

The Second Sunday of Pentecost
June 14, 2009
Year B, Proper 6

PRIDE & HUMILITY

[Ezekiel 31:1-6, 10-14: The Cedars of Lebanon \(the first shall be last\):](#)

PRIDE:

1. **Metaphor**: This oracle, written in 587 BC, is a metaphor comparing Pharaoh to a Great Cedar. However, after building up the ego of Pharaoh, Ezekiel then compares him with Assyria (interestingly, the word “assur” meaning “cypress tree”), which despite its power has been laid low by Babylon.
2. **Historical Background**:
 - **Exile**: Ezekiel is set in Babylon in the 5th year of Judah’s exile (first exile was in 597 BC when Nebuchadnezzar conquered Jerusalem, and put a puppet king, Zedekiah, on the throne).
 - **Zedekiah**: However, in 593 BC, Zedekiah hosted in Jerusalem a meeting of local nations to plot a rebellion. Ezekiel had spoken to Zedekiah from afar in his exile in Babylon, urging him to honor his pledge of obedience to Babylon, and not be fooled by the relatively small power of Egypt. Ezekiel urged Zedekiah to turn the nation back to its religious roots, where its strength lay not in its army but its faith.
 - **Pharaoh**: But Zedekiah did not listen, and in 592 BC, Pharaoh Psammeticus II (595-589 BC) strutted his military prowess in Jerusalem, impressing Zedekiah all the more. The Pharaoh left Egyptian priests in Jerusalem, adding idolatry against God to the crime of a broken treaty with Babylon.
 - **Pride Leads to Rebellion**: Zedekiah, his chest now pumped up with pride, withheld his tribute to Babylon, relying on Egyptian protection.
 - **Pride Leads to Defeat**: Nebuchadnezzar then mounted a campaign against Judah in 588 BC, surrounding the city in a yearlong siege.
 - i. When the city fell in 587 BC, Zedekiah fled the city dressed as a woman, but was caught in the town of Riblah, brought back to Jerusalem, and forced to watch the execution of his sons before his eyes were then burned from his head, and he led in chains to Babylon.
 - ii. The glorious Temple of Solomon was destroyed, leaving not one stone upon another. Judah’s demise was the end of the Davidic kingdom, and the end of the Israeli hope to have the world under their influence.
 - **Ever-Present Pride**: Of course, the pride of man continued, so much so that the Jews thought the Messiah would be a King riding a steed into

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Jerusalem to wage war against Rome, not a Carpenter riding a donkey
proclaiming peace.

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3. Ezekiel:

- He was a priest, his deportation in 597 BC suggesting his prominence as the upper echelon were removed.
- His message, at a time when Judah had lost all of her material power, was the spiritual power of God. He portrays it in a vision of God on a chariot with a crystal floor, and 4 angels (cherubim) as the wheels. They represent the attributes of God:
 - i. Man (intelligence),
 - ii. Lion (aggressive courage),
 - iii. Ox (strength), and
 - iv. Eagle (swiftness).
- Later, the same symbols will be used for the 4 gospels:
 - i. Matthew (a man as the gospel begins with the genealogy of Jesus),
 - ii. Mark (a lion as the gospel begins with John the Baptist crying out in the wilderness like a lion),
 - iii. Luke (an ox as the gospel begins with the sacrifice of Zachary in the temple), and
 - iv. John (an eagle as his gospel soars above the others).

Mark 4:26-34: The Mustard Seed (the last shall be first): HUMILITY:

1. The Mustard: is a tree that grows both wild and cultivated in Palestine. Its flowers are yellow and its leaves dark green. It grows to a large size. The spice mustard is made from its seeds when ground into powder.
2. The Tree has always been an image of God's rule, its branches reaching out in all directions, and its leaves protecting anyone from the sun and rain under their care.
3. The rule of God, unlike that of man who conquers by having peoples submit to the will of the ruler, is to protect and comfort.

2 Corinthians 5:1-10: Existing and Becoming: There are two forms of living: to exist and to become.

1. Existing: Due to God having become Man on Christmas, the divine has metaphysically mixed with the human, and so mankind, although material and thus doomed to die, will live on after death eternally. The Spirit of God that dwells within us enables this to occur. As Paul says, God "has given us the Spirit as a guarantee."
2. Becoming: However, God wants for us far more than just to live. He wants us to live well. Hence, Paul tells the Corinthians that they should not be penny wise and pound foolish. Their bodies, no matter how muscular, no matter how adorned, will wither and die. He compares them not to a house, but a tent, something that is put up today and taken down tomorrow.
3. Judgment: Death is the end of this process of becoming. When we stand before the judgment seat of God, we then eternally "receive good or evil, according to

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- what he (we) has done in the body.” Thus, we must make the most of our time in the body to become more and more perfect “as your heavenly Father is perfect”.
4. **Obstacle to Growth**: Pride often stands in the way of our growth. We live in a society that is small minded. We do not think of the vast difference between us and God that leads to humility, but rather to the smaller differences between us and others that leads to pride and envy. Think about what we flaunt:
 - a. **Strength**: As a boy, it might have been how far you could throw a baseball or football, or how you could jump in basketball, or how much weight you could lift at a gym.
 - b. **Power**: As an adult, we brag about how many employees serve under us, or what our title at work is, or how the company for which we work would crumble were it not for us.
 - c. **Possessions**: Here is where we really fall down, bragging about where we live, what we drive, what we wear, as though living in Spring Lake, driving a Bentley, and wearing Ralph Lauren from head to toe somehow makes us better than the next guy.
 5. **God**: The answer is to look at the difference between God and us.
 - a. He is eternal; we are temporal.
 - b. He is omnipresent; we are stuck in one place at a time.
 - c. He is omnipotent; our power is confined to one job, or to being able to lift or do just so much, and not more.
 - d. He is omniscient; our knowledge is limited, even if we have 5 doctorates.

So, don't make the same mistake that Zedekiah made. Don't put all your eggs in an earthly basket. Realize, as it says so succinctly in scripture, “What does it profit a man to gain the world, but lose his soul?” The answer is simple: NOTHING!

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