

Problems with Pride

1Samuel 14:24-52

I'm often amazed at what the medical field is able to do these days, but I am also sometimes surprised at the arrogance present in some members of the profession.

That was true the day our second child was born.

One of the things that doctors often offer women in labor is an epidural.

It's pretty amazing. In our spinal column there is a small space between the spine and the spinal nerves and doctors take a needle and insert it into that space and then inject drugs to control pain.

There is a risk though and that is if the needle gets pushed in too far it can puncture the covering of the spinal cord which will then leak spinal fluid.

The doctor who came to give the epidural to Michelle gave her a bit of speech before he put the needle in.

He told her how lucky she was to have him and how much more experience and ability he had than another doctor.

Anybody have a guess as to what happened? He messed it up and Michelle began to lose spinal fluid.

I didn't know this before that day, but our brains actually float in fluid in our skulls.

If you leak out enough fluid your brain actually sinks and rests on the base of your skull creating an extremely bad headache.

It's possible to treat the problem by doing another epidural, taking some the patient's blood and injecting it into that space.

The blood then finds the hole and creates a patch allowing spinal fluid to build up again and relieve the headache.

So the next day we went back to the hospital to give that a try. They took Michelle into a room and I waited outside with the baby.

After what seemed like a very long time someone came out of the room and I asked how it went to which he replied, "good".

I went in the room and there were several pieces of blood stained gauze and Michelle was tearing up.

I thought to myself, "that guys definition of good and mine are not the same."

They had trouble drawing blood effectively for the patch which required several attempts but at the end of the day it seemed to work and after a while the headache subsided.

The situation was bad enough on its own, but what made it worse was the pride of the doctor talking about how great he was only to mess it up.

[Pride causes a lot of problems in life. We can see many examples of that in life and there are certainly many examples of it in the Bible. This morning we are looking at one of those examples in 1 Samuel 14:24-52. In this text we can see at least four problems with pride. We would be wise to consider them carefully and seek to fight against them in our lives. Here is the first problem with pride...]

Point #1 – Pride produces selfishness. (Verse 24)

It is impossible to focus our attention on ourselves (pride) and avoid putting ourselves ahead of others (selfishness).

As we come to verse 24 we have to remember the situation.

The Israelites were in deep trouble as the army of the Philistines had rolled into town.

With the odds completely against him Jonathan (the son of King Saul) takes it upon himself to go out and fight against the enemy putting himself in the hands of God.

Following that God puts the whole army of the Philistines into confusion so the end up fighting one another and running away in every direction.

It's only after that the people come out and start chasing their enemies.

So as we come to verse 24 here we have to ask the question,

“How much credit does Saul deserve for the battle looking good for Israel at this point?”

Answer, Zero!

Having that in mind we read this in **verse 24**.

We see Saul's pride at the end of the verse.

What or who is his primary concern?

The words “I” and “my” tell us that he is focused on himself.

In a situation where he should be on his face thanking God for His mercy and grace, King Saul is making the situation all about himself.

We see his selfishness in the first part of the verse.

We are told that the men of Israel are in “distress” why because Saul “bound the people under an oath” to not eat anything until “evening came”.

He has no concern for the wellbeing of his people, he is concerned about himself.

That is what pride does, it makes us concerned primarily about our own wants and needs at the expense of others.

[Anybody here like the outdoors? I like the outdoors but I am far from hard core about it. Even at my level of outdoorsiness I know that one of the most important things you need to know how to do is start a fire. Have you ever tried to start a fire by rubbing sticks together? If you can do that than your outdoorsiness is at a pretty high level. The idea is simple, you rub sticks together creating friction which produces heat and if you produce enough heat you will produce fire.

Personally I like the blowtorch method but either way if you have enough heat you will produce fire, because that is what heat does.]

It is the same thing with pride. The very nature of pride (putting ourselves first) produces selfishness (getting what we want at the expense of others).

It doesn't matter that I've had ten cookies, I'm eating the last one.

I can't believe you did such and such for someone else, you should have done this for me instead.

I believe that selfishness which is produced by pride is the source of the vast majority of anger, conflict, and disappointment in our lives. We can see that in this chapter.

I won't ask this morning how many people struggle with pride, because the answer whether we want to admit it or not is all of us.

The question I want to ask is how much are we fighting against it?

[Are we content to let the radio station in our brains be on ME FM or do we want to turn away from our pride and turn towards the LORD? I would encourage each and every one of us to take some time this week at the end of a couple of days and evaluate the day and ask, how often in the thoughts and actions of my day do I think of myself as most important. What makes me angry or sad? Is it a lack of love for Christ or that we didn't get what we want? Pride unchecked will make us into selfish ungodly people. Here is another thing pride will do...]

Point #2 – Pride brings trouble to others. (Verses 25-32)

Like all sin, making ourselves the focus of our thinking, feeling, and doing creates problems for those around us.

In verses 25-26 we are told that the army enters a wooded area and comes upon a blessing.

There is honey the NIV says "oozing out", the NAS says "there was a flow", and the NKJ says it was "dripping".

The idea is there was an abundance of honey, so much that everyone could see it.

That is very reminiscent of what God had told the people about the Promised Land.

He said it will be a land "flowing with milk and honey."

Here is a good gift that no one had to work for and could enjoy right away.

Furthermore they all needed it. Fighting battles consumes a great deal of calories and they could have used the boost, but no one takes any because of the foolish oath Saul had put the army under.

Jonathan wasn't there when that happened because he was off doing something useful and so we read this in verse 27.

I think about this verse whenever I am feeling rundown and take a drink of pop or eat a few peanut M&Ms.

The sugar hits the bloodstream and you feel it almost instantly.

Almost just as quickly though things take a turn. Someone tells Jonathan about the oath and he rightly says this in **verses 29-30**.

Exactly right, Saul hurt the whole nation by hurting the soldier's ability to fight the war, but it gets far worse in **verses 31-32**.

Leviticus 17:10-14 strictly forbids the people of Israel from eating the blood of animals because the blood represented the life of the animal and was to be used to make atonement for their sins in Old Testament worship.

Now it needs to be said that these men cannot excuse their sin against the LORD because of what Saul did.

God's word says, "Man does not live by bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD" (Deuteronomy 8:3)

Their hunger does not excuse their behaviour, but it certainly creates an enormous temptation for them to which they give in.

The temptation was completely unnecessary and unhelpful and did harm to the people.

Pride, like all sin, negatively impacts those around us.

[How many of you have seen pictures or video of a wildfire from out west? It is absolutely devastating. Thousands of acres of forest, hundreds of homes, and often lives are lost in those fires. You know it never starts out that big. They start with a campfire that wasn't supposed to be lit, a lightning strike, or a sparkler, anything that gets the fire started and from there it spreads.]

That is a good illustration for unchecked pride.

It brings harm and sometimes even devastation to those around us.

Why am I at times unnecessarily harsh with my children? Righteousness? Not at all, most often it is pride.

Why am I impatient with difficult people? Because they are not worth my time, because God doesn't want me to show them care and concern? No, because of my pride.

What is it that causes people to make mountains out of mole hills and hurt others because of it? Pride.

What is it that causes people to consume sinful material that bring a great deal of pain and suffering to many people? Pride.

What is it that causes people to push a godless agenda upon children in school or at story time in public libraries? Pride.

[Far too often we think that our sin is contained to ourselves. We say things like, “What difference does it make if I’m not hurting anybody? That is never true, particularly with the sin of pride. If we are indifferent about it, or even worse encourage it, we will see the trouble it brings spread like fire. It will bring trouble to others. Here is a third lesson on pride from this text...]

Point #3 – Pride puts man’s authority above God’s. (Verses 33-44)

When we are more important in our own eyes than the LORD, then we will prioritize what we think above what the LORD says.

It is important to point out that the dietary laws of the Old Testament are no longer binding to the Christian, just as the sacrificial system has passed away on account of Jesus’ complete fulfillment of the law and His perfect sacrifice.

That said, at the time the events of this chapter were taking place they were in effect.

Someone rightly tells Saul in verse 33 that the “men are sinning” against the LORD.

Saul, to his credit, does take action to stop what is happening and properly prepare the food, however, he does so with zero reflection on his own actions which certainly served to tempt the men towards this sin.

Further, to his credit, he builds an altar which may have been used to offer sacrifices for the sins committed here.

Though he rightly rebukes the people, there is a sense of graciousness to his response.

He seems to move past the sin of the people in order to carry on with fighting the Philistines for his own sake.

That is not what Leviticus 17 says to do. It says “anyone who eats blood must be cut off” which either means they are kicked out of the country or killed.

He just decides to disregard the commanded penalty without any inquiry of the LORD.

Now let’s contrast that with how he deals with Jonathan.

Before the army resumes the pursuit of the Philistines a priest suggests that they “inquire of God” in verse 36.

Saul asks, “Shall I go down after the Philistines?” in verse 37, but it says in that same verse, “God did not answer him.”

Look with me at verses **38-39**.

There is a great deal of pride in those words. He does not consider the possibility that he may be the problem and he raises the issue to the death penalty without first finding out what the offense is, he doesn’t even care if it costs the life of his own son.

In verses 40-43 they go through the process of casting lots, which is sort of like rolling dice, to determine who is responsible for the situation.

Casting lots in the Old Testament was permitted, but it was always intended to fall under the authority of God’s Word.

It's was never intended to leave decisions to chance.

Well, the lot falls to Jonathan and so we read this in verses **43-44**.

Saul is given multiple chances to admit his foolishness and pride, but he doesn't waiver from them at all.

What sin has Jonathan committed? None, the honey was not forbidden by God's word. Quite the opposite it was an excellent gift.

Further Jonathan knew nothing of the oath; therefore, according to biblical standards he made no oath.

Contrast that with the men eating the blood because of their extreme hunger.

Blood was forbidden and it's possible the death penalty was actually supposed to be carried out.

So why does Saul have a seemingly gracious response on one hand and is ready to put his own son to death on the other.

Pride! He sees what Jonathan did as a greater offense, even though he did nothing wrong, on account of his own word not the LORD's.

[The very same thing made Jesus upset in His dealings with the Pharisees. He saw that they made all kinds of rules and regulations and often gave them higher regard than what the Scriptures say. It was so bad that the religious leaders were encouraging people to neglect their parents so that they could raise some extra money.]

This same sort of thing is alive and well today too.

I've seen people tell others they were not Christians because of what they were eating for breakfast.

I've heard people say many times, 'I don't care what the Bible says, this is what I think...'

You have probably heard people disregard clear passages of scripture saying, "That is just your interpretation" or "That was for them and not for us."

And the list could go on and on.

[Listen, I am all for statements of faith. I am all for drawing clear boundaries and being passionate about what the Bible says, but we must be very careful to keep ourselves from going beyond the Scriptures because when we do we set ourselves up as a higher authority and that is always bad and can lead to some very dark places. That brings us to one more lesson about pride from this text. Pride produces selfishness, it brings trouble to others, it puts man's authority above God's, and lastly...]

Point #4 – God opposes the proud. (Verses 45-52)

Placing a high priority on ourselves always puts us in a position that is against the LORD.

Because Saul is so neck deep in pride he is totally ready to put Jonathan to death rather than consider the possibility that he is the one in the wrong.

The fact is he should never have bound the people, he should have recognized that Jonathan could not have been bound by an oath he didn't know about, and he should have repented from the whole thing.

He doesn't, but instead of Jonathan being murdered by his own father we read this in **verses 45-46.**

These guys are far from perfect as we have seen in this chapter but they are seeing this clearly and rightly.

Remember earlier that day, Jonathan had started the fighting with the Philistines and he did it trusting the LORD.

He went step by step doing things that make no sense from a battle strategy perspective and God graciously responded to him by giving both him as an individual and the army as a whole a miraculous victory.

They clearly see that there is no way Jonathan should lose his life, he is the hero of the day.

I believe that is God providentially opposing Saul's course of action here.

After we are told of Jonathan being rescued by his fellow soldiers the writer gives us a brief summary of Saul's reign as king over Israel.

It is a life with some successes and high points and also one of a great deal of trouble.

It ends on this note in **verse 52.**

The whole time he was king there was 'bitter war' the NAS calls it severe.

He enjoyed little rest and few days of peace as king.

I find it very interesting that the writer gives us that note right after this whole situation of an oath he made on account of his pride.

Combine that with the LORD's silence earlier in the chapter and it seems clear that King Saul was at odds with the LORD.

That is not a good place to be and that is where pride puts us.

Please don't miss understand. Turmoil in life does not always mean that God is opposed to you.

There was no one more humble than Jesus and He suffered more than anyone else for the glory of God.

He took our sins upon Himself and because of that God displays His perfect Justice and boundless love to everyone who trusts Christ as their saviour.

We have much more here than just the difficult political situation to know that Saul had a pride problem and that God acted against him because of it.

That is what pride does, it invites the opposition of the LORD.

[Anyone here this morning have LED lights in their home. LED stands for light emitting diode. A diode is an amazing little electronic device that only allows current to flow in one direction. If the polarity is in the opposite direction of the diode than it will resist the flow of current with everything it has. Why does it do that? Because that is the nature of a diode.]

It is the same idea with God. He is the creator and sustainer of absolutely everything in the universe.

The heart of pride is the idea whether great or small that we don't need God or we are more important than God.

The LORD cannot allow that to stand without denying His nature and therefore He opposes pride.

That is why the bible says, "Pride goes before destruction" (Proverbs 16:18) because no one can have eternal life while living in opposition to the LORD.

That leads me to a very important question, "If pride is so bad, how do we fight against it? How do we humble ourselves?"

The answer is worship. For every single prideful thought we have there is a corresponding thought of worship.

In every situation where we are tempted to put ourselves top of mind, we can turn it to the praise of God instead.

When we do that everything gets turned upside down.

We become less selfish and more selfless.

Instead of bringing trouble to others we bring blessing.

We minimize our authority and maximize the authority of the word of God.

And best of all instead of God being opposed to us, He gives us grace (oh how we need grace).

Consider then today some of the problems of pride and plead with God for humility.

Let's pray together towards that end.