

Spiritual Revival: Humble Yourselves

We are studying the essence of spiritual revival. In 2 Chronicles the chronicler is showing Israel that amid their own difficult circumstances they can be renewed by the Lord, just as their forefathers were centuries before. In 2 Chronicles 7:13-14, the Lord says to Solomon, “When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command the locusts to devour the land, or send pestilence among my people, if my people who are called by my name humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.” We have noticed that there are four conditions to spiritual revival and three promises, all in verse 14. In this study we want to examine especially the condition of humbling ourselves. C.S. Lewis, in *Mere Christianity*, has said, “As long as you are proud you cannot know God. A proud man is always looking down on things and people: and, of course, as long as you are looking down you cannot see something that is above you.” As Andrew Murray once said, “Pride must die in you, or nothing in heaven can live in you.” In our text we notice that the truth of James 4:6b is illustrated: “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”

2 Chronicles 12:1-12

1 When the rule of Rehoboam was established and he was strong, he abandoned the law of the Lord, and all Israel with him. **2** In the fifth year of King Rehoboam, because they had been unfaithful to the Lord, Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem **3** with 1,200 chariots and 60,000 horsemen. And the people were without number who came with him from Egypt—Libyans, Sukkiim, and Ethiopians. **4** And he took the fortified cities of Judah and came as far as Jerusalem. **5** Then Shemaiah the prophet came to Rehoboam and to the princes of Judah, who had gathered at Jerusalem because of Shishak, and said to them, “Thus says the Lord, ‘You abandoned me, so I have abandoned you to the hand of Shishak.’” **6** Then the princes of Israel and the king humbled themselves and said, “The Lord is righteous.” **7** When the Lord saw that they humbled themselves, the word of the Lord came to Shemaiah: “They have humbled themselves. I will not destroy them, but I will grant them some deliverance, and my wrath shall not be poured out on Jerusalem by the hand of Shishak. **8** Nevertheless, they shall be servants to him, that they may know my service and the service of the kingdoms of the countries.” **9** So Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem. He took away the treasures of the house of the Lord and the treasures of the king's house. He took away everything. He also took away the shields of gold that Solomon had made, **10** and King Rehoboam made in their place shields of bronze and committed them to the hands of the officers of the guard, who kept the door of the king's house. **11** And as often as the king went into the house of the Lord, the guard came and carried them and brought them back to the guardroom. **12** And when he humbled himself the wrath of the Lord turned from him, so as not to make a complete destruction. Moreover, conditions were good in Judah.

Let us notice first of all:

I. God opposes the proud (vv. 1-5)

For reasons that we will discover in the text, God hates our pride. Notice this:

a. Our pride comes from our success (v. 1)

Rehoboam had already revealed himself as a proud man in chapters 10 and 11. But in 12:1 we see a new occasion for his pride, namely, he was “established” and “strong.” In Rehoboam’s case and in ours, our strength often leads us to pride. Solomon said in Proverbs 16:18, “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.”

b. Our pride leads to rebellion (vv. 1-2)

Notice that from Rehoboam’s strength he then “abandoned the law of the Lord” and became

“unfaithful to the Lord.” Pride keeps us from submitting to proper authority, from loving those in our own families and communities, from listening to wise people around us, and from being spiritually renewed. Every time we turn our back on the law of God and on our relationship with Him, we have just expressed our pride.

c. Our pride offends the Lord (vv. 2-5)

Our pride indeed offends other people, but the bigger problem is that it offends Him.

Proverbs 16:5 says, “Everyone who is arrogant in heart is an abomination to the Lord; be assured, he will not go unpunished.” We see throughout the scriptures how offensive pride is to God — with Adam and Even in the Garden of Eden, at the Tower of Babel, with Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar, and Belshazzar, and on many other occasions.

II. God gives grace to the humble (vv. 6-12)

We find the word “humility” 36 times in the Old Testament, 18 of them referring to sacred humility. Three times in Samuel and Kings do we get the word, but 14 times in Chronicles. The concept of humility involves our confessing our need and acknowledging our sins. Sinclair Ferguson once described meekness as “being who we are in the presence of God, nothing more and nothing less.” Our society seems to run on pride, whether it is presidential candidates, Olympic athletes, or our own network of friends and associates. Here is what our text teaches us:

a. Our afflictions humble us (v. 6)

John R. Mott, the founder of the YMCA and a wonderful Christian, once said, “A necessary precursor of any great spiritual awakenings is a spirit of deep humiliation growing out of a consciousness of sin, and fresh revelation of the holiness and power of glory of God.” We notice in our text that it was “then” that the princes of Israel and the king humbled themselves. The “then” in the text refers to the afflictions perpetrated upon Judah by Shishak of Egypt. We too are humbled by the afflictions that God places upon us.

b. Our humility exalts the Lord (v.6)

Notice how their humility immediately led them to proclaim, “The Lord is righteous.” The most insidious form of pride is spiritual pride; yet, when we humble ourselves under the afflictions of God, we find a breakthrough: we are not the righteous ones, but God alone is righteous. John Calvin says that it is faith alone that solves the problem of pride; that is, we put our trust not in our own righteousness but in the righteousness of Christ alone.

c. The Lord preserves the humble (vv. 7-12)

Notice first of all that God promises not to destroy us. We should not take this lightly, because we deserve to be destroyed because of all of our sins and rebellion against Him. We are not destroyed because Jesus Christ was destroyed on Calvary’s cross. We live because He was raised on the third day from the tomb. God will not destroy us.

But notice that God continues to discipline us. In verse 8, we read that the Judahites shall still be servants to Shishak, that they may also be servants of God. God continues to afflict us, that through this discipline we may remain faithful to Him. This is why we read in verse 12, “Moreover, conditions were good in Judah.” They may have lost much of their wealth and security, but they gained God!

Discussion Questions

1. What happens to us when we experience success? Why does this happen?

2. Why is pride so offensive to God?

3. If we belong to God, how does He keep us humble? Why does He keep us humble?

4. Why is humility essential to personal and corporate spiritual revival?

5. Describe spiritual pride. Why is it so destructive? What is the remedy for spiritual pride?

6. Explain why the chronicler says in 2 Chronicles 12:12: “Moreover, conditions were good in Judah.”

Going Deeper

1. When are you most likely to fall into pride? How does your pride most commonly show itself?

2. What intentional steps can you take to humble yourself before the Lord?