

Practicing Honour

by Thaddeus Barnum

The sermon emphasizes the transformative power of honour, rooted in humility and obedience, to counteract the pervasive dishonour in contemporary culture.

Duration: 34:00

Scripture: 1 Samuel 2:30, Esther 2:10, Esther 2:20, Psalm 145:8-9, Proverbs 18:12, Matthew 23:12, John 14:15, Ephesians 6:1-3, Colossians 3:23-24, James 3:9-10

Topics: "Honour", "Honor", "Obedience"

Description

Thaddeus Barnum emphasizes the significance of practicing honor in our lives, urging the congregation to pray for the character of honor to be built within them. He discusses how humility is the foundation of honor and how obedience to God and authority figures can transform our relationships and culture. Using the story of Esther, Barnum illustrates the consequences of dishonor and the importance of honoring God, family, and community. He challenges the church to be a light in a culture that often embraces dishonor, encouraging everyone to reflect God's character through their actions. Ultimately, he calls for a collective commitment to honor in all aspects of life, starting with personal prayer and reflection.

Transcript

Father in Heaven, we join with Mary today and to say our spirit rejoices in God our Saviour. For you have had regard for the humble state of your bonds slave, and the Mighty One has done great things for us. We praise you, we bless you, we glorify you, we worship you.

We thank you for all the grace and love that you have lavished upon us in your Son, Jesus Christ. And for empowering us by the graciousness of God the Holy Spirit into our everyday life. So, Lord, cause us to walk in honour of you, in obedience to you, pleasing to you in all ways.

Through Christ our Lord. Amen. Good morning again, dear friends.

I began last week to take up a conversation with you on the story of honour. As we came into the new year and to begin to look at what it might mean that we would have a life in this new year that would honour the Lord with who we are and how we have our lives together in all ways. And the thing about honour is it is a bit of a foreign word to us in our present culture.

And what I would like to perhaps strike out is how would we be different, you and I, if we actually prayed the prayer, Lord, teach me honour in my life. How would we be different? Lord, build the character of your

honour in me. If we were to pray that prayer intentionally, what would that mean? And how would we be changed by it? How would our worship of the Lord be different? How would our disciplines of how we conduct our behaviour and our life, how would our words be different? How would our homes be different? How would our marriages be different if we honoured? How would our children be different if honour was put at the centre of how our family is, how parents modelled how children were raised? What if honour was met in our employ and our workplaces? What if we were to honour our bosses, those who are in authority over us? What if we were to honour the laws of our land? What if honour crept into our soul and made us, shaped us and defined us? How would we be different? And especially in a culture today that is shifting, where dishonour actually has become normative.

We are seeing a culture in lawlessness or in rebellion to God. We have watched morals changed, which means if we want to hold on to God, we have to then change our religion, change our view of God, shape Him into our image and then honour the one we have made, rather than the one who is God, Father Almighty, Creator of all that is seen and unseen. How would we be different if we as a church brought honour back into the culture, back into our life? How would things be different? I believe in some ways this was the question asked by the church going out into the pagan world.

How could we be a light in the darkness? And part of that light in the darkness is reflecting the character of God in the midst of a dark and pagan world which is only increasing. What would it be like if honour was restored? Last week we began with the simple first principle behind honour. It isn't a good one.

It isn't a nice one. It isn't a happy one. It's called humility.

Why do we say that? Well, Proverbs 18, 12 tells us, Humility precedes honour. Always. We saw the great king Nebuchadnezzar last week.

And he so filled with pride in his life. And we watched Daniel beg him, urge him to do away with his pride, break away from his pride, practice righteousness, go to the poor and show mercy. We saw Jesus pick the same thing up.

When your heart gets lifted up, and you go into a banquet, don't go to the highest place. Run to the last place. Let humility define you.

For the exalted shall be humbled, and the humble shall be exalted. And that principle is undergirding really everything in it. How do we know honour? Save the humility of the soul coming before God.

And we saw it in the life of Nebuchadnezzar last week. We saw it as he in his humility, having been humiliated, actually comes out of it to worship and to praise and to honour God with his lips and with his life. And so this is the way honour begins.

Today I want to take up the second principle behind honour. And it is called obedience. I want to take up, if you could, if you wouldn't mind, I want to take up in these days just before we begin the season of Lent and prepare for the wonderful work of Monday, Thursday, Good Friday, and Resurrection Morning.

I want to look at a book in the Bible that is so rarely talked about that holds up this story of honour in such a beautiful way. It's not heard of much because... I don't know why. I love this book.

It's one of those moments where when we actually did 25 years ago outline the Bible reading program, we did it in a way that as we read through the Bible over the course of the year, in some ways, especially

going through pieces of it, there were chronological pieces. So at the end of the year in the Old Testament, we read books like Haggai and Zechariah. But the one I love coming right at Christmas time is the book of Esther.

Does anybody love the book of Esther? I mean, it is the best book. The thing that's surprising about it is that it does not actually mention the name of God in it. So people don't understand that.

And it's also not mentioned in the New Testament. So it's been given sort of a diminished role. But I want to say this to you.

The very theme of Esther is written and inscribed in every part of Old Testament and New Testament. The very principles are underlying the story of Joseph as he's sent down to Egypt. In Daniel, like we saw last week, the principles that undergird the story have everything to do with honor.

And I love this story. I always wait to read it. It's like a little tiny historical novelette in the Bible.

It's crafted beautifully. And in the center of it, what we find is a couple who has been exiled in dishonor. The Jewish nation came to a place where though they were chosen by God, they did not honor God and they rebelled against Him.

And in their rebellion, the Lord sent prophets and prophets calling them back, calling them back. And they refused. And in their rebellion and in their disobedience, the Lord sent them away.

And now you've got this picture of this couple in exile. This man named Mordecai and this woman Esther in the middle of Persia, in the middle of a culture that is filled with all the secular stuff we face in our life today. And the way the book starts is just fabulous.

The king has decided to honor himself. Don't you see this all the time on television? Am I wrong? Let's have another award show. How many award shows are there per week? Oh, and I get the award again.

I can't tell you how much this means to me. Whatever. It's fabulous how we see splendor and riches and majesty.

Well, the king of Persia who predominates over this vast area of 127 provinces. And you'll see this right at the beginning of Esther. Reigning from India to Ethiopia.

Over 127 provinces. Decides to actually give a feast for his officials and servants. The army of Persia and Medea and the nobles and the governors.

And he decides to show the riches of his royal glory and the splendor and pomp of his greatness for many days. Many days. 180 days.

Did you want to talk about me? I mean, it's just this display. It's lavishing everybody with a seeing of his splendor and his glory and his riches. What's really amazing about the Bible is when you look at the Bible, though, God actually can do the same thing.

He can show his glory. He can show his splendor. I mean, there are moments in the Scriptures like when Isaiah chapter 6. He comes in the presence of Almighty God and falls down before him.

Read the book of Revelation. It is just this constant sense of all of a sudden you're in the presence of God Almighty. The wonders of his glory, his splendor, his beauty, his majesty.

But when he came to teach us about himself. When he came to show us his character. Did you notice he didn't come to show us his glory? He came in humility.

Did you see that? When he reveals his character, he doesn't just go, here I am. Although, if you read the Gospels carefully, behold the glory of the transfiguration. Of course, he only took three with him.

Just three. He didn't do it with everybody. He was going to show us that his real glory, the real lavished grace of God would be seen in the darkest moments of Calvary.

That's where his glory was displayed. This character of God Almighty in humility. He's not like this king.

But he is. But he chooses to reveal himself in humility. And give the character of humility.

So that when you see him, all you can do is fall on your face and honor him. You see the pattern? That's how it goes. That's why in the beautiful reading by Peter.

Hail today of Psalm 145. It's an explosion of the people of God. Worshipping him in his splendor, in his glory, in his radiance.

The Lord is gracious and merciful. Slow to anger and great in loving kindness. They shall speak of the glory of your kingdom.

We will make known your mighty acts and the glory of your majesty, of your kingdom. Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom. The Lord sustains all who fall.

He raises up all who are bowed down. See, he reveals himself in his glory, in his beauty, in his majesty. But he reveals himself in his humility first.

And that's the beauty of it. And that's why when he teaches us honor, look how he demonstrates it for us. And so we get this beginning of the book of Esther.

Which is the king actually doing the opposite. There are three feasts in the opening chapter. Yes, three feasts in the opening chapter of Esther.

There's the one that goes for six months over the entire place from Ethiopia to India. Then there's the one he does in the capital of Susa. He does his own seven days.

And it is just lavish banquet. It is 25 cruise lines all in one moment. I mean, it's just everything.

You know the... oh, anyway. And then Queen Vashti herself has her own party. So there are these feasts going on everywhere.

But at the end, what the king wants to do at the end, is he wants to display his greatest, most precious treasure he has in all his kingdom. He wants to show the vastness of his splendor and his wealth in the last crescendo of the final day, of the final week, of the final month of all his splendor. He wants his beautiful queen to step onto the stage and people to see her beauty.

This is the moment. This is the drum roll. This is everything.

The whole first chapter builds to the moment where he calls Queen Vashti in beautiful form, radiance of glory, to step out onto the stage. And you can almost imagine the hand wave. I'm just the only one that I know here in Majesty's world.

And the entire story crumbles in just a few words. Queen Vashti refused to come. Right at the heart of the story is the center of disobedience and dishonor.

Right at the center of it is a humiliation publicly of the king in front of everybody. In front of the seeing world and then through communications even back in those days, the word always, gossip has always been way before Google lights. Gossip has always gone everywhere.

It's like water. You can't stop it. It finds its way everywhere.

And Queen Vashti says no. Now, the storyteller doesn't dig underneath it. We can't find out why.

There's no story behind the story of was there a justifiable reason. Actually, the story tells us there isn't a justifiable reason. All that we need to know is that she, whatever reason, whatever was behind it, she said no to the king.

And so we've got right at the beginning, not the story of honor, but the story of dishonor and shame and public humiliation. And suddenly out of the belly of the king comes anger. Comes wrath.

Comes burning inside of this public humiliation of his wife, of the queen. As a man, as a husband, as a king. And here, at this moment, suddenly he is surrounded by his law, his team, his legal team, his counselors, his magi.

All the people that bring him counsel and they say, king, the impact of what she has done is going to affect everybody in the kingdom. You've got to act. You've got to do something.

Now, my friends, this brings a question I would suggest to you and to me. What does dishonor do if it's not dealt with? Can you imagine a culture where dishonor reigns? Can you imagine a culture where children are allowed to do that with their parents? Where wives, where spouses, where... Can you imagine a culture where suddenly we didn't care about the laws, we didn't care about... And chaos began to be a normative part. What happens to a culture when rebellion and dishonor begin to take root and are not dealt with? What happens to the people? What happens to the character of the people? What happens to the culture? What happens to us as a people when dishonor becomes untended, undealt with? And therefore, whether passively or inactively, it's basically approved.

Rebellion is allowed. People are allowed to do what they want to do, when they want to do it, with their lips, with their lives. What if the Queen Vashti was just a normative part of life? Well, I don't think we have to think hard.

Friends, this is not the 1940s, is it? It's not the 1980s. What would it be like if dishonor ruled in our day? It's a question to be thought through in our own lives and to be asking the question, where do we actually model that culture, dishonor, in our homes and our families? And you can see it everywhere. You can see it even uprooting in our young coming up.

You've seen it. Go to the mall today. You'll watch a tantrum of a young child dishonoring their parents and having no effect.

It's everywhere. It's everywhere. Here in this moment of chapter one, an edict is given, and it's fascinating what the edict does because the edict basically comes out to say to the whole known world, Queen Vashti has been placed in exile.

She will never again see the face of the king. She will no longer be queen. She is put in exile.

She has been sent away. Let it be known from the least to the greatest, there shall be respect in this kingdom. There shall be honor in this kingdom.

The way marriages work, the way families work, the way all levels of society work, there will be honor. An edict goes out to ensure the people that justice and a just response has been made so people can know. Order must be in our culture, an order that centers around honor.

Did you see that? It centers around honor as the piece of it. And we're talking secular world now, not the God world, not those who know the Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Now, I do want to say to you that the principle is one and the same.

Think about this just for a moment. Because this is the whole point of how Esther begins. It begins with Mordecai and Esther who are in exile in the midst of a pagan land.

Why are they in exile? Because we, the people of God, chosen by God, brought to the promised land. God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob established it. And we rebelled against God.

That's the story in the Bible. We rebelled against God. And so, in love and in compassion, He called us back.

He called us back. He sent the prophets. He sent the judges.

He constantly called us back until the rebellion was so deep that the Lord sent His people away. As it's stated in the prophets like Ezekiel and Jeremiah and Isaiah, He gave a writ of divorcement to the wife of Jehovah, His bride, His people. He sent her away.

It's the same picture actually. That rebellion at the end of the day ends up in this break. And that's how the story begins.

Chapter 2 of Esther begins with Mordecai and Esther. Esther, who is a Jewish female orphan. Her mama and daddy have died.

She's suffering under the hardship of her family being taken from her. And Mordecai is actually her cousin. And Mordecai comes to be papa to Hadassah or to Esther.

And you see this couple in the midst of exile having been sent away. And as much as Queen Vashti was sent away, the people of God were sent away. And now you've got this couple in the midst of this land.

And that's where the story begins. Because you know what's at the center of Mordecai and Esther? It's a reversal. They've come to honor the Lord.

This is a key principle underneath the Scriptures. 1 Samuel 2.20 actually captures the words in print. Those who honor me, I will honor.

1 Samuel 2.20, memorize it. Those who honor me. Say it.

Those who honor me, I will honor. You just memorize it. Those who honor me, I will honor.

It's a promise of the Bible. It's underneath everything. It's underneath everything.

Back the year that Errol and I were married in 1981, the great feature film of that particular year was a film called Chariots of Fire. Anybody remember that? 1924, the Olympics, you have this wonderful runner by the name of Eric Little. And there he is, this Scottish missionary to China.

A man who would die in China actually, but he came to run the Olympics. God had made him fast. Perhaps you remember some of the great dialogue out of that movie.

But underneath it came the great moment in the traditions of the Olympics that he was to run on the Sabbath day. He was to run on the Sabbath. And every principle inside of him said, I want to run.

I want to make my name known. That's why God made me. But I will not break his command to honor the Sabbath day.

And there's pressure put on him. Pressure to break this. Pressure because the nation needed their young man to stand up and represent them.

And there's Eric Little saying no. The nation is never honored first. God is honored first.

God is honored first. And they put pressure on him to do this. Again, you'll find our culture today, we have so thrown away the entirety of what we understand the Scriptures to say and to mean.

Sabbath means nothing today in 1915, does it? 2015, Sunday, Sabbath, a day for the Lord, means nothing in our culture at all. But back then, 1924, this man knew what was right in the eyes of God and would not break it. And on a day, if you remember the story, he gets changed out with one of the runners.

And just as he's about to run, in the movie, I don't know if it happened in real life, but in the movie, such a spectacular moment. He's about to run and one of the Americans comes over and puts in his hand a piece of paper to run with. And what does the piece of paper say? 1st Daniel 2.20 Those who honor me, I will honor.

It's a principle of life. It's a principle of everything. If we honor Him, and that's what you see rooted in this couple, Mordecai, who is a papa over Esther.

Inside, in the middle of their humiliation, in exile, cast away, there these two are. Honoring the Lord with their lives in the midst of that dark and pagan land. They're honoring Him.

Two statements from Esther that are so key in this passage. Esther 2.10, Esther 2.20, where it says that she did not make her kindred known because Mordecai told her not to. And again, in chapter 2.20, I love the way this is said in chapter 2.20. Esther had not made known her kindred or her people as Mordecai had commanded her.

For Esther obeyed Mordecai just as when she was brought up by him. She constantly knew that to honor her father, her honor to honor her father, Mordecai, the one who God placed as his, was the beginning of life. It's the small things.

It's the small things that we begin to find the beginnings of life. I can't tell you for me how important this is. I did not have to learn pride.

Nobody had to school me in pride. Nobody had to come teach me the principles of pride 101 and then advance to my master's and my doctorate. I achieved my doctorate in pride at the age of three.

Is that right? Is that right? But honor does not come naturally. Do you understand that? Honor is not something that is born in this condition of a sinful broken heart. To honor God, to honor our parents, to honor in our culture takes lessons learned and taught.

It isn't something that you just do once. There it is. It's part of being imbibed into the character of a person.

How we learn to honor. It is something that becomes us. We put it on and we learn it.

I thank God that when I was growing up in the faith, and especially as I was going into ordained ministry, I had very strong papas in the faith that taught me how to honor. I say that because my papas, their papas in the faith, which in our tradition are bishops, in my day, these bishops were dishonoring God publicly. They were dishonoring God publicly.

And here we were under their authority. And I was being called into the bishop's office one day, and I was prepared. I was prepared to speak my mind.

And I had my papa in the faith call me. My senior clergy, my rector called me and said, Now, these are the three things I'm asking you to do. Number one, I want you to hold your tongue.

Number two, I want you to be gracious in everything. Your speech seasoned with salt. And number three, I want you to make no response at all.

Leave the office, pray it through before you actually speak it out. So that when you speak it out, it will be done with respect and honor. Well, this is why the Bible, this is why Jesus says, Take the yoke of an older oxen and put it on the younger oxen.

Because the younger oxen wants to move. The younger oxen wants to go. The older oxen knows the story.

Do you understand? Honor is not something that we just acquire because it happens. It's got to be a principle learned, a principle taught, a principle lived. The reason we begin to see these great moments in Joseph's life, Daniel's life, and now Esther's life, as suddenly she is called in to be one of the women, to be selected to be the next queen.

We see favor come upon her. We see her being honored. The only reason she's being honored is because she's learned honor in her life.

Honor in her practice. Honor in her way of being. Honor in how she tells her story.

This is the way it's done. Honor in every piece of how we live our life. Learning it with our wives or learning it with our relationships.

Learning it with our bosses. Listen to how Paul talks about the way we should treat our bosses when we go to work. He uses the word of slaves and masters.

He says, Slaves, in all things, obey those who are your masters on earth. Not with external service as merely pleasing men. But rather with sincerity of heart and fearing the Lord.

Whatever you do, do your work heartily as for the Lord. Not for men. For from the Lord you'll receive the reward of your inheritance.

It is the Lord Christ whom you serve. Did you see what Paul did here? He tells us to obey our bosses and to see in their face the face of our Lord. Because at the end of the day, we are serving Him.

And when we honor our boss, we're honoring Him. Do you see what he does? How do we treat those in authority over us? How do we treat everybody? How do we treat our families? Start with our elderly. Does anybody not have an outcry in this generation of what's happening to our elderly? Does anybody not have something inside of them that says, These are the ones we should be honoring.

But what are we doing with our elderly? How are we treating our elderly? We have glorified the young and we've cast out the old. What have we done as a people, as a culture? Does anybody not have a disgust inside them about these things? Why? Because we've not learned the principles of God underneath. Honor always comes first in who we are and in what we do.

And out of it comes a cry that you hear in the sounds of someone like Mary who simply says, He has had regard for the humble state of His bondservant. Do you want to know the character of God? Then read the Gospels. See the person of our Lord Jesus Christ.

What did you learn about Him? You learned this about Him. I have come not to do my will, but the will of Him who sent me. I love it the way it says at the end of John 14.

He says, I am doing as the Father has commanded me so the whole world can know I love the Father. I do what my Father says so the world can know I love the Father. I love the Father.

And so He goes to the cross of Calvary for us to honor His Father and to bless us and to teach us the first principles. If anyone loves me, he will do what I say. And the Father and I will come make our home with Him.

Honor, dear friends, is everything. This week, Errol and I were down at the College of Bishops meeting in Orlando, Florida. And at one point in the bishops meeting, there was a moment to make sure all of our relationships were good.

And above board, if anybody had been hurt in any processes, to have a moment to speak, to have a moment to have a confession and a time to ask forgiveness. And a man rose to the microphone, and apparently he was the mediator and moderator of the conversation. And he said, When you speak, I'm going to give you certain principles.

The first principle is that you will speak the truth in love because you will honor one another in the way you speak, as James 3 says, because all of us are created in the image of God. Number two, Paul says, even to the least of those for whom Christ died, everyone deserves honor and respect. So when you speak, make sure you guard your tongue, watch your finger.

That's what I mean by finger. And check your tone. And see if the goal of your words is to ensure honesty, peace, forgiveness, towards reconciliation.

We put honor at the center of how we do life together. That's not our culture. What would happen if you and I prayed, Lord, teach me honor in my life.

Build the character of honor in the Christian soul. And start with me. Lord, what would our fellowship be like here if we actually honored one another, even in our disagreements? What would our relationships be like with our brothers and sisters in other churches if we honored? What would it be like if we began to honor those in our workplaces? How does life change if we ask the Lord, teach me.

Oh, Lord, teach me honor in my life. I dare you to take up the prayer. In the name of the Father, in the name of the Son, in the name of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

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