

A Renewed Heart

Many years ago I was talking to an older gentleman about coming to a church service with me. He was facing some troubles in his life and I believed then, just as I believe now, that Jesus was the real answer to his situation. He declined my offer and said he would never step foot in a church again. This piqued my curiosity. I didn't think he had any church background. He said to me, "A church is like a chicken farm and I'm not going back to one." I had to ask him what he meant. He went on to explain that on a chicken farm when you get a chicken that is lame or sick the rest of the chickens will come over and attack it and peck it to death. Then he walked away from me.

I was fairly new to my faith in Christ at the time. I had only said yes to Jesus a year or so before this. I had not seen anything like what he was describing in the church I attended. I did not see an attitude like that in the other believers I knew that attended other churches in the area. I quickly surmised he had had an isolated incident or probably had turned his back on God. Looking back, I was so new and naïve.

Since that conversation some 30 years ago, I have seen people gang on someone because of a mistake or poor choice. I have seen people shun someone to the point of them not only walking away from their church group but from the Lord as well. I have seen everyday people pointed out from the pulpit of churches for sin or mistakes they have made and I have seen fellow clergy, brothers and sisters in service to the Lord, chewed up and spit out by the established church.

When we started Cell Life Church more than 7 years ago, one of the things we really felt the Lord calling us to do was to reach out to those who had been ostracized by the church, the ones who had been wrongly accused, or chewed up and spit out by the church, and help them rebuild a trust in the Lord and continue to serve him despite what others thought or said.

Many of us know who Mahatma Gandhi was. He was a civil rights leader and a Hindu. He said some things about Jesus and Christians that we should hear and helps us set up today's encouraging message. Listen to some of these quotes from Gandhi.

"A man who was completely innocent, offered himself as a sacrifice for the good of others, including his enemies, and became the ransom of the world. It was a perfect act."

"Live like Jesus did, and the world will listen."

"Jesus is ideal and wonderful, but you Christians - you are not like him."

"I like your Christ. I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ."

Friends, this is often how the world sees Christians. Many of us have experienced what it is like to make a mistake or commit a sin, or even be accused of making a mistake or committing sin, and suffered the wrath of a church or church leadership.

Today we would like to look at two individuals who make mistakes. They committed sins, some very grave. We're talking about disloyalty, lying, adultery, and murder. These are serious things, and there are consequences. However, God never gives up on anyone.

Let's look at the first person we're going to talk about, and you may have guessed, it is King David.



King David is credited with writing a majority of the Psalms. He was also the virtuous leader that would not strike down King Saul who was hunting David even when he had a clear opportunity too, because of his loyalty to God.

Let's read 1 Samuel 26:7-11

(7) So David and Abishai went to the army by night, and there was Saul, lying asleep inside the camp with his spear stuck in the ground near his head. Abner and the soldiers were lying around him. (8) Abishai said to David, "Today God has delivered your enemy into your hands. Now let me pin him to the ground with one thrust of the spear; I won't strike him twice." (9) But David said to Abishai, "Don't destroy him! Who can lay a hand on the LORD's anointed and be guiltless? (10) As surely as the LORD lives," he said, "the LORD himself will strike him, or his time will come and he will die, or he will go into battle and perish. (11) But the LORD forbid that I should lay a hand on the LORD's anointed. Now get the spear and water jug that are near his head, and let's go."

This same David, some years later commits adultery with Bathsheba. We won't read the passage but we encourage you to read 2 Samuel chapter 11. This records David's viewing of Bathsheba while she bathed. She was the wife of one of his soldiers. Then he sent for her and took her to his bed. She became pregnant. David's solution was to send for her husband to come home to cover up his sin. When that didn't work, he arranged for her husband to go to the front lines of the war Israel was fighting and be placed in the center of the action so he would be killed. Thus, Bathsheba would be his.

But God sees everything. He knows everything. He knows our thoughts. After all this happened, God sent the prophet Nathan to confront David. David fell to his knees and repented for all his sin. Shortly after this, he wrote Psalm 51. Let's read Psalm 51:1-12

(1) Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. (2) Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. (3) For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. (4) Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight; so you are right in your verdict and justified when you judge. (5) Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. (6) Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb; you taught me wisdom in that secret place. (7) Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. (8) Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice. (9) Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity. (10) Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. (11) Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. (12) Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

You see, sometimes we don't see our sin or mistakes for what they are when we are in the middle of them. We may feel something isn't right, but we don't recognize our sin or poor choices. If we are willing to see, God will point out to us where we need improvement. He will show us where we are wrong or are sinning. The lesson here is not to throw our hands in the air and give up. We must fully turn to God and repent of our actions and poor choices. We must ask the Lord to cleanse us of our iniquities and return to us the joy of our salvation. We must ask him to renew a right spirit in us and give us a clean heart. The best thing about God is he is merciful and will do that when we turn to him sincerely.



The second person in the Bible we want to focus on is Peter in the New Testament. We know Peter was a fisherman that Jesus called to be one of his disciples. He was uneducated and often making quick statements or brash judgments that Jesus had to either rebuke or correct.

But Peter was also genuine. We read in Luke chapter 9 about Jesus asking the disciples who people say he is. There were many answers. But then he asked, "Who do you say I am?" and Peter blurts out over everyone else, "You are the Messiah, the Son of God!" Jesus praises Peter for this and really encourages him.

Not too much later, we see Jesus arrested and he is standing before the high priest and Peter is standing nearby watching. Let's read Luke 22 starting in verse 31

(31) "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat. (32) But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers." (33) But he replied, "Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death." (34) Jesus answered, "I tell you, Peter, before the rooster crows today, you will deny three times that you know me."

And continuing in verse 54

(54) Then seizing him, they led him away and took him into the house of the high priest. Peter followed at a distance. (55) And when some there had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and had sat down together, Peter sat down with them. (56) A servant girl saw him seated there in the firelight. She looked closely at him and said, "This man was with him." (57) But he denied it. "Woman, I don't know him," he said. (58) A little later someone else saw him and said, "You also are one of them." "Man, I am not!" Peter replied. (59) About an hour later another asserted, "Certainly this fellow was with him, for he is a Galilean." (60) Peter replied, "Man, I don't know what you're talking about!" Just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed. (61) The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: "Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times." (62) And he went outside and wept bitterly.

Peter has gone from total hero to complete liar. He was saying just what the Holy Spirit had laid on his heart that Jesus was the Son of God and their Messiah. Now he is lying and saying he doesn't even know Jesus, just to save himself. Complete betrayal.

Many people like to stop thinking about Peter at this point. They like to associate with the Peter that makes mistakes and loses focus of Jesus and starts to sink in the waves. They like to identify with the Peter that was going to lie just to save himself because that's what the natural person would do.

But after Jesus was resurrected and he reappeared, look at the interaction he had with Peter. Let's read John 21:15-17

(15) When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." (16) Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep." (17) The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep."



Jesus not only forgave Peter, but he also restored him to ministry, and not just any ministry, he restored him to leadership. Peter goes on to be one of the pivotal leaders in the Church and was instrumental in bringing the gospel to the first gentiles. He spoke the best sermon ever preached on Pentecost that you can read in Acts chapter 2.

What we are trying to say today, is God continues to reach out to us. He continues to clean us and make us better. However, we must be willing participants. We must allow him to give us a clean heart and a renewed spirit as David prayed for. We must be willing to do all that he asks of us, whatever that may be, as we read about Peter's ministry and leadership after being restored by Jesus.

Friends, no one is too far from God for forgiveness. No one has done so much they can't refocus on Jesus and ask for a renewed spirit and clean heart.

Fellow leaders in Jesus' Church, we must not ever count anyone out. We must work with people to the best of our ability, committing them to Jesus every day. As we lead our groups and congregations, we must have the attitude of Christ who was betrayed and lied about by one of his most trusted disciples and friends. Yet, he was willing to put all that aside and restore him once he repented.

Do you need a renewed heart and spirit today? Ask the Lord. Seek his face. He is faithful and will do this for you if you are sincere and are repentant in heart. Pray as David prayed, "Create in me a clean heart, oh Lord. And renew a right spirit in me. Return to me the joy of your salvation."

