

Jeremiah 13:1-27 Pride Makes You Useless Falls Church AM 11/28/21

This chapter is about sinful pride.

As Christians, we legitimately take a holy pride in our accomplishments, but not separate from God. Our pride is holy when we recognize that it was God who gave us the energy and gifts. But a sinful pride is when we forget about God. When we fall into the pitfall of pride, then without realizing it, we are drifting toward uselessness for serving God.

Is it possible that you could wander from God, and suffer spiritually? Of course this chapter shows that it is possible, but I asked the question, so that you could test yourself. If you answered that it is not possible for you to wander from God, then you have already fallen into the pitfall of pride!

There are five sections to this chapter, presenting five images or five pictures of pride. Five ways that Jeremiah explains the danger and damage of pride.

The main theme is this statement, found in your church bulletin: **Jeremiah prophesied how Christ would redeem you from the five images of how pride makes you useless.**

Falling into the pitfall of pride is like....

1. ...like a favorite piece of clothing now repulsively ruined - no longer close to God! (v.1-11)

God called His prophets to do more than speak. Here for the first time in the book of Jeremiah, there is something beyond what Jeremiah must speak, now what is added is something that Jeremiah must do. We call this symbolic action. What God asked Jeremiah to do had a direct connection to the message that God is giving the people through Jeremiah's prophetic speaking.

Why? Because the people were not listening. They were not repenting.

So, God ratcheted His message up to a new level, and God resorted to showing the people object lessons in the life of the prophet Jeremiah, as if Jeremiah were putting on a mini-performance to act out the lessons.

So, the first lesson is appropriate for us to consider on Thanksgiving weekend, because God sent Jeremiah shopping! Verse 1 – go and buy a belt. It was a linen belt, which our Bibles translate as a loincloth. Jeremiah was told to wear the cloth belt without washing it. That symbolizes our spiritual lives without repenting. We get dirty and stay dirty. We get prideful and stay that way. We pull away from God and stay distant. If we fastforward to the end of the chapter, the question is “*how long will it be before you are made clean?*” How long will it be before you draw near to God? What are you waiting for?

Back to our story – okay in verse 2, Jeremiah did purchase a belt.

Jeremiah wore a prophet's long tunic of coarse material, with a cloak over it. For Jeremiah to wear a linen belt around his waist - the type of clothing worn only by a priest or wealthy king - it would have made Jeremiah look like a spectacle or a curiosity – almost like a clown in a parade whose clothes are mis-matched on purpose. All of the attention would go to the new piece of clothing that Jeremiah has added. For Jeremiah to put on a linen loincloth or belt, would be like me to be wearing simple jeans and sweatshirt, but then putting on something I have only worn for graduation day – to get something out of a storage box – like that giant diagonal sash, and put it on over the top of my sweatshirt, and see if anyone notices me.

Verse 3, the Word of God came again to Jeremiah and in verse 4, instructed Jeremiah to take the belt or sash and hide it in the crack of a rock. Verse 5 Jeremiah hid the belt in the crack of a rock. Verse 6, After many days, God told Jeremiah to retrieve the belt. Verse 7, Jeremiah retrieved the belt, and it was rotten. Good for nothing. Useless. Verse 8, Word of God came to Jeremiah to say in verse 9, the rotten belt shows how God will ruin the pride of the people. Verse 10, the people's pride was seen in their refusal to hear God's message to repent, their stubbornness to follow their own hearts, and even follow other gods, instead of following the LORD God. The end of verse 10, God said the people are like the rotten belt – ruined and good for nothing. Pride had rendered them useless. Verse 11, here is what was supposed to happen, in the words of the LORD, "*as the loincloth (belt) clings to the waist of a man, so I made the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah cling to Me, declares the LORD, that they might be for Me a people, a name, a praise, and a glory, but they would not listen.*"

The concept is that the pride of the people would be destroyed. How? By God doing to His people what Jeremiah did to his linen belt. Namely, to take the people away from their home territory, and hide them somewhere far away. Jeremiah's belt rotting in a crack in the rock was a picture of how the people's pride will deteriorate when God would later put them in exile!

Deuteronomy 26:18-19, "*And the Lord has declared today that you are a people for his treasured possession, as he has promised you, and that you are to keep all his commandments, and that he will set you in praise and in fame and in honor high above all nations that he has made, and that you shall be a people holy to the Lord your God, as he promised.*"

As we walk with God through life, depending on Him to get through our days, we are supposed to receive praise and fame and honor above all other people, because the Lord has called us to be His holy people. The Lord has declared that we are His treasured possession. He has given His Son for our sins, to cleanse us and fulfill His promises to us. We are humbled that God has called us, and we take pride or are thrilled in being close to God.

God wants to be close to us, like He is wearing a sash or a favorite piece of clothing. In a reverse image, we want to be close to God, like God is a favorite piece of clothing that we wear.

As the apostle Peter wrote in 1 Peter 5:5, we clothe ourselves with humility toward one another. That is the object lesson of the belt of Jeremiah. Be glad that you belong to God! Paul wrote in Ephesians 6 that we are strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might, and as a word picture, wrote what it looks like is we wear the armor of God, the belt of truth, the shoes of the gospel of peace, the helmet of salvation, "*praying at all times in the Spirit...*" We are all sinners saved by grace. We actually take pride in being children of God, because of God's grace. We are not proud in a self-honoring way, but rather a God-exalting way. We have confidence as we approach the throne of grace to keep praying for God to help us through each day. We walk close to God, like wearing a favorite shirt!

2. ...like a wrongly filled bottle – designed to be filled with God's Spirit, but not. (v.12-14)

Verse 12, God's message changes images now. We are done with the belt. We are moving on to a new image of a jar or bottle filled with wine.

This time it is actions done not by Jeremiah, but rather actions done by others, which Jeremiah interpreted.

God's message that Jeremiah is to tell the people is that "every wine bottle will be filled with wine." And because that seems obvious, the people said, we know that. But then Jeremiah

interpreted it. Like bottles should be filled with wine, people should not be filled with wine. Verse 13 says that the people, when they are wrongly filled with wine, will become drunk. Every king and leader, and all the people living in Jerusalem will be drunk. So drunk that verse 14 says they will be running into each other.

How do we understand these 3 verses? What should wine bottles be filled with? Wine. The wrath of God in the Old Testament was often pictured as wine. If you drink the cup of God's wrath, you are being judged, and become dead drunk.

Now let's ask the question what should the people be filled with? They should be filled with the closeness of God, the nearness of God, the service of God. What could be closer than having The Spirit of God? The people should be filled like bottles get filled - with the Spirit of God. All of the kings, priests, prophets, and all the people need, instead of being filled with the judgment of God, to receive the Spirit of God.

The hinge is whether or not the people repent of the sin of pride.

If they refuse to repent, God will not have pity on them, God will not spare them, God will not have compassion on them. But if they repent, God will have pity on them, God will spare them, and God will have compassion on them.

They would not repent. So, God used a foreign enemy to take them into exile in order to crush the pride, and give them the gift of repentance.

When Jeremiah was long gone, God sent the last of the prophets, a man named John the Baptist. We read about him in Luke chapter 1, "*And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared.*"

God will continue to pursue His people, so that we are all like the symbolic John the Baptist. No longer drinking the cup of the judgment of God, but instead being filled with the Holy Spirit.

After Christ came, and at the cross once for all drank the cup of the judgment of God for us, He rose again, ascended to heaven, and poured out His Spirit for us. All that remains for us to be filled with the Spirit.

Ephesians 5:15-21, "*Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, 16 making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. 17 Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. 18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, 19 addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, 20 giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, 21 submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.*"

3. ...like turning off the light – no longer listening to God's Word. (v.15-17)

Verse 15, "*Hear and give ear; be not proud...*" Again, the theme of the whole chapter is pride. Verse 16, God would be bringing darkness, but it was not yet dark. It is as if they got up early, and climbed a mountain in twilight to watch the sunrise, waiting for more light. But

instead of sunrise, God would bring more darkness. So dark that they would stumble to get back down the mountain in deep darkness. Why? Because the people would not listen to God. When in verse 16, the statement is “give glory to God” it means at least agree with the verdict of God. Agree that the people would not repent, and so exile was warranted.

Verse 17, if this unrepentance persists – with the people not listening to God’s Word, then we get a response from the weeping prophet, that Jeremiah’s very “*soul will weep in secret for your pride.*” Jeremiah wrote, “*my eyes will weep bitterly and run down with tears, because the Lord’s flock has been taken captive.*” Because they people would not repent, the exile truly would become necessary. What is causing Jeremiah to weep? Not the exile. But rather the pride of the people that made the exile necessary!

The pride of the people was incorrigible. For them to refuse to listen to God’s call to repent was to turn off the light. Their whole life became darkness.

What would be their attitude while going off into exile? Contrite acceptance of God’s vindicated just actions? Or, would they go into exile defiant - in undiminished self-righteous anger at the unfairness of it all, blaming God Himself and their ancestors for all that would happen next. Pride creates an armored shell of resentment. See why Jeremiah wept? Jeremiah echoes the tears of God Himself. God remains heartbroken that His people not turn back to Him to be His people, carrying His name for His praise and shared glory. There is no grim pleasure in God to order the exile, or to populate hell. In the dark hallways of sin, we hear divine sobbing in secret. In Ezekiel 18:32, God says, “*...I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the LORD God; so turn and live.*”

John 11:10, Jesus said, “*If anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him.*” John 12:35-36, Jesus said, “*the Light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The One who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going. While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of the light.*”

In Jeremiah’s day Jerusalem did not listen, so Jeremiah wept for them. Did they listen in Jesus day? No. Luke 19:41, “...*when [Jesus] drew near and saw the city, He wept over it...*” Paul wept for his fellow countrymen. Roman 9:2, Paul wrote, “*I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart...for the sake of my brothers...*”

God is saying to you - Let me turn the lights on. Get into My Word. Listen to Me. Your sinful pride is what is keeping you from the Bible. You figure you don’t need your Creator to get through that day. That is the pride that is damaging you.

4. ...like the heartbreaking fall of a mighty leader – a needlessly sad failure to humble oneself! (v.18-19)

If the people placed any hope in the government to protect them, that is taken away in verse 18, ‘when the king and the king’s mother have their crowns and thrones removed from them. How needless! They should have humbled themselves, instead of waiting to be humbled by others.

What a disappointment these human leaders were.

We have this happen again and again. People do not put their trust in the Lord, but instead in a human leader. A governor, a mayor, a president, a congressman, a political party. Or, people turn to the family and put trust in a parent or grandparent, a sibling or an Aunt or Uncle. Or, people turn to the church, and put their trust in a Christian leader, a popular speaker, a pastor, an elder, an author. But what do we have happen again and again? The mighty fall.

The best person in government lets us down. The best person in our family lets us down. The best person in our church lets us down.

The problem is us. We keep pridefully putting our hope somewhere other than the Lord God Himself.

Verse 18, the leaders would lose their crowns and power. In verse 19, the people would be “*taken into exile.*” Then Jeremiah doubles the announcement. They would be “*wholly taken into exile.*”

How sad.

5. ...like being the last to know – your disgrace, loss, and uncleanness were obvious to God & others before you become aware and enter mourning in bitterness and shame. (v.20-27)

The last section, verses 20-27, read like a description of the city of Jerusalem pictured as a woman facing a terrible fate.

Verse 20, the enemy will invade from the north, presenting danger to the people of the city. Verse 21, the city will be in such grief that it is compared to the pangs of a woman in labor. Verse 22, if there is any remaining confusion as to why this is happening, there is always ready at hand the stark reminder – “*it is for the greatness of your iniquity that...you suffer violence.*” It seems that it has been repeatedly made abundantly clear, and yet this city can still condense the

events down into one question “Why?” as if they were just hearing about this. The people seem to be the last to know how they have disgraced God. God knew. Jeremiah knew. Other nations even knew. Pride has this ugly dynamic in which the proud person seems to be oblivious, while their sins are obvious to others. Any chance that could be you? These ancient people had developed quite a reputation for their pride and sin, and yet after all of the efforts of Jeremiah to get the message across, they openly wonder why this calamity and loss is happening to them! Verse 23 contains that famous question from the Bible – “Can the Ethiopian change his skin...” And it means that a person cannot change his race, and so deeply entrenched are the people in the sin of pride, that they are no longer able to change their ways. We cannot save ourselves, we need God to save us. We never get so educated, so cultured, so refined, so reformed, so godly that we graduate from our struggle with sin and the sin of pride in particular. We are sinners, and we are only saved by grace, becoming children of God. Verse 24 contains the result of the pattern of prideful hearts and evil behavior – that God will scatter them. Another way to describe the exile. Verse 25, this is their punishment, because they forgot God and trusted lies. Verse 26, following the image of the city as a woman, God will expose her shame. Verse 27, God describes the sins of the city as the sins of a loose woman, and asks how long before she will be made clean?

Conclusion: Verse 27 left us with a question. “*How long will it be before you are made clean?*” The answer – as long as you insist on cleaning yourself! Pride says I can fix this. We have to turn from that, and realize that we need God to make us clean. A sinner cannot change his own nature. Neither an Ethiopian nor a Scandinavian can change his skin. A leopard cannot change his spots. We need God to make us clean, and as long as we keep on trying to clean ourselves up, we remain unclean, and stuck in our pride and uselessness!

So the last verse our chapter expressed God’s longing for His people to be clean! For the people in exile, it was just a hope. But later, God gave us this actual gift of a cleansing. Within the book of Jeremiah God promised it when He said that He would make a new covenant. Jeremiah 31:31, “*days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house...of Judah.*” And our cleanness is part of the new covenant, as we read in Jeremiah 31:34, “*...they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares The LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sin no more.*” The new covenant in Christ covers and atones for the sin of pride, and reverses all of its damage, making us useful to God.

The chapter started and ended with the issue of clothing as an illustration of the need to be made clean. Verse 1, God sent Jeremiah to buy a belt and put it around his waist, but then Jeremiah was shamed by stripping off his beautiful sash and having it ruined. In verse 26, God shamed Jerusalem by the stripping off of her skirts, exposing her sin, allowing her to be violated, and even allowing her to be taken away into exile. The nakedness, shame and sin, takes us back to the Garden of Eden, where God needed to say – who told you that you were naked? Man clothed himself with fig leaves, but then God re-clothed them with skins from animals, which required the sacrifice of the life of another. The first sin, with its losses, was tragically re-enacted by Israel. The first clothing covering shame will be gloriously re-enacted and fulfilled by Christ.

Only when the Lord Jesus had our sins and shame symbolically placed upon his naked body on the cross, was there finally the full punishment that our sins deserved, so that we could be made clean. When Jesus rose from the dead, He granted to us the robe of His righteousness to wear to clean our uncleanness, to cover our disgrace, and to restore our losses. We now appear as humble and righteous and obedient, as we stand before God, clothed with Christ's humility, Christ's righteousness, and Christ's obedience. Jesus showed true humility during His life, and furthermore in his death as Philippians 2:8 revealed that Christ "*humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*" Christ was obedient to God the Father. That humble attitude of Christ is given to us, to replace our sinful pride. Hebrews 12:10, God "*...disciplines us for our good, that we may share in His holiness.*" Every time we have sinful pride, we become useless. But Christ comes to us by His Spirit and Word, and humbles us, making us useful in serving Him and His Church and His Kingdom. Christ redeemed us from pride and its effects.

Ephesians 1:4-6, God the Father "*chose us in [Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will, to the praise of His glorious grace, with which He has blessed us in the Beloved.*"

We have been chosen to live not for our own pride and glory, but rather for God's glory and God's purpose.

What is God's purpose for us? For us to be clean, and to be close to God. Instead of the picture of an immoral woman, we get the picture of God's purpose for us when we see it expressed in the vision of heaven. The people made clean by God become a beautiful holy woman, dressed up as a bride who is pictured in a wedding, getting married to God in all holiness and cleanness in Revelation 19:6-8, "*the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure*"—*for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.*"

When we live our lives for God, based on the cleansing given by the cross of Jesus, we become like our Risen Lord Jesus and we attract admiration from people. The main lesson of this chapter 13 of Jeremiah is that it is imperative that we always acknowledge that the admiration we receive is for Christ in us, not admiration for us. This is the permanent cure for the dangerous sin of pride, and this is the key to being useful and living lives of permanent meaning and purpose.