

Message:

So we're continuing our journey through Proverbs seeking wisdom. Proverbs is a book of wisdom, pithy little sayings and statements from Solomon himself – nuggets of gold to help us in our complex world.

And before our last hymn we heard Paul read some selected the verses from Proverbs, certainly not all of them, about pride and humility. Some nuggets of God's truth – including the one the popular phrase pride comes before a fall – it's scripture, I wonder how many of you thought Shakespeare wrote that?!

Today, we are going to be talking about one of the most important teachings on wisdom. In fact, it is the most deadly sin, and the opposite is one of the most important virtues. It is something that we all are guilty of but most people don't think they are guilty of it, PRIDE.

Dare I start by saying that I think pride is a spiritual cancer... it's a sin we don't like to recognise in ourselves but more readily notice in others. Pride is the mother of all sins. Number one sin failing in all of us. In every single one of us.

Let me remind you of some of the Proverbs on pride and its opposite virtue of humility before us today:

**² When pride comes, then comes disgrace,
but with humility comes wisdom.**

**¹⁰ Where there is strife, there is pride,
but wisdom is found in those who take advice.**

**³³ Wisdom's instruction is to fear the LORD,
and humility comes before honour.**

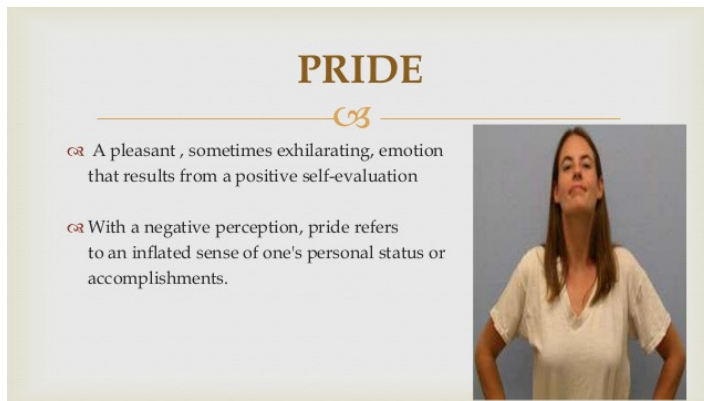
**⁵ The LORD detests all the proud of heart.
Be sure of this: They will not go unpunished.**

**¹⁸ Pride goes before destruction,
a haughty spirit before a fall.**

**²³ Pride brings a person low,
but the lowly in spirit gain honour.**

These proverbs don't pull any punches about the danger of pride in our lives. It was through pride that Satan became Satan, it's the root of all sin dare I suggest – an anti-God state of mind. Our pride cuts us off for relationship with God. This is serious stuff we are thinking about today.

What is pride?



There's two definitions of pride in the dictionary.

- 1. A pleasant, sometimes exhilarating, emotion that results from a positive self-evaluation. That's a positive definition of pride when an ability, skill, character or goodness is celebrated.**
- 2. But as we all know too well, there is a negative perception too, pride refers to an inflated sense of one's personal status or accomplishments.**

Essentially, pride is looking down and feeling superior to other people. It is the drive to feel like you are better than others in comparison. It is the attitude that credits ourselves with our successes and blames others for our failures.

I'm a big fan of C S Lewis (anyone else here like his work?) I've been reading his thoughts alongside the bible all my Christian life. I was given this book by my minister Robert from his own collection when I was training for the ministry.... It's an old copy of Mere Christianity. Published in 1956. A long time before I was born! It's got a chapter on pride which I reread this week.

C S Lewis writes “

“Pride is essentially competitive... Pride gets no pleasure out of having something, only out of having more of it than the next man. ... It is the comparison that makes you proud: the pleasure of being above the rest.”

I think there is a truth to that, whether we recognise that in ourselves or not. Pride is a human problem. So why does God have such a problem with pride that it makes it into the top things that God hates according to Proverbs 6:

- 16 There are six things the LORD hates,
seven that are detestable to him:**
- 17 haughty eyes,
a lying tongue,
hands that shed innocent blood,**
- 18 a heart that devises wicked schemes,
feet that are quick to rush into evil,**
- 19 a false witness who pours out lies
and a person who stirs up conflict in the community.**

God hates pride because it the root cause of three sins in our lives that I want to focus on briefly.... The first is

INGRATITUDE. Pride prevents us from crediting God with the good things in our lives. Instead, we reach the mistaken conclusion that whatever we value in our lives:

Our appearance, our abilities, our families, our possessions are somehow the result of our effort. It's because of what we have done. Of how hard we have worked. And we are reliant on ourselves.

And that shouldn't come as a surprise, we live in a culture that worship at the altar of individualism and self-reliance.

St. Paul says this in 1 Corinthians 4:7. ***7 For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?***

What good thing in your life is not ultimately a gift from God? Our appearance – from our Mother's wombs and before we are fearfully and wonderfully made.... A gift from God. Our abilities – James reminds us that every good and perfect gift comes from above. Our children – the Psalmist in ***Psalms 127*** reminds us that children are an heritage from the Lord. Our possessions are a work from God's hand – says Job. ***(Job 34:19)***

Every good thing in life, beginning with the breath of life itself, is ultimately a gift from God. And yet pride blinds us to such an obvious truth leading us to not being thankful. **Ingratitude.**

And pride leads us to the sin of **INDEPENDENCE.**

God does not need our attention, in human terms He is self-sufficient. He existed before His creation and yet He wants our relationship. Our adoration. (picture) I love this picture.... Because He knows that it is impossible for us to be fulfilled apart from a relationship with Him. That is how we are made. In the image of God. He's a gift giving God – to get our attention.

Matthew 7:11 says this:

11 If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!

God's plan is to shower us with good gifts, so that we might desire to know the loving giver of those gifts. Unfortunately, ingratitude-the result of pride-leads to independence. When we delude ourselves into thinking that we are somehow responsible for the good things in our lives, we decide we really don't need God.

That was Satan's problem and its ours.... A declaration of independence. That we can cope without Him. That we are sufficient without God. Because of who we are and what we can do. That's the problem of pride.

Perhaps the worst sin pride leads to, is our third 'I'.... I've classed that as **INABILITY TO ACCEPT GOD'S GRACE.**

Pride is the biggest thing that gets in the way of our relationship with God. You see, the gospel says that we are all sinners, but Christ died for us because he loves us more than we can ever imagine. And if we put our faith in what Jesus had done for us on the cross, we get to receive the righteousness of Jesus, in essence, his position in the relationship with God. So, it is not by works that we are saved; it is by what he has done for us. It is by grace, which means a gift that we are saved to a relationship with God.

In order to receive this gift, you have to acknowledge that you need this gift. That's the only requirement for the gift. You only need God's grace, God's mercy if you are in need, if you can't do it on your own. So, that means you have to acknowledge that you are sinner. You have to come humbly before God and say, I am not good enough. I am a sinner! I am a ratbag in need of a Redeemer. But to wallow and swim in that grace we are offered we need to swallow our pride and admit we need help, that we can't do it by ourselves.

And for a lot of people pride bars us from admitting our need for grace.

The only way to a relationship with God is if we repent. That's the biblical term. If we repeat not only of our behavioural sins but the sins of our heart. It is only when we realize that we are broken in our hearts that we become humble.

HUMILITY:

Pride takes you down, but humility takes you up says Proverbs 29.23.

Jesus said something similar: blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs in the kingdom of God.

Obviously, the antidote to pride is humility; but, how do you become humble?

Humility builds relationships. The Bible says in 1 Peter 3:8, ***Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble.***"

How are you and I going to grow in humility? It happens by letting Jesus Christ begin to control our thoughts and hearts and attitudes and reactions. He's got to be a part of this. Ephesians 4:23-24 says, **"Let the Spirit change your way of thinking and make you into a new person"** (CEV).

How do you become a new person? How do you start to think in a different way? The basic law of relationships is this: You tend to become like the people you spend time with. If you spend time with grumpy people, you get grumpier. If you spend time with happy people, you get happier. If you want to have more humility, spend time

with Jesus Christ. He is humble. He wants a relationship with you. He wants you to spend time with him in prayer and reading his Word and talking to him. He is humble, and as you get to know him, you'll become more like him.

“Be humble and give more honour to others than to yourselves You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to” (Philippians 2:3b, 5-6).

Let me finish with a story about a donkey. Because we all know I love a donkey!

On Palm Monday The donkey awakened, his mind still savouring the afterglow of the most exciting day of his life. Never before had he felt such a rush of pleasure and pride. He walked into town and found a group of people by the well. "I'll show myself to them" he thought. But they didn't notice him. They went on drawing their water and paid him no mind. "Throw your garments down," he said crossly.

"Don't you know who I am?" They just looked at him in amazement. Someone slapped him across the tail and ordered him to move. "Miserable heathens!" he muttered to himself. "I'll just go to the market where the good people are. They will remember me." But the same thing happened. No one paid any attention to the donkey as he strutted down the main street in front of the market place. "The palm branches! Where are the palm branches!" he shouted. "Yesterday, you threw palm branches!"

Hurt and confused, the donkey returned home to his mother. "Foolish child," she said gently. "Don't you realize that without him, you are just an ordinary donkey?"

Phillip Brooks, the clergyman who wrote the words for the Christmas carol O Little Town of Bethlehem said this, ***“The true way to be humble is not to stoop until you are smaller than yourself, but to stand at your real height against the higher nature of God - that will show you what the real smallness of your greatness is.”***

May we be a people who do that, submitting ourselves to God's tender touch – so he can heal us of our pride and make us more like Jesus.