

Falling to Grace

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I find there are two challenges when talking about sin. The first is that many people don't think sin is all that serious. They think "I'm a good person so a bit of wrong, the occasional mistake isn't going to make that much difference in my life." But that is not actually how life works.

Good deeds are not like money in the bank and when you sin you simply withdraw a bit and as long as you've done more good than bad you're okay and it all balances out. The Bible is very clear that sin is not the other side of good deeds but a symptom of a serious problem in our lives.

Sin is when we do something that goes against what God calls us to do- when we aren't good but evil. It's when we act or speak in a manner that hurts and harms. When we are selfish and put our desires, our wants, above the well being of others. Sin is when evil touches the world through what we say and what we do.

Which means that sin is not simply when we forget to do good, a minor blip in life, but a problem with where we are heading and how we are living. Because good deeds- being generous, kind, loving- reflect and show what we hope and what we believe. We help, we share, we are generous and we are loving because we follow Jesus, we are faithful because we hope and trust in God. So our good actions are not insurance against doing wrong but good deeds and compassionate words show our response to God in our lives.

Now most of us understand that killing, stealing, breaking promises, lusting, dishonouring, violating the commandments are wrong. And even when we say that those actions are mistakes, unavoidable, or lapses in judgement, we can see that they have a terrible effect. Because sin is always devastating for us and for others.

If it helps think of being a good person as the road on which we drive down the highway of faith. The more good works and love we share the more confident we are that we're headed in the right direction. And sin, sin is when we lose control in our lives and go off the road. When we crash.

Because a lifetime of goodness, of doing good and being good, doesn't keep you from being affected by sin anymore than a lifetime of being a good driver makes a difference when leave the road and hit a telephone poll. No matter how good a

person you are sin devastates your life. Sin leaves our lives crumbled and broken in a way we can't fix. Which brings us to our first lesson today.

King David is beloved by God and revered by the people. He has been faithful and patient, he has honoured the words of prophets and priests, and he has continually offered God praise and service. And the land has prospered and benefited from David's faithfulness. Which we hear summarized in 1 Kings which records that "David did what was right in the sight of the Lord, and did not turn aside from anything that he commanded him all the days of his life, except in the matter of Uriah the Hittite."

David is walking on the roof of his palace on a hot summer afternoon when he sees a beautiful woman bathing. And is quite taken with her. He asks who she is and finds out she is Bathsheeba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite. And he summons her to the palace.

That evening David does what he wants without caring about anyone else but himself. And David sins. After all Bathsheeba is someone else's wife. And she has no choice but to obey the king. And sin is a problem even if we think no one knows about it or we have a good explanation for our behaviour or because we are the most powerful person in the land. Sin has consequences.

And when Bathsheeba shows up pregnant with his baby, David tries to avoid the consequences, he tries to undo his action. He summons Uriah home to his wife so he'll think the baby is his. But Uriah won't go, he feels it would dishonour the men who are not able to go home. And after two tries to trick him into going home David sends Uriah back to the army with a letter. Telling the general to make sure Uriah is killed in battle.

Sin is devastating. Because even when no other person knows our sin it has an effect. It changes us. David goes from being a virtuous and faithful man to being an adulterer and then a murderer. David sins and then sins more trying to cover up his sin. When we try to deal with sin ourselves we end up making things worse. We end up making ourselves worse when we let sin guide our behaviour.

Now when I started I said there were two major challenges when talking about sin. The first is when people don't think sin is that serious. The second is when people realize that how much of a problem sin is. Because when we recognize and

understand the devastation we, you and I, cause by harmful actions and habits we can begin to despair. Because there is nothing we can do, nothing we can say, to turn back the clock and avoid the consequences of our action. And that is when we often assume that nothing can be done about sin.

Now at the end of our first lesson it seems like David is lost and damned because of his sin and honestly it is bad. But God has an answer to sin and while it will take a prophet and a tragedy for David to repent of his sins, to turn away from the evil he has done and back toward God, he does. And David discovers the power of God's grace.

For God promises us that we can repent, turn away from our sins, and know forgiveness and mercy. For the only one who can deal with sin in our lives is God. The only one way our burdens can be lifted is through the forgiveness which God offers to us for only God's mercy and grace can wash us clean from the stain of sin. For the good news is that you can be forgiven, you can be renewed, you can have a life after sin. That is God's promise which we see expressed through the cross and empty tomb. For God's love is greater, God's forgiveness is wider, than anything you can do or say.

And to know that forgiveness and grace you need to confess your sins. Admit and own up to what you have done. And then repent, turn away from the behaviour that caused you to sin and turn back to God. So that you can experience the forgiveness and mercy of God. So that you can know the new life which Jesus offers and the possibility of moving beyond the mistakes, problems, and hurts of the past.

Now be aware that grace doesn't make it as if sin has never been in our lives. If you hurt someone with your actions or words they'll still be hurt after you repent and ask forgiveness. But forgiveness and mercy give you a chance for healing and through God's grace you can begin to rebuild that relationship and live in a better way.

For when we fail in life, when we sin, we have a choice. We can fall and be trapped by our sin. Or we can turn to God. We can come before God and know the mercy and forgiveness which can lift us and move our lives forward. For God can rebuild what is broken, heal what is hurt, and renew us and our world through God's unstoppable love and amazing grace.