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Attitudes Which Set Us Free

Psalm 25

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Someone once said that attitude determines altitude. There is truth to that. Your attitude does have a lot to do with how high you go in life. Let me give you a couple of examples of that.

The last three weeks have been heavy camp weeks. We had junior high week, then senior high week, and then we had junior camp week. There are kids who go and experience the same speaker, the same worship, and pretty much the same thing. Some will come home and say, "Man, it was great." Others will come home and not be too thrilled with it. Not always, but oftentimes, the difference is just in attitude. Attitude determines the quality of many of our relationships and many of our experiences.

It is not unusual that on a Monday I will get an email from someone who visited the church. They will say, "You know, I visited your church. That is the most unfriendly church I have ever been to." Then I will click to the next email and somebody else visited the church. They will say, "That is the friendliest church we have ever been to." Often it is a reflection of the attitude of the person more than anything else.

Attitude does dramatically affect our relationships and our experiences in life. Certainly this is true in the Christian life. Our attitude has a lot to do with what we experience in our relationship with God. With the wrong attitude, it becomes a religion filled with restrictions and rules. With a different attitude, it becomes a relationship that is filled with meaning, purpose and everything that God wanted for us to experience.

As we think about this whole issue of attitudes, one of the areas that is always a battle in our Christian faith is this whole discussion related to freedom. What is it that really sets us free to live? Everybody wants to be free. Everybody fights the restrictions. What is it that sets us free? Oftentimes the very things that we think will set us free are the things that keep us in bondage. And the very things we fear will put us in bondage are often the very things that set us free.

Let me give you an example of that by using a dog for an illustration. I am a firm believer that when you buy a dog, you put in the time up front to get the dog trained with basic obedience: sit, stay, come, and heel. If you do that at the beginning and the dog becomes an obedient dog, you can enjoy the dog for the life of the dog. You can go out and have him with the family. I have a golden retriever. When we lived here in town, I could go anywhere I wanted in town and take him without a leash; it was never a problem. Therefore, anytime we were outside, we could let the dog out and it was not a problem. The dog basically surrendered his will to mine and obeyed, so he got maximum freedom. If a dog is unwilling to obey—if he is not trained, in other words—the dog is pursuing his own freedom, and what he gets is bondage. He gets put in a kennel; he gets tied to a tree; he gets put in a garage.

I have had this discussion with my girls many times. I have explained that if they want to have freedom they need to surrender their will to mine. They need to be obedient. If they do, they will get more freedom than they know what to do with. But if they try to get their own freedom and rebel, then I will "chain them to a tree."

Oftentimes how we experience freedom comes just the opposite of what we tend to think. That is very true in the Christian life. We struggle with this whole thing of freedom, and that is what David talks about in Psalm 25. He talks about attitudes that set us free.

Psalm 25 is a psalm of David, but we do not know at what point in his life he wrote this psalm. One of the interesting characteristics about this psalm is that it is what we would call an instructional psalm. What we mean by that is that the last couple of psalms we have studied have been very emotional. They have been very intense, which isn't at all unusual in a psalm. They were of David crying out of his anguish and out of his experience.

An instructional psalm is not like that. An instructional psalm is more like David in the classroom. David is instructing and, in this case, he is teaching some basic issues of discipleship. These are really the foundational issues of attitudes that set us free in this relationship with God.

Consistent with this idea of it being an instructional psalm is the idea, then, that it is organized as an acrostic. In English if you were to take the letters of the alphabet, A through Z, and just line them up, each line of this psalm would play off each letter in the alphabet. The first line starts with an A, the second line starts with a B, the third line starts with C. Only it is not in English; it is in Hebrew. When it translates into English, of course, the entire acrostic is lost. You look at it and say, "It doesn't look that way to me." It is not; and that is one of the problems. When you translate into English, the acrostic is lost, which makes it very hard to organize. I was reading through various commentaries trying to get a feel for the psalm. It is interesting how they all just meandered around, trying to find some way to organize this psalm. When the acrostic is lost, it just seems like it is random out there, so we will wrestle with that a little bit.

The psalm was put in an acrostic as a method of learning—a method of instruction. The Hebrew people did not have a Bible at their disposal. Whatever they took of the Word, they had to memorize. The acrostic was meant to make it easy to memorize so they could then remember these basic attitudes.

One other thing about this psalm, before we dig in, is that it is what we would call an individual psalm. In other words, the pronouns are *me*, *my*, and *I*. David is talking about himself until you get to verse 22. Then it goes from an individual psalm to a community psalm. What is interesting about this is that verse 22 does not fit in the acrostic. In other words, to put it again in English, you have A through Z. You finish the last line on Z. Then, the last line, verse 22, is just thrown in there; it does not fit with the acrostic at all. That is a technique which causes that verse to just leap off the page. We find ourselves asking why this line does not fit with all the rest. The last line is the line that really captures the idea of the psalm. He says, "Redeem Israel, O God, out of all his troubles." This means "set her free." To redeem means to set free.

David goes from a personal psalm that says, "These are the attitudes that set me free." He then applies it to the life of the people and says, "This is what, as a people, will set us free in this relationship with God."

Having said all that, let's begin our study. The first attitude David talks about in verses 1, 2 and 3 is the attitude of *trust*. He says: "To Thee, O LORD, I lift up my soul. O my God, in Thee I trust, do not let me be ashamed."

Notice the first name for God is LORD. This is the Hebrew *Yahweh* or *Jehovah*. It is the personal, intimate, covenant-keeping God. The second name for God is “God,” which is *Elohim*. This is the sovereign Creator God of the universe. So David is saying, “The God who is the sovereign Creator God is also my God.” He says that is the God in whom he trusts.

When he says, “I lift up my soul,” that is just a poetic way of saying, “God, I lift up my soul; I give it to you; I trust you. I give you my life. Don’t let me be ashamed.” The word “ashamed” in the Hebrew means “don’t let me be disappointed; don’t let me be dishonored; don’t let me be embarrassed.” It is the idea that David says, “You know, God, I have believed you. I have trusted you. When it is all said and done, don’t disappoint me. Don’t embarrass me. Don’t dishonor me. Don’t let my enemies exalt over me.” In other words: “God, our team needs to win.”

Verse 3: “Indeed, none of those who wait for Thee will be ashamed; those who deal treacherously without cause will be ashamed.” With each one of these attitudes, David records a benefit. He says at the end of verse 2, “...don’t let me be ashamed.” But then in the beginning of vs. 3, he says “Indeed,” which is a way of saying, “God, I know this is true. I will not be ashamed.” He is basically dividing the righteous and the wicked. Those who wait for God are the righteous who follow God; and those who deal treacherously are the wicked—those who don’t follow God. David is saying, “God, I know this is true. I am going to trust you. I know in the end I won’t be disappointed. I won’t be dishonored. I won’t be embarrassed because I trust you.”

He also says those who don’t follow after God and who don’t walk in His ways are the ones who will be ashamed. This is not a popular message in our culture today, because our culture has bought into a belief called pluralism. Pluralism is a belief that all roads lead to heaven and that all religions lead to God. It is a belief that one way or another, all religions are true and they all end up in the same place.

Yet when you read the Scriptures, God is very exclusive. Jesus Himself said, “I am the way, the truth and the life. Nobody comes to the Father but through Me.” When Paul was writing to Timothy, he said there is only one way for sinful people to reach a holy God and that is through Christ Jesus. The reality is that from Genesis to Revelation, God is a very jealous God. And God makes it very clear He is God and there is no other. There is only one way to Him and that is through Jesus.

David is saying that he believes that is true. David knows that when he stands before God he will not be disappointed and he will not be embarrassed. He will not be dishonored. There will be thousands of people who have believed otherwise. David says that when those people stand before God they are going to be disappointed, because what they believed simply was not true.

Sometimes it does not feel like God’s team is winning. Sometimes in this culture we are laughed at. We are scoffed at and people think our morals and values are old-fashioned and kind of square. But the reality is that David says, “God, upon you, I will take my stand. I will take my hits and I will take my lumps. In the end, I know I will not be disappointed because I know our team wins.”

The first attitude, then, is an attitude of trust. If you don’t have that trust, the rest of the attitudes are impossible.

The second attitude in verses 4-7 is an attitude of *surrender*. He says: “Make me know Thy ways, O LORD; teach me Thy paths. Lead me in Thy truth and teach me, for Thou art the God of my salvation; for Thee I wait all the day.”

Look at the statements David makes. They are really wonderful. He says, “God, make me know your ways. Teach me; lead me.” In other words, he is saying, “God, you are in charge and I am not. You are the sovereign God and you are in charge. You lead me, teach me, guide me; and I will follow. I will obey.” David is saying, “God, it is your will, not my will.”

Have you ever noticed how often your will conflicts with God’s will? I find that happens to me all the time. The question is, at that intersection, at that point, who wins? Is it going to be your way or God’s way? Those two ways collide pretty often. It is a good thing every morning to get up and say, “God, I just want you to know today you are in charge. You are God. You are sovereign. You are in charge; so ask whatever you will and I will obey.”

When your will conflicts with God’s will, who wins? When you are involved in some behavior and God tells you that behavior is offensive to Him, who wins? Is it God’s will or your will? What if you are tired of your spouse and ready to make a change, but God comes along and says, “You have no grounds for a divorce. I want you to love your spouse.” Who is going to win that? Maybe you are having sexual relations with someone who is not your spouse. God says that offends Him. He says to abstain from sexual immorality. Is it going to be your way or God’s way? Maybe you have trouble with a negative tongue or maybe you like to pass along gossip. God says that offends Him; it is sin. Is it going to be your way or His way? Do we figure out little ways to dismiss and rationalize in order to just keep on doing our thing, or is it going to change? Is it going to be God’s way or your way?

That is really what David is talking about here. That is what it means to surrender. It means that when we come to that point of conflict, it is going to be God’s way, not my way. David says, “God, lead me, teach me, guide me. You are in charge.”

What is the benefit of that? Verse 6: “Remember, O LORD, Thy compassion and Thy lovingkindnesses, for they have been from of old. Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to Thy lovingkindness remember Thou me, for Thy goodness’ sake, O LORD.”

What is the benefit? The benefit is that we experience the goodness of God. We are set free. We are set free to experience the goodness of God, defined here as His compassion and His lovingkindness.

We will never really experience the goodness of God until we surrender, until we yield, until we let Him be in charge. David says, “God, I have seen your faithfulness in days gone by to the saints of old and that is what I want. Don’t remember my failures. Don’t remember my sins. Don’t remember my transgressions. Just remember me.” That “me” in the verse is emphatic, which means that it just jumps off the page. He says, “God, don’t remember all the ways I have blown it; just remember *me*.” That is God’s goodness. We will never really experience God’s forgiveness and goodness until we surrender and allow God to be in charge.

David says, “God, I trust you and I am going to take my stand.” He says, “God, I surrender. You are in charge. You tell me how to live and I am going to live that way,

whatever that means.”

The third attitude in vs. 8-11 is an attitude of *humility*. He says: “Good and upright is the LORD.” The Hebrew word for “good” is the word that means “merciful.” The Hebrew word for “upright” is the word that means “just.” “Merciful and just are you, LORD.” Those are the two attributes that sent Jesus to the cross. Because God is just, He could not look at sin and say, “That is all right. Let’s just pretend it didn’t happen.” If He did that He would be loving, but He would cease to be just. Sin had to be paid for. Somebody had to pay for our failure. So God in His mercy became flesh and was nailed to a cross, and He took our punishment on Himself. That is mercy. We did not get what we deserved—it was put on Him. It was at the cross that mercy and justice came together. Why? So that He could instruct sinners in His ways. That is what it says in verse 8: “Therefore He instructs sinners in the way.”

Apart from His mercy and justice coming together, God could not lead sinners, because there would be this chasm between a holy God and sinful people. God could not have anything to do with us. He couldn’t lead us or guide us or instruct us. We would just be lost. But because mercy and justice came together, God can instruct us. He can tell us how to live. Vs. 9: “He leads the humble in justice, and He teaches the humble His way.”

It is only one with a heart of humility that receives the salvation provided at the cross. It is the humble who enter into this mercy that God offers. Humility is a hard thing to talk about. It is even a harder thing to assess in our own lives. About the time we think that we are really pretty great in this humility thing, we have lost it. Humility is not thinking low thoughts of ourselves. It is not kicking a pebble and saying, “Oh, I am no good. I am really just a clod.” That is not humility. As a matter of fact, I would say that behavior is offensive to God because God stated very clearly, “I made you. I created you just the way you are. I have called you and empowered you to a very significant calling in the Kingdom of God.”

If I say I really don’t matter, that is not true. It is bad theology. God says I have a very important calling to His Kingdom. It is a high and holy calling. That is true for every one of you who has trusted Jesus as Savior. Humility is not saying, “I am not important; I don’t matter.” Humility is more just taking our eyes off of ourselves and putting our eyes on God. That is really what humility is.

The opposite would be arrogance. Arrogance is constantly thinking about me and how everything in life filters through me. If I take that arrogant filter off, and I replace it with a filter of humility, then I process everything differently. I process life thinking, *What does it have to do with God? This is not about me; it is about God. God whatever you want, you can have it because it is about you. It is not about me.* That’s how I process my life. If somebody treats me unfairly that is okay because it is not about me; it is about God. I don’t come to church as a consumer running everything through my filter, saying, “This is what I want. These are my tastes. This is what should be done to please me.” Rather I run it through the filter of God and I say, “This is all about you, God; it is not about me. What do you want?” If God comes along and says, “I want you to wash that person’s feet,” I say, “Okay, God, I will do that because it is not about me; it is about you, so I will do that.”

If God comes along and says, “Bryan, I want you to suffer with this disease for the next twenty years,” I say, “Okay, God... because it is about you; it is not about me.” That is humility.

What is the benefit of that? Verse 10: “All the paths of the LORD are lovingkindness and truth {every one of those situations I just named, they are all a path and they are all lovingkindness and truth} to those who keep His covenant and His testimonies. For Thy name’s sake, O LORD, pardon my iniquity, for it is great.” It is only when we have a heart of humility that we understand God’s forgiveness and God’s pardon. The benefits are very similar to those of surrender.

The next attitude begins in verse 12. It is the attitude of *fear*. He says: “Who is the man who fears the LORD?” This is not fear in the sense that I am afraid. This is fear in the sense of reverence or awe. It is understanding the awesome holiness of God. Sometimes, in the presence of God, our mouths just need to drop open. Sometimes we fall on our face like Isaiah did, because God is God. This is a hard thing to keep in balance.

Looking back historically, you had the fundamentalist movement who presented God more as an angry God of wrath and hail, fire and brimstone with rules and restrictions. That was kind of the tone. Then the pendulum swung to the other side to the concept of God as our pal and God as our buddy—God not really held in high esteem. It’s the thought that we live our own lives and hope that God will bless us somewhere along the way.

There needs to be a balance in here where we understand that He is God. When I come into His presence, I need to have a sense of awe and of reverence. I also am not afraid of Him. I come boldly before the throne of grace because of what He has done for me on the cross. He is also my heavenly daddy. I say, “Abba Father” but I never lose that sense of fear, that sense of reverence and respect for who He is.

The second part of verse 12 says: “He will instruct him in the way he should choose.” What is the benefit of that? Verse 13: “His soul will abide in prosperity and his descendants will inherit the land.” David says that if God instructs us, we will prosper. In that culture it was land and descendants. In our New Testament covenant it would be the blessings of God. God causes us to prosper.

Verse 14: “The secret of the LORD is for those who fear Him, and He will make them known His covenant.” I love verse 14. When he says “know His covenant” he does not mean “know about it.” That word “know” is a term of intimacy. It means that we will know it; we will live in it; we will experience it. We will live in this relationship with God in a way that we never could if we didn’t fear Him. The first part of that verse (“The secret of the LORD is for those who fear Him”) means that those who fear Him will know things about God that other people will not. Those who fear Him will know the secrets of God that He only reveals to His children who fear Him. The wonderful deep hidden secrets of God come to those who fear Him.

Do you ever read the Bible and it just seems to make no sense? Maybe part of the problem is an attitude. With an attitude of reverence, God then reveals His secrets. That is why He says in verse 15: “My eyes are continually toward the LORD, for He will pluck my feet out of the net.” If I have that high of a view of God, I think about Him all the time. That is what He is saying. It is not that I just go about my life and, now and then when I get into trouble, I call on Him. It is not that I just have a quiet time in the morning. I read a little of the Bible and I have a little prayer; then I go on about my day. That is not what God wants. God wants us to do our day *with Him*. God wants us to run every decision, no matter how insignificant, through this grid of God and who He is. We think about Him all the time. That is a relationship. That is what it means to have my eyes on Him continually.

The last attitude is in verses 16-21. I wasn't quite sure what to call this; I'm calling it an attitude of *dependence*. David says:

Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted. The troubles of my heart are enlarged; bring me out of my distresses. Look upon my affliction and my trouble, and forgive all my sins. Look upon my enemies, for they are many; and they hate me with violent hatred. Guard my soul and deliver me; do not let me be ashamed, for I take refuge in Thee. Let integrity and uprightness preserve me, for I wait for Thee.

David is saying in this psalm that he is dependent upon God. He is saying, "God, I am needy." He says, "I have inner turmoil. I am lonely and afflicted. I have external turmoil. I have enemies who hate me and want to kill me." He is saying, "God, I have problems and I need you."

The opposite of that would be to be self-sufficient and say, "I have life by the tail. I have it all figured out and I have it all wired. God, I can do it. I can do it. I will call you if I need you." But David says, "No, I am needy."

Deep down in our hearts, one of the hardest things to admit is that we need help. We don't think we feel self-sufficient, but we do. Let me ask you a question: How much time did you spend in the Bible this week? That is a very clear picture of whether or not you are self-sufficient. If you did not spend time in this Book, it is because you did not think you needed to, which is another way of saying that you don't need it and you can handle life yourself. How much time did you spend this week on your knees in prayer? That is a very accurate read of whether or not we are self-sufficient. If we do not spend time in prayer, it is because we don't think we need it. We've got it wired and we can handle it. We can take care of it.

When we are needy, we consume the Bible. We cannot get enough of it. When we are needy, we are on our face before God because we need help. The reality is that we are very self-sufficient, aren't we?

There are five attitudes that set us free. An attitude of *trust* says, "God, I trust you. I am going to take my stand. I know in the end I won't be ashamed. I won't be disappointed. I know you tell the truth so I am going to trust you." An attitude of *surrender* says, "God, you are in charge; I am not. Whatever you want, you show me your ways; lead me and guide me. Wherever my will conflicts with your will, I will do it your way." An attitude of *humility* is putting a filter on our lives where everything is about God and not about me. An attitude of *fear* is a reverence or sense of awe at the greatness of God. We are not afraid of Him but have a sense of who He is. Finally, an attitude of *dependence* or neediness says, "God, I need you."

Those are five attitudes which can set us free.