

Prayer is...Confession

March 3, 2019

Daniel Hickinbotham

- **Prayer is Confession**
 - I hate contemporary art. Sure, there are a few pieces that speak to me, but primarily I hate it..
 - The first reason I hate it is because of this painting (**SHOW PAINTING**)
 - This is called “Untitled” by a guy named Cy Twombly... and it sold for \$46.5 Million Dollars
 - It is obscene to me that something that looks like my 21-month old daughter painted it during craft time and then spilled water on it during snack time would sell for that much...
 - That being said... I have some one-of-a-kind Clementine Hickinbotham originals that will be for sale in the back, starting in the low 6 figures...
 - The second reason I hate it... It leaves all of the work of interpretation to the observer...
 - One of the most valuable things about art is that it allows us to see a shared experience or a common object from the point of view of another person...
 - EVEN IF WE HAVE AN UNTRAINED EYE, we can still get something out of it...
 - But contemporary art usually doesn't do that...
 - It presents some amorphous splotch of color, or nebulous image, labels it “Untitled” and then requires the observer to make some kind of sense out of it...
 - For some of us, including me for the first 25 years of my life, prayer is a little like contemporary art...
 - We aren't really sure what it is... and it isn't particularly moving for us...
 - ...but that guy up there seems to be REALLY excited about it... and the Bible makes it seem like it is really valuable...
 - The heart behind each one of these messages, and this series as a whole, is to help produce a more accurate portrait of prayer for you as an individual, and for us as a church...
 - To help broaden our perspective of and engagement with prayer...
 - Thankfully, God didn't leave prayer entirely up to our own limited imaginations...
 - Also, thankfully, we don't have to have a perfect understanding in order to pray!
 - Last week, Jeff showed us that the beating heart of the Lord's Prayer is dependence...
 - The week before that I had the opportunity to show us that prayer is a rooted in the nature of God and His Gospel.
 - The week before that Jeff kicked this series off with the reminder that prayer is not one-sided monologue, rather it is a giving and receiving tool of relationship.
 - These three messages have built the frame, stretched the canvas, and laid down the background colors on the portrait of prayer we are painting from the Word.
 - This morning we are going to start diving into the finer brush strokes, the little details, the how and the what of prayer.
 - We are going to see that Prayer is Confession...
 - So, as some of us inwardly cringe, again, at the Confession word... let's pray...
 - <PRAY> “God... Our Father... Our Savior... Our Companion... as we open Your Word, we confess together our dependence upon You. Without You these words will mean little, and will do little to transform us. But if You illuminate our hearts to these words, by the power of Your Spirit, they will become life giving bread, satisfying drink, and soothing medicine to our souls. Speak to us Lord, Your people are listening. Amen”
 - Our primary scripture this morning is Psalm 51:
 - It is a perfect passage for today, because it shows us a few things about what confession is. First:
 - **Confession is an outflow of our Listening to, Responding to, and Depending upon God.**
 - Leave your finger in Psalm 51... before we dive into the text, let's get some context:
 - Written by David... David is the King... A good King...
 - But in 2 Samuel 11 he makes a horrendous and tragic choice...
 - Armies are off fighting,

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- Instead of being with his army he's lazing around the palace,
- Starts watching this woman bathing on a rooftop...
- He has this woman, who happens to be the wife of one of his BEST soldiers, brought to him...
- Sleeps with her and gets her pregnant....,
- Tries to cover up his sin,
 - Calls Uriah back, tries to get him to go to bed with his wife...
 - He won't do it... too noble... Captain Israel...
- Because this deception doesn't work:
- David sends Uriah back to the battlefield carrying his own death warrant (classy move).
- Uriah gets killed then David marries Bathsheba,
- Thinks he has gotten away with it...
 - But, as it is with sin, we never truly get away with it...
- One day the prophet Nathan shows up and tells King David a very sad story...
 - It is about a rich man stealing and cooking a beloved family pet from a poor man, so that he doesn't have to kill one of his own lambs to make a meal for an unexpected guest...
 - This infuriates David who says this man deserves to die... and he orders that the rich man must pay back 4 times what he stole...
 - What was Nathan's response?
 - You... are that rich man.
 - He said, God has given you EVERYTHING you could want, and if you had asked for more he would have given it to you... but you murdered a man to preserve your reputation then stole his wife!
- What was David's response? Confession...
- We see in 2 Samuel 12 that his very first response is to say "I have sinned against the Lord..."
- Psalm 51 is an explication of, an expounding upon, that confession to God...
 - It is a look into David's personal prayer journal... it is a look into the heart of the sinful man who was still said to be "a man after God's own heart"...
 - Look with me at [Psalm 51:1-4](#)
 - **Be gracious to me, God, according to Your faithful love; according to Your abundant compassion, blot out my rebellion. Wash away my guilt and cleanse me from my sin. For I am conscious of my rebellion, and my sin is always before me. Against You—You alone—I have sinned and done this evil in Your sight. So You are right when You pass sentence; You are blameless when You judge. Indeed, I was guilty when I was born; I was sinful when my mother conceived me.**
- Knowing the context of this Psalm, we can see that David LISTENED to God (through His prophet Nathan)
 - I mean REALLY listened... not just let the guy talk, but heard the voice of God in what was being said
 - He did not harden his heart, but rather absorbed the full impact of it...
 - ...he didn't get angry or defensive... he got quick to listen...
 - Brothers and sisters is this how WE behave when the scriptures, or our friends, or even our spouses, point out sinful behaviors and attitudes in our lives?
- David then immediately recognized and took full ownership of his sin and RESPONDED to God being Holy...
 - He said to Nathan, I have sinned against the LORD... in the Psalm he says against You ALONE, O Lord, have I sinned...
 - Think about all the people he had harmed and yet his conviction was over his sinning against GOD, not everyone else...
- I think David took Ownership and Responded this way because he understood a few things well.
 - He understood the holiness and generosity of God so deeply, that he was grieved more over his offence against God than he was against people...

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- I also think he not only understood the height of God's holiness, but the depths of his own depravity.
 - That he was not just a sinner by choice, but that he was a sinner by nature!
- But He also intimately understood God's merciful nature in his expression of DEPENDENCE...
 - "Be gracious to me, God, according to YOUR faithful love... according to YOUR abundant compassion, blot out my rebellion."
 - David is not trying to justify himself before the Lord... He is trusting that God will make a way to blot out his sin.
 - This isn't outlandish trust either.
 - Throughout the Old Testament leading up to David, God had time and again revealed His willingness to forgive, especially in response to confession.
 - He even wrote it into the law that He gave His people
 - **LEVITICUS 16:21-30**
 - David is TRUSTING, DEPENDING upon the God who makes a way for sin to be atoned for.
- David's confession was external evidence of a real relationship with God, one that was grounded in God's Word and filled with the patterns of listening, responding and dependence.
 - Which leads to the next point...
- **Confession is an external process reflecting an internal state.**
 - Even though this is like part of David's prayer journal... he did have it published to be used as part of the worship of Israel.
 - It is a piece of music intended "For the Choir Director"
 - If you didn't know, Choir Directors generally direct choirs... And choirs generally sing... out loud... and in public...
 - And David is GIVING this to them...
 - But in all seriousness, our willingness to confess to another person, especially someone it might cost us something to confess to (job security, relational capital, etc.) is a good indication of our genuine willingness to confess to God.
 - DAVID CONFESSED TO NATHAN... Not to one of his Yes Man lackeys...
 - We see in verse 16-17
 - "You do not want a sacrifice, or I would give it; You are not pleased with a burnt offering. The sacrifice pleasing to God is a broken spirit. God, You will not despise a broken and humbled heart."
 - "But Daniel", you say, "God is saying He doesn't want all that external process!"
 - You're right... he wants something far more precious... something far more costly...
 - Even when this was written, God knew that Jesus was going to be the better sacrifice... He knew that the shedding of blood for the remission of sins was going to be done, and more effectively than with the blood of sheep and goats...
 - He is looking for those who aren't trying to justify themselves... the ones who are like "LOOK AT THIS PERFECT LAMB I AM BRINGING TO THE ALTAR"...
 - He is looking for the tax collector who is beating his breast saying, be merciful to me a sinner... the humble one that he HE can reconcile...
 - Those who are broken in spirit aren't as worried about retaining their reputation in the eyes of their friends and community as they are about experiencing reconciliation with God.

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- A humble spirit is one who can confess before anyone... including the one who could fire them, who could turn them into the police... or who could legitimately consign them to wrath...
- What keeps us from confession? Pride, absolutely... but mostly Fear I think... Fear that it is going to hurt us more than help us... (Hurt our reputation, Hurt our pride, hurt our checkbook).
 - But God has made it BENEFICIAL for us to confess our sins:
 - David talks about it in **Psalm 32:1-5**:
 - “How joyful is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered! How joyful is the man the Lord does not charge with sin and in whose spirit is no deceit! When I kept silent, my bones became brittle from my groaning all day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy on me; my strength was drained as in the summer’s heat... Then I acknowledged my sin to You and did not conceal my iniquity. I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,” and You took away the guilt of my sin.”
 - This holistic benefit is reiterated in the New Testament. Look at **James 5:16**
 - “Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, so that you may be healed...”
 - The absence of confession can have detrimental effects on our interior health, both physically and spiritually.
- How many of you have ever experienced unconfessed recurring sinful behavior that just feels like it is rotting your insides?
 - That’s because it is!
 - In those times, how many of you have prayed private generic prayers like, “God you know what I am struggling with” or “God I am sorry that I did ‘it’ again.”
 - How successful has that been in fixing the issue?
 - In my experience, not very! Why?
 - BECAUSE THE SHAME OF OUR SIN -the thing that keeps us locked in the cycle of sinning- IS IN THE DETAILS of our sin...
 - It is easy, as a man to confess to struggling with “lust”... it is difficult to confess to struggling with lusting after say, a best friends wife, in this particular way, etc.
 - It feels like it will cost us something tremendous... and it will...
 - It will cost us our pride first and foremost
 - An inability or refusal to identify our exact sin is also part of our problem...
 - Psalm 51:14, David identifies his “it”... he calls it Blood shed or blood guilt... although he did not stab Uriah to death himself, he was guilty of shedding Uriah’s blood
 - This is the only type of name-it-and-claim-it theology that can be biblically justified.
 - But what happens when you have exposed your sins, named them by name like David, to God and another person?
 - Isn’t it usually freeing??!!
 - <Personal Examples PICK ONE>

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- IN ALL OF SCRIPTURE SIN IS EQUATED TO SLAVERY to BONDAGE... Confession is like finding the key that is going to remove the shackles of sin and shame and bring us into an EXPERIENCE of freedom... and it was for FREEDOM that Christ sets us free... which means...
- Confession is a normative part of the Christian experience, not an exception.
 - <STORY OF THE OIL CHANGE LADY>
 - At some point, someone, had told her that she never need hear about sin or repentance or confession again because she had already been saved.
 - Friends, we need to hear this:
 - Adam literally walked with God in the Garden and he sinned...
 - David was a man after God's own heart... and yet he STILL fell into grievous sin...
 - The Apostle Peter, who walked for 3 years with Jesus, who got so filled with the Holy Spirit that he preached a sermon that brought thousands to repentance, got called out by the Apostle Paul for the sin of the fear of man...
 - If the very BEST of us in scripture fail, and fail hard, to achieve sinless perfection, then you and I are definitely going to fail to get there this side of Christ's return...
 - Now listen... Look at me... THIS IS NOT A PERMISSION SLIP TO SIN OR ACT FOOLISHLY...
 - This is a permission slip to throw yourself in dependence upon God when you DO sin.
 - Look how David does this in **Psalms 51:10-12**
 - **"God, create a clean heart for me and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not banish me from Your presence or take Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore the joy of Your salvation to me, and give me a willing spirit."**
 - Be very wary about ministries that REFUSE to talk about sin... The ones that tell the sweet lady's at the oil change shops that they don't need to hear anything about sin anymore:
 - The truth is not in those ministries... Look with me at **1 John 1:7-10**
 - **"But if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say, "We have no sin," we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say, "We don't have any sin," we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.**
 - Remember John is writing this book to believers...
 - We have forgiveness and cleansing as we continue on in a confessional life style...
 - If we depart into "I have no sin-land" we are in a very dangerous spot...
 - But on the flip side, we can't be running around vomiting all our sins all the time on every person who comes within earshot...
 - We need to confess to trustworthy and understanding men and women who will be able to hold us accountable while embodying the grace of God to us, always redirecting us to the good news that our sins have been forgiven and that we can have relationship with God.
- As we get ready to wrap up I want to give you some very practical tips on how to practice confession, both to God and to other people. To start we are going to contrast what confession is not:
Confession Is NOT:
 - Getting Caught
 - David is not our perfect example. David did what was right, but only after he was put on blast. He did not escape earthly consequences, as a direct result of His sin.

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- Had he come clean and confessed right at the beginning who knows what the results would have been.
 - Uriah certainly would not have been murdered...
 - David's life was forever altered as a result of His decisions... but God spared his life because he confessed.
- Think about with your kids or employees... isn't it much easier to be gracious when they tell you something before you discover it.
 - EMPLOYEES DAMAGING TRUCKS
 - Would there be consequences for both situations... yes...
 - Would they be as bad as if they had told me immediately? Not even close...
- Getting exposed in our sin is not the same thing as exposing our sin for the purpose of repenting..
- **Blame Shifting**
 - Confessing to another person's sin is not confession...
 - But it is potentially our oldest tendency...
 - STORY OF ADAM AND EVE... It was the Woman YOU gave
 - STORY OF SAUL... You didn't show up Samuel...
- **Self-Righteous & Proud**
 - LAMECH, in Genesis 4, brags about committing murder and that how it somehow entitles him to MORE of God's protection... seriously... look it up...
 - Ever heard someone boast about being an alcoholic as they sit drunk on a bar stool taking shots with their friends? Not confession...
 - Or ever meet the person who is only willing to confess to the "BIG" sins, or maybe only confess to the "SMALL" sins... that's not confession, that is self-righteousness..
 - Ever heard someone say something like "Yeah I hit him, but I had to do it because he called me a name"
 - None of those qualify as a biblical confession...
- **Self-Centered**
 - If you confess to being legitimately the worst of all the worst, that there is no possible way that you could ever be forgiven or free of a particular sin, and that you are horrible worm that God could never bear to be around... then your confession is about your awfulness being higher than God's awesomeness...
 - You ever talk to those people who say, "well if I ever darkened the door of a church God would strike me with lightning"...
 - God sent HIS SON to deal with the horror of your sin... why would he send something so insignificant as lightning? You really think you are that special that you need a bolt of lightning in ADDITION TO THE SUBSTITUTIONARY ATONEMENT OF THE SON OF GOD?
 - Wow... you must be extra specially bad...

Confession Is:

- **Proactive**
 - David, at any point could have confessed to what he had done... in the moment he saw Bathsheba bathing... the moment after he slept with her... the moment he found out she was pregnant... etc... We need not wait till we commit a "big" sin, or the pain and destruction of sin is too great to bear, or we get exposed for what we are doing. We are invited to come the Lord in the very moment that we sin.
- **Taking Ownership**
 - We don't blame our wives for our pornography use. We don't blame our husbands for our overspending. We don't blame our friends for making bad choices. We don't blame life circumstances for our drinking problem.
 - Listen, there is zero indication that Bathsheba was a completely neutral party... She was bathing out in the open... if David could see her from the roof of the palace, it is not unreasonable to think she could see him... it doesn't say that he forced himself upon her... but guess what... NONE OF THAT MATTERS...
 - And we see David's confession, in Psalm 51, places the guilt for the sin SOLELY with himself...

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- Excuseless & Humble

- David didn't complain to the Lord and say "It was just so tempting to see this naked woman, and you know me and my elevated testosterone levels... that's why I committed adultery." or "I was just scared because she was pregnant... that's why I committed murder."
 - He said... I have sinned against the Lord... I am conscious of my rebellion...
 - You have every right to judge me... every right to pass sentence... every right to remove your Spirit from me...
 - In my weakness and sin I can only ask your mercy... only ask that you cast me not away from your presence... only ask that you wash me... cleanse me... create in me a clean heart and steadfast spirit... no demands... no excuse... I am just trusting in your mercy...

- Christ-Centered

- Our confession is certainly about our sin and to our benefit... but it is not just about getting a clean conscious by blurting out to the first person who will listen the long list of sins we committed... the very act of coming to the Lord to confess is a declaration of trust that the Cross was enough to pay for our sin... that Jesus really did drink down the cup of the Wrath of God on the cross and left none for us... that his saving work ACCOMPLISHED IT'S GOAL OF SALVATION, to the point that we can approach a Holy God for help, without being consumed or unmade by his Holiness... it is an act of worship... we make our confession to God and one another as an act of honor and trust and proclamation that He is altogether Holy and altogether Kind and Merciful...