

Lessons From Ephesus: Confessing Sin

“Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed what they had done. A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly. When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to fifty thousand drachmas. In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power” Acts 19:18-20

Welcome

- Bible reading encouragement
- Power, Supernatural Power in the Word of God

Read Text & Pray

- thank you that you speak to us
- speak Holy Spirit
- make your Word alive to us
- give us ears to hear and hearts to believe and hands to obey

Intro

- Happy New Year!
 - first Sunday of the year
 - would be a great Sunday for a quality motivational sermon
 - new year, new you
 - you got this
- last week, a Pastor in Boston (not AI) had quite the experience
 - he posted this all online, I'm simply sharing it with you
 - he was preaching a sermon called “I'm Over It”
 - end of the year
 - time to move on from those hurdles holding us back
 - and as a display, he brought out a hurdle on stage, and a little trampoline
 - as he goes to jump, the trampoline slips and he flies through the air, and lands on his head

- isn't that just how it goes
 - new year, new you
 - I got this, watch everyone
 - and the next minute, you're on your head

- I want us to start this year somewhere else
 - I want us to think about the Holiness of God

- God is holy, he's perfect
 - he has never slipped
 - he is absolutely good and absolutely holy
 - he is surrounded right now on his throne, by millions of beings declaring his holiness and his worth

- Church, we have to start here, because what we're doing right now, a walk with God, is not a self improvement project
 - God is not our self help coach, telling us "you got this. you can do it"
 - if you are looking for a place to hear about your potential, and how great you are, how much you can accomplish, this is not the place for you
 - in fact, you don't need church for that message - it's in every best selling book on the shelf

- Church, this place, is a place where we behold the glory and majesty of a Holy God
 - and it's a place for only one type of person
 - there's only one type of person
 - one who is in desperate need of help, of a savior, of one who is higher than we are
 - Church this is a place where we say "Jesus, all our hope is in you"
 - "I need you"
 - "Apart from you, I can't do anything!"

- **the true mark of a mature Christian, is one who knows how weak they are**
 - **one who throws themselves at the mercy of God**

- **who knows their only hope is Jesus, his salvation, his righteousness, his presence, his Spirit at work in their life**

**this morning, we see a new church that was radically moved to humble themselves before a Holy God, to confess their sin*

Context

- we're in a series where we're learning essential lessons from this newly planted church in Ephesus
 - 1) Don't Forget Your First Love (Jesus)
 - 2) We Confront our Enemy Satan
 - 3) We Confess Our Sin

Where We're At:

- **at the beginning of this chapter, we see Paul come to Ephesus and begin to preach the gospel**
 - we see people believe and filled with the Spirit
 - we see God performing miracles
 - we see people getting set free from evil spirits
- **the sons of Sceva - Jewish exorcists see the success in driving out demons by these new Christians**
 - so they try to use Jesus' name in driving out demons
 - but because they had no relationship with Jesus, a demon possessed man beats them up, and they run away literally naked
 - *and because of all of this, verse 17 says:*
 - "When this became known to the Jews and Greeks living in Ephesus, they were all seized with fear, and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honor" Acts 19:17
- **now, in our verses this morning - we read this:**
 - "Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed what they had done. A number who had practiced soccer brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly" 19:18-19

- **first, notice this: they *openly* confessed their sin!**
 - radical sin! witchcraft!
 - **again - there is only one type of person**
 - **a broken and sinful person**
 - **and the Church is where we come, with our baggage, radical baggage, and we give it to Jesus**
 - **“I’m sorry Lord. Here’s where I’ve been. I’ve wandered. I’ve done wicked things. I confess my sins to you”**
- **Second, they not only confessed, they publicly destroyed their works of witchcraft**
 - this church collectively threw away their books of sorcery that was valued at 50,000 drachmas
 - drachma = a days wage (average daily wage in America is \$200)
 - 50,000 times \$200 is \$10,000,000
 - that could’ve bought a new church building!
 - God would rather that \$ be in the fire
 - What good is \$ when our souls are at stake?
 - **what is a rich church when there is secret and unconfessed sin in a church?**
 - **confession is costly, but it is far less costly than loosing our souls**

***now I want to ask us a question church. I want to get real for a minute:**

**why do we struggle so hard to openly and publicly confess and renounce our sin?*

**when was the last time someone came forward in our lives and said: I’ve been addicted to porn. I’ve been cheating on my spouse. I’ve been constantly angry.*

**here: take my hard drives. take my drugs. take my laptop. take this bank account. take this prescription. I’m done with this.*

**why do we struggle with this?*

- **Fundamental misunderstanding of what it is to be a Christian**
 - story of Pharisee and Tax Collector (Luke 18)
 - Pharisee was killing it (doing everything right)
 - “Thank you God that I’m able to do this”
 - Tax Collector (the worst kind of sinner)
 - stood far off
 - “Have mercy on me O God, a sinner”
 - Jesus says, “I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.” Luke 18:14
 - *to walk with God, is to humble yourself, and daily cling to the mercy of God (repeat)*

**I’ve noticed that something else is so often missing in our conversations about confession of sin*

**I’ve noticed that while we remember that we have an enemy - Satan, we forget about an essential truth in the Christian walk*

**because we’ve forgotten this truth, we don’t know how to think properly when it comes to our sin, and to confession of sin*

A Forgotten Doctrine: Indwelling Sin

- **here’s how the story typically goes** (I’ll use myself as an example, but this represents countless conversations I’ve had with others over the years)
 - in my youth I was introduced to many sins that I learned to love and walk in
 - I was exposed to pornography at 5th grade
 - I began to drift into sexual sin with others by jr high
 - this sin continued in a powerful way all through my college years

- I knew this was wrong
- I'd tell myself and God I was sorry
- but never really had any success in stopping
- then in my last year of college, the Lord did a powerful work in my life
 - all of a sudden, I just had this radical love for the Lord, for his Word
 - my sin seemed gross, I genuinely didn't want it
 - I had this new success in fighting my sin that I never had before
 - I thought - this is it! that sin is gone! it's done!
- but as time went on, as years went by, this old sin would rear its head again
 - a temptation came out of nowhere and I'd stumble again
 - I'd fight it, have success, and then even a year would go by and then that sin and temptation would be back!
- **now what I've noticed in myself and in others - is confusion and extreme discouragement at this point**
 - ***why is this back?***
 - I thought I was past this!
 - I thought I was delivered from this!
 - I thought I was healed of this sin and temptation!
 - I thought the Spirit in me would completely remove any love for my old sin from me
- **now we as a church are pretty familiar with *some* common tools in this moment**
 - we're familiar with our enemy Satan, and so in these moments we pray, we do warfare against him
 - we're familiar with the filling and baptism of the Spirit. So we pray and get refilled for power against our sin
 - **but I've found there's another tool we are not equipped with - it doesn't come up in our conversations, in our prayers, in our spiritual tool kit**
- **it is what the Bible calls our flesh, the old man. What theologians call the doctrine of Indwelling Sin.**

Need to See this Biblically

- Galatians 5:17 “For the **flesh** desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the **flesh**. They are **in conflict** with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want”
 - as born again Sons and Daughters of God, we are filled with God’s Spirit
 - and yet we still have what the Bible calls the flesh, our old nature
 - and so, every Christian has a daily battle waging inside (not just outside)
 - “So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God’s law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me” Romans 7:21-23
- even Jesus taught us to pray every day “Father...forgive us our sins...” Luke 11:4

Where Indwelling Sin Fits In the Christian Journey

- **New Birth**: new creation. born again. adopted as a son/daughter of God
- **Justification**: forgiven once and for all, and declared completely righteous before God
- **Sanctification** (confusion happens here): the slow process of becoming practically holy
 - we fight the devil, the world, and our flesh (indwelling sin)
 - we forget that the Bible teaches us that we aren’t yet perfect, and we will still struggle with sin
- Hebrews 12:1-2 “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God’s throne. (NLT)
 - Jesus is the **initiator** of our faith
 - when we first learned of his love and grace on the cross for our sins
 - Jesus is also the **perfecter** of our faith
 - we still need Jesus!
 - we still need to remember his love for us as we struggle and stumble and sin!
 - we forget that to walk with Jesus in this life is one of slow growth towards holiness
 - we want a quick fix
 - we want God to simply remove the struggle, to heal us completely

- *he will! but not yet...*

- **Glorification**: the day we see Jesus face to face, and are made completely new
- **this is why the doctrine of indwelling sin is so important**
 - **it teaches us that we will still struggle**
 - **that we will need to confess our sin**
 - **that we are still in a battle - not just with the Enemy, but with our own flesh!**
- **the point is this:**
 - ***we are not to be surprised that we still struggle with sin way down the road as Christians***
 - ***in fact, the more you grow as a Christian, the more aware you are of your own weakness, the flesh that remains, and your desperate need for God's help!***
 - in fact: (pastoral encouragement)
 - **if you're struggling against sin, the struggle is evidence that you are born again**
 - "He shall find the stream to be strong who swims against it" John Owen
 - don't be surprised when indwelling sin, when your flesh rears its head
- **so, as Christians, we will continue to struggle with this flesh, these desires in us to sin**
 - and because of the grace and love of Jesus, we are free to confess them, and to slowly grow more and more practically free from our sin

**want to close with some practical help, help for us to confess our sins*

**rather than confess our sins, we so often act like our first parents, Adam and Eve*

**want us to turn to Genesis 3, learn 3 practical truths that will help us confess our sin*

Case Study: Genesis 3

Set the Stage:

- God said do not eat from the Tree of Good and Evil.
- Satan comes and deceives Eve.
- Eve takes the fruit, eats, and gives some to Adam and he also eats
- in this moment of sin, they are filled with shame, they realize they are naked

**now notice what they do, because it is what we also are tempted to do in the moment after our sin*

- Genesis 3:7 “Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked, **so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves**”

1) Rather than confess, we try to cover up our sin.

- fig leaves
 - they knew they had sinned. and they felt shame, naked, exposed
 - and so they used their own hands and the resources available to them, and they made coverings for themselves
 - we do the same thing
 - we sin, we feel shame, naked, and exposed
 - and so we cover ourselves
 - maybe with positive thinking
 - maybe with good works
- they were hiding from their own shame, and from one another
 - Bonhoeffer “Sin demands to have a man by himself. It withdraws him from the community. The more isolated a person is, the most destructive will be the power of sin over him” (Life Together)
- where are you covering up what needs to be shared?
 - husbands and wives - is there something you are not sharing with one another?
 - what is the Holy Spirit speaking to you, right now?
 - what are you covering up?

**next, see what they do:*

- Genesis 3:8 “Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day **and they hid from the LORD God** among the trees of the garden”

2) Rather than confess, we run from God.

- when we sin, we feel a palpable separation from God
 - we know we have walked from him, and chosen our sin
 - now, rather than return to God, so often we run and hide ourselves from God
 - in the very moments we need him most - we refuse to come to him. We stop going to church. We stop going to home group. We avoid those friends who love God and love us, in case they notice that we've drifted away.

**and at this moment, some of us, especially men, do something even worse than running from God.*

- Genesis 3:12 “The man said, ‘The woman you put here with me - she gave me some fruit from the tree...’”
 - I want to talk to the men for a moment
 - we see Adam in this moment not only not confess his sin, we see so bold as to blame his wife, and to blame God for his sin
- Eve doesn't do this, the very next verse we read: **Then the LORD God said to the woman, ‘What is this you have done?’ The woman said, ‘The serpent deceived me, and I ate’** 3:13
 - that is a legitimate confession
- **but men, how often are we like our first father**
 - some of you are in sin
 - and you are blaming your wife for it
 - you are blaming God for the circumstances you are facing
 - if that is you, you need to repent this morning
 - you need to own your own sin
 - no blaming someone else, what they have done to you
 - what God has let happen in your life
 - you need to get right

**but the third and incredible truth we learn about confession in Genesis 3 is this:*

3) God pursues sinners like us.

- Genesis 3:9 “But the LORD God called to the man...”
- Genesis 3:21 “The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them”

- in the moment where Adam and Eve were at their worst, God came
- he sought them out
- he called to them

**he called to them*

- **one of the names of Jesus is “the Word”**

- because Jesus is the ultimate example of God calling out to us
- Jesus is God calling out to us at our worst
 - “I love you”
 - “I’ve come for you”
 - “I’ve come to set you free”

- **right after this in Genesis 3, God told Satan that a son of Eve would come, and would defeat Satan once and for all**

- on the cross when Jesus died, and in the resurrection when Jesus came back to life, Jesus crushed the head of Satan

- **as Adam and Eve were naked and ashamed....**

- on the cross Jesus was naked, and yet the Bible says he despised the shame
- as Pastor John Piper puts it, Jesus says to shame:

- “Listen to me shame: you think you can distract me? I won’t even look at you. I have a joy set before me. Why would I look at you? You are ugly and despicable. And you are almost finished. You cover me now as with a shroud. Before you can say, ‘So there!’ I will throw you off like a filthy rag. I will put on my royal robe”

- **and as God clothed Adam and Eve with a better robe**

- Jesus' blood and righteousness is offered to us, who would turn from our sin and cling to him!
- like the father of the prodigal son, God runs to us and clothes us and covers us with his love and righteousness

****there's no better news and no better help to confessing our sins than knowing the love of God that covers our sin***

**and our text ends with this report:*

“In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power” Acts 19:20

- don't we all want to see revival
 - don't we all want to see more of our friends, family, neighbors, cities come to know Jesus?
- it starts with **US**, church
 - it starts with us getting real with God and with one another
- every great revival begins with confession of sin
 - The Great Passage on Revival says this
 - “if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and **turn from their wicked ways**, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land” 2 Chronicles 7:14

Call to Worship (Invite Band Up)

- **going to call us to be doers of the Word today**
 - confess your sin today
 - prayer team
 - one another
 - simply pray the blood of Jesus over them
- **after confession comes great joy and freedom**

- “Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective” James 5:16
- “Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper, but the one who confesses and renounces them finds mercy” Proverbs 28:13

- **communion**

- **worship**