

f o o d f o r T H O U G H T

I heard a story the other day of a young lady who went to her local Catholic priest for confessions. "Father, I fear that I have been falling into the sin of vanity," she began. "Every time I pass by the mirror, I look at myself and think of how beautiful I am."

The priest hesitated for a moment before he spoke. "My dear daughter, you are not sinning. You are simply mistaken."

Humility is a virtue, isn't it? But it's something that we must strive for. Jesus said, "whoever exalts himself shall be humbled, and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted." (Matthew 23:12) The question is, what do we see when we look in the mirror?

Before us in Esther 5 & 6, we see the contrast between two people - Mordecai, who was humble before King Xerxes, and Haman, who exalted himself before everyone. His life motto probably could've been similar to that of SNL's Stuart Smalley: "I'm good enough, I'm smart enough, and, doggonit, people like me!" Was it true? No way! But it was what Xerxes had fooled himself into thinking. He had favor with the King. He had everything going for him. Except humility.

One of the most striking things about this passage, however, is Mordecai's humility. This is the first time that we see Mordecai recognized for what he had done. After all, he had saved the king's life - and what did he get? Absolutely nothing! Can you believe it? And to top it all off, his people was scheduled for a genocide by the king's top official! Had it been me, I would be furious!!! Can you imagine?

The e-mails would've been going out to all of the top officials. Picketers and unions would've been in place declaring this injustice. Hate-filled letters would have been published in the local papers, and angry calls would've filled the airwaves of the call-in radio shows. But Mordecai? There was none of that. Simply a humble servant's heart as he sat at the gates.

Where are you in your thoughts about yourself? About what you do? How do you react when you do something for someone else - or for the church - and nobody pays any attention to it??? Or worse yet, people complain about it? How do you react when you don't get your way at church or in life? Be careful - that's where Haman fell.

It's interesting to note where Haman's attitude began - with Mordecai's refusal to kneel down and pay Haman honor as was the custom. (Esther 3:2-6) Not only did Haman's anger burn against Mordecai, but all of the sudden, Haman lumped all of the Jews into the same boat - and the more and more he thought about it, the angrier he got!

What about you? This passage shows how easy it is to take your anger about one thing and let it grow to a place where you can't control it. Suddenly, it consumes you, and as we saw in today's passage, can lead to your downfall. James writes about that - how sin begins with a thought, and how, if not tamed, grows to full strength - leading to death! (James 1:14-15)

"But what do I do?," you ask. Understandably, it's not easy to let go of feelings, and oftentimes, pride plays a huge role in our inability to change in this area of our lives. Even more important, however, is the fact that our anger against each other is sin. And while God wants to use you for amazing things, sin diminishes your effectiveness in ministry. Whether it be in your workplace or at home - or even in the things you do here at the church - any sin will keep you from fulfilling God's true plan for your life.

That's why it's important that we take every opportunity we have to give our lives to Him. That we lay our lives down in humility, allowing Him to work in and through us - so that we may be built up into the man or woman of God that He is calling us to be. Do you need to do that this morning? If so, don't wait! Confess it to God - and then make things right. You won't be sorry you did.