

West Side Fellowship

Lost in Pride

For by the grace given me I say to everyone of you: Do not think of yourselves more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgement, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.

Romans 12v3

Many years ago while on ministry in Norway I took a mountain bike out into a mountain forest in the mountains. In those days I was quite fast and after a couple of hours and many miles found myself quite deep in the forest. I raced down one track after another and then as I noticed the time made the turn for home, only to find I had no idea what direction home was in. Although it hurt my pride, I have to admit that in all the excitement of racing around I had become lost, not only was I lost, but I was lost in a very remote area and there was not going to be anyone else around to ask for directions. Because of the type of ground I had been riding over I didn't even have any tracks to follow, I was stuck. With trees all around there was nothing to get any sense of location from local landmarks and I must admit it was getting a bit concerning. Sadly, like so many of us, it was only when I had exhausted my own abilities that I started to pray!

The solution was easy, even if the journey was tough. I fixed my eyes on a very high mountain in the distance, it was a peak that stood above all the others and was probably over forty miles away, much further than I needed to go, but it acted as a landmark above all the trees and I started travelling towards it, not by trying to follow the paths others had made, but by literally going in a straight line. After a few miles of scrabbling through the forest including a few streams, some of which was done with the bike on my shoulder, I finally found myself in a valley with a road, at that point the rest of the journey fell into place.

That day I learnt a spiritual lesson that I remember to this day, even though the rest of the trip has faded, and it is a lesson that has continued to be a blessing to this day.

As we have seen in the verse above, a simple lesson to be learnt is "not to think of myself more highly than I ought". It's often easy to reject the idea of having a pride problem, but when we put this verse into context we see that it comes after two verses that have been a challenge to me for over thirty years, two verses the Lord constantly brings me back to, Romans 12v1-2; the living sacrifice and the transforming of the mind to know the ways of God. It is after these two verses that the challenge comes about not thinking more of ourselves than we should. Sadly, just like my ride into the woods, we can be very busy with our "spiritual business" while not realising that we have become totally lost. It's a theme we see in the warning of Matthew 5v21-23, plenty of action, but lost before the Lord, and is something we all suffer from over the years, however in our pride we try to hide it from others and even from the Lord. We start to look round for others to ask for directions or try and look at the paths that others have made in the hope that they will put us back on course, when the solution is simple. Look up and fix our eyes into the distance on something that never moves, the Lord himself and then start our journey directly towards Him, no matter

what gets in the way or how stupid we may look before others. It's what we see in the life of Jesus as he endured the cross (Hebrews 12v2), he was looking to the end point of the journey and was not distracted or led astray by the situation he found himself in, for he knew he was right in the middle of the Father's will.

Sadly for so many of us, pride prevents us from looking at ourselves with sober judgment. Sometimes because we think we have achieved or know so much that we can't imagine the possibility of being lost. Other times we know the truth, yet because of our pride and the thought of having to do something about it, we bury the truth in the hope that somehow everything will just work out alright in the end, while in reality we continue to drift further and further off course. It takes a real step of humility to cry out to the Lord that we are lost and need His directions to get back onto the right path.

Crying out to the Lord and admitting we are lost is only the start of the journey, like reading a map it doesn't get you to the place you are going to, for that you have to start the journey itself and follow the instruction. I could have fixed my eyes on the mountain all day, but until I started to walk I was going nowhere, even if I knew I was lost and the direction I needed to go in. What we need is a step of faith, a step of obedience to the Lord. Now at this point it's very easy to allow our pride to lift us up as we tell ourselves how we obey all the rules and as such are a good Christian. However, obeying the rules can often mask the true state of our heart towards God. It's what we see in Mark 10v17-31 as we read of Jesus and his encounter with the rich young ruler. For here was a young man that was obeying all the rules, yet when asked to follow the Lord sacrificially, as we are called to (Romans 12v1) he walked away. His measure of faith, walk of obedience, was not what he thought it was and was not something he was willing to commit to. He just liked the idea of feeling good about himself before God because he had obeyed the rules.

Let's just think about the rules for a moment. Why do we have rules? Why do we have to have endless laws? Sadly it's because of our selfishness and the desire to do what we want to do when we want to do it, no matter what the cost to anyone else. If murder was legal, people would kill others just for annoying them. Most laws are put in place to stop us harming others, the rest are supposed to be there to stop us from hurting ourselves.

When God put the various laws in place it was to stop His people going astray, to give them a line in the sand that told them that this was the edge of the path. Sadly the laws didn't change their hearts towards God, for when our hearts are set on fulfilling the will of God we do not need rules and laws. If we are walking in daily obedience, listening and following the guidance of the Lord we would not even get close enough to edge of the path to see the line in the sand that marked the boundary and we certainly wouldn't see it as we would be looking at the Lord as we read earlier in Hebrews. It is the lesson Jesus tried to teach to those around him as he stood on the mountainside in Matthew 5v17-48. Here Jesus tried to explain that just following the rules was not enough, the rules just stopped them fulfilling the worldly desires of their heart. Jesus was trying to show them that they needed to be transformed, by the renewing of their minds so that their hearts desire became the will of God. As Jesus said in Matthew 5v17-20, he was not abolishing the law, rather he was saying that if they truly lived with a heart after the Lord they would never break the law, it would be obsolete.

The danger we face is that our lives become driven by a love of the rules as we see in the lives of the Pharisees, rather than a heart after God himself. It is very easy to slip from having a relationship with the Lord into a relationship with the rules. Our words and actions are driven by

the desires of the heart (Luke 6v45), therefore if in our lives we keep being stopped by the rules, then we have to question what our hearts desire is. What is it fixed on that takes us to the boundary of the path?

There are often times in our life when the Lord has to bring us to a halt, times when He tries to get us to see how lost we have become. Times when once again we need to examine the true desires of our heart. For like any relationship that is failing, if we are humbly willing to make the sacrifices required, it can be rebuilt. However, if our heart is hard, if there is no true desire for that person or the Lord himself, then any cost will be seen as a burden and not worth the price to be paid. It is at that moment we get a true glimpse into the desires of our heart.

The problem with these times is that if we have pride in our heart, the word from the Lord is rejected. If we think of the parable of the sower (Matthew 13v1-9 & 18-23), only the seed that fell on the good soil was taken in and produced a crop that lasted. Hardness of heart, pride, caused the rejection of the seed that landed on the path. The seed that fell on shallow soil or among the weeds just landed in hearts that had a superficial love for the Lord, yet their true desire was set on other things. It is a hard challenge, but it shows how we deceive ourselves about our own heart state towards the Lord. The heart of Christ was humbled and obedient (Philippians 2v6-8), it's a heart attitude that we should aspire to, yet we turn back at the first obstacle. If our hearts are not truly set on the Lord, we will never be willing to pay the sacrificial costs involved. That is the true state of our hearts, our faith, that we are asked to consider in Romans 12v3.

If we think about our whole Christian life, it is all based around the foundation of our heart desire towards Him; our desire to "know Him". It is so easy to slip and replace "knowing Him" with "knowing about Him", following the paths that others have made instead of seeking the Lord for ourselves. Let us take a moment to think of ourselves with sober judgement and then fix our eyes on the Lord and start walking straight towards Him. There will be obstacles and struggles, things that our new heart attitude reveal, but our act of faith is to continue to keep our eyes fixed, walking in the direction of the Lord and allowing Him to guide us in how to deal with the obstacles and issues that are revealed.

The Christian life is a life of love, a heart desire towards God, that leads to a life of faith; a desire to listen to and do His will. It is the foundation of the Christian life, for seeking the Lord allows Him to speak into our lives that then leads to repentance; the action of changing our current direction to the path the Lord would have us walk in. That repentance to obedience is the path of salvation in which the Lord would have us walk (2 Peter 3v9). It is not a one off decision when we accept the Lord, it is a daily calling, for when it ceases to be daily, our hearts have grown cold towards Him. It's time to once again to evaluate ourselves, check our direction and examine the desires of our heart; to once again fix our eyes on the Lord and step out in faith to follow the path towards Him.

But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgement. When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world.

1 Corinthians 11v31-32