



ZEPHANIAH 2:3, 3:13 | What Are You Afraid Of?

Sunday, February 1, 2015 – 4th Sunday after the Epiphany of our Lord

*2:3 Seek the Lord, all you humble of the earth,
who carry out what He commands.*

*Seek righteousness, seek humility;
perhaps you will be concealed on the day of the Lord's anger...*

*3:13 The remnant of Israel will no longer do wrong or tell lies;
a deceitful tongue will not be found in their mouths.*

But they will pasture and lie down, with nothing to make them afraid.

Pride goes before the fall. It's a well-known saying. And if you examine history you will see that severe pride very often preceded the fall of many men and nations. Julius Caesar was confident in his standing as the emperor of the greatest nation on earth—until Brutus and his cohorts stabbed him in the back. The Roman Empire ruled the earth for centuries amassing land and wealth like the world had never seen—until it came crashing down because of civil unrest and bankruptcy. Adolf Hitler had taken Europe by storm. He believed the Aryan race to be supreme, and took pride in the fact that he was a part of it—until the world fought back and destroyed what he had built.

But truthfully pride doesn't just affect powerful men and notable nations. Pride is a part of every human being's nature. Watch a one- or two-year-old child for a few minutes. When given praise, the child beams with pride. When praised for something good they will repeat it over and over and over again because they enjoy hearing their name and the praise that accompanies it.

And pride is dangerous. Those of us who have lived with teenagers (or been teenagers) will know that many a foolish act has been done out of pride. How many of us have argued for the sake of arguing because we didn't want to admit we were wrong? How many of us have made decisions and paid a price for it because our pride clouded our judgement? Those are all very dangerous things, but for humans something much more dangerous lurks within us—a sense of pride that says we can do it ourselves.

Isn't that dangerous? It's especially dangerous when we hear the words of Scripture: "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." "There is no one who does good, not even one." "All our righteous acts are like filthy rags." It's a hopeless fight. We fight that nature and constantly lose. We lose because we don't want to lose face in front of someone. What if someone might think I'm weak? So I'll do this questionable thing despite me knowing it's wrong. What if someone will make fun of me or tease me for doing what's right? So I'll do this sinful thing even though I know it's sinful. What if someone sees me as small? insignificant? useless? So I'll show them...I'll do this thing so that people will know who I am and what I can do.

Maybe it's a desire for praise. I want to be successful and productive. So I'll show him that I can do it. I'll do this even though I know it's morally wrong. I want to be on top. I want to do my best. So I'll try this even though it's questionable and sinful.

We even excuse it away! God wants me to work my hardest. After all, he really wants me to do my best. But the most dangerous part of pride is when we're confronted with sin we think we can get out of it ourselves. We refuse to let God do his work. We shove him away and let guilt and fear and self-loathing fester in our hearts so that God's grace is nowhere to be seen. And it is at that point that pride will come before the fall. When we stand before God and claim some action of our own or deny that God could possibly save us we fall woefully short of what's needed. And we soon find out that our actions and deeds deserve nothing but death.

But thanks be to God! We have a perfect Savior from our sin of pride. Oh, he was tempted! Satan worked hard on him to force him to stumble and fall. But he never did. From birth to death Christ showed perfect humility. He submitted himself to God's will and allowed control and power to be out of his hands.

So, what are you afraid of? Are you afraid that you'll lose power? Are you afraid that you might lose some status in society? Are you afraid that people might look at you as weak or timid? Why? Isn't that exactly what Jesus says in the Beatitudes? "Blessed are the meek..." "Blessed are the humble..." Christians have a different attitude toward social status. Social standing, while a blessing from God, is not the end all and be all of joy and happiness in a Christian's life. We take joy in the forgiveness we find in Christ, in the peace we taste in the Supper, in the relationship we have with our Father through baptism. It is in those Means of Grace that we find fullness of life.

So what are you afraid of, dear Christian? Take courage! The Lord has won! He is in control! Christ is here to save you from sin. Now, find joy in that knowledge, peace in the Supper, and life in Christ. Have no fear, for Christ is here! Amen.



Soli Deo Gloria!

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