

Proverbs

Wisdom and Pride

July 16, 2017

As we've been talking about wisdom this summer, we've said this in different ways, but I want to say it again, because it's especially important in thinking about Wisdom & our pride: Wisdom isn't doing the right things, doing the wise things, doing doing doing. Wisdom is about the type of person we are. And the type of person we're becoming. Michael Bailey summed it up really well last week in talking about our words, is that wisdom is primarily a heart issue. And the same thing is true about pride and humility.

What I hope you don't walk away with today is 4 steps to being a humble person. Humility is about who you are as a person, not what you do. A proud person is proud not because of their actions, but because of their hearts. It's their proud actions that flow from their proud hearts. And it's the same with humility.

One of the things that Tim Keller says is that humility is very shy. As soon as you start to talk about it, it goes away.

So, let's look at a few proverbs and then let's consider wisdom and pride.

Proverbs 8:13

The fear of the LORD is hatred of evil. Pride and arrogance and the way of evil and perverted speech I hate.

Proverbs 21:24

"Scoffer" is the name of the arrogant, haughty man who acts with arrogant pride.

Proverbs 14:6

A scoffer seeks wisdom in vain, but knowledge is easy for a man of understanding.

Proverbs 9:7-8

Whoever corrects a scoffer gets himself abuse, he who reproves a wicked man incurs injury.

Do not reprove a scoffer, or he will hate you; a wise man, and he will love you.

Proverbs 18:12

Before destruction a man's heart is haughty, but humility comes before honor.

Proverbs 22:4

The reward for humility and fear of the LORD is riches and honor and life.

So, a few weeks ago I began thinking about what I was going to say this morning. And as I've been reading through the proverbs with our reading plan, there were a few things that were standing out to me, but I really wasn't sure. But, I enjoy twitter a good bit, it's where I get a good bit of my news from, both #FakeNews and real news. So, I follow some political folks, I follow some sports folks. And as I was thinking about preaching & thinking about what's coming up often on my feed, I'm getting a lot of folks who are pretty arrogant about their political stances. And so, I begin to think about maybe talking about pride, seems like in our cultural climate, pride will really be applicable. And then I scroll down a bit and see some Clemson folks tweeting, and I think, "Yeah, we've got a lot of pride, I can talk about this for days. This'll be great."

And some of you may know, but other than Ant, the rest of our Pastors are not Gamecocks, so I deal with this Clemson pride a good bit in the office. And then they beat Alabama, and it's like, even more intense these days. On Pastor's retreat, we re-watched the national championship game. I sent out an Instagram post asking for prayers at that point and I appreciated all the support I got.

And so, I began looking into pride & arrogance, and one of the themes that came up a good bit reading some of the church fathers, Jonathan Edwards, Charles Spurgeon, C. S. Lewis, was that one of the key marks of pride is that pride is really great at seeing it in everybody else. And learning how to preach and learning how to teach is still a process for me, and I was able to finally put words on this feeling I've had for years now: one of the main reasons that preaching is difficult for me is how it speeds up the repentance process in my life. Teaching forces me to think about what I'm going to say, and it doesn't afford me the opportunity for a leisurely repentance. And so, I stand before you as someone who is deeply struggling with pride.

CS Lewis puts it this way: "Unchastity, anger, greed, drunkenness, and all that, are mere flea bites in comparison: it was through Pride that the devil became the devil: Pride leads to every other vice: it is the complete anti-God state of mind."

Jonathan Edwards: "Pride is the worst viper that is in the heart; it is the first sin that ever entered into the universe, and it lies lowest of all in the foundation of the whole building of sin... and nothing is so hateful to God, and contrary to the spirit of the Gospel"

These guys had some strong things to say about pride, and the reason why is Proverbs 8:13: Pride and arrogance and the way of evil and perverted speech I hate.

And so, they have these strong words because there's nothing more dangerous in our lives than pride, and one of the dangers of considering it is that even walking in here this morning, is that pride is so coached up in us in so many areas of our lives. In all honesty, there's probably no greater sin that Christianity and Culture clash on more is pride. We are coached up in pride! Be better! Believe in yourself! That's pride. If someone has low self-esteem, how do we respond? No! Feel better about yourself! You've got a lot of great attributes! This is one of the coaching tools that the world leans on the most.

And here, we see that God hates it. That it's the worst of all sin. That it's the foundation of all sin. So, we have to consider why. And I hope that we'd be willing to be exposed, that's my hope this morning. That we would be a people who would be willing to be exposed, and that we'd take what we find to Jesus and receive his healing and receive his pardon and his forgiveness.

First, let's define what pride is.

Two things we see in Proverbs, the first is arrogance. Arrogance is an unjustified high estimation of yourself. It's the result of the belief that due to some of your choices, some of your hard work, your political beliefs, some of your achievements, your practices, your morality, your religion, that because of some or all of these things, it's the belief that you are superior to other people.

"You know, I've kind of just got these certain areas of my life figured out, and other people don't, and in a real strong sense, I legitimately feel superior to them." And it doesn't necessarily take on the form of a brash personality, it can also look like a quiet smugness, and sometimes it's more reviling when it's that quiet smugness.

We see this in the Pharisees, the people that Jesus gets the most fired up about. These people put us all to shame when it comes to spiritual disciplines. Like, when you've memorized the first 5 books of the Bible, okay then you get to be a part of the conversation with the Pharisees. They gave away a ton of money. They did evangelism. And Jesus couldn't stand them, because they think so highly of themselves for their religious life.

The other side of arrogance comes out in our shame. Pharisees think highly about all their good traits, but the shameful think highly of their bad traits, and we see this in Recovery often. It's expressed in the idea, "God

could never heal me, I'm too broken." Or, "I'll never be able to rid my life of this sin issue," It's the belief that your bad things are too bad. That you're too unworthy, that the Gospel of God can't restore or forgive this super evil dark sin that you're harboring, or the thousandth time that you've fallen. It's pride to believe that your sin is more powerful than God's grace. It's arrogance.

So, one of the things we see about pride is that it's not just arrogance, but it's also self-absorption. This is thinking of yourself very highly, and also thinking of yourself a lot.

When our thoughts about our coworkers is consistently about how they annoy us, or our roommates, or our kids. Whatever it is. This is us when our thoughts are only about our pains, our distresses, our gripes, and we're unable to enter into any else's pain.

Self-absorption is this belief that I am the only one worth thinking about all the time.

Pride is thinking highly of yourself, but it's also thinking about yourself a lot.

So, what are the dangers of pride?

The first danger of pride is that it's blind. Pride can't see itself. And we all need to enter into the desperation of this point. This should cause us to feel nervous. Nobody walked in this morning thinking about, "I'm proud." Because proud people never think they're proud. Pride can't detect itself.

Proverbs 21:2

"Scoffer" is the name of the arrogant, haughty man who acts with arrogant pride.

Proverbs 14:6

A scoffer seeks wisdom in vain but knowledge is easy for a man of understanding.

A scoffer seeks wisdom, but it's all in vain. In Proverbs, "scoffer" is the title of the proud person. And what we see is that the scoffer actually will seek wisdom. The problem, though, is not that he doesn't hear wisdom, it's that he can't detect the sin in his own heart. The prideful person never thinks that their opinion is too high, they think that it's justified. Pride can't detect itself.

But that's not all, pride also can't receive correction.

Proverbs 13:1

A wise son hears his father's instruction, but a scoffer does not listen to rebuke.

There's nothing more offensive to pride than correction, because to receive correction, by definition, proves that there is something lacking in thought or motive or action. When I'm being corrected, all of a sudden, this idea that I have it all together comes into doubt, this notion that I'm good enough is questioned. It's a frontal assault on pride, so it's always fended-off or swatted-down, and worse-case scenario: the proud person hears the correction and assumed that they already understand it.

Pride is my estimation of myself based on my performance, and correction brings anger because it's a shot at my own estimation that I'm a good person. In fact, Proverbs teaches that sometimes, the way you deal with prideful people is that you don't even correct them! Proverbs 9:8 says, "Do not reprove a scoffer, or he will hate you." Proverbs 22:10 says, "Drive out a scoffer, and strife will go out, and quarreling and abuse will cease."

In pride, our value is derived directly from our performance, and what that means is that we never hear, "Don't do it that way," or "Maybe you should think about doing it this way," because pride can never hear care in correction in criticism, all it hears is attack.

Pride always feels attacked when correction, reproof, and advice comes. This is why pride eventually will wreck your relationships, because when you do hear it, all you hear is an attack.

Whoever corrects a scoffer gets himself abuse, and he who reproves a wicked man incurs injury.

Thirdly, pride is always in competition. The reason why Pride lashes out at everybody else is because it's the great fault-finder. There's no better way for our pride to convince us of our own goodness than to be able to point out the faults in everyone else. Fault-finding is how we establish our superiority, and this is where pride thrives. This allows us to then distinguish ourselves from other people. This is the Pharisee in Luke 18 who is praying to God thanking him that he has a better theology, a better work ethic, thankful that he's better at friendships and that he's never late. Unlike the tax-collector. Pride always sees everyone else as competition.

Pride can't detect itself, pride can't receive correction, pride is always in competition, and finally, Pride always leads to destruction.

Proverbs 18:12

Before destruction a man's heart is haughty, but humility comes before honor.

Pride always leads to destruction, because pride is fundamentally saying, "Judge me. Evaluate me on the basis of my work. Because I've found myself as better than others, and I suspect you will too."

And at the end of your life, when God himself asks you to give an account, if your plan is to say to him, "Look. I put some things together. I voted Republican! I never smoked pot, even after it was legalized! I read my Bible most of the time. I wasn't sexually promiscuous." If that's your plan, then know that that's the path out of the new Heavens and the new Earth. That is the plan of all that will never enter into God's Kingdom. That's why pride leads to destruction.

Pride keeps us believing that when the verdict is passed on our lives, that our record will merit a verdict of, "well done!" But at the end of the day, even the "best" of us know that it's not enough.

So, what's the cure? What's the solution? The solution is humility. But the difficult thing is that you can't simply decide to be humble. That's actually a prideful thought in and of itself. Humility only happens when you encounter the cross. Pride is only defeated at the foot of the cross. Because you can't stand underneath the cross and any longer believe that your morality or your niceness or your voting habits or your grades or your great thoughts give you any right to esteem yourself higher than anybody. Because what the cross says is, "All of my best was good enough to get me into this position. Someone has to die in order for me to live." That's where your best got you. The cross says that my sin is so evil, and that my best is so poor that it takes blood to make me right. And not just anybody's blood, it actually has to be the blood of God.

When we encounter the cross, it eliminates our ability to look down on anyone else, for anything! The cross says that we have failed to justify ourselves. We have failed to achieve "Well done!" And we can never earn the cross, because that defeats the whole notion of it! If someone deserved grace and others didn't, it wouldn't be called grace. This is where Christianity and every other worldview differ: Every other worldview, at the core says, "Do the work, take care of yourself, and you will be rewarded. Work, then get accepted." And pride is the result of living by this way of life. Do the work, and then get accepted. The work can be anything. Being Republican, being Democrat, being Independent, it could be your grades, it could be your degree, or your paycheck.

Jesus teaches the opposite. Jesus says, "You're rewarded. You're accepted. You're approved. Now live out of that reality." Nothing in the world gives you approval and acceptance on the front end and says to live out of that instead of living for that, except for Christianity. You are not accepted based on your works. This is what

Paul is saying in Ephesians 2: “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”

It’s the cross alone that brings us humility, and humility is nothing more than finally understanding rightly who we are before God: you’re inadequate. You’re not enough. Humility removes competition and comparison.

To look on someone else and feel a sense of superiority is to say, “They need Jesus to cover more parts of their life than I do.” Practically: What part of your life leads you to feel superior to others? Because that’s the part of your life that’s holding you back from the healing and miracle of God’s grace. Whatever part of your life that you think you’ve got together and doesn’t need Jesus, even if it’s the religious part, that’s actually the place where pride is keeping you from God’s grace. The part in which we don’t think we need Jesus.

The cross stands as a judgement on our lives, and what it says is that “everything you thought you should be proud of is all for nothing!” And the insecurity that we all feel most of the time, that few of us ever verbalize, this sneaking suspicion that at the end of the day we’re really not good enough, is entirely true. Actually, it’s true in a deeper level than any of us are comfortable with or could even understand. The cross says, “it takes death to pay for how inadequate we are. That we are guilty, that we haven’t handled life ourselves” and when you begin to grapple with that, it actually frees you from having to be defensive, from having to shield off criticism, from having to prove yourself.

There is rest to be had in humility. If you want rest from having to prove yourself day in and day out, if you want rest from having to defend yourself from every critique, and rest from living in competition with those around you, come to the cross. You have to come to the cross and see that the verdict is in on your life: you have not proved yourself.

Encountering the cross removes arrogance of all the good you claim and disdain of others, and encountering the cross actually is the solution to all of us constantly being preoccupied with ourselves, because you can’t stand at the cross and think of yourself very long. Whether it’s thinking of yourself in despair or in arrogance, you can’t stand at the cross and navel-gaze. Because the cross shows God’s judgement on your life: you are guilty. And the cross shows where that judgement goes: on Jesus, not on you.

This is why CS Lewis says that humility isn’t thinking less of yourself, it’s actually just thinking of yourself less. You simply just can’t tear your eyes at the miracle of God’s grace to look at yourself when you encounter the cross.

It’s only the grace of the cross that brings humility, the cure to pride. The cross says that it doesn’t matter what other people think of you. And, it says that it doesn’t even matter what you think of you. It only matters what God thinks of you, and at the cross, God has justified you. He has approved of you. He has acquitted you. He has accepted you. In spite of your life, not because of it.

We don’t have to live every day in our pride wondering if we’ve provided more evidence for the prosecution or more evidence for the defense. You don’t have to count that anymore. God has said the verdict is in, and you are righteous because he has found Jesus guilty.

The one who clings to the cross doesn’t hear correction and get defensive, they become thankful. The heart of humility isn’t in competition with others, the heart of humility, having met the cross, sees that all have fallen short of the glory of God.

Don’t you want this? Don’t you want to not feel on trial every day? That’s what Jesus offers us. He offers you the ability to see that God’s evaluation of you is the only evaluation that matters, and God’s evaluation of you, Christian, is that you are righteous. Not because of anything that you have done.

Proverbs 22:4

The reward for humility and fear of the LORD is riches and honor and life.

Humility leads to life because it clings to Jesus and looks at its good stuff and looks at its bad stuff and realizes that holding on to Jesus is all that it has. There is blessing, there is honor, and there is life when you stop staring at yourself and you see in the cross that your guilty verdict is poured out on Jesus, and the verdict of his life, which is righteous, is poured out on you.