

(PP1) Genesis 45:1-15

“Joseph’s Humblebrag”

LeVar Burton doesn’t need to remind you that he is famous. He burst onto the scene in the 1970s with his portrayal of the young Kunta Kinte in the historic miniseries *Roots*. He played the sight-enhanced engineer Geordi La Forge in *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, and he is known to a couple of generations of kids as the host of *Reading Rainbow*.

When you are that famous, however, you can’t help but subtly remind people that you’re kind of a big deal. And, social media like Twitter has proven to be a great place to do that. Recently, LeVar tweeted “It’s a good night for natural light in LA,” featuring a photo of a roaring fire in his fireplace.

On the mantle above, however, conspicuously placed, were his ten Emmy Awards. Three days after Christmas this past year, he tweeted “Stockings still hung” with a photo of said stockings hanging on his awards.

We can’t blame LeVar, however. As Muhammad Ali once said, “It ain’t braggin’ if you can do it.” But in these days, when you can let everyone know what is going on in your life in 140 characters or less, it is easy to buy into the myth of one’s own importance, even if you want to do it subtly.

There is a new term in the dictionary of urban slang known as the “humblebrag.” A humblebrag is false humility couched in “woe is me” complaining or self-deprecating humor that is designed to remind everyone that your life is still more awesome than theirs. And, the humblebrag allows the self-important person to boast about his or her achievements without any sense of shame or guilt.

People are becoming so good at this that there is actually a Twitter feed (@humblebrag) to expose their “shameless” boasting. Here are some examples from some famous and some not-so-famous people: Carolyn Fell tweeted, “I just stepped on gum. Who spits gum on a red carpet?”

Former White House Press Secretary Ari Fleischer tweeted, “They just announced my flight at LaGuardia is number 15 for takeoff. I miss Air Force One!” Model Jane Randall tweeted, “Recognized a gagillion times today ... even two casting directors said they were fans.” And actor David Hasselhoff tweeted, “It’s an evening with the Hoff! *Britain’s Got Talent* followed by my life story on Piers Morgan. Hopefully you won’t be sick of me!”

You get the idea. If regular bragging is designed to inspire awe, humblebragging is designed to inspire awe *and* sympathy. Nobody likes a cocky braggart, but a humblebragger gets by with letting people attempt to feel their pain. What’s missed in the exchange, however, is the reality that humblebragging is another way of saying to the people in your social network, “You’re my fan, not my friend.”

(PP2) It would be easy to think of Joseph as one of these humblebraggers, especially when we read about his childhood beginning in Genesis 37. He is daddy’s favorite among all of his sons, and his dad gives him a robe of many colors – the kind reserved for royalty, not for someone who works for a living.

Joseph had every reason to become the ultimate spoiled brat, and if he had had a Twitter account back then, who knows what photos he might have tweeted with the phrase: “New robe! Dad thinks I’m royal material but gotta go feed the sheep first!”

Not only was Joseph the favorite, he is also “tweeting out” his dreams to his brothers – dreams in which his brothers are bowing down to him as

his servants, rather than his siblings (37:5-11). It's no wonder they "un-friended" Joseph by stripping him of the robe, dumping him into a pit, and then selling him as a slave to some merchants on their way to Egypt (37:12-28).

(PP3) As we read the whole Joseph story, however, we begin to see that Joseph wasn't actually humblebragging. Instead, he was following the life that God had prepared for him. He becomes a slave in Egypt, and yet he rises to a position of responsibility in the household of an Egyptian official. There, Joseph is falsely accused of attacking the official's wife, and he thrown in prison. But even there he rises to the top, eventually becoming Pharaoh's right hand man.

Joseph has every reason to be proud of his accomplishments, but he knows that he can't brag because *he* did it. Instead, Joseph is aware throughout the story that it is God who has been making him successful all along. When Pharaoh asks about Joseph's ability to interpret dreams, Joseph responds, "It is beyond my power to interpret your dream, but God can tell you what it means, and set you at ease." (Genesis 41:16)

This brings us to Genesis 45 and its powerful scene revealing that Joseph's childhood, God-driven dreams about his brothers bowing down to him, had become a reality. This revelation comes after Joseph first recognizes his brothers in chapter 42. They had come to Egypt to buy grain in the midst of a famine in Canaan.

Now, the younger brother, who had been thrown into a pit and sold into slavery, holds the lives of his brothers in his hands. It is the perfect scenario for revenge, and the classic opportunity for a humblebragger to say, "See! I told you so!" But Joseph tests his brothers before telling them that this powerful Egyptian official standing before them is actually their long lost little brother.

Finally, Joseph “could stand it no longer” and he tells his brothers the truth. “I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?” (vv. 1-3). The brothers are stunned to realize that Joseph is standing there in front of them.

Now here, we would expect that Joseph would spend some time bragging about how he had made it from “the pit to the palace” on his own steam. But Joseph doesn’t see his brothers as groveling fans, nor does he barrage them with a series of self-serving humblebrags.

Instead, he says to them, “Please, come closer. I am Joseph, your brother, whom you sold into slavery in Egypt. But don’t be upset, and don’t be angry with yourselves for selling me to this place. It was God who sent me here ahead of you to preserve your lives.” (vv. 4-5)

Joseph knows that he has nothing to brag about. Whatever success Joseph has had is the result of God’s work, and not his own. Joseph sees his whole life through the lens of God’s purposes, and, if he is going to brag about anything, it will only be about God working in his life.

He says, “God has sent me ahead of you to keep you and your families alive, and to preserve many survivors. So it was God who sent me here, not you! And, He is the one who made me an adviser to Pharaoh – the manager of his entire palace, and the governor of all Egypt. (vv. 7-8).

(PP4) In other words, it ain’t braggin’ if God did it! Joseph reiterates this again in Genesis 50:20, when he says one of the most important lines in the Scriptures: “You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good. He brought me to this position so I could save the lives of many people.” Joseph, the one who interpreted visions, has a vision of a God who will make things right.

Genesis began with God calling his creation “good,” and Joseph sees that, no matter what humans will do in their sinful, self-serving nature, it

is God who will make it all good again. In the end, humans have nothing to boast about, unless we are boasting about our God. It is God who reconciles a broken world, and who can even reconcile a broken family like Joseph's. Only God's grace makes that possible.

We can't forget what God tells us in Romans 3. "Everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard. Yet God, with undeserved kindness, declares that we are righteous. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins. For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood."

"Can we ***boast***, then, that we have done anything to be accepted by God?" Paul asks. "No, because our acquittal is not based on obeying the law. We are made right with God through faith in Jesus Christ!" And now, we can rejoice (***or even boast***) in our wonderful new relationship with God because our Lord Jesus Christ has made us friends of God."

We may never be celebrities, but that doesn't prevent us from striving after fame, treating others like fans instead of friends, and falsely believing that our humility is part of our greatness. (PP5) Joseph reminds us that everything we have, and everything we are is only possible because of the goodness of God.

God is not impressed with our awards, or what color carpet we've walked on, or whether we ever get to ride on Air Force One. God only wants us to live with His purposes in mind. We shouldn't be looking for fans for ourselves anyway because *we* are called to be followers of Christ, our Lord.

The next time we are tempted to tweet out a humblebrag, or humbly tell our neighbor how great we are, let's skip the brag and remember the humble! Like Joseph said, "It ain't braggin', because God did it!" May God bless you all, Amen.

Sermon Notes

Genesis 45:1-15

“Joseph’s Humblebrag”

- There is a new term in the dictionary of urban slang known as the “humblebrag.” A humblebrag is false humility couched in “woe is me” complaining or self-deprecating humor that is designed to remind everyone that your life is still more awesome than theirs. The humblebrag allows the self-important person to boast about his or her achievements without any sense of shame or guilt.
- Joseph was not a humblebrag. Instead, he followed the life God had prepared for him. He becomes a slave in Egypt, but eventually becomes Pharaoh’s right hand man. Joseph has every reason to be proud of his accomplishments, but he knows that he can’t brag because *he* did it. Whatever success Joseph has had is the result of God’s work, and not his own. Joseph sees his whole life through the lens of God’s purposes.
- Genesis began with God calling his creation “good.” No matter what humans will do in their sinful, self-serving nature, it is God who will make it all good again. In the end, humans have nothing to boast about, unless we are boasting about our God. It is God who reconciles a broken world to himself.
- Romans 3 reminds us, “Everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God’s glorious standard. Yet God, with undeserved kindness, declares that we are righteous. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins. For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood.”
- “Can we boast, then, that we have done anything to be accepted by God?” Paul asks. “No, because our acquittal is not based on obeying the law. We are made right with God through faith in Jesus Christ!” And now, we can rejoice (*or boast*) in our wonderful new relationship with God because our Lord Jesus Christ has made us friends of God.”
- Joseph reminds us that everything we have, and everything we are is only possible because of the goodness of God. ***May God bless you!***

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Joseph Reveals His Identity

1 Joseph could stand it no longer. There were many people in the room, and he said to his attendants, “Out, all of you!” So he was alone with his brothers when he told them who he was. 2 Then he broke down and wept. He wept so loudly the Egyptians could hear him, and word of it quickly carried to Pharaoh’s palace. 3 “I am Joseph!” he said to his brothers. “Is my father still alive?” But his brothers were speechless! They were stunned to realize that Joseph was standing there in front of them. 4 “Please, come closer,” he said to them. So they came closer. And he said again, “I am Joseph, your brother, whom you sold into slavery in Egypt. 5 But don’t be upset, and don’t be angry with yourselves for selling me to this place. It was God who sent me here ahead of you to preserve your lives. 6 This famine that has ravaged the land for two years will last five more years, and there will be neither plowing nor harvesting. 7 God has sent me ahead of you to keep you and your families alive and to preserve many survivors.* 8 So it was God who sent me here, not you! And he is the one who made me an adviser* to Pharaoh—the manager of his entire palace and the governor of all Egypt. 9 “Now hurry back to my father and tell him, ‘This is what your son Joseph says: God has made me master over all the land of Egypt. So come down to me immediately! 10 You can live in the region of Goshen, where you can be near me with all your children and grandchildren, your flocks and herds, and everything you own. 11 I will take care of you there, for there are still five years of famine ahead of us. Otherwise you, your household, and all your animals will starve.’” 12 Then Joseph added, “Look! You can see for yourselves, and so can my brother Benjamin, that I really am Joseph! 13 Go tell my father of my honored position here in Egypt. Describe for him everything you have seen, and then bring my father here quickly.” 14 Weeping with joy, he embraced Benjamin, and Benjamin did the same. 15 Then Joseph kissed each of his brothers and wept over them, and after that they began talking freely with him.

Reach Prayer

Loving God, you invite us to worship in this place, and so we respond with praise and thanksgiving. As creation proclaims your greatness with all its beauty, so we proclaim your presence with us in word and song. We accept your invitation to worship you, O God, help us to respond with praise and thanksgiving. In Christ's name we pray, Amen.

Responsive Call to Worship

Call: Oh what greatness our God has demonstrated. God's people have been set free!

Response: How great is our God!

Call: God has turned our ashes into something beautiful.

Response: How great is our God!

Call: God has taken what was worthless and made it more precious than gold.

Response: How great is our God!

Call: God has restored our brokenness and healed our sinful hearts.

Response: How great is our God!

Call: Our God is greater and stronger and mightier than any foe we may face.

Response: How great is our God!

All: God, we give you glory for all that you have done and all that you are. To you be all glory!

How great you are!

Pastoral Prayer - Loving and merciful God, in this quiet moment, we ask that you align the hearts of your people with yours, that we may submit to your will in all things. There is so much in our lives that we don't understand. Fear and doubt try so hard to keep us from trusting your goodness.

But, let each one here today release their fears and doubts; let them give them freely to you. Help them to come to you not hiding their uncertainty, but bringing it before you, knowing that you are not surprised by their feelings. We come in trust, and we ask your Spirit to renew our faith in you once more. You are God, and we belong to you, so help us now to pray together the prayer our Lord Jesus taught us to pray....

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, forever, Amen.

Hymns

To God Be the Glory

All Glory, Laud and Honor

In the Cross of Christ I Glory