

Talking About One's Self

by J.R. Miller

The sermon emphasizes the importance of humility and the dangers of talking about oneself, encouraging listeners to focus on serving others rather than seeking personal honor and reward.

Scripture: Matthew 6:1

Topics: "Humility", "Selflessness"

Description

J.R. Miller emphasizes the dangers of self-promotion and the importance of humility in our actions, particularly in doing good deeds without seeking recognition. He warns that talking about oneself often stems from pride and can diminish one's influence and worth in the eyes of others. Instead, Miller encourages believers to focus on serving God quietly and anonymously, as true rewards come from the Father in heaven rather than from human praise. He cites Jesus' teaching on performing acts of righteousness in secret, highlighting that self-praise is counterproductive and ultimately harms one's character. The sermon calls for a shift away from self-centeredness to a more Christ-centered approach in our lives and interactions.

Transcript

"Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you." Matthew 6:1-4

One of the evils of self-love, is the tendency to talk about one's self. It seems a harmless habit to fall into--but in reality it is most miserable. Talking about one's self is always perilous. It were safer to exclude the theme altogether from the list of topics for conversation. There may be matters referring to one's self that it shall sometimes seem necessary to discuss. They may be matters of general interest about which other people will insist on talking. But there is a way of speaking of such things, without bringing in the personal element. At least, if one's own part in the affair or the achievement must be brought out--it were better that others should do it, and not the participant himself.

But sometimes people do not know of the important part we have taken in the good work that has been done. They may even be giving the credit to others, altogether unaware that it was our wisdom which

inspired the thought, our quick energy which wrought it out into achievement, or our deft hands--to which the final success was due. It seems to us only just and right that the truth should be known, and there is only one way to have it made known--we must tell our friends of our important part in the affair!

But we are mistaken in all this. Possibly we may be in error concerning the relative largeness and importance of our own part in what has been accomplished. We are prone to see the value of our own work and influence written large. We may stand so close to the achievement, that we cannot see how many other hands have been at work in bringing it about.

But even if we have been one of the chief actors, and if what we think of our own achievement is unexaggerated, it still remains true that it does not befit us to talk about it. There is really no absolute necessity that the world should know of our fine achievement. It matters not who the human instrument in Christian work may be; we are secondary always, and the honor is the Master's. Much of the best work for Christ in this world, is wrought anonymously. No one knows who did it--no name is written on it. What does it matter whether we are praised or not--when we have been working for Christ and his glory? He knows what heart and hand have wrought for him, and that is publicity enough.

Indeed, one of the marks of acceptable work, is indicated by the great Teacher himself in his exhortation that we do not perform our righteous acts before men to be seen by them; else we shall have no reward with our Father in heaven. Very explicit is the counsel that we do not sound a trumpet before us in synagogue or street when we do good; that we let not our left hand know what our right hand does; that our good deed may be in secret. Certain it is, that work done for human and earthly reward, is not so honorable as that done only for the eye and the commendation of Christ. Thinking about one's self in connection with what one is doing, and doing it for one's own honoring--will always vitiate its worth.

The inference from this teaching is that it is not only not necessary for people to know our part in the good deeds which are attracting their attention--but that it is better they should not know; that it is a more holy serving, which receives no praise of men. Certainly it is very clear from these words of Jesus, that far from being under necessity to declare our good works with our own lips--it is our duty rather to keep secret what we have done. Our reward is not men's commendation. It is plainly said that those who do good deeds to receive honor from men--that "they have received their reward in full". It is intimated that this is all the reward they get. But those who seek to conceal from men their good deeds, letting not their left hand know what their right hand does, shall have recompense from the Father in heaven, who sees in secret.

There is no doubt that, even in the estimation of men, that talking of one's self does one harm, defeating the very end one has in view in seeking honor. It is almost universally true, that whenever a man begins to talk about himself--he lowers himself, with those to whom he speaks. He makes himself appear less noble and worthy to them. The good things he says about himself, however true they may be, lose much of their luster and worthiness, by being proclaimed by his own lips. Self praise never can appear lovely, no matter how true it is, nor how deserving!

The spirit which prompts a man to talk about himself, however it may be disguised, is really pride and self-conceit; and self conceit is not only a disfiguring blemish in a character; it is also a mark of weakness in a life. Its revealing always makes one less strong and influential with one's fellows. Instead of taking the self-conceited man's own estimate of himself, people discount it so heavily that they are likely, on account of his self praise--to rate him much below his true value. Thus a man's very object in talking about himself, and proclaiming his own virtues and good deeds--is defeated! He does not receive praise from men--but

dislike and depreciation instead!

Here is a bit of good counsel on this whole subject, from Wilberforce: "Think as little as possible about any good in yourself. Turn your eyes resolutely from any view of your acquirements, your influence, your plans, your successes, your achievements; above all, speak as little as possible about yourself. The inordinateness of our self-love makes speech about ourselves, like the putting of a lighted torch to the dry wood which has been laid in order for burning. Nothing but duty should open our lips upon this dangerous theme, except it be in humble confession of our sinfulness before God."

These are wise words. We should train ourselves not to think about our own good deeds. If we have done anything beautiful, made a self-denial for another's sake, conquered a feeling of resentment, given help or shown a kindness, the temptation will be to think about it in a spirit of self-commendation. But it is better we should resolutely turn from it, not allowing our thoughts to linger for a moment on the good thing we have done. If we stop to contemplate our own virtues, attainments, or achievements, we do not know what the end will be. The only safe thing is to refuse to think at all of ourselves, or our work. Self-consciousness is always a mark of unwholesomeness. When we say of one who has done a fine thing, "That was well done--and he knows it!" our commendation is obliterated by what follows it. The most beautiful spirit--is one that is unconscious of its own beauty. When we begin to talk of the good in us, or in our work--we mar whatever is beautiful.

Nevertheless, there are many people who disregard such counsel, and continually fall into the snare of speaking about themselves. There are many who entertain you every time you meet them, with a recital of their ills and troubles. When you innocently and courteously ask, "How are you today?" you open the gates of speech to an account of poor health, of uncomfortable feelings, of aches and pains, of bad nights and days of wretchedness, enough to crush an ordinary mortal into the grave! If such people knew how wearisome such hypochondriac talk is to their friends, they would break off the habit.

When a friend or neighbor greets us on a bright morning, and expresses the hope that we are well, he does not want us to recite in his ears a long chapter of our melancholy imaginations. Far better is a cheerful greeting, with nothing but brightness in tone and word. Even if we have had a sleepless night, with bad dreams, and are suffering from a dozen serious illnesses, there is no reason why we should talk about our discomforts and our ills. This is not among "whatever things are lovely." We have no right to unlace our unhappinesses, where they must become disturbing elements in the lives of others. At least, it is nobler for us to try to carry them ourselves.

Also, such a habit of complaining, spoils the sweetness of one's spirit, and mars the beauty of one's character. Talking of one's frets and worries, is surely an unlovely and an unprofitable thing.

There are some preachers who fall into a perilous habit of talking about themselves in the pulpit. They tell incidents in which they have had a more or less conspicuous part. They repeat what good people have said to them or about them, not even withholding the compliments. They take pains that their agency in important achievements shall not fail to be known, and are careful in announcing meetings in which they are to participate, to say that they will speak on the occasion. If these clergymen realized that nearly every time they speak thus of themselves in public--they not only violate the spirit of the Master's teaching, but also lessen their influence with their people and make their ministry less effective, they would forever seal their lips against so dangerous a theme!

There are men who seem never to think of anything, but in its relation to themselves. A clergyman of the generation just past, as he grew old would attend the funerals of all the men of his own age, and would seek the opportunity to say "a few words" on the occasion. Instead, however, of extolling the virtues of the deceased, he would glide, perhaps unconsciously, into autobiographical reminiscence, telling the friends--not what the good man in the coffin had done--but what he, the speaker, had done in connection with him. Surely it is a sad illustration of the danger of talking about one's self, that a man should become such a slave to the habit, that even in a funeral sermon all he can do is to grow talkative over reminiscences of his own life.

In all lines, this tendency to talk about one's self has abundant illustration. There are generous givers, the worth of whose charity is discounted everywhere, by the vanity which always sees that their gifts are well announced. There are writers whose finest pages are disfigured by the continual recurrence of the first personal pronoun singular. They write scarcely a paragraph, in which they do not flaunt their miserable egoism. There are conversationalists who, whatever subject they discuss, always manage to talk about themselves.

The aim of all these men--is to make their own brightness or greatness apparent to others, to have their neighbor duly impressed with their importance. Unfortunately, however, the effect is in every case just the reverse of that intended. Egoism, belittles a man. Personal vanity, dims the luster of a name. We would better be content to have our good deeds go unpraised, than that our own lips should speak the praise. The story of our life should rather not be told, than that we should be our own biographers! The wise man's counsel is good:

Let another man praise you, and not your own mouth;

A stranger, and not your own lips.

The praise of others, if sincere, is honorable; but when we take it upon ourselves to tell the story of our own greatness, or point out the excellences of our own character, we do that which is most unfitting. It were better that we go on with our life and work, doing always our best, and then leave in God's hands, all the matter of praise and reward!

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