

Title: Pride Stinks, Really
Text: Isaiah 14.3-27
Theme: Where pride will take you
Series: Isaiah #19
Prop Stmtnt: Glory now is no match for judgment later.
Aim: I aim to convince my people to trust only in God and not be fooled by the temporary and condemned arrogance of this world.

Disciple-town – dismiss

For years he ruled as the rule-maker. He sold the oil in his country at great profit, keeping the billions of dollars for himself and his family while his own country lived in meager conditions. He was obsessed with his clothes, his hair, his appearance and his image. But, in the end, when he ran from the rebels and was found hiding in a drainage pipe, he was just like any other man. Moammar Gadhafi died in a manner that he inflicted upon others. And when he died, no one came immediately to rescue his body. Only his enemies came to mock the corpse of the man that they had learned to despise. Gadhafi is only the latest in a long string of rulers on this earth who reflect this text and who all point to the one world ruler (antichrist) yet to come.

The text that we are looking at this morning, centers upon a song or a poem. We are at a bit of a disadvantage since most of us cannot read Old Testament Hebrew. But, if we could, we would see an example here of some of the finest example of Hebrew literature that has ever been penned. There is balance, meter, compelling description and brilliant imagery. There is drama and surprise; pomp and disgust; beauty and horror all woven together to make an unmistakable point. And Isaiah does it, brilliantly. Perhaps it is just as well that due to the inherent difficulties of translating poetry from one language to another, that we are not distracted by the literary elements of this text, but able to focus upon the very point itself. We need to hear this. We need to really listen to this poem and take its message to heart.

I remind you that Isaiah is a prophet, probably a blood-relative to the king of Judah, the southern kingdom of Israel. The year is around 700 BC, and Assyria is conquering the Ancient Near East and bringing with her a tyrannical reign of terror. Syria, (neighbor to the north) and Israel, (northern kingdom) fall into the hands of Assyria. It seems to be only a matter of time when Judah succumbs as well. What is tiny Judah compared to mighty Assyria and how does the God of Judah stack up to the gods of Assyria?

Taken together, Isaiah 13 and 14 are a one-two knock-out on the kingdom(s) and king(s) of this world (Babylon) and all that she represents. The message is: Do not be fooled by this world – Babylon – This kingdom is going down. Do not be intimidated by her kings – They are going down! Isaiah was saying, “Don’t trust in that which is condemned! It cannot save you!!!” It cannot save you, because this world believes that it does not need God. It believes that it can ignore God’s laws, sneer at God’s Word, and mock God’s standards. That is arrogance. What happens to a person who is arrogant?

Calvin Johnson, wide receiver for the Lions has used it effectively to frustrate smaller defensive backs. It is called, a stiff-arm. When a would-be tackler is reaching to take you down, you push him and avoid being taken down. It is the same idea presented in James 4.6. “God opposes (stiff-arms) the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”

Proud people put on a good show. Their pride is part of their defensive scheme designed to keep people at a distance so their fears and insecurities are not exposed. Rulers hide behind their military. But, what is that? It is nothing more than saying, if you do not give me what I want then I will exercise power over you. I will intimidate you. I will dominate you. I will take away or threaten to take away from you what you want if you do not give me what I want. Others hide behind their image of having it all together. The truth is, they don't, but they don't want you to know that. So, the image is bolstered by clothes or cars, personality and pleasantries, or stuff and stories, really anything to give you the impression of having it together. But, the heart of pride is pretending to be something that only God is or pretending to be able to do something that only God has the right to do.

Read Text – The end of pride. (2 sections – 3-23; 24-27)

1. **What really happens when the proud die.** (14.3-23)

Why is Isaiah so compelled to address this? Tiny Judah was being threatened by hostile forces much larger than she. The gods of the other nations appeared to be more powerful since they were the ones who were victorious in battle. The king(s) of Assyria and Babylon were terrifying in their threats and ability to carry inhumane levels of destruction against their foes. But, as v.3 indicates, they are on a leash. They will not win the day. They will have their moment in time, but God will in the end, give rest to his people. The language here echoes what happened in Egypt. The masters became the servants and the slaves were finally given rest. This pattern was repeated by Babylon and will happen at the end of the age. But in the end, the arrogant will not stand. All kingdoms will crumble before the real Kingdom and all kings will bow before the true King. And in that day, you will take up this “taunt.” The word, translated as “taunt” also can mean “proverb” or “parable.” Proverbs are sayings and parables are stories that have a twist, a surprise, a jab that makes a point in an unforeseen, but now unforgettable manner. This song, this poem about the pride of the king is more of a parable and is full of contrast, irony and surprise.

Now, I am not going to go into great detail about the literary qualities of this text, though I am tempted to because the Bible is not only the most significant body of truth – ever!, it is at the same time, brilliantly written. This book is a literary masterpiece. It is a story; woven together by God that ends where it begins; that flows along one major theme and at the same time is marked by all of these ribbons of thought. That is not only true on a large scale, but even in these smaller passages there is wonder and beauty.

For example, this poem is another example of a chiasm.

Intro (3-4a)

A1 The reaction on earth (4b-8)

B1 The reaction in the other world (hell) (9-11)

B2 The reaction in the other world (heaven) (12-15)

A2 The reaction on earth (16-21)

Concl (22-23)

But here is the point! The proud (those who live as if they do not need God) are condemned. This poem is an explanation of “what happens when the proud die.”

3-4a - Intro

A. There will be rejoicing. (4b-8)

When godless maniacs like Pol Pot, Hitler, Stalin, Ghadafi, Hussein and others die, there is nothing wrong with being relieved and even rejoicing in the fact that an enemy of God and an enemy of truth, peace, righteousness and justice has finally met the Creator. Think about it! What would this world be like if death did not put a lid upon the evil that these men were carrying out? There is compelling evidence to support that Stalin was planning a Russian version of a Jewish holocaust when he had a stroke and died. Am I glad that he died? Yes, I am. At the same time, I am grieved that this man used his power and position to inflict so much evil upon this world. The death of every wicked person is still a loss, but while that is sad to consider, the fact that justice is now being served is a cause for relief.

The Ancient Near East kings knew how to reign through terror. They knew the art of mental torture as well as physical. They were relentless in their evil and used it quite effectively. Here is Isaiah going on record, publicly declaring that these kings are going down and will meet their demise. He is willing to state it, in spite of the fact that his words will probably be used against him at some point. His own life illustrates the very message that he is declaring. Don't fear the ones who carry scepters that can be broken like twigs. Trust in the One who scepter is eternal.

Verse seven speaks of the earth being at rest and being free to sing and rejoice at the death of the proud king(s). This earth was made by God to be ruled by God. This world is currently out of order. When Cain murdered his brother Abel, God said, “the voice of your brother's blood cries to me from the ground.” This earth labors under the violence of man. Sin on this earth is nature's version of food poisoning. There is something here that does not belong and that cannot be handled. Bloodshed puts this world out of sorts with itself because injustice and violence is out of sorts with God. When the evil One is dead, the earth will be at rest. Now, there is heaviness and longing, but someday there will be rest.

Verse eight continues this theme of how nature itself will be relieved at the demise of a tyrant. This planet, with all of her eco-systems and intricate balance of natures, awaits the day when her King returns and removes these imposters who have subjected her to such chaos because of their insatiable egos and appetites for violence.

There were a number of men named Herod who ruled in Israel, but the one who was king when Christ was born would fit the description of this text like many others. When Herod knew that he was dying, he ordered that the most respected citizens of Jerusalem be arrested and held in Jericho until the moment of his death. And then, upon the news of his death, they were to be executed so that when Herod died, there would be mourning and anguish. What Herod either failed to realize or attempted to ignore was that at the moment of his death, he no longer had any authority to issue an order. Instead of death, the citizens were released which only added more dancers to the party. What happens when the proud die...?

B. There will be mocking. (9-11)

These verses (9-11) take us to the realm of the dead. Here, the death of the arrogant which brought relief and rest to the world brings agitation and turmoil to the underworld. Proud people like to pretend that the rules do not apply to them. Death is the great equalizer that exposes that lie, doesn't it? And here, in the realm of the dead, those who died before are mocking this proud king by saying, "you are no different than us. You died just like us."

The picture that is painted in verse 11 is as gripping as it is graphic. It depicts a royal funeral procession with all of its pomp and ceremony. Pageantry, pomp, music and mourners all carefully staged to give the appearance of importance and dignity, but then someone looks into the coffin and the end of the verse describes what is really there. This is what is really happening. Death is not impressed by the proud. Maggots are the bed and worms are the cover. Now, that's pretty disgusting isn't it? But all of the ceremony and dignitaries, military salutes and giant monuments do not change a thing. It's not like the worms have a conference call and say, "hey, get the word out, we can't touch this one, he was a king." By the way, now you know why I titled the sermon the way I did.

Do you get the point that Isaiah is making? His appeal is to the nation of Judah. He is challenging his own king Ahaz and all others like us who are tempted to be impressed with earthly power and the symbols of influence. He is saying, "Look at what they are going to be! Why would you fear them? Why would you give your life seeking their approval?"

These verses are a window into what the proud (godless) can expect in death. They will still be conscious. Their existence will continue, and obviously they will be able to know others and be recognized by others, but not with the influence they had on the earth. They will be weak, vulnerable, and at loss. The demise of Moammar Ghadafi did not end with the death of his physical body. His humiliating death was just beginning of his sorrows. What happens when the proud die...?

C. There will be judgment. (12-15)

The third stanza is also about the afterlife, but it is not the underworld (like 9-11), but heaven. Heaven is confirming the sentence of judgment by rendering the verdict of guilty. Some have thought that these verses are referring to Satan. I do not believe that to be the case since this entire song is speaking of the utter folly of any human to think that he is some sort of god who can challenge the one and only God. And yet, even though I do not think that this text is specifically referring to what happened to Satan, the attitude and pattern of the proud is a reflection of how Satan thinks. His goal has always been to replace God. He wants to be the most high, but he does not possess the power to reach that high. Therefore, all he has is lies and intimidation. He uses them effectively because the truth is; he is condemned, sentenced and awaiting his punishment to begin. He therefore wants to take every single person that he can with him.

The title, “O Day Star”, is believed by some to be a reference to the planet Venus, which appears brilliantly in the early morning sky, but when the Sun appears, the planet is no longer visible. Earthly kings have no inherent brightness. The appearance of their light is dwarfed by the appearance of the true King.

The heavens are now pointing out what the proud did with their “power”. It was never enough. The proud are never content. Their lust for glory cannot be quenched because they are seeking to satisfy an illicit desire. There is only One who is truly glorious. All others are imposters. All others have vain-glory. Only God has true glory. Those who are vain-glorious are pretending to be glorious and have to rely upon all of the symbols and images of power to give to others the impression that they really are powerful. But all of these symbols and images cannot stop death. They may impress the masses, but they do not impress death. Death does not care if you have a crown on your head, a scepter in your hand or an army at your command. You can even claim to be God (14), but when you die (15) it will be obvious that you are not! Unless of course you rise again from the dead three days later. What happens when the proud die...?

D. There will be disgrace. (16-21)

The scene is now back to the earth, where the unattended, and therefore, unburied corpse of the dead king is being stared at by people who are struck with the fact that here was the man who made other people tremble in fear, but who is now, completely powerless. If he had no power over death, then, did he really have power over people? These verses are full of irony. Here is the guy who would not let his prisoners go home, who now, has no home (18-19a). Here is the guy who gave no thought to the murdering of thousands, only to find himself being weighed down and pulled down to judgment by those that he killed (19b-20). In the end, the proud, who try so hard to forcibly leave their mark on this world, only leave holes that are covered over with the sands of time.

22-23 – Concl

The conclusion of the song is given by the LORD who shows that kingdom and king will all go down to nothing. Don't trust the ways of this world. Check your heart. Will there be relief or grief at your death or retirement? The seeds of pride are planted in each of our hearts. What would you do with power and money? What do you do with what you have now?

2. **What do we do now?** (24-27)

A. **Rest: No enemy of God will stand.** (24-25)

Here is the word of God predicting the demise of Assyria. We will read of it soon, but while it was sudden, and to some degree shocking, it should have been expected. God said it. I have planned – it will be. I have purposed – it will stand.

And this is really the crux of the whole matter for you. Are you willing to acknowledge that what God has said is true? Look at his track record? Look at what he has said about nations and what has happened? His plans and purposes are for the entire world – and they include you. He will not be denied. He will accomplish everything that he has said. You will either get on board with him or run over by him, but no one will defy and change the plans of God. That is good news for those who follow.

B. **Trust: Every promise of his Word is true.** (26-27)

The really beautiful thing about this entire text is not so much what it says, but what it sets us up for. This poem is a graphic expose on the true future of the proud, but at the same time, it is an enormous contrast to our King.

At this point in Isaiah, we do not know that much about him other than he will come as a child (7.14) and (9.6) that he will be a wonderful counselor, mighty God, everlasting Father, whose reign will never end. But later in chapter 53 Isaiah says that he will grow up before him as a tender shoot, as a root out of the dry ground, whose appearance is not remarkable, and who is so kind and tender that he won't even break a bruised reed. He doesn't need symbols of power. He is born in a stable. He doesn't intimidate with feats of strength or threats of violence, but with truth he exposes lies and with love he comforts the humble, and with grace he pardons the repentant. His death is not a charade of power. In fact, his death appears to be the epitome of weakness and shame as he is hung on a cross to die in front of a mocking crowd, only to discover that his life could never be taken away, rather he laid it down, he gave it up. His death was the ultimate display of power. He had everything. He was everything. He gave everything, in order that your sins could be paid for. It was the only way.

We follow a King who died – for us. Who then, rose again – for us! Who is coming again for us! In that day, all pretenders and imposters will be gagging on the dust balls under his footstool. He will not be denied!

Do you want to follow him? Give up your pride. Give up your excuses. Acknowledge your sin and rebellion. Call upon his grace and trust Him, surrender to Him, bow to Him – the only King and the true lover of your soul.