

PRIDE--ANOTHER HINDRANCE TO REVIVAL
Acts 14:8-18

Intro: For several weeks now we have been considering the subject of revival, revival as we see evidence of it in the Word of God.

Revival is a word which has to do with the people of God. They are the ones God revives.

And there is a sense in which the church is always in need of revival--even in those times of the greatest blessing. We can say this because there are always ways in which the church can be improved and cleansed and made more holy. Regardless of how the power of God may be displayed in the lives of the Lord's people, there can always be greater power!

In the course of these messages we have considered what a revival is. We have seen some of the conditions which indicate that the Lord's people are in need of revival. We have seen the message that God blesses when His people need reviving. We have seen how one of the Lord's servants, Ezra, prayed for revival. Revival is always accompanied by much prayer and by a return to the Word of God.

Times of revival are not set by men, but by God. And yet there are certain indications that the Lord may be preparing to pour out great blessing upon His people. We may be seeing that in our own day by the way in which many of the Lord's people are being enlightened concerning the doctrines of God's sovereign grace. While we were back in Philadelphia recently we saw that the same thing was taking place back there that is taking place here, and in so many other parts of our country. More and more of the Lord's people are getting weary of the man-centered emphasis that has been in the church, and their hearts are responding to the preaching of the doctrines of grace. The return is not as great as many of us would like to see, but there is a definite work of the Holy Spirit going on. May it increase until we find ourselves in a great spiritual awakening such as the church has experienced many times in many places in the past.

Last week we considered one of the great hindrances to revival. We were looking into Ephesians 4:30-32 where Paul wrote about how bitterness and its companion sins grieve the Holy Spirit.

Today I want to deal with another sin: the sin of pride.

Pride really is the root of all sin. Bitterness and pride are related to each other because we would not be bitter if we were not proud. Sin makes us proud, and pride causes us to sin more and more. And so, when God is preparing His church for revival, we always see how He works to humble His people and to make them

realize their sinfulness, their unworthiness, their helplessness and constant need of the Lord.

There are not many even among the Lord's people who can say, as the Apostle Paul said, "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing . . ." (Rom. 7:18). Instead, we have those who preach a gospel of self-esteem, which is nothing but a catering to the pride of man--and it is not the Gospel at all!

But we can be deceived about humility. We can take steps to humble ourselves and be very proud of it! Spurgeon once said that if Paul had not been speaking by the Holy Spirit when he told the Ephesian elders that he had served the Lord with all humility of mind when he was with them, that he would not have believed even the Apostle Paul. It is easy for us to think that we are humble when we are proud. False humility always seeks to make us think of ourselves. A truly humble person seeks the glory of God, and can be just as thankful if the blessing of God comes through someone else instead of through himself.

Much can be said about pride and humility. The Word deals with these subjects from Genesis to Revelation. So obviously we are not going to be able to deal with either one exhaustively this morning, but I do want you to think with me about it, and let us see what light we can get out of the Scripture which has been read to us from Acts 14:8-18.

Pride is deeply rooted in all of our hearts, and it will not be completely removed until we are with the Lord, but there are two things that I am concerned about from our text, and I want you to note what they are:

- 1) What makes us especially susceptible to pride--as the Lord's people?
- 2) How can we prevent our hearts from becoming proud, and so hinder the blessing of God? Or, to state that another way, what does the Lord do to prevent us from becoming proud?

Remember that this is only one passage from Scripture. There are others that could teach us other lessons, but I believe that we will find this passage very instructive.

I. WHAT CONTRIBUTES TO OUR PRIDE?

There are two things that are brought out from this time that the Apostle Paul and Barnabas were in Lystra. Strangely enough the first was:

A. The blessing of God.

Look at what had happened here: a man who had never walked was healed by God through the Apostle Paul! Now

this was a particularly dangerous time, a crucial time, for the Lord's servants, Paul and Barnabas. Preachers and missionaries and apostles are particularly in danger of manifesting pride, especially when the blessing of God is upon them.

Have you noticed in Scripture how the Lord dealt with certain men whom He was planning to use? Let me mention some Biblical examples:

- 1) Abraham.
- 2) Joseph.
- 3) Moses.
- 4) David.

And one from the NT:

- 5) Peter--especially when Satan wanted to sift him as wheat!

Even with Paul--what a humbling experience he had in connection with his salvation on the road to Damascus. And there were three years about which the Scriptures are silent before he entered into his public ministry. What was the Lord doing with him then?

The Lord knows what He is doing with all of us. So when there is failure, when there are delays which seem to be so meaningless, when we labor long with little or no apparent success, remember that God is dealing with our pride because we are never more in danger than when the Lord begins to bless and use us. We are all so prone to take at least some of the glory to ourselves.

Was this the reason that Peter began to sink after he had walked on the water to meet the Lord?

But notice another problem from our text.

B. The admiration of the people.

Look at verses 11-13. Who could ask for greater acceptance? How contrary this seemed to be with what the Lord had said about His servants being hated by the world! (Remember that this was the admiration of unregenerate people.) Sure the Gospel was not foolishness to them! Was there not some way in which such a reception could be turned to the advantage of the Gospel?

This was better than any Ph. D. that could have been conferred upon these men.

How easily we can be deceived and our hearts be lifted up with pride when men speak well of us! Nowhere were Paul and Barnabas treated as well as they were in Lystra--and

yet this is the very city and the very visit when Paul was stoned! Oh, how we need to be careful when we are with people who speak more highly of us than they do of our Lord.

Do you see from this why the Lord usually brings His people through humbling experiences (sometimes humiliating experiences) before He gives them the blessing that they seek, and often the blessing that He has promised to give them?

But now, let us ask another question: What kept Paul and Barnabas from falling for these temptations to pride?

There are three answers to that question which are observable in our text.

II. SAFEGUARDS AGAINST PRIDE.

The first was:

A. A true understanding of the doctrine of man.

And this they applied to themselves.

They knew that in their hearts they were no different from these heathen people in Lystra. Apart from Christ Paul and Barnabas knew that they would have done the same thing. Man is so prone to being deceived that he will worship man instead of worshipping God! We see it all of the time.

When the Lord has shown us what we are by nature, and the potential that we still have for sin, we can never take pride in ourselves or in our accomplishments. Like Jacob said to the Lord when he was returning home to face Esau,

I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast showed unto thy servant . . . (Gen. 32:10a).

What did Job say after all of the tragedies he experienced? See Job 42:5, 6.

What about Isaiah? See Isa. 6:5.

Look at the words of John the Baptist in 1:23, 27; 3:30.

Even when the sinless, elect angels spoke to John, the Apostle, they refused to let John worship before them. Cf. Rev. 19:10; 22:9.

Peter rebuked Cornelius for this very thing in Acts 10:25, 26.

The servant of the Lord who delights in the praises of men has never really seen the corruption and frailty of his own heart.

But there is a second safeguard.

B. Paul's commitment to the Gospel.

See v. 15m.

Paul was not preaching as some men preach today--that we can go on living like we have been living, only have Christ, too! He preached a radical change, a turning from false gods to the living and true God.

And he would not forsake his message in order to court the favor of any people. See his statement to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:24.

The preaching of the Gospel must never be neglected nor watered down for the sake of winning the favor of people. To do so is to fall prey to the pride that is in our own hearts. You could not get Paul to turn away from his message, and this in itself was a great safeguard to him.

But let me point out the third safeguard.

C. A realization of the greatness of God.

Paul spoke of God as "the living God," as the Creator; as the sovereign God, and as a good God. See vv. 15b-17.

Have you noticed how often Paul spoke to Gentiles about God as Creator? Back in the middle 1800's (c. 1858) Charles Darwin propounded the theory which is known today as the theory of evolution (and it is a false theory). But think of the damage that has been done to countless numbers of people because they do not recognize that God is our Creator, and that we are responsible to Him!

Listen to these words from Psalm 8, written by David:
When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?

One reason we find it so easy to glory in ourselves and in others is because we have such a deficient understanding of the greatness and majesty and holiness of God! The reason Job abhorred himself was because he had seen God. The reason Isaiah knew that he was so undone was

because his eyes had seen the King, the Lord of hosts!

Concl: Let us check ourselves out on these truths to see how ready we are for revival.

— Have you realized the corruption of your own heart? Do you see yourself in the light of modern psychology, or in the light of the Word of God?

How committed are you to the Gospel? Do you believe that people can be changed and made acceptable to God by any other means?

How does your life reflect your understanding of the character and greatness of God? Is your theology correct, but it still has not had much of an effect on your life?

There is really nothing worse than human pride. It is in all of us. Only God can deal with it effectively, and He does it by His Son, and by the Holy Spirit, and through bringing the truth of His Word upon our hearts so that we will walk in the light of His Word and live for His glory alone. Pride is sin. It exalts man instead of God. It encourages dependence upon man instead of God. Therefore, we need to humble ourselves continually before the Lord, and let Him exalt us with His blessing in His own time and way.

— (Close with the example of our Lord Jesus Christ as stated in Phil. 2:1-11.)