

The Context of Humility in the Cosmic Purposes of God

by Art Katz

The sermon emphasizes the importance of humility in the Christian life, and how it is the only root from which the graces can grow.

Scripture: Matthew 5:5, Philippians 2:7, James 4:6

Topics: "Grace", "Humility"

Description

Art Katz emphasizes the profound significance of humility in the cosmic purposes of God, asserting that true growth in grace is rooted in humility, as God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble. He illustrates that humility is not merely a trait to be imitated but a divine attribute that must be cultivated through a genuine relationship with God, often through painful and humiliating experiences. Katz argues that the meek shall inherit the earth, and that God's ultimate purpose is to replace the prideful fallen angels with humble believers who reflect His character. He stresses that true humility comes from recognizing our own limitations and relying on God's grace, leading to a life that exemplifies the meekness of Christ. The sermon calls for a deep desire for humility as the foundation for fellowship with God and others, ultimately fulfilling God's redemptive plan.

Transcript

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In his book entitled, Humility, Andrew Murray calls humility "the only root from which the graces can grow." In other words, there is no growth in grace and no receiving of anything from God without this ultimate and essential requirement. The scripture that supports this is: "He gives grace to the humble, but resists the proud." The proud have no disposition, recognition or need of receiving that grace. And God looks for this fundamental condition of humility, which is also the very essence of what God is in Himself: "I am meek, and lowly; learn of Me."

There is a special promise made for the meek that is not given to any other, "The meek shall inherit the earth." Indeed, the Lord's own death on the Cross as well as His whole earthly life is a statement of that meekness and humility. Just His coming in the form of man is a humiliation for God. He was confined in a body, limited to a finite form, and fixed in very narrow place within Israel, from Galilee to Jerusalem, for His thirty-three years. His whole life had to be expressed and developed within the confines of one small geographic piece of His own creation. In only three-and-a-half years, and by His own example, He had to express and set forth a mode of being that would be given to mankind as a basis for all the days that are left for the human race.

Murray continues, "It is the one indispensable condition of true fellowship with Jesus." I would add the only basis for true fellowship with anyone. Pride, arrogance, and haughtiness of spirit prevent fellowship. If humility is at the heart of the matter, then how do you get it? Anyone who has tried to seek to imitate humility knows that he is on the road to dismal failure. It is the phoniest of attempts to try and be humble. Humility is what God is. So the only way to have it then is to find some kind of basis by which we appropriate what God Himself is. Every time we find ourselves in a circumstance that's painful or humiliating, and receive it from God's hand as coming from Him, we have an opportunity to learn of Him. This is true obedience, and, with every such obedience rendered to God, something of the very character and personality of God is transmitted into the believer.

Humility is hard to define because it is something wrought in the man through a history of union with the God, who Himself is meek. Acquiring humility will never be our experience unless we covet and desire this attribute. And it should be as distinctive of us as it is of God. If it is only one of many things in which we might have an interest, it will not be obtained. But if it's the very basis of the receiving of any grace from God, and the basis for relationship with Him and with believers, then it ought to be the foremost object of our consideration.

One can always tell religions that are false because what they celebrate and what they themselves express are completely the antithesis of the meekness of God. Violence is a statement of human arrogance that presumes it has the right to take the life of another. The world's definition of meekness is a kind of self-deferring humility that is contrived and phony. In fact, if we're satisfied with that, and people are impressed with that, we'll never have the real thing. If you're going to come to the meekness of God, you've got to come to the recognition first of your humanity, especially when you are stung and your self-interest is challenged and threatened. Whatever comes up from you will show the truth of the nature that has not yet been met by the Cross. So, just like anything else, if we're satisfied with a false substitute for the authentic, God is not going to force the true upon us. We have to first come to the humbling and humiliating recognition of the truth of our condition. Then comes the repentance over that and the shock of the disclosure of what is the truth of our condition. Then comes the washing and the contrition in order that we can find a place of union with God in truth.

God will not bestow grace except on the ground of truth. When we come on that ground, and the recognition of the horror of what has been revealed about the truth of our condition, then we're in a place to receive a God who will meet us with His grace. We have come in truth. Then, by such meetings and such union, the time comes when the meekness of the Lamb, which you cannot imitate or emulate, becomes part and parcel of what we in fact are. And so, when our self-interest and self-love are threatened or touched, we don't react in arrogant self-defensiveness.

Paul rejoiced for those Hebrews saints who took their strippings with joy, knowing in themselves that they had a far greater recompense in heaven. It didn't matter what was stripped from them in this life; they knew their reward in the life to come. They knew it was not an accident that could be attributed to men, but that God Himself had allowed it as the very testing of the truth of where they were with Him. If you are too much in your possessions, you're going to be resentful, angry, irritated, and vexed if they were to be rudely taken from you. But if those things are given of God to begin with, then you receive the 'stripping' with joy, because you know that God Himself has brought that provocation and testing. And in receiving it with joy, you're giving to those who have stripped you such a testimony that they'll not be able to turn from it. They expect you to be resentful; they expect you to curse and to be angry. But to see you taking that stripping with magnanimity and grace is the very testimony of God Himself.

Andrew Murray continues,

"...[P]ride can degrade the highest angels into devils, and humility can raise fallen flesh and blood to the thrones of angels. Thus, this is the great end of God: raising a new creation out of a fallen kingdom of angels."

In one statement, you have the whole cosmic purpose of God through the church--to replace fallen angels who have fallen through their pride and arrogance. God is going to replace them with those of His church who exhibit the character and humility of God, and who can therefore rule and reign with Him from that governmental place. Those angels, who were first given that governmental place, have lost it through their pride. God will return, through humility, what was lost to Him through pride, through the sons of men that are being formed at His hand in their character and life.

There is an intimation of this in Romans 11:25 of a fullness of Gentiles "coming in." In my opinion, this fullness is the number from all nations that will replace the number of fallen angels who have lost their place of preeminence because of their pride and arrogance. Their leader, Lucifer, exalted himself by his own beauty. He was intoxicated and taken up with himself in pride, and they who followed him had the same disposition. But those who will replace him have exactly the opposite; they have the humility of God. And that is the whole cosmic saga; that is what this whole history of redemption is about since its commencement.

The fullness of the Gentiles are those who exhibit this essential quality of God, not as a cosmetic overlay, but as the essential truth of their being. They have submitted to the work of God in the humiliating circumstances that bring them down. They accept lowliness, they accept rejection, they accept stripping, and they accept even the loss of their own lives if it should be required. Thus, they are exemplifying the very nature of God.

In its deepest and truest form, God's salvation is bringing humility to men. It is a divine attribute; you can't form it from the earth. You can form other things--intelligence, skill, diligence--but humility is distinctively what God is in Himself. And except that God comes down with it and makes it available for man, there is no prospect of obtaining it. Salvation is God bringing humility to men, not just a salvation from hell and death.

When God has got that in a people who can replace those that have fallen from pride, the age will have been completed, and then "Israel shall be delivered" (Romans 11:25-26). He waits for this in the church in order to deliver Israel. So, He humbled Himself, taking upon Himself the form of man, and as a servant and as a Jew, He bore that humiliation, and humbled Himself unto death. That very same humbling of

Himself unto death opens up the grace of life--resurrection life--through the willingness to come to that final place of humility.

To 'die to self,' or to come out from the power of self, cannot be done by any act of resistance we can make. This death to self, which is the last hindrance to humility, is not something that we can perform. Self cannot die through self, by self, because if self could do it, then we would be boasting in what we have accomplished in the death to self by our own self. It is a death that only God can bring. So the one true way of dying to self is the way of patience, meekness, humility and resignation to God. It is to have the humbling awareness that I cannot do this in myself. I may desire humility and to be like the Lord in lamb-likeness, but I know that the more I try in a self-conscious way to obtain it, the more frustratingly it will allude me. I have got to recognize that only God can perform this, and that He will perform it in His own time--not when we might want it.

A total resignation to God is required, and that is the most humbling thing to which man can submit himself. A total submission to God, to have this formed in us in the time and mode that He Himself will elect, is resignation. Any impatience that desires it before that time, or seeks to circumvent God to obtain it by ourselves, is to effect and put on a show of it. It is not a true submission or resignation to God. Resignation is that complete yielding and trusting, and that is the key to obtain the humility of God.

I can sum this up another way. It is being willing to suffer the humiliation of not having humility you feel could be yours. But you would rather live with the humiliation of the truth of your condition, knowing that the remedy is not going to come by any hands-on that you can apply. You're concerned for the lack of humility, not because you want to be relieved of the reproach, but you want to see God glorified by the truth and the reality of what He is wanting to perfect in that person or fellowship. The resignation is that you will have to wait for it. It's waiting on the Lord; it's trusting in the Lord; it's being resigned unto the Lord. The issue of God's glory needs to be greater than the issue of personal relief.

William Law, another respected author, writes:

"This is the truth and perfection of dying to self. For if I ask you what the Lamb of God means, must you not tell me that it is and means the perfection of patience, meekness, humility, and resignation to God? Must you not therefore say that a desire and faith in these virtues is an application to Christ, is a giving up of yourself to Him and the perfection of faith in Him? And then, because of this inclination of your heart to sink down into this patience, meekness, humility, and resignation to God, you are truly giving up all that you are and all that you have from fallen Adam. It is leaving all you have to follow Christ. It is your highest act of faith in Him."

This is the leaving of all. This is the giving up of any last confidence in yourself (that you can of yourself and by yourself obtain the character of God), and rather trust Him for it in His own time and way. It is that final surrender by which, indeed, the true thing comes. It is your highest act of faith in Him because you are trusting Him to do it.

No man can have the humility of God unless He bestows it. And when we humble ourselves to call on the name of the Lord, that process of obtaining begins. God alone has the power to bring His own person, His own attribute and character into the life of a believer. William Law continues,

"When the Lamb of God has brought forth a real birth of His own meekness, humility, and full resignation to God in our souls, then it is the birthday of the Spirit of love in our souls."

When we talk about the life of God or the abundant life of God, it is not only a source of energy and enablement, but also the source of a distinctive quality of life - namely, the Lord's humility. We have His humility in proportion as we have His life, and we have His life in proportion as we have put our own natural life into death. We cannot bring ourselves to that death of self outside of the recognition that that death can only be worked by God. It is meekness to recognize that we are powerless, and that something has to be wrought in us from God by His life.

Jesus humbled Himself unto death, even the death of the Cross, which is to say, the most humiliating form of death. Under Roman torture, the victim died of asphyxiation because he was stretched out in such a way that the fluids of his body finally drowned him. That is why they broke the legs, to hasten the death because as long as a man could stretch himself on his feet, he could continue to suck air. But the moment that he could not stretch, then the fluids would rise up and he died an agonizing death of suffocation or drowning. He bore the humiliation of being stripped naked before people who were watching the process. In fact, the crucifixion of Jesus was the most remarkable demonstration of the only authentic God who is God. In that death, His very distinctive was portrayed.

"Learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly of heart, and you will find rest for your souls. You don't have to strive, if you'll learn of Me--not learn about Me with your mental faculties--but learn of Me by appropriating the means that I will give you to obtain what I am in Myself every time you'll accept with resignation the conditions that are calculated against your pride. You will learn of Me as I give you the conditions by which you will see My grace." [Paraphrased!]

This is the way of God; this is the faith; this is why people cannot make up their minds for Christ; this is why they are in the valley of decision and never come through. They intuit that this is a way that is against the flesh and pride, and they will not have any part of it. Our mission task is to call people to a very strange salvation--from the very thing that the world wants them to enjoy and to develop, namely, their pride, their self-sufficiency, self-exaltation, of commending themselves before men by virtues that they have in themselves. God wants all that to be brought to death. The only thing worth having is God Himself. He alone is righteous; He alone is love, truth, mercy, patience, and humility. He calls us to the way of the Cross, which is the way of humbling, and the church is the very provision for our maturation in the way. In the fellowship of believers, you are going to find yourself in collision with others. There will be the inevitable conflicts where you have to humble yourself to go to one another and find reconciliation before you bring your gift to the altar.

Who wants this kind of a salvation? Only those who desire God above all else. Their reward will be a place of eternal distinction in the governmental overview of His kingdom. They will replace those fallen angels who opted for pride, and He will have in the place of government those that are lowly and meek like Himself. They will exhibit the authentic reality of God because only then can the government of God go forth. The government of God is not bureaucracy, but the administration of God's mercy, kindness and goodness to the earth. It is the bringing of the spirit of humility by which such government is performed. So, it is good to know what we are being saved for and what salvation itself means: that Christ might be formed in us, through His life, because this humility is the distinctive character of that life.

From a transcribed message

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