

What lies beneath?

1 Samuel 16: 1-13

Matthew 23: 1-12

A Highland Crofter met up with an Ayrshire dairy farmer. The two men began talking about their land and the crofter told the farmer that he operated his business on 5 acres. The man from Ayrshire scoffed at such a small parcel of land. He said, "That's nothing." On my farm I can get in my Land Rover and I won't reach the fence line of my property for half an hour." The crofter said, "Chust so, chust so, I used to have a one like that."

Bragging rights, it seems everybody wants them.

Whether it is the biggest house, the fanciest car, the most impressive wardrobe, the most well-behaved children, everyone wants to be top dog in some aspect of their life.

This desire to be first is also called pride, and God has something to say to those who have too much of it.

Now, the religious leaders of Jesus day, wanted to be looked at and treated as though they were a step closer to God than anyone else. Just like many people today, the Pharisees wanted others to see them as special and treat them as though they were closer to God than anyone else. They wanted others to be impressed with their piety and impressed with their holiness. They wanted others to think they had some special bragging rights that the common man lacked. They were chest thumpers. You could almost hear them say: "Hey, look at me! Look at how important I am." See how broad my phylacteries are and how long my fringes are?

Now, phylacteries were small leather boxes containing portions of God's Word. They were worn by Jews who interpreted literally the instructions to fasten Gods Word on their hands and forehead. Also, Moses, in Numbers 15, had instructed the children of Israel to put fringes on their garments to remember, not only the law in general, but also the smaller parts of the rites and ceremonies belonging to it. So, the Pharisees made their phylacteries broad. They put more writing on them or made the letters larger and thus more visible, to appear more holy. And they made their fringes longer to show the

world how they followed the finer points of the law. I am sure they did not like it when Jesus pointed out how "these men" dressed to draw attention to themselves. To put themselves on a higher level than others. They wanted to appear religious without actually being religious, for they did not practice what they taught. Their philosophy in essence was, "Do as I say, not as I do." These men thought they were important to God, they thought they were important to men, but they were just hypocrites. They wore a mask of Holiness. They thought they were going to be first in the Kingdom.

Yet, Jesus shares this truth: those who seek to be first, in truth will be last. God is not impressed with pride. God is not interested in how great you are. He is interested in how great others are as a result of your life.

Story: a teacher taught a wee boy called Teddy in year four. He was a slow, unkempt wee soul, a loner shunned by his classmates. The previous year his mother died, and what little motivation for school he may have once had was now gone. The teacher did not particularly care for Teddy either, but at Christmas time he brought her a small present. The teacher's desk was covered with well-wrapped presents from the other children, but Teddy's came in a brown bag. When she opened it there was a gaudy bracelet with half the stones missing and a bottle of cheap perfume. The children began to giggle, but thankfully, the teacher saw the importance of the moment. She quickly splashed on some perfume and put on the bracelet, pretending Teddy had given her something special. At the end of the day Teddy worked up enough courage to softly say, "You smell just like my mother . . . and her bracelet looks really nice on you too. I am glad you like my presents."

After Teddy left, his teacher got down on her knees and prayed for God's forgiveness. She prayed for God to use her as she sought to not only teach these children but to love them as well. She became a new teacher. She lovingly helped students like Teddy and by the end of the year he had caught up with most of the students.

She did not hear from Teddy for a long time. Then she received this note: "I wanted you to be the first to know. I will be graduating second in my class. Love, Teddy."

Four years later she got another note: "They just told me I will be graduating first in my class. I wanted you to be the first to know. The university has not been easy, but I liked it. Love, Teddy."

Four years later: "As of today, I am Theodore Stallard, M.D. How about that? I wanted you to be the first to know.

I am getting married next month. I want you to come and sit where my mother would sit if she were alive. You are the only family I have now; Dad died last year. Love, Teddy."

His teacher, a Miss Thompson, went to the wedding and sat where Teddy's mother would have sat. She made a difference. She let God use her as an instrument of his love, an instrument of encouragement.

Some of the greatest blessings in life come when you humbly realize someone else is more important than you are. If you want to be somebody, put others before yourself. It is as simple as that.

Now we, as Christians are always under a microscope. Are you living a life worthy of being called a child of God or are you just a hypocrite wearing a mask? Who are you trying to impress?

Francois Fenelon was the court preacher for King Louis XIV of France in the 17th century. One Sunday when the king and his attendants arrived at the chapel for the regular service, no one else was there but the preacher. King Louis demanded, "What does this mean?" Fenelon replied, "I had published that you would not come to church today, in order that your Majesty might see who serves God in truth and who flatters the king."

Jesus was not looking for glory. He was looking for you. If you want to be great in Gods Kingdom be the Servant of all. Become great by becoming a servant. Become the greatest by being the servant of all.

A pompous-looking church leader was trying to impress upon a class of boys the importance of living the Christian life. "Why do people call me a Christian?" the man asked. After a moment's pause, one youngster said, "Maybe it is because they do not know you."

Hear me on this. All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted. Christ said, "I come to serve, not to be served."

What influences do you have, or could you have with others? Your influence is measured by your willingness to serve others. Take Gandhi for instance, as he stepped aboard a train one day, one of his shoes slipped off and landed on the track. He was unable to retrieve it as the train was moving. To the amazement

of his companions, Gandhi calmly took off his other shoe and threw it back along the track to land close to the first. Asked by a fellow passenger why he did so, Gandhi smiled. "The poor man who finds the shoe lying on the track," he replied, "will now have a pair he can use."

True greatness lies inside of each and every one of us, and it is crying to get out. Release it in service to others. We cannot fool God.

1 Samuel 16:7 states, "the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart." God sees through our pretending and posturing. Our broad phylacteries and long fringes do not impress God. Being humble is hard. Why? Because as soon as you believe that you are becoming humbler, you, in essence, are not humble anymore!

There is an old song that goes:-

Oh Lord. It's hard to be humble when you're perfect in every way.  
I can't wait to look in the mirror Cause I...get better looking each day  
To know me is to love me I must be a heck of a man.  
Oh Lord It's hard to be humble But I'm doing the best that I can.

Let me share with you this final story (true):

During the American Revolution a man in civilian clothes rode past a group of soldiers repairing a small defensive barrier. Their leader was shouting instructions but made no attempt to help them. Asked why by the rider, he retorted with great dignity, "Sir, I am a corporal!"

The stranger apologized, dismounted, and proceeded to help the exhausted soldiers. The job done, he turned to the corporal and said, "Mr. Corporal, next time you have a job like this and not enough men to do it, go to your commander-in-chief, and I will come and help you again."

The stranger's name was George Washington, the first President of the United States.

I'll finish with these thoughts.

These thoughts come from two of the greatest servants this world has ever known. Mother Teresa and D. L. Moody.

--Mother Teresa "Let no one come to you without feeling better and happier when they leave."

--D. L. Moody

"The measure of a man is not how many servants he has, but how many he serves."

Greatness comes from service, and service comes from humility.

Remember our Lords words to us:

"For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.

Amen