

Tyre of Pride. Ezekiel 28.

What do you say to . . . ?

After last Sunday evening's livestream we were having a brief discussion about how we can engage the confident and the comfortable with the Christian gospel, with the message that God has fixed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Lord Jesus whom He raised from the dead, and that forgiveness and life, eternal life, can be found by turning back to God by believing and following Jesus.

There seem so many in our society, amongst our neighbours and workmates, for whom that message – in whatever form and from whatever starting point it is shared – has no interest, no traction.

They are confident in themselves that they – humanity, or at least their slice of it – can solve all their own problems without God, that they are competent to run their own lives, can sustain their own prosperity and health, and individually and collectively withstand and overcome the shocks of the unexpected and unwanted – like Covid 19 – life on this planet throws at them. They don't need God for a full and satisfying life. They are ok on their own.

Confident, comfortable, complacent – and often critical of the beliefs and behaviours of followers of Jesus, of what they see as the unnecessary complications belief introduces into people's lives, how it stops people from getting on and living the life they want.

You might know people like that, be fearful for where they will stand in the judgment, and frustrated by your lack of ability to get through to them.

What do you say to the proud who think they have no need of God?

What does God say to the proud?

To answer that we have to start with what God says to the proud, and we find that very clearly in Ezekiel 28, addressed to the leader of the city of Tyre, someone whose heart v. 2, that is his mind and will, is proud.

Ezekiel 28: The word of the LORD came to me: ²“Son of man, say to the prince of Tyre, Thus says the Lord GOD:

*“Because your heart is proud,
and you have said, ‘I am a god,
I sit in the seat of the gods,
in the heart of the seas,’
yet you are but a man, and no god,
though you make your heart like the heart of a god—*

Ezekiel 25- 32 – the surrounding nations

Ezekiel 28 seems quite a shift from those parts of Ezekiel we have looked at so far. Up to chapter 24 Ezekiel's prophecies have been focused on the coming judgment of Jerusalem, its destruction by the forces of Nebuchenezzar. God has been trying to get the Jewish exiles in the province of Babylon to

accept its justice and its certainty, appealing to them to repent of the same idolatry and sins that had provoked God to act this way against His own sanctuary and people.

We reached a turning point in Ezekiel 24 with the news of the commencement of the siege, and you would expect Ezekiel to go on straight on and record the fulfilment of his prophecy in the fall of Jerusalem.

While he will do that, as we will see next week in Ezekiel 33, in between the announcement of the beginning of that siege, and the announcement of its end, Ezekiel has recorded in chapters 25-32 a whole series of prophecies of the LORD's judgments on the nations surrounding Israel.

Most, but not all of these, were given during the siege of Jerusalem. All concern nations that had colluded in planning rebellion against Nebuchednezzar, who had encouraged Judah's rebellion and then failed to help, some even taking delight and profit from Israel's defeat.

The very existence of these prophecies against the nations – found here and in Isaiah and Jeremiah and Daniel, was a reminder to the exiles and to us that the LORD is not some small tribal deity. He is the Creator, the LORD of heaven and earth, the LORD of human history.

He is not just the LORD of people who acknowledge Him, people who worship Him. He is the LORD of all, and He executes His judgments over all, and He can work His good purposes for His people in and through all. There is a lot there to think about and take comfort from as we see tensions rising between China and the US and Australia, or between Iran and its neighbours, or turmoil in Belarus. But today I want to focus on this prophecy against the King of Tyre, on what God says to the proud, including the proud who are not amongst His people, the proud who are completely unconcerned with the LORD

The prophecy of chapter 28 is just one part of the prophecy against Tyre which covers three chapters, 26-28. Tyre was an ancient Phoenecian city state located on the Mediterranean coast about 20 kilometres north of the current Israeli – Lebanon border. It had had dealings with Israel from the time of David. It was wealthy, dominating commerce in the region through its fleet which traded throughout the Mediterranean, and was currently independent of Babylon.

Tyre's prince or king is singled out, but is a representative of the whole city, of the whole society and its confident pride. In verses 1-10 we see first the expression of human pride, its origins, and its outcome. Then in verses 11-19, the lament for the King of Tyre, we see the pride of the rulers of Tyre presented in exaggerated, almost mythological language, to be a type of the ancient and recurring tragedy of creaturely pride.

The pride of Tyre vv. 1-10

Ezekiel 28: The word of the LORD came to me: ² "Son of man, say to the prince of Tyre, Thus says the Lord GOD:

*"Because your heart is proud,
and you have said, 'I am a god,
I sit in the seat of the gods,
in the heart of the seas,'
yet you are but a man, and no god,
though you make your heart like the heart of a god—*

v. 6 *Because you make your heart
like the heart of a god,*

⁹ *Will you still say, 'I am a god,'*

Expression

In v. 2 we see Tyre's pride expressed clearly.

'I am a god'. As far as we know the Tyrian kings did not, like Egyptian pharaohs, openly claim divine status. The prophet is distilling the attitude his actions and words reveal.

He claims divine status – that is the right to be accountable only to himself, to not be under anyone else's authority, to be able to sustain life and be the source of his own blessing, to have the world serve him.

He claims the authority of God

*I sit in the seat of the gods,
in the heart of the seas,'*

Sitting on the throne in his island palace he claims that he is on the throne of the gods, has the authority to exercise divine rule. He is exalted, and can execute his own judgments, and make sure his will is done in the world

He claims the knowledge, the insight of a god. That is what it is to *make your heart like the heart of a god*. The heart is the thinking and willing centre of our being. The king is claiming divine intelligence, a divine wisdom and will, so that he is confident that his decisions are the right decisions, decisions that will be effective in promoting his prosperity and security.

For humanity, individually or collectively, to claim divine status, authority, and wisdom is pride.

It is pride to claim that humanity rules, humanity alone.

That we are accountable to no one but ourselves

That we are the source of our own prosperity, can ensure our own security, are sufficient in ourselves to know all we need to know to live in the world.

While all the time, as the LORD observes in v. 9, being mortal.

Source

So what led to this claim being made.

The prophet points to Tyrian knowledge and wealth, that are then experienced in its beauty and splendor.

³ *you are indeed wiser than Daniel;
no secret is hidden from you;*

⁴ *by your wisdom and your understanding
you have made wealth for yourself,
and have gathered gold and silver
into your treasuries;*

⁵ *by your great wisdom in your trade
you have increased your wealth,
and your heart has become proud in your wealth—*

Wisdom is the knowledge that allows you to succeed and prosper in the world, and the prince is wiser even than Daniel – probably here the biblical Daniel, who was renowned for being able to negotiate the shifting currents in Babylonian political life and still prosper. The king of Tyre has negotiated the shifting currents of trade on the sea, always to his advantage.

Nothing is a mystery. The king can unlock all the secrets of the universe – what he needs to know about ships and navigation, about the winds and tides, trading partners and markets, and can discern people’s minds

The king is wise, knowledgeable – he can rely on his understanding and judgment. He doesn’t need anyone to tell him what he needs to know to prosper.

And through his wisdom he has amassed great wealth in trade vv. 4-5, wealth which is security – whether that is the ability to build bigger fleets, purchase the latest military hardware, buy abundant food, secure alternative homes, or pay off invaders.

By wisdom and wealth the city of Tyre is confident it can keep itself safe in the world, not needing anyone else.

And by its wisdom and wealth it is also adorned with beauty and splendor. The king has continually reinforced to him by the plenty of his table, the opulence of his wardrobe, and his built environment his and his city’s power, glory and status.

His knowledge, his wealth, his beauty – all say you are special, you are self sufficient, you are a god; they all allow him to live with his proud illusion, and to share that with his society.

So often that’s the way isn’t it. Wealth and knowledge that allows us to control our environment to achieve our goals and secure our comfort, health and security, make us proud, proud enough to say, or to at least think ‘I am, we are, gods’

But he is not a god. These proud claims will find their contradiction in his death, the death he shares with all people. But the Lord prophesies his end will come in a way that particularly shows up the emptiness of his claims

Outcome

⁶ *therefore thus says the Lord GOD:*

*Because you make your heart
like the heart of a god,*

⁷ *therefore, behold, I will bring foreigners upon you,
the most ruthless of the nations;*

*and they shall draw their swords against the beauty of your wisdom
and defile your splendor.*

⁸ *They shall thrust you down into the pit,
and you shall die the death of the slain
in the heart of the seas.*

⁹ *Will you still say, ‘I am a god,’*

*in the presence of those who kill you,
though you are but a man, and no god,
in the hands of those who slay you?
¹⁰ You shall die the death of the uncircumcised
by the hand of foreigners;
for I have spoken, declares the Lord GOD.”*

The LORD will bring v. 7 the most ruthless of peoples, the Babylonians. This is His world, and he directs the affairs even of empires to do His bidding. They will despoil Tyre and bring it down to death. It will be a humiliating death v.10 – for to the circumcised Phoenicians the death of the uncircumcised was an unclean and uncivilised death.

Mortality is the great denial of any claim to be a god, and in the terror, v. 9 of that death Tyre will have exposed the lie of their proud claims..

We all, no matter what we claim, die. The living God alone has life in Himself.

And the living God can end our life when He wills. We are unable to resist His will

The almighty God can bring about what we cannot even imagine, what we do not desire, what we cannot prevent. Like our lives, our wisdom, strength and resources are finite.

And this is not true only of the King of Tyre, of the people of ancient Tyre. This is true of all the children of Adam, and the lament that follows helps us see the circumstances of every proud human in the history of the king of Tyre.

Tyre’s story retold as a type of the human tragedy vv. 11-19

The language here is deliberately exaggerated, with the glory of Tyre and its leader expressed in the most grandiose way. This may well echo the way they spoke of themselves, and also their own accounts of the first human and the garden of God. But it is also used to bring home what is true, that humanity as created was glorious and privileged, equipped in every way for rule, endowed with splendour, to make the reader recall Genesis chapters 1-3

While some, moved by the richness of the language, have taken this as recollecting some ancient story of the fall of the devil, this account, like the one in Isaiah 14, is speaking of humans. It speaks v. 12 explicitly of the king of Tyre, and it speaks in ways that recollect the fall of Adam.

In both the King’s attributes, and his fall, we can see every proud human.

Ezekiel 28: ¹¹ Moreover, the word of the LORD came to me: ¹² “Son of man, raise a lamentation over the king of Tyre, and say to him, Thus says the Lord GOD:

*“You were the signet of perfection,
full of wisdom and perfect in beauty.
¹³ You were in Eden, the garden of God;
every precious stone was your covering,
sardius, topaz, and diamond,
beryl, onyx, and jasper,
sapphire, emerald, and carbuncle;
and crafted in gold were your settings*

and your engravings.

*On the day that you were created
they were prepared.*

¹⁴ *You were an anointed guardian cherub.
I placed you; you were on the holy mountain of God;
in the midst of the stones of fire you walked.*

¹⁵ *You were blameless in your ways
from the day you were created,
till unrighteousness was found in you.*

Human glory embodied vv. 12-14

The king is portrayed v. 12 as the embodiment of human glory. As His signet or seal He is the representative of the true King, the Creator, perfectly proportioned, fitted for this role in creation.

He had all wisdom, and was perfect in beauty. Endowed with knowledge, nothing was out of place. His movements were marked by grace and strength.

His home, v. 13, was a paradise, Eden – a realm of prosperity and joy, and he was richly adorned with the treasures of the earth.

His was glory and splendour

And notice – these were God’s gifts

Wisdom, beauty, wealth – these are not wrong in themselves.

They are part of God’s good creation.

Just as this glorious creature was created by God

On the day you were created v. 13, v. 15

The LORD was the source of this beauty and perfection

And it was the LORD v. 14 who had given him his privileged position – I placed you, and it was the LORD who gave him the responsibility as ‘the guardian cherub’ to protect and preserve this Eden in all its splendor.

But the language of Eden also prompts us to think of the first man, Adam and Eve, and their endowment. Of the goodness and abundance of God’s provision to humanity in their creating.

Sometimes in the life of the privileged and able you can get a glimpse of what humanity might have been, was designed to be – beautiful, created to rule creation for its good, equipped with understanding to rule creation, and in that to show the goodness and generosity of the Creator

Wisdom, beauty, wealth – these are not wrong in themselves.

They are part of God’s good creation. The problem is found in us, not in our location or God’s provision, just as the problem was found in the King of Tyre

¹⁵ *You were blameless in your ways
from the day you were created,
till unrighteousness was found in you.*

Human Fall repeated vv. 15-19

Ezekiel outlines what the king and people of Tyre did with God's good gifts and the opportunities it gave them in verses 16-18, in each verse outlining their sin and its consequences – presented as a fall of epic proportions, from the mount of God to the earth, a loss of position and privilege.

¹⁶ *In the abundance of your trade
you were filled with violence in your midst, and you sinned;
so I cast you as a profane thing from the mountain of God,
and I destroyed you, O guardian cherub,
from the midst of the stones of fire.*

In seeking wealth through trade v. 16 they embraced violence, oppressing and exploiting others;

¹⁷ *Your heart was proud because of your beauty;
you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor.
I cast you to the ground;
I exposed you before kings,
to feast their eyes on you.*

their beauty and wisdom v. 17 made them arrogant, and in their arrogance, in their desire to maintain their position they embraced intellectual corruption, abandoning truth and the fear of God to promote self interest

¹⁸ *By the multitude of your iniquities,
in the unrighteousness of your trade
you profaned your sanctuaries;
so I brought fire out from your midst;
it consumed you,
and I turned you to ashes on the earth
in the sight of all who saw you.*

and then v. 18 their dishonest and corrupt trading practices in turn 'made a mockery of their religious practice' [Wenham]

Rejecting God's rule, claiming they were gods, they took God's good gifts and used them to enhance their own rule and position, elevating themselves over others. They acknowledged no constraint upon their behaviour except their own interests – as gods the world was there to serve them, and they were accountable to no one but themselves. Not the nations they wronged in trade, not the people they oppressed in their pride, not the God who had made them.

And like Adam who claimed equality with God, who wanted in eating the fruit to become autonomous, the determiner for himself of good and evil, right and wrong, to make decisions not on God's word but on what suited him, they are cast from God's presence v. 16, their folly is exposed to all v. 17, and they are left v. 18 to the consequences of their pride in their own society – I brought fire out from your midst.

Denying God, claiming equality with God, does not stop the LORD being God, being the just judge of all, a God who in Isaiah's words

Isaiah 13:11 "I will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; I will put an end to the pomp of the arrogant, and lay low the pompous pride of the ruthless."

In God's judgment on Tyre the Proverb proves true '*Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall*' Prov. 16:18

And that will always be the case in the world God rules.

For His glory and our own good the LORD will always oppose human pride, for when the creature claims to be god we oppress others and destroy ourselves – for we are finite and mortal, and can only sustain our claims by dangerous self deception that exposes us to destructive folly, or by forcing others to bow down to us, others who will contest our claim to be god in favour of their own.

Seeing ourselves in Tyre

In retelling Tyre's pride and fall in the language of Adam this prophecy is a warning to all the proud, a warning wealthy western nations like ours should heed.

We are also a nation which has grown rich on trade, and like Tyre we are proud – comfortable, complacent, confident in ourselves.

We don't say 'I am a god'.

No, our society says 'There is no god'.

While we tolerate people keeping their own private personal gods for their personal comfort, we don't acknowledge a real God who rules and judges, on whom our lives and prosperity depend.

And claiming there is no god we have moved ourselves into the place of God, confident we have the wisdom and knowledge to secure our own wealth and safety, that we can unlock all the secrets of the world

Confident to set and live by our own rules.

Some examples – you can probably provide your own.

As every one of you who has been asked by your work which pronoun you prefer to be referred to by, our society believes we have a right to define our own identity, whether we are he, she or whatever

Our society believes we can redefine marriage, rejecting it as given by God.

Confident in our knowledge and insights we engage in great social experiments – abandoning the restriction of sex and child bearing to marriage, marginalising the permanency of marriage, the authority of parents, the significance of biology

And we can solve our own problems. Look at the response to the pandemic. We are praying, but where is the public call to turn to God for mercy? No need. We can beat this on our own, putting our trust in science. And we can secure our own economic recovery – we have the resources.

And to secure our wealth we are happy to oppress, whether it is bugging the Prime Minister of Timor Leste's office [2004] to give us advantage in treaty negotiations, or seeking to withhold workers entitlements – even our universities have been found out underpaying their staff.

We are a proud, an increasingly proud, society – trusting in our wisdom and wealth like Tyre to keep us secure and comfortable, corrupting our wisdom to embrace folly in the name of preserving our own sense of godlikeness, our own autonomy.

The judgment on pride is a judgment our society should fear, a judgment each one should fear if you, a mortal, are living as if you are the god of your own life, living by your own rules, accountable only to your own judgement, or that of your like minded peers, putting all your trust in your own wisdom.

But it is not just enough for believers to say that our society is proud and must humble itself before its Maker

We believers live in our society and unless we actively resist we take on, like a chameleon, the colours, the attitudes, of those we live amongst.

Seeing our pride it is worth asking, as I have been asking myself, How might the pride of a prosperous self sufficient society have seeped into our thinking as believers?

Test all things, but here are some suggestions

Unconcern for the poor? That was the sin, according to Ezekiel 16:49, of proud Sodom. How much do we factor in provision for the poor here and overseas into our spending decisions? Do we give more than our spare change?

A lack of thankfulness for the common goods of this life – peace, plenty, health? Is heartfelt thankfulness slipping out of our common and private prayers?

Do we invest in and rely more on our programs and techniques than prayer and faithfulness for evangelism or raising up gospel workers?

Do we as Christians expect cultural dominance and privilege – that we should have the good jobs and positions of influence, and that we alone in the Christian family should not have to sacrifice and suffer?

Do we think, like our post Christian society that we can sustain the fruit of Christian behaviour without the root of a living faith expressed in each day dying to ourselves to follow Jesus by doing what He teaches us?

As I look at my life, what I invest my time in, the nature of my prayers, and plans, I am convicted that conformity to our proud world is never far away, and that I need to be continually transformed.

What about you?

But how?

How can we escape pride and its judgment and learn to walk humbly with God?

Escaping Pride [Mark 10:43-45, 1 Cor. 1:18-25]

Because pride is an attitude, a belief, about ourselves, escaping pride starts in our thinking, our thinking about ourselves. So let me tell you four truths that if embraced will free you from pride.

Firstly, we are creatures. Finite in wisdom and power, with our life a gift from our Creator who is infinitely greater. He has no limit to His might or wisdom. He gives us life, and He can take it when He chooses, and HE has every right to. We are the clay, and He is the potter; He exalts, and He brings

down, and He is not accountable to us in any way. He is the source of all the good we enjoy, our work and wisdom the means, not the cause, of enjoying His provision. Humility comes with confessing we are creatures, our life dependent on our Creator.

Secondly, we are sinners. We are deceived and self-deceiving, in darkness unless the LORD shines the light of truth into our lives. We corrupt all our thinking and actions with self-love, a self-love that distorts all our judgments. Humility comes with confessing God's judgment on us is just and we are dependent on Him for a true knowledge of ourselves and our world.

Thirdly, humility comes from confessing that we are, and can only be, saved from the consequences of our pride by the crucified Saviour Jesus.

Jesus on the cross is the antithesis of human pride.

The autonomy we claim – he turned His back on, saying your will be done, not mine.

The comfort we desire – he did not seek for Himself

He did not put His own interests first, but ours.

He humbled Himself to die a death no human wisdom would want for itself, no human power permit itself to suffer.

Yet here alone, in the death of one the proud despised, can we be spared the death our proud rejection of our Creator's word and rule deserve.

Fourthly, confessing we are saved by Jesus by grace alone, not by our works. That there is nothing we have done or can do that contributes to making us right with God, that it depends all on God – His choice, His call, His grace, His sacrifice of His Son in our place – should end all our pride, all our boasting

If you want to escape pride and the judgment on pride

Confess yourself a creature, a sinner, someone who is only saved by the cruel death of Jesus on the cross, saved only by God's free decision to show you mercy.

If you are done with the folly and futility of living as if you are a god, confess and call out to the living God for mercy

And believer nurture that confession in your heart every day

But what is within must find expression in our lives. We have to learn to walk humbly

Cultivating Humility [Phil. 2:1-11, John 13:1-17]

How.

By embracing the life of humble service of others Jesus modelled and called His followers to practice.

Washing His disciples feet He said

John 13: ¹⁵ For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you.

¹⁶ Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷ If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.

He said greatness was service

Mark 10: ⁴³ But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all.

Pointing to Jesus Paul called believers to

Philippians 2: ³ Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. ⁴ Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. ⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,

Service of others is the test of whether the gospel you confess has shaped your life.

That service starts in the home, and spreads out from there.

Parents, dads especially, do your children see you clean up around the house, do a job you don't like to do for the sake of others?

Young people, do you only help when you are made to, or do you serve like Jesus because you follow Jesus

It starts in the home, but it cannot stop there.

There are neighbours, there are brothers and sisters in Christ to serve with the gifts God gives you

And if you are too busy, and we can be busy at times, review your busyness. Don't let it be an excuse just to concern yourself with your own interests.

We should serve, and we should cultivate the habits of a humble life.

What are they?

Generosity - for when we see need we think there but for the grace of God go I

[and I see the big group hug are looking for donations]

Thankfulness to God always, including formally giving thanks at meals and celebrations

Saying Lord willing, publicly recognising that our plans only come to fruition as the Lord prospers us

Ordering our time to do what God tells us we should do, including meeting, when we can, with His people, for our lives are not our own, but His

Courtesy to all, not expecting people to serve us but being courteous, patient and kind, especially to the less powerful in the relationship. Consumerism flatters us into thinking we are the most important people in the world whose choices should always be fulfilled, and we start treating people in shops as if that was true! It doesn't cost you extra to say thank you, to acknowledge the humanity and dignity of someone serving you. There is no humility in rudeness.

In a proud society we should ground our thinking in the truths that humble us, and we should practice behaviours that nurture humility in us.

So that in humility we can speak to our proud world, to the confident and complacent

And what we say

As we think about what we say don't confuse the possession of wealth or wisdom/knowledge, with pride.

Wealth and knowledge are good gifts of God, and they can be possessed with a good heart by those who have good hearts.

But there are many who put their trust in their wealth and wisdom, in themselves and their own abilities and judgment, and think and act like they are god.

While we might look for ways to engage them

We need to tell them the truth, for humility does not think it knows better than God what the proud need to hear

That to think you are god, even if it is god of your own life with the right to do whatever pleases you

That to act like you are god, as if you are accountable only to yourself

That to put their trust in their own goodness and reason, or in human leaders as if they are gods who can save them

Is the sin of pride, and it will lead to a fall

We need to tell them that they are mortal, and death will be the end of all their claims and all their imaginings, and that their wisdom and wealth will not mean they escape death and judgment

And that their princes, their secular saviours, are mortal and their plans and promises perish with them

They may not want to hear, they may dismiss it, but it should be said clearly so that when God humbles them they will perhaps know it is His doing, and they will turn to Him for mercy

But we should also remember that in a proud society not all are proud, and that many have been humbled by grievous failure, or are all too aware of the limits of their power, wealth and knowledge

Many, knowing no god, and confronted with their limits - challenged say with their children's behaviour or inability to find work – are anxious, fearful, and confused

Point them to the humble saviour who served and yet is the almighty Lord, who associated with the lowly, who knows want and grief, who says the kingdom of heaven is not for the proud but the poor, those who have come to the end of their resources, who know they have nothing to offer; who beckons the weary to come to Him

Ask them to whom to turn from the proud who cannot even save themselves from death

To the one who having died the death of the despised lives to always keep His promises, to give life, and rest, to all who call on Him