

## September 11, 2011 - Pride vs. Poor in Spirit

We are starting a new series, the series is called "Battlefront". We chose that name because it seems like, in our world, there is this battle going on, there is this conflict going on, a war, if you will that is being waged. Whether we realize it or not, we are on the front lines of that battle. We are right in the middle, right in the heart of it. On either side of us there are these two sides that are waging war against each other, yes, but, also against us or perhaps for us. We're not really sure but we know they are both battling for us or over us. So here we are in the middle with both sides waging this war around us and both sides are sending us essentially the same message. Both sides are sending us a message that, life is going to be best on my side of things. So, if you join my side of the battle and if you join my group and if you join my army and if you join my people, I can offer you the best kind of life. Of course, the other side is offering you the exact same thing. Join my side, join my people, join my cause, and I can offer you the best kind of life. That kind of puts us right here in the middle and it kind of tears at us a little bit because we're right in the crux of this thing and both sides are trying to pull us their way and we're not really sure what to do. I think it's in the heart of that tension that Paul writes these words in Romans, chapter 7. I love this passage. I think it is one of the most relatable passages in the entire Bible.

"I don't really understand myself, for I want to do what is right but I don't do it. Instead, I do what I hate. I want to do what is good but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway. I have discovered this principle of life, that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong. I love God's law with all my heart but I see another law at work in the members of my body waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within the members of my body."

And Paul says, "I feel this tension because there is just war going on and both sides are pulling at me and I try to follow this side but I don't and I try to avoid that side and I don't and I'm caught right in the middle. There's this war being waged right inside my very self." And I think probably most of us can relate to that kind of feeling. Often get's animated in this kind of scenario, right? You have this person and on one shoulder they have the angel who is telling them all the good things they should do and on the other shoulder there's the devil who is telling them all the wrong things they should do. We're kind of stuck in this and we hear these two voices that are both trying to tell us and are both trying to sell us on their side of things and we're just never really sure which side we should listen to. That struggle has been going on since, well, forever. Remember way back in the Garden of Eden. Way back in the beginning there's this tree and on this tree there is this fruit and Adam and Eve are in front of this tree with this fruit and on one side they have God saying "Don't eat that fruit, I can offer you a really good, fantastic, wonderful life. Just stay away from the fruit." And in their other ear they have the serpent saying "Take a bite of the fruit because if you do you will have such a fantastic wonderful life, God doesn't want you to have this life because this life is so much better than the life he's offering you. Take a bite of the fruit." And there's that tension and there's that struggle within.

We see it throughout our society in our literature, in our stories. Pinocchio, the famous story of Pinocchio, right? On one side he's got Jiminy Cricket and Jiminy Cricket is telling him "Do the right thing. Spend the money on the groceries. Go home to Geppetto. On the other side, he's got this guy named Lapwick who is trying to get him to do all the wrong things. Spend the money on candy and do all sorts of bad things like smoke cigars and drink and play pool, of all sorts of things. And so he's got these two people who are on either side of him and he's getting these mixed messages and he's trying to navigate his way on what to do.

Famous story of Star Wars. Luke Skywalker is the main character and throughout the first three movies, there's this struggle. There's this battle, because on the one side he's got this Obi-Wan and Yoda and they're telling him "Go to the light side of the force Luke where there is peace and there is harmony and there is love and there is everything good on the light side of the force. And on the other side, he's got Darth Vader and the Emperor who are saying "Come with me and we will rule the galaxy together". And so, he has these messages that are just pulling at him and tearing at him and pulling him apart. I think, to some extent, we all live in that tension in our life. We have both of these sides grabbing for us.

Some of us, in that scenario, we pick our side. We say "I am going with this side and I am going to pledge my allegiance to this side and I am going to follow this side and I am going to fight for this side." And some of us, probably, I would guess, a lot of us, kind of waffle. We kind of go "Okay, this side sounds right. This side sounds good. This side sounds appealing". And we go there for awhile and then we have struggles and we have problems and then we say "Well maybe this side, actually has some merit to it. Let's check that out for awhile." And we kind of waver back and forth. Sometimes we've been in that struggle for so long and we've felt that tension for so long that really, what we want to do is just give up and ignore the fact that the battle is going on at all.

In the movie The Matrix, just in a nutshell, there are these people and they're living in this world that isn't real. It's this virtual reality world but they don't know it. So, they're in this world and the computer tells them everything that is going on but none of it is real. At one point, this one character names Ciper, he's in this beautiful restaurant which he knows isn't real, and he's sitting at this table which he knows isn't real; and in front of him is a nice juicy steak which he knows isn't real. But then, he says this "You know, I know this steak it doesn't exist and I know that when I put it in my mouth the matrix, the computer, is telling my brain that it's juicy and delicious, but after nine years, you know what I realize. Ignorance is bliss." And some of us have been fighting this battle so long that we kind of think "You know what, Ciper might be on to something. Maybe ignorance is bliss. Maybe we can shut all the battle out and we can just live our life and pretend that none of that is going on." Some of us might take a different point of view and decide "You know what. We agree with John Milton in what he wrote in Paradise Lost when he said 'it's better to reign in hell than to serve in heaven.'" So we decided, "You know what, better for us to go over to

this side, even though we know it's probably not the right side, but we can be someone pretty special on this side so maybe we'll go over there instead and maybe life will be easier for us and maybe the battle will be easier if we go over there."

Unfortunately, there are some problems with all of those lines of thinking. First of all and most importantly, Milton was wrong. It is not better to do anything in hell than to do anything in heaven. So let's just strike that one off the top.

Secondly, you just really can't opt out of the battle because the battle is over you. So no matter where you go and no matter what you do and no matter how you try and ignore it, you're in the battle because you are the battleground. There is no getting away from it.

Number three. This is where, I think it gets interesting. I think lots of times we think that if we choose God's side of the battle, you can say "Well I can choose God's side of the battle and if I do Satan is just going to pester me and he's going to keep nagging me and he's going to keep attacking me. So maybe I'll just give up and give in and I'll go to this side of the battle. Somehow we have it in our mind that if we go to this side of the battle, God is just going to let us go. God's just going to ignore us. God's just going to say "Well, that's unfortunate but let's move on." But that's not true either. God will never let you go. God will never concede Himself to you being lost to the other side. And so no matter what we are always in the middle of this battle. There is no getting out of it. There is no escaping it and there is no way around it.

So, during this series, we're going to talk about the battle and we're going to talk about some of the battle lines that get drawn on either side and each week we're going to look at the battle lines on either side.

The two sides that we're looking at. On the one side, we're looking at what's been dubbed the Seven Deadly Sins. Now, off the top of your head, in your head, see if you can name what those might be? This is not an official list this is just a list that someone made up and it caught on. But, see if you can name the seven. How many of those seven can you get in your brain?

On the other side, we have out of Matthew, Chapter 5, Jesus is teaching the people and He gives what has been dubbed "The Beatitudes" and He lists eight things that He says "Your life will be blessed if you are in these eight categories". How many of those eight Beatitudes can you conjure up in your mind? Now, I don't really care if you don't learn to list the Seven Deadly Sins, but I hope, that by the time we're done this series, the Beatitudes will be firmly rooted in your mind. Some of you may have gone through that whole process and maybe you're saying "You know what, Seven Deadly Sins, none of those an issue for me. Kind of got those covered." And then you look at the Beatitudes and you say "Yeah, check that one, check that one, we're doing fairly good here". And if that is you, just humour me for the next seven weeks because if you don't need these lessons, I do. And secondly, if you

think you have all of those things checked off, if you have all of the Deadly Sins handled and you have all of the Beatitudes firmly rooted in your life, then maybe just, perhaps, you need our first lesson.

**PRIDE.** This morning we are going to talk about pride. Before we do that, we need to clarify something because pride is kind of a murky topic because there's really two kinds of pride and one is really almost kind of a virtue and one is a vice and it gets really mixed up when we start talking about pride because we're never sure which one we're talking about. And so we say "You should never have pride". And we say "Oh! You're talking about the virtue that doesn't make any sense." And then you say "Well, it's okay to have pride but if you're talking about the vice then it's not."

So, let me just try and briefly clarify this issue of pride. This week, my son came home from school on the bus. He's 5. He came home, I was proud of my son. And the funniest part was, I'm supposed to wave to the bus driver from the door. He got off the bus on the first day and I expected him to run up the driveway and into the house. No. He got off the bus, stopped in the driveway and started chatting with the neighbour in the next yard over. He was doing fine. He was okay. And I was proud of him for that. My little guy, coming home on the bus. And that was okay. It's good to be proud of your children when they are growing up and they are maturing.

Maybe your spouse has had a promotion they've worked hard in their job and they have been promoted. It is good. It is right for you to be proud of what they have achieved. Maybe you have a friend who has been practicing and working very hard to achieve something and they make that goal finally, and you should be proud of them and what their efforts have achieved and what they have managed in your life.

Maybe you have a team that starts out 1 in 7 and maybe they rebound and win a championship and if that ever happens I suppose you could be a little proud of what the players had done and the effort they had put in to make that happen. Now that's not the kind of pride we're talking about this morning. That's okay. Be proud of your family. Be proud of your friends. Be proud of what people manage to do with God's help. There's a different kind of pride though and that's what we want to talk about this morning.

There have been some incredible things that have happened and as I try to think back and try to imagine what people a generation or two ago would think if they saw our world. I can't imagine what that would be like. Can you imagine going back a generation or two and telling them "You know what, you can have this thing that's not much bigger than a postage stamp and it can hold thousands and thousands and thousands of songs on it and you just pop it into your ears and listen to it." That would blow their minds.

Can you imagine going back to someone who used a rotary phone or had to phone the switchboard to try and get a line and try and describe to them what a Smart Phone can do.

Can you imagine? That would just be beyond their comprehension, perhaps. Or maybe you have these I Pads that are all over the place right now. Those look like something straight out of science fiction shows of the '70's and 80's. And I remember watching those and thinking "That would be so cool if we ever had those, but we won't." It's just too inconceivable to think that we would have something that could do all the things that these things are doing. But now we have them and they are doing them. I tried to think and it's beyond by capability, but I tried to think what for me is in that category. What if someone from the future came back and told me "You know what, in the future we do 'this'." What would I be blown away with and couldn't imagine. The only thing I could, this is not even that much of a stretch, unfortunately, but I remember on the show Star Trek, and they had the Transporters and the guys stood on these little circles with lights underneath them and they pressed a button and they kind of de-materialized into this glowy thing and then they disappeared all together and then they appeared somewhere else on the planet or a different ship or something. And I thought "Now that would be really amazing if that were real". Can you imagine? If I told you, you know what, a year from now we're going to have Transporters and so, we're going to have one out in our lobby in the foyer there, just in case and you can get on it and in a second be over in Australia and hanging out on the beach and surfing and then in another second you could be in London doing some sightseeing and then in another second you could be down visiting Travis and Alicia and in another second you could be all over the place. Would that just, like, how many of you would not believe that that is possible? Now, hold that thought because that kind of un-believableness is what we need to kind of capture.

Now this is a man named Nicolaus Copernicus. And back in the early 1500's he came up with an idea. When he came up with this idea, everyone thought he was crazy. Everyone thought, this is impossible, this is unfathomable, you're just off your rocker, Copernicus. Now, before he came along, everyone believed that there was the sun and there were the planets and in the middle of them all there was the earth. All the sun and all the planets, they kind of just went around the earth. They went around and around, the earth. The earth was right in the centre, right in the middle of it all. But Copernicus came along and said "You know what, that just doesn't work right so, what if we're not quite as big as we thought we were and not quite as important as we thought we were, and what if all the planets go around the sun." And everyone said "Copernicus, you've lost it. Copernicus, that's crazy, that's not possible, it doesn't make sense."

Well, pride is like that. In that, pride makes you the centre of the Universe. And pride suggests that if anyone even hints at the fact that maybe you are NOT the centre of the Universe, they are crazy like Copernicus". Pride is what puts you front, centre, the most important thing in your world. Pride is what brings us to the mirror on the wall. Our metaphorical mirror on the wall and we say "Mirror, mirror on the wall, who is the fairest of them all?" And we expect the mirror to say "You are." That's what pride does to you. Pride turns you into this guy who walks around with a sign that says "I'm great", "I'm right", "I'm very smart."

Jeff Cook says “Pride is not just thinking too much of myself, pride is thinking of myself far too much.” And when pride takes root in your life, your self is all that you can think of. Pride is what takes that natural love and concern and esteem that you have for yourself and it magnifies it and it mutates it and it perverts it into something that causes you to disdain other people and it diminishes other people and it excludes other people. Pride is something that is manifested in arrogance and ego and self-centredness and all of those things have a way of just narrowing our world down to us and us only. Which is the exact opposite of what Paul encourages the Philippians to do. Phil. 2:3-4 says:

“Don’t be selfish. Don’t try to impress others. Be humble thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don’t look out only for your own interest, but take an interest in others, as well.”

You see, pride always leads us to a state of isolation at state where we say “I don’t need anyone but me. No one or nothing else matters except me. And pride says “you know what, that’s okay because I am the only important thing.”

Now Cook suggests that unlike other sins, pride usually appears when you are at your best. I kind of like to disagree with that. I think pride appears almost anytime and then convinces you that you are at your best. No matter what situation you’re in, I bet you, you could be proud about something in it.

Perhaps you got a cool new toy, an I-something and you could be proud about the fact that you have this cool new toy. Or, if you don’t get a cool new toy, you could be proud about the fact that you were so frugal and had such self-restraint, that you didn’t go out and buy that cool new toy. Perhaps if you are very slender and healthy, you could be very proud of how well you have taken care of your body. Or, if you are more chunky, you could be proud of the fact that you have learned to enjoy all the wondrous food in the world and are not caught up in all that image stuff that some other people are. Perhaps you could be proud of the fact that you allow your kids to go out and discover who they are. Or you could be proud of the fact that your kids are very well disciplined. You could be proud of the fact that you read your bible a lot or you go to church regularly. Or you could be proud of the fact that you base your faith on a relationship with Jesus. You could be proud of the fact that you have a high paying job or you could be proud of the fact that you’re not materialistic and don’t need a high paying job. You could be proud that you have lived a good life and things have gone well for you or you could be proud of the fact that you have managed to get through some rough times and have managed to come out the other side. I don’t know if there’s anything that we couldn’t find a way to be proud about our situation. Pride seems to have a way to just seep into everything and try and warp whatever it is that’s going on and tell us “you know what, you did good there. You did wonderful, you’re on the right side. You’re doing well.” Pride tells us that we know what is right. Pride tells us that we’ve done what is right. Pride tells us that we are at our best and pride tells us that our best is better than almost

everyone else. And sometimes, I get comfortable with all of that because in the back of my mind, I think I'm right. And so, yeah, it seems arrogant for me to say all of this but pride tells me I'm right and so I stand by that and sometimes pride will even tell you that God agrees with you and so it's okay for you to be so bold in your thinking because you're on the right side. But James tells us in James 4:6:

“God gives us more grace,” that's why the scripture says “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”

And that's one side of the argument. Pride says “Trust yourself, rely on yourself. Build yourself up. Focus on you. Your skills, your talents, your abilities, your accomplishments. Look out for number one, which is obviously, you.

So we come to the other side of the battle.

First Beatitude, Jesus said “Blessed are the poor in spirit.” Here is how some theologians have interpreted that phrase. You are blessed when you are at the end of your rope. Blessed are the spiritual zeroes, the spiritual bankrupt, deprived and deficient the spiritual beggars. Those without a wisp of “religion”. Blessed are those who know themselves poor. Blessed are the poverty-stricken in spiritual things. The simple minded, the untalented, the religiously unsophisticated. And poor isn't a very attractive offer. Poor makes a pretty lousy sales pitch. Poor doesn't really make us want to run over and join Jesus' team. Who in their right mind would want to become all of that. However, poor in spirit is not something we should aspire to become. Jesus says poor in spirit, is what we already are. Jesus' argument is that everyone is poor in spirit. Some people recognize it and admit it, other people deny it. Pride says “Never admit that you might possibly, perhaps, somehow, in some way, maybe, be slightly, insufficient. Jesus says “Only those who recognize their own poorness can have a life that is blessed and happy.”

Socrates said “The only ones who are wise are those who know they are fools.” I looked at some passages in the New Testament written by the Apostle Paul. The Apostle Paul seems to know that there is value in poorness. In Philippians 3:46-49, he says”

“If anyone thinks he has reason to put confidence in the flesh, or to have pride, I have more.”

He goes through this long list of things that he feels the readers would think would be worthy of pride and he ends by saying”

“Whatever was to my profit, I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I everything lost compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord. Consider it all rubbish.” And he says “Having been found in Him, having a righteousness not of my own, that comes from the Law, which means nothing that I have done, but which comes through faith in Christ. The righteousness that came from God is by faith.”

In 2 Corinthians, he gives a similar, a little bit different list and he's writing to people who are giving their list of credentials and trying to say to the people of Corinth "Here's our list of credentials, you should listen to us over Paul." And so Paul has been kind of backed into this corner and he said "Okay, if you want to compare lists, here we go." He says "Anyone else desires to boast about" and he says "I'm speaking like a fool here because I know that comparing lists is crazy, I also dare to boast about." And then he starts going through the list and half way through he has to pause and say "I am out of my mind to talk like this." But he goes on for the sake of the argument. And he counts more things in his list and he's been in prison and he's been exposed to death and he's been beaten with lashes and he's been beaten with rods and he's been on the move and in danger and he's been attacked and he's been on rivers and all sorts of things and he has laboured and he has toiled, and then he concludes his argument by saying "besides everything else I face the daily pressure of my concern for the churches. Who is weak and I do not feel weak. Who has led to sin and I do not inwardly burn, but if I must boast, I will boast about the things that show my weakness." 2 Cor. 11:21b-30.

Next chapter over in 2Cor. 12:9b-10, he says:

"Therefore, I will boast more gladly about my weaknesses so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why for Christ's sake I delight in weakness and insults and hardships and persecution and difficulty. For when I weak, then I am strong."

Paul knew the value of poorness. Paul understood that it was only by being poor that he could truly receive the life and the blessing that Jesus promised to offer.

Have you ever been out trying to do something and right in the middle of it you realize you're missing an essential ingredient? Couple weeks ago, I was trying to make macaroni for the kids and Michelle was on her way out the door to go to something. We scrounged the house, it was the end of the grocery week so there was nothing there and so we scrounged and I said "Okay, I can make Kraft dinner for the boys for their lunch" so I started making it and just as the last cycle of the microwave came to an end, I went to the fridge to get the butter and the milk so I could mix it all together and I realized "You know what, we don't have any milk". And so I was in this place, what do I do because I don't have any milk. Now, in the big scheme of things, running out of milk is not a big deal. But, as a parallel to real life, being out is definitely made worse by not knowing that you are out. Being out isn't changed by the fact that you deny or ignore the fact that you are out. In fact, our car desperately needs gas. I'm hoping we can get some on the way home before we're out on the street. If you see us pushing please come and help us. But ignoring the fact, as we have done for the last several days, that our car is almost out of gas, doesn't change the fact that our car is almost out of gas and being out, can only be fixed once you realize that you are out.

That's how it is with our life. Once we realize we are poor in spirit, once we realize we have

nothing to offer, once we realize we cannot do it on our own, then, we can receive what God has to offer and the life He has given.

Cook says that being poor in spirit is like being part of an AA meeting where all the participants confess openly that their lives have become unmanageable. It's like the poor in spirit should gather together and begin by saying "Hi, my name is Mike, I am poor in spirit. I can't do this on my own. I need some help." Unfortunately, pride wants us to be more like Red Green, who says "I'm a man and I can change if I have to, I guess." Pride wants us to say "If I can't do this on my own, I suppose I might use a little help if I'm desperate and it's really bad and I can't find a way to do it on my own." That's the difference between the two sides.

So this morning, we have to choose which side we will be on. Pride says "I've got it all together and I've got it all." Poor in spirit says "I got nothing and I need some help." Jesus said to those who accept that they are poor in spirit, theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven." And in fact, the only way to participate in the Kingdom of Heaven is to realize you can't get there on your own. Paul writes to the Ephesians and says in Eph. 2:8-9:

"For it is by grace that you have been saved by faith and this is not from yourselves, it is a gift of God. Not by works so that no one can boast."

The Kingdom of Heaven is not something we earn, it's not something that we merit, the Kingdom of Heaven is something that God offers to those who realize that they can't get there on their own. The Kingdom of Heaven is so much more than just eternity too. The Kingdom of Heaven is God's version of life here and now and it's only accessible through Christ and it's only functional with the help of others.

On the other hand, pride begs us to avoid exposure. To hold up our chin. To pretend that everything is going well. Pride loves the mask that we hide our lonely faces behind. Pride says "You can figure it out on your own." Pride requires you to rely solely on yourself. Pride insists that you are just fine and it tells you that no one will respect you if you expose the places you have failed and in doing so, pride can exclude us from the Kingdom of Heaven.

So you stand on the front lines. The battle is on. Which side will you choose?