

Pride

In 1839, Jean-Baptiste Alphonse Karr became the editor of one of France's leading newspapers. He also began a monthly journal which contained bitter satirical wit. For example, as the French debated abolishing capital punishment, he wrote "let the gentlemen who do the murders take the first step".

There is another phrase for which he may claim credit. It is one that we still use. I will spare you my "rusty" French and provide the translation.

"The more things change, the more they continue to be the same thing." This is usually translated as "The more things change, the more they stay the same."

With this introduction, Let's read from a minor prophet a stinging rebuke directed at the religious leaders of that day. Keep in mind this is written more than 700 years before Jesus was born. We will read first from Micah and then we will turn our attention to the words of Jesus recorded in Matthew. We will notice that even after more than 700 years, exiles and returns, Jerusalem and Solomon's temple destroyed and the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem not much has changed.

Let's open our Bibles to Micah the 3rd chapter. You will find Micah immediately following Jonah and just before Nahum.

Now hear this, heads of the house of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel, Who abhor justice and twist everything that is straight, who build Zion with bloodshed and Jerusalem with violent injustice. Her leaders pronounce judgement for a bribe, her priests instruct for a price and her prophets divine for money. Yet they lean on the LORD saying, "Is not the LORD in our midst?

Calamity will not come upon us."

Therefore, on account of you Zion will be plowed as a field, Jerusalem will become a heap of ruins, and the mountain of the temple will become high places of a forest. (Micah 3:9-12 NASB)

God is speaking through Micah and telling the religious leaders of that day their corrupt ways would bring ruin to their nation. In this brief passage, we get an idea of the corruption that had grown into the religious circles. We also see that God is not pleased. God tells them, in a few verses that their temple and capital will be left in ruins.

Just days before His crucifixion, Jesus has had His last conversation with the Pharisees. We mentioned this last week. Jesus is now in the presence of His disciples and others who have gathered to hear Him. He gives a scathing assessment of the Pharisees. Before we read through the words of Jesus, I share these words from St. Augustine of Hippo.

In his treatise, The City of God, Augustine of Hippo wrote: "*Pride is the beginning of sin. And what is pride but the craving for undue exaltation? And this is undue exaltation - when the soul abandons Him to whom it ought to cleave as its end, and becomes a kind of end to itself.*"

That last phrase tells a truth that we should always remember: *when the soul abandons Him to whom it ought to cleave as its end, and becomes a kind of end to itself.* As we open our Bibles to the 23rd chapter of Matthew, reflect on Augustine's suggestion of pride being the beginning of sin.

There are times when we forget that the Bible was broken into chapters and verses many hundreds of years after they were written. This section may be a continuation of the previous

conversation when Jesus asked **“What do you think about the Christ, whose son is He?” (Matthew 22:42 NASB)** In the opening section of the 23rd chapter, Jesus leads those listening to a point where they must choose. They may continue to follow their religious leaders or they may follow Jesus and accept that He is the Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed One. In this chapter, Jesus uses strong language to describe the current leaders. He uses words like fools, hypocrites, blind guides, and son of hell. Earlier this morning we read from Micah and we find more than 700 years later, the leaders are still twisting scripture and misleading their followers.

Then Jesus spoke to the crowds and to His disciples, saying: “The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses; therefore, all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say *things* and do not do *them*. (Matthew 23:1-3 NASB)

Earlier, Jesus had spoken directly to the Pharisees and warned them of their hypocrisy (Matthew 15:7). Later he had talked with His disciple about the Pharisees and Sadducees (Matthew 16:5-12). Now, Jesus is open with His remarks to the crowd.

The shadow of the cross is looming over the scene. It is time for all to see and decide whether to follow Jesus as the Christ.

The reference to Moses’ chair is one that would be familiar to those who had been in the temple. In the temple, there was a stone chair near the front and close to the scrolls of the Law. Anyone sitting in this chair was indicating that they were successors to Moses and entitled to speak with the same authority.

Jesus points out that, while they may be of the lineage of Moses and entitled to sit in this chair, they failed to live consistently with their own teachings.

In the next portion of our scripture, we will see the element of pride in the religious leaders, as we continue our reading starting at verse 4.

They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on men’s shoulders, but they themselves are unwilling to move them with *so much as* a finger. But they do all their deeds to be noticed by men; for they broaden their phylacteries and lengthen the tassels of *their garments*. They love the place of honor at banquets and the chief seats in the synagogues, and respectful greetings in the market places, and being called Rabbi by men. But do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers. Do not call *anyone* on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. Do not be called leaders; for One is your Leader, *that is*, Christ. (Matthew 23:4-10 NASB)

These pious leaders had gone beyond the actual commandments God gave to Moses and followed a strict set of traditions that had developed over the years. They expected everyone to follow the same traditions and burdensome rules. Observing these traditions was a weight few could bear.

Jesus offered relief from this when He said: **“Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.” (Matthew 11:28-30 NASB)**

The religious leaders wanted to be seen and revered within the community. They dressed in a manner to call attention and demanded to be seated in the best and desired seats. They wore phylacteries on their forehead and wrapped around their arms. These phylacteries were leather boxes that contained certain scriptures from the Law.

In Exodus 13:9, there is a mention that the Law should be on their hands and on their foreheads as a reminder that the law of the Lord should be in their mouth. The pharisees made it a point to wear large boxes and place them where all could see. The tassels of their garments were large

and ostentatious. They wanted everyone to see that they were the experts on the Law of Moses. They loved to be called by special names or titles.

Everything that was done for show points to the arrogance and pride rather than pointing toward God. Jesus then returns to a common theme as we read the next two verses.

But the greatest among you shall be your servant. Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted. (Matthew 23:11-12 NASB)

Jesus has just exposed the Pharisees. He has directed the light of truth on them and shown them to be hypocrites. Their interest is more in being placed in a position of honor than helping others live in harmony with God. They are guilty of the very thing that many accused the Gentile rulers. Pride is a disease that may afflict anyone. Even those in the close inner-circle with Jesus wanted positions of honor. We may remember when the mother of the sons of Zebedee (James and John) appealed to Jesus to allow her sons to sit on either side of Jesus in His kingdom.

The message of Jesus for the apostles was this: **“You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and *their* great men exercise authority over them. It is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” (Matthew 20:25-28 NASB)**

This Christ, the Messiah did not come to be served but to serve. There is no pride in Jesus.

Later, on the night of his betrayal, He washed the feet of the disciples, even the feet of the one who sold Him out to the very leaders of whom Jesus speaks about in today’s passage. This is our example.

The Sheriff of Jones County often quote this phrase: ***“If serving is beneath you, leadership is beyond you.”*** This is a quote and I never found the origin. However, it closely aligns with the teachings of Jesus. The idea that pride is a quality that we should avoid is not a new teaching of Jesus. We may again turn to the minor prophet Micah where he tells us what is pleasing to God. Let’s read in Micah the 6th chapter verse 6-8.

With what shall I come to the LORD *and* bow myself before the God on high?

Shall I come to Him with burnt offerings, with yearling calves?

Does the LORD take delight in thousands of rams, in ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I present my firstborn *for* my rebellious acts, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you

But to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? (Micah 6:6-8 NASB)

This morning, the question for each of us is simple. Have we become modern day Pharisees? Are we living in an arrogant pride that we follow certain religious forms that we fail to see the needs of those around us? Are we like those of whom God spoke in Isaiah when He said: **this people draw near with their words and honor Me with their lip service, but they remove their hearts far from Me,**

And their reverence for Me consists of tradition learned *by rote*? (Isaiah 29:13 NASB)

Pride is a dangerous and deadly sin. Often, those who are infected with this sin fail to realize that they are guilty of the pride that robs God of His rightful place. Yes, God expects certain acts of worship. However, the acts of worship should be our expressions of love and adoration and not a burdensome load.