

Lent 3 Sunday 4/3/18 Sin as Leprosy

This week we are continuing with our theme of looking at some of the different shadows of sin... and today's shadow is that of sin as leprosy.

Now remember, the aim of these studies is not to become an expert at describing sin or to be able to spot sin in others or even to wallow in sin... rather, our goal is to see sin for what it really is, so that we are able to deal with it in the way God calls us to.

Having a clear and biblical understanding of sin will also help us to be able to deal with the world in which we live. We will have a wisdom and understanding about the true nature of things which will keep us from being overwhelmed, keep us from complete despair and also ultimately, we will be able to more clearly see the beauty, brightness and brilliance of God's love for us in Jesus.

The challenge for us over these weeks is to be able to engage in honest self-reflection which can be difficult and painful at first, whilst at the same time, keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus. If we don't keep our eyes on Jesus, we can easily get swallowed up in feelings of guilt and shame. This is another positive reason for doing these studies in our Life Groups...with people who we trust and can share openly with.

Sin as leprosy:

Our discussion on this week's shadow of sin is based on the story of Naaman found in 2 Kings 5:1-14.

Background information: Leprosy is a disease of the nervous system with its symptoms starting in the skin and then spreading to other parts of the body. There is disfigurement of the skin and bones and often blindness. One of the features of leprosy is that it destroys nerve endings that carry pain signals. Not being able to sense touch or pain, those suffering leprosy tend to injure themselves and be unaware of the damage being caused.

In addition to pain and disfiguration, biblical leprosy and Hansen's disease (what it is known as today) are both dreaded, and people were shunned because of them. References to leprosy in the New Testament stress God's desire to heal. Jesus freely touched people with leprosy. While people with leprosy traditionally suffered banishment from family and neighbours, Jesus broke from the tradition. He treated lepers with compassion, touching and healing them.

Discussion questions:

1. List four features to describe Naaman. Read 2 Kings 5:1,5
2. Why was Naaman seriously offended? (V11)
3. What were Naaman's expectations for how he would be helped? (V5, 11-12,)
4. Discuss the evidence for saying that Naaman's story represents the deeper sin of sin of leprosy. I.e. the sin of pride and self sufficiency.
5. As mentioned in the introduction, one of the effects of leprosy is that a person loses the sense of damage being done to their body. In what way is this similar to the insidious sin of pride and self sufficiency in the way it affects our relationships in terms of love and wisdom? Clues: "hard and stupid"
 - a. Love
 - b. Wisdom
6. Divide your Life Group up into smaller groups to discuss the comparison of the healing of Naaman and the healing power of the gospel in:
 - a. The simplicity of the cure
 - b. The "freeness" of the cure
 - c. The exclusivity of the cure
7. Reflect on your own faith journey and how the shadow of leprosy (or pride and self sufficiency) impacted your faith walk. What were the steps which moved you back to the life of repentance and trust?