

w/b 1st December 2019

Holy Spirit: Person, presence, Power - Holy Spirit Blocks - Part 3: Pride. Life Application

Introduction

What things in your life make you particularly proud (*eg achievements, your background, possessions, family etc*)? How do you feel if anyone criticises those things? Or how do you defend those things if you feel they are threatened (*eg you know you're good at your job — or what you do in church or other non-work activities — and someone you think is not as good as you looks set to be promoted above you*)? And how easy is it to let God help you in the things you know you can do well?

On Sunday Matt used the example of King Saul as someone who came from nothing, was exalted and then became too proud for his own good. It's a long story (22 chapters) so we'll just use a few edited highlights!

Read:

1 Samuel 8 1-8, 18-22

The whole story of Saul is born out of pride and disobedience to God. Would you agree that the greatest pride we can have is to think we know better than God?

Adam and Eve sinned because the serpent convinced them they knew better than God and so could ignore his command not to eat of the fruit from that one particular tree. In what ways do the people of Israel know better than God in this passage (*NB v5 and v7*)?

God actually agrees to the people's request, but warns them of the consequences in vv10-18, which tells them of how the kings will oppress them to their own advantage, and that (v18) they will 'cry out for relief from the king (they) have chosen'.

How does Israel respond to this warning (vv19-20)? And how does God in turn respond to them (v22)? Consider this carefully: What is our reaction to God's response to Israel? Does it concern us that God agrees to go along with the people and not impose His own will to continue to be their King? Why do you think God agrees to their demands? What does it say about the way God treats our pride? Do we begin to see how pride can be a blockage to the Holy Spirit in our lives?

1 Samuel 9 tells us the story of how Saul came to be anointed as Israel's King. In vv1-2 we read that Saul was the son of a Benjamite and he was 'as handsome a young man as could be found anywhere in Israel, and he was a head taller than anyone else.' Samuel is told by God that Saul is the man he has chosen to be King. Samuel's response in v21 is: "But am I not a Benjamite, from the smallest tribe of Israel, and is not my clan the least of all the clans of the tribe of Benjamin? Why do you say such a thing to me?"

Is the fact that he is from 'the least of all the clans' mean that he himself is humble, or could it make him even more proud of his appointment'? Is there a danger that pride in our own backgrounds (maybe even pride in the fact that we are of a humble background) can entrap us into pride and hold us back in our walk with God?

The Holy Spirit does not feature many times in the Old Testament. Most famously he is promised in the book of Joel, written anything up to 500 years after the events described by Samuel. Yet as Matt told us on Sunday, there are two references to Saul being filled with the Spirit. Firstly, in **1 Samuel 10 v 10**, when a procession of prophets met Saul. We read: 'the Spirit of God came powerfully upon him, and he joined in their prophesying.'

In **1 Samuel 11** Nahash the Ammonite besieges Jabesh Gilead (a town east of the Jordan in the territory held by the Israelite tribe of Manasseh), and the men of Jabesh asked them him to 'make a treaty with us, and we will be subject to you.' Nahash would only reach a treaty with them if he could 'gouge out the right eye of every one of you and so bring disgrace on all Israel.' When Saul heard about it (v6), 'the Spirit of God came powerfully upon him, and he burned with anger'. Only after that was Saul confirmed as King. He had proved his commitment to Israel and been filled with the Spirit on two separate occasions — in days when being filled with the Spirit was very much the exception rather than the norm.

We saw on Sunday how Saul's slide into pride meant the Spirit of God was progressively removed from him. It starts with him not waiting for Samuel to turn up to sacrifice to God. Saul wanted to seek God's favour when his battle against the Philistines was going badly. Instead of waiting for Samuel Saul grabs the offerings and sacrifices them himself. This may not seem like a great sin: but it is the turning point for Saul.

Read 1 Samuel 13, 13-14. Why does Samuel rebuke Saul so harshly? (*You may need to bear in mind that the role of King and Priest were completely separated. Kings were not consecrated as Priests were and could not officiate in sacred matters. Jesus Himself brings the two roles together as Priest and King.*) Why is this the 'beginning of the end' for Saul? In what way is Saul exercising pride in what he does?

Saul's pride had devastating consequences for himself. Not only did it spell the beginning of the end of his reign, and cut off his descendants from the Royal Line, it later led him into huge jealousy of David, his appointed successor, to the extent that Saul tried to murder him. And it's significant that the lineage of Jesus is traced back only to David, not to Saul as the first King of Israel. His pride led to him being disowned by God.

Application

We need to guard ourselves against falling into pride and thereby losing the blessing of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Matt gave us a list of symptoms of pride:

1. **Fault finding** — Seeing the twig in another's eye
2. **A harsh spirit** — Speaks of others' sins with contempt, irritation, frustration, or judgment
3. **Superficiality** — concerned with others' perceptions of us than the reality of our hearts
4. **Defensiveness** — Reacting badly to challenge or rebuke
5. **Presumption Before God** — We should worship the Lord with reverence, and rejoice with trembling
6. **Desperation for Attention** — Pride is hungry for attention, respect, and worship in all its forms.
7. **Neglecting Others** — Pride prefers some people over others

Consider whether these characteristics are appearing in our own lives. Think of strategies to correct them and pray for each other to recognise, and deal with, pride before it can destroy the most precious thing to us: our relationship with God through the Holy Spirit, won for us by the blood of Jesus.