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Called to Speak for the Lord – the Book of Jeremiah

The Snare and Sin of Pride

December 27, 2020

Sermon Text: Jeremiah 9; 2 Cor 10

Scripture Reading: 2 Cor 10

Jeremiah 9:23-24 ESV Thus says the LORD: “Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, (24) but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD.”

We looked at these verses a few weeks ago when we came to Jeremiah 9. Jeremiah’s words here in verse 24 are cited at least two times by the Apostle Paul in his letters to the church at

Corinth where pride was a real problem in many there:

1 Corinthians 1:28-31 ESV God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, (29) so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. (30) And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, (31) so that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”

2 Corinthians 10:17 ESV “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”

Pride is a snare and a sin when it creeps into our minds and we allow it to take root. Pride makes us blind. It prevents us from seeing truth and in fact turns things around 180 degrees. Foolishness becomes truth, and truth becomes foolishness. Right becomes wrong and wrong becomes right. The work of the Spirit starts to be seen as foolishness, as contemptible, and the work of fleshly men and women parading as Christ’s

servants is elevated to “a mighty work of God.”

As we come upon a new year, it is a good thing for us to think about this matter of pride and how it is always working through our fallen flesh or through the deception of wicked counterfeits to creep into our minds and lives and church. The Lord gave sober warnings about it through Jeremiah and He gives multiple warnings to us through the Lord Jesus and the apostles.

I have no doubt at all that every single Christian church and organization *will inevitably move toward pride and arrogance, man-made tradition, pomp and ceremony – Rome if you will – if Christians are not wise to this snare. Study the history of the church and look at what is happening in our own day and you will see that it is only a rare case when this does not happen.* Pride ultimately and unfailingly will result in the Lord’s Spirit being quenched and if persisted in, even in His departure.

So let’s take a closer look at this thing, with the Apostle Paul’s help.

The Background

2 Corinthians 10:1-2 ESV I, Paul,

myself entreat you, by the meekness and gentleness of Christ—I who am humble when face to face with you, but bold toward you when I am away!— (2) I beg of you that when I am present I may not have to show boldness with such confidence as I count on showing against some who suspect us of walking according to the flesh.

The Corinthian church had regular issues with pride. If you watch for it in Paul’s first letter to them, you will see it over and over:

1 Corinthians 5:1-2 ESV It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife. (2) **And you are arrogant!** Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you.

Now he is having to deal with it again here in his second letter. The context is that there were some in the church who slandered Paul, called him an inferior apostle, criticized his preaching, and accused him of being a wimp when he was in their presence, but harsh when he wrote to them. Their motive was to

bring the spotlight of self-glory upon themselves and turn the people away from Paul.

The truth was that Paul was humble. He modeled Christ's humility – *the meekness and gentleness of Christ*. Pride and arrogance interpret this as weakness and cowardice. These evil critics accused Paul of not ministering or preaching by the Spirit, but merely as a man. No doubt in contrast they put themselves across as some kind of eminent pious saints of the holiest kind.

NOTE: Whenever you see some preacher or other professing Christian using flowery words and flamboyant tones and styles of speech – beware. Certainly there have been genuine Christians speaking truth faithfully who were wonderfully gifted orators – Charles Spurgeon, George Whitefield, etc. But their oratory never drew attention to themselves – only to Christ.

This self-glorying was what the wicked people at Corinth were craving. So they attacked Paul. They presented another Jesus.

2 Corinthians 11:4 ESV For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if

you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough.

Now, listen carefully as Paul exposes hidden things and shows what was really going on:

What Christ's Weapons Look Like:

2 Corinthians 10:3-6 ESV For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. (4) For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. (5) We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, (6) being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete.

Paul was a man, just like us. He “walked in the flesh” just as we do, BUT he did not serve Christ (wage war) ACCORDING TO the flesh – as a mere man. [The difference in prepositions here is no accident, “in” vs “according to”]. No, his weapons were of *divine power*. God's power.

What then was this power of God? That is, *how did it manifest itself?* Was it some kind of constant display of miracles like fans of Oral Roberts expected? No. Look further and we can see it:

God's power in the Apostles' ministry effected the destruction of strongholds.

What is a stronghold?

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These are all *military and warfare* terms Paul is using.

- Waging war, warfare
- Weapons
- Destroying strongholds

NOTE: Lazy, willfully blind people who claim to be Christians live as if there is no war, no enemy, no weapons required. They are what we might call spiritual pacifists who think they can love the devil into submission. Following Christ is warfare-

2 Timothy 2:3 ESV Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.

This stronghold then, not surprisingly, is a military term – *a strong military installation*. This tells us then that these strongholds that Paul worked to destroy *are not the mere constructions of men. They are established as outposts of another enemy kingdom, at the head of which is a commander in chief – Satan.* So what is a stronghold in the sense in which Paul's meaning here is?

Well, you can answer that by looking at verse 5 –

We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ,

Strongholds are lies. They are the lies of the father of lies, Satan. They are false arguments and false opinions, all of which oppose God's truth – about Himself, about ourselves, about Christ and so on. Therefore, the primary weapon which is divinely powerful and perfectly suited to the demolition of these strongholds is – *the Word of God.*

Hebrews 4:12-13 ESV For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the

thoughts and intentions of the heart. (13) And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

TRUTH! This is what sets captives free from those strongholds that also serve as prisons. And it also does something to the servants of the devil who try to keep people imprisoned – *it punishes them and it forces them to submit to Christ whether they want to or not.* Not in a saving way, but in the sense of “every knee shall bow.”

If you believe a lie, you are captive to the liar. You are under his power. He has established an enemy fortress in your mind.

Romans 7:6 ESV But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.

Colossians 2:8 ESV See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.

Notice carefully that last conditional phrase at the end of verse 6 –

(6) being ready to punish every disobedience, **when your obedience is complete.**

This would seem to indicate that Paul, in his hesitancy to punish those at Corinth who were disobeying the gospel, *was waiting for all who were going to repent to do so, and then he would deal with the wicked who had crept in.*

Let me suggest one other application of this verse as well. It seems to me that we can conclude from it that *as long as a Christian holds back in some manner in following and obeying Christ, the strongholds of lies the enemy has established in that believer’s mind will remain untouched.*

For example, when we considered the evil of idolatry a couple of weeks ago, we saw that *the family* – mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, and so on – can be idols. Of all the enslaving powers that the enemy uses in the lives of so many of the people who communicate with me – besides an abuser spouse – *family* (mother, father,

siblings, grandparents....) are absolutely the most common tools of enslavement. *Especially, I say it again, if those family members claim to be Christians.* The enemy constructs fortresses in our minds so that we believe we cannot ever break from such people.

Christ tells us that we must always obey Him and in that sense “hate” father, mother, sister, brother, etc. rather than obeying their demands which are in conflict with the marching orders of Christ. We must love HIM more than anyone else.

If my application of verse 6 here is correct, this means that the Lord, by His Spirit and His Word, is not going to launch an attack on the strongholds in our minds *until we obey Him*. That is to say, He is not going to free us from all the lies and enslaving enmeshments that Satan holds us by, until we obey His command to follow Him no matter what the cost. *As long as we continue clinging to an idol, God is not going to blow up the fortress that the enemy is using in our minds to keep us clinging to the idol.* It’s like “stretch our your withered hand” or “rise up and walk” and in doing so we are set free. But if we just refuse to stretch out the hand or

get up and walk, well, we aren’t going to be healed.

Can you see how *boasting and pride* enter into the enemy’s strategy of warfare against us here? We won’t listen to truth. We will think we know better. And as long as we cling to this sinful pride and self-sufficiency, we are doomed to remain prisoners in the enemy stronghold – all the while boasting how free we are!!

The Foolishness of Prideful Comparison

2 Corinthians 10:12-18 ESV Not that we dare to classify or compare ourselves with some of those who are commending themselves. But when they measure themselves by one another and compare themselves with one another, they are without understanding.

(13) But we will not boast beyond limits, but will boast only with regard to the area of influence God assigned to us, to reach even to you. (14) For we are not overextending ourselves, as though we did not reach you. For we were the first to come all the way to you with the gospel of Christ. (15) We do not boast beyond limit in the labors of

others. But our hope is that as your faith increases, our area of influence among you may be greatly enlarged, (16) so that we may preach the gospel in lands beyond you, without boasting of work already done in another's area of influence.

(17) “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.” (18) For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends.

I am not at all happy with what I see going on in most local churches and Christian organizations today. You have heard me say this many times. Evildoers are being given safe harbor in churches and God’s Word is being regularly compromised so that many people who are church members are not even born again. Pride reigns. These are errors that need to be exposed.

However, when we point out such errors, *we must take care that our motive is not pride in us!* Pride sets in when, as Paul says here in verse 12 – *we begin to compare ourselves with others to make ourselves look better.* Understand? “Why, just look at what that church or those people are doing. WE would never do that here. WE are

better than them.” Paul says that is as stupid and sinful as saying one yardstick is more accurate than another yardstick because we compare the two side by side and then pronounce the one we prefer the accurate one!

We are only to boast *in the Lord*, which is not really boasting at all because it is not motivated by pride *in ourselves*. We “boast” only in the sense of saying that *the Lord has assigned us a particular area of ministry*. HE is the one who has given it to us. WE didn’t create it. To say, “we are better than those guys because the ministry we do is better than the one they do” is sinful and stupid. Now, it MAY be better if another ministry is false, but to compare OURSELVES with others and announce WE are better – is sinful and arrogant.

Listen again as Paul goes on:

(15) We do not boast beyond limit in the labors of others. But our hope is that as your faith increases, our area of influence among you may be greatly enlarged, (16) so that we may preach the gospel in lands beyond you, without boasting of work already done in another's area of influence.

It IS right to “boast” about the great things the Lord is doing through us. We don’t compete with others and try to take credit for ministry someone else is doing. Apparently Paul’s enemies who had crept in at Corinth were accusing Paul of taking credit for establishing the church there that didn’t belong to him. In fact he was responsible for bringing the gospel to them and it was these enemies who were taking false credit for themselves. THEY were the boasters.

But here is the main point of which this business of who got credit for the work the Lord did at Corinth –

2 Corinthians 10:17-18 ESV “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.” (18) For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends.

Who are we? Just instruments through whom the Lord works. And everything WE are is all His doing. And this brings us right back to where this chapter started:

2 Corinthians 10:3-5 ESV For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging

war according to the flesh. (4) For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. (5) We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ,

These weapons are of the Lord. They really are like David’s slingshot – there was no way that a kid’s slingshot should have killed that giant. Look at this:

1 Samuel 17:34-36 ESV But David said to Saul, “Your servant used to keep sheep for his father. And when there came a lion, or a bear, and took a lamb from the flock, (35) I went after him and struck him and delivered it out of his mouth. And if he arose against me, I caught him by his beard and struck him and killed him. (36) Your servant has struck down both lions and bears, and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, for he has defied the armies of the living God.”

Those actions are impossible. They were preparatory Goliaths for David!

1 Samuel 17:40-46 ESV Then he took

his staff in his hand and chose five smooth stones from the brook and put them in his shepherd's pouch. His sling was in his hand, and he approached the Philistine. (41) And the Philistine moved forward and came near to David, with his shield-bearer in front of him. (42) And when the Philistine looked and saw David, he despised him, for he was but a youth, ruddy and handsome in appearance. (43) And the Philistine said to David, "Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?" And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. (44) The Philistine said to David, "Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and to the beasts of the field." (45) Then David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. (46) This day the LORD will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head. And I will give the dead bodies of the host of the Philistines this day to the birds of the air and to the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel,

acting by the Word of God, using David for the glory of God. And David's weapons were divinely powerful in the hands of a young man who believed God and obeyed Him.

David's weapon was not really the slingshot. It was the Spirit of God