

## Who am I?

Hello Dear Listeners;

Here is a question for you, and for me!

Who am I?

I'm tougher than the toughest dandelion.

I'm the cause of things like murder and adultery - but no one sees me, lurking in the background.

I was the devil's first sin - and I'm your sin, too.

Who am I?

Pride.

### One sermon

The Englishman G. K. Chesterton once said, "I had one sermon to preach, I would preach on pride . . . all evil began because there was a sneer in Heaven." The Bible tells us that man's sin, too, began because he wanted "*to be like God.*" Let me for a few moments take you on a journey exploring this sin - and also how God addresses it.

Let me count the ways . . .

How pervasive is your pride?

Let me take the lead, here.

Pride is why I often feel hurt or wounded. Pride is why I won't admit I don't know something. I'm reminded of C.S. Lewis's observation that the devil loves to cure a small sin with a bigger one.

Someone else observed that insecurity is a sign of pride. Strange - but I think it's true.

Pride is at the root of so many of our sins. Why are we irritable and difficult to live with? "*Pride breeds quarrels*" we read in the Bible book of Proverbs ( ch. 13:10). Why do we so often fail to love other

like we should? Because at bottom we really look down on them. It's pride that suffocates our love.

### **The Good Samaritan**

Take a look, for instance, at the parable of the Good Samaritan. In this story Jesus confronts someone who came to him thinking he was pretty good. "What do I have to do, Jesus, to inherit eternal life?" he asks. When Jesus tells him to love God and his neighbor, he asks, "And who is my neighbor?"

In the parable Jesus tells in response there's a priest, a Levite, and a Samaritan. When they see a wounded traveler, beaten and left for dead on the side of the road, the first two pass by without a pause. It takes a Samaritan to love and care for the injured man.

### **Lesser humans and heretics**

Like all of Jesus' stories, there's a deeper message. It's more than a story about loving people in need. The point of the story, as you may know, relies on the fact that in those days Jews looked down on Samaritans. They were seen as no-account heretics.

Now notice the story doesn't go like you might think it would - that in the end, a Jew helps a Samaritan. Instead, it's the *Samaritan* who helps the Jew!

The point of the parable then is not just to tell us to love everyone. In Jesus' story a Samaritan is better at love - better than two Jewish holy men, even. It's a Jew who is at the side of the road, in need of some serious help - and he has to accept the help of a Samaritan!

Can you imagine the Jews listening, bristling? I certainly can.

Some commentators think the Good Samaritan is a reference to Jesus. Possible - it does fit with the flavor of the story. The man who first asks about love, needs to see he has a bigger problem - one of pride. And that's true for all of us.

### **Infected with Pride**

Do I need to describe further how infected we are with pride? Just look at the auditions for American or Canadian Idol - how easy it is to think we're great when we're not. I write "we" - because that's ourselves, too, up there on stage. This is the sort of thing our self-centered society encourages in all of us.

C.S. Lewis noted that pride is quite good at camouflage. But there are ways to glimpse your own pride. When you see the pride of others, for instance. Why does their pride irk you? That's your own pride, drawn into action. There's nothing that bothers pride more than other pride.

### **God's answer**

In the Bible we see a God who deals with pride.

First of all, he does it in judgment, in the consequences of sin.

Look at that first sin, Adam and Eve, wanting to be like God. Did they get what they desired? In Genesis 3 we read- "*Then their eyes were opened,*" (sort of what the devil had promised) "and they realized they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together."

Imagine that! Promised to be like God! Now they're fumbling with fig leaves. They have new knowledge - but it's of guilt and shame. Sin always leads to shame - and that's God, in his poetic justice - dealing with the pride that goes before the fall. Hell is a big part of this, too. Hell is first of all a place of shame (see Daniel 12:2.) Hell

is a place where human pride is silenced forever.

### **Mirror, Mirror**

Look at the rest of the Old Testament. It puts us all down a notch or two. We see ugly stuff, like Cain kill Abel, a world so bad God sends a flood, even King David committing adultery. In fact, the people of God as a whole don't seem to have a faithful bone in their body. In the end, they are carted off into exile and the temple is destroyed.

In many ways, the first half of the Bible is a long sober look in the mirror. Your reaction after reading the Old Testament is supposed to be one of humility, even humiliation.

It's to lead you to one conclusion: we've got it bad, we're in over our head. Our bragging and babbling about ourselves ought to stop. We need serious help - from no one less than God himself.

### **Bitter-sweet**

And that's how the New Testament opens. Jesus is born - the Son of God. It's both joyful and humiliating at the same time. It's like a teenager in trouble so bad that mom or dad actually has to show up in person to bail them out.

Look at the work of Jesus, too. It's not something little. He has to die for us, he has to live for us. All we do can and must do is accept it in faith.

Salvation, too, is a beautiful way God deals with our pride. We don't make a single contribution, we don't offer God a penny. Which is good, because spiritually we haven't got a single one. Salvation costs us nothing - except our pride.

## **Level ground**

The Apostle Paul in the book of Ephesians. notes that in the church all social conventions are destroyed - and as a result even proud Jews and proud Gentiles get along.

How so? Because to be a Christian means to put aside all pretensions, everything you're proud of, be frank about your spiritual poverty and utter helplessness, and together drink completely from the forgiveness of God in Jesus Christ. The ground at the cross is level - even between kings and slaves.

## **Stunned into silence**

There's more. Look at the transformation Jesus works in his followers. He makes sinners into saints. He teaches those prone to hatred to love - not just their neighbour, but God. How can we proudly keep talking about ourselves? The marvel and magnitude of what Jesus does in the lives of his followers has to forever change our tune.

God has a wonderful way of dealing with human pride. He not only answer pride in judgment, but also in salvation. He sends his own Son, he works so greatly in our lives with his Spirit, so that in the end, we are forever humbled, stunned into silence, by what is so clearly his power, *His* love, *His* grace.

And nothing of us. In fact, when Jesus' work in his followers is finished and unveiled on the last day, even demons will be stunned, drop not just their jaw but their pride, and confess the greatness of God!

## Two ways

There are two ways you can live. Two kinds of pride, you might say. The one is all about you. Or you can abandon that and turn humbly to Jesus. And then you will learn instead to boast in God!

The one is shrill and hollow, and gets thinner by the moment. The other is beautiful and ever deeper. The one is the old tune of the devil. The other is new song of God. The one alienates you, isolates you. The other joins you to others, even a whole new creation, that together into eternity will revel in the goodness and power of God.

Which will it be? Amen and

Thanks for listening.