

DEADLY PRIDE

II KINGS 20:1-21

GOD OPPOSES THE PROUD BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE

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DEADLY PRIDE

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Let me start by bringing us up to speed. Last week we said that ungodliness seemed to be the primary cause of all sin. Jerry Bridges defined ungodliness like this: "Ungodliness may be defined as living one's everyday life with little or no thought of God, or of God's will, or of God's glory, or of one's dependence of God." In other words, when our focus is off God in any way, then we are operating in an ungodly manner.

It occurred to me this week as I was studying through pride, that if we were consciously aware of God's presence and person, we couldn't possibly commit the sin of pride. Pride can only manifest itself in our lives when we compare ourselves to others. You see, in the presence of God, we only have God to compare ourselves with, and if that were the case, we would always have to be humbled. On the other hand, when we compare ourselves to others, we can find areas in which we are superior whether the comparisons are real or imagined. Once we establish our superiority, then rewards and recognition are expected to follow. It seems to me that we as human beings are always looking to upgrade our status.

Let me give you an example. When I was a young pastor, I visited a person who was kind of poor. I repeatedly invited him to church, but he said he couldn't come because he felt his clothes were too shabby. And so, being the good-natured guy I am, I took him shopping one day and bought him a really nice suit. He came to church for the next three Sundays. And then he didn't show up for a while. I went back to visit him and asked him why he stopped coming to church. He said, "When I got dressed up in my new suit, and when everyone told me how elegant I looked, I decided I looked good enough to attend the Episcopal Church."

I think that most of us who claim to be Christians would readily acknowledge that pride is a bad thing. We know that people who brag a lot, people who are arrogant, and people who are self-promoting are not very likable people and we know that it is not pleasing to God. However, what I want to do this morning is point out where pride may be so subtle, we may miss it in our own lives. I'm going to follow up with Jerry Bridge's thoughts of how pride can affect us as believers. The reason this is important for us to examine and understand is the main idea of this morning's text. **GOD OPPOSES THE PROUD BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.** In other words, it is important because if we are proud in any way, we can be sure that God is not only not on our side, but He will actively work against us. If we are going to build a Christian culture here at Devon Church, then it needs to be built on humility. Any pride that slips in, no matter how subtle, will sink our work here.

I. THE SUBTLE ROOTS OF PRIDE (VS 1-3)

Religious Pride Is Often Hard To Detect.

The subtle roots of pride are described here in verses 1-3. **RELIGIOUS PRIDE IS OFTEN HARD TO DETECT.** If our goal is to please God, then we should understand how easy it is for us to get off track.

First of all, it is important to know that God has a plan for our life. If we are believers, it is important that we be ready and eager to hear God's will as described in verse 1. Here we meet Hezekiah, one of Israel's few good kings. Listen to what the Bible says about Hezekiah:

¹³He did what was pleasing in the LORD'S sight, just as his ancestor David had done. ⁴He removed the pagan shrines, smashed the sacred pillars, and knocked down the Asherah poles. He broke up the bronze serpent that Moses

had made, because the people of Israel had begun to worship it by burning incense to it. The bronze serpent was called Nehushtan. ⁵Hezekiah trusted in the LORD, the God of Israel. There was never another king like him in the land of Judah, either before or after his time. ⁶He remained faithful to the LORD in everything, and he carefully obeyed all the commands the LORD had given Moses. ⁷So the LORD was with him, and Hezekiah was successful in everything he did. He revolted against the king of Assyria and refused to pay him tribute. ⁸He also conquered the Philistines as far distant as Gaza and its territory, from their smallest outpost to their largest walled city" (II Kings 18:3-8 / NLT).

We are talking about a real standout. This guy worked hand in hand with God's prophet Isaiah. Isaiah is the author of the Biblical book of Isaiah. Hezekiah accomplished a great deal for God and for the nation. After all these accomplishments, God sent Hezekiah a message through the prophet Isaiah. God told Hezekiah it was time to die. He should put his house in order.

Do we ever stop to think about this? God not only has a plan for our life, He has a time and manner for our death as well. However, I don't think many of us think about that. Let's think for a moment with King Hezekiah. He was at the top of his game. He was only 54-years-old. He was a good honest king. Israel had a bright future ahead of her under the kingship of King Hezekiah, and yet, God determined Hezekiah's job was done and it was time for him to die.

From a human perspective, how could that be? How does that make sense? When it's time for loved ones to die, it often doesn't make sense to us. Over the years I have often wondered why good people die while wicked people live on. But as I think about it now, that is ungodly thinking because it takes the focus off the one on one relationship the person has with God and brings it down to a worldly level where I'm comparing the person with other people.

Before we go on with this thought, let me tell you how I feel about my own death. I don't want to be alive one second more than God wants me to be alive. When He calls I want to recognize His wisdom, His plan, and His timing. So if I were to face a serious illness, I will be honored to think you will be praying for my recovery. However, when you pray that, please be sure to add that I only recover if it's God's will that I recover. For me, that's what it means to pray in Jesus' Name. I don't want God's second best for my life. I want His best. You see, when we start to take our focus off God and His plan for our lives, we can be distracted and make bad choices.

Once we are distracted and start to focus on worldly comparisons, we can start to get sucked into the pride of religious people like King Hezekiah did in verses 2-3. In his book Respectable Sins, Jerry Bridges lists 4 types of pride that we may fall into easily as Christians.

The first one he describes is "Moral self-righteousness." This is when we look at the society we live in and unbelievers, comparing their values and behaviors with ours. For example, our society condones all forms of sexual immorality. They accept as normal people having sex outside of marriage, homosexual acts, pornography, and all sorts of other perverted stuff. It is considered acceptable to lie if you don't get caught, cheat at business, taxes, etc. Even when looking at nominal Christians who seldom read their Bibles, don't spend much time in prayer or devotion, and don't demonstrate much maturity in the Christian faith, it is easy to slip into moral self-righteousness. When most of us compare ourselves to society at large, we start to feel morally superior. We say, "I'm not like the world. I don't steal, I don't cheat or lie, and I don't commit adultery or have premarital sex. I'm a pretty good person." And so we feel morally superior to the culture and unbelievers. The other comparison to nominal Christians tends to be prevalent among pastors and church leaders. It is easy to start judging people who are not reading their Bibles, praying regularly, and serving. And so it is easy to feel even better about our maturity as believers.

However, the critical flaw in self-righteousness is that we have taken our eyes off Jesus and started to compare ourselves with other people. When King Hezekiah compared himself with other Kings in Israel's history, he clearly could claim to have followed God's laws and walked in His ways. In fact, as we read from the Bible earlier, God compared Hezekiah to King David and

stated he did everything that was pleasing to God. Hezekiah worked hand in hand with the priests and the prophets. And so, when he cries out to God in bitterness, he says to God,

"Remember, O LORD, how I have waked before you faithfully and with wholehearted devotion and have done what is good in your eyes." (II Kings 20:3 / NIV).

King Hezekiah was an outstanding King when it came to following God. However, if Hezekiah compared himself to King Jesus, how would he come out in that comparison? You see, as long as we compare ourselves to unbelievers or to believers who are not as far along as we are, we will always look good. However, if we keep our eyes and attention on Jesus, then how do we come out in that comparison? Pride can only slip in if we allow our attention to be drawn away from God and onto other people. And even then we don't take time to compare ourselves with Christians who are much more mature than we are. We always compare ourselves to people who are less holy than we are. The answer to falling prey to moral self-righteous pride is to stand in the presence of God and compare ourselves one on one to Jesus' holiness. Believe me, when we stand only in the presence of God, we will realize what a piece of garbage we really are. So when we are tempted to fall to self-righteous thinking by comparing ourselves to others, we are really only comparing two pieces of garbage.

Next, Bridges points out that we slip into pride over correct doctrine. It's dangerous to be right. I have seen ministers and Christians publicly defending the Christian faith in such unchristian ways. It seems as if they are angry and judgmental. Their doctrine is biblically correct, but their attitude is one of pride and not of humility. I am astounded at how vehemently Christians argue theology. Let me put this in perspective. I ask Christians, "If you were to take a theology test when you arrived at heaven, would you be happy with a 70%?" People readily admit they would be happy. "Then," I ask, "how do you know which 30% of your theology is wrong?" I am not a Dispensational theologian. My view of the end times differs from the authors of "The Left Behind" series. However, I have enjoyed listening to them on tape. I have listened to the whole series and have learned a great deal. Yet when I tell people I enjoyed them, they often respond, "How can you read such garbage?" Listen, we are reading the same Bible and we agree on the events that will take place. Our timing of the events may be different, but we can all learn from one another. We won't know for sure how the timing and events may take place until they actually do. However, if we are humble and know one another's views, it will be easy for us to adjust when our view proves to be wrong. To be sure, we must argue for correct doctrine and theology in the major issues where protecting the church is at stake. But we must do so with humility.

I think the biggest danger comes when you have been falsely accused and later proven to be right. It is hard to fight off the temptation of being publicly exonerated. However, we must remember that we are not to compare ourselves with other people. We are to compare ourselves to God. Even though we may have been proven right on certain doctrinal issues, we must readily admit in the presence of God that it will take a lifetime to correct all of our wrong thinking. Not until we see Jesus face to face will we be perfect.

King Hezekiah did reestablish the correct worship of God. He tore down all the altars built to false gods. He destroyed all the idols and reinstated correct worship. All false religion was destroyed. However, as correct as he was, he failed to identify his wrong thinking and theology about the connection between righteousness and death. In other words, he felt that because he had been righteous, he shouldn't have to die so young. That is clearly wrong theology. So we need to be humble as we maintain correct doctrine.

The third situation we easily fall prey to pride is in our achievements. King Hezekiah's achievements were legendary. He conquered land and expanded Israel's borders. He drove out the enemy and defended Jerusalem against powerful nations. I think that sometimes our own success is our worst enemy. We often carefully and prayerfully formulate a plan. We diligently stick to the plan and work hard at accomplishing it. When our task is complete, we are tempted to think it was our careful planning and hard work that brought the success. We compare

ourselves to other people who are not careful planners or hard workers. We then start to believe that we deserve what we have and what we have accomplished.

If we are Christians, we must stand in the presence of Christ and hear Him say to us as He did in the Gospel of John:

"¹⁵Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing: (John 15:5 / NLT).

If we are Christians, then we have to humbly accept the fact that whatever we accomplish is because God accomplished it. Again, one on one in the presence of God, we can realize how incompetent we really are because we have often accomplished things that we didn't deserve to accomplish. Standing alone in the presence of God should only bring fear and gratitude to our hearts. We can see all our accomplishments and achievements are like filthy rags in God's presence.

And finally, Bridges points out that an "independent spirit" is a manifestation of pride. We were raised to be independent, to not ask people for help, and to never be submissive. However, this is disastrous in church. The Bible is very clear about the church submitting to the leadership of the pastor and leaders. However, most people will never truly submit. They will just submit to the teachings they agree with. We have come to believe in the United States that we can believe what we want to believe and do what we want to do. I think I have from time to time experienced this same situation that Bridges describes in his book when he says:

"Resistance to spiritual authority and an unteachable spirit is not limited to students and young adults. I sometimes encounter this attitude in teaching the Bible to older adults. Often a response to something I am teaching is, 'Well, I think thus and such.' No appeal to Scripture is made; it is only the person's opinion. Yet in his or her mind, that opinion is authoritative. There is no willingness to grapple with the teaching of Scripture."

Those of us, who have been Christians for a long time, especially if we have been actively pursuing holiness, are especially susceptible to these forms of pride. As great and holy a king, King Hezekiah was, it still did not keep him from falling into these types of pride. In fact, the text records him turning his face to the wall, weeping, and then presenting God with his spiritual resume. Pride blinds us and corrupts us. As we will see later in this text, it ruins Hezekiah's life and it wrecks the nation of Israel. We need to be vigilant because **RELIGIOUS PRIDE IS OFTEN HARD TO DETECT.**

II. PRIDE BLINDS US (VS 4-13)

Unidentified Or Unchecked Pride Leads To Stupid Behavior.

Let's now continue on with this idea that pride blinds us as described in verses 4-13. In other words **UNIDENTIFIED OR UNCHECKED PRIDE LEADS TO STUPID BEHAVIOR.**

In verses 4-7 we see that pride wants its way. In other words, King Hezekiah thought that he was good and that he accomplished a great deal for the Lord. He wasn't willing to accept God's plan for his life. Here is something that I want us all to pay attention to. Sometimes, when we display prideful attitudes, one way God can bring us down is through giving us what we want and ask for. God decides to answer Hezekiah's prayer. He sent the Prophet Isaiah back to inform Hezekiah that God just added fifteen more years on his life. Isaiah applied the salve to Hezekiah and he got well.

Many times in our lives, God sends illness our way to humble us, to cause us to take time and reflect on what we are doing. Illness can often be used as a way in which God deals with our

pride. Most of the time we can see that as God taking a stand against our pride. But here, God seems to use granting King Hezekiah's request to get well and not die as a way in dealing with his pride. When we are not humble, even things that seem to be blessings can turn into God's judgment.

In verses 8-11 we see that pride demands its way. It wasn't enough that God promised to heal him, now he wanted a sign. Not only did he want a sign, he wanted a miraculous sign. The Lord answered his request and Hezekiah's request was granted. He was healed. The problem with proud people is they assume that what they want, what they are doing, and how they are doing it is all right and good. At this point, Hezekiah is no longer operating under the will of God. He is now operating alone.

The problem now with pride at this stage is described in verses 12-13 as pride feeding pride. Let's review. King Hezekiah had a fantastic career. He lived a godly, righteous, and holy life. Under his reign, the priest, the prophet, and the king worked together to lead the nation in righteousness. He achieved a great deal militarily and politically. When it was time to die, Hezekiah let his pride and selfish desires get in the way of submitting to God. He became proud and as judgment, God gave him what he wanted, another fifteen years added to his life. And now King Hezekiah is even more proud. The next thing we see is Hezekiah showing the Babylonian envoy all his accomplishments. He showed them the storehouses, the silver, gold spices and fine oil. He showed them his armory and all his military force. He showed them everything. He must have felt extremely proud to watch the Babylonians ooh and ahh as he showed them all his power, wealth, accomplishments, and prestige. He must feel like King of the world, and the sad thing is that he still feels as if he is a righteous king and that God is blessing him.

Here is a good lesson for us. Pride will blind us and we will be so blind, we won't even be able to see how far amok we have gone. That is why each of us should surround ourselves with friends who will tell us the truth. Friends who just go along with everything you say and do are not your friends. We have all heard the saying, "Friends don't let friends drive drunk." Real friends won't let you drive under the influence of pride. Real friends will tell you when you are acting stupid. Why didn't Hezekiah accept the word of God brought to him by his friend and coworker, the prophet Isaiah? Please develop friends who are not impressed with your achievements, your good works, your holiness, wealth, talent, or anything else. Surround yourself with people who are willing to tell you the truth. And here is the key component. Be humble enough to listen.

Later on, the Babylonians came to destroy Jerusalem. And basically, they had all the reconnaissance they needed. They didn't even need spies and they didn't need to be covert about a thing. King Hezekiah showed them everything they needed in order to formulate a plan of attack. Oftentimes our pride will cause us to say and do things that will ultimately lead to our disgrace and our failure. This is a truth that has played itself out from the beginning of time.

UNIDENTIFIED OR UNCHECKED PRIDE LEADS TO STUPID BEHAVIOR.

III. GOD OPPOSES THE PROUD (VS 14- 21)

God Will Not Let Pride Go Unpunished

The devastating thing about prideful people is not only do they crash and burn themselves; they often bring down disaster on those around them. Verses 14-21 remind us that God opposes the proud. The Bible is clear on this point. **GOD WILL NOT LET PRIDE GO UNPUNISHED.**

Verses 14-15 clearly demonstrate that God confronts the proud. After the Babylonian envoy left, the prophet Isaiah paid King Hezekiah a visit. Isaiah asked Hezekiah what they saw while visiting. Of course, Isaiah already knew because God sent him. We can imagine how proudly and how righteously Hezekiah told Isaiah he showed them absolutely everything. God may

confront our pride through a friend's counsel, through an illness, through some sort of setback, or even through church discipline.

But what follows next is even more frightening. Verses 16-18 warn us that God judges the proud.

And now listen to how God responds to Hezekiah's pride:

"¹⁷The time will surely come when everything in your palace, and all that your fathers have stored up until this day, will be carried off to Babylon. Nothing will be left, says the LORD. ¹⁸And some of your descendants, your own flesh and blood, that will be born to you, will be taken away, and they will become eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon" (II Kings 20:17-18 / NIV).

This prophecy was fulfilled less than 85 years after Hezekiah died. The Babylonians came and laid siege to Jerusalem. They broke through the walls, burned the city and carried Jews back to Babylon as captives. If you have the inclination to see what damage pride can do, read through the book of Lamentations. It describes the fulfillment of what God promises King Hezekiah as his punishment for pride. Let me just read two verses from Lamentations just to give you a taste:

"⁸But now their faces are blacker than soot. No one even recognizes them. Their skin sticks to their bones; it is as dry and hard as wood.

⁹Those killed by the sword are far better off than those who die of hunger, wasting away for want of food.

¹⁰Tenderhearted women have cooked their own children and eaten them in order to survive the siege.

¹¹But now the anger of the LORD is satisfied. His fiercest anger has now been poured out. He started a fire in Jerusalem that burned the city to its foundations" (Lamentations 4:8-11 / NLT).

The really sad thing about getting sucked into pride is that the proud never understand as described in verses 19-21. Proud people don't really care about who they hurt or what they blow up in order to feed their ego. Verse 19 is a description of how the proud repent. Hezekiah starts out by acknowledging that what God spoke through Isaiah was good. But he really wasn't sorry. Look what he reasons. He thinks to himself that this judgment won't come during his lifetime. He doesn't really care because in the end, it is other people who have to suffer for his sin of pride. Proudful people leave a lot of casualties in their wake.

It is really sad. Had King Hezekiah humbled himself and died according to God's plan for his life, he would have been remembered as one of the greatest kings, arguably the best king in all of Israel's history. However, because of his pride, he will be remembered as the king who set Israel on the path to a horrible destruction and captivity by the Babylonians.

How do we want to be remembered? Do we want to be known for humbly serving and following God or for being proud and for leaving many casualties behind in our wake? The fact is that **GOD WILL NOT LET PRIDE GO UNPUNISHED.**

IV. EPILOGUE

Understanding how pride works and its consequences are critical because we don't want to find ourselves in an adversarial role against God. The Bible is very clear that **GOD OPPOSES THE PROUD BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.**

Let me just recap the critical error that leads to pride. When we compare ourselves to anyone except Christ, we open ourselves up to the sin of pride. Phillips Brooks put it in perfect perspective:

"The true way to be humble is not to stoop until you are smaller than yourself, but to stand at your real height against some higher nature that will show you what the real smallness of your greatness is."

In other words, if we want to stay humble, then the key is not to focus on anyone or anything but our relationship with Jesus Christ. When standing in the presence of the living God, there is no way any of us could be proud about anything.