

Title: Who do you think you are?  
Text: Isaiah 47-48  
Theme: The deceit of privilege  
Series: Isaiah #40  
Prop Stmtnt: A little bit of success tends to blind us to the grace of God that enabled us to enjoy a little bit of success.  
Aim: I aim for my people (and myself) to recover an accurate view of ourselves as being completely dependent upon the grace of God for everything, all of the time, and to see God's grace expressed primarily in the cross.

Mac Breedlove plays lacrosse for his Texas High School. He was traveling with his team to a tournament by plane and decided that Southwest Airlines boarding policy applied to others, but not to him. Instead of waiting for his turn, he slipped in with another group and figured that he had cheated the system that was good for others. Mac's coach, Evan Welchel called him out on it. Evan went to the flight attendants, explained what had happened, and they called Mac up to the front of the plane, where he apologized to the rest of the flight. He said, *"During the boarding process I took advantage of this airline's kindness. While some of my teammates were called to the front of the line, I was not. And yet I cut in line. I hope you will all find it in your hearts to forgive me, for I am just a young man that [who] thinks I am smarter than I am."* Kudos to coach Welchel!!

We all like to think that we are better than what we really are. After all, no one dreams of getting 4<sup>th</sup> place, do they? Here is the pattern: a little bit of success tends to blind us to the grace of God that enabled us to enjoy a little bit of success. This text exposes our hearts even as God addresses the ongoing war of pride and self-worship that rages within all of us. It is an age-old and relentless battle. Here is the setting: Isaiah is a prophet, who speaks and writes God's Word, primarily to the nation of Judah (southern kingdom). It is around 700 BC. Israel, as a nation split into two countries about 200 years before, and recently, the Assyrian empire had invaded and virtually wiped out the northern kingdom. Judah escaped defeat by a last minute appeal to God. But, her repentance would not last, and neither would her security. Already Babylon is being to arise and will eventually defeat Assyria and Judah, taking many of her people into captivity. God reveals this to Isaiah 100 years before it happens. But, just as the Assyrian empire did not last, the Babylon empire will not last. God, speaking through his prophet Isaiah, is explaining his purpose and plan through all of this. Babylon will be humbled and Judah will be restored. This is recorded for them and for us in order that we might see that we are living in the midst of God's plan. Don't miss the point! When you think that any success or favor or gift is yours because you are somehow inherently better than someone else – You miss the point! The point of this text and the aim of this message is for us to recover an accurate view of ourselves as being completely dependent upon the grace of God for everything, all of the time.

Read Text:

Audience – Humbled Babylon (47)  
Restored Judah (48)

Just as God humbled Judah because she refused to acknowledge that God was the source of her privilege, so He will humble Babylon. The warnings for them are clear for us.

1. **Privilege can blind you to what you really are.** (47.1-7)

Babylon is pictured as a formerly beautiful and arrogant woman who has had all of her jewelry, clothes, servants, security and possessions stripped from her. She is now forced to do the very work that, in her day, was only done by people who were way beneath her. Now, be careful, because, while you rightfully think that it is wrong to think of yourself as being above others, it is very easy to think of yourself as being above those who think of themselves as being above others. So, even as Isaiah paints a distressing picture of the coming humiliation of Babylon, the warning should be clear to Judah. Do not think that the destruction of your enemy is based on the fact that you are better. If pride takes them down, it will take you down too.

A. **Your throne can make you think you are in charge.** (1)

Babylon thought that because she had a throne (for a time) that she was “born for this.” The gods had selected her above all else because she was the best. Here she is now being called to sit in the dust because she does not have a throne anymore to sit on. Come; sit down here in the dust, just like the rest of us. You are really like us. But, she cannot sit too long can she. Notice the commands of the first two verses; “come, sit, sit, take, grind, put off, strip off, uncover, pass through.” These are commands given to one who is not in charge. She used to be in charge, but not any longer. She goes from being served as one who is glorious to serving those who now pretend to be powerful.

B. **Your clothes can make you think you are beautiful.** (2-5)

Her clothes were the finest in the world – and she wore them. What does that say about her? Nothing really. What is she? She is just like the rest of us. What are we? We are not, in our heart of hearts privileged people deserving of wealth and ease. “Put off your veil.” She was attempting to say that her beauty was striking that it had to be hid from the common people, only to take off the veil and see, “hey, she’s just as ugly as the rest of us!” When we experience a taste of wealth and ease, it is so easy to think that this is the life that we deserve. Babylon did. Reality really hurts. The clothes only provide a covering what is really underneath. Clothes do not change us; they only provide the appearance of change.

Babylon was, in reality, not this beautiful, powerful young woman of means. She was under the just judgment of God (3b-4). She completely misinterpreted her privilege. She saw it as something that she was due, rather than something that was hers to steward. And now, she is not just sitting in the dust instead of on a throne (1), she is sitting in silence and darkness (5). The story of the world is the repeating story of how the mighty fall.

**C. Your status can make you think you can treat others however you want. (6-7)**

This verse is very instructive. God is saying to Babylon, that I raised up and gave you power because I was using you as a corrective in the lives of my children. It wasn't that you were great; it was because my people needed to repent. However, in your might, you showed no mercy. Even on the aged, who from the very basics of any civilized thinking should be treated with respect, you make their yoke exceedingly heavy. You thought that you would be "mistress forever" (7). Your title can give you a false sense of security. You thought that your title gave you the right to be able to be cruel.

Beloved, this wicked thinking lurks very close to the surface of our hearts, just waiting for a chance to pounce. How many times have you been in a restaurant and as the customer (status symbol) and you think that you have the right to be demanding, and demeaning? We never have the right to be demanding and demeaning. I don't care if you own the restaurant, or if you own the whole chain. You never have the right to be discourteous, and demeaning. But, if we get just a little bit of weight, a little bit of power, we think that we have to throw it around. Everyone who gets a taste of power is tempted to believe that this is what they were born for. This is their destiny. It is nauseating when experienced on a personal level. When it is embraced on a national level, it is used to justify ethnic cleansing and racism of the vilest order.

What are you – really? Your status, possessions, even position is not the final word. But, if you are given privileges, it is so difficult to think and believe that in reality you are just like everyone else. But you are. Privileges are temporary gifts for us to steward while God carries out his plan. If we fail to see that, we blind ourselves to what we really are. Privilege then is wasted on the pursuit of pleasures instead of used for others. When you take your privileges and do nothing but pursue pleasure, the blindness only deepens.

**2. Pleasure can blind you to who you really are. (47.8-15)**

Pleasure is a gift from God in order to enjoy God. But when it is disconnected from the enjoyment of God, pleasure becomes the god. The pursuit of pleasure leads to demands that are completely disconnected from reality. For example:

**A. You think that you will never experience grief. (8-9)**

Babylon thought that she was above pain. She was above loss and grief. Her pursuit of pleasure had falsely led to her to believe that she would not experience what normal people do. After all, she was not average. In fact, notice the 4<sup>th</sup> line of v.8. "I am, and there is no one besides me." What is Babylon thinking? She is thinking that she is God. She can control all things. Grief, loss and sorrow only happen to others. Not me. I will never be widowed; I will never lose a child. Have you ever said, or heard someone say, "No one should ever have to go through this." "No one should ever have to experience pain."? What is the belief system underneath that?

In 1616, two titans were born. The one, William Shakespeare would leave his mark on the literary world. The other, John Owen would forever impact the world of those who love the gospel. John Owen was one of the finest Puritan theologians and pastors who ever lived. He would preach before Parliament, lead Oxford University and run in influential circles with the likes of Oliver Cromwell. But, when you read Owen, you read none of that. Owen, by most accounts wrote the most thorough works on sin, ever. His dissection of the nature of the human heart and exposure of the true condition of our humanity is exhausting. As I read him, I wonder, what kind of a person writes like this? How can you think so deeply, so exacting, so relentlessly about motivation, desire and the gospel? How can a man who rubbed shoulders with such prominent people, be so vulnerable, so careful, so humble, and so transparent. John Owen walked with God. He also had eleven children with his first wife and only one lived beyond adolescence. And even this daughter who lived into adulthood, returned home after her marriage fell apart, and died in his home. Why was Owen not bitter? Why was Owen not consumed with himself? Why was Owen not complaining to God? When you read Owen, it is abundantly clear that he was not an unfeeling, stoic machine. He was a man of deep passion and was engaged in much soul-searching. He knew anguish, but Owen was so aware of the gospel, so amazed by God's grace, so taken by the mercy of God that the privileges that he was given for a time did not become expectations or demands. He was so aware of how merciful God was not to condemn us, but to rescue us through Christ, that he did not think of God as being unkind, even through deep personal loss. Beloved do you see this in this text? If you live for pleasure, she will blind you. She will only set you up for bitterness and sorrow because...

**B. You think that you are the exception to the rule. (10-11)**

If you think that you are God, you think that you can live by your own rules. You think that you are accountable to no one. But God says differently. In fact He is saying that you used evil on others, and evil is what you get and you will not know what to do with it.

**C. You think that you know how to get what you want. (12-13)**

Babylon thought that through her magic and sorcery she had figured out how the world operated and that she was able to manipulate the forces to do her bidding. It is no different than the person who thinks that he has learned how to manipulate the market, find the loopholes in the policies, and work the system. You see these people at work. They figure out how to take twist things in such a way, that they do the least amount of work possible and take the maximum amount of time off, stretching the definition of a sick day beyond anything imaginable. What is the heart behind that? What is the thinking behind that? I deserve pleasure! I should not have to work! I am smarter than others. I can get what I want. That thinking is not of God. Babylon thought that way and she was completely unprepared for disaster. And it came fast...

**D. You cannot save yourself. (14-15)**

And when it came, she, who thought she was above the rules, thought that her magic, her powers, her vast investment and emphasis upon astrology would save her, were in the end not only useless, but they betrayed her. Belshazzar partied in arrogant stupidity while Babylon was being invaded by the Medes. He mocked God, only to have God write his judgment on the wall of the banquet hall. But instead of seeing their own hearts revealed in Babylon's attitudes, Judah witnessed the rapid rise and inglorious demise of the Babylonian empire and missed the whole point. Judah's response was that of arrogant smugness. It was an attitude that said, "You had that coming. Now, we can be restored back to our rightful position of glory." Chapter 48 is for arrogant Judah.

**3. Pride blinds you to your real need. (48.1-11)**

Look at the four lines of description in v.1. Do you see what was going on?

**A. Pride relies upon the form of faith and not the reality. (1-2)**

Judah was so proud of the form of religion that she was blinded to the fact that her faith had no substance. She did not really believe what she said. But, was proud of the fact that she said the right things. It's like taking a class on theology and getting a 100% on every quiz, test and term paper and then holding that up before God as the basis of your righteousness. What if every Sunday we recited the Apostles Creed?

*I believe in God the Father, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth: And in Jesus Christ, his only begotten Son, our Lord: Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary: Suffered under Pontius Pilate; was crucified, dead and buried: He descended into hell: The third day he rose again from the dead: He ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty: From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead: I believe in the Holy Ghost: I believe in the holy catholic church: the communion of saints: The forgiveness of sins: The resurrection of the body: and the life everlasting. Amen.*

Now, there is some good theology in that (along with a couple of statements that need clarifying). But, if, in saying this every Sunday in church, you came to believe that because you repeated the Apostles Creed in church, unlike others who did not, that you were inherently better? That is completely missing the point. That is such a danger. The very things that are designed to make us aware of our need and help us understand the gospel can become the occasion for us to be arrogant.

**B. Pride refuses to submit to the obvious truth of God. (3-8)**

In these verses, God is responding to how stubborn and bull-headed Judah is. (4) So, God goes on the record before these things happen, and then they happen exactly as he said in order to make it undeniably clear that He is God. And yet, they refused to submit. That is why; I maintain that if you found Noah's Ark, preserved in a glacier on the side of a

mountain, it would not change a thing. The evidences of God's authority are abundantly clear. His predictions of history, including the rise and fall of empires, are astonishing in detail. Yet, people refuse to believe. People refuse to even investigate. They do not want to be backed into a corner where they must acknowledge the supremacy of God. And when they do, they miss seeing what God is really up to.

**C. Pride cannot see the actual purposes of God. (9-11)**

Judah was blind to all that God was really doing, and was not in a place where she could engage in it.

**4. Pride blinds you to the real need of others. (48.12-22)**

The rest of the chapter is an appeal to Judah. God is pointing out to his people, that Babylon's problem was her failure to acknowledge and submit to the authority of God. But, what God judged Babylon for, was the same thing that he judged Judah for, and would judge her again if she did not change.

**A. Babylon's problem was God (and so is yours). (12-16)**

**B. Judah's hope is God (and so is yours). (17-22)**

Verses 17-18 are so instructive, aren't they? Look at this! The God of the universe is telling his people that he has been the one who was behind all of their prosperity and privilege. It was not because of them, it was because of him. If they had only acknowledged him and humbled themselves before him, then he would never have brought down the house. They would have continued to enjoy these privileges, not because they ever deserved them, but because God loves to show his mercy and grace to undeserving people.

What are you doing with the privileges and pleasures that God has graciously given you? God has all power, all might, all authority, and all resources. What does he do with all of this? He shares it. He provides protection and care for the weak. He pours out mercy and grace on the humble. He is tender to the broken. He does not have to. He certainly does not need to. In fact, this completely self-sufficient God chose to live as one who needed sleep, food, clothing, and shelter. He chose to humble himself and become one of us and experience our needs and vulnerabilities, and in so doing, he not only identified himself with lowly us and became one of us, he did so, that he might as both God and man, be able to die for our sin, because as God, he was pure, but as man, he was able to be the sacrifice for sin, for humans. God took his position of privilege and used his authority as a place to serve and love others.

What is your privilege? Are you wasting it on pursuing your own pleasures, being your own little god, attempting to control your little world? Or, do you see that what you have is entrusted to you, in order to make God known? Does your strength bring comfort to those around you, or do you use it to make others cower? Are you privileged with

money? Do you really believe that is because you are inherently better than others and therefore, you have that simply for your own pleasure? Are you privileged with a position of leadership? Do those under you get a taste of the mercy of God by the fact that you use your leadership to serve, rather than be served?

Whatever you have, is not yours to begin with, and is not yours to keep. What you are and what you have is by the grace of God. He, who could have given us justice, gave us salvation through Christ. Now, you can reflect that in your mercy toward others, who just like you, do not deserve it.

Who do you think you are? Deserving of privilege and demanding your due or deserving of judgment and overwhelmed that Christ took your due, in your place?