

Kingdom of the Lowly

Luke 15:1-10 (v. 7)

Introduction

What is the main barrier between us and the kingdom of God? Of course, sin separates us all from God: *All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23)*. *The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23)* Sin causes the gap, but what's the biggest barrier to crossing that gap? Is it money? After all: *Money is the root of all kinds of evil (1 Timothy 6:10)*. Or maybe it's stubbornness? That was a big problem for Israel (*Deuteronomy 31:7*). The number one barrier to the kingdom of God is pride. As *Proverbs 16:18* says: *Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.*

To Repent or not to Repent

When Peter was preaching on Pentecost and he had just told the people how God has exalted this Jesus whom they had crucified, the people said, *"Brothers, what shall we do?"* Peter's reply was, *"Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins" (Acts 2:37, 38)*. At the heart of repentance is being sorry for your sins. Without repentance there is no forgiveness of sins. So, it would seem simple. If you want to be forgiven, be sorry for your sins.

Never Apologize

But once I met a man who said he wanted to know what the words of atonement were. When I told him they were, "I'm sorry", he said that would be a lie because he was raised never to apologize. I had heard that before, but it was on TV. Rule #6 for Leroy Jethro Gibbs in *NCIS* was, "Never say you're sorry." He may have stolen that from John Wayne's character, Captain Nathan Cutting Brittles in *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon*, who said, "Never apologize, it's a sign of weakness."

Self-Righteousness

This kind of pride is easy to spot. It's what the parable of the lost sheep seems to be communicating. That's why *there's more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance (Luke 15:7)*. The flock didn't need rescued. If we don't feel the need to repent, it's due to being self-righteous. That's what Jesus was talking about in *Luke 5*. After calling the tax collector Levi to follow Him, He ate at his house with other tax collectors. When the Pharisees objected, He said, *"I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance" (Luke 5:32)*. Since all have sinned, the first step is to acknowledge our sinfulness and lostness.

Reverse Pride

But there's another way pride comes through that's not quite as obvious. That's when we feel like our sin is too horrible to be forgiven. We read in *Hebrews 10* (Read *Hebrews 10:12-14, 18*). Christ offered His life once, for all sins, for all time. Then He sat down at the right hand of the Father because that was enough. If I think that my sin is so terrible God can't forgive it, then I am saying I'm more powerful than God. Besides, when it comes to sin, they are all the same in God's sight. There are no such things as a big sin or a little sin with God. He is holy and cannot abide any sin.

“Be a Man and Apologize”

Have you ever seen two kids arguing and someone tells them to shake hands and make up? How real do you think that apology is? They’re just saying, “I’m sorry” because someone bigger than them told them to. Another prideful barrier to repentance is the notion that “it takes a big man to admit he’s wrong.” If I apologize because it makes me feel like a big man, that’s not an apology either.

Apologize in Humility

There’s only one way to say, “I’m sorry.” That’s in humility, as Isaac Watts communicated so beautifully:

Alas! And did my Savior bleed,
And did my Sov’reign die?
Would He devote that sacred head
For such a worm as I? (**LSB #437, v.1**)

When we recognize how low we are compared to God, there’s only one response. “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me, a poor miserable sinner!” That’s the prayer of faith; that’s the prayer of atonement.

God Grants Repentance

I was reminded of this passage of Scripture this week (Read **2 Timothy 2:24-26**). “God may grant them repentance.” Repentance isn’t something we can work up. It isn’t something we can be persuaded to do. It is something God gives us, a gift of grace.

Means of Grace

And God gives His grace through the Means of Grace – Word and Sacrament. When we hear the Word and receive the Sacrament, God gives us the faith to believe. He opens our eyes to just who we are in His sight and gives us the faith to humbly cry for mercy. Only the lowly can get into the kingdom of God.

*And the peace of God,
Which surpasses all understanding,
Will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*
