

# Pride comes before a fall

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 26 November 2023

Preacher: Martin Ayers

[ 0 : 00 ] you will find on page 858 of the Bible in front of you. It's Ezekiel chapter 28, and we're going to read the whole chapter. Ezekiel chapter 28.

The word of the Lord came to me. Son of man, say to the ruler of Tyre, this is what the sovereign Lord says. In the pride of your heart you say, I am a God.

I sit on the throne of a God in the heart of the seas. But you are a mere mortal and not a God, though you think you are as wise as a God.

Are you wiser than Daniel? Is no secret hidden from you? By your wisdom and understanding, you've gained wealth for yourself and amassed gold and silver in your treasuries.

By your great skill in trading, you have increased your wealth, and because of your wealth, your heart has grown proud. Therefore, this is what the sovereign Lord says.

[ 1 : 19 ] Because you think you're wise, as wise as a God, I'm going to bring foreigners against you, the most ruthless of nations.

They will draw their swords against your beauty and wisdom and pierce your shining splendor. They will bring you down to the pit, and you will die a violent death in the heart of the seas.

Will you then say, I am a God in the presence of those who kill you? You will be but a mortal, not a God, in the hands of those who slay you.

You will die the death of the uncircumcised at the hands of foreigners. I have spoken, declares the sovereign Lord. The word of the Lord came to me, Son of man, take up a lament concerning the king of Tyre, and say to him, this is what the sovereign Lord says.

You were the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God, every precious stone adorned you, carnelian, chrysalite and emerald, topaz, onyx and jasper, lapis lazuli, turquoise and beryl.

[ 2 : 42 ] Your settings and mountings were made of gold. On the day you were created, they were prepared. You were anointed as a guardian cherub. For so I ordained you.

You were in the holy mount of God. You walked among the fiery stones. You were blameless in all your ways from the day you were created till wickedness was found in you.

Through your widespread trade, you were filled with violence and you sinned. So I drove you in disgrace from the mount of God. And I expelled you, guardian cherub, from among the fiery stones. Your heart became proud on account of your beauty. And you corrupted your wisdom because of your splendor. So I threw you to the earth.

I made a spectacle of you before kings. By your many sins and dishonest trade, you have desecrated your sanctuaries. So I made a fire come out from you and it consumed you.

[ 3 : 42 ] And I reduced you to ashes on the ground in the sight of all who were watching. All the nations who knew you are appalled at you. You have come to a horrible end and will be no more.

The word of the Lord came to me. Son of man, set your face against Sidon. Prophecy against her and say, this is what the sovereign Lord says.

I am against you, Sidon. And among you I will display my glory. You will know that I am the Lord when I inflict punishment on you and within you am proved to be holy.

I will send a plague upon you and make blood flow in your streets. The slain will fall within you with the sword against you on every side.

Then you will know that I am the Lord. No longer will the people of Israel have malicious neighbors who are painful briars and sharp thorns.

[ 4 : 49 ] Then they will know that I am the sovereign Lord. This is what the sovereign Lord says. When I gather the people of Israel from the nations where they have been scattered, I will be proved holy through them in the sight of the nations.

Then they will live in their own land which I gave to my servant Jacob. They will live there in safety and will build houses and plant vineyards. They will live in safety when I inflict punishment on all their neighbors who maligned them.

Then they will know that I am the Lord their God. Amen. Amen. Thanks very much, David, for reading.

Good morning, St. Silas. If we've not met before, I'm Martin Ayers. I'm the lead pastor here. We're in this sermon series in this book, Ezekiel. So a less well-trodden part of the Bible.

It would be really helpful if you could keep your Bibles open for me. Page 858 of the Church Bibles. And you can find an outline inside the notice sheet if you find that helpful. Let's ask for God's help as we turn to his word.

[ 6 : 03 ] Let's pray. Mighty God and loving Heavenly Father, we praise you that your word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. And we ask that you would lighten our way this morning, that you'd give us attentiveness to what your Spirit says to us, that we might see your light and walk in that light.

For we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, how do Christians feel when the church is in decline? Yesterday, in my newspaper, there were reports about what Dame Prue Leith said about Christianity in Scotland.

It was actually because she's bringing a bill to try and get euthanasia, or assisted dying, legalized in Scotland. But she explained the reason why she wanted that to come through in Scotland, rather than at Westminster for the whole of the UK, was because she said, the Christian faith is fading on this side of the border.

In other words, she feels that this is a bill that Christians would be against in terms of their understanding of right to life. But actually, that in Scotland, because the Christian faith is fading, was her language, the bill might get through.

So how do we feel if we're a Christian and we hear language like that? Some years ago, in the book Salmon Fishing in the Yemen, the writer Paul Torde wrote this, I can't remember when I last went to church.

[ 7 : 33 ] You still see people coming out of church on Sunday morning, chatting on the steps, but no one I know goes anymore. We never talk about it. We never think about it. We have moved on from religion.

Instead of going to church, which would never occur to us, Mary and I go to Tesco together on Sundays. That is our Sunday ritual. Now, when that's the narrative we hear, the devil would love to use that to discourage believers.

Because we might think, the non-Christian life, it's just so dominant all around us. And if you can't beat them, join them. I mean, does it not look sometimes a bit more attractive?

You get to make up your own rules. You get Sundays for yourself. And as we maybe hear the non-Christian world looking at the church and the decline of the historic church institutions with kind of smugness, even with mockery.

Or they hear that we go to church and they're patronizing about that. We might think to ourselves, does God not see that? Where is the justice in that for God's people?

[ 8 : 43 ] Well, in our Bible reading that came from Ezekiel just now, in lots of ways, you'll have picked up, it's for a world that was very different to ours. But actually, for Ezekiel and his first heroes, the people of God at that time had a similar problem in their hearts.

At that time, the people of God were living as a nation state around Jerusalem. But Ezekiel and his first heroes, they were in exile. We've actually got a map of that. If, Ellie, you could just put up the next slide.

You can see that just east of the Mediterranean Sea at that time, God's people were Israel, not connected with the political state today and what we've just been praying for there. But the Old Testament people of God were in and around Jerusalem.

And the temple was there where God's presence was. But Ezekiel and his first heroes, they've been taken away from that land, the promised land, into exile in Babylon.

Now, when they looked back at the visible people of God, Israel, what they saw was decline. They saw a fading light.

[ 9 : 50 ] And the reason for that, we heard last week in an earlier section of the book, it was that the people of God were under the judgment of God. God had saved them. He'd redeemed them, brought them into the promised land and assured them that they could stay in that land, enjoying

the blessing of relationship with God so long as they stayed faithful to God.

But the people of God rejected him. They turned to idolatry and he sent prophets to call them back and they didn't listen. And now the message from last week was, the time has gone for the people around Jerusalem.

God is moving out. He's leaving them. And the Babylonian Empire are going to come in and bring exile to the people. It was coming. And for Ezekiel and anyone holding on to God's promises at that time, they would be thinking, that might be just of God, but what about all the other nations around? They completely reject God. And they seem to be doing fine. They're prospering. What about them? And their mockery of God's people. It was confusing.

It was discouraging. And perhaps it was also just a little bit seductive as well. They might think, maybe we're better off without God and going after the nations around us.

[11:10] And this morning's word from God addresses the question then, what is God going to do about the nations? It's a focus for this whole section of Ezekiel. And we're just taking one representative chapter today in our series.

Now, you can see how this passage is placed and how this section of the book is placed. If we just turn back in our Bibles to chapter 24, I think this is worth doing.

Just turn back to page 854 and have a look at verse 25 of chapter 24. We get the news that Jerusalem is going to fall and we hear how Ezekiel will find out.

Verse 25. And you, son of man, on the day I take away their stronghold, that's the city of Jerusalem, their joy and glory, that's the temple, the delight of their eyes, their heart's desire, and their sons and daughters as well, on that day, a fugitive will come to tell you the news.

And the refugee that God promises is going to come with the terrible news that Jerusalem has fallen, we get him, he arrives in chapter 23.

[12:26] So if you turn on to page 865, we're in chapter 33. We're going to be looking at this next week. Chapter 33, verse 21.

We read this. In the twelfth year of our exile, in the tenth month, on the fifth day, a man who had escaped from Jerusalem came to me and said, the city has fallen.

So that fugitive that's been promised in chapter 23, arrives, in chapter 20, sorry, chapter 24, arrives in chapter 33.

And in between, we've got this section, chapters 25 to 32, where God speaks words of judgment against the nations around Israel, but they are words of assurance to his people about the people who have made themselves enemies of God and his people.

We've got another map, just the next slide, Ella, on the screen. You can see the pattern of these chapters. The kingdom of Israel is in the middle there, and around the outside, these chapters work clockwise around the people around Israel who've made themselves enemies.

[13:38] So God pronounces that judgment will fall on Ammon to the right, on Moab to the south of them, on Edom, which is down at the bottom, on Philistia, which is the red bit round to the left.

And then what we're looking at this morning are his words of judgment in chapter 28 on Tyre and Sidon, which are up to the northwest of the people of God. And our first point is that God's judgment is a judgment that takes down the proud.

We hear about the king of Tyre in chapter 28, verse 2. If you just have a look with me again. Verse 2. The Lord says, Son of man, say to the ruler of Tyre, this is what the sovereign Lord says, in the pride of your heart you say, I am a God.

I sit on the throne of a God in the heart of the seas. Now this problem for the king of Tyre is remarkably contemporary, kind of 2023.

Why would people today think they've got, think nothing of God? Why would they think they've got no need for God? Well we find out why the king of Tyre thinks that. If you have a look at verse 4, it says, By your wisdom and understanding you have gained wealth for yourself and amassed gold and silver in your treasuries.

[14:59] And how has he done that? Verse 5. By your great skill in trading. You have increased your wealth and because of your wealth your heart has grown proud.

So it's wealth and wisdom that have made him proud. And if we'd been looking on at the king of Tyre in Ezekiel's time, we would have thought this guy has every right to be proud.

Tyre was built in ancient times as an island city. It was just off the coast. It was a mile long and half a mile wide. And over time, as the kind of tides brought silt and sediment, it connected this island

city to the mainland on a peninsula.

So it was perfectly located to be a trading hub between west and east. Think Hong Kong today. Think Singapore. These kind of trading hubs on peninsulas.

And the king of Tyre has fallen for the seductive power of wealth that when you're rich you think of yourself as powerful, as autonomous, as self-dependent, as influential.

[16:07] Why would you need God when life seems to make so much sense for you without any reference to him? Just as today, isn't it often people with wealth who show the least interest in Jesus and they don't seem to need him?

And the message that Christians believe that we bring that is a humbling message that we have a need and that God is glad to meet that need in the gospel, people who are wealthy are so used to feeling self-dependent and secure that they don't feel they need help from anyone, let alone God. And maybe we get caught into that as well. We look at them and think, do you really need anything? When I turn on YouTube, I get these adverts flashing up from this guy, Greg Secker.

Now, I had a little spot check at half nine how many other people's YouTube watching is dominated by Greg Secker and nobody else. I don't know what it is about YouTube seems to be targeting me with this guy.

I don't know why, but maybe some of you are as susceptible as me, apparently, to what he's selling. Now, this guy, he's always, his adverts, he emerges from his own private swimming pool or he's on the side of his yacht and he says, you know, before I became a millionaire, currency trading, I used to have to go to work every single day.

[17:32] Now, I want to help people like you. That's what I'm here for. My mission is to help you get out of that trap by coaching you in how to trade. And that's the kind of world we see around us, isn't it?

In global terms, lots of people around us today are very wealthy and it gives people this kind of self-confidence, this idea of that they're just effortlessly secure in what they have.

And it's easy to see that and think, you know, life seems to make pretty good sense without any reference to God. Now, that is the trap the king of Tyre fell into and the Lord says it's because of your wealth your heart has become proud.

As well as wealth, the king of Tyre was also proud because of his wisdom. He gave no thought to the idea that maybe it was the God of the Bible who put me in this place of prosperity.

He looked at other people and evidently thought, no, I did this because I knew how to trade. Like the professional today, the lawyer, the accountant, the medic, or the business person who looks at what they've got and maybe looks at other people who don't have it and think, do you know the difference?

[18:47] I applied myself. I made the right calls in life. It's down to my skill. If you're wise today, it can make you proud. Our bookshops are full of expert advice.

We've got money-saving experts telling us whether or not to partake in Black Friday. We've got leadership gurus. We've got parenting specialists. We've got podcast charts full of opportunities to listen to successful people share their stories of what made them successful because we're looking for worldly wisdom all the time.

Now, it's not that wisdom is wrong in itself or that wealth is wrong in itself. The issue is when pursued without reference to God and you get it, it makes you proud like the king of Tyre without feeling any need for God.

So what does God say to the king of Tyre? Well, have a look with me at verse 6. Therefore, this is what the sovereign Lord says. Because you think you are wise, as wise as a God, I'm going to bring foreigners against you, the most ruthless of nations.

They will draw their swords against your beauty and wisdom and pierce your shining splendor. They will bring you down to the pit and you will die a violent death in the heart of the seas.

[20:09] Will you then say I am a God in the presence of those who kill you? It was a judgment that fell on the king of Tyre just a few years later. The Babylonian Empire came and descended on Jerusalem and sacked it in 587 BC.

Just five years later, they went to Tyre and the king of Tyre was taken into exile for the rest of his life. And the judgment being spoken of here that fell on him in the Lord's providential hand as the Lord used the Babylonian Empire as this instrument of his judgment, that is a foreshadowing in history of the final judgment that Jesus assures us is coming for everyone.

One day, we will all stand before God, including the leaders of every nation. The apostle Peter, when he's talking about what Jesus told him and the other apostles to pass on to the world, he says this in Acts chapter 10, he, Jesus, commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead.

And then he offers mercy. He says, all the prophets testify about Jesus that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name. The message from Jesus through the apostles is he is the one God has appointed judge of the living and the dead.

Sometimes we feel squeamish about God's promised judgment, but we can see all over the world news today how much our world needs a day of reckoning as we see people who live assuring themselves that there will never be that day of reckoning and blazingly causing bloodshed and injustice.

[ 22 : 01 ] And God says, Jesus one day will put everything right. He'll hold everyone to account. Or through Ezekiel, pride comes before a fall.

The God who appeared to Ezekiel, we saw him in chapter one, the man on fire on the throne, above the vault, above the mighty warrior angels, he's the God of every nation.

every leader is in his hands and one day his judgment will fall. So that's our first point. Secondly, it's a judgment with dramatic reversals.

What we get in verses 11 to 19 of this chapter is a song describing the same man and the same event that's coming for the king of Tyre.

If you look at verse 12, it says, Son of man, take up a lament concerning the king of Tyre. Now it's a lament which is a sad song and that's because there's no pleasure for God's people.

[ 23 : 00 ] There's no kind of smugness or mockery when people do come under God's judgment. God himself says in Ezekiel that he takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked but longs that they would turn to him and find life.

But the lament is also dripping in irony. The king of Tyre and his kingdom are so magnificent. He is so opulent and so majestic that what Ezekiel does in writing this song is it's like he takes every tool from his kind of lyrical toolbox as a priest and applies it to sort of exalt the king of Tyre so that he's like this mythical figure of greatness.

So just have a look at verse 12. This is what the sovereign Lord says. This is to the king of Tyre.

Peter, you were the seal of perfection full of wisdom and perfect in beauty.

He says looking at him was like looking at paradise. Verse 13, you were in Eden the garden of God. Every precious stone adorned you. And then he dials it up another gear.

He's like saying it's not even like you were Adam in the garden of Eden. You were like an angel.

Verse 14, you were anointed as a guardian cherub. And then he takes his vision, his idea from the garden of Eden to the mountain of God where the temple was.

[ 24 : 24 ] You were on the holy mount of God. You walked among the fiery stones. And this is a priest describing in Bible language this kind of mythical exaltation.

It's a bit like someone today describing someone and saying you were Barack Obama when he first got voted in and tens of thousands of people gathered to celebrate that you were going to be the most powerful man in the world.

You were Scarlett Johansson as Black Widow. You were Tom Cruise as Ethan Hunt. You were Taylor Swift on the Era's Tour. You were Lionel Messi going back to Buenos Aires with the World Cup trophy.

You were the Empire State Building. You were Apollo 11. You were the Red Bull Formula One car. The master of the universe. And then the twist. The heart of it again verse 17.

Your heart became proud on account of your beauty. And then he goes on. So I threw you to the earth. I made a spectacle of you before kings.

[ 25 : 30 ] In other words the bigger they are the harder they fall. He carries on verse 18. By your many sins a dishonest trade you've desecrated your sanctuaries.

And then it's as though what was within him is pride is what destroyed him. So I made a fire come out from you and it consumed you. And then look how far he falls.

I reduced you to ashes on the ground in the sight of all who were watching. And then I remember that Eric Clapton had this blues song. Nobody knows you when you're down and out. And the king of Tyre is going to discover that in verse 19.

All the nations who knew you are appalled at you. You've come to a horrible end and will be no more. And when Ezekiel was given this oracle it would have seemed inconceivable that that would happen to the king of Tyre.

And yet he accomplished it dramatically. How many of you this morning just nod your head if you've heard of King Ethbal III of Tyre. We've never heard of him have we?

[ 26 : 35 ] That's this guy. I've only heard of him this week King Ethbal III and my favorite podcast is The Rest is History. 300 episodes King Ethbal III I don't even they've not even mentioned him.

He's barely a footnote in our history books. And the message is the same will be true of those who are proud today. And the people of God needed to hear that and we need to hear it so that we don't get discouraged when we see the powerful prosper without God.

And we don't get seduced by that. There was a story of Ozymandias by the poet Shelley where he says I met a traveler from another land and he said on the way that he'd gone past in the desert two vast legs of stone standing next to them on the sand half sunk in a broken sculptured head and on his face was the sneer of the arrogance of power and on the pedestal you could still just make out the words my name is Ozymandias king of kings look on my works ye mighty and despair and all around the decay of that colossal wreck boundless and bare the lone and level sands stretch far away.

It's all gone. So the message for God's people a bit like we hear in Psalm 73 is don't be overawed when someone gets rich and prospers.

don't get kind of destabilized when people are beautiful and worldly wise and they've rejected God. And one of the key points for us and for them is when we see people who are smugly proud without God don't think God doesn't see that he sees it and he has it in hand.

[ 28 : 28 ] When we see today people who seem to have fulfillment wealth wisdom happiness without God don't be seduced by it don't drift away from God to those things.

One day God promises his judgment is coming and when they stand before God they will fall short because everyone falls short on our own merit before God.

So it's a judgment that takes down the proud it's a judgment with a dramatic reversal but finally we hear it's a judgment with surprising effects. The first surprising effect is that through judgment God is making himself known.

He lets us know what he's really like. So we see that in verse 23 at the end there as he promises the judgment on Sidon next to Tyre the last sentence of verse 23 he says then you will know that I am the Lord.

And that refrain comes again and again in this section of prophecy of judgment look at the next column chapter 29 verse 6 then all who live in Egypt will know that I am the Lord.

[ 29 : 40 ] I don't know what you think about that but I think that's a surprise to us today in our culture if we were thinking about God making himself known his character known we might think about his acts of mercy his acts of compassion his kindness through them people come to know that he is the Lord what we're seeing here that's true at the same time what we're seeing here is that God is also glorified and makes himself known when he judges sin when he takes down the proud he displays his goodness his holiness his power and on the last day there won't be any atheists every knee will bow to the Lord Jesus but there is another way that God makes himself known through judgment and that is he makes known his saving power and his faithfulness to those who are trusting him so have a look at verse 24 he says no longer will the people of Israel have malicious neighbors who are painful briars and sharp thorns then they will know that I am the sovereign

Lord then these verses 25 and 26 they are just two verses but they are right at the very heart of this section let me just explain how that works in this section of judgment against the nations there are seven nations that God gives oracles of judgment against seven is a great Bible number and he has seven here but what he does is he has the judgments against six of them from chapters 25 to 28 and then he has six judgments against the seventh from chapter 29 to chapter 32 so that there's perfect symmetry and right in the middle he puts these three verses at the heart of the chapter verses 24 25 and 26 clearly he wants us to take these verses to heart look at verse 25 this is what the sovereign Lord says when I gather the people of Israel from the nations where they've been scattered

I will be proved holy through them in the sight of the nations then they will live in their own land which I gave to my servant Jacob so through judgment he will establish his people in safety verse

26 they're going to be safe they will build houses they'll plant vineyards and it's all through him inflicting punishment on their neighbors who maligned them then they will know that I am the Lord their God so the outcome of God's judgment is deliverance for his people and that is the pattern of the Bible story that God delivers his people through judgment one day Jesus will come in glory he'll judge the living and the dead and he will bring all who've waited for him through that judgment and into his kingdom that will have no end so on that day we will all meet him as our judge or we can meet him as our saviour when we trust him and have life with him that lasts forever and he can bring he can offer that to us because he has already come to bear judgment not to bring it it struck me reading about the king of

Tyre this week in this chapter how much he had in common with king Jesus he lived in a city likened here to paradise like the garden of Eden and Jesus was in paradise he was king of heaven the king of Tyre was imagined as like a cherub on the mountain of God in the presence of God and Jesus is the eternal son even greater than the angels in the presence of God and both of these kings had a disastrous fall the king of Tyre and king Jesus were both reduced to ashes on the ground so that the passers-by who knew them were appalled at them but Jesus did that not because of his pride but because of our pride the king of Tyre is condemned for his many sins Jesus was condemned for our many sins so that when we trust him he carries us through the judgment of God and out the other side and any of us all of us who trust him can live in safety and enjoy the blessing of knowing him forever let's pray together

Lord Jesus as we come to your table we thank you that you are just and righteous and you see the sinfulness and pride that so characterize our fallen world we praise you for your goodness and glory displayed in your judgment of sin and that one day everything will be put right so as we come to your table we ask that your spirit will assure us and transform us as we eat and drink to remember that you bore the judgment for us that we might be with you forever Amen we goodness we goodness thank you we ██████████ we leave we YES WE WERE WE WERE CHAIN WE WERE COichen TU

[ 35 : 25 ] WHERE WE WERE ██████████ osure NICK LIKE long WEREanz