

Holy People, Spirited Living: Humility, Not Pride

**Matthew 5:1-12
1 Chronicles 21:1-17**

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In the past few years, Canadian cigarette manufacturers have been required to place notices like these on their packaging. WARNING - think twice before you indulge. Smoking may be very injurious to your health.



I want to issue a similar sort of warning to the sermon series that we're beginning this morning -
WARNING - the following weeks may prove injurious to personal complacency and self-satisfaction.

We are now in the Christian season of Pentecost. In it we give thanks for presence of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of all believers - setting them on fire for Jesus. Hence this huge flame mobile which Cheryl prepared for us. The Spirit draws our attention to Jesus. He builds our love for Christ. He fills us with energy and power to live our lives for the Lord.

The Christian season of Pentecost is the time to consider the growth of our Christian character; to pray that we will reflect Jesus more faithfully, individually and as a community.

This year we'll reflect on a spiritual-development grid developed first in the monasteries of Egypt in the 4th century.

The monks were wrestling with living a deeply Christian life. They didn't want to just **know** biblical truths. They didn't want to merely **know** what was right and good. They wanted to **BECOME** good people, people that reminded those who saw them of their Lord by their lasting character and consistent action.

In that way these monks were declaring war on Satan, whose one objective is to demean, to dirty and to cheapen human life, isolating people from their Creator and their Saviour through sin.

As they declared war on sin and temptation the monks thought about some of the most basic, influential areas where the human life can be challenged in terms of Christian discipleship and holy living for Jesus. These were areas that reach through various morphs and offshoots into many different corners of the soul. We know them today as "*The Seven Deadly Sins.*"

St. Augustine suggested that, rather than merely focussing on the sins, believers do well to contrast them with statements of blessing which Jesus spoke into the life of believers - what we know today as "*the beatitudes.*"

Augustine considered these to be superbly opposed to the seven root vices. Follow along as Joyce reads them, please:

MATTHEW 5:1-12, p.4 (New Testament)

Where the deadly sins seek to cripple and destroy life, the blessings of Jesus seek to foster and renew life.

So, let's begin -

Today, a quick glimpse at the root of all sins, one that Gregory put in a category all its own.

To set it up, watch this clip from the opening of the movie *Titanic*.

As you watch, I'd like you to think of a word or two that captures the mood of this little scene from the famous journey of

the largest ship ever built to that day,
the fastest,
the most luxurious - the pinnacle of human achievement.

The movie features Jack, a street-smart kid who gambles and wins a ticket onto the boat. He's smart, he's quick. Like the boat, he's got lots of potential. Watch how the producers set us up for the rest of the film.....

Elapsed time: Measured from the beginning of the opening credit, this scene begins at 00:31:30 and ends at 00:33:45.

What words entered your mind?
Power?
Prestige?
Accomplishment?
Exhilaration?

"I'm king of the world!"

The irony, of course, is that this "king's" vessel is going down, and the "king" himself will die with it.

This scene, as good as anything I know, depicts the terrible root sin of



PRIDE

Thinking we are more than we really are.
Self-absorbed.

Directly opposite of the blessing spoken by Jesus:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
(Mt 5:3)

Blessed are you in selflessness, when you recognize that you have no significant, dependable resources in and of yourself.

Or, as John Calvin paraphrases it -

Blessed are you who are reduced to nothing in yourself, brought to complete reliance on the mercy of God,

Poor in spirit -

In the Scriptures, the poor are those without any resources in and of themselves. They have nothing. They can accomplish nothing. They only look to God - who has and is everything in their life.

Blessed are you when you realize that your life is not invincible.

You are not the brightest.

You are not the best.

You are not the biggest.

You are not the most powerful.

You are not the fastest.

You are not the most street-smart.

You are not king of the world or captain on the bridge, in control and steaming full speed towards your own destiny.

Such pride will sink you.

Blessed.....

are the poor in spirit, for **theirs** is the Kingdom of Heaven.

Pride -

It is illustrated in God's Word.

And God's response is also illustrated.

Read with Joyce, please:

1 Chronicles 21:1-17

Satan incites David.

How does he try to take down this man after God's own heart?

See how big this nation is - this nation that David, the warrior king, has unified under himself.

Pride grows in David's heart - placing the whole nation in peril.

Hence God's very strong response.

Three things about pride show up in this passage -

1. Admiration

Perhaps it is a fluke, but at least in the English word PRIDE, did you notice what the central letter is?

"I"

"I" stands for "idol", the competitor for God's rightful place at the centre.

When I think about the ways in which I excel -

for David counting the people.

Perhaps for me counting the articles I write, or the money I save, or the people I know, or the title I carry, or the compliments I get.

2. Comparison

Not only do I notice myself, I begin to compare myself to others around me. I am better than them. I am worth more than them. I deserve to be first. I am above you.

3. Independence

And finally, since I'm good, better, best, I can do it myself.

And God ends up at a distance. As do you.

The Creator is ignored or even rejected, and me - little critter in creation - heads off on my own, convinced I can do just fine.

David falls prey to Pride.

And the Lord, who gives and who takes away, attacks that root sin in David's life with a punishment that will reduce the very numbers of which David had been so proud.

Seventy thousand die.

And a powerful angel stands ready to destroy more.

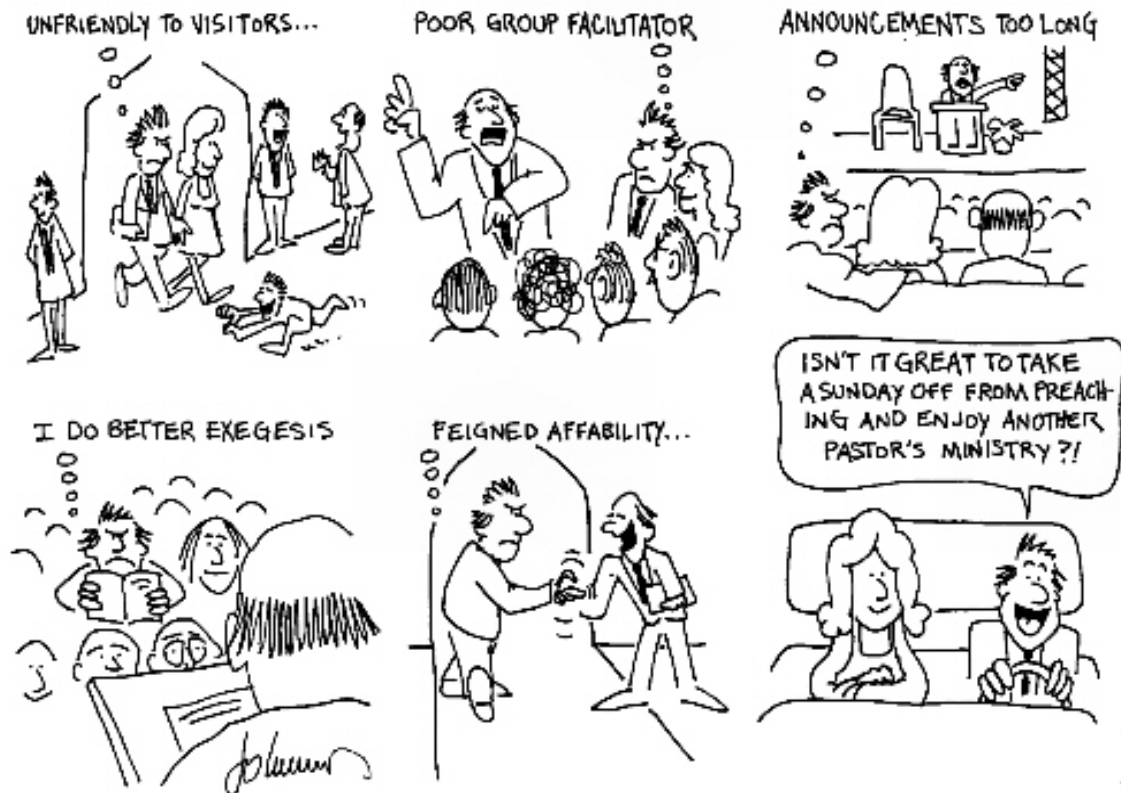
Making David feel empty and small. Repentant.

Admiring self.

Comparing self to others.

Saying you don't need others.

For virtually every pastor, at one time or another, it can look like this:



Do you see what happens?
Pastor is feeding himself at the expense of the other person.

When PRIDE takes root we are flirting with idolatry. And living **light years** away from the attitude that Scripture calls us toward:

Philippians 2:

If you've gotten anything at all out of following Christ, if his love has made any difference in your life, if being in a community of the Spirit means anything to you, if you have a heart, if you CARE - then do me a favour [writes Paul]: Agree with each other, love each other, be deep-spirited friends. don't push your way to the front; don't sweet-talk your way to the top. Put yourself aside, and help others get ahead. Don't be obsessed with getting your own advantage. Forget yourselves long enough to lend a helping hand.

Think of yourselves the way Christ Jesus thought of himself. He had equal status with God but didn't think so much of himself that he had to cling to the advantages of that status no matter what. Not at all. He set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave, became human!... [the Message]

So....

.....How to combat the root sin of Pride?

Jeremy Taylor, Anglican pastor in the 17th century, suggested the following to combat pride and incubate poverty in spirit.

1. Don't think that you are better because of something that has happened **to** you.
2. Love to be concealed and little esteemed: be not troubled when you are slighted or undervalued. If you find yourself irritated because another person gets thanked and you don't, take heed!

3. Even as you seek poverty of spirit, don't be ashamed of your birth, or your parents, your trade, or your present employment.
Poverty of spirit doesn't mean running yourself into the ground.
4. When you are praised for something you have said or done, take such praise lightly and be quick to return it to God. Reflect on Him as the giver of the gift, as the blesser of the action, the aid to the design. Thank Him for making you an instrument in His hand.
5. Don't ever try to fish praise from others.
6. Encourage the praise of others in your presence. Be truly glad when you hear such praise.
7. Don't compare yourself to others, unless it is to advance the other person's cause.
8. Admit your errors. Don't come up with excuses.

My dad read these words at our wedding - and over the last 26 years, I've had to read them again and again. Perhaps they're good for you, too:

God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Humble yourself, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time. Cast all your anxiety on Him, because he cares for you.

1 Peter 5:5-7

If we don't work on humility, God may have to sink our ship for us. Perhaps in as drastic a way as He did for David.

Or perhaps through moving circumstances such as happened to Alabama Troy State University football coach, Chan Gailey.

His team was very successful. They were playing for the national championship. The week before the big game, he was headed to the practice field when a secretary called him back to take a phone call.

Irritated, Gailey told her to take a message because he was on his way to practice.

She responded, "But it's Sports Illustrated."

His eyes brightened. "I'll be right there," he said.

Gailey began to think about the upcoming article. It would be great publicity to be in Sports Illustrated. He realized that a three-page article would not be sufficient to tell the whole story. Then he started thinking that he might be on the cover. "Should I pose or go with an action shot," he wondered. His head was spinning with all of the possibilities.

He picked up the phone - "Is this Chan Gailey?"

"Yes, it is," he replied confidently.

"This is Sports Illustrated....."

.....and we're calling to let you know that your subscription is running out. Are you interested in renewing?"

Crash!!

Coach Gailey concluded the story by saying,

"You are either humble or you will be humbled."

Brother, sister - what will it be?