

Turtle Top Theology

Luke 9:46-50; Proverbs 16:18

One of Dr. Seuss's more famous poem is called "Yertle the Turtle"
" On a far away island of Sala-ma-sond,
Yertle the turtle was king of the pond.
A nice little pond. It was clean. It was neat.
The water was warm, there was plenty to eat.
Until - one day - the king of them all
decided the kingdom he ruled was too small.
'I'm a ruler of all that I see.
But I don't see enough and that's the trouble with me.'

'With this stone for a throne I am too low down
I cannot look down upon the places beyond.'
So Yertle the turtle king lifted his hand,
and Yertle the turtle king gave a command.
He ordered nine turtles to swim to his stone
and, using these turtles, he built a new throne.
He made each turtle stand on another's back;
and he piled them all up in a 9 turtle stack.
Then Yertle climbed up. He sat down on the pile.
What a wonderful view! He could see 'most a mile!

'All mine!' Yertle cried. 'Oh the things I now rule.
I'm king of a cow. I'm king of a mule!
I'm king of a house! And, what's more, beyond that
I'm king of a blueberry bush and a cat!
I'm Yertle the Turtle! Oh, marvelous me!
For I am the ruler of all that I see!'"

As the poem progresses, Yertle wants to be more and more powerful. He wants to rise higher so that he can have more - to see and to rule over. Then, he notices the moon rising above him as the night approaching. And looking at the moon, he says:

"'What's THAT?' snorted Yertle. 'Say, what IS that thing
That dares to be higher than Yertle the King?
I shall not allow it! I'll go higher still!
I'll build my throne higher! I can and I will!
I'll call some more turtles. I'll stack 'em to heaven!
I need 'bout 5000, 600 and 7!'"

And then as he starts to get that done the bottom turtle burps, and the entire tower of turtles come tumbling down leaving Yertle the Turtle as the King of nothing but mud.

It reminds me of another story I read. It happened in the jungle one day. A lion with a big ego went around asking the other animals who the king of the jungle was. "Who's the king of the jungle?" the lion roared at a monkey. "Why you are, Mr. Lion," said the monkey with fear in his voice. The lion went on and found a zebra. "Who's the king of the jungle?" he snarled. "There is no doubt about it. You are Mr. Lion," said the zebra. Seeing a turtle crossing his path the lion bellowed, "Who's the king of the jungle?" Scared out of his shell the turtle said, "You are Mr. Lion. You are the king of the jungle." Then the lion came upon an elephant. Once again he roared out the question, "Who's the king of jungle?" The elephant used his trunk to grab the lion by his tail. He spun him around over his head several times, dunked him in a mud hole, and slammed him into a large tree. Dazed and dirty the lion said, "Just because you didn't know the correct answer was no reason to get upset."

When you compare the story of Yertle the Turtle with the story told in Genesis about the tower of Babel you see a lot of close similarities. Also when you look at the political world we live in today we see a lot of similarities. We need to look at God's advice found in (Proverbs 16:18) "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall"

In a certain pond, there were two ducks and a turtle who were neighbors and the best of friends. They played together all day long during the summer time. But as the cold drew near and the water dried up, the ducks realized they would have to move. This would be easy for them, but what about their friend the turtle? Finally it was decided that they would put a stick in the bill of each duck, and then the turtle would hang onto the stick with his mouth and they would fly him to another pond. And so they did. Just then, a farmer looked up and said to his wife, "What a great idea! I wonder who thought of that?"

Proudly, the turtle said, "I didddddd!" Thus illustrating: "Pride goes before a fall!" Power can drive a lot of people.

Then in Luke 9 we find that this pride can easily enter into the church, or among the followers of Jesus if were not careful. the disciples had become Yertle's. They are motivated by the same mind set that drives the king of the turtles.

Yertle the Turtle wanted to be the greatest in his kingdom. And the disciples wanted to be considered the greatest in God's Kingdom.

Yertle didn't care about the other turtles... they weren't as important as he.

And each of the disciples cared less for the others than they do for themselves, for they were more important (in their own eyes) than the others.

The problem doesn't lie with the DESIRE to be valuable/ important/ influential. The problem lies with how we go about getting those things.

Look with me to Luke 9:46: "An argument started among the disciples as to which of them would be the greatest." Now notice what Jesus says at the end of verse 48 "...he who is least among you all— he is the greatest."

So, can you become a great person in the Kingdom?

Yes, of course you can! Jesus said so. You can have value/ importance/ great influence in the Kingdom of Heaven. But you can only have that if you're willing to do it God's way. OTHERWISE, you risk becoming a Yertle.

So, my point is this: there's nothing wrong with wanting to be great in the Kingdom of God, but if we're not careful, we can end up using others for our own ends.

But it doesn't have to be that way. And the way to avoid that trap is to learn the lessons of Yertle the Turtle.

- I. Yertle's biggest problem was that he didn't think anybody should be higher than he was.
 - A. He looks up at the moon and he snorts: "Say, what IS that thing that dares to be higher than Yertle the King?"
 1. HE WAS THE KING... and this was HIS kingdom.
 2. Nothing, and no one, else was allowed to impose on his authority and power.
 - B. And amongst the disciples, there was a similar problem.
 1. At a different time, James and John asked to sit on Christ's right and left in His kingdom and the other disciples became angry.
 2. You could just hear them as they complained: "Say... who are James and John that they dare to try to be higher than we are?"
 3. How dare they usurp OUR power and OUR prestige. This is OUR kingdom they're messing with."
 4. In fact, when a competitor sets up shop down the road they get upset. In Luke 9:49 John complains "Master, we saw a man driving out demons in your name and we tried to stop him, because he is not one of us."
 - C. What was John upset about?
 1. "He's NOT ONE OF US! How dare he infringe on our copy write? It's our kingdom... not his." Really???
 2. Excuse me... whose kingdom is it? It belongs to Jesus, not us.
 - D. This is a significant principle in God's kingdom every position and role in the church should be undertaken with this thought in mind.
 1. In I Peter 5, Peter says: "Be shepherds of GOD'S FLOCK that is under your care, serving as overseers— not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but EAGER TO SERVE; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away." (I Peter 5:1-4)

2. Their role was that of servants to God's people, not rulers and tyrants.
 3. It's God's flock, not theirs, and God was watching what they were doing in the hopes that when Christ returned He could impart to them a crown of glory.
 4. But the church doesn't belong to the Elders. It doesn't belong to the Preacher. It doesn't belong to a church board, or a group of influential members.
 5. The church belongs to Jesus.
 6. Many people forget who the church belongs to.
 7. They don't want certain things done in "their church"
 8. They don't want certain people in "their church"
 9. And their battle cry is "this is our church"!
 10. I even heard one man declare before the entire church "you new people don't understand how much OUR building means to us."

 11. What was he saying?
 12. He was saying – "you new people don't really belong here. This is 'our church' and it will never be yours!"
 13. Or God's for that matter.
- E. But it doesn't have to be just about church...
1. it can be about other parts of your life as well.
 - a. It can be about "YOUR home"
 - b. Or "Your" job
 - c. Or "Your" Business
 - d. "Your" family
 - e. "Your" possessions
 - f. "Your" future - etc. etc.
 2. But once you become a Christian that's no longer true.
 3. These things aren't YOURS any more.
 4. They no longer belong to you... they're just on loan.
 5. When you became a Christian you gave everything to Jesus... they're all His now.
 6. And that's true, because, now you realize
 - a. there is someone who is more exalted than you are
 - b. there is someone whose throne is higher than yours
 7. And that someone is Jesus.
- F. But Yertle didn't think anybody was higher than he was - and that was his 1st problem.

II. And Yertle's 2nd problem stemmed from his first.

- A. He felt that what he had was his because he deserved it.
1. He was king by virtue of his own ability and strength of

- character.
- 2. He was king because he deserved to be.
- B. And the disciples had gotten to believing that their position as Christ's followers was deserved.
 - 1. They were HIS disciples.
 - 2. I mean, He came and sought them out.
 - 3. He chose them from amongst everyone else in all of Israel.
 - 4. They were special. And they must be special because Jesus had seen in them abilities and powers beyond those of mortal men.
 - 5. Or at least, that's what they thought.
- C. So Jesus set the record straight.
 - 1. Look with me to Matthew 18:1-4
 - 2. "At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"
 - 3. He called a little child and had him stand among them. And He said: "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."
 - 4. To be great in Christ's Kingdom Jesus said we need to become like a little child.
- D. But why would Jesus use a little child for His lesson?
 - 1. I mean, there wasn't anything special about this child. He doesn't seem to be rich, or wise, or important.
 - 2. He had no special abilities that we know of. So, why bring this child into the discussion?
 - 3. Well, Jesus used this child because he WASN'T that important. Jesus didn't ask him over because of what he knew, or what he could do, or because of what he owned, or what he could give.
 - 4. This child's value lay in his willingness to obey.
 - 5. He did exactly what Jesus told him to do. The little child came to Jesus and allowed Jesus to use him.
- E. When we're willing to humble ourselves to the point where we think of ourselves as having little value, but instead come before God with the gentle openness of a little child, then God can use us.
 - 1. Jesus said: "everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." Luke 14:11
 - 2. One woman said it this way: "I'm just a pencil in the hand of God" (Mother Teresa)
 - 3. In other words: I'm only useful as God uses me.

4. I'm just a tool... and I pray that God uses me!
- F. When we're humble enough to look at God in that way then God can lift us up and make us a great people.
- G. Yertle type people aren't interested in little kids. They're not of much use to important folks.
 1. At one church I know about, some of the church members complained about the wear and tear that the youth group activities was having was on the basement carpet.
 2. Why were they upset?
 3. It was their money that paid for the carpet... not the kids.
 4. Essentially – it was their carpet... it belonged to them, not the kids. The kids hadn't contributed anything to the purchase or installation of that floor covering. They were 2nd class citizens.
- H. But God tells us that if we're going to impress Him, we need to be servants.
 1. Servants to people who can't contribute anything to make the church strong & influential.
 2. Servants to children who are too young to fix things, or teach, or lead singing
 3. Servants to widows who are too poor to contribute to the church budget
 4. Servants to anyone who is too weak or crippled or handicapped to be able to repay our kindnesses.
 5. Philippians 2:3-5 tells us that Jesus is our example in this: "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.
 6. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!
- I. That's the example of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.
 1. And God's promise to us is that when we humble ourselves as Jesus did... He will lift us up.

A man was walking through an art gallery when he came upon a picture of the Lord Jesus dying upon the cross. He stopped and looked at the beautiful portrait of Calvary's love. As he stared into the face of Christ, so full of agony the gallery guard tapped him on the shoulder. "Lower," the guard said. "The artist painted this picture to be appreciated from a lower position."

So the man bent down. And from this lower position he observed new beauties in the picture not previously shown. "Lower," said the guard. "Lower still." The man knelt down on one knee and looked up into the face of Christ. The new vantage point yielded new beauties to behold and appreciate.

But motioning with his torch toward the ground, the guard said, "Lower. You've got to go lower." The man now dropped down to two knees and looked up. Only then as he looked up at the painting from such a low posture could he realize the artist's intended perspective. Only then could he see the full beauty of the cross.

Is the same not true in worship? Only as we position ourselves lower and lower in humble submission can we behold more fully the glories of our wonderful Lord.