

Meditations of the Heart - Reflections on the Scriptures

Psalm 19:14 Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

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The following is taken from Eugene Peterson's *Leap Over A Wall – Reflections on the Life of David*. This is an excerpt from Peterson's chapter on the sin of David with Bathsheba where Peterson also reflects on the nature of our own sin.

Sin stories, after a while, tend to sound pretty much alike; virtually all sins ring changes on the scheme of wanting to be gods ourselves, taking charge of our lives, asserting control over the lives of others. Since there are only a finite number of ways to do this, no one of us reading this story has any difficulty finding himself or herself in it. Nor does finding ourselves in this story, whether in fact or imagination, surprise us. We're sinners. The precise details of our sin may not correspond to David's, but the presence and recurrence of sin does. The moment we recognize our common sin bond with David, we're ready for a real surprise here – the gospel story develops out of the sin story.

The story takes a gospel turn when David's pastor, Nathan, shows up and preaches him a sermon. At the moment David has no idea that's he's listening to a sermon, for he isn't sitting in a pew and Nathan isn't standing in a pulpit. There's no explicit reference to God in the sermon and there's no altar call. Nathan is good at this. He stalks his prey. He tells an artless, simple story about a rich man with large flocks of sheep who needs a lamb for a dinner he's giving. But instead of taking a lamb from his own flocks, he cruelly and arrogantly takes the pet lamb of a poor man living down the street. He kills the lamb and serves it up to his guests. David, drawn into the story, is outraged at this callous cruelty and, as a righteous judge, passes a death sentence on the rich man. Then Nathan pounces, "You are the man." (II Samuel 12:7)

'This is the gospel focus: you are the man; you are the woman. The gospel is never about somebody else; it's always about you, about me. The gospel is never a truth in general; it's always a truth in specific. The gospel is never a commentary on ideas or culture or conditions; it's always about actual persons, actual pain, actual trouble, actual sin: you, me, who you are and what you've done; who I am and what I've done.'... 'One of the most frequently misunderstood features of the gospel by outsiders – maybe the most frequently misunderstood – is this: that a confession of sin isn't a groveling admission that I'm a terrible person; it doesn't require what's sometimes described as "beating yourself up." Insiders to the gospel know that the sentence "I have sinned against the Lord" is a sentence full of hope. It's full of hope because it's a sentence full of God.'

'The Latin phrase 'felix culpa', usually attributed to Augustine, puts the hope in a slogan: "O happy sin!" Only when I recognize and confess my sin am I in a position to recognize and respond to the God who saves me from my sin. If I'm ignorant of or indifferent to my sin, I'm ignorant of or indifferent to the great and central good news: "Jesus saves!" In the Christian life our primary task isn't to avoid sin, which is impossible anyway, but to recognize sin.... We don't want to face sin because we don't want to lose our god-illusions, we're afraid that if we're not the gods of our lives and actions we're nothing... When sin is discovered in us, our guilty fears often produce a sense of condemnation. But if we stay with the story – the God story, the David story, the Jesus story – before long, the condemnation gives way, whether slowly or suddenly, to the surprised realization of grace, mercy, and forgiveness...'

'So we're trained to become sin-watchers, after the analogy of bird-watchers: we go looking for sin with a certain sense of anticipation and delight, for each discovery of sin brings us to the brink of grace. Our approach to sin, then, is characterized not by warnings and threats but by encouragements to honesty, invitations to come out in the open and greet the "sun of righteousness" who rises with "healing in its wings" (Malachi 4:4).'...

'The basic, fundamental condition of our humanity is God. We're created by God. We're redeemed by God. We're blessed by God. We're provided for by God. We're loved by God. Sin is the denial or ignorance or avoidance of that basic condition. Sin is the word we use to designate the perverseness of will by which we attempt being our own gods, or making for ourselves other gods. Sin isn't essentially a moral term, designating items of wrong-doing; it's a spiritual term, designating our God-avoidance and our god-pretensions.'

'That we sin so frequently is a puzzle, for our lives are always diminished in the process. But our capacity for sin is no puzzle: it's required by the nature of love and freedom, the twin aspects of humanity in which we become what we're created to be. A coerced love is hardly love. An enforced freedom is no freedom. If God is serious about creating us to experience his love and to love freely, to experience his freedom and to freely love, then there must be the capacity to not love, to not be free. When we exercise those options negatively, regardless of the forms in which those acts come to expression, we're sinners.'...

*'The subtlety of sin is that it doesn't feel like sin when we're doing it; it feels god-like, it feels religious; it feels fulfilling and satisfying – a replay of the episode in Eden when the tempter said, "Ye shall not die... ye shall be as gods." (Genesis 3:4-5). David didn't feel like a sinner when he sent for Bathsheba; he felt like a lover – and what can be better than that? David didn't feel like a sinner when he sent for Uriah; he felt like a king – and what can be better than that? Somewhere along the line he had withdrawn from the life of worship: adoration of God had receded, and obsession with self had moved in.'*²

¹ Peterson, Eugene, *Leap Over A Wall*, Harper-Collins Publishers: New York, NY, 1997, pp. 185-187.