

What Man Proposes

Let us consider three great men in the eyes of the world: Napoleon Bonaparte, Alexander the Great, and Jack Dawson. Napoleon Bonaparte was a genius general, a grand tactician, who crowned himself emperor of France. He may have been the most powerful man in the world at one point in time. Right before his famous last battle, the Battle of Waterloo, a young man came up to Napoleon as he was planning his strategy and posed the question, “Know ye not, Napoleon, that man proposes but God disposes?” In other words, “The horse is made ready for the day of battle, but the victory belongs to the LORD” (Proverbs 21:31).

Napoleon, in his typical fashion, responded to the young man, “Know ye not, that whatever Napoleon Bonaparte proposes, Napoleon Bonaparte disposes?” But that night the rains came and the dust turned to mud, so the soldiers couldn’t march, the cavalry couldn’t run and flank, and the artillery could not maneuver as he had proposed, and God disposed of Napoleon at the Battle of Waterloo. Napoleon Bonaparte, the great general of Western Europe, disposed by precipitation.

Now we move on to the second great man of note, Alexander the Great. He was one of the greatest kings of all time; by the age of 32 he ruled the entire known world. One night in 363 BC, Alexander got a fever and as he was lying in the palace of Nebuchadnezzar II, he slipped away to meet the king of kings, Jesus Christ. Most scholars say that what killed Alexander the Great was a mosquito, passing on West Nile virus or malaria with its blood-sucking bite.

Napoleon taken out by rain, Alexander the Great taken out by a mosquito, and Jack Dawson, taken out by an unforeseen iceberg and a freezing ocean. Jack stood on the bow of the Titanic, the ship that was supposedly unsinkable even by God, and he leaned against the railings and spread his arms out wide and shouted, “I’m the king of the world!” It was on that journey that he would meet the real king of the world due to an unforeseen iceberg.

What do these three men have in common? What is it that did them in? Napoleon Bonaparte didn’t know that a little rain was going to do him in. Jack Dawson didn’t have any idea that an iceberg was headed his way.

Alexander the Great didn't know about the mosquito. The sin of pride had infected all three of these men, who were great in their own eyes. In seven chapters, we're going to cover the seven deadly sins, which can also be called the seven daily sins. Let's discuss how they were first identified.

The beginning of a long battle

The seven deadly sins were codified and counted over 1500 years ago by a Monk named Evagrius. Evagrius and his monks went far away from civilization out to the desert to be in a perfect little religious bubble and established a monastery. These super-Christians separated themselves physically from the world—no television, no internet, no politics—just the Christians in their Christian bubble in the desert. It was there, in isolation, that they discovered the seven deadly sins. They put them into a list that we still have to this day.

They discovered that while alone in the desert, without a woman in sight, with no internet and no magazines, that lust was still with them in their hearts. They had no fine-dining restaurants and no Little Debbies; over their simple bowls of porridge, they discovered a dining companion called gluttony. They discovered there in isolation, away from the “bad world,” without any private property or promotions, that they still hoarded with greed.

They discovered in complete isolation that the line between good and evil ran right through the middle of their hearts. They learned that what is wrong and broken with the world is also what's broken with them. They tried to have heaven on earth, a perfect utopia, but in the end they themselves ruined it. What was ruining their community and killing them softly was the seven deadly sins—the seven daily sins.

The culprits of calamity, anxiety, and sin in our daily lives are one or multiple of the seven deadly sins. They hide in the grass; they lurk and crouch and must be exposed. Imagine you want to go hunting. Small animals, like birds or rabbits, are difficult to target because they hide in the bushes. You need hunting dogs to scare them out. When they fly up, then you can target them. That's the way it is with the seven deadly sins.

They hide in the deadly thorn bushes of your heart, and you need a dog (a pastor) to run ahead and shake the thorn bushes of your heart so that the seven deadly sins will be exposed and you can have success in taking them down.

Defining Pride

The first one we'll talk about is pride. We start with pride because it is the fountainhead of all sins and is the sneakiest of them all. It has undergone a grand transformation in our society in that what used to be considered a vice is now considered a virtue. It has transformed into a beautiful angel of light and most Christians are falling prey to it.

Society might ask, "What's wrong with pride?" Isn't it true that the main job we have as parents is to instill a good sense of self-worth in our children? If you look up self-worth in a dictionary or thesaurus, one of the synonyms is pride. Society would say that our job as parents is to instill in our children a good sense of healthy pride. What's wrong with that? What's wrong with Black pride, or Southern pride? Is there anything wrong with cheese being the pride of Wisconsin? I can't think of anything wrong with this kind of pride, but the illustrations of pride and humility in the Bible tell me to be suspicious.

Vice as a virtue and vice-versa

Imagine you're taking an English grammar multiple choice test. The question is about selecting the version of the sentence that is correct. As a student from a small town with lax grammar in its dialect, you circle the one that just "sounds right." But the students that get "A"s every single time are the ones who study the grammar rule book. A lot of Christians approach ethics and morality in the same way as the student that just circles what "sounds right." They trust their ethical gut, but the problem is that their ethical gut is influenced by their sinful nature as well as a sinful society. When they trust their ethical gut, they do enough to make a "C." The way to solve moral or ethical problems as Christians is to study the book and answer according to what it says—not according to

what sounds right. Our ethical gut might get us a C but it is never going to earn an A.

As a grammar book contradicts the way people talk in your small-town neighborhood, the Bible contradicts the ethics (or lack thereof) of society. In the case of pride, society may say it's right, but the Bible says it's wrong. Society says the main reason people are in prison is that they have a really low opinion of themselves. But what if they are really in prison because they have too high a view of themselves? What if the question of self-esteem is tricking people like the questions on that grammar test did? If crime is the result of a low view of self, can we say that a low view of self was the cause of the greatest crime in history—the crime of the Nazis? Did the Nazis perpetrate the Holocaust because they had a low sense of self or was it because they had too much nationalistic pride and too high a view of themselves?

You may argue, “But sometimes we use the word pride in a different sense.” For example, we have “pride” in our accomplishments. “Can’t we say that?” Maybe we can use the word that way, but as a Christian with the Bible as my guide, I am suspicious of any use of the word “pride” in the Christian’s life. If we can at least agree to be suspicious, let’s look at what the Bible says about pride.

The center of the universe

Solomon tells us in the book of Proverbs that “there are six things that the Lord hates, seven that are an abomination to him” (6:16). The first one he lists is “haughty eyes”—pride (6:17). Solomon, the greatest man who ever walked the planet, said that God hates pride. Luke, the greatest historian in the Bible and perhaps one of the greatest historians of all time, tells the story of King Herod, who was eaten up by worms and died when he received applause and took credit for something that God deserved. Through this historic anecdote we see that God hates pride. The apostle Paul taught that Jesus Christ was equal with God yet “did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped”; rather, he lowered himself, “taking the form of a servant,” humbling himself even “to the

point of death” (Philippians 2:6-8). The entire life of Jesus Christ can be characterized by humility.

I believe the passage of the Bible that best shows us God’s feelings toward pride is Daniel 4, where we have the testimony of Nebuchadnezzar the Great, who was in his lifetime the most powerful man on the planet. He himself wrote Daniel 4. In my experience, I find the best testimonies always start with a dream, like this one. Nebuchadnezzar, the man who built the hanging gardens of Babylon, gives us a good picture of pride starting in Daniel 4:10:

The visions of my head as I lay in bed were these: I saw, and behold, a tree in the midst of the earth, and its height was great. The tree grew and became strong, and its top reached to heaven, and it was visible to the end of the whole earth. Its leaves were beautiful and its fruit abundant, and in it was food for all. The beasts of the field found shade under it, and the birds of the heavens lived in its branches, and all flesh was fed from it.

This tree is an ancient metaphor. It extends from earth to heaven—the bridge between man and God. The tree’s branches extend all over the globe; all who seek rest, provision, and protection go and dwell in the branches of this tree. This tree is the center of the divine ecosystem; it’s the axis around which everything else in the universe revolves. Nebuchadnezzar thinks himself to have become the tree—the center of the universe, around which everything revolves.

Pride is thinking yourself to be this tree. In other words, pride is thinking yourself to be God—thinking and imagining yourself to be that which provides protection and provision for all of mankind, around which everything else should revolve. Out of that heart of pride will come expectations for other people, anxiety, a feeling that God owes you, and an inaccurate image of yourself. Pride leads you to be out of touch with reality. Out of the prideful heart comes bragging.

In Daniel 4:30, Nebuchadnezzar brags: “And the king answered and said, ‘Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?’ While the words were still in the king’s mouth....” There he is, on the bow of the ship, his arms spread out wide, shouting, “I’m the king of the world!” And as the words come out of his mouth, *chop*. Down goes the tree. Pride starts in the heart, imagining that you stand in the place of God, and out of that comes bragging.

Pride is more insidious and more hideous than you realize. Think about what it means to “toot your own horn.” The saying actually comes from the account of Jesus’ rebuke toward the pride of the Pharisees, who blew trumpets in the streets as they gave alms to the poor (Matthew 6:2). Before God created humanity, he created a host of angelic beings. These angelic beings included cherubim, seraphim, and other heavenly creatures, and they all sang one song in harmony and in unison, “Holy, holy, holy” (Isaiah 6:3).

They all sang the praises of God. God was the tree and they orbited around the tree. God was the center of the divine ecosystem, and all the angels sang his praises and exalted him. All of the universe was in perfect order. It was paradise. But then one particular angel, Lucifer, began to be filled with pride in his heart. He began to see himself in the place of God and began to think of himself as the tree. Out of that heart of pride, he began to sing his own praises. Isaiah recorded the prideful song of Satan, which is filled with “I will”s (14:13-14). Satan began to toot his own horn and a third of all the angelic beings put on choir robes and began to sing with him and toot his horn. They also all began to toot their own horns. And then there was not one song in harmony and in unison but multiple songs in the universe. This entire fallen race of angels who were all singing their own praises yielded chaos, pain, sin, and brokenness.

The off-centeredness of pride

Musicians have a word for when you play two notes that don’t sound well together—dissonance. Musicians use dissonance to create a feeling of tension in the middle of their songs. Dissonance can be used to

communicate a feeling of pain, sorrow, or calamity. This dissonance creates in listeners an expectation and desire for resolution. In other words, dissonance gives the music a plot. There were now two songs playing at the same time; when Satan began to toot his own horn, he introduced conflict.

When we toot our own horns, we introduce dissonance into our circles—our relationships, our society, and our world. The universe is broken and destroyed because of the seven deadly sins, and pride is the fountainhead of those sins. When we are filled with pride, thinking ourselves to be God and thinking everyone else should orbit around us, we introduce disorder into the universe, singing the same song as Satan himself.

So where does that put us in the universe with a God who sings a different tune and who has promised to bring a resolution to this composition? Where does tooting our own horns put us with a God who is just and has promised to wipe away every tear, all pain, and all sorrow and reintroduce harmony? Pride introduces enmity with God. It puts us exactly opposite him, and that's exactly where Nebuchadnezzar found himself.

If you're a Christian, you're probably confessing to yourself right now that you sing your own praises quite often. That confession is half the battle. But you also sing God's praises. When we come together corporately, we are trying to realign ourselves with reality by saying, "I'm not God; you are God." We sing about God being God to try to get that reality back into our hearts in the place of pride. We sit still and listen about God being God because we fight to believe the reality that God is the center of the universe and not us. We are constantly fighting this tension—this dissonance—in our lives. This is called worship—realigning ourselves with the reality that God is God.

Diagnosing Pride

If you don't think you're wearing Satan's choir robes or tooting your own horn, here's a diagnostic test. We can call it, "You might be a stiffneck (an Old Testament name for someone who is full of pride) if....":

...while driving, you consider the speed you are driving to be the standard.

...your Facebook updates are mostly complaints and selfies.

...others accuse you of being too defensive, thin-skinned, or hypersensitive.

...you constantly worry about what others think of you.

...you have said, "I don't care what others think of me."

...you have trouble-making friends because there is something wrong with everyone else.

...you find it hard to admit weaknesses, can't stop thinking about your weaknesses, or can't think of any weaknesses.

...you won't ask for help during hard times or you use those hard times to make everyone feel sorry for you.

...you find it hard to confess your sins or like to confess your sins to "get close to people" and not to be necessarily healed of the sin.

...you find it hard to ask for advice, even in areas where you are constantly wrong.

...you feel that God owes you something.

...you try to punish yourself for your own mistakes.

...you use your children to prove that you are better than others.

...you think no one and nothing is good enough for your children.

...you ever prayed, "Thank you, God, that I'm not like those sinners."

...you ever prayed, "Thank you, God, that I'm not like those church people."

...you ever prayed, "Thank you, God, that I'm not like my parents."

...you can't let it go when people don't recognize your service and accomplishments.

...taking this test makes you feel pretty good about yourself.

...you've ever sinned.

...you think you've never sinned.

...you've answered one or more of these questions.

Pride leads to bragging, which introduces dissonance into your relationships and ultimately into the universe and pits you against a God who is the *center* of the universe and has promised to bring order to the world. How then does God deal with us? We are just as guilty as King Nebuchadnezzar. He was greater than we are, but we are all guilty of the same pride. In Daniel 4:31-33, God humbled Nebuchadnezzar:

“O King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: The kingdom has departed from you, and you shall be driven from among men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. And you shall be made to eat grass like an ox, and seven periods of time shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will.”
Immediately the word was fulfilled against Nebuchadnezzar. He was driven from among men and ate grass like an ox, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair grew as long as eagles’ feathers, and his nails were like birds’ claws.

Do you want to know how God deals with pride? If you make yourself to be God, he will cause you to be an animal. But if you humbly say, “I am just a man,” he will cause you to be all a man was ever intended to be (Matthew 23:12). Nebuchadnezzar was high up on his ladder, and God lowered him. Learn humility from this. If you do not fall down in worship, God will cause you to fall down in wrath. It’s just a matter of a time. If you take the gifts that he’s given you and use them to write your own composition for other to sing your praises and not his, he will ultimately lower you and end your existence.

Fighting Pride

I know there are a lot of preachers out there who preach only Jesus’ love and compassion. Jesus most certainly is loving

and compassionate, but we have to understand that God is also wrathful and just. According to C.S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia*, God is a good lion, to be sure, but he's also not a tame lion. He has a roar. Most of us understand that God has promised to bring justice into this world and have some feeling that we had better watch out. That's a good feeling. Would you hit the ground if someone fired a gun? Would you move out of the way of a fastball? Would you jump out of the way of a speeding bus?

I would, because they're bigger and stronger than me and would be painful. Jesus says, "Fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matthew 10:28). Will you be in harmony or disharmony with the one who will bring a resolution to the dissonance in his universe?

As a kid, I was afraid of God's wrath, but I didn't understand God's love. Fearing wrath will get you halfway. You also need what Nebuchadnezzar had—a vision of a tree. 2000 years ago, the actual king and center of the universe came to this world and was crucified on a cross. Nebuchadnezzar thought himself to be the tree; Jesus Christ came and was placed *on* a tree. His nails didn't grow out like an animal's, but he was nailed to the cross. His hair did become like matted feathers, not because he was like an animal, but because of the blood that had coagulated on his scalp. He was stripped naked, not because he was insane, but because the men crucifying him were insane with anger and wrath.

He was nailed upon the cross and humiliated this way not because he got on top of his palace and strutted his stuff and said, "I'm the king of the world!" He was actually taken to the highest point of the world by Satan and shown all the kingdoms of the world but declined the offer. The reason Jesus Christ, the actual king of the universe, came down and was crucified on a cross is because we are the ones strutting our stuff. We are the ones standing on top of our palaces of accomplishments and talents and well-behaved children, saying, "Look at me; look at what I have built!" He was treated like a beast because we have made ourselves to be God. To the degree that you don't just duck from

wrath but also get the mercy of the cross of Christ in your heart,
you will have victory over pride in your own life.