

March 15, 2020

Give Up!  
Give Up Arrogance!  
Luke 18:9-14

**Opening words:** How many times have you been asked the question, “What are you giving up for Lent?” It’s a good question. Many in our area do give up something for Lent because it is a Roman Catholic tradition. The idea of giving up something for Lent is based on Matthew 16:24, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.” So, giving up something for Lent is about self-denial. It’s not a second chance at your broken New Year’s resolution. Giving up something for Lent should be done prayerfully, so we can wholly renew ourselves in Christ. Giving up something for Lent is not a bad thing but a good thing. There are certain things that are holding us back spiritually.

This is sermon number four in this year’s Lenten sermon series, Give Up! We are looking at things that are impeding our spiritual growth. To date, we have looked at control and darkness. In the weeks to come we will look at enemies and greed. On Palm Sunday, we will look at popularity. On Easter, we will look at death. Today, we look at **arrogance**. Our Gospel reading for today is Luke 18:9-14. Let me call this message Give Up Arrogance!

**Luke 18:9-14** To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: <sup>10</sup> “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. <sup>11</sup> The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. <sup>12</sup> I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’

<sup>13</sup> “But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’

<sup>14</sup> “I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

**Billy Graham** (1918-2018) died on February 21, 2018. If anyone deserved to go to heaven, it was Billy Graham. He preached the gospel to more people than anyone in history. Only God knows how many souls he won for Jesus Christ. Yet, Billy himself never forgot the truth. He was a sinner, who was dependent on God’s grace. Those closest to him told us, Billy Graham helped plan his own funeral. As he listened to his own arrangements, he had a simple request: less about Billy, more about Jesus. Billy Graham was a humble man. He never forgot, he was saved by grace and by grace alone! **How humble are you?** If that makes you think say, **“Amen!”** With that in mind let us look at our Gospel lesson.

We find ourselves today in the eighteenth chapter of Luke. Bruce Larson (1925-2008) was the Senior Pastor of the University Presbyterian Church in Seattle, Washington. He once said, the first thirty verses of this chapter are vital because these verses contain the qualities, we must possess to live the abundant life in Jesus Christ. In our reading for today, we discover one of those qualities, humility. At the very heart of this parable is humility. Like all parables, it is easy to imagine.

Two men went to the temple to pray. There is nothing surprising about that line. The people of Jesus's day valued prayer. They prayed regularly. Daily, morning and evening prayer was scheduled at the temple in connection with the sacrifices. However, the temple was always open for private prayer. Prayer was not isolated to the Sabbath. Prayer was a big part of their daily lives. In Jesus' story, one of the men was a Pharisee. He is the embodiment of arrogance. He stood upright and reported to God all his good deeds. He fasted twice a week and gave generously to the poor. The other man was a Publican, or a tax collector. He is the embodiment of complete brokenness. He stands at a distance beating his breast. He is not proud of the life he is living. He admits he is a sinner, and he asks God for mercy. The two gentlemen in Jesus's story are from opposite ends of the universe. There is nothing surprising in the story until the last verse. Verse fourteen says, "I tell you that this man, (the tax collector) rather than the other, (the Pharisee) went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted." Can I ask you a question? Do you relate more to the tax collector or the Pharisee? If you know what your answer should be, say, **"Amen!"**

John C. **Maxwell** (born 1947) is an American author, speaker and pastor. He has written many books. His primary topic is leadership. He once said, "There are two kinds of pride, both good and bad. "Good pride" represents our dignity and self-respect. "Bad pride" is the deadly sin of superiority that reeks of conceit and arrogance." We call bad pride, arrogance. How many people do you know who have "bad pride?" How many arrogant people do you know? Our world is, and always has been, filled with arrogant people. Webster defines arrogance as "offensive displays of superiority." If you don't believe me, just ask the internet highway.

Who are the most arrogant celebrities? That is the question I punched into my google search engine. You can find anything on-line. There are many sites with such a list. This one came from a website called "top-ten." According to them, these are the most arrogant celebrities—

I will give the top five to you in reverse order:

5. Charlie Sheen
4. Alec Baldwin
3. Lindsay Lohan
2. Kim Kardashian

1. Kanye West

I was surprised that Justin Bieber wasn't on the list. He came in at number eleven. However, he was number one on the list of annoying celebrities. It pains me to say it, but John Wayne, "The Duke," is number six.

Then, I punched the question, what are the most arrogant countries in the world? Once again, I will give them to you in reverse order:

5. South Korea
4. Israel
3. Italy
2. India
1. United States

Ok, I will tell you. Great Britain was number six and Russia was number seven. Just think about that for a moment. Kanye West and the United States of America have this sad thing in common. We are both viewed by the world as the most arrogant. That means, we are the Kanye West of the world. Could it be our national pride has turned into our national arrogance?

Then, I punched in the question, who are the most arrogant people in history? Our generation is not the first to struggle with arrogance. History is filled with arrogant characters. One of the names on that list is found in the Bible, Herod the Great (74 BC–4 BC). Jesus was born under his rule. Do you know his story? Insecure and paranoid, he thought the entire world was after his throne. For this reason, he never trusted anyone, including his own family. Everyone said and everyone knew, it was better to be Herod's dog than it was to be Herod's son. He hated everyone and in return everyone hated him. Herod the Great knew that everyone hated him, to the point that he feared that people would celebrate at his death. How would that look? He wanted to fool history, so he gave a sinister order. He ordered that on the day of his death, three hundred innocent lives should be taken. He hoped the loved ones of the three hundred would mourn openly, tricking the world into thinking they were grieving for him. I am glad to report, that order was never executed. Listen to the next line. Arrogance fools itself into thinking it is attractive, but it is not. If you are a little uncomfortable with our international ranking, say, "**Amen!**" Let us return to our Gospel lesson. It is about arrogance. Here is a question you must answer.

Why does God hate arrogance? There is not a single answer. However, there are four answers. Let me list them for you and give you a Biblical illustration with each one.

- 1. Arrogance damages our relationship with God.** The one thing we know about God clearly is that He loves being worshipped. The problem is arrogance lies to us and tells us we are equal to God. In the story of the exodus, Pharaoh believed he was a god. (Exodus 5:2) The Egyptian people at that time saw him as a god in human form. His arrogance led to him challenging God. In the end, the Pharaoh lost. He was devastated, because

he was not a god. He was just a man. He illustrates the point. Arrogance damages our relationship with God. If you can agree with that point say, **"Amen!"**

- 2. Arrogance damages our relationships with others.** In my station in life, I have seen it countless times. Siblings live less than a mile apart, but they haven't spoken in years. Their stories are different, but the stories are the same. There is some ugly scene in the past no one will forget. The relationship between the participants has been eroding to the point that they no longer speak. They think the word, I love you or I am sorry, but they can't utter those words because their personal pride is so great. Each one plays the anti-Joseph. In Joseph's story, he reunited with his brothers because he was humble and forgave them. (Genesis 50:15-21) If Joseph can forgive his brothers, then why can't you forgive? Could it be your pride, your arrogance, is holding you back? Arrogance damages our relationships with others. If you can agree with that point say, **"Amen!"**
- 3. Arrogance damages ourselves.** When arrogance fills our hearts, we begin to make poor decisions. We forget about the long range and concentrate on the short term. We have seen it countless times. Celebrities take senseless risks because they believe it will never happen to them. It did. It is a story of self-destruction. In the Bible, Naaman is a story of self-destruction. (Second Kings 5) You remember is story. He had a good life and a powerful position. Then, the unthinkable happens. He gets leprosy. A servant of his wife's tells him about Elisha. It is the prophet who tells him how to be healed. He is to wash himself seven times in the Jordan, then he will be healed. It seems like a quick fix, but it is hard for Naaman to do because he is an arrogant man. The story has a happy ending. Naaman washes himself in the Jordan and he is healed. Arrogance is a dangerous thing. Arrogance damages ourselves. If you can agree with that point say, **"Amen!"**
- 4. Arrogance damages our purpose.** One of the great challenges in the local church is not a lack of gifted people or money. One of the great challenges in the life of the local church is a surplus of arrogance. Everyone seems to know what is best for the whole and everyone seems to control everything. This is the truth. You don't and you can't. That is why conflict is common in the local church. If you think you know what is best for the whole, then you are more like James and John than you think. Do you remember the story? (Mark 10:35-45) As Jesus is traveling down the road, James and John comes up to Jesus with a request. They want one to sit and his right and the other to sit at his left. Those are positions of authority in a political kingdom. The problem is Jesus didn't come for political reasons. He came to establish a spiritual kingdom. The entire discussion is a distraction and waste of time. James and John are guilty of being arrogant. Arrogance damages our

purpose. If you can agree with that point say, **"Amen!"** Never forget, God hates arrogance. Do the people in your life consider you arrogant? Do the people in your life consider you humble?

Elie Wiesel (1928-2016) was born in Romania, but he is remembered as an American author and Holocaust survivor. On April 19, 1992, he wrote an article that appeared in Parade Magazine. In his story, a man is sitting on a boat surrounded by other passengers. Without warning he begins to chop a hole in the boat under his seat. The other passengers begin to shout and shriek at him, "What are you doing? Have you gone mad? Do you want to destroy us all by sinking the boat?" Calmly the man answered, "I don't understand. What I am doing is my own business. It is none of your business. The hole is under my seat, not yours. The egoist ignored the truth that they were all in the same boat. Let me remind you.

We are all in the same boat. This is the bottom line. If you want to be a disciple of Jesus Christ, then check your ego at the door and join the team. It is not all about you. However, it is all about Jesus. Do you remember the quote from John C. Maxwell? He once said, "There are two kinds of pride, both good and bad. "Good pride" represents our dignity and self-respect. "Bad pride" is the deadly sin of superiority that reeks of conceit and arrogance." How many people do you know who have "bad pride?" Are you guilty of "bad pride?" Do the people in your life consider you arrogant? If that makes you think say, **"Amen!"**