share some of that experience with you. This is not where I got the idea, but it may help some understand what I'm talking about. The tradition of the Quakers years ago was to simply wait in complete silence for what would probably seem to us an eternity. Finally, someone would hear something from the Lord and share that; then another; then another—similar to what we would call a prophetic word.

So what we want to do during the quiet time is to still our soul from inner noise and turn our ear toward heaven. If God drops something in your heart we will give opportunity for you to share that. There is a difference between just having an opinion you want to share verses having a word that you feel God has spoken to you. But doing this might open the way for the Lord to speak something to us.

(Sing “Humble Thyself in the Sight of the Lord”).

## OUTLINE

### How to Respond to Humbling Circumstances

Life Church: April 26, 2015

#### Intro

- A. Paradox in Matt 23:12 “...*whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.*”
- B. Pursuit of World Opposite
- C. Principle We are to Live by

#### **I. Examples** from Bible

- A. Jesus Ultimate Example (Phil. 2:5-11 Ampl.)
- B. Joseph & David (went down before up)

What do you do when God has ordered your steps into humbling circumstances?

#### **II. Exhortation** from Peter

1 Pet. 5:6 “*Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time.*”

- A. Sometimes God uses His hand to lift us up; but sometimes He uses it to hold us down.

- B. Pride will drive the Presence of God away.  
C.S. Lewis wrote, "...the utmost evil is Pride. Unchastity, anger, greed, drunkenness, and all that, are mere fleabites in comparison: it was through Pride that the devil became the devil: Pride leads to every other vice: it is the complete anti-God state of mind."
- C. Jesus made of Himself no Reputation and shows us how to respond to humbling circumstances.

### III. Erroneous Response by Israel

- A. Isaiah 9:8-13
- B. *The Harbinger* by Rabbi Cahn makes interesting application to America  
Eccl. 3:4 "A time to weep, And a time to laugh; A time to mourn, And a time to dance."  
2 Chron 7:13-14 God told Solomon, "When I shut up heaven and there is no rain, or command the locusts to devour the land, or send pestilence among My people, 14 if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land."

### IV. Explanation of Worship

- A. Focus on humbling ourselves and waiting on Lord
- B. Silence before God

### Questions

1. Did you feel discomfort in the silent time? Did God speak anything to you during that time?
2. How does the world's avenue for success differ from the one Jesus stated in Matt. 23:12? Have you had experiences where the world's way seemed to work for you? Have you had experiences in which the Lord's way worked for you?
3. Has the Lord led you through experiences in which His hand was holding you down? Has He led you through experiences in which His hand was lifting you up?
4. Do you think humility is an important foundation for Life Church? How would you suggest that be cultivated in our culture?
5. Do you see humility as essential for inviting God's presence in our church services and in our daily lives?
6. How does the 12 step recovery program emphasize humility?