

January 4, 2015  
Sunday Evening Service  
Series: Communion  
Community Baptist Church  
643 S. Suber Road  
Greer, SC 29650  
© 2015 David J. Whitcomb

*To Ponder . . .*

Questions to ponder as you prepare to hear from Jeremiah 9:22-25.

1. What were the days like in Judah when God gave Jeremiah this message?
2. What does pride look like in your life?
3. What do you do to prevent or counteract pride in your life?
4. What Bible doctrines are you proud to have firmly in hand?

### **WHAT DOES THE LORD REQUIRE OF YOU? Jeremiah 9:22-25**

Jeremiah probably received this message from God and declared it to the people sometime in the latter part of Josiah's reign. In those days, it appeared that everything was coming up roses for Judah. The king was a good guy who evidenced a genuine heart for God's law, God's temple, and God-kind of stuff. The people didn't mind playing along with the religion fad as long as it was accompanied by a good economy, protection from enemies, and food stamps.

However, as Jeremiah's sermon at the temple gate in chapter seven indicates (chapter seven being the larger context of our text), most of the religious activity on the people's part was surface. It was just a show. It was like people in America going to church because

times are good and we hope that by being somewhat religious we can encourage God to keep things that way.

That real life in our culture flies in the face of God all the time doesn't seem to matter. The blatant disregard for God, the public hatred for anything that symbolizes Him, the boldness to vehemently attack His Word is a pretty good indication that Christians aren't having a whole lot of impact on the culture. Each year lewdness and gross sensuality is made more public and more acceptable. Disrespect, dishonor, undependability and outright sinful crime is almost beyond control these days.

All of that pasted against the background of Micah 6:8 helps us understand how far this "Christian" nation has wandered from God's standard. Micah cried out to people like us, *He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? (Micah 6:8).*

Justice is almost never present when humility is also absent. Has there ever been a prouder people than America? We boast so much we don't even know when we are boasting. You can't watch a sporting event without having your soul vexed by unending boasting and arrogance.

I have had the privilege of visiting the United States Military Academy at West Point, the Naval Academy at Annapolis, and the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs. At each of them, I spent about thirty minutes viewing their promotional videos. Each of them ended with essentially the same message. "When you graduate from our academy, you will have received a top-notch education that will prepare you for whatever life throws at you. And you can always stand proud to say you are one of us."

Am I saying that a person who works hard should not be satisfied with his accomplishments? No, I am trying to help us see that there is a world of difference between being thankful for the abilities and success that God gives us and demonstrating the heart of Satan as we inflate ourselves over our supposed accomplishments.

When we come to the cross of Jesus Christ and really acknowledge what He has done for us, there is no room for personal pride at all. There is no exalting of performers, no applauding

winsome preachers, no pandering of the flesh. When we preach Christ crucified, we can have nothing but gratitude in our hearts for His grace.

### **Check Your Pride.**

God's message to Jeremiah as we find it recorded in this text was, *Thus says the LORD: "Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches" (v.23)*. Notice that in this statement alone, God addressed three areas of pride. First, God told the people not to be proud of their wisdom. The necessity for this warning lay in the fact that it was a time when the king was making good choices about religion. Good times seems to generate pride.

In the case before us, it had been about twenty-two years since Manasseh died. He had virtually ruined the nation. He himself was extremely perverse; and as goes the leader, so goes the nation. He led the nation into deep paganism. People were so ungodly in Judah that they were unaware God had a law and maybe were even unaware there was a God of Israel.

After Manasseh died, his son Amon ruled for only a couple of years. That was time enough for him to prove that he was bent on living just like dad had. The people had all they wanted of that foolishness, and the king's own servants assassinated him. God's blessing to the people.

With King Amon acquiescing the throne at only two years into his reign, he didn't have a son old enough to take his place. Or so folks would be prone to think. However, by God's design, Amon's young son, Josiah, grandson of wicked Manasseh, ascended the throne at the ripe, old age of eight. By the time he was twenty-six, and as a result of godly tutelage, we find him walking in fellowship with God. Therefore, he was zealous to enact repairs on the temple. He led the nation in repentance when the Book of the Law was discovered. He restored worship and the Passover.

We can easily imagine the resulting attitude among the people who were relieved to have a religious king for a change. Surely the hearts of the devout people were grateful as they worshiped God like

their ancestors about three generations ago had done. Sadly, human nature being what it is, most of the people were not motivated by a right relationship with God but by a desire to do the popular thing — the "king thing." If they knew anything about their history, the people could have been proud to be "God's people" more than any other nation again. We are certainly of that vein. After all, who knows better how to serve the Lord than we Americans do? That is because we are proud people. To assume that we are the only ones who have the truth of God figured out and who apply it correctly all the time is nothing but pride. Pride fails to realize that the created being will never fully understand the Creator in this life that is plagued by sin.

Second, God warned the ancients (and us moderns) not to be proud of our might. Did Judah have military might under Josiah's reign? At the time, Judah was certainly not the powerhouse they had been under David or Solomon. None of the Middle Eastern nations feared being over run by Judah. In fact, they had for many years witnessed stronger kings and nations barging in on their peaceful domain. Part of God's ongoing judgment against the people was to humble them by greater powers.

However, it seems obvious from the Josiah story that Judah was equipped militarily enough that they didn't hesitate to confront the mighty king of Egypt. We know that Pharaoh Necco marched north with the military might of Egypt to fight with the king of Assyria who was pushing his weight southward. For some reason, Josiah marshaled his forces to meet him and, quite unexpectedly, met his Waterloo instead.

This move by the army might reveal the overall attitude in Judah at the time. Surely the king of Judah had to realize that he was no match for Egypt. Maybe the people thought that since they had gone back to church, God was on their side again. Maybe they wrongly assumed that God would do miracles again like He did for Moses, or Joshua, or David. He didn't. The defeat was a grim reminder that a wrong opinion of self-worth will cause us to act foolishly. When human pride is not corralled and corrected, it leads us to make bad choices. Bad choices are a great teacher that pride doesn't pay.

A quick survey of America's military conquests over the past century might prove this point. It appears that we were dragged into WWI and we came out with the winning side. When WWII came along, we also got caught up in it; and by the time it was over, the world realized that a new world power had been born. Nobody ought to mess with the guys who had bombs that could wipe out entire cities. And yet we fought with China in Korea and were forced to concede. The same thing happened in Vietnam. We fought a quick conflict called Desert Storm that really didn't accomplish anything. We got bogged down in Iraq for too many years, beat the enemy, secured the nation, and then turned it over to a worse enemy. In the past fifty years, this mighty military machine called America has spent trillions of dollars, wasted thousands of lives, and has not won a lasting victory. Solomon was spot-on to conclude that *pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall (Proverbs 16:18)*.

Third, God warns, "Do not be proud of your riches." In Judah, it was a time of prosperity. For many years Judah had not been engaged in war nor had the nation experienced a famine. Probably it seemed like God's material blessing was clearly on this nation. Be that as it may, the people might have forgotten that we brought nothing into this world and we'll take nothing out. In the prosperous times, it is easy to forget that God blesses so that we can praise Him and serve Him. Human pride either consciously or sub-consciously believes that we prosper through our own wisdom, skill, and shrewdness.

As a result of such wrong-headedness, in all ages among all people, we demonstrate innumerable areas of pride. It's pretty hard to avoid in light of the fact that we are born proud. Pride is sin and we are born in sin. Satan's sin, the first sin, was pride. He believed that he had the power to become equal with his Creator. God judged the angel and, it would appear that quite soon afterward, Satan infected our forefather Adam with the same sin. Paul reviewed the case and wrote, *Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned – (Romans 5:12)*. Because we are all infected by the same sin principle, no one has to teach us how to be proud. In fact, we are

taught how to perfect this sin from the cradle to the grave. Teachers are so bold as to demand that we be proud. Often the lessons are couched in terms like "self-respect" or "ambition," but those are still encouragements to be proud.

Being thoroughly endued with sin, we exude pride. Consider the example of your culture. Hollywood and Broadway present "red-carpet" events as the pinnacle for which young men and young women need to strive. Imagine the world at your feet worshipping you as myriads of photographers are snapping pictures of your smiling face. The epitome of self-esteem is pictured as rock stars screaming and gyrating to thousands of adoring fans. They get all the attention, they make the mega-bucks, they are the topics of blogs and talk shows. In similar fashion, the sports heroes flaunt their prowess on national television and are paid absurd salaries to act like animals.

I was struck by this display of pride again this week as I watched some of the bowl games. At the Belk Bowl in Charlotte, the Belk Company gave each of the players of the two teams \$450 dollar gift cards to spend at the store. One of the players bought gifts for his family. He said that this was the first time he had ever had money to buy his family something for Christmas. He grew up in a poor home and he didn't make any money while he was in college. I realized that this was the case for probably most college athletes. But then I projected ahead a few months to the NFL draft and wondered what it would be like for a kid who has had fans flocking around him since he was in highschool to suddenly have the fans and a ten million dollar contract. Human nature in all its pride would say, "He has arrived."

Pop and sports are not the only arenas in the America culture where we find pride flowing freely. Consider the religious culture. How amazing and how sad that the glitz and glamour of Hollywood and Broadway has overtaken the church. The same pride that motivates movie stars and rock stars motivates too many leaders of ministries. Many of these men are very gifted with the talents of communication and administration. They would be multi-millionaires if they had gone into business. They have learned how to manipulate gullible followers by the thousands. They have learned what to say, what not to say, and how to say what they say in order not to offend

anyone. They become little gods motivated by the same pride that drove the anointed cherub to attempt to take God's place.

The existence and practice of pride is undeniable. Humility is a bit rare. But what is astonishing is that we are even proud of our humility. Even when we seek to do good things, it is easy to overlook the amount of pride that motivates us. We are proud to exercise the talent God gave us. We are proud to minister to crowds of people. We are so satisfied to receive the congratulations of people. If we discover that something draws out people's praise, we do it over and over again to extremes like a toddler banging on a piano. We can become like the Pharisees who were proud to do the right things toward God.

It is possible for a person who talks about humility, and truly seeks to appear to be humble, to actually be motivated by pride. Maybe there are quite a few people who are like the hypothetical man who wrote the book, "The 10 Most Humble People in the World, and How I Taught the Other Nine." And so in our humility we humbly reject everyone who disagrees with our understanding of Scripture even in the smallest or unclear matters. Pride is definitely a problem. What can we do about it?

### **Pursue Humility.**

Jeremiah continued to reveal God's warning with the encouraging words, "*But let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight,*" declares the LORD (v.24). The best antidote to pride is to boast in the Lord alone. We know how we can boast in Him because we know Him. We know Him because of His grace. Because we are born in sin and pride, we are at odds with God. In spite of being God's enemy, He graciously reached out to us. He convicted us of our sinful nature. He drew us to Himself. He saved us by grace through faith. He put Christ's righteousness on our account.

Having come to know God and His character, we learn that He practices what He preaches. In a nutshell, this is what God tells us to do: *He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to*

*walk humbly with your God? (Micah 6:8).* The challenge is simple. We need to do what is just (*mish-pawt*). We need to exercise steadfast love (*chesed*). We need to walk humbly with God. Most people, even unregenerated moral people, believe this is a good motto by which to live.

The "motto" is amazing because it is an accurate expression of God's character. We have come to know God. What we have learned about God is that He practices steadfast love (*chesed*). It's the same word as the challenge in Micah six. It means that God is true to His promises. His love is not dependent upon our response but upon His own character. His is a love that endures incredible abuse to Himself. It is love that endures for eternity. Furthermore, we have learned that God practices justice (*mish-pawt*). Again it is the same word we found in the challenge of Micah. God exercises steadfast, dependable, consistent judgment. We can be sure He is not capricious or moody. Third, we have learned that God practices righteousness. He will always do what is right according to His own will and character. This is the basis of His steadfast love and justice. We have learned that God does exactly what He desires for us to do.

Therefore, we should be proud of what makes God happy. The word boast is the Hebrew word *hallel* which means to glory in, to boast self-confidently. When we are the object of that kind of boasting, it is evidence of sin. Conversely, when our Creator is the object of that kind of confident praise and glory, it is the very thing that pleases God. So here, in a short and over-used phrase, we learn again that life is not about us but it is about God. We must not be concerned about what people think of us when we serve our God. We must be concerned about what we already know about Him. Are we "proud" (in a good way) to reveal to people by the way we live that God practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness? To that end, Jesus taught us to serve in such a way that our left hand is unaware of what our right hand is doing. We are to keep walking a straight line though it may not be exciting, and it may not attract the attention of others. We must pattern our walk, our lifestyle after God Himself who is faithful, consistent, loving, just, and righteous. And be satisfied with that kind of life that cuts across the grain of all that is human and all that is Hollywood.

## Avoid the Consequences

The warning against pride is clear. The antidote to pride (boasting in the Lord) is clear. In conclusion, the Lord warned the people through Jeremiah of the dire consequences of not taking the antidote. *Speak: "Thus declares the LORD, 'The dead bodies of men shall fall like dung upon the open field, like sheaves after the reaper, and none shall gather them'" (v.22).*

This was a particular warning of a particular judgment. It spoke specifically of the coming of mighty Babylon who would destroy the nation, the city, and the temple. Indeed the destruction was so great it took the prophet's breath away (read the *Lamentation*). But as we read about this coming judgement because of the people's pride, we must not pass lightly over the reality that God's general judgment against pride is no less painful. Pride is one of the most obvious examples of sin. God judges sin.

Sometimes God levels judgment against the sin of pride in this life, in contemporary circumstances. Solomon warned that *when pride comes, then comes disgrace* (Pro. 11:2). He warned us that *before destruction a man's heart is haughty* (Pro. 18:12). He warned that *one's pride will bring him low* (Pro. 29:23). With all of these warnings, James agreed in the New Testament that *God opposes the proud* (James 4:6). We should boast in the Lord who is gracious enough to call us up short for being proud in life.

The more serious consequence of unconfessed, unforsaken pride is God's judgment for eternity. In the last book of the Bible, we read that the proud find their place along with the *faithless, detestable, murderers, sexually immoral, idolaters and liars* in the lake of fire (Rev. 21:8). When we understand that eternity is at stake, bowing in submission to our Creator does not seem like a bad idea.

This could be viewed as a vague and general warning. However, it is clear from the text that the Lord warns particular people. *"Behold, the days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will punish all those who are circumcised merely in the flesh" (v.25).* The phrase, *circumcised merely in the flesh*, shows us that the target of God's judgment against pride was the religious pretenders. These

were people who went to the temple regularly. But they were also people who argue with and even tried to kill God's prophet Jeremiah.

We, too, must guard against being proud of our religion. Praise God that He graciously allows us to know Him, love Him, serve Him. Thank God that we have the Bible, that He gives us the ability to know it and the desire to obey it. At the same time, let us not become proud of what we have "learned." Especially if someone else has not learned the same level of truth. And especially let us not be proud that we know the doubtful things. Charity, grace, kindness, patience and longsuffering with others are all part of walking humbly with our God.