

A PROUD PERSON IS SATAN INCARNATE!

Today's Text: Ezekiel Chaps. 28-31

Extracts:

The word of the Lord came to (Ezekiel) again, saying, ... “Son of man, *take up a lamentation for the king of Tyre, and say to him, ... ‘You were in Eden, the garden of God; ... you were the anointed cherub who covers; I established you; you were on the holy mountain of God; ... you were perfect in your ways from the day you were created; till iniquity was found in you. ... Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendour; I cast you to the ground, I laid you before kings, that they might gaze at you’*” [Ezek. 28: 1,12, 13, 14, 15, 17]

Dick was a brilliant and hardworking young man that we all used to admire. He came from a poor family but by dint of hard work, he paid his way through college while supporting himself and family. Based on his good performance in the bachelor's degree examination, he was awarded a Federal scholarship for an MBA degree in a top American university. I lost close touch with him thereafter, but I heard that he had done quite well in the Nigerian private sector where he had set up a successful commercial bank. One day, I accidentally came across him in a gas (petrol) station in Lagos. He walked with a swagger and spoke with some affectation. He told me that he was going to spend the Christmas holiday in his home town. I observed that he had lined up six cars for the journey, only one of which was occupied (by himself and his family). When I jokingly asked why he was going with so many cars when one would do, he said, “Money is no longer my problem. I need to show my people that I have arrived!”

Dick's attitude typifies that of proud people. They are brilliant. They are successful in the material sense. However, they allow their success to get into their heads. In the process, they may step on other people's toes, especially those that had helped them to climb up the success ladder. Ultimately, they offend God Himself by arrogating divine attributes to themselves. They remind God of Satan's rebellion against Him. So, He does not hesitate to judge proud people as He had done with Satan. That is why proud people can be regarded as Satan incarnate.

We all have a streak of pride in us. The danger lies in crossing the line and putting ourselves at odds with God. At what point do we cross that line? What can we do to avoid culpable pride? Those and more are the issues that we shall examine in today's lesson.

1. Shades of pride

During the Civil Rights movement in the United States in the 1960's, the late soul music star, James Brown, waxed a song which became the signature tune of the freedom movement. The refrain says, "Say it loud, 'I am black and *proud!*'" As used here, to be proud means not to be ashamed but to be satisfied with or fulfilled to be dark-skinned. It is in this same sense that parents are proud of their successful children, and teachers of their former students that have made it big in their chosen professions. That kind of pride is a measure of admiration or self-esteem. Therefore, it is positive pride!

There is also negative pride. It is called arrogance or bigheadedness. A proud person in this sense is one who is self-centred, self-important or self-righteous. However, how can we draw the line? If a mother who claims to be proud of her children seizes every opportunity to brag about them to her less privileged neighbours, is she expressing her fulfillment or being arrogant? If a top graduating student says to her less successful classmates, "I made First Class (*Magna Cum Laude*)," is she expressing satisfaction with her performance or swollen with arrogance? Clearly, it is a thin line between both types of pride.

We can put our attitude to material success (or the lack of it) on a *continuum*, ranging from modesty or humility to arrogance. There are several milestones along that route, some of which are as follows:

a) *Modesty: When we attribute our success to others*

In this case, we attribute our achievements to others, especially God. That pleases those whose contribution we have so publicly acknowledged, and usually they become the ones who will be proud of us. For example, Jesus often said of His works, "*The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner*" [Jn 5: 19]. That was why His Father could express His admiration when He told the Jews, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" [Matt. 3: 17]. Job was a very rich man who was "the greatest of all the people of the East." In spite of his enormous material wealth, we are told that he "feared God and shunned evil." Consequently, God was proud of him and boasted of Job to Satan, saying, "there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and shuns evil" [Job 1: 1, 3, 8].

b) *Humility: When we accept full responsibility for our failures*

Here, we accept full responsibility for our failures, such as sin, error or violation of rules. To accept full responsibility is to apologise or confess to the offended party and ask for forgiveness. As in the first case above, this is a show of humility which is the opposite of pride. We have swallowed

our self-importance and admitted that we were wrong. The offended party is likely to forgive and restore us to good standing. For example, Peter denied Jesus three times during His trials. As soon as Peter realized that he had sinned, “he went out and wept bitterly” [Matt. 26: 69-75]. It was to that repentant Peter that the risen Christ gave the commission to feed His sheep and lambs [Jn 21: 15-17].

c) *Irresponsibility: When we shift blame for our failures to others*

Here, we begin to step into the realm of arrogance. We know that we are wrong but refuse to confess or repent or even accept responsibility. For example, it was Adam and his wife, Eve, who ate the forbidden fruit, contrary to God’s command that they should not. When God confronted them and asked why they had chosen to disobey Him, Adam said, “the woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate.” His wife added, “the serpent deceived me, and I ate” [Gen. 3: 11-13]. Blame shifting is not repentance. People who do such things leave God with no other choice than to pronounce instant judgment on the offending parties. Adam and Eve were immediately thrown out of the Garden of Eden.

d) *Arrogance: When we claim to be self-made!*

Here, we claim full credit for our earthly successes. We play down or refuse to acknowledge any help from others, not to talk of God. We have become swollen-headed and look down on our subordinates, peers and superiors. Take the case of king Herod who persecuted the early church by killing the apostle James and putting Peter in prison. He became quite arrogant and full of himself, especially as he had the power to supply or stop food to the nearby people of Tyre and Sidon. One day, he sat on his throne, “arrayed in royal apparel” and gave a powerful speech. As he spoke, the people kept shouting, “The voice of a god and not of a man!” Immediately, “an angel of the Lord struck him, *because he did not give glory to God*” [Acts 12: 1-3, 20-23].

The fourth case is the one treated in today’s lesson. Before we can appreciate the danger of that kind of pride, let us analyse today’s Bible verses taken from the book of Ezekiel.

2. **The king of Tyre was full of himself!**

God pronounced judgment against Tyre and Sidon (Chapter 28), and Egypt, Ethiopia, Libya and Lydia (Chapters 29-31). The *theme* of pride runs through all the chapters. Therefore, we can use the chapter on Tyre as representative of the others.

God saw arrogance in the king of Tyre that was demonstrated as follows;

a) *He attributed his success to own wisdom*

He saw himself as “wiser than Daniel” and there was no secret that could be hidden from him. With his wisdom and understanding, he had “gained riches for (himself), and gathered gold and silver into (his) treasuries” [Ezek. 28: 3-4]. The word of God is quite clear that promotion or exaltation is not from man but only from God [Ps. 75: 7], that He gave us the power to get wealth for His purposes [Deut. 8: 17-18]. By arrogating the success of his kingdom to his own effort and wisdom, the king of Tyre was exhibiting arrogance.

b) *His heart was lifted up*

The king’s heart was lifted up and he saw himself as a god sitting in “the seat of god” [Ezek. 28: 2]. Having seen a similar trait in Satan, God spoke about the king of Tyre as if He was speaking of Satan. The king of Tyre was in “Eden, the garden of God.” He was a paragon of beauty. He was the anointed cherub that was on the holy mountain of God. There, he “walked back and forth in the midst of fiery stones.” He was perfect in his ways from the day that he was created “till iniquity was found in (him)” [Ezek. 28: 13-16].

Examples from other parts of the Scriptures will confirm the close link between Satan and pride. You may recall one story, when Jesus came with His disciples to the region of Caesarea Philippi. He asked them who they said that He was. Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus poured encomiums on Peter and promised to build His church on the rock of his faith. Soon after, however, Jesus revealed to His disciples His pending crucifixion in Jerusalem. Peter drew Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, “this shall not happen to You!” Jesus turned to Peter and said to him, “Get behind me, Satan!” [Matt. 16: 13-23]. Was Jesus calling Peter Satan? Not at all. Rather, Peter’s arrogant assertion was not from God but from Satan. As Jesus would later confirm close to the time of His passion, Satan desired to sift Peter as wheat [Lk 22: 31]. The same Satan led Peter to deny Jesus thrice!

You may also recall God’s message through the prophet Isaiah to the king of Babylon who had exhibited pomp and majesty for being the ruler over the then known world. When God decided to clip his wings, He spoke of him as if the Babylonian king was Lucifer, saying [Is. 14: 12-15]:

*How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!
How are you cut down to the ground, you who weakened the
nations! For you have said in your heart: ‘I will ascend into*

heaven; I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the Most High.’ Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol, to the lowest depths of the Pit.

In the book of Revelation [**Rev. 12: 7- 11**], you will find the record of how Lucifer’s rebellion in heaven led to war in which he and his evil angels lost and were thrown out of there to the earth. Now, he has continued to make war on those “who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus” [**v. 17**]. Arrogance, the cause of Satan’s downfall, is one weapon that he uses in that warfare.

c) *Pride led to his downfall*

God told the king of Tyre that even though he had lifted up his heart and seen himself as a god, yet he was nothing but “a man and not a god.” Therefore, God would bring attackers from terrible nations and “they shall throw (the proud king) into the Pit” [**Ezek. 28: 7, 8**]. God would cast him and his kingdom out the same way that Satan had been cast out “as a profane thing out of the mountain of God” [**v. 16**]. The Pit is the same thing as hell, Satan’s abode [**Rev. 20: 3**].

Was that not what happened to another proud man, king Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon? He had had a dream which Daniel interpreted to him, to the effect that his arrogance, if unchecked could make him lose his throne and sanity for a time [**Dan. 4: 18-27**]. A whole year later, the king was walking about his huge palace and he said to himself, “Is not this great Babylon that *I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power and for the honour of my majesty?*” Hardly had he finished speaking than a voice from heaven said, “the kingdom has departed from you!” The king became deranged and dwelt with the beasts of the field, eating grass [**vv. 28-33**]. God showed him mercy and he regained his reason after seven years, and was restored to his kingdom. Hear what the formerly proud man now had to say, “Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, all of whose works are truth, and His ways justice. *And those who walk in pride He is able to put down*” [**vv. 34-37**].

3. Conclusion: You had better audit your actions!

Tony Parker, a member of the San Antonio Spurs that won the 2007 NBA Championship, was voted the Most Valuable Player (MVP) of the basketball championship finals. After the tournament winning game, a television reporter asked him, “Tony, this is your third (championship) ring in five years, and you have this year been voted the MVP. In July, you are getting married to a Hollywood star. What else do you now want?” The 25-year old French man

replied calmly, “I will just thank God. When I get back to San Antonio, I shall go to church.” That is a modest man talking. He did not allow his heart to be lifted up by success.

The road to pride is shorter than you may think. As soon as you take off from the point of modesty and humility, you have no idea where you may wind up. So, no matter where you find yourself on the route, ask yourself the following questions:

- *When things go wrong around me, what do I do?*

Some people apply the advice from their insurance companies quite literally to every aspect of their lives. They will tell you not to accept any responsibility in the event of an accident involving your vehicle and somebody else’s. In the journey of life, you are bound to collide with different kinds of people. In some cases, you have been wronged. In other cases, you are wrong. When you shift the blame where you are culpable, you are showing streaks of arrogance. The Psalmist says, “When I kept silent [i.e., refused to confess], my bones grew old through my groaning all the day long, for day and night (the Lord’s) hand was heavy upon me.... *I acknowledged my sin [to Him], and my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, ‘I will confess my transgression to the Lord,’ and [He] forgave the iniquity of my sin*” [Ps. 32: 3-5]. So, don’t ever think that your sins and errors are too big to be pardoned as the reason for not confessing or apologizing. Don’t hold back for fear of shame or damage to your self-esteem.

- *How can I handle success?*

Failure is easier to manage than success! When you fail, you are likely to be left alone, but when you succeed, there are many claimants to it! In the process of excluding false claimants, you may be arrogating too much to yourself. In the process, your heart becomes lifted up, something that God hates. Isaac Newton’s 2nd Law states, “If I have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants.” Once you learn to give credit to whom it is due and to give all to God when you have no one else to credit, you are a modest and humble person and God will lift you up higher and higher.

Everyone proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord [Prov. 16: 5] and pride goes before a fall [v. 18], but with the humble is wisdom [Prov. 11: 2]. Therefore, *be humble so that you be not humiliated!* A proud person is Satan incarnate.