

Series: Gospel-Centered Paradigm
#7: Preaching the Gospel to Yourself (Repentance and Faith)
Psalm 51
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New City Church of Los Angeles
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Tell the story about someone who went to an AA meeting.

I. Introduction

Today, we're going to conclude the series, "Gospel-Centered Paradigm." We've been talking about the reality that the gospel is not just a way to get into the Kingdom of God, but it is also the foundation of the way we live as a Christian.

Many of us have reduced the gospel only as a way to get into heaven and then, after that, it's just a religion just like every other religion. We discard the gospel after we become a Christian and focus on the more "advanced" stuff like God's rules and principles. The main premise of this series is that the gospel is the advanced stuff. It's not just for beginners.

I want to make a note: If you're here not sure if you would consider yourself a Christian, and wondering what this church is all about or what being a Christian is all about, I want to tell you that it's different than what you think. You probably think that being a Christian is about living a certain kind of lifestyle and following certain rules. Actually, that's not true. In fact, it couldn't be further from the truth. That's religion. That's what all the religions of the world are essentially about: moral striving. Christianity is about the solution to our failures, our brokenness, our messed-up-ness, our loneliness, our emptiness. I hope you see this as you hear me out.

Today, I want to close up the series by teaching you how to preach the gospel to yourself so that we will continue to practice the art of being gospel-centered. It is a spiritual practice. The gospel is at the center of Christianity. Paul said it was "of first importance." It's the most important thing.

So, by preaching the gospel to ourselves, we are taking the most important news in the world and finding ways to soak our hearts in it everyday, to meditate on it every moment of our lives.

This is a developed skill. It's an art, and so, it takes time to hone and sharpen.

Listen to David preach to himself in the midst of turmoil and despair:

- Psalm 43:5: “Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God.”

What is David doing? He’s preaching to himself to focus on the gospel of God’s salvation. He’s reminding himself of the hope he has in God.

David is an incredible example of preaching the gospel to himself in the midst of suffering, turmoil, and persecution.

But, later after he became the King of Israel, instead of remembering what the most important thing is, he began to trust in himself and became arrogant. Then, he lusted after the beautiful Bathsheba. Because he lost focus on the most important thing, he ended up breaking all kinds of commandments: he coveted his neighbor’s wife, he committed adultery, he lied, he abused his power, and he betrayed Uriah, his loyal officer and Bathsheba’s husband, and had him killed.

It’s a sad story. But, God said David is a man after His own heart. How could someone like David be a man after God’s own heart? Psalm 51 shows us the kind of repentant heart David had, and it acts as a model of how to go about preaching the gospel to ourselves.

Let’s read Psalm 51 [READ]

There are two elements of preaching the gospel to yourself: (1) repentance; and (2) faith.

II. First, we have to go down the slope of repentance.

A. The first step to our repentance: You have to see and own your sin.

In verses 2 and 3, David prays: “Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.”

David used words like iniquity, sin and transgression which give us a fuller picture of how he viewed what he had done. He’s essentially saying that he’s revolted, rebelled, trespassed, and offended God, brought misery and affliction upon himself and others. David saw and owned up to his sin and recognized the true depth of what he had done.

Instead of owning up, we have a tendency to water down God's standards, to undermine our sins, to shift blames, create excuses.

Do you remember the case last April of Josef Fritzl, an Austrian man who imprisoned his own daughter in a windowless cellar for about 24 years and repeatedly raped her and fathered 7 children through her? I remember Grace and I couldn't get over the horror of his depravity. There was media frenzy about the case, and I was just amazed by what the man said: "I am not a monster." I don't know about you, but if there is anyone who should be called a monster, it is him. But, he doesn't seem to see and own his sins. He appears to be deceived: "I am not a bad guy. I am a good guy. I just made a mistake." That's what we all do. We don't own up to our own depravity.

The other day, I read a story about William Carey, a pioneer missionary. He wrote this on this seventieth birthday to one of his sons:

I am this day seventy years old, a monument of Divine mercy and goodness, though on a review of my life I find much, very much, for which I ought to be humbled in the dust; my direct and positive sins are innumerable, my negligence in the Lord's work has been great, I have not promoted his cause, nor sought his glory and honour as I ought, notwithstanding all this, I am spared till now, and am still retained in his Work, and I trust I am received into the divine favour through him."

William Carey, who went to India in 1793 is called the father of modern missions. Grace used to work for a college named after him. He translated all or parts of the Bible into more than 40 languages and dialects. He was the originator of the well-known missionary slogan: "Expect great things from God; attempt great things for God."

How about Apostle Paul? He said this towards the latter part of his life in 1 Timothy 1:15:

"Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst."

How can such remarkable men like William Carey and Paul, both of whom accomplished so much for God, lament toward the end of his life his own sinfulness and shortcomings while someone like Josef Fritzl feel like he's not that bad? Did Carey and

Paul have unhealthy low self-esteem (needing a fix from Dr. Phil) or did it reflect a healthy realism that is characteristic of Godly mature Christians?

Remember the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector? Jesus said in Luke 18:11ff,

“The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’”

But, unlike the Pharisee, the tax collector was painfully aware of his sinfulness. He didn’t just ask for forgiveness of certain sins; he pleaded for mercy as a sinner. In the original Greek, the text reads, “God be merciful to me THE sinner.” He didn’t compare himself with other. He only knew he couldn’t measure up before a holy and righteous God. He knew he stood alone before God with his sin, so he pleaded for mercy.

Jesus said only the tax collector went home justified in front of God. We often set aside this story and say: ya, those Pharisees. But, you have to remember that these were the people who were most confident of their righteousness because they were considered the most mature.

Jesus is saying that the sign of a mature Christian is the understanding of the depravity of our hearts, and the sin that is within us.

Now, most of us, after we acknowledge our sins, our instinct is to say I am sorry and then use place our will power to change things. We promise we’ll never do it again, until we mess up again. Then, we just become a hypocrite, or end up with an inferiority complex (I am just a loser) or a superiority complex (I am better than you because I fixed myself). Our sinful nature tries to move us quickly from the horrors of sin and into *quick* fixes. This is cheap and never lasts. Even if it does, it only creates hypocrites and Pharisees.

B. What we have to do is to go to the second step of repentance: see the sin beneath the sin.

In Psalm 51:4: David prays:

“Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment.”

David realized that his sin wasn't primarily adultery with Bathsheba, but it was cheating on God; it was idolatry against God. David first committed sin spiritually in his heart against God who loved him. His heart started to move away from God to something else for meaning and pleasure in life.

So, you have to ask the tough question of why you have sinned and get specific. Don't jump too quickly to confess your sins until this work has been done. We feel a little guilty and say a quick confession (forgive me for everything we did wrong; or I am sorry for that). If we keep doing this, we end up with cheap, meaningless repentance, weakened faith, and therefore cheap grace. The only way we can come to God with a broken and contrite spirit is by digging deep and asking the tough questions.

We have to ask what it is that we are looking to other than Jesus for our satisfaction and meaning in life.

**C. The sin beneath the sin is the idols or the false lovers of your heart.
You have to expose these other gods or idols of your heart!**

David was worshipping another god. He had to first break the first two commandments before he could ever break all the others. The first commandment is to have no other gods before Him and the second is to never make idols. These are the most important commandments because if you break the first commandment, you end up breaking all others. In fact, it is impossible to break the other commandments unless you first break the first one. For example, commandment 8 says you shall not steal. But, before you steal, if have to make something other than God, say, like material things, more important than God in your heart. Commandment 7 says not to lie, and before you lie, you always break the first commandment of making your success or approval more important than God. You've made something else God of your life.

David's idol was self-reliance. He felt like he didn't need God anymore. Idols are not always going after bad things. They are also good things we over-desire. Money is a good thing. A good job is a good thing. A house is a good thing. A family is a good thing. Physical beauty is a good thing. An approval of our friends is a good thing. Acceptance by our co-workers is a good thing. Self-reliance is a good thing. But, if we over-desire (hyper-desire) these things, they become idols. That's what idols are. They

often look good on the surface. But, slowly, they replace Jesus as our savior. They become false lovers of our heart, and seek to displace the one who should be our one true love above all other loves. They have no mercy. If you don't live up to the idol, they crush you as a failure. And they never deliver when you succeed because enough is never enough. They hurt you, your family, and your relationship with God.

By pursuing your idols, you are saying to God, "Jesus is not enough. I also need _____ to be happy." David was essentially saying to God: "God thank you for your favor and grace, but you're not enough to make me truly happy. I need to have sex with a woman I don't know before I'll feel satisfied." What David did is a glimpse into our own hearts.

You have to truly come to the realization that you are more messed up than you thought, that you deserve to be judged and condemned by God. That's what David says in verse 4: "you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge."

After David utterly hated his sins and repented of them, he confessed his sin to God—not because he wanted a mere pardon from the pain or the judgment, but because he wanted God Himself. He saw that God was enough for Him to bring Him joy and to cause his heart to soar.

David wanted to be with God, close to God, be loved by God, have God, have nothing in the way of his communion with his God. **God was the pursuit in his confession.**

We see this in when David says in Psalms 51:7-12 "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be **clean**; wash me, and I shall be **whiter than snow**. (8) **Let me hear joy and gladness**; let the bones that you have broken rejoice. (9) Hide your face from my sins, and **blot out all my iniquities**. (10) **Create in me a clean heart**, O God, and **renew a right spirit within me**. (11) **Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me**. (12) **Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.**"

These are tremendous requests from David. But, David had confidence God would answer his prayer: Psalms 51:17: "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise." David knew that God would not

turn away from him if his heart was truly broken over his sin. God never turns away a truly contrite sinner who has true repentance. He delights in it!

III. Here's the second part of preaching to gospel to yourself: it is faith.

The objective is to receive by faith God's unconditional love that comes through Jesus Christ.

The second step is not to preach morality, right and wrong, to yourself. That's the most common mistake we make. We repent of our sins, maybe even deeply, but the first things we do afterwards is to get on the performance treadmill. We've got to change now that I've repented. YES, but before you run off to change your life, your heart has to change first. Otherwise, you're going to run out of steam. You're going to burn out. You're going to end up in a vicious cycle of repentance and sin and you're not going to want to repent anymore. Your heart has to change.

Your heart changes when you come to realize God's grace and unconditional love for you. God loves you more than you can ever imagine!

A. God loves us so much, that he came down to us in the person of Jesus Christ, and ultimately died for our sins.

He took our sins, failures, messiness, bondage, emptiness, and took it upon himself and paid the price justice demanded of our sins. That's why the death of Jesus Christ is the focus of the gospel. It is the ultimate demonstration of the love of God that while we were still sinners, God would send his only son to die for us.

- So that we can be cleaned.
- So that we can be restored into the presence of God.
- So that we can be filled with His Spirit.
- So that we can live in the joy of his company.

B. Jesus not only died for us, but also lived for us.

Theologians call this double imputation, meaning that I don't simply have a clean slate because of Jesus, I have a righteous record of Jesus. I have God's forgiveness AND righteousness. Whatever Jesus did right, God see that in you. You are clothed with His perfect righteousness.

- If you've failed in something, preach to yourself that God does not see a failure in you, he sees the success of Jesus in you. He sees you as though you were obedient to the end because of Jesus.
- If you are struggling with being a good spouse, preach to yourself that Christ is the perfect groom who loves His bride perfectly and has never failed, that God sees you as already perfect in His sight. You are not a failure because Christ did not fail.
- If you are struggling with lust, know that Christ never had an adulterous heart and never lusted. He kept God's law perfectly and therefore you are counted as perfectly righteous in Christ. His record has become your record and God sees you as righteous now!
- Thank God, that unlike David who committed adultery, God was always Jesus' first love and He never failed to love God and live faithfully to Him. He perfectly pleased the Father and because you are in Jesus, God sees you and I the same way. He delights in you! He is blessed by you. He wants to commune with you as His adopted children as He desires to commune with His son Jesus. As He says to Jesus, "this is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased," so He says to us, "this is my beloved son and daughter _____, in whom I am well pleased."

IV. Conclusion

The discipline of preaching the gospel to yourself does two things: (1) it makes us honest about ourselves and our depravity—that we are a lot more messed up than we thought we were, which leads us to humility, but (2) the gospel helps us see, understand, and receive God's unconditional love that came through Jesus—that Jesus died and lived for us so that we are clothed with his righteousness, which leads us to confidence.

It gives us this amazing dynamic of humility and confidence at the same time. And this gives us freedom, honesty, transformation, security, and JOY!