

“Pompous Pride in the Eyes of the Lord”
Isaiah 23

The oracle concerning Tyre.

*Wail, O ships of Tarshish,
for Tyre is laid waste, without house or harbor!
From the land of Cyprus
it is revealed to them.*

*² Be still, O inhabitants of the coast;
the merchants of Sidon, who cross the sea, have filled you.*

*³ And on many waters
your revenue was the grain of Shihor,
the harvest of the Nile;
you were the merchant of the nations.*

*⁴ Be ashamed, O Sidon, for the sea has spoken,
the stronghold of the sea, saying:
“I have neither labored nor given birth,
I have neither reared young men
nor brought up young women.”*

*⁵ When the report comes to Egypt,
they will be in anguish over the report about Tyre.*

*⁶ Cross over to Tarshish;
wail, O inhabitants of the coast!*

*⁷ Is this your exultant city
whose origin is from days of old,
whose feet carried her
to settle far away?*

*⁸ Who has purposed this
against Tyre, the bestower of crowns,
whose merchants were princes,
whose traders were the honored of the earth?*

*⁹ The LORD of hosts has purposed it,
to defile the pompous pride of all glory,
to dishonor all the honored of the earth.*

*¹⁰ Cross over your land like the Nile,
O daughter of Tarshish;
there is no restraint anymore.*

*¹¹ He has stretched out his hand over the sea;
he has shaken the kingdoms;
the LORD has given command concerning Canaan*

to destroy its strongholds.

12 And he said:

*“You will no more exult,
O oppressed virgin daughter of Sidon;
arise, cross over to Cyprus,
even there you will have no rest.”*

13 Behold the land of the Chaldeans! This is the people that was not; Assyria destined it for wild beasts. They erected their siege towers, they stripped her palaces bare, they made her a ruin.

*14 Wail, O ships of Tarshish,
for your stronghold is laid waste.*

15 In that day Tyre will be forgotten for seventy years, like the days of one king. At the end of seventy years, it will happen to Tyre as in the song of the prostitute:

*16 “Take a harp;
go about the city,
O forgotten prostitute!
Make sweet melody;
sing many songs,
that you may be remembered.”*

17 At the end of seventy years, the LORD will visit Tyre, and she will return to her wages and will prostitute herself with all the kingdoms of the world on the face of the earth. ¹⁸ Her merchandise and her wages will be holy to the LORD. It will not be stored or hoarded, but her merchandise will supply abundant food and fine clothing for those who dwell before the LORD.

- Isaiah 23, ESV

Is Pride Always a Bad Thing?

What’s the one core area of life where the Bible and the modern American mindset disagree the most? Human sexuality? Human identity? Materialism? Evolution vs Creation?

I would propose that there’s a deeper, underlying core issue that’s even more fundamental and foundational than any of these – Pride. In America, pride is a bipartisan virtue – from conservatives who wear things that say “Made with Pride in America” and “America Pride” to progressives who organize Pride Parades and who are convinced that low self-esteem and self-worth are the real reasons why people commit crimes – everyone in America seems to celebrate pride. And yet, Biblically, pride is the root sin, the core problem with rebellious humanity.

C.S. Lewis so eloquently expressed it this way –

There is one vice of which no man in the world is free; which everyone in the world loathes when he sees it in someone else and of which hardly any people, except Christians, ever imagine that they are guilty themselves. There is no fault which makes a man more unpopular, and no fault which we are more unconscious of in ourselves. And the more we have it ourselves, the more we dislike it in others.

According to Christian teachers, the essential vice, the utmost evil, is Pride. Unchastity, anger, greed, drunkenness, and all that, are mere fleabites in comparison. It was through pride that the Devil became the Devil: Pride leads to every other vice. It is the complete anti-God state of mind.

But you don't have to take C.S. Lewis' word for it. Proverbs 6:16-19 lists the sins that God hates –

*There are six things that the Lord hates,
seven that are an abomination to him:
haughty eyes, a lying tongue,
and hands that shed innocent blood,
a heart that devises wicked plans,
feet that make haste to run to evil,
a false witness who breathes out lies,
and one who sows discord among brothers.*

What is the first one in the list? Haughty eyes, or pride. And in the flow of these verses, the pride leads to the other actions.

To find the central idea of a passage in the Hebrew Bible, the place to look is often in the center, especially of a Psalm or a prophetic oracle. In the very heart of our text today, verse 9 says:

*The LORD of hosts has purposed it,
to defile the pompous pride of all glory,
to dishonor all the honored of the earth.*

But is pride always a bad thing? What is it that makes pride sinful?

Being satisfied with a job well done, appreciating the gifts God has given you, and acknowledging what those gifts are is not pride. Being proud of someone for working hard

and accomplishing something significant or feeling satisfied with your own hard work and accomplishments is not, in itself, pride – or, not sinful pride.

Pompous pride, or sinful pride, is always self-centered, comparison-based, and striving for more (dissatisfied / discontented):

1. Focused on how great I am and what I have done, not on how great God is and how thankful I am for what He has given and done.
2. Always comparing to others – only proud of being richer, faster, better than others.
3. Never satisfied or content – always reaching for more, grasping to accumulate more, especially craving power and control.

Because pride is indeed the root sin, we should not be surprised to find it deeply rooted in our own hearts and in the heart of every human culture, too.

I. The Pompous Pride of Tyre and Sidon,

And so God exposes the pompous pride of Tyre and Sidon, the leading cities of the Phoenician civilization. What are they proud of? Their ships (v. 1), their merchants (v. 2), their revenue (v. 3), their power to bestow crowns (v. 8), their honor (v. 8), and their palaces (v. 13) are some of the specific things named in this passage.

A. The Economic Greatness of the Phoenicians

The Phoenicians lived along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea to the northeast of Israel. Hiram, the King of Tyre, was a major support of both David and Solomon and provided them with the strong wood used for their palaces and for the Temple. They were a sea-going, trading people. Because they had the best boats and the best sailing ability on the rough and unpredictable Mediterranean Sea, they got incredibly wealthy and spread their influence far and wide across the known world.

B. The Intellectual Greatness of the Phoenicians

There's another greatness of the Phoenicians not mentioned in this chapter, and that is the fact that they invented the alphabet. When we talk about a phonetic alphabet or phonics, we're talking about the Phoenicians. This is one of the most important intellectual contributions to the history of humanity. It may be because they traded with so many people who spoke such different languages that they needed a way to spell out what people were saying. Whatever the reason, the technology required to build their ships and to navigate properly and the phonetic alphabet all bear witness to an intellectual greatness that enabled their economic greatness.

C. The Cultural Greatness of the Phoenicians

And, finally, because of their contact with many other cultures, the Phoenicians were one of the most culturally advanced and sophisticated civilizations of their day.

II. The Pompous Pride of America and Americans

We can draw many parallels and direct comparisons between ancient Phoenicia and modern America. America is the global superpower, and Phoenicia never was, but still, we can see some similar reasons for greatness.

A. Military Superiority

Like the Phoenicians, America has the greatest ships in the world. We have the greatest navy and the most superior military. At times, this has caused us to think we could solve any problem or accomplish anything with our military might. We also are responsible for more shipping of more goods all over the world.

B. Economic Dominance

Like Phoenicia, America is an economic powerhouse, trading with countries all over the world. We have products from all over the world and have spread our products worldwide, from Coca-Cola to McDonalds to KFC. We even have famous brands that get imitated in unusual ways – KFC, Squarebucks, and Stars and Bucks in Bethlehem. Everyone in Israel speaks English and takes dollars.

C. Intellectual Achievements

America has also been responsible for so many intellectual achievements that have created our modern world – from the telegraph and telephone to assembly line manufacturing to the Internet and smartphones – the modern technological world we live in is, in many ways, “Made in America” or at least, was invented in America.

D. Cultural Influence

American also has a tremendously widespread cultural influence – through Hollywood movies and YouTube and popular music from Taylor Swift and Beyonce and other global superstars.

A very common and understandably human reaction to this greatness is to exult in ourselves. In the face of rising greatness and competition from Asia – especially from China and India and Korea – we might think we need to be even greater and the world needs us to be great. It's very easy to fall into this trap. Even one of my all-time favorite presidents called America “a city on a hill” and “the last, best hope of man on earth.” In the 1980's, facing the global threat of communism, it's understandable where this sentiment came from, and it certainly was effective in rallying Americans to win the Cold War.

But this kind of pompous pride mixed with self-righteousness – the idea that we need to be great because only we are good, etc. – is exactly the kind of thinking the Lord condemns, especially when it is atheistic and self-centered, as it increasingly is in our times.

III. The Lord Judges Pompous Pride

So, how does God respond to pompous pride? Well, this is something the Bible is abundantly clear about from the beginning to the end. Here in Isaiah 23, we get the Lord's sentence against Tyre and Sidon in verses 9-16:

*The LORD of hosts has purposed it,
to defile the pompous pride of all glory,
to dishonor all the honored of the earth.*

*¹⁰ Cross over your land like the Nile,
O daughter of Tarshish;
there is no restraint anymore.*

*¹¹ He has stretched out his hand over the sea;
he has shaken the kingdoms;
the LORD has given command concerning Canaan
to destroy its strongholds.*

*¹² And he said:
“You will no more exult,
O oppressed virgin daughter of Sidon;
arise, cross over to Cyprus,
even there you will have no rest.”*

¹³ Behold the land of the Chaldeans! This is the people that was not; Assyria destined it for wild beasts. They erected their siege towers, they stripped her palaces bare, they made her a ruin.

*¹⁴ Wail, O ships of Tarshish,
for your stronghold is laid waste.*

15 In that day Tyre will be forgotten for seventy years, like the days of one king. At the end of seventy years, it will happen to Tyre as in the song of the prostitute:

*16 “Take a harp;
go about the city,
O forgotten prostitute!
Make sweet melody;
sing many songs,
that you may be remembered.”*

The Lord says that He will lay low the glory of Tyre and Sidon, and that He will do so through the Babylonians – the Chaldeans – who have recently been destroyed by the Assyrians. If you remember from a couple of weeks ago, Isaiah had a traumatic vision of the destruction of Babylon at the hands of the Assyrians, and yet Babylon will rise again and will destroy Tyre and Sidon. Like Jerusalem, the Phoenicians will be judged by the Lord for 70 years.

This is both a literal prophecy, because both Jerusalem and Tyre were destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar but then restored by the Medo-Persian Empire after 70 years. But also, 70 years of judgment is a representative number meaning God will impose the judgment He has decreed for His appointed purposes and His appointed length of time.

Next week, we’ll see that the Lord will judge all the nations in His time for His purposes. By the way, after next week’s judgment oracle, we’ll be taking a turn toward some more positive prophecies in Isaiah, although most of that will wait until the Fall while we once again do a summer series in the Psalms. This summer, we’ll be focusing on Psalms that rejoice in the Lord as the King of Creation with Creation Hymns and Kingship Psalms.

But from the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11 to the final fall of Babylon the Great in Revelation 18, the Lord consistently proclaims that He judges and humbles nations that exalt themselves in pompous pride. So, beware of following any national leader who exalts himself in pompous pride, for such pompousness invites God’s judgment. And if your response to that is that all American politicians these days are guilty of that, then take heed and take it to heart. Learn to read the signs of the times.

God judges, according to His purposes and in His timing. But the last verse of Isaiah 23 gives us the eternal perspective and our hope: Judgment is not the final plan of the Lord.

IV. The Lord’s Plan for the Pompously Proud

“Her merchandise and her wages will be holy to the Lord. It will not be stored or hoarded, but her merchandise will supply abundant food and fine clothing for those who dwell before the Lord.” – Isaiah 23:18, ESV

Here we have to pull back from the prideful perspective of boasting humanity and see the truth: Everything good in the world comes from God and is intended for His glory.

“For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.” – Romans 11:36, ESV

And, in the end, God will reclaim all that He has given for His glory and the eternal good of His people. Psalm 47:8-9 puts it this way –

*God reigns over the nations;
God sits on his holy throne.
The princes of the peoples gather
as the people of the God of Abraham.
For the shields of the earth belong to God;
he is highly exalted! (ESV)*

And Revelation 21, after the downfall and judgment of Babylon, shows us this reality about the New Jerusalem –

And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life. – Rev. 21:23-27, ESV

In the end, everything that God has given in the world is given for good, People misuse it and abuse it for their own selfish ends, but God will redeem all His people and all of His creation, including the creation He gave us through the hands of people. He will gather His people from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation – no one will be excluded. He will then gather in all the good creation He has given and it will be used for the purposes for which he gave it – to glorify Him and bless His people.

How does this redemption come? Only through Jesus Christ. His death and resurrection provides forgiveness of sin and eternal life - resurrection life - for all who trust in Him. In Him is the firstfruits of the new creation and the guarantee of the full redemption of all creation.

What is the opposite of pride? What is true humility?

In the meantime, as we await that glorious day, the Lord is calling us to walk in humility. Three times the Lord tells us in His word that He opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. (Proverbs 3:34, James 4:6; I Peter 5:5)

But true humility is not thinking poorly of yourself or beating yourself up or downplaying your accomplishments. No, true humility is much more joyful, content, grateful, and focused on God and others. True humility begins by seeing everything in our lives as a gift from God, be given by his grace and for his glory.

In gratitude, humility praises God and seeks to use the good gifts God has given to bring glory to his name and to bring a blessing to others. True humility is neither self-exalting pride nor self-loathing shame but is rather self-forgetting love for God and others. It is freed from either being puffed up with pride or beaten up with shame. It is free to live a life of worship and love.

This kind of joyful and freeing humility is possible only through the salvation that comes by grace through faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ and from a perspective that sees all of life as from God and for God. In this perspective, we don't look down on everything in a morose self-hatred but neither do we try to take credit for ourselves and advance our own name and agenda. We are free to walk in a humble confidence and in a loving gratitude toward God and others.

May the Lord be pleased to give us such a vision of Christ and his excellence and of the abundant grace that we receive day by day that will free us to walk in this kind of joyful and grateful humility.