

“BEWARE THE PRIDE OF HEROD”
2 Chronicles 32:16-26, I John 2:15-17, Acts 12:19b-25
November 2 & 3, 2024

“Basketball coach Pat Riley tells about the 1980 World Championship Los Angeles Lakers in his book, *The Winner Within*. They won the NBA Championship that year, and they were recognized as the best basketball team in the world. They began their 1980-81 season considered likely to win back-to-back championships. But within weeks of the season opener, Magic Johnson tore a cartilage in his knee, and he needed a three-month recuperation period. The team and the fans rallied, and the remaining players played their hearts out. They determined to make it through that period without losing their rankings. They were winning seventy percent of their games when the time began to draw near for Magic Johnson to return to action.

“As his return grew closer,’ Coach Riley explains, “the publicity surrounding [Johnson] increased. During time-outs at the games, the public address announcer would always say, ‘And don’t forget to mark your calendars for February 27th. Magic Johnson returns to the lineup of your World Champion Los Angeles Lakers!’ During that announcement the other players would look up and curse. They’d say, ‘We’re winning now. What’s so great about February 27th?’

“As the day approached, fewer and fewer things were written or said about the players who were putting out so much effort. All the media attention was focused on the one player who hadn’t been doing a thing.

“Finally the 27th came, and as they clicked through the turnstiles, every one of the 17,500 ticket holders was handed a button that said, ‘The Magic Is Back!’ At least fifty press photographers crowded onto the floor while the players were introduced. Normally only the starters were introduced, and Magic Johnson was going to be on the bench when the game began.

But he was nevertheless included in the introductions. At the mention of his name, the arena rocked with a standing ovation. Flashbulbs went off like popcorn. Magic Johnson was like a returning god to the crowd that night.

“Meanwhile the other players who had carried the team for three months and who were totally ignored, were seething with jealousy, resentment, anger, and envy. They were so resentful that they barely won the game that night against a bottom-of-the-bucket team, and eventually the morale of the entire team collapsed. The players turned on each other. The coach was fired. And they eventually lost their opening game of the play-offs, having one of the most disastrous records ever.

Coach “Riley said, ‘Because of greed, pettiness, and resentment, we executed one of the fastest falls from grace in NBA history. It was the Disease of Me.’”¹

That “Disease of Me” syndrome is present in so many places in our world today. Wars are being waged because of pride. Violence around the globe is on the rise because of pride. Family values and structures are being decimated because of pride. Churches are on the freefall from God’s grace because of pride. Governments and businesses are ruined because of pride. Pride is at an epidemic state right now, but there are few who want to do anything about it. And none of us is exempt from the dangerous consequences of pride.

And though it is so rampant in our world today, “pride is the only disease that makes everyone sick, except the one who has it.”² The “Disease of Me” turns the person who has it away from everyone else, and focuses everything in life toward themselves, so that everything must revolve around that one. And the sad part is that our society feeds into that pride, making the one, or ones, look like human gods who can do no wrong, say no wrong, and get away with

¹ (Robert J. Morgan, *Stories, Illustrations & Quotes*, [Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000] pg. 634)

² (Tony Evans, *Tony Evans’ Book of Illustrations*, [Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2009] pg. 238, #729)

anything. Since the person is treated like a god, that one feels like they can avoid or break any laws they want to just because they are SOMEBODY. But in the end their humiliation is quick, and their demise is complete. It doesn't matter if they are an athlete, a movie star, a politician, a pastor, a world leader, or a common ordinary person, if they present themselves as something more than they really are, they are headed toward a quick freefall to destruction.

Our Old Testament lesson of 2 Chronicles 32 gives us a couple of great examples, yet with two different outcomes. Sennacherib, king of Assyria, considered himself to be a god because he had conquered so many countries with his armies. When he came up against the city of Jerusalem, he was strutting his stuff, speaking boldly and claiming to be better than the God of Israel. He tried using his pride to intimidate King Hezekiah into just giving up without a fight, professing that the God of Israel was no more than the pagan gods of the other countries he had conquered. *“Sennacherib’s officers spoke further against the Lord God and against His servant Hezekiah. The king also wrote letters ridiculing the Lord, the God of Israel, and saying this against Him: ‘Just as the gods of the peoples of the other lands did not rescue their people from my hand, so the god of Hezekiah will not rescue his people from my hand”* (2 Chron. 32:16-17).

But Hezekiah had instructed the soldiers on the towers and walls of Jerusalem not to reply to the false accusations (2 Kings 18:36). Instead, *“King Hezekiah and the prophet Isaiah son of Amoz cried out in prayer to heaven about this. And the Lord sent an angel, who annihilated all the fighting men and the commanders and officers in the camp of the Assyrian king”* (32:20-21a).

Listen, when you think you are somebody special and you begin ridiculing and belittling the God who created the Universe, you are not going to be getting out of there unscathed. In fact, the angel of the Lord, killed 185,000 soldiers in the Assyrian army, decimating the troops

and the morale of the Assyrian army (2 Kings 19:35). The greater you think you are, the bigger the fall will be when God gets done with you. And that “Disease of Me” will end up not only affecting you, but all those around you as well.

“So [Sennacherib] *withdrew to his own land in disgrace. And when he went into the temple of his god [Nisrok], some of his sons, his own flesh and blood, cut him down with the sword*” (32:21b). The God of Israel is THE GOD OF ALL, and no matter when or where, if He is profaned or ridiculed by someone who thinks his or her puny human power here on earth is enough to stand up to God, they will be suffering the eternal consequences of that pride, and they will become like the dust of the earth.

But contrast Sennacherib’s pride and arrogance with the pride of Hezekiah. When Hezekiah became ill, he begged the Lord for His mercy, and God granted him healing and recovery. But “*Hezekiah’s heart was proud and he did not respond to the kindness shown him; therefore the Lord’s wrath was on him and on Judah and Jerusalem. Then Hezekiah repented of the pride of his heart, as did the people of Jerusalem; therefore the Lord’s wrath did not come on them during the days of Hezekiah*” (2 Chron. 32:25-26).

Hezekiah knew enough to repent of his pride before the Lord God of Israel, and his life was spared and God’s wrath was postponed until another time. While Sennacherib persisted in thinking he was the god the world revolved around, Hezekiah humbled himself before the Lord. That decision made all the difference between death and life.

And it does for us, too. As we become aware of the pride in our lives, it is a good thing to repent of it before that pride gets us into trouble. Proverbs 16:17-19 gives us great guidance in this area. “*The highway of the upright avoids evil; those who guard their ways preserve their lives. Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall. Better to be lowly in spirit*

along with the oppressed than to share plunder with the proud.” And James 4:6 gives us the reason for the need for repentance; *“God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.”*

And we see that in the next section of our study of the Book of Acts. It’s not a long section, but it clearly outlines the danger of thinking more highly than we ought to think. This is Acts 12:19b-25. (READ Acts 12:19b-25)

After King Herod Agrippa (I) executed the guards who were unable to keep Peter in prison, he returned to the official capital town of that Roman province - Caesarea. “The Jewish historian Josephus records how Herod celebrated games in Caesarea in honor of the Emperor, which were attended by the leading men of the kingdom. When Herod entered the theater, clad in a glittering silver garment, his flatterers addressed him as a god: ‘May you be propitious to us, and if we have hitherto feared you as a man, yet henceforth we agree that you are more than mortal in your being.’ The king accepted their flattery. Then looking up he saw an owl perched on a rope and took it as a symbol of ill fortune. At the same time he was seized by violent internal pains and was carried into his palace where he died after five days of illness” (Josephus, *Antiquities*, 19:343-350).³ This varies a bit from Luke’s version, but captures the event.

God does not take kindly to those who attempt to usurp His power and authority. No one is above the Lord God Almighty, not even the angels. Herod foolishly welcomed the claim that he was a god, wrapped up in human form. But God wasn’t amused. In fact, “God, Himself, acts against those who usurp His position and claim divine honors for themselves.” So Herod was quick to suffer the consequences of not giving God the glory that is due to Him. He who was quick to be God, was just as quickly disposed of by the One and only God.

But notice please the next verse, *“But the word of God continued to spread and flourish”*

³ (I. Howard Marshall, *ACTS*, [Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1980] pg. 211-212)

(Acts 12:24). Even though Herod opposed God and did his best to persecute the Christian faith, those who held on to their faith continued to live in such a way that enabled the Christian faith to grow and flourish. The believers in Jesus Christ were telling all those around them about the Salvation that Jesus achieved for those who will believe through His death and resurrection.

There is nothing that can stop the spread of the Good News of Jesus Christ. When we have faith in Jesus and trust Him as our Savior and Lord, no matter who is in power, no matter who might be leading us as an earthly president or king, the Word of the Lord Jesus will continue to spread and flourish when we live our lives for Him. Jesus is the Lord and Master of every person!

Jeter Johnston and I just finished the section in confirmation that helps us to see that Jesus is our Lord and Master. In this segment we found that we have only One who is the real Lord of our lives. It's not someone who thinks that they are a god, but it is He who is the true Master of all things in this world. Jesus is the only Savior, the only Messiah of the world, the only King of kings, and the only Son of God. No one else took our sins away and paid the price for those sins, which is death. No one else fulfilled all of the prophecies of the Messiah. And no one else has gained victory over death by rising again from the dead. There is no other God but Jehovah, and Jesus is the only one that we are to have as the Lord and Master of our lives. Only Jesus forgives! Only Jesus gives eternal life to those who believe in Him and receive Him and follow Him! Jesus is the Lord of ALL!

So how do we avoid the pride of Herod? How do we protect ourselves from the "Disease of Me?" Well I John 2:15-17 helps us to get our minds off of us and back on the Lord Jesus. Hear it again, "*Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world - the lust of the flesh, the lust of the*

eyes, and the pride of life - comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.”

We need a healthy dose of King Hezekiah’s humility and repentance to find God’s favor once more. We need to remember who we are, and to whom we belong. We need to look beyond our own small accomplishments and consider the One who created the whole Universe. We need to look beyond ourselves and find our place as one of Jesus’ friends as we do what He commands (John 15:14). We need to look at all that is still needed to be done in our world to bring food to the hungry, freedom to the captive, health to the sick, sight to the blind, and safety to those who are vulnerable. We need to learn God’s Word so that we might be able to obey it. We need to live and think and speak in ways that reflects the Lord Jesus in our lives. We need to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God so that He may exalt us at the proper time (I Peter 5:6).

I started today with a basketball illustration, so let me finish with another one.

In his book entitled *Victory* [(Creation, 1994), reprinted in *Men of Integrity* (May/June 2000), p. 60], NBA player A. C. Green writes: “Men often talk about their ‘glory years’ in high school. At Benson High School, in Portland, Oregon, I was a sports-minded, egotistical maniac. I was the tallest guy on the team and could have broken scoring records, but Coach Gray wouldn’t let me. Even with the brakes on, twice that year I scored 39 points, and in the season finale against Wilson, I scored 40. I averaged 27 points per game. As a team we scored more than 100 points in seven games and averaged over 90. I was voted the Oregonian’s 1981 All-Metro area player of the year, and joined Dean Derrah on the All-Metro team.

“Coach Gray wouldn’t allow me to be a hotshot scorer because he was more interested in the final stat--number one. He knew the only way we could reach that championship level was

for us to become team players.

“In basketball and in life, everyone starts out with a ‘what's-in-it-for-me’ attitude. Children are selfish. That natural selfishness has to be broken to be a winner. You have to realize you can't do it all by yourself. You need the team. Coach Gray made me pass the ball and play unselfishly. Regardless of individual stats, we, the team, reached the top. We went all the way.”⁴

A.C. Green has it right. If we fall for the “Disease of Me” syndrome we will fail and fall pretty fast, and completely. But if we look beyond ourselves, to those around us who are also believers in Jesus Christ, and we work together as a team, we can fully accomplish all that God has put before us to do. If we try to do it all by ourselves, we will fail. But if we humble ourselves to work together as a team, we will thrive and flourish as we live the Word of God in our lives. If we become the servants of Jesus Christ and step up to use our own personal gifts and work together, no matter what we have to face, we will be victorious. And we’ll take the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ throughout the world, for the glory of God.

Beware the pride of Herod, and humble yourself to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let’s pray; Father, it can be so easy for us to become so focused on ourselves that we miss the chance to bring victory to You. As we serve Jesus Christ together, living as His servants, we will be able to thrive and flourish, helping many more find the salvation that comes through Jesus. Give us eyes to see You as our Lord and Master. Give us the courage to humbly evaluate our lives, and repent of our own pride, submitting ourselves to Your service. Help us to give up our focus on ME, and begin to work together as a team, the Christian team, ready to work together for the saving of the world. This we pray in Jesus’ Name. AMEN.

⁴ (PreachingToday.com, *More Perfect Illustrations*, [Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2003] pg. 279)