

The Narcissism of Sin

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[0 : 00] Welcome to the Providence Podcast.

My name is Chris Oswald. I'm the senior pastor at Providence Community Church. We've been dealing with the issue of repentance at our church.

No, not because anyone has, you know, needed to, especially repent in any kind of particular or public way. But because we are concluding the part of the book of Exodus that deals with Pharaoh. And Pharaoh's story has much to tell us about the doctrine and the ideas behind repentance. And so I thought we would get into that a little bit further in this particular podcast.

Now, I would advise you to listen to the message that should appear right beneath this in whatever podcast player you are using. I think that message is called Pharaoh and False Repentance or something like that.

[1 : 04] I would encourage you to listen to that. You don't have to listen to it first, but I think that after we get done with this one, you may need a little bit more information that that particular podcast provides. Today, in dealing with the issue of repentance and specifically the issue of Pharaoh's lack of repentance or his false repentance, I want to talk about the narcissism of sin.

The narcissism of sin. And I get that idea from what God says through Moses to Pharaoh in Exodus 9, verse 17.

The verse is simply this. You, speaking to Pharaoh, are still exalting yourself against my people and will not let them go.

Now, we all know that pride is the root of many sins, so that if you were to place many sinners in a room, you could find extreme diversity in all of their particular sins.

Some would be liars. Some would be worriers. Some would be prone to harsh words. Others to cowardice. Some would have sexual sins or other kinds of addictions. You could put all those people in a room and they'd have all these different stories and all these different consequences related to their particular sins.

[2 : 20] But then if you spent enough time with them and you really were able to drill down to the root of the situation, you would almost always find pride. This is what we see in this text. You are still exalting yourself against my people.

So I think a big takeaway from one of the big takeaways that we didn't really discuss in yesterday's message about Pharaoh and false repentance is that false repentance is almost fundamentally, almost always fundamentally rooted in false humility.

False repentance is rooted in false humility, while true repentance is rooted in true humility. And what we see in the text is that one of the key sources of Pharaoh's false repentance is that even though he appears humble later on in the passage, he has still not actually become truly humble. His humility is a false humility. He was in reality still exalting himself. So when Moses wrote this account, he had to choose a Hebrew word to describe Pharaoh's pride.

And I think this word exalting is an interesting choice. The Holy Spirit inspired Moses in his writing of the book of Exodus to use the Hebrew word *mistilel*, which means to pile up or elevate.

[3 : 42] You know, the word is not commonly used to describe an attitude. It's actually kind of more of a construction word, if that makes sense. In the book of Job, this word is used to describe siege works.

And if you don't know what that is, the idea is that an invading army wishing to conquer a particular, you know, kingdom would build a large, you know, it would take weeks, if not months, and they would build a large amount of dirt, like a big dirt ramp up against the wall of their enemy so that they could get over the wall and get over the wall in mass.

Not just a few people who could be easily killed, but thousands of people could run up this ramp and scale over the wall. But the word for exalt is used elsewhere in a construction sense and is translated often as highways, which again is just this idea of mounded up dirt and elevated road. Jeremiah 50 uses this same word to talk about a pile of grain. You see what I'm getting at? Like the word is really typically something about, you know, heaping up, about raising up, raising up a highway, raising up a pile of grain, raising up siege works, and so on and so forth.

You know, it is used attitudinally a little bit in the Old Testament. For instance, in Proverbs 4.8, we are told to elevate wisdom to her rightful place.

[5 : 13] Elevate wisdom to a rightful place. Proverbs 4.8, The word prize there, if I'm not mistaken, is actually the word that is used for Pharaoh and himself in Exodus 9.

So he's building himself up. He's prizing himself. He's putting himself first. There's another verse, Psalm 68.4, Sing to God, sing praises to his name.

Lift up a song to him who rides through the desert. His name is the Lord. Exalt before him. And our word appears here as lift. Lift up a song.

Build up a song is the idea, which is a, if you're into music, it's a really great way of talking about the development and progression of a song. It's a lifting up.

It's a building of the song. One melody upon another, upon a harmony and instruments and so on and so forth. So that's the idea of the word, that Pharaoh is building himself up.

[6 : 33] He's lifting himself up over the people. Note that God doesn't say, God doesn't say, you are exalting yourself against me and my people.

He doesn't say, you're exalting yourself against me and my people. Because he doesn't need to say it that way. It's completely understood by this point that God is for these people to such a degree that anything done to them is done to him.

And this is, this is not an unfamiliar mindset, even for us in the modern Western world. If someone were to hurt one of your children, it would be as if they were hurting you.

But in the Eastern mindset in particular, which includes the Hebrews, there's a collective way of seeing things. And if you do something to my family, you're doing it to me. Which, you know, is a pattern we see throughout scripture and an important pattern.

Listen to Matthew 25, 31. When the Son of Man comes in his glory and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations.

[7 : 40] And he will separate people, one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on his left. Then the king will say to those on his right, come, you who are blessed by my father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you before the foundation of the world.

For I was hungry and you gave me food. I was thirsty and you gave me drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me. I was naked and you clothed me. I was sick and you visited me. I was in prison and you came to me.

Then the righteous will answer him saying, Lord, when did we see you hungry or feed you or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and welcome you or naked and clothe you?

And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you? And the king will answer, truly I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of my brothers, you did it unto me.

Now there's a couple interesting things in this passage. One's kind of a little bit of a side trail, but just bear with me. It's really interesting here that Jesus just transparently calls himself the king. I'm actually not aware of another place where he so openly declares this.

[8 : 49] I might be missing one. I can't think of any. There are plenty of places where he infers that he's the king every time he talks about his kingdom, obviously. But I don't remember another time where he just openly calls himself the king, which is kind of cool.

But the main point I want you to see is that Jesus is engaging in a very typical collective mindset, the notion being, if you do it to my family, you've done it to me.

If you haven't done it to my family, you haven't done it to me. That would not have appeared strange to the original audience. That mindset has been in the world for a very long time.

Actually, it does indeed flow from God and from Trinitarian origins, really, but that's another topic for another day. It wouldn't have appeared strange for Jesus to say, if you've done good things for my family, it's as if you've done them for me.

The only strange part about this particular passage is that Jesus is counting the hungry and the thirsty and the stranger and the naked and the sick and the imprisoned. He's saying that these are people in my family.

[9 : 57] These are a part of the king's family. And he is not ashamed of them. He does not disown them. They are his. And therefore, if you are kind to them, you are kind to him. So that's kind of what's the dynamics underlying some of what, well, a lot of what God's dealing with Pharaoh in.

And God's like, you're treating these people poorly. You're treating me poorly. God is claiming these poor Hebrew slaves as his family, which if you think about it, would have been just hard to believe for Pharaoh that anyone would care about them.

After all, look at them. They're nobodies. They're enslaved. They're weak. They have no political power and so on and so forth. And God's saying, no, they're mine. They're mine.

And now that you're being terrible to them, you're really being terrible to me. So God doesn't have to say that explicitly to Pharaoh. It was just understood when he says, you're exalting yourself over my people, that whole dynamic that Pharaoh is not just sinning against the people but also against God.

That's all accounted for in that statement. Now, just bear with me a minute. I don't want to leave that idea completely yet. I want to take this somewhere, and I think it's going to prove helpful to you.

[11 : 10] Let's just take a moment to load our minds with some data about God's identification with people. I think this is going to pay off at the end of our conversation or the middle of our conversation.

So let's just look at some verses that express that. So Psalm 68, we see that God identifies with the fatherless in a special way, and that he himself is the protector of the widows.

In Deuteronomy 10.18, we see that God executes justice for the fatherless and the widow and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing.

In Psalm 34.18, we see that the Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth. In Genesis 12, with the Abrahamic covenant, we see very clearly that God is for his people and that those who honor his people will be honored and those who curse his people will be cursed.

In Psalm 34.18, we see that the Lord is near to the brokenhearted. In Isaiah 19.20, we see that when God's people cry to the Lord because of their oppressors, he will send them a savior and a defender and deliver them, which is, of course, exactly what we see happening in the Exodus story.

[12 : 28] So why is this relevant? Well, one of the fundamentals we need to deal with with sin and this kind of narcissistic aspects is that our sin almost always hurts people.

Our sin almost always hurts people. Listen to Galatians 5.19-21. Now, the works of the flesh are evident. Sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these.

I warn you as I warned you before that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. Now, one of the things to just notice is that all of the sins on this list hurt other people, and they do so in the same way that Pharaoh was doing so.

These sins hurt other people because we, when we commit these sins, exalt ourselves over other people. That's what I'm getting at when I'm talking about the narcissism of sin.

It's a self-centered, self-oriented, self-important activity. Take anger for existence. You know, there's this whole cluster of anger-adjacent sins on this list.

[13 : 51] You've got enmity and strife and fits of anger and rivalry probably fits there. Well, somebody, or somebodies, are on the receiving end of these sins.

Right? What is happening when you speak a harsh word to someone? You're putting yourself first. You're exalting yourself above another. You're putting your need to vent and the indulgence of the momentary passions of your flesh, you're putting all of that above the one who takes the brunt of your anger.

Take sexual sin on this list. Sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality. Those are some of the sexual sins in this list in Galatians 5. You know, you're hurting people with these sins.

Certainly, if you're engaged in sexual immorality and you're married, you're hurting your spouse, you're hurting your children, you're hurting your entire family legacy, by the way.

You're almost, in a sense, creating bastards of your future people because you're sort of removing yourself from any kind of honorable, like, legacy-giving capacity.

[15 : 06] Certainly, if you're married and you're committing any kind of sexual immorality, you're looking at pornography or whatever, you're hurting your spouse. This is not a victimless crime. But, you know, you're also hurting the person that you're engaging in this sin with.

We like to hide behind the word consensual to give cover for our selfishness. We think of, for instance, pornography as somewhat consensual, that the pornographer is a willing participant, after all.

That's a big part of the fantasy. But is that really true? You know, it's not completely true. In the case of pornography, you, a person who knows better, is taking advantage of someone who does not know better.

Let me just strip away all the foolish lies concerning this particular sin for a moment and just speak the naked truth to you.

When you look at pornography, both you and the person on the screen are guilty of a sin. Now, here's what you need to know. If you are in Christ, you may well be forgiven by the Lord.

[16 : 18] You may stand before the Lord and receive grace because of your place in Christ, but that young woman is going to stand before the Lord too. And if she never puts her faith in Christ, she is going to answer for the sin she committed with you, even passively, in a way that you will not.

It's just, it's not, it's not a victimless crime, guys. Sometimes a believer will enter into an adulterous relationship with an unbeliever.

Is this a consensual relationship? Well, you know, legally, yes, but spiritually, no. You have light that your partner does not have.

They're enslaved to the passions of their flesh. Ephesians 2, they're following the course of this world. That's not true with the believer. He or she knows better. There are some sins on this Galatians list that appear to be victimless.

Take drunkenness, for instance. A person with a drinking problem might refuse to see that his or her sin is causing anyone else any pain. But man, the world needs you at your best.

[17 : 29] The world needs you at your best. The world needs you at your most spiritually confident in the Lord. The world needs you at your most alert. The world needs your evenings to be invested in good and hospitality and care for your family and checking in on people who are lonely.

They need you engaged, man or woman. They need you. And when you drown out your evenings in a pile of beer cans, you're taking away.

you're hurting other people. Even if you're not abusive or mean when you drink or whatever. By diminishing yourself, you're diminishing what you have to offer the world.

If you don't believe me, by the way, stop drinking and watch your evenings blossom into a life-giving garden. And you will see that you are actually wasting a lot of life, a lot of time, a lot of money, and that all of that was really affecting others.

My point is, and this is just essential to just understand and listen, I'm giving you some good medicine here. I'm going to be unashamed in telling you that I'm giving you good medicine.

[18 : 47] I have nothing to apologize for here. In fact, this podcast could be the game changer for you.

It really could be. And if it needs to be listened to more than once or needs to be listened to once a week or whatever, listen, I'm giving you the pure distilled stuff here. I'm giving you the good stuff. One key to overcoming sin is to see how narcissistic it is. all sin invariably involves some kind of exaltation of self at the expense of someone else.

And even seemingly benign sins like hoarding of wealth or greed, these are fundamentally self-exaltation. You know, other people exist besides you and they could really be served by some of the wealth you're hoarding just so that you can add another fractional point of security to your end days.

This concept that sin is selfish and prideful and that it is the exaltation, the building up of self over another, this is key to true repentance.

[20 : 02] Firstly, one reason that this is key to true repentance is because in the Christian life, love is a very, very powerful force.

Seneca, the Stoic, said, you act like mortals in all that you fear and like immortals in all that you desire. You act like mortals in all that you fear and like immortals in all that you desire.

What he means is that people are very cautious and reserved when responding to fear, but they get rather reckless and adventurous when given a positive desire.

Christians know this firsthand. This is what Thomas Chalmers called the expulsive power of a new affection, of a new infection, of a new affection. If you can begin to see your sin as unloving, friends, if you're in Christ, you're a partaker of the divine nature, you are indwelt by God and God is love. And there is so much energy in love to overcome things that mere fear cannot. Often, all that a Christian winds up needing to overcome a particular sin is to become truly convinced that their sin is hurting someone that they're supposed to love.

[21 : 23] So this insight that our sins are rising, raising ourselves up over others in a way that hurts them, once you frame your sin in this light, you will see it for what it is.

1 John 3, 14 says, We know that we have passed out of death into life because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death.

We know that we have passed out of death into life because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. Love is a fundamental part of the Christian heart, my friend.

And once seen as hate toward others, sin can be more readily repented of by the Christian because the Christian really does want to love. You know, I never feel a deep need to help a person nail down the exact moment of their salvation.

I just want to help them nail down the reality of their salvation, you know. And people get caught in sin, like pretty serious sin.

[22 : 30] And I never think automatically because someone's caught in serious sin that they're not saved. The world and the flesh and the devil are crafty. A Christian's faith can grow very weak.

His flesh can gain the upper hand. You know, the existence of some, you know, scandalous, terrible sin in a person's life is not what causes me to doubt whether they're a Christian or not.

What causes me to doubt whether they're a Christian or not is a lack of love. Love is Christianity 101. And I do truly tremble for the person who is not obviously loving toward others and is not convicted when they see that their sin is hurting those that they should love.

So, my sense is that so many people who are Christians are actually real Christians and they actually do want to love and not because there's anything good in them but because Christ dwells in them.

There is a strong compulsion deep within them through the Holy Spirit to love others and they just don't see how their sin is so hurtful to other people.

[23 : 47] I think that this is one of the reasons why particular sins remain relatively intact in certain Christians' lives for a long period of time.

I think that the sins that they cling on to are the ones that they think only hurt themselves and maybe not even that. They really aren't seeing sin as narcissistic and it is self-exaltation and it always has a victim.

There are people who if for no other reason just need you at your best who will suffer if you remain in your unrepentant state. There's another reason that I like this idea as a key to unlocking habitual sin and so forth.

I think that this idea as I've stated works with the fundamental impulse of our new nature to love others but you know it also increases the fear of the Lord.

remember all those verses I read a little bit ago about the Lord being with the weak and the victimized? Once you realize that your sin is hurting others those verses ought to fill your hearts with a holy fear.

[25 : 07] Once we see that our sins are hurting others we are immediately in a position of having to reckon with the real possibility that the Lord God will take their side and in taking their side stand in opposition to us like he did with Pharaoh.

This idea is not is not complex and it is not hidden. It's right out in the open for us to see in the word of God. Listen to 1 Peter 3.7 Likewise husbands live with your wives in an understanding way showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel since they are heirs with you of the grace of life so that your prayers may not be hindered.

So that your prayers may not be hindered. Live with your wife in an understanding way showing honor to the woman as a weaker vessel so that your prayers may not be hindered.

What's going on there? What does that mean? Well this is directly tied to a concept that would have been widely known to the Jews of Peter's day because it had caused them so much trouble in their national past.

How does the book of Isaiah for instance open? Well you know Isaiah is going to terminate in national judgment for Israel. How does it open? Well Isaiah 1.11 Listen to what God says to the people.

[26 : 37] What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices says the Lord. I've had enough of burnt offerings and of rams and the fat of well-fed beasts. I do not delight in the blood of bulls or of lambs or of goats.

When you come to appear before me who has required of you this trampling of my courts? Bring no more vain offerings. Incense is an abomination to me.

New moon and Sabbath and the calling of convocations. I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates.

They have become a burden to me. I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands I will hide my eyes from you. Even though you make many prayers I will not listen.

Your hands are full of blood. Wash yourselves. Make yourselves clean. Remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes.

[27 : 39] Cease to do evil. Learn to do good. Seek justice. Correct oppression. Bring justice to the fatherless. Plead the widow's cause. Same message is conveyed in the prophet Amos.

Amos chapter 5 verse 21 I hate I despise your feasts and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings I will not accept them and the peace offerings of your fattened animals I will not look upon them.

Take away from me the noise of your songs to the melody of your harps I will not listen but let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever flowing stream.

God has had it with these people. They can offer all the sacrifices they want. They could fill the entire land with incense. They could raise their hands for every hour of every day in prayer but until they start being kind to those they are currently sinning against he wants nothing to do with them. Indeed he is bringing great judgment upon them. So I would hope that once you realize that sin is narcissistic and it is hurtful to others you would be motivated sufficiently by Christian love to simply repent of your various sins.

[29 : 07] But if your love for others is not sufficient then perhaps your fear of the Lord's is. Perhaps your fear of the Lord will be sufficient. Listen to 1 Thessalonians 4 3-8 For this is the will of God your sanctification that you abstain from sexual immorality that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor not in the passions of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter because the Lord is an avenger in all these things as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you.

No one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter because the Lord is an avenger in all these things as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you.

You see it would be wonderful if merely motivated by Christian love you realize I have got to stop sinning because my sins are hurting people I'm supposed to love. But if that motivation is insufficient then perhaps the fear of the Lord will step in and supplement what is lacking in your love.

And the fear of the Lord is something like this. That person who you're hurting with your sin God's going to avenge them. He's on their side.

He won't listen to your prayers. He's not going to merely accept you because you utter the right religious words. He is not on your side if you are continuing for whatever reason including a lack of self-control if you're continuing to hurt the people he's called you to love.

[30 : 52] The Lord is an avenger in all these things is what 1 Thessalonians says. Now Exodus makes it clear that the same dynamic is at work in 1 Thessalonians regarding sexual sin is at work regarding Pharaoh.

God isn't only the avenger of explicitly sexual sins. He's just the avenger of sins that are hurting people hurting weak people especially.

While Pharaoh's sin is different it was like a usury the sin of those in Isaiah and Amos is different as well the same dynamics are always at play the Lord is an avenger in all these things.

So if you've been hateful and cruel toward the very people God has called you to love I hope you can see your sin is cruelty and I hope you can see that God stands with the victim and will take vengeance on their behalf.

If love is insufficient to motivate you to repent then perhaps the fear of the Lord can supplement that which is lacking in your love. The big thing I want you to hear today is to just be urgent in your repentance.

[32 : 07] One of the things I wish I had said in yesterday's sermon about Pharaoh's false repentance was I wish I had made some comment about his lack of the Bible teaches that the word of the Lord is a double edged sword and it brings life and restoration to some and death and condemnation to others.

Listen to Hebrews 12:14 through 17 Strive for peace with everyone and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God that no root of bitterness springs up or causes trouble and by it many become defiled that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau who sold his birthright for a single meal for you know that afterward when he desired to inherit the blessing he was rejected for he found no chance to repent though he sought it with tears the main message here is that the time for repentance is not an unlimited time the game clock eventually runs out this is why it's so important to obey the words in Isaiah 55 verses 6-7 seek the Lord while he may be found call upon him while he is near let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts let him return to the

Lord that he may have compassion on him and to our God for he will abundantly! pardon sin this is where pride can really kill you you can be persuaded that you're in the wrong you can be persuaded that you know I see now that my sin is hurting other people you can even be persuaded to some degree that the Lord is the avenger of those who are being hurt by your sin you can see all that but if you are afraid of humility like deathly afraid of humility true humility not false humility if let me say this another way might make more sense if you are afraid of being humiliated you might you might run out the clock like Esau did pride really is so dangerous remember that word exalting yourself in Exodus 9 it's most commonly used to refer to a building or a ramp or an elevated position and the sin that you've been practicing has you puffed up it didn't happen overnight you built up this false sense of superiority one shovel of dirt at a time or one act of self exaltation at a time and you may say oh Chris I don't feel puffed up I don't think I'm proud but I think I struggle the opposite way I think I struggle with the sense of inferiority and so forth friends no no no you giving vent to your particular sins while knowing those sins cause other people pain or will cause other people's pain when they're found out your giving in to those things is not flowing from a sense of inferiority it's flowing from a sense of pride and the thing to understand is that to really to really see that you have actually created a world in which your desires get special preference

God's making an exception for you you know the rules apply everywhere else but for you it's because you're special you're kind of up there kind of exalted see to really repent of hurting others you're going to have to get off the elevated platform that you built and you're going to have to surrender the moral high ground and the sense of self superiority and here's the deal you're actually going to become lower than the one you've been oppressing lower than the one you've been hurting and here's the naked truth of it you're going to have to spend some time down there as much time as it takes for God's gift of repentance to have its full work on you there's obviously a lot of talk about narcissism these days and in some respects it's just a cultural buzzword that gets over applied and stretched out to include far more people than it should but at the same time let's recognize this sobering reality there are people plenty of them who would choose hell over humility who would choose hell over humiliation and who are choosing hell over humiliation to be put low especially in a public way is for them a more terrible idea than hell itself that's a scary thought that's where

[37 : 44] Pharaoh was he couldn't go as low as he needed to and he ran out of time I want to entice this person that we're imagining this person who is so afraid of humiliation that they would put it off all the way to hell I want to entice this person back into good thinking back to Isaiah 55:5 and 6 seek the Lord while he may be found call upon him while he is near let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts let him return to the Lord that he may serve that he may have compassion on him and to our God for he will abundantly!

pardon! You know if you've made a habit of just being a jerk and being selfish and if you've made a habit of being cruel if you've if you've a person if you're the kind of person who's kind of lost any sense of the virtue and joy of compassion it's really hard to imagine becoming the weakest and the most pitiable and most vulnerable person in a room and it's hard to imagine that because you assume that there'll be other people like you who will take advantage of that lowness and judge it

and think less of it and so on and so forth but again I want to entice you because the next verse says the following for my thoughts are not your thoughts neither are my ways your ways declares the Lord for as the heavens are higher than the earth so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts now this verse gets should we say misinterpreted it gets misapplied I think this passage Isaiah 55 is about God extending grace to wicked people it begins with why do you spend money on that which does not satisfy and this is just God extending an offer of forgiveness to his people seek the Lord while he may be found let him return to the Lord that he might have compassion on him and that God will abundantly pardon him and then we get this phrase!

we tend to apply that more broadly to refer to how much wiser God is he sees more clearly and better and he knows better and so on and so forth but I actually think in the context of Isaiah 55 he's actually just saying I'm not like you when you get a chance to bully someone who's already beaten down you take it when you get a chance to accuse someone who's broken in their sin you take it when you get a chance to cast a stone you take it and God is saying I don't work that way I don't work that way I won't make you as miserable as possible when you finally come to your senses and repent I'm the father who when you come to me and say I am unworthy to be your son only let me be a servant that I might eat what the servants eat our father is the kind who says kill the fatted calf for my son was dead and now he is alive this verse for my thoughts are not your thoughts neither are my ways neither are your ways my ways as high as the heavens are in the earth so my ways are higher are afraid to repent to me because you know that in this world people like you who are cruel will make the most out of this or that person's lowness

God's like I'm not that way I'm not that way you may have used other people's sins and failures and weaknesses to gain a sense of moral superiority to rub it in their face and show how bad they really are but God doesn't do this in fact the moment you just repent and take the posture and you go all the way down get off of your big ramp of dirt you've built up to exalt yourself and get all the way down facing the dirt at the feet of the one whose feet are pierced with the nails who atoned for your sins as soon as you drop into the position of humiliation and humility not false humility but soul depth to the bones humility as soon as you get there God has gone from being against you to for you God opposes the proud but he gives grace to the humble listen to Luke 18 this is the parable of the two men going up to the temple to pray two men went up into the temple to pray one a pharisee and the other a tax collector the pharisee standing by himself prayed thus

[43 : 10] God I thank you that I am not like the other men extortioners unjust adulterers or even like this tax collector I fast twice a week I give tithes of all that I get but the tax collector standing far off would not even lift up his eyes to heaven but beat his breast saying God be merciful to me a sinner I tell you this man went down to his house justified rather than the other for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled but the one who humbles himself will be exalted I want you to imagine kind of a happy ending to this story suppose the pharisee went home and he had taken in the tax collector's prayer that was happening simultaneously to his own he had noticed just the obvious difference in humility true humility so the pharisee went home and just felt a deep conviction in his heart he dare not settle down for the evening so he stands up and he goes back up to the temple and this time with deep contrition in his heart he simply prays what he saw that evil tax collector what he heard that evil tax collector pray

God be merciful to me a sinner well two things are going to happen the first one the Lord will immediately hear him God is near to the broken hearted but there's a second thing that will happen no doubt as he's praying given the kind of man he was before he will almost certainly start worrying that someone is watching him and judging him because that's what he used to do to others the cruel and judgmental person will often struggle so much to become weak and vulnerable as repentance requires because he knows that out there there are other wolves like him other snakes like him other accusers of the brethren like him and he is on guard so a choice has to be made in these moments this is I think one of the reasons why Pharaoh couldn't repent he had used the weakness of the

Hebrews against them so often he dared not become weak assuming that if he were to become weak he would himself be crushed of course it was exactly the opposite because God's not like us the only hope that people in this position have is what God says in Isaiah 55 7 through 8 my thoughts are not your thoughts my ways are higher than your ways that passage continues in verse 9 for as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth

making it bring forth and sprout giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth it shall not return to me empty but it shall accomplish that which I purpose and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it and here's what he's doing with his word he's saying to the same people in chapter one who were wearying him with their hypocritical religiosity while being cruel to their neighbors he's saying to those very people repent seek the Lord while he may be found that he might pardon you for my ways are not your ways I'm not going to be cruel to you he says I've sent my word out to accomplish this next section for you shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress instead of the briar shall come up the myrtle and it shall make a name for the Lord an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off God says angels rejoice when a sinner repents it's pretty easy to imagine that if you were to go all the way and really humble yourself and really deal with the sin at hand that you would be so weak so as to tempt the other wolves in the world to step on you and trample you and so on the thing is that when you repent like that you immediately enter onto the other side of the balance sheet and now you have the

Lord as your vindicator and your avenger and your protector God is with the lowly in spirit humbling! [48 : 25] Humbling yourself is not the hell you imagine it will be because God is not like you He takes no pleasure in your humiliation He won't end it one second beyond what is necessary to teach you what you need to learn yes to make things right you may need to put on sackcloth and ashes you may need to be brought quite low you find Jesus Christ down there my friend because God isn't like you He doesn't take advantage of you while you're down there He joins you down there He will restore you

I'll tread down the wicked for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I act says the Lord listen friends you're going to be on one side or the other of that passage are you going to hold on to your pride and be set ablaze or are you going to fear his name and find healing the text says that the selfish and arrogant will become ashes and that the feet of the righteous will trample on them this is really just a choice God says to the Hebrews before I behold today I set before you life and death choose life that you may live or as they say these days do you want to be the bug or do you want to be the windshield so let's review some of what we've covered so far sin is harmful to others it is exalting oneself over others sometimes this is obvious other times it's less obvious but it's always true if you're a Christian who's partaking in the divine nature you should feel a love in you ought to give you a zeal to stop your sinning but if that love is insufficient then perhaps the

Lord the fear of the Lord will supplement what is lacking the Lord is with the very people you're hurting he is their avenger the Lord is against you when you're hurting people he is wearied with your religious words and activities with the same mouth you praise God and curse your brother these things should not be your prayers are affected my friend he's not receiving the gifts you're offering he's not for you he's against you repent humble yourself before the Lord and do so with a sense of urgency seek the Lord while he may be found don't accidentally run out the clock and find no more time to repent Micah 6 8 he has told you oh man what is good what does the Lord require of you but to do justice and love kindness and to walk humbly with your God you may be in a position where you fear humiliation more than you fear hell come to your senses come to your senses that is nonsense you may be in a position where you fear humiliation more than you fear hell this is delusional besides the Lord is not cruel he is kind and compassionate if you fall like a heap of the sin that you are before the pierced feet of God you will receive a blessing why continue in this foolishness any longer remember the beginning of Isaiah 55 come everyone who thirsts come to the waters and he who has no money come buy and eat come buy wine and milk without money without price why do you spend your money on that which is not bread and your labor for that which does not satisfy listen diligently to me and eat what is good and delight yourselves in rich food friends the end of this repentance is not sackcloth and ashes sackcloth and ashes is a tiny little chapter in the whole story the end of this story is feasting and blessing and joy

I talked to plenty of people as I mentioned before who sometimes they know that they're saved but they don't know exactly when and I'm usually never very worried about this the reason that a lot of them doubt it or you know the reason that a lot of people doubt like their initial conversion story say when they were a kid or something is because almost always in those cases these people had some kind of secondary experience at some point in their life where they realized just how

desperately they needed the righteousness of Christ imputed to them for free a lot of times these people who wonder was I saved when I was a kid or I saved when I was in my twenties a lot of times the reason they're doubting that is they just had this enormous moment of realization later on in adult life that they have nothing to offer God at all they thought that they needed Christ before you know but it was called kind of abstract but then at some point later on they were faced with undeniable evidence of their own total depravity and they finally realized that they had only one course of action nothing in my hand

I bring simply to thy cross I cling and that's really what I want to call you to do listen right I don't care so much when you were saved I just want you to know that there was a period of your time I want you to be able to say there was a moment in your life when you were utterly undone and you were able to say my goodness there's nothing good in me apart from Christ don't trust in your repentance this is not a conversation about you trusting in your repentance your repentance is even filthy rags your repentance won't justify you there's an old Puritan prayer that goes something like even our tears of repentance must be washed with the blood of Christ so don't try to justify yourself with your repentance that'll just make you twice the child of hell you were before rather look to Christ who has the one thing you lack actual factual true and not pretend righteousness he actually has the thing you're pretending to have righteousness that simply is and always has been and always will be that's who you need you don't have that don't worry about being brought low before [55 : 48] God he's not like you he's not going to rub it in your face he's not going to extend the pain any longer than necessary he will even give people you've hurt the grace to forgive!

humble yourself under the mighty hand of the Lord and in due time he will lift you up one of the things we want to make sure we cover before we end this is that in Pharaoh's case his change in attitude would have resulted immediately in real world action so we're not calling in this conversation for some sorrow or just think about this just like with Pharaoh there's a thing to be done whether it's confession building up a system of accountability lots of things there's something you need to do that's actually I think what kept him from acting is the thing that he would have to do was just really hard you see he had wired his whole economy it's the second generation of this the Pharaoh before him had died he had wired his whole economy around free labor it's hard to overstate the kind of impact that has on a culture in an economy but when you've got a massive source of free labor when the

Hebrews leave Egypt we're told there were 700,000 men plus women and children so that'll tell you lots of folk he had wired his whole world around having this free source of labor and so to repent he would have had to rewire like literally everything his I mean the amount of austerity the amount of humiliation that would have had to take place for him to rewire everything I mean it's just it's just crazy so it's understandable from the flesh that why he would you know why he would not repent but that should serve as a warning to you do not get hung up on all that it will cost you if you repent please don't do that don't get hung up on all that it will cost you to repent live for the joy that it will bring you getting right with

God focus on those things Pharaoh would have lost a lot but he wouldn't have lost everything and God would have been with him most importantly and so it is with you whatever it takes to walk away from whatever we're talking about your particular thing whatever it takes to walk away from it is a small price to pay in the end Pharaoh really wished the second the water wall was collapsing on him in the Red Sea that he had just done the right thing there's a story I want to leave you with the story of Zacchaeus the text says that he entered Jericho and was passing through Jesus and behold there was a man named Zacchaeus he was a chief tax collector and was rich he was seeking to see who Jesus was but on account of the crowd he could not because he was small in stature so he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him for he was about to pass that way and when

Jesus came to the place he looked up and said to him Zacchaeus hurry and come down for I must stay at your house today so he hurried and came down and received him joyfully this is pause right there this is who God is he looks for the guy who has a disadvantage and he blesses him don't worry about putting yourself at a disadvantage by doing the right thing Jesus will look at you he will come into your house and you will feast with him Revelation 3 20 okay so when he saw this they they grumbled all the you know the religious types he has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner and Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord behold Lord half of my goods I give to the poor and if I have defrauded anyone of anything I restore!

[60 : 34] fourfold! Jesus said to him today salvation has come to this house since he also is a son of Abraham for the son of man came to seek and save the lost!

But then it says that they did not openly accept him because they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.

And Zacchaeus could testify against those people and say, are you serious? You couldn't just go low for a minute and let Jesus restore you?

You couldn't entrust your wealth or your reputation with Jesus? Hmm. Will Zacchaeus testify against you in the final day?

Could Zacchaeus testify against you in the final day? I sure hope not. So as the Holy Spirit talked to you today, I want to encourage you to act on what he said before you chicken out.

[62 : 35] Don't succumb to cowardice. You got some nerve, act on that nerve before you have a failure of nerve. I'll end with this.

You might have noticed I've not actually directly spoken about sinning against God. I've talked about sinning against others, and I've made the point that God stands with those you're sinning against so that in a way you are sinning against God.

But let me just address your sin against God in a very particular way as we close out. Listen to Hebrews 12, 18. For you have not come to what may be touched a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them.

For they could not endure the order that was given. If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned. Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, I tremble with fear. But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who were enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

This last phrase I want to draw your attention to. What does it mean when it says that Jesus' blood speaks a better word than the blood of Abel? Well, the blood of Abel speaks only condemnation.

[64 : 07] The blood of Abel says, look what you've done to me. And that's all it says. But the blood of Jesus speaks a better word. It says, look what you've done to me, and look what I've done for you through what you've done to me.

That's a much better word. It's a much better word. We have to realize that our sin played a hand in killing Jesus. That in addition to victimizing all the various people in our lives, and how all that works out, and you know, in your unique particular situation, in addition to that, and most importantly, our sin actually played a role in killing Christ.

Listen to the following from C.J. Mahaney. Were you there when they crucified my Lord? The old Negro spiritual asks. And we must answer, yes.

We were there. Not as spectators only, but as participants. Guilty participants. Plotting, scheming, betraying, denying, and handing him over to be crucified.

We may try to wash our hands of responsibility like Pilate, but our attempt will be futile. Before we can begin to see the cross as something done for us, leading us to faith and worship, we have to see it as something done by us.

[65 : 29] Leading us to repentance. Only the man or woman who is prepared to own his share in the guilt of the cross may claim his share in its grace.

So yes, you must see that your sin has made you a participant in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. But understand, when you acknowledge that, you also become a beneficiary of the redemptive work that God accomplished in spite of you.

Friends, only when we recognize that the blood of Christ is on our hands will the blood of Christ be applied to our hearts. So yeah, you've sinned against the Lord.

Yes, you've contributed to his terrible sufferings. But our Lord Jesus took all of that. He took all of your sins and all the wrath you deserved for those sins, and he died with them so that you can die to them.

And then he rose from the grave so that you can rise from your own spiritual death and live a new life in obedience and freedom and kindness and joy. So let's be done exalting ourselves.

[66 : 45] Let's overcome this powerful pull of the narcissism of sin. Let's embrace the humiliation of true repentance. It's a small price to pay.

And let's never forget that God is not like us. In spite of how much we've sinned against him, if we will put our faith in Jesus Christ and repent and make kindness and justice and humility our priority, God is eager to bring healing and restoration to what has become a very nasty heart environment. I'll leave you with what David assured himself of in Psalm 51 after he himself had to undergo a very deep humiliation after a very significant sin in which there were many victims.

David says this, The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

Dear Father God, as I sit here and record this podcast, I pray for all who listen to it. No one is too far off. You spoke peace to those who are near and to those who are far off.

[68 : 06] Through your blood, you can reconcile anything and everything to yourself. Lord, let not the sinner despair, even if their whole lives have to be rearranged to follow you.

Let them not despair. Rather, let them have joy. For as Jesus said, The kingdom of heaven is like a man who finds a treasure hidden in a field. And with joy he goes and sells all that he has so that he might buy that hidden treasure.

Lord God, I am reminded of one of the heroes of my faith, David Livingston, who had done so much for you and gone through so much suffering and given up so much, so much pain, so much poverty, so much hardship.

And he absolutely bristled at the idea when someone suggested he had ever made any sacrifices. He says, Sacrifices? Sacrifices?

I will not speak of sacrifices. He said, Everything I did, Everything I did was worth, was far more than worth what I got.

[69 : 17] So Lord, I pray that even as a sinner has become sick and their faith has become mighty weak, that you through your Holy Spirit would give them the faith they need to see that you are good, your word is true, their sin is hurting other people, and they don't want that.

They want to love them. Their sin in hurting other people is causing you, Lord, to stand against them, and they don't want that. So Lord, the weak saint, with weak faith, who has made a mess of things, God, give them faith.

Give them faith. And Lord, there are some who are listening to this who are not yours. They've never reached that moment in their lives when they completely, really, fully, deeply, to their bones understood that they need Jesus.

That even the tears of their repentance need to be washed by the blood of the Lamb. And so, Lord, would you convict them and show them Christ? Have them call out to you while you may be found. Have them ask you, Lord, for forgiveness. Have them confess you to be their Lord, to swear their allegiance to follow Jesus for the rest of their life.

[70 : 39] Lord, give them a new heart. Make them a new creature. Forgive all their sins. And make them your son or daughter. We pray all of these things in the mighty name of Jesus Christ.

Amen.