

For as long as I can remember, I've been remarkably a remarkably proud and arrogant person. I clearly remember gazing up at sheets of paper on a wall of our Kindergarten room. The teacher had added stickers that recorded our performance. As I counted the stickers, I found my sheet had the most; I had done the best of anyone in the class. I resolved in my little-boy heart to always have the sheet with the most stickers because that would make me the most important.

That pride drove me as I moved from elementary school to middle school to high school, determined to fill my resume with as many stickers as possible. Once, after a high school theater performance, I told my friend we should go out and mingle with the audience. When asked why, I responded, "So they can tell us how awesome we are!" That attitude typified my high school until my senior year when the Lord did an incredibly kind thing: he removed my ability to enjoy almost everything I did. I was exhausted and miserable from pursuing something I could never catch.

I consider that God's kindness because the Lord hates arrogance. James writes, "God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble." The Lord was beginning to show me that pride is folly. The Lord hates arrogance—a truth made plain in our passage.

**Isaiah 9:8–10:4: The Lord's anger is against all arrogance and pride.** In the previous chapters, we've read the woes pronounced against God's people for their rebellion and the destruction that would come upon them. We now read how they will respond to it. "They will say with pride and arrogance...." Their response would not be repentance and faith but pride and arrogance.

In verses 10-12, we see Israel's arrogance in their ability to recover. "The bricks have fallen, but we will rebuild with cut stones; the sycamores have been cut down, but we will replace them with cedars." "What was destroyed, we will build back better! We can make Israel great again!" Because of that arrogance, the Lord would send foreign nations to consume Israel.

In verses 13-17, we see the arrogance of Israel's unrepentance. "The people did not turn to him who struck them; they did not seek the Lord of Armies." Israel's arrogant leaders misled the entire nation into wickedness and evil-doing. Therefore, the Lord would cut off their elders and prophets. He would show no compassion to the fatherless and the widow.

In verses 18-21, we see Israel's arrogance in their relentless selfishness. Their wickedness was a fire that consumed everything and everyone. "No one has compassion on his brother...Manasseh eats Ephraim, and Ephraim, Manasseh; together, both are against Judah." Their pride led them to consume one another without satisfaction. Instead of repenting, they continue in their sin.

In verses 10:1-4, we see Israel's arrogance in their injustice. "Woe to those enacting crooked statutes and writing oppressive laws to keep the poor from getting a fair trial and to deprive the needy among my people of justice, so that widows can be their spoil and they can plunder the fatherless." They created laws with loopholes so that you can deny justice to the poor and profit off of the needy but still claim, "Hey, it's legal! We're not doing anything wrong!" So Isaiah asks, "What will you do on the day of punishment when devastation comes from far away? Who will you run to for help? Where will you leave your wealth?" There will be no loopholes to escape. "There will be nothing to do except crouch among the prisoners or fall among the slain."

These verses display the heart of pride: believing that you can thrive apart from the Lord. Pride says, "I can become great through my own cleverness and strength. I can neglect my neighbor and oppress the poor. I can use my wit and influence to twist the law and claim innocence."

Examine your heart. What are you preaching to yourself? Regardless of what piety you display in public, what do you believe inside? Do you think you have the wisdom, strength, and skill to make yourself great? Do you know your selfishness is robbing the needy, but you continue

anyway? Do you comfort yourself in your ability to twist Scripture to justify your crookedness and escape judgment? Four times, we read this refrain: "In all this, his anger has not turned away, and his hand is still raised to strike." Don't be deceived. The Lord's anger is against all arrogance—he will strike it down.

I wish I could say I left my arrogance behind after high school, but such was not the case. I aimed to attend a private college with a stellar vocal music program. Because the Lord took away my enjoyment of music, I didn't participate in solo competitions. That meant I had no solos with which to audition for scholarships. So I aimlessly wandered to the University of Northern Iowa, where I quickly realized that no one cared about anything I'd worked so hard to accomplish.

In my freshman year, the Lord made the gospel plain to me, making me see that Jesus died for my sins and rose from the dead. My salvation was not the result of my performance but a gift received by faith. He showed me the glory of his sovereignty, holiness, grace, and mercy. I was excited about who God is, and I wanted others to know about it.

I wish I could say that my faith in Jesus spelled the end of my arrogance, but it wasn't. As I studied the Bible and began teaching it to others in our campus ministry, I learned that people would praise you for it. I learned about Christian heroes, who quickly became idols. My flesh realized that the church in America was a stage on which people performed and received glory. Of course, I couldn't say that out loud—the first rule in pursuing glory in Christianity is to make much of your own wretchedness and humility before the glory of God.

Pride followed me to seminary, where I received the admiration of respected faculty. I sat in the chapel, and, instead of gratefully receiving the good God offered through imperfect preachers, I arrogantly found their every flaw. I inwardly boasted of how much better I could do. I imagined the day I would return to preach in chapel, and people would say, "I went to seminary with him."

As Paul laments in Romans 8, our wretchedness perseveres long after we believe. Our hearts are always a mixture of sincere desires to glorify God and ourselves. My arrogance was like a stubborn weed that grew back up as fast as I could chop it down. I entered pastoral ministry, imagining that if I could interpret the Bible correctly, preach it skillfully, and do church the way the heroes in my tribe did, the Lord would grant me success and flourishing. He did use me to help people love him, only not in the ways I desired. It came through trial, pain, and persecution. I grew angry that God was not giving me what I wanted—how and when I wanted it. In his kindness, God never gave me what I thought I wanted. Instead, he allowed me to grow unhappy and burnt out.

I consider that to be God's compassion because his pleasure does not rest on the one who has perfect theology, remarkable giftedness, and noteworthy results. No, the Lord says at the end of Isaiah, "I will look favorably on this kind of person: one who is humble, submissive in spirit, and trembles at my word."<sup>i</sup> You can have pure doctrine, deliver timeless sermons, build a thriving church, and have a pious personality—all while being inwardly arrogant. You can do the Lord's work successfully, accomplish his will, and still be the object of his anger.

**Isaiah 10:5-19: The Lord's anger is against those who do his work with an arrogant heart.** Now the focus shifts away from Israel to Assyria. In Isaiah 6, the Lord said he would make Israel like an oak tree cut down to a stump. Assyria was the ax the Lord would use to fell the tree. Assyria would be successful in doing the Lord's work. So, the Lord's word to Assyria surprises us. It is not, "Blessed are you, Assyria, who does my will and accomplishes my purposes." No, it is "Woe to Assyria, the rod of my anger—the staff in their hands is my wrath. I will send him against a godless nation; I will command him to go against a people destined for my rage, to take spoils, to plunder,

and to trample them down like clay in the streets.”<sup>ii</sup> Why a message of woe when Assyria died what God commanded? Because Assyria did God’s work with a proud heart.

The Lord sent Assyria to plunder Israel as an act of chastisement. But Assyria carried out God’s will with arrogant intent. We see this in verses 7-11. Assyria intends to rule the world—to destroy and cut off many nations. He boasts of doing it in his own strength—his commanders are all kings! His hand seized other kingdoms and showed their idols to be worthless gods. He considers the God of Jerusalem an equally worthless idol, easily overthrown.

The Lord responds in verse 12: “But when the Lord finishes all his work against Mount Zion and Jerusalem, he will say, ‘I will punish the king of Assyria for his arrogant acts and the proud look in his eyes.’” Though Assyria’s work against Israel was the Lord’s will, he did it arrogantly. “I have [been successful in the Lord’s work] by my own strength and wisdom, for I am clever.” “I have gathered the whole world [through my preaching, writing, church planting, apologetics, hospitality] as easily as one reaches into an abandoned nest to gather the eggs.” The Lord mocks this pride saying, “Does an ax exalt itself above the one who chops with it?”

Again, we see the heart of arrogance: it is to believe that your accomplishments (past or future) are due to your own strength and cleverness. If you say in your heart, “I have been or will be successful because I have experience, excellent theology, profound insight, remarkable skill, and have gleaned from the best ministries,” then you stand on a thin sheet of ice over the river of God’s wrath. Soon, your own weight will plunge you into the torrent of his wrath.

Doing God’s will in pride and arrogance is incredibly dangerous. “Therefore the Lord God of Armies will inflict an emaciating disease on the well-fed of Assyria.... He will completely destroy the glory of its forests and orchards as a sickness consumes a person. The remaining trees of its forest will be so few in number that a child could count them.”<sup>iii</sup> The destruction of Assyria would be a visible picture of its inward sickness—a proud, arrogant heart.

Pray for God to reveal and address such sickness anywhere his people put their hope a human leaders’ charisma, competencies, and accomplishments instead of in the Lord—even in our church. Pride is a raging fire that destroys everyone in its path. We cannot quench it by denial. It is not slowed by severe treatment of the flesh, by rules and regulations, or by fawning humility in our speech and appearance. The only acceptable response to arrogance is to repent and trust in God’s saving grace in Christ—otherwise, his wrath remains.

In his kindness, the Lord showed me this in my own war with arrogance. No matter how much I did what I believed was correct and scriptural, I never felt at peace with God. No matter how much I strove to pastor to the best of my abilities, there was always harsh criticism and opposition. Some of my best friends and biggest supporters would suddenly turn their backs and walk away. I was undone, begging for someone to show me grace. Apart from grace, life was hopeless. And that’s when the gospel became precious to me more than any other time in my life. In it, I saw that Christ had done everything for me and was working for me at all times based on grace alone.

**We see the glory of God’s grace in Isaiah 10:20-34: The Lord’s anger is turned away from those who trust him.** The mighty oak of Israel would fall; only a remnant stump would remain. Two things would characterize the remnant. First, it “will no longer depend on the one who struck them.” Israel and Judah had trusted in treaties with superpowers for protection. The world trusts in human strength, cleverness, and success for life, liberty, and happiness. But God’s people repent of such idolatry; they do not put their faith in the strength of this world.

Second, it “will faithfully depend on the Lord, the Holy One of Israel.” They return to the Mighty God and trust in him alone. Those who depend on the Lord have every reason for hope. Though these believers would experience the pain of the Assyrian invasion, the Lord gives them not two reasons not to fear. First, believers should not be afraid because God has satisfied his wrath. “In just a little while my wrath will be spent.” The Lord promised that his anger against them would come to an end. He would satisfy his wrath, and it would threaten them no more.

Second, believers should not be afraid because the Lord will destroy their enemies. “In just a little while my wrath will be spent and my anger will turn to [Assyria’s] destruction.” Once God’s wrath was satisfied, he no longer had use for Assyria. Since Assyria was arrogant in its destruction of Israel, the Lord would end Assyria and set Israel free. In verses 27-34, the Lord promises to use an ax, cutting away the yoke of oppression, chopping Assyria to the ground.

This reversal is a picture of the gospel. Those who “faithfully depend on the Lord, the Holy One of Israel,” need not be afraid. Who is this Holy One? In John 6, Peter confesses, “Lord, to whom will we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.” God’s people faithfully hope in Christ alone.

We have no reason to fear. In Christ, God has satisfied his wrath and will destroy every enemy of his kingdom. God’s wrath against our arrogance is turned away—only it through punishing us. At the cross, the humble Messiah stood in our place and was cut down by God’s wrath. With God’s wrath against us removed, nothing but God’s pleasure in his Son remains.

We have no reason to be afraid because God will put every enemy under the feet of Christ. After his resurrection, Jesus went and proclaimed his victory to captive demons. God declared that Christ had paid for all our sins and crushed Satan’s head. In his ascension, Christ reigns until every last enemy becomes his footstool. In his return, death—the last enemy—will be destroyed. On that day, Christ will change this proud, arrogant body of death into an incorruptible and immortal body like his—we will never sin nor suffer again.

The question that faces today (and every day) is this: When earthly circumstances threaten your hope of comfort, safety, success, and glory, to who or what will you turn? When guilt and shame confront you, where will you turn? Will you look inside to your cleverness and strength? Will you turn to the successful leaders and rulers of the world? Or will you turn to Christ, the Holy One of Israel, who alone has the words of eternal life?

Brothers and sisters, do not fear what the world fears. Do not trust in what the world trusts in. For “if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. . . . For the Scripture says, Everyone who believes on him will not be put to shame. . . . For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”<sup>iv</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> Isaiah 66:2 (CSB)

<sup>ii</sup> Isaiah 10:5-6 (CSB)

<sup>iii</sup> Isaiah 10:16-19 (CSB)

<sup>iv</sup> Romans 10:9-13 (CSB)