

LENT PT 2. SORTING OUT

Imagine I have been approached by a man keen to join Central and be part of the worship team. He is a lovely Christian guy. I have known him for quite a few years now – He's a kiwi, but has just come back from Australia where he has spent 15 years over in prison. He was well known Christian artist over there. But about 2004 he had an affair with a married work colleague and ended up killing the husband of this woman, covering it over. He got away with it for a while. The murder was unsolved and he married this woman. But then it all unraveled. He was found out and jailed. Amazingly he is still married to this lady. Now he is keen to join our team. I have seen evidence of his deep repentance in this matter. How would we feel about this man leading worship?

That could be David in the Old Testament. (with a few extra bits just to keep it relevant for today 😊)

The Second step in the process of spring cleaning is to have a sort out – to pull everything out of the cupboard as it were and lay it all out in the open. This second step is probably the hardest step because it is not easy to see all the we have accumulated in the cupboard - the junk we have kept and the things we have avoided dealing with.

Why is David called a man after God's own heart when he is a murderer and adulterer. He is by no means perfect. When he sinned, he did so in a major way. But his life is not confined to just this time of sin. He lived a life following God. Dr. Sproul, preacher theologian, who has written over 100 books comments:

"In the Psalms, we see the heart of a penitent unveiled and in that I think we see most clearly the greatness of David the Great. If you read Psalm 51 and read it carefully and thoughtfully, that Psalm will reveal more than anything else in the history of David why David was called a man after God's own heart. Because here it reveals the broken heart of a sinful man who sees his sin clearly."

Now throughout David's life we see his obedience, his understanding of God's character and God's justice. But he also understood in a profound way the grace of God. He didn't take it for granted. He didn't think that he had somehow earned it or deserved it. Dr. Sproul carries on.

"Who of us could ever measure the amount of grace that we have received? It has been so abundant and bountiful. But somehow for us as fallen creatures, we're never satisfied with the grace of God. We can always conceive of ways and places and circumstances where he could have been more gracious and given us a little more. Let's not make that mistake. David didn't and recognized the graciousness of grace."

His concern is that his actions have broken fellowship with God. He totally accepts that God could write him off. But he longs for fellowship again with God. Read Ps 32 and 51.

There is an interesting contrast between Saul and David. Saul had all the attributes of a great leader. He was tall, courageous, generous and good looking. He looked like a leader. When Samuel anointed Saul he told him clearly to wait seven days for Samuel to arrive to do the offering of sacrifices. He was told this would all be confirmed by a series of signs. All these miraculously took place. But seven days later his army was under threat. His men were in the process of deserting him before his very eyes. This was his first test of leadership. So Saul decided he could not wait any longer and that he would make the burnt offering himself.

Now it is easy to think: "Why is that such a big deal. He didn't murder anyone or commit adultery. He just took some action under pressure." Sure he was told to wait, but he could not wait any longer. He was a leader and action needed to happen now. He could not wait around for the old prophet Samuel who was probably dawdling down the road.

When Samuel confronts him, he does not own this sin. We try to blame Samuel for not turning up when he should have. He makes excuses. He says he felt compelled. In the end he relied on his own initiative, and did not rely on God. But the biggest issue is when called out for his sin, he did not take responsibility for it. The actions reveal the pride and disobedience that was beginning to lurk in his heart. He would do things his way, not rely on God.

Later on the same issues of his heart arise when he and his men did not obey God's command to destroy all the enemies livestock. They kept the best for themselves, despite a very explicit command. Again when confronted by Samuel, he makes excuses and blames the people for pressurizing him. (1 Samuel 15:22-23, NLT)

We see the different value of God in what Samuel says. Stubbornness is as bad as worshipping idols. Rebellion is as bad as witchcraft. Note both are heart issues: the being with sins that are obvious. But to God the issues of the heart as just as important as external actions.

The burnt offerings in today's context are the outwards things we do that others might notice. Like going to church or serving on one of the churches teams. These are not bad things at all but they don't necessarily really reveal what is going on in our hearts.

David understood his sin was ultimately not towards the husband Uriah that he had killed, or Bathsheba, but against God himself. He had grieved God and he showed deep repentance. Saul when suddenly faced with the implications of what he had done sought forgiveness but it was superficial.

This week I invite you to reflect on a series of questions that focus on what is happening in our inner world. The purpose



is not so that we can beat up on ourselves or make ourselves feel bad. Paul, other NT writers encourage us to examine ourselves: to take a long realistic look at ourselves. Romans 12:3–4, NLT 2 Cor 13:5 1 Corinthians 11:28

John in writing to the churches in Asia minor records Jesus words to the 7 churches. He affirms things and also corrects them. Why? Because he sees beyond the superficial to what is really happening. Listen to what he says to the church at Sardis: “ I know all the things you do and that you have a reputation for being alive. But you are dead.” Wow! This is apparently an outwardly great church. Maybe they have an awesome worship team and significant community ministry. But he says they are dead can calls them to repent and turn back to himself.

To the church at Laodicea. “You say I am rich. I have everything I need. I don’t need a thing. And you don’t realize that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked.” There is massive self deception going on here. This is a church that appeared to have it all and yet did not see themselves as Jesus saw them.

Jesus tells the story of the tax collector and the religious leader coming to the temple to pray. Luke 18:9-14. The tax collector is profoundly aware of his need for God’s grace. The religious leader is full of pride at how good he is. Jesus said it is the tax collector who will go home right with God. Why? The tax collector was ruthlessly honest before God. And in humbling himself before God, God lifted him up

When God choose David, he rejected all his brothers. When Samuel asked why he was rejecting these candidates that seemed well qualified, God says that he looks at the heart, not the outward appearance. (1 Samuel 16:6–7, NLT)

We all put on a mask to some extent or another. We all pretend that we are better than we are. We can easily fool other people. I have been in pastoral ministry now for 30 years and one of the conclusions I have come to is that all families are screwed up to some degree or another. Why? Because we are all broken vessels to some degree or another, we are all carrying woundings from our past, we are all struggling with internal stuff that very few know about.

One of the reasons we have as a priority cultivating an authentic faith as a top of the list of our priorities is that authentic is about being real. Authentic faith has doubts. Authentic faith is not super victorious. An authentic faith encompasses failure and suffering and unanswered prayer. Authentic faith has shades of grey and well as black and white.

This week is a chance to be self reflective and deeply honest about where we are at. God is not shocked at what is happening in our hearts. He knows the answers to the questions before we answer them. But when we acknowledge the reality, we are agreeing with him and this is the starting point for growth and healing. If we don’t acknowledge this reality we are living in denial.

Having made some space in your life for this time of lent, now the real work begins. Use your journal to reflect on each question. Take your time. Ask God to reveal to you what is happening. Trust the Holy Spirit to reveal what he need to.

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REFLECTION + DISCUSSION

What has God be speaking to you about over the last week? Is there anything that surprised or shocked you?

How hard was it to be ruthlessly honest?

Did you find things that seem to want to distract you from doing this work?

Did you find thoughts of condemnation and feelings of failure creep in? How did you counter these? (maybe you didn’t and need the homegroup to pray for you)

Do you think this time of self examination was useful?

If John (the author of Revelation) was writing to Central Baptist, what do you think Jesus would be saying about us? What would he be commending us (the church) for? What would he be correcting us (the church) for?

Of the 7 churches which one might be the most relevant to Central? Either read Rev Ch 2-3 or read summary below.

Ephesus - Commended: hard work, patient endurance, no tolerance for evil or false apostles Correction: loss of first love for God and each other.

Smyrna Commended Faithfulness in suffering.

Pergamum Commended: loyalty in face of persecution Correction: tolerate false teaching

Thyatira: Commended: their love, faith service, faithful endurance. And improvement Correction: allowing a false prophet to lead people astray.

Saris Commended: some have remained faithful and not committed evil. Correction: appear alive but are dead. No actions

Philadelphia Commended: Actions and obedience despite weakness

Laodicea Correction: neither hot nor cold. Apathetic. Proud of their spirituality yet in reality poor

Do we struggle to hear words of correction from Jesus? Have we created a picture of Jesus that is too “meek and mild”? How do we reconcile the hard words of Jesus in the gospels with the revelation with his love and grace?



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