

## TALKING ABOUT JESUS PT 2.

Tim grew up in a Christian and went to Sunday school and Bible class. However, at 18 he left school, got a job, and started hanging out with a different bunch of people. At 22 after a personal crisis, he heard a typical gospel message and gave this heart to God. Now Tim cannot understand how the message that convicted him 30 years ago seems to have no effect on his daughter. In fact, if anything it is turning her away from Christianity.

In Acts 16:30 the Philippian jailer facing a crisis asks Paul and Silas, what I must do to be saved? How would you answer that question. Is there a right way a best way to answer that question? Typically, how we have presented the gospel has been the same. We are sinners, the cross has paid the price for our sin, we can be saved as we trust in Jesus.

The problem with presenting the gospel with a sin focus.

1. The word sin has changed its meaning. Sin is sort of like a guilty pleasure, like eating lots of chocolate.
2. Most people do not feel guilty. Therefore, Jesus taking our guilt away is not very attractive. If you do not feel guilty, why do you need saved from guilt?
3. Truth has become relative. To the postmodern, there are no absolutes. You have your truth and as long as you do not impose it on me, then that is fine.
4. Jesus did not talk about sin a lot. To the women at the well, he talks about inner thirst, not about her sin in living with a guy. In the parable of the lost sheep, sin is about becoming lost, losing your way in life. In the parable of the rich fool, sin is it is about putting earthly wealth above eternal wealth. In the parable of the Pharisee and tax collector sin is about being self-confidence and being judgemental. So it is not that Jesus does not talk about sin, it has just he does not use the word much. He tells stories that talk of the heart.

Therefore, when it comes to talking about Jesus, don't use the word sin. However, if we understand sin it has three elements; vertical element, horizontal element, internal element. In David and Bathsheba. He sinned against himself. He let himself down. He should have known better. He should have been out fighting. He sinned horizontally by seducing Bathsheba, misusing power and murdering her husband. He sinned vertically by breaking God's laws. All three elements are important. David eventually came to realize he had sinned against God.

However, his sin had personal and social ramifications. He lost his moral authority with his family. All sin has implications at all three levels. It alienates us from God, from others and from ourselves. So when the jailer asks what I must do to be saved. What was it he asked to be saved from? Ultimately he needs to be saved from his guilt before God and the earthquake made him aware of this. However, maybe he was aware of his own internal issues, his insecurity and fear. Alternatively, maybe he also wanted to

be saved from the brutal work conditions he was under, because he was probably on minimal wages and working long hours. The jailer might have well been aware of all three manifestations of sin. Save me from God, from the struggle of this life, from this internal battle going on within.

Often people are aware of one of the axis of sin. They might not be aware of their sin against God but they can see how things are unravelling at the internal level or a social level. I want to look at six ways of talking about sin without using the word sin or guilt.

If I had a car that I wanted to give to a friend, but my friend is sceptical that the car is what they need, and then you would promote the car to them. However, how you promoted it would depend on the friend. Now the car has not changed. You are simply finding ways to connect the car to the person in a way they can understand. There would be no point in promoting how big the boot of the car was if your friend was single and did not need much storage space.

**Brokenness.** This language resonates with many. There is an awareness of brokenness. Marriages, relationships with parents, relationship with children. Many people can appear successful and yet are carrying the wounds of broken relationships.

In Gen 3 we see how brokenness and sin are closely linked. When humanity choose to do their own thing, 3 things happened. Work became frustrating, child birth became fraught with death and danger and human relationships between men and women will be abusive and fractured. In an age of individualism, self-absorption and pleasure, relationships are increasingly broken.

The gospel clearly presents the cross as the means of reconciliation. So a person with broken relationships in their life will relate to a message of the cross that focusses on how Jesus came to restore relationships with God and with others. Col 1:20 2 Cor 5:18-19

**What we Worship** We all worship something. Many people have an area of life that they give absolute priority to. We live in a culture that tells us to pursue happiness and success and identity and security. These are all good things, but many try to find these things through their work, or their family or success or possessions. We worship the gifts from God not the giver. And the trouble with these gifts is that they make lousy gods

So the gospel message is about seeing our idols for what they are, and giving them up, and putting Christ as the centre of our worship. This is what happened to Zacchaeus. Romans 1:25

**Shame Dishonour** People do not resonate with guilt anymore, but many understand the concept of shame. We



live in an era where shame culture is stronger than guilt. On social media you can be publically shamed for you views. So rather than talk about rebelling against God, we can talk about bringing shame to God, and not honouring God. Shame is personal and speaks to this generation more than guilt. Acts 14:15-17, 17:22-31 the apostles used a different approach than what they used with Jews. God has revealed himself in creation and yet we shame him by ignoring Him. Isaiah 61:7

**Self-righteousness** We are encouraged to be true to yourself so how can we feel guilty. Guilt is imposed on us. Yet people are still quite judgemental and self-righteous. If I am into the environment, I might recycle, and bike to work. This makes me feel good that I am doing my bit for the environment. Then I will look down on others.

Jesus often used self-righteous as a picture of sin. The parable of the Pharisees and the tax collector is one on a number of examples. The issue is not that the Pharisee was blatantly breaking the laws. The issue is that he felt proud of how good he was.

**Falling short** We are often told today to be the best we can be. We can make a difference in the world. Seize the moment. You only live once. And God wants us to make a difference. In Genesis God placed humans in the world to care for it and make it better. But we fall short of our expectations. We fall short of all the God would want for us. We fall short of all we could be.

Again, in the story of the Pharisee and the tax collector. The Pharisee was being a good husband. He was generous. These are good things to be celebrated. But he fails to be all that he could be. He is not good enough to be a child of God. He needs to admit his shortcomings and come to God as a child, with a simple faith and humility. Romans 3:23

**Lack of peace** Because of sin, many people are aware of a lack of peace in their lives. They struggle with who they are what their purpose in life is, they do not feel at peace in their bodies, or with their gender or They don't feel any satisfaction in their work. their relationships are a mess. They are anxious about the future. They long for peace. Often in talking with people, you hear a longing for peace. Therefore, lack of peace is a picture of sin. In addition, the cross brings shalom, a deep peace. A peace that is not dependant on circumstances. Ephesians 2:17-18

**Defilement** There are many today who have suffered sexual abuse. Others have abused their minds and bodies with drugs, porn, and alcohol some have been sexually involved with many partners and it has left them feeling used and empty. Some people feel a deep need to be cleansed and made pure. Paul talks of being washed clean and purified. Hebrews 9:13-14 MSG

The cross is multi-faceted. The Bible presents a rich tapestry of pictures to understand the cross. And the classic sinners prayer model ignores some major things. There is no focus on God's plan for a new community. It is just about me

and God. And there is no focus on God's plan for the renewal of creation. It's just about getting to heaven. And there is no focus on following Christ as a disciple.

The cross and the gospel do not change. But how we present them has to change. How we have presented the gospel in the past is no longer working today, because the world view of people has changed. The gospel does not change but how we connect it to people has to change. Jesus saw what the deep heart needs of each person he meet was. He did not condemn them or judge them. He showed them a better way to meet the need the person was striving for. Think of the people you are close to who do not know Jesus. Which model of sin and salvation is most applicable to them? Once you figure that out, you have a starting point for the language to use to share the gospel.

One simple model of presenting Jesus is to use three words, Manger, Cross-, and King. The advantage of this is it is about Jesus as a person in a story. He is someone real, who we can love and relate to. It is not about a set of propositions. Story resonates with post moderns.

Jesus came as a baby. He identified with the poor, broken, and oppressed. He preached against the authorities and religion. He demonstrated the reversal of values. The first will be last, whoever loses his life finds it whoever wants to lead should be a servant. Jesus died on the cross. Jesus had to die for us. We are only saved by God's grace. Jesus is setting his kingdom up on earth. He invites us to be part of this plan for renewing and restoring.

Jesus story and our story are very powerful. They are not a set of facts to believe or not. They allow engagement with the listener. Rev 12 says the blood of the lamb and the testimony of the saints is what will bring victory. ie God's story, our story.

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#### REFLECTION + DISCUSSION

- How was the gospel message presented to you, as you came to faith?
- Why do you think people don't seem to connect with the traditional gospel message any more?
- Discuss the different pictures of sin. Which one resonates more for you? Think about how they might relate to people you know who are not Christian and the language best suited to them.
- How would you respond to someone who says that we are watering down the gospel by not talking about sin and guilt?
- The gospel is good news and yet it often comes across as irrelevant. How can we present it as good news?
- Pray for opportunities to share the gospel this week.



**CENTRAL BAPTIST**

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