

A Prevailing Pride

Luke 9:46-56

Born in 1706 Benjamin Franklin lived through and was part of the birth pangs of our great nation. He was an individual whose expertise spanned many different areas. He was a revered statesman, a leading author and printer, a political theorist, scientist, inventor, and diplomat. He was instrumental in his discoveries and theories regarding electricity. He invented the lightning rod, bifocals and the Franklin stove. He founded the Philadelphia fire department, the postal service, and a university. He fought hard for colonial unity and was the first US ambassador to France.

Walter Isaacson said that Franklin was "the most accomplished American of his age and the most influential in inventing the type of society America would become."

It would be easy for someone so gifted and so accomplished to bask in the glory of his fame and wealth yet he understood how thin the thread of pride is. He wrote in his autobiography that "There is perhaps no one of our natural passions so hard to subdue as pride. Beat it down, stifle it, mortify it as much as one pleases, it is still alive. Even if I could conceive that I had completely overcome it, I should probably be proud of my humility."

Benjamin Franklin knew full well the devastating effect pride can have if one is not careful of its subtle influence and pervasive control.

American novelist David Rhodes rightly stated that "pride is the dandelion of the soul. Its root goes deep; only a little left behind sprouts again. Its seeds lodge in the tiniest encouraging cracks. And it flourishes in good soil: The danger of pride is that it feeds on goodness."

Pride is defined as an exaggerated self-esteem, conceit, an overly high opinion of one's self, and arrogance. To that we could add selfishness and self-centeredness. Those may sound like sharp

words, but they define and describe the core of its nature. Left alone the ugly head of pride will rear up and consume us and we won't even know what happened. Pride is like a virus that slowly takes over the body without our knowing until it's too late. It blinds us and makes us think the problems are with everyone else.

A U.S. Air Force transport plane with its captain and 5 crew members was flying over Alaska in the mid-50s when they entered an unusually fierce snowstorm. The navigator contacted an air base only to be told that he had veered several hundred miles off course. Correct coordinates were given to the navigator, who continued to insist that his own calculations could not be that far off. Soon the plane ran low on fuel. The six men decided to abandon the plane and parachute to safety, but because of the -70 degree temperature and winds that gusted to 50 mph, they were all frozen within minutes of hitting the ground. As a result of the navigator's pride, 5 other people went to their deaths.

Pride causes us to believe our words, attitudes and actions are right and are justified. Everyone else sees our pride except us and the moment we believe we have eradicated pride in our life that is the moment it takes over. If you don't believe me, then believe the Word of God and the example our text gives us of the heinousness of pride. The disciples are a case in point.

From Luke 9:46-56 let's consider the following:
 Pride and power
 Pride and paranoia
 Pride and prejudice

In each of these points we will see the attitude of the disciples and the answer by the Master.

I. PRIDE AND POWER – v. 46-48

Mark tells us that the discussion about to unfold takes place in Capernaum, perhaps Peter's house

their base of ministry operations. Mark notes that Jesus asked the disciples a question. Probably embarrassed they kept quiet because they were arguing about who was the greatest. Luke simply notes that an argument started between the disciples. All three synoptic Gospels agree on the nature of their argument. It had to do with who was the greatest.

We see it in the barnyard.

We see it on the playground.

We see it in an office.

We see it on the assembly line.

It can even appear in the church.

It's called the pecking order. Throw a bunch of chickens together and in time they will vie for top spot in the barnyard. One will become dominant.

In Matthew's account, the disciples ask Jesus to settle the issue once and for all. They had been with Him for almost 3 years and were curious about His opinion. Who was the greatest among them?

Maybe they were discussing their recent trip into the country side to proclaim the gospel and heal. Maybe one of them argued that he was a better speaker.

Maybe one of them argued that he had healed more people.

Maybe one of them argued that he had cast out more demons.

Maybe one of them argued that he had visited more villages.

Maybe one of them argued that he drew greater crowds.

Peter, James, and John may have indicated that they had been selected by Jesus to accompany Him up on the mountain to pray and on an earlier occasion when they were allowed to go with Jesus into the room at Jairus's home when his daughter was raised from the dead.

In Matthew's gospel just before the debate on who

was greatest Jesus and Peter had a discussion about the Temple tax and Jesus paid for both of them. Maybe he bragged about that.

Perhaps they were still musing about the kingdom they expected Jesus to establish as Messiah and their role in that kingdom. Whatever their reasons they each had their own opinion about who was greatest and it broke out into an argument.

Now we can take pride in an accomplishment or achievement, or pride in our kids or grand kids. In that sense we take it to mean being satisfied. But there is a delicate balance between pride, like that which is okay and pride that calls attention to oneself. Pride wants others to notice us; it wants to be the center of attention. It wants to be at the top. Pride only looks at self and elevates self above others. It looks with disdain on others and thinks others are beneath them. When I played city league volleyball we asked someone to join our team. He said he was too good for us.

In a teaching bout true greatness, Jesus unmasks the disciples' pride. One of the characteristics of pride is that it ruins unity. On two separate recent occasions Jesus had informed them that He was going to suffer and die. That hadn't sunk in yet. They were still consumed with their own superiority. Even though Jesus is about to give them a lesson in humility they are going to take up the argument about greatness again. James and John are even brazen enough to ask Jesus for prominent spots in the kingdom. They wanted to sit on either side of Jesus in His kingdom.

The prevailing attitude of pride ruins unity. Jesus was months from the cross and He needed to galvanize these men into a group that would stand united and committed to carrying out the Great Commission, to carry on His work of proclaiming the gospel and at that moment they were bickering over who was the greatest. A lot was riding on them as the first generation of gospel preachers.

They needed unity not discord.

Paul addressed pride when he wrote to the Romans.
Romans 15:5-6

Paul addressed pride when he wrote to the Corinthians.

I Corinthians 1:10-15

Pride separates churches and divides friends. People want the spotlight, the notoriety, the accolades. They may not come right out and say it, but they're thinking it. Like Mohamed Ali who announced to the world that he was the greatest.

In answer to their question and argument Jesus gave them a principle to follow about true greatness. With the 12 disciples gathered around Him He called a little child to come stand by His side to illustrate as an object lesson what true greatness was like. Then He remarked that to be great, you had to become like that child and welcome children in His name. Children are helpless, defenseless, without status and live by faith that their parents will provide and care for them.

Jesus modeled true greatness by demonstrating humility. He could have boasted about who He was. Instead he humbled Himself and looked to the needs of the helpless. He chose to serve not be served.

Philippians 2:3-4

How shocked the disciples must have been when Jesus did not select any of them but rather chose a little child to demonstrate greatness. Children were considered the lowest class in society. The disciples had to come to a place of humility and acknowledge that they had no rank nor did they have any achievements that would merit entrance into God's kingdom. To reject a child was in essence to reject Christ and to reject Christ was to reject the Father. Jesus is saying that how we treat others is how we treat Him and the Father.

Pride elevates self, it seeks power over others. It wants to be the greatest.

With pride we also see paranoia.

II. PRIDE AND PARANOIA – v. 49-50

Paranoia is a distrust of others. Notice again the attitude of the disciples and then the answer by Jesus.

Because of paranoia, pride will often cast blame. John tries to take the focus off them and the embarrassment they must have felt over Jesus' answer and focuses on another issue.

"Master," said John, "we saw a man driving out demons in Your name and we tried to stop him, because he is not one of us."

It sounds so self-righteous.

Here's another characteristic of pride.

Pride exhibits exclusivity.

Pride doesn't want to include others in the group. Pride really says that you're not good enough for our group. If you don't know the secret handshake then you don't belong.

John said this other guy was casting out demons in Jesus' name and because he wasn't part of our group, we told him to stop. The other person was doing what Jesus had given them the power to do. He was casting out demons and he was being successful at it. They were jealous. Maybe they felt they were supposed to be the only one's doing that. Maybe they felt jealous because of their recent inability to cast out a demon, if they couldn't do it no one else should be allowed to either.

"Jesus, You gave us that power and someone else is taking over." He thought Jesus would be pleased with their action.

Notice also that He was casting out demons in Jesus' name. We need to understand two things. One is that Jesus was allowing it and two the man must have been one of Jesus' other followers, perhaps one of the 70 He will send out.

A third point to notice is that that told him to stop. Why? He wasn't part of their group. He wasn't one of the chosen 12. He was outside the group.

Greek scholar A.T. Robertson writes "The man was doing the Master's work, in the Master's name, with the Master's power." The disciples didn't like it.

Pride believes it has exclusive rights and will do what it can to forbid others to succeed. A church can be so paranoid about others starting up or succeeding.

I was talking with someone recently about their son who was promoted to a management position. He's an outsider coming into another plant and some didn't like it. When certain practices were addressed, the response was "we don't do it that way here." The person was really saying "you're not one of us." Come to find out the person giving the most opposition had applied for the position and didn't get it, so his pride was attempting to hinder the new guy from doing his job.

How does Jesus respond to pride that fosters paranoia? He tells them to let the guy continue what he was doing. He's on the same team. If he's not against us, he's for us.

Gene Getz pastors Fellowship Bible in the Dallas area. At the time he related this story, his church was about 4,000 members. A pastoral group from another church came and met with him to share their vision of another church they wanted to build across the road. They shared their ministry philosophy and target group. This church would be larger than his, which can be threatening to a pastor, but after their discussion Getz gave his blessing and both continued to reach the community and grow.

Pride feels threatened by others who come in and appear to be bigger or better and so it throws up roadblocks.

Pride resents what others are doing that we feel belongs exclusively to us and we become paranoid that we're going to be replaced.

A church can become paranoid when another church moves into town.

A Bible study teacher or class can feel threatened when another study or teacher seems more popular. That's what happened in Corinth. I'm of Peter, I'm of Apollos, I'm of Paul, and the pious ones said they follow Jesus.

Pride resents the new kid who comes in and gets better grades or is a better athlete or takes our spot in the band or orchestra.

Let's check our heart to see if we have any pride that is hindering someone else from doing what God has called them to do.

Pride wants to be the greatest but when someone else comes around who may be doing the same things we are or may even be doing them better we can become paranoid. Pride feels superiority over others. Pride feels superiority over outsiders. In verses 51-56 we see that pride feels superiority over opposition. In this passage we see pride and prejudice.

III. PRIDE AND PREJUDICE – v. 51-56

Prejudice is a judgmental attitude or opinion about someone in disregard to facts that contradict it.
 There is prejudice over race.
 There is prejudice over ethnicity.
 There is prejudice over economic status.
 There is prejudice over religious beliefs.
 And the list can go on and on.

How is pride and prejudice displayed here?
 Through what Luke writes we come to understand that Jesus' death on the cross is near. Verse 51 tells us that Jesus purposefully set out toward Jerusalem. He was fixed on that destination. This was the purpose for His incarnation – to go to the cross and

die for the sins of mankind. Without the shedding of His blood there would be no forgiveness of sin.

On a map we don't know where Jesus is in reference to Jerusalem. At some point after the discussion about greatness they had left Capernaum and traveled where we don't know. In order to get to Jerusalem He decided to take a short cut through Samaria. This is the region of Israel that was first conquered by the Assyrians. Many of the Jews were deported from the land and other conquered peoples were brought in to populate the territory. In this way the conquering nation could better control the population because there was less national loyalty. Religious beliefs were also disrupted through this amalgamation of cultures which would further reduce the possibility of a revolt.

The Samaritans were descendants of these settlers that were brought in by Esarhaddon to replace the deported Jews. Over time these Gentiles and the remaining Jews married and subsequent generations adopted a cultic form of worship that blended Judaism with paganism. In time they cast off the pagan element of the religion and returned to Judaism even though it included pagan ideology.

When Ezra and Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem during the reign of King Cyrus the Samaritans offered to help rebuild the Temple but were denied the right to help because they had defiled themselves by marrying Gentiles, something forbidden in the law. That further escalated their animosity toward one another.

Because they could not worship at the Temple in Jerusalem they built their own Temple on Mt. Gerizim around 400 B.C. That was the mountain the Samaritan woman referred to in her discussion with Jesus at the well. During the intertestamental period between Malachi and the coming of Christ, the Jews destroyed the Temple on Mt. Gerizim built by the Samaritans further severing ties between the two groups. This consequently led to extreme

prejudice. The worst insult a Jew could give another Jew was to call them a Samaritan. In fact we read in John 4:48 that the Jews called Jesus a Samaritan.

It is through this region that Jesus was going to travel and we read that He sent a couple disciples ahead of the group in order to make arrangements for lodging and food in a Samaritan town. But we read that upon arriving the town's folk rejected Jesus' need for lodging because He was headed to Jerusalem.

He was not rejected because He was Jewish.
He was not rejected because of His personality.
He was rejected solely because He was headed to Jerusalem, the place of the Temple, the Temple they refused to acknowledge as the central place of worship.

When the rest of the group caught up and discover they cannot stay there James and John display prejudicial pride by asking Jesus if they could call down fire to destroy the town. They felt this was a justifiable response for their rejection perhaps thinking about their recent meeting with Elijah on the Mt. of Transfiguration and recalling the time when he called down fire from heaven to destroy Ahab's soldiers.

II Kings 1:9-14 (King Ahaziah wanted to inquire of Baal if he would live. Elijah met the servants)

We display our pride when out of prejudice we want go to bring judgment on our enemies.

In a display of patience and compassion Jesus instructed them to move on to another town. The word "another" means more than just the next town. It means another of a different kind, meaning they were to go on to another town that would receive them. We see here the universal scope of Jesus' mercy. And later on in Acts we read that the gospel penetrated into Samaria so that many were saved.

So what can we learn from this passage? First let's realize how pervasive pride is. Without even realizing it the disciples demonstrated arrogance by arguing among themselves about who was the greatest. They demonstrated pride by rejecting the work someone else was doing in serving the Master. They demonstrated pride in their prejudice against a culture that for a long time had been the enemy of real Jews.

Here's what we need to understand for the disciples and for us. *Before God can use us effectively, He must first strip us of our pride.* In the way Jesus responds to the disciples He was doing just that.

It may be that God is doing that in your life. It could be through something you read in Scripture. It could be through the conviction of His Spirit. It could be through the circumstances of life through which He is revealing self-centeredness that has blinded you toward that sin in your life.

Pride is both a disposition or attitude and a type of conduct.

Scripture speaks about the pride of the eyes – Psalm 101:5; Isaiah 5:15. In these two passages we are told that God will not endure the haughty person and the eyes of the arrogant will be humbled.

There is pride of the heart – Ezekiel 28:2, 5, 17.

There is pride of the spirit – Proverbs 16:18, which says that the result of pride is destruction. Pride has destroyed the reputation and career of Yankee's player, Alex Rodriguez who admitted using steroids to enhance his ability. Pride has destroyed many a politician, many a CEO, many an athlete, pastor, church, and family.

Pride is the admission of a person who arrogantly claims that he has no need God. His confidence is in himself.

George Gordon Liddy, one of the conspirators of

the Watergate scandal had this to say shortly after he was released from prison: "I have found within myself all I need and all I ever shall need. I am a man of great faith, but my faith is in George Gordon Liddy. I have never failed me."

That's quite a different response than that of Chuck Colson who came out humbled and with faith not in himself, but in Jesus Christ as Savior.

In the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament there is a distinction made between the person who is proud and who is righteous. Pride is associated with the wicked, arrogant and the presumptuous.

Lest we conclude that pride is no big deal let's understand that Scripture is very clear about God's view on the matter.

Proverbs 16:5 "The Lord detests all the proud of heart. Be sure of this: They will not go unpunished."

Proverbs 6:16-17 "There are six things the Lord hates, seven that are detestable to Him: Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, a false witness who pours out lies and a man who stirs up dissension among brothers."

Let's keep in mind that at the heart of every sin is the original sin, the sin of pride.

Pride was the result of Uzziah's downfall. II Chronicles 26:16 "But after Uzziah became powerful, his pride led to his downfall." Like King Saul, Uzziah felt he was above the law and offered a sacrifice on the altar. God struck him with leprosy until his death. It's a sad ending to a great beginning. At age 16 when he became king Scripture tells us that he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord and as long as he sought the Lord he was successful. But over time he became proud of his success. Folks, it takes only a little bit of pride to take root and spread. It's a weed that

sprouts anywhere and can destroy.

In Daniel 5:20 we read the pride resulted in the hardening of King Nebuchadnezzar's heart.

Psalm 10:4 states that another result of pride is that we won't seek God; there is no room for God.

Proverbs 11:2 tells us that pride brings disgrace.

In Proverbs 13:10 we see that pride breeds quarrels. We certainly see that in the disciples.

According to Jeremiah 49:16 and Obadiah 3 pride deceives the person who allows it to grow.

Proverbs 29:23 and Isaiah 2:11 tell us the pride brings a person low.

Isaiah 2:17; Daniel 4:37 speak of how pride humbles a person.

James 4:6 reminds that God is opposed to the proud, but He gives grace to the humble. It's a military term that means to battle against and means that God has drawn up His battle formation against the person who is proud. And guess what? If you go up against God, you'll lose.

Pride lifts up self and neglects giving God glory. E.M. Bounds writing in *Power Through Prayer* had this to say: "Selfability in some wicked form has defamed and violated the temple which should be held sacred for God." What he means is that when we put self on the throne because of pride, we push God off the place that should exclusively belong to Him.

No matter how we try to dress it up, justify it, make it seem religious or pious pride produces the same result – arrogance and rebellion against God. Pride puts self on the throne and dethrones God. It is subtle and almost undetectable until it's too late.

So how do we overcome a spirit of pride?

I Peter 5:6 gives us the answer.

"Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God." It can also mean to allow ourselves to be humbled. To humble ourselves before God is to submit to His authority in all situations. If we are humble before God, we don't need to exalt ourselves, in time God will exalt us. We are in the meantime to clothe ourselves with humility. By humbling ourselves we avoid divine opposition and we receive divine grace. But pride exalts self and rejects God and His plan. Humility is the antithesis of pride. Humility puts God in the rightful place in our lives.

When I choose to sin, it's pride saying no to God. When I disobey God's will, God's direction for my life, it's pride saying no to God.

Pride says we know better than God does about this thing and we're going to do it our way not His. God will bring low the haughty and exalt the humble.

Pride seeks power

Pride is paranoid

Pride is prejudiced

I don't know about you, but like the disciples, I have a lot to learn and practice in humbly submitting to God. Let's ask Him to help us keep pride from prevailing in our lives.

Perhaps like David, his prayer will be ours.

"Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." Psalm 139:23-24