

The Greatness of Man

by Blaise Pascal

The greatness of man lies in his awareness of his own misery and his pursuit of glory, which is a mark of his excellence.

Scripture: 1 Samuel 16:7, Psalm 8:4, Proverbs 22:1, Matthew 23:12, Romans 12:3

Topics: "Human Nature", "Self Worth"

Description

Blaise Pascal delves into the paradoxical nature of human existence, highlighting the dualities of greatness and misery within each individual. He emphasizes that despite the inherent miseries and pursuit of glory, humans ultimately seek esteem and recognition from others as the source of true happiness. Pascal argues that the pursuit of human reason and the desire for admiration are deeply ingrained qualities that define the essence of man, surpassing material possessions and comfort. Even those who degrade humanity still yearn for admiration, showcasing the internal conflict between self-perception and societal validation.

Transcript

The greatness of man is great in that he knows himself to be miserable. It is then miserable to know oneself to be miserable; but it is also being great to know that one is miserable. All these same miseries prove man's greatness. They are the miseries of a great lord, of a deposed king. We are not miserable without feeling it. A ruined house is not miserable. Man only is miserable. We have so great an idea of the soul of man that we cannot endure being despised, or not being esteemed by any soul; and all the happiness of men consists in this esteem.

The greatest baseness of man is the pursuit of glory.

But it is also the greatest mark of his excellence; for whatever possessions he may have on earth, whatever health and essential comfort, he is not satisfied if he has not the esteem of men. He values human reason so highly that, whatever advantages he may have on earth, he is not content if he is not also ranked highly in the judgment of man. This is the finest position in the world. Nothing can turn him from that desire, which is the most indelible quality of man's heart.

And those who most despise men, and put them on a level with the brutes, yet wish to be admired and believed by men, and contradict themselves by their own feelings; their nature, which is stronger than all, convincing them of the greatness of man more forcibly than reason convinces them of their baseness.

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