

How Long, Oh LORD?: Pride and Glory

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[0 : 00] If you ask people what the biggest problem in the world is, in their opinion, you're going to get a variety of answers. What is the single biggest issue that we should be most concerned about?

A lot of thoughts about that. There was an interesting study done last year by the World Economic Forum asking this very question to young adults, millennials, all around the world.

And here are the top five answers given from around the world. Biggest problem facing us that we need to deal with. Fifth place, government corruption and lack of accountability.

That's a pretty big one. In fourth place, poverty. In third place, religious conflicts, particularly in the Middle East. In second place, large-scale war.

That's a pretty big deal. And then the first place issue that we should be most concerned about, climate change and the depletion of natural resources. So all of these are major issues.

[0 : 58] And in fact, probably there are people in this room who your job is directly related to trying to solve some of these major problems around the world. All major concerns. Scripture, however, tells us that there is an even greater problem.

Something that we should actually be more concerned about. And the reason is because this thing is actually the thing behind all of these issues.

It is the thing that drives government corruption. It drives religious conflict. It drives the lack of change around climate care. Around creation care.

And of course, this issue is the issue of pride. Now, I don't know about you, but that comes as a surprise to me. As I think about all that's wrong with the world, it's hard for me to think that pride is at the top of the list.

But in fact, it is. C.S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity* devotes a whole chapter to the topic of pride. By the way, it's a fantastic read. I'll be drawing heavily from it today.

[2 : 04] But he titles the chapter, *The Great Sin. Pride, The Great Sin*. And he says in that chapter, It is pride which has been the chief cause of misery in every nation and every family since the world began.

That's a huge claim. Pride has been the chief cause of misery in families and in nations ever since the world began.

Pride. We've been studying Habakkuk, which is a minor prophet in the Old Testament. Short book, just three chapters. And we've been studying it because it explores the questions surrounding suffering and evil and injustice in the world.

We've been looking at this for the past few weeks. And as we come to chapter 2, particularly verses 4 through 20, we see that God gives Habakkuk a vision. And he wants Habakkuk to write this vision down and to give it to heralds so that they can run and share this vision with the world.

And the vision is essentially God's way of saying this. If you want to understand human evil and corruption and injustice and suffering, if you want to understand why this is so pervasive and why it is so hard to solve these issues, you have to understand pride and the role it plays underneath all of this evil.

[3 : 34] And so this passage shows us two things about pride. It shows us the sickness of pride. And then it shows us the cure for pride. The sickness of pride, that it's a sickness.

And then the cure for it. Let's pray as we open God's word together. Lord, we do pray as we recognize your promise to speak through your written word, that you are here with us now.

And that we desperately need to hear what you have to say. And so we pray that by the power of your spirit, you would open your word to us and through it reveal to us your living word, Jesus Christ.

And it's in his name that we pray. Amen. So if we look at this passage together, the vision opens in verse 4. It says, behold. That's how you know the vision has started.

Behold, his soul is puffed up. It is not upright within him. But the righteous shall live by his faith. Behold, his soul is puffed up.

[4 : 34] Now, at face value, this is talking about the Chaldeans, as it says, or as we know, the Babylonians. But we know that this is a vision meant for everybody. And so this is really a description of the human condition apart from the righteousness of God.

Human beings on their own have a condition. Their soul is puffed up. Now, just to give you a sense of that word, that Hebrew word actually is translated as either bloated or even tumorous.

So in other words, it's saying, behold. Pride is the tumor in the soul of humanity that is making the world sick.

There's a bloated, grotesque tumor on the soul of humanity, and it's making the world sick. Now, I just want to be clear that by pride, I don't just mean having a high opinion of yourself.

More accurately, pride is a high self-preoccupation, a high sense of self-importance or self-mindedness. That's what pride really means.

[5 : 39] And the reason that pride is so dangerous is because it is what drives other sins. You wouldn't realize it, but pride lurks underneath the other sins and struggles in life.

So Lewis gives the example of greed. And he says, to a point, greed leads us to want money and a nice house and a nice car and all of those things.

He says, only to a point. But then after that, it doesn't just become about wanting money. We want more money. Right? We don't just want to be rich. We want to be richer. We want to have a nicer house.

We want to have a nicer car. In other words, at that point, it becomes pride. Because pride is essentially competitive. I want to have more than that person.

I want to have it better than that person. That's pride. It's no longer greed. Take lust as another example. Right? And I think lust for many men is not just about sexual desire.

[6 : 40] To a point, it is. To a point, it's just sexual desire. But then at some point, it begins to shift. And it's about conquest. It's about attaining. It's about having.

It's about taking what I want and giving nothing in return. It's about having what I want on my terms. That's the allure of pornography. I can take and take and take asks nothing of me.

Right? And that makes me feel powerful. And that's pride. That's pride. Right? I think for many women, not all women, but I think for many women, the experience of lust is different.

To a point, it's maybe about sexual desire. But then after that, it becomes something else. It's about wanting to be desired. It's about wanting to be the object of desire.

And then to be seen as being more desirable than other people. And then at some point, maybe, the desire to be the most desired of all. And again, we've crossed a line.

[7 : 42] It's no longer about sex. It's become about pride. I want to be more desired than anyone else. Right? So pride is lurking behind so many other sins.

It's the hidden source of all different kinds of evil. And if you look at the rest of chapter 2 in Habakkuk, it gives us a series of woes. Right? The oppressed, those people who have been exploited and taken advantage of.

It says those people will one day pronounce woes over Babylon. And as you look at them, one thing we might do is just look at each of the woes pronounced. But they all actually trace the same theme.

And as we look at them together, they all show how pride does harm in every sphere of life. So if I had a board back here, I would draw concentric circles. Imagine concentric circles.

And it's saying pride does damage in every sphere, every dimension of life. And there are four areas we see that are highlighted. The first circle, the furthest circle out, environmental harm.

[8 : 50] You say, the Bible talks about that? Yeah, it actually does here. It says that pride and living a life based in human pride leads to us exploiting and destroying and depleting the environment.

If you look at verse 8 and verse 17, they talk about the violence that is done to the earth. The violence done to the earth. The Babylonians were rapacious and exploitative.

They would move to an area and conquer it and then they would plunder all of the natural resources. One heartbreaking example is the cedars of Lebanon. Lebanon was known for these beautiful cedar trees.

And the Babylonians came in and they clear cut all of the trees. So that they could turn the wood into timbers to build their palaces. And so that's why in verse 11 you have the beams, the cedar beams in the palace walls crying out for justice.

Because of what's been done to them. Pride is what drives environmental exploitation and degradation. It wants to take but not give because it is self-centered.

[9 : 58] It believes I am more important. Right? So that's why after years, I mean our generation has grown up since I was a little kid, being told by everybody that we need to care for the environment.

That we need to make radical changes in life if we hope to see the world continue for future generations. And yet still CO2 levels are at historic highs. Still today 58,000 square miles of forest are cut down each year.

Still we have species going extinct at a rate 100 times faster than ever before in recorded history. There are a lot of reasons for that.

But I think underneath a lot of this, there is human pride. Pride is not the only cause, but I think it's much more than we would like to think or admit. Because deep down, I believe that my convenience, I believe that my income, I believe that my lifestyle, or for some of us, I believe that my political office is more important than future generations.

Who will inherit this planet? It's pride. So pride leads us to exploit and deplete the world, the environment around us. It says me first.

[11 : 07] But if we move to the next concentric circle in, we see that pride also does tremendous social harm. Not just environmental, but social. It harms our relationships with one another.

And I think many of us would probably agree with that. Pride is what leads you to treat people with contempt or indifference.

It's what allows us to say that certain people groups don't matter as much. Lewis says, quote, other vices may sometimes bring people together.

Right? So you find good fellowship among drunk people. It's a lot of fun. A bunch of people all get drunk together. That's a fun time. Right? There's fellowship there.

Right? There's fellowship, as Lewis says, with unchaste people. Right? That's really bringing people together. But Lewis says, Lewis says, pride is different.

[12 : 06] Pride is different. Because pride, by its very nature, is enmity. It is enmity. It is hostility toward the other.

The woes in chapter 2 talk about exploitation and unjust gain and bloodshed and debauchery.

This is happening in the ancient Near East. Think about recent history in our country. Think about the massive financial crisis in 2008, 2009. The subprime lending crisis.

Right? That's driven not just by greed. It's driven by pride. It's people saying, my gain is worth whatever it costs these people. This people group can be put at great risk of ruin.

Thousands of lives can be destroyed. Because I matter more. That's pride. Right? What drives sex trafficking?

[13 : 06] What drives modern day slavery? We talked about this last week with IJM and Freedom Sunday. It's not just lust. Don't be deceived. It's not about sex. It's about some people saying that it's worth exploiting other people to have more money and more power.

That's what drives it. Right? Pride drives the ongoing racism and the equally, equally pernicious classism that exists in our country.

It's driven by pride. Preferring certain people over others. It even affects, I think, our relationships in much more subtle ways in an ongoing daily basis, even in our own community.

There was an interesting piece in the New York Times called The Stories We Tell Ourselves. And if you saw this, it's interesting. This writer basically says that we are constantly narrating and revising history in ways that make us look the way we want to look.

So he says, we tell stories that make us seem adventurous or funny or strong. We tell stories that make our lives seem interesting. And we tell these stories not only to others but also to ourselves.

[14 : 18] I caught myself doing this the other day. Don't tell anybody. Doesn't leave this room. But here's what happened. Hard day. Busy day at work.

A lot going on. Kind of stressed out. Fighting traffic coming home. I walk in the door. Totally spent. And I look up. And before I've even set my stuff down, my wife just runs over and just shoves a screaming child into my arms.

Eight week old, right? Just inconsolably screaming. Kids are freaking out. And so then I take her and I start to kind of, you know, shush her and walk around the living room.

And about 15 or 20 minutes later, I caught myself red-handed doing this thing. Do you ever catch yourself red-handed doing something? You're doing it before you even realize you're doing it and then you realize that you're doing it?

About 15, 20 minutes in, I realize that I have begun to spin this narrative in my mind. I've begun to weave this story about how I've worked so hard and I've put it all out there and I'm so exhausted.

[15:21] And I deserve to be able to just come home and flop down and take a break. And nobody understands how blah, blah, blah, blah. Self-pity. This martyr story. Where's that coming from?

It's pride. Pride. It's pride saying my needs matter more. It's this story rooted in my sense of self-importance. And by the way, rule of thumb in marriage.

Rule of thumb. If you're the spouse who's out working and the other spouse is the one at home with an infant all day, when you come home, unless you have a major bleed from an artery happening right then, they've had a harder day than you have.

It's just a great rule of thumb, right? And if you, as I did, say otherwise, it's like throwing a live hand grenade into the living room, okay?

And I'm still picking shrapnel out from the explosion. And I've learned. And I had to repent of my pride. Pride. It's ugly. It's nasty. Right?

[16:29] So now I'm going to turn it a little bit. I'm going to say something that might get me in trouble with some of you. I'm going to say it anyway. Is it possible that some of you who are not married, who want to be married, are still not married because of pride?

Is it possible? Just before you attack me, just hang with me. Let me just say this. Is it possible? It may not be. This may not be you. So don't even listen.

But if you have ears to hear, just listen. Listen, is it possible that there are people who are available, who are amazing, who are believers, who are in your life, whom you have prematurely written off?

That you've said, you've heard again and again and again, don't settle. Don't settle. Don't settle. And so there are people in your life that you didn't even consider because you said, well, I don't want to settle.

Is pride part of it? Not all of it, right? I know it's a lot harder and a lot more complicated than that. Is it part of it? Suggestion. Not prescription.

[17:39] Here's a suggestion. Take that. Pray about it. Pray about it for a week. If the Lord brings anybody to mind in your life and they're a believer and they're available.

Very important. I want you to go onto your knees, repent before the Lord and ask that person out. Just pray about it. It's between you and the Lord. I don't need to know about it.

Pride harms our relationships in all kinds of ways, right? So if you think about environmental harm, it does social harm. Then move the next circle in, getting closer to home, and we see that pride does psychological damage.

It does emotional damage. Verses 4 and 5 say, the puffed up soul is not upright. That's a biblical way of saying unhealthy. It's not upright.

The puffed up soul is self-deceived. The tumorous soul is restless. The tumorous soul is unsatisfied. This is psychological and emotional distress, right?

[18:46] There's a famous Harvard psychologist, Gordon Allport. He wrote about neurosis and the nature of neurotic disease. And he says, Any neurotic is living a life which in some respects is extreme in its self-centeredness.

The region of his misery represents a complete preoccupation with himself. The very nature of the neurotic disorder is tied to pride.

How amazing and horrifying is it that one of the ways Satan would attack people is by taking their misery, taking their suffering, taking their hurt, taking their pain, and using it against them.

Real hurt and real suffering. And turning them inward. And using pride, right? Like a wound that then becomes infected.

Pride comes in and infects that wound. And you become mired in self-pity. Right? Even if that's not you, think about the ways pride undermines us on a daily basis.

[19:57] Think about your hang-ups and your issues and the things that you wish were different about your character. Let me ask you some questions. Why don't you admit when you're wrong?

Immediately? You know, why does it take, if you're anything like me, especially in my marriage, it normally takes me a day or two. Why? Why don't you admit when you need help? And just say it. Why don't you admit that you need friends and that you're lonely? Why are you a people pleaser? Why are you so threatened by the success of other people? Why are you chronically indecisive? Why do you always criticize yourself and beat yourself up? Why can't you take the criticism of other people who love you? Why do you have such a paralyzing fear of failure? Why do you lie to make yourself look better? Pride.

[21 : 05] It all comes back to pride. All of it. This is not autobiographical at all. I had to interview lots of very screwed up people to get these examples.

But this is what I hear about pride and what it does to people. So pride is a tumor that does harm environmentally. It does harm socially.

It does harm psychologically and emotionally. And then lastly, and most importantly, pride is spiritually devastating. The last three verses in these woes, verses 18, 19, and 20, talk about idolatry.

And you ask the question, what does pride have to do with idolatry? What's the connection? C.S. Lewis in that chapter says, in essence, in God you come up against something that is, in every respect, immeasurably superior to yourself.

So as a result, you see yourself as nothing by comparison. And here's the key. Unless you know God in that way, you don't know God at all.

[22 : 13] Chances are you are worshipping a God of your own creation. A God of your own imagination. Right? If you say to God, well, I believe in God, but I would never believe in a God who X, Y, Z.

Or if you say, you know, I believe in God, but I believe in a God of love. And those other things that he says about how I should live my life or about sin or about, I reject those things because I believe that God is only a God of love.

Any version of that that you choose, what are you ultimately doing other than creating a God who is subservient to you rather than superior to you?

And Lewis says, unless you know God in such a way that he is immeasurably and vastly greater than you, you don't know God. And that's why he goes on to say, as long as you're proud, you cannot know God.

It's impossible. A proud person is always looking down on things and people. And of course, as long as you're looking down, you cannot see something that is above you.

[23 : 21] So pride is this tumor in the heart of humanity that is causing environmental and social and psychological and spiritual devastation. Now, before we go to the cure, I want to stop and just ask, as you're hearing this and as you're wondering, well, how big of an issue is this for me?

Let me give you a way to think about this. A test, so to speak. A litmus test. Is pride an issue for me in my life? Think about this. when people snub you.

When people overlook you. When you feel unappreciated at your job. When you feel unnoticed. When you feel unnoticed. When you're really wanting to be asked out, but nobody's asking you out. When you feel rejected. When you hear about all those people that went and did that fun thing and you didn't get to go. Those things hurt everybody. How much do that hurt?

Does it just hurt you? Or does it devastate you? Is it the kind of thing that you linger on for days? Does it grind away at your soul? That is one way to gauge how much of a hold pride has on you.

[24 : 38] How much does it hurt? Does it undo you? Does it destabilize you? That's pride. Right? That's pride that has been scorned. Right?

So now as we reflect on the sickness of pride, we have to ask, what is the cure? What is the cure for pride? And there are really only two possible ways out of pride.

Out of the grip of pride. And spoiler alert, one of them doesn't work. But we're going to talk about it anyway. First possible way out of pride is the way that we might call the moralistic approach.

It's very simple. You hear this and you say, okay, pride is bad and humility is good. So starting right now, I'm going to stop being proud. And I'm going to devote myself to being humble.

I'm going to become a humble person. I'm going to become more humble than anybody you've ever seen. I'm going to become the most humble person ever. And then guess what? You're back into pride. And it's a hamster wheel.

[25 : 39] It's a hamster wheel. Right? I'm proud. I'm becoming more humble, more humble, more humble. I'm so humble, I'm proud again. And it just goes around and around and around and around. And you can't escape it.

Right? And the reason, the reason that it doesn't work and that whole approach doesn't work is the same reason that the moralistic approach doesn't work in any sphere of life.

Because here's the thing. The more moralistic you are, the more prideful you will become. The more moralistic you are, the more prideful you will become. And the reason is simple.

It's because moralism is to pride as gasoline is to a fire. It fuels it. And it stokes it in unimaginable ways.

And if you just think about it, we live in a highly moralistic society right now. I think it's as or more moralistic than ever before. And we live in a very prideful society.

[26 : 38] Both. Both. We live in a highly moralistic society. You know, people talk about the moral decline in the West. And they talk about the rise of moral relativism.

No. We're not less moralistic. And we're certainly not relativists. We're pluralists. Moral pluralism. The whole world of morality has become a giant game of King of the Hill. It's a game of King of the Hill. And everybody wants to be on the moral high ground. And the only difference is there's not just one hill.

Everybody has a hill. And everybody's standing on the moral high ground of their little hill. And everybody's saying their hill conveniently is the only one that matters.

Right? So some people have the Judeo-Christian sexual purity traditionalism hill. And they stand on top of that hill. This is the real hill. And then other people have a hill that is built on inclusivity and open-mindedness and tolerance.

[27 : 42] And they say this is the real hill. This is the one that matters. And then you have somebody over here on their hill and they say well the thing that really matters the morality that really matters is the food that we eat and where it comes from.

And then you have the hill over here of the person who says well what really matters is how we give birth to our kids and how we parent. Right? And it just goes on and on and on. And there's a vast sea of moral hills and people shouting at one another from their moral high ground.

It's King of the Hill. Gone wild. This is the moral world that we live in. But the point I want to make is that moralism regardless of what hill you're standing on moralism fuels pride by giving you a measure of your own excellence.

So if you define moral excellence as sexual purity show everybody your ring and tell them how you're saving yourself for marriage. If you define moral excellence as inclusion and open-mindedness and tolerance then post articles online that show people how open-minded you are.

But it doesn't matter because the same thing is happening underneath. The same phenomenon is playing out again and again and again. It's all just pride and virtue signaling from one hill or another.

[28 : 55] And by the way you're saying okay what does this have to do with Habakkuk? Well we've got to go back to chapter 1. We intentionally didn't talk about this when we did chapter 1 because I wanted to wait until now because I think it makes more sense in this conversation.

In Habakkuk 1 he says in verse 4 the law is paralyzed and justice never goes forth. Now he's not just talking about the law of the land the local kind of civil you know statutes.

He's talking about the Torah. He's talking about God's law. Do you hear his complaint? God your law isn't working. There's all this evil and injustice and suffering and you gave us the law to put a stop to this and your law is paralyzed and justice is not going forth.

It's not happening. Your law isn't enough. And here's the great truth that we see emerge from the pages of Habakkuk. The law can never cure evil.

It can never cure evil. Why? Because it can never deal with pride. It can make you appear a lot more sexually pure. It can make you appear to be a lot more pious, care about the Sabbath.

[30 : 08] It can make you appear to be, even depending on your moral framework, if you reject certain, it can make you seem more open-minded or inclusive. It can make you appear to be all kinds of things, but it can never deal with pride.

It's powerless. All it can do is fuel it. So, there is really only one answer, one cure for pride, and you see it in verse 14.

what is God's cure for human pride? It's to fill the earth with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord. God says the world is filled with pride, and until it is filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, pride will always be a problem.

Imagine this polluted water and this clean water begins to pour into it and push all the pollution out until there is no trace of it left, to fill the earth with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord.

Another image, if pride is a tumor, then God's glory is like the radiation that burns the tumor away until it's no more. And there is one place where we see God's glory more clearly than anywhere else.

[31 : 26] Paul says it this way in Philippians 2 when he is talking about Jesus. He says, Jesus, who though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped.

In other words, he wasn't prideful about it, but instead he emptied himself by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

And the cross is shocking because that's where you see the person who is most deserving of praise and most deserving of glory. Casting all of that down, humbling himself, becoming a slave, and then dying like a common criminal.

And then Paul says, therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

To the glory of God the Father, filling the earth with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, beginning with the cross. So when we look at the cross, we see the glory of God and we see the truth about ourselves.

[32 : 48] That tends to happen. When you see the glory of God, in that light you begin to see yourself differently. And you know what you see when you look at that glory? No matter how great you think you are, no matter how you measure up on your little hill of morality, that the truth about us all is that we are so bankrupt, we are so hopelessly lost, that it took nothing less than the death of the Son of God to save us.

We're all on equal footing. Nobody's on a hill. We should all be on our faces. There's a reason that happens when people see God. They fall to their face.

Woe is me, for I'm a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips.

Considering this, Isaac Watts wrote these beautiful words, When I survey the wondrous cross, on which the prince of glory died, my richest gain I count but loss, and poor contempt on all my pride. So the glory of God on the cross burns our pride away. And then do you know what happens?

When you begin to be liberated from pride, you know what happens? You become more and more and more gloriously self-forgetful.

If you can imagine how much time and energy you put into protecting and stoking your ego, and how amazing it would be to just let it all go, to become blessedly self-forgetful.

[34 : 21] You know, the quote is often attributed to C.S. Lewis because it comes from his writing, but really it was penned by Rick Warren, but I love it anyway. Humility is not thinking less of yourself, it's thinking of yourself less.

It's a great definition. It's a great definition. You just don't think about yourself. You don't root for yourself. You don't, because you're too busy thinking about God, you're too taken up with what God is doing.

You're too focused on the people around you. You just don't really think about yourself. You become blessedly self-forgetful. Summarizing all of this, all of life is a choice between human pride and God's glory.

All of life comes down to that. Human pride broke the world, and it continues to break the world. But one day the promise is this, that all the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord.

When that day comes, all will be whole and well again. Let's pray. Let's pray.