

West Side Fellowship

Pride in Prayer

When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land or send plague among my people, if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

2 Chronicles 7v13-14

Over the last few weeks we have looked at the impact of pride, the root of sin, and how it impacts the various areas of our life. As we have seen before, one of the biggest problems with pride is that once our hearts have become hardened, we find it very difficult to see the pride in our own lives and the devastating effect it has on our spiritual lives. In the opening scripture from *2 Chronicles 7v13-14* we read the words spoken by the Lord to Solomon in response to Solomon's prayer of dedication of the temple (*2 Chronicles 6v12-42*). It is a response that as Christians we really need to think about as "pride in prayer" is something that, as we will see, is not only common, but can become something that we actively teach and encourage.

Over the years I have read and heard many messages on prayer and how to get God to answer them, and sadly in almost every case it's been about methodology. How to present ourselves in the right way before God with the right words so that we can boldly tell Him what needs to be done, yet rarely is humility mentioned and yet as we have seen in the life of Jesus (*Philippians 2v6-8*) and in the instruction from God to Solomon, humility is crucial for God's instruction to Solomon starts with humility and humility was at the centre of the life of Christ. God is basically saying that if we do not approach Him with a humbled heart we have lost perspective of who is Lord and we are approaching Him as if we are equal or above Him, assuming that we have the right to tell Him how to run the world. We may not realise it but this is from the root of pride, for as Jesus said at the end of *Luke 6v45*:

For out of the overflow of his heart the mouth speaks.

Luke 6v45

If we have pride in our hearts, not only does that pride come out in the way we speak to others, but it overflows into the way that we speak to the Father himself. For this pride that is totally "anti Christ", that is totally opposite to the ways of God, it is the fruit of the fall of man. For when we come in pride before the Father we come to Him in the same attitude that Satan did, an all knowing, self elevating attitude that is totally offensive to God. We display in our attitudes and the overflow of our hearts the fruit of the fall of man, thinking that we are like God (*Genesis 3v5*), knowing how things need to be sorted in our lives and in the world around us.

One of the great problems we face in the world as a result of the fall of man is that it's attitudes teach us that we should be at the centre and everything should revolve around us. Our rights, our self esteem, our needs and our desires and dreams, even our view of how the world should be and

what is fair and unfair. That same attitude, that comes from the root of pride, has become so part of “normal” life that it remains with us and infects our spiritual life and we come to God with the same fallen attitudes of the world. Coming before Him with pride of heart that forgets who God is and who we are, for let us never forget while we may serve a Holy God, we are mere sinners saved by grace (*Ephesians 2v8-10*). When we come to God we need to humbly focus more on His will, the works he has for us to do and the needs of the Kingdom (*Matthew 6v33*) that come from the humble servant heart towards God, allowing Him to meet our needs as he sees fit.

A simple example of the pride we can bring in prayer is seen in *John 9v1-5*. In this passage we read how Jesus was walking along with his disciples when they came upon a blind man. The disciples are already sure they know the cause of the blindness, sin. So their question to Jesus is about who has sinned, the man or his parents. This is a great demonstration of pride in action and notice how when they ask Jesus what is going on they give him the options of the man or his parents, they do not consider any other cause and it is a reason why we so often find it hard for the Lord to speak to us, because although it may seem like we are asking Him and seeking His will, what we so often do is give him our options and ask him which is right based on our formula or opinion of events. We fail to conceive that Almighty God is a few steps ahead of us and if we want to know the plans, we have to seek Him. This was supposed to be the lesson for the Israelites during the exile.

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”
Jeremiah 29v11

God knew the plans he had, but the Israelites had no idea. They rebelled against the idea of exile expecting the Lord to work a miracle and set them free. I can imagine their petitions to the Lord now, “Deliver us O Lord from this oppressive injustice that has befallen us, deliver your holy people and bring glory to your Name!” Not for one minute did they consider that they they had fallen away from the Lord, seeking foreign gods, and were no longer a holy people and therefore this was not the hand of an oppressor, it was the hand of the Lord carrying out one of the forms of discipline He speaks of in *2 Chronicles 7v13*. They have no understanding of this because in their pride, even when seeking the Lord, they see themselves as something they are not. What they needed is some sober judgment (*Romans 12v3*) that comes from humbling themselves before the Lord and seeking His ways so that their minds might be transformed and they can then understand His will. Understand what He is doing in the same way that Jesus had to explain to the disciples that the man's blindness was there so that in that moment the glory of God could be displayed. It is similar to the situation in *Jeremiah 29v10-14*, the exile had happened to discipline the Israelites and get their attention with the goal of getting them to humble themselves and seek the Lord with all their heart (*Jeremiah 29v13*). How often have we in our pride petitioned the Lord to fix what we view as an injustice before seeking Him to ask what is going on.

Another more recent example I came across was when someone asked me to pray about the new president in America because he did not have the same views towards Israel as the previous leader. At first this sounds good, but actually it is showing the prideful assumption that Israel needs the protection of America. However, let us think for a moment: Who is Israel's protector? It's the Lord! How He delivers them is His business, we run into the danger of actually working against the will of God by desiring a different outcome, assuming in pride that we are correct. Let us step back and look at the bigger picture, what is the Lords desire for Israel? Paul sums it up very well when he writes:

Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved.
Romans 10v1

God in His eternal mercy is looking for ours and their eternal well being, and as we all know, for God to get our attention He often has to put us in desperate situations before we will cry out to Him in humility rather than demanding in pride. So our danger is that we pray that the Lord will change the attitude of a president so that the Israelites can trust in him rather than the Lord.

We need to be careful in prayer, for prayer starts with humbly seeking the Lords will and not assuming we know it. It's why Paul's constant prayer for the church was for revelation and wisdom from God. A revelation and wisdom that comes from seeking His will and not assuming we already know it. Paul does not pray for worldly blessings upon the church, his desire is always for spiritual revelation of God, for people to know Him better. For that to happen the Lord often has to lead us into tough situations, not for others to be telling the Lord to end our trial, but for us to gain understanding through the trial and learn the perseverance in the Lord that will bring glory to his name and bring spiritual maturity into our lives (*James 1v2-5*). Teaching us to seek the Lords wisdom in all areas of our lives and then walking in obedience to the revelation He brings.

Too often we are like Peter in *Matthew 16v21-23*, actually rebuking the Lord for the plans He has for us. Let us realise what Peter was doing, for Jesus had just explained to him the will of the Father, but as far as Peter was concerned, God had got it wrong and no suffering should be allowed in the life of Jesus. It's a good job that Jesus was resolute in his ways and rebuked Peter for his prideful rebellion against the will of God. For if he had worked to Peters plan there would have been short term physical gain for Jesus, but eternal loss for all through sin. Peter in his intellectual and emotional flesh meant well, but his heart was far from the ways of the Lord, for he had not taken the time to seek or consider the Fathers will.

This pride in prayer can be a difficult concept for us to grasp because most of the time, to our shame, we are walking according to the flesh and our actions and prayers are based on what will make ours or the other persons flesh feel better, as if that will somehow draw them or us closer to the Lord. If we do not seek the Lord first we fail to understand His plans, even if they may seem painful or unfair to us. If we truly want to be walking according to the Spirit and praying in the will of God we need to spend a lot more time in humility, bowed down and listening, rather than dictating our terms to the Father. The plans he has for us, the discipline He pours out in love towards us, and those we know, are for our and their long term spiritual benefit. So before we raise ourselves up and start to tell the Father how to run the world, let's take a moment to humble ourselves and seek His face before we ask God to change His plans to our plan.

Finally as we continue to think about prayer and pride, let us think about the words spoken by Jesus to his disciples in the garden of Gethsemane.

"Why are you sleeping?" he asked them. "Get up and pray so that you will not fall into temptation."
Luke 22v46

Here we see how the lack of prayer leads us into temptation, now as always we tend to jump ahead and think of the physical act of sin, the actual item or event that causes us to sin. However as James tells us (*James 1v12-15*), the action of sin comes from the evil desire within our heart, pride. One of the benefits of true "seeking" prayer is that it reinforces humility as we are actively

acknowledging our constant need for the Lords leading and teaching with no assumption that we already know. For as we read in *John 16v12-15*, God wants to speak to us by His Holy Spirit and the only way to hear that still small voice is to humble ourselves in prayer before Him. Not voicing our opinions, but waiting to hear His. Not just waiting for a moment, but as it says in *Psalms 40v1-2*, waiting patiently in teachable humility, not moving forward until His instruction is given, even if it means waiting in the slimy pit. If we want to be those who claim to walk according to the leading of the Holy Spirit, then we need to not only acknowledge the need for humble prayer, but we need to practise it as well. For if we do not, although we may deny it, in our pride we are declaring we have no need for the Lords instruction and guidance, we can manage quite nicely without Him.

Solomon was a king above his people, but he bowed down in humility before God (*2 Chronicles 6v13*). It was only when he ceased to humble himself and chose to go his own way did disaster befall him (*1 Kings 11v1-13*).