

New Covenant Priesthood (Part Four)

Humility

John W. Ritenbaugh

Given 08-Dec-01; Sermon #533

Hebrews 13:15 By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.

Some have remarked that the book of Hebrews is the Leviticus of the New Testament. This of course is because there is so much touching on the High Priesthood of Jesus Christ. What spins off that is the general responsibilities of the priesthood *under* Jesus Christ because much of the responsibilities that come upon us as individual priests within this priesthood are going to be somewhat similar.

In this verse, *sacrifice*, *praise*, and *thanksgiving* are linked. Sacrifice is a major responsibility of a priest, and two of his sacrifices are praise and thanksgiving. Perhaps we do not often think of them as sacrifices, but they are. In the Old Testament, the Peace Offering (what many feel was the most frequently offered sacrifice), is sometimes called "the *thank* offering."

This sermon is eventually going to be worked into the subject of the priesthood and humility, but praise and thanksgiving are also linked to humility. Those three go hand in hand. Before we get there, I want to review some things important to praise, gratitude, and thanksgiving which are also a part of our responsibility. Praise, gratitude, and thanksgiving are *not* specifically the same, and yet their linkage to the priesthood is so strong that they have to be considered together. Let us define them.

Praise means to express admiration and approval for. Some synonyms of it are acclaim, applaud, extol, honor, endorse, and bless, which is a word that you are probably more familiar with in the Bible. "Bless the Lord, O my soul." It means, "Praise God with my life."

Gratitude means the *readiness*, or the receptiveness, to show appreciation for, and to return kindness.

Thanksgiving is the expression of gratitude.

The way one author of a commentary put it is that gratitude is internal. It is a mental awareness, a receptive attitude that is alert to favors and services given in one's behalf, whereas thanksgiving is the *external* response to that awareness. A person, in his own mind, can feel grateful for something, but if he never reciprocates by giving thanks, then he is grateful, but no thanksgiving is given. Gratitude *precedes* the giving of thanks, and it is a necessary component actually to both praise and thanksgiving.

I want to be sure that we understand clearly what I meant toward the end of my sermon two weeks ago in regard to David hearing God, and his applying that hearing through being filled with admiration for Him. This in turn issued forth a torrent of praise and thanksgiving for God.

Let us go back to Psalm 19, which I used to illustrate this. I choose this because it is so clearly seen. It is pretty hard to misunderstand what was happening here.

Psalm 19:1-4 The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows his handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night shows knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them has he set a tabernacle for the sun.

Not a single one of us has ever heard the heavens speak. But David understood what the heavens were telling him about God. What David saw and heard through God's creation, in this case, was the shining radiance and the immensity of the heavens and the heavenly bodies. What did they tell him? It helped him to come to know God because he saw in their movements a regularity that taught him that God is orderly, consistent, and dependable.

David concluded that God was just as consistent and trustworthy in other areas of life as He is in the operations of the heavenly bodies. He concluded that in God there is no shadow of turning aside from what He has set Himself to accomplish in the creation of Himself in us, and that there is sufficient power in Him to enable Him to do this. It was very faith-building for David to look up into the heavens and to meditate upon what he saw, and reach conclusions.

Just in case you want to study Psalm 19 a little bit further, you will see that there is a turn in the psalm away from the creation to *law*. There is a turn to testimonies, to judgments, to commandments, and to statutes. These are four synonyms for law. What David saw there was a transference of what he saw in the heavens to the law, to the Word of God, and so he knew the same God who created the heavens was going to be the same way in the creation of Himself within David. David saw that God was absolutely dependable, no shadow of turning, and it gave him a great deal of faith.

Let us look at another example from David in Psalm 139. The overall subject of this psalm is God's omniscience, God's omnipresence, and God's omnipotence, in that order. In each case David examines them as he goes along in the psalm.

Psalm 139:1-2 O LORD, you have searched me, and know me.
You know my down sitting and my uprising: you understand my
thought afar off.

What is David talking about here? He is talking about *omniscience*. God knows **everything** that is going on. That is incomprehensible to us. Our minds are so finite, but God's mind is not.

Psalm 139:3-6 You compass my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O LORD, you know it altogether. You have beset me behind and before, and laid your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me: it is high, I cannot attain unto it.

In verse 7 David begins examining God's omnipresence. Every one of us has a presence. We may walk into a room and our presence is noted by others who are around us, but look how limited it is. Our presence is limited to where we are. God is omniscient. He knows everything. He is omnipresent. He is present everywhere at the same time. How about that! And then David goes on to God's omnipotence. God is almighty in power, in wisdom, and in understanding. Everything about Him is above every power that exists within the framework of man's knowledge.

Psalm 139:13-18 For you have possessed my reins: you have covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise you; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvelous are your works; and that my soul knows right well. My substance was not hid from you when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Your eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in your book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them. How precious also are your thoughts unto me, O God! How great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand; when I awake, I am still with you.

What I want us to see here is how David's meditation on subjects like this brought him to the place where he stood in admiration of the mind and of the powers of God. He shifted that to something that every one of us should be able to understand. We should be able to grasp that, because he shifted it to something that you and I can see with our own eyes—ourselves. We can see ourselves.

What does "seeing ourselves" teach us about God, the Creator of our body? What part of our body can we seriously examine and meditate upon that does not leave us with a much deeper appreciation of God's intelligence and His creative power? Is it the eye? What a magnificent creation that there should even be something such as an eye and be able to see. Is it the ear, the hair, the skin, the bones, the stomach, the intestines, the brain? Is it the tremendous variety of cells that enable each part of the body to function, doing its individual job? And yet even though it is different, it is somewhat the same, but it performs a different function for the whole.

How about even one simple single cell? I read where a researcher said that one simple single cell from the human body is about as simple as the street map of New York City. Our body is a marvelous creation that should stir us to awe of the intelligence, the power to give life. Man has not created a thing yet from his own powers that can give life to it.

There is yet another thing here, and that is David shows amazement that God showed such a detailed and intimate interest in him as an individual from among the billions of mankind. Maybe this is an obvious question, but are these things that we take for granted so often in the rush of the busy routine of daily life?

Let us go on to another. This one we are going to pick out of Psalm 78. If you are on to me and carrying through with my thought of what I am showing you, these are areas we need to think about so that we can give praise to God, just using the Psalms as an example. It does not appear that David is the author of this psalm, but that does not matter because it reveals the same basic principle that is in many of David's psalms.

Psalm 78:1-5 Give ear, O my people, to my law: incline your ears to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in a parable: I will utter dark sayings of old: Which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, showing to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he has done. For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children.

What were they to make known, and why?

Psalm 78:6 That the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children.

He is describing a cycle that God has commanded. Do you not remember what God said to Abraham? God said, "I *know* him. He will teach his

children about **Me**." God knew that Abraham would pass these things on. Why? We will see in just a bit. This is a rather long psalm, and what it does is go on to record a number of historical events of Israel's past. Did you notice that the word "praises" even appears in verse 4?

God's dealings with Israel made it possible for Israel to continue as a people. Is it possible that none of us would even be here and having this opportunity to know God's truth and to have salvation in the Kingdom of God if God had not done what He did with our forefathers in Israel? Now what did God do? He recorded Israel's history.

Are any of you familiar with the histories that men have written? They cannot be trusted because all those histories are written from a prejudiced point of view. Everybody is essentially saying, from a nationalistic point of view, that this happened, this happened and this happened. They were saying they were the good guys and the other guys were the bad guys, while the guys who wrote the stories on the other side said the same thing from their point of view.

God is the only one who is not prejudiced about what was recorded in Israel's history. It is an absolutely true account of what happened. What we see in that is that God Himself is included as the One manipulating, guarding, and guiding Israel's history, and so He commanded our forefathers that this should be taught to the children of Israel.

Now what is the psalm about? It is about God's faithfulness. It is about His faithful and true dealings with our spiritual, and in many cases, our physical forefathers, because that is the issue of this psalm. That issue is extremely important to us because we must live by faith, and one can only fully trust someone who has shown himself to be trustworthy. The psalm shows God as Almighty, full of wisdom, and seemingly endless in His displays of His lovingkindness. It shows His discipline of us, His sovereign authority, His watchful care and providence. It shows that even in a trackless wilderness and without farm or home, God was able to supply them with food and water so that their lives did not end.

Let us go back to Psalm 78 once again. In verse 7 we have the main point of the entire psalm.

Psalms 78:7 That they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments.

He shows a linkage between remembering what happened in the past and the keeping of His commandments in the present, because the God we serve is the same God who was faithful to Israel on every count.

Psalms 78:8-12 And might not be as their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation: a generation that set not their heart aright, and whose spirit was not steadfast with God. The children of Ephraim, being armed and carrying bows, turned back in the day of battle. They kept not the covenant of God, and refused to walk in his law: And forgot his works, and his wonders that he had showed them. Marvelous things did he in the sight of their fathers in the land of Egypt, in the field of Zoan.

If His covenant is ever going to work, we must make sure that we never forget. Israel did forget, and we're going to see that.

To do what I have just said requires thinking. It takes preparation of the mind so that we do not go into prayer unprepared to pray, and to give thanks. Perhaps you think these things only appear in the psalms. They do not. We are going to go to one verse in the New Testament, in II Corinthians 4.

II Corinthians 4:15 For all *things* are for your sakes . . .

Mark that one well. "*All things*." Let us include the Old Testament **and** the New Testament in that. Let us include all of those psalms with their instruction to give praise to God, and to give thanksgiving to God, because that is the subject of these sermons. Let us put down here the recording of all the history of Israel and God's part in those things. Let us put down the names and the places where these events took place, thus leaving us a record of things that we should do or not do. Let us put down a record of these things that we should never forget so that we apply them to our lives right now. It is the principle of them, the intention that God is getting to.

II Corinthians 4:15 For all things are for your sakes [for the church's sake] that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God.

This verse is a parallel of I Thessalonians 5:18 (where it says "Give thanks to God in everything") and of Ephesians 5:20 (where it says "Give thanks to God in everything"), but it is a bit more specific in regard to a couple of things.

Now how can this "all things are for your sake" possibly be true? Let me read this verse from the *New American Standard Bible*. It is just a little bit clearer.

II Corinthians 4:15 (NASB) All things are for your sakes, that the grace which is spreading to more and more people may cause the giving of thanks, and abound to the glory of God."

Remember what grace is. It is God's free gift to us. It is everything from forgiveness to those things which enable us to overcome and grow. It is the opening of the mind and the power to overcome. It is wisdom, knowledge, and understanding. It is deliverance in tight spots. It is healings. It is healings of the mind, healings of the heart, healings of the body. It is circumstances in which we find ourselves, which sometimes can be very difficult, painful, and frightening. We could go on and on.

What about all the things we are reading in the newspapers of what America is involved in and of things that are going on in Afghanistan? Are they all included? Yes they are. They can all play a part in our salvation. That is what Paul is saying. "All things are for your sake." Just try to get a little bit of a grasp of what God is juggling here. He is juggling a world full of billions of people and events of awesome magnitude. How many angels is He directing to do this, that, and the other thing, receiving information back and processing it? Can you imagine? He has at least an Intel 4 chip in His mind! It is awfully fast with tremendous capacity. You see, it is all being worked for the purpose that He is working out, and you are part of that purpose.

II Corinthians 4:15 (NASB) All things are for your sakes, that the grace which is spreading to more and more people may *cause* [I want you to think of how important it is to give thanks to God.] the giving of thanks, and abound to the glory of God.

Everything is being done ultimately to bring glory to God and thanksgiving from us because we get it, and we see that it is great and good and beneficial for us. Eventually it is going to result in the conversion of the Afghanis, and maybe even that Osama bin Laden. Who knows? Do you think he is not going to remember these things in the future and realize how wrong he was, and how wrong his enemies were too? What is God juggling here?

Look at it this way. "Grace" is the subject of that sentence, and "thanks" is the direct object of "abound," which incidentally in the Greek is a verb and should more accurately be translated "abounding," or "increasing." It is something that is ongoing. It is active, not static. It is increasing. Paul is saying that the increasing numbers of people being converted and giving glory to God through thanks is the result that Paul is so pleased about.

In a broad sense, Paul is saying that eventually "all things" will work to God's glory. In a narrow sense, "these things" are aspects of God's grace, and they all work, or can be made to work to our advantage. That is awesome! It is almost incomprehensible. When we understand there are about five or six billion people on earth, and to think of a mind that is able to keep track of what is going on, that is beyond me.

Isaiah 51:1-3 Hearken to me, you that follow after righteousness, you that seek the LORD: look unto the rock whence you are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence you are digged. Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bare you: for I called him alone, and blessed him, and increased him. For the LORD shall comfort Zion: he will comfort all her waste places; and he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the LORD: joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody.

Do we have any doubt about whom this is speaking? In the first case it is the physical nation of Israel. In the second case it is the church. It is spiritual Israel, the spiritual nation. The **rock** that is mentioned in verse 1 is shown in verse 2 to be Abraham. It is not Christ this time, but Abraham, because verse 2 gives the answer who the rock is. The rock is not just Abraham, it is Abraham and Sarah. Even as Abraham is our spiritual father, Sarah is our spiritual mother. In the analogy that God is giving us here, we are hewn from them, because we are to be of the same mind as they were. Both were very faithful to God. The context then addresses all of those who have been hewn from them, and these of course include those who have made the covenant with God.

In verse 3 God describes some of the beautiful characteristics that will identify Zion, which includes those who have been hewn out of Abraham and Sarah. Zion becomes a code name for that group of people. Found among these characteristics are thanksgiving and joyfulness.

The reason I went through this is to establish in your mind that God expects us to give Him thanksgiving. It is not acceptable to Him that we do not. He expects us to praise Him. He expects us to be overflowing with joy. The only way that we can do this is to recognize that we are the unmerited beneficiaries of His grace. He did not have to call us, but He did. He could have called a billion other people, but He called us. I think that for us to be appreciative of this we have to be brought to the place where we are thinking about it enough to realize the odds that were against us for this occurring. They are pretty massive. How many people could God have called and opened their minds who are far superior to us? God called the weak. How many people have human carnal character that exceeds what we have as a converted person?

What I am driving at here is that being thankful requires thinking, and it requires thinking along certain lines within certain parameters. This is primarily what the psalms are for. They are to establish in our minds those areas that we need to think about in order to fulfill our priestly responsibility of giving thanks to God and praising Him. What have we seen already? We have seen the creation. We see the history of Israel and all of those things that have led up to us being the recipients of God's blessings to Abraham. We do not deserve it one bit.

Go now to Psalm 26. This is another psalm of David's.

Psalm 26:6 I will wash my hands in innocence: so will I compass your altar, O LORD: that I may publish [proclaim] with the voice of thanksgiving, and tell of all your wondrous works.

David asked for the opportunity to thank God. Of course the way God would respond would be to open David's mind to enable him to comprehend as he meditated on these things what he needed to thank God for.

In Martin's sermon last week he used Psalm 150, and I want to go back there. This is the final psalm. It is the conclusion to all the psalms of thanksgiving and praise, and it answers a number of questions.

Psalm 150:1-6 Praise you the LORD. Praise God in his sanctuary: praise him in the firmament of his power. Praise him for his mighty acts: praise him according to his excellent greatness. Praise him with the sound of the trumpet: praise him with the psaltery and harp. Praise him with the timbrel and dance: praise him with stringed instruments and organs. Praise him upon the loud cymbals: praise him upon the high sounding cymbals. Let everything that has breath praise the LORD. Praise you the LORD.

Here are some questions and their answers.

1. *Where should God be praised?* (The answer is in that psalm.) God should be praised ***EVERYWHERE!***
2. *How should God be praised?* (God answers that too.) The psalm says to praise Him with every suitable instrument, including the human voice, which incidentally far exceeds any instrument that man has invented to give a melodious sound. There is nothing that compares to the voice which God created. All the other things are nothing but imitations of the human voice.
3. *Why should God be praised?* (That psalm tells us again.) God should be praised for His powerful deeds in behalf of men, and for what He is in Himself. In other words, God should be praised for His inherent greatness.

4. *Who should praise God?* Everything that breathes should praise God.

All of those things are in that little six-versed psalm. Are you looking for things to pray about? It is endless. You can go back to Revelation 4 and 5 where there are angels who are praising God night and day endlessly for what He has done and for what He is.

Psalms 100:1-5 Make a joyful noise unto the LORD, all you lands. Serve the LORD with gladness: come before his presence with singing. Know you that the LORD he is God: it is he that has made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name. For the LORD is good: his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endures to all generations.

In this psalm we are commanded to come into His presence with thanksgiving. This psalm gives us three more reasons why we should be thankful. They all appear in verse 5. We should be thankful (1) because the Lord is good, (2) because His mercy is everlasting and, (3) because His truth endures forever.

All of this that I have given to you is leading up now to this point: Why in the world does God want us to do this? Well, everything that He has us do is for our good. It is for *our* good that He wants us to praise and thank Him. There are at least three reasons why God is so concerned about praise and thanksgiving being given as a constant part of our prayer.

Reason 1 : Giving thanks and praising God keeps us focused in the right direction.

Remember the Chinese proverb that I gave in the last sermon which says, "If one looks at the sun, all shadows are behind." Our focus in life is to be on God and His purpose.

There is a very poignant statement there in verse 3 where it says: "Know you that the LORD He is God: it is He that has made us, and not we ourselves."

God is the Author of life. He is the Author of His purpose. He is the Author of His plan, and therefore of salvation and eternal life. It is He by His calling that made us His children. Preparing for thanksgiving focuses our mind on that very important fact that we are the created, He is the Creator, and all these marvelous things in life come from Him.

Remember the warning that was given by the apostle Paul in Romans 1. It can be concluded like this: "Because God was not acknowledged as the Creator and thanked in return, the people turned to idolatry." It is that simple. It cannot be made any simpler. Meditating upon things to thank God for keeps us focused on the fact that He is the Creator, and we are the created. What did the people do when they did not give God the thanks? They worshipped the created things. They did not give God the thanks because they were not thinking about Him as the Creator and they the created, and God's purpose for their life, and they turned to worshipping created things rather than the Creator. Now take the hint. We will do the same thing. The focus of our life will shift from the *Creator* to the *created*. It just cannot go in any other direction.

Keeping our minds focused on the Creator takes work. It takes thinking within certain parameters, meditating upon them, and then praying about them. Our thoughts may be simple and may be shallow compared to David's. They may be shallow compared to some scientist's, but were not you (mothers and dads) pleased with the very beginnings of your children learning to talk? We have got to begin somewhere. Do not worry about it being, "God, You've heard this before." Oh no. He has not heard it from *you*, and that makes the difference. You may have had many children, but each child that comes along is a treasure to you. They begin to give you evidence of their increasing powers in speaking, in thinking. There is nothing hard about that. It has to be done.

Reason 2 : This thinking about God and thanking Him supports the faith by which we are to live in order to please Him.

"Without faith it is impossible to please God." When we begin thinking of Him for the purpose of thanking Him, this in turn supports the faith and increases it. It becomes more firm and convicting to us. We become more aware of Him because we see Him everywhere we look in what He has

made. It supports our faith because it forces us to think through the very real and powerful-to-save characteristic of the One that we are to trust. It is like I said in regard to Psalm 19. David looked at the heavens and said, "Hey! God can save me." David was confident of that. He said, "Anybody who can do that can turn me into what I need to be, and He can save me."

Reason 3 : Thanksgiving has a strong tendency to keep us humble.

You might recall that I said this in a somewhat different way in the previous sermon. The way I said it then was that the major deterrent—the major hindrance—to being thankful is pride. Pride makes us important in our own eyes. It makes us think we are more important than we actually are. Pride leads us into sin by making us forget God. How does it do it? To the elevation of the self. As we elevate ourselves, we take our eyes off God, and the first thing you know we are the only things that we seem to praise. We do not see the handiwork and the grace and the compassion and the mercy of God.

Let us connect this to a chapter and the thought that is within that chapter that we have gone into I think in the last three sermons. We are going to go back again to Deuteronomy 8, and we will look at verses 11 through 18. Now maybe this will make more sense to you as to why God warns, "Don't forget Me!" "Don't forget what I've done."

Deuteronomy 8:11 Beware that you forget not the LORD your God, in not keeping his commandments, and his judgments, and his statutes, which I command you this day.

The linkage there is very interesting, that if we forget God, what is the next step, according to that verse? It is to sin. It is to quit keeping His commandments. Out of sight, out of mind, out of thought. Who needs God? We will see.

Deuteronomy 8:12-14 Lest when you have eaten and are full, and have built goodly houses, and dwelt therein; and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and your gold is multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied: Then your heart be

lifted up, and you forget the LORD your God which brought you forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage.

We have here prosperity, pride, and forgetfulness. They are linked together in an unholy trinity. My Bible has a marginal reference to verse 14 where it says, "Then your heart be lifted up." My margin says, "Become proud." This is because of what happens when we do not discipline ourselves to thankfully think about God and His purpose. Our focus blurs and we elevate ourselves to become the center of our universe. If you want New Testament proof of this, just read about the Laodicean. "You say that you are rich [prosperity] and increased with goods, and you have need of nothing."

The Laodiceans do not need anything even from God. Where is God in their lives? He is nothing to them but an intellectual thought that they carry in their minds. They do not need anything from Him, and thus they do not look at Him in the same way that somebody with a humble heart would look at God and feel that he needs everything that God can possibly give him. What happens is that this unholy trio—the prosperity, pride, and forgetfulness—blurs our focus and we elevate ourselves and become the center of our universe.

I was studying through my notes this morning and this thought came to me. Do you not think this indicates that it is in our best interest that God keep us in a more or less constant state of weakness and vulnerability? Do you ever wonder why so many of God's people are poor, and why so many of God's people appear to be so weak? This is one of the reasons.

It is not just because God calls the weak, but because God Himself *moves* to keep them in that state in order to make sure that He can save them. They, recognizing their weakness and their need, cry out to Him and make Him the center of who it is going to be who supplies their need, and that becomes the means of their salvation. Being poor in spirit is a recognition of one's weakness, of one's spiritual bankruptcy. What do the poor do? They cry out to God for help.

There are six words in the Hebrew that are translated "pride." That is because, either directly or indirectly, they all imply the sense of "lifting up." That is what happens in pride. One becomes lifted up about himself. Another

way of putting this is that "lifted up" in *this* regard is to the reality, to the truth about themselves in relation to God or other people.

Pride gives us a very difficult battle, because pride persuades us that we and what we think and what we accomplish, are the most important things that are going on. It convinces us to focus on our own interests sometimes almost to the exclusion of all other things, including leading us directly into breaking God's laws. It makes us unrealistically defend our position on issues, bringing forth at times a torrent of rationalization and justification. Pride is the father of much of the stubbornness God found so distasteful in Israel. Another fruit is that because it forces our attention on the self, proper service to others is neglected. Another fruit is warfare, because it forces each to defend and advance his position against another.

Let us go back to Hebrews 5. This is about our High Priest. I am going to apply some of the things said here to us.

Hebrews 5:1-4 For every high priest taken from among men is ordained [or appointed] for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins: Who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way [that is, beset by weaknesses]; for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity. And by reason hereof he ought, as for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins. And no man takes this honor unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron.

This is about Aaron, and it should include you and me.

Pride and humility are very important subjects to a priest in regard to carrying out his responsibilities. This is because much of a priest's service is in prayer, mediating in behalf of others. Most of us are aware of what would be called "intercessory prayer." Is not intercessory service what we are doing when we pray for others? We ask you to pray for somebody because he is sick, or because he is out of a job, or because his marriage is falling apart, or whatever. We are interceding with God in their behalf, and so we go to God in prayer.

We go to God in prayer, and hopefully what we are doing is thinking about the situation enough so that we present to God reasons why we feel a judgment in these people's behalf needs to be made. We can say to God, "Well, I think they've suffered enough," or "They had enough pain," or "They need a break from what they've been going through. I think this has been going on for a long time, and if I put myself in that position, I would want to be relieved of it." We ask God to forgive or to reveal, or whatever it is going to take to get out of this situation. What are we doing? We are actually giving God what our judgment is and acting as those people's advocate, their attorney before God, pleading their case. We are interceding.

Intercessory service requires sacrifice because we have got to give up time in order to think about and prepare for, and then actually give the prayer in another person's behalf. It takes energy to do that, as well as time, and so we are making a sacrifice in order to do this. This becomes important when one considers what God had to say about the responsibilities of the priests. We are going to go back to that verse that we looked at a number of times in Numbers 16:5 just to refresh our memory.

Numbers 16:5 And he [Moses] spoke unto Korah and unto all his company, saying, Even to morrow the LORD will show who are his, and who is holy; and will cause him to come near unto him: even him whom he has chosen will he cause to come near unto him.

You understand that this was a dispute over who were to be the priests. The priest's responsibility is to draw near to God, because he has to draw near to God in order to carry out that responsibility. Now why is humility so important to this? It tells why in Isaiah 66.

Isaiah 66:1-2 Thus says the LORD, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that you build unto me? And where is the place of my rest? For all those things has my hand made, and all those things have been, says the LORD: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and trembles at my word.

How can a priest, who is lifted up about himself, perform his responsibility before God if God will not even look to him to acknowledge him, accept him, and pay attention to him? Did we not just read there about who the ones are that are going to get God's attention? It is not the proud.

Let us go to the book of James, and we will see this put in James 4.

James 4:5-6 Do you think that the scripture says in vain, The spirit that dwells in us lusts [or desires] to envy? But he gives more grace. Wherefore he says, God resists the proud, but gives grace unto the humble.

That is pretty much self-explanatory. A proud priest cannot do the very job for which he was called to perform because God will resist him, and so the prayer hits the ceiling, and nothing happens.

There is a very great deal of misinformation floating around about what biblical humility is. Some people think that low self-esteem is an evidence of humility, but of and by itself it is not evidence of *biblical* humility. It may be only a very close counterfeit of true humility, while the reality is that the one having low self-esteem is, in God's eyes, really quite prideful. On the other hand, one who is truly humble in God's eyes may appear, especially to the unconverted, as an arrogant "know-it-all."

Brethren, the outward personality or inward feeling may be quite deceptive unless one knows what to look for.

About six weeks ago I was reading, and I found the following description of humility in a book whose main subject was on prayer. This paragraph or two actually became the motivation for this sermon because it is so misleading. Now listen to this.

To be humble is to have a low estimate of oneself. It is to be modest, lowly, with a disposition to seek obscurity. Humility retires itself from the public gaze. It does not seek publicity nor hunt for high places. Neither does it care for prominence. Humility is retiring in its nature. Self-abasement belongs to humility. It is given

to self-deprecation. It never exalts itself in the eyes of others, nor even in the eyes of itself. Modesty is one of its most prominent characteristics. In humility there is a total absence of pride, and it is at the very farthest distance from anything like self-conceit. There is no self-praise in humility. Rather it has the disposition to praise others. It is not given to self-exaltation. Humility does not love the uppermost seat and aspire to high places. It is willing to take the lowest seat and prefers those places where it will be unnoticed. Humility does not have its eyes on self, but rather on God and others. It is poor in spirit, meek in behavior, lowly in heart.

That is from the book "E. M. Bounds on Prayer," and I put in parenthesis, "Not a particularly good reference work."

Not much in that rather long quote is one hundred percent accurate, but this sentence is: "Humility does not have its eyes on self, but rather on God and others." The rest of those terms do not define what humility is, but rather lists *possible* evidences or signs that godly humility may or may not exist. I said "may or may not," because all of those fine qualities can be counterfeited by human nature. Only God can truly open a person's mind so that the outward qualities *are* the fruit of what God, by His Spirit, has produced inwardly.

Let me give you my definition of humility. It is much simpler.

Humility is that quality of mind, of attitude, generated by contact and the resulting relationship with God, that motivates a person to submit in obedience to God and to others because of God, regardless of personal feelings, in order to follow God's will, His truth, His word, His law.

Did you notice everything was in relation to God? The kind of description that man gave can be nothing more than a skill in human relations, because, except for a couple of things, they can be done in relation only to men and be done for the purpose of promoting one's self.

Let us look at Hebrews again.

Hebrews 11:24 By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter.

We are going to see the action and the inner being of a man who really was humble.

Hebrews 11:25-29 Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season: Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible. Through faith he kept the Passover, and the sprinkling of blood, lest he that destroyed the firstborn should touch them. By faith they passed through the Red sea as by dry land: which the Egyptians assaying to do were drowned.

When this quality is mixed with faith it enables one like Moses to take everything that God dishes out in his life in the very best of attitude. Moses went from being the future king of Egypt to a mere shepherd, a husband and father, and back again to being the commanding leader of millions who ordered, on occasion, the killing of his brethren, his fellow Israelites. We do not often think of a humble person ordering the slaughter of maybe thousands of people. To many in the world that would look pretty arrogant and bloodthirsty.

On any given occasion in Moses' life, from the time that God opened his mind, how would men judge what Moses was doing on the basis of their own understanding of what humility is? How many people died in Egypt because of what Moses gave orders to do? In order for one to have a proper evaluation, one has to have the proper standard of measurement. There is the central issue of whether a person is humble in God's eyes, or whether he just has a social skill.

In some ways humility is a very complex attribute, extremely difficult to describe and judge, because it is so complex. Humility does not mean that one has no care for the self. It does not ignore thought about the self. It is born in a person by his honestly looking at God and His holiness, and then

looking at himself, examining and evaluating his own unholiness. This absolutely requires a revelation by and continuing contact with God who is opening the evaluator's understanding of His truth.

Humility is not truly born in one simply because one makes an honest and accurate evaluation of oneself in relation even to God, until one is actually putting into practice humble characteristics in his relationship with God and others. To be truly humble requires conduct that fits the biblical standard.

We will turn to one other verse before closing for today. This subject is going to require a couple more sermons. We are laying a groundwork here. What I want you to get today is the linkage between thanksgiving, praise, and humility. They cannot really be separated. They go hand-in-glove. As long as we are focusing our attention on God and thinking about His attributes, meditating upon them, it gives us a chance to really be truly humble before God because it makes us think about Him, and then ourselves in relation to Him. It is the thinking about Him that produces thanksgiving and praise that in turn produces humility, because it gives us an honest evaluation by setting the right standard before us. And then it completes the process by obeying, submitting to what God says to do, which sometimes might be very difficult and go against the grain of our thinking.

Proverbs 22:4 By humility and the fear of the LORD are riches, and honor, and life.

This proverb links humility and the fear of the Lord to prosperity, reputation, and abundance—that is, eternal life—thus showing that biblical humility is in relation to God only. It must be this way, because without the correct starting point for one's evaluation, without the correct standard against which to measure oneself, every judgment regarding humility is going to be skewed.

Humility gives the impression of lowliness, but lowliness in relation to what? That is the key. What standard determines whether this conduct or that attitude is low and another is high and proud? This helps explain why there can be men like Moses and Joshua and David—men who sometimes did violent things or ordered violence to be executed on others—still can be held by the Bible to be humble men. It was *who* and *what* they were humbled before and compared against that made the difference.

I think that this gives us a good starting point, a good foundation, and God willing, we will carry this subject through in the next sermon or two.