



Articles and Sermons :: The Sewer, The Sinner, And My Savior by Sandeep Poonen

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With the many traumatic events in the past few weeks here in this country, we in the U.S. are learning a lot more about ourselves, our current society, the pain and suffering in marginalized communities, and the bubbling cauldron of hate and anger and violence that has hit a boiling point.

I have been processing this, and I thought I would share 3 present learnings:

1. What is that smell? It is the sewer of the human heart

There is an evil smell that we can sense. But it is much worse than the evil smell of racism. And much worse than the evil smells of oppression and violence. It is the diabolical smell of a defiled human heart.

The primary problem that needs to be solved is our defiled human heart. That is what Jesus said in Matthew 15:19-20 â€œFor out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders. These are the things which defile the man.â€

As an analogy, we might smell the stench of overflowing toilets when we enter a house. But a plumber does no good in fixing the overflowing toilets if the rotten smell comes from a burst main sewer line. So yes, there are wonderful perfumes that we humans have developed: education, social good, acts of kindness, generous giving, mindfulness, etc. But the broken sewer of the heart of man cannot be rehabilitated or fixed through any of these.

The only solution.. Yes, THE ONLY SOLUTION for the problem of the broken sewer of our hearts is to be born again. Racism is the fruit of a filthy heart, and it simply cannot exist in the heart of a born-again Christian. The love and Spirit of Christ expels every prejudicial and racist instinct. So anybody who holds onto and harbors racist thoughts (let alone actions) is definitely not born again. When we are born again, Jesus resolves the problem of the sewer within us that spews out hate and bias from within us. And He promises to birth rivers of living waters of love to flow from the deepest part of us (John 7:37-39) - so that instead of bias and prejudice flows love and kindness and compassion in our words, our thoughts, and our actions.

Jesus came all the way to earth (have we stopped to realize how far down He stooped just to become a man?) to give us a brand new identity and pave a new way of thinking (Ezekiel 36:26; Hebrews 10:17-19). And how did He do that? He first lived a totally sinless life. Then He died for us and took the full punishment for all our sins, and was raised by God to defeat death â€œ thus proving His uniqueness.

When we agree with God about the state of our stinking hearts, and we ask God to get rid of that smell forever, the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross can now completely cleanse our heart of all sin. Jesus has done all the hard work already and now waits eagerly for us to turn (2 Peter 3:9). And He promises to not only help keep our hearts clean, but also create rivers of holy love to flow out of us, through the Holy Spirit that He sends to live inside us.

So yes, there are small short-term benefits to activating and agitating for social change. And I must seek to do good and to love equally every one of my fellow men and women and children (of every race). And I can help those who are marginalized and oppressed in my own small way. But I am seeing even more clearly that all these actions by itself are just spraying a fragrant perfume in a house that has open sewer lines.

So while I am not criticizing the perfumes of earthly kindness and efforts for justice in any way, I want to recognize the crystal-clear unique message of Jesus: Come to Me and do it My way. I must first fix the stench of your open sewer line of sin in your heart (Ephesians 2:8-9). And then, I will give you the strength to spread a perfume of good works on top of that (Ephesians 2:10) to those around you.

2. A dying Man cried out for His Daddy

One of the recent flashpoints here in America was the shocking video of a policeman putting his knee to a man's throat until he didn't breathe anymore and died. It was physically and emotionally hard for me to watch. Every time I watched the video, it was simply too much. The most gut-wrenching part was watching as he lay gasping for breath, and hearing him cry out multiple times, "Mama!"

This man was a full-grown man. He weighed over 225 pounds (100kg) and his friends called him a gentle giant. But here he was, gasping for air and calling out for his mother in the most helpless of terms, "Mama!"

This cry for "Mama" reminded me of the one and only time that Jesus cried "Daddy!" Throughout the gospels, we see that Jesus always called God His Father here on earth. In fact, that is why the religious leaders killed Jesus "because He was claiming an intimacy with God that seemed blasphemous. But Jesus would not budge. God as His Father was the source of ALL His strength (John 5:18-20).

But then, we find this one instance where Jesus was pressed more than any human will ever be pressed. This was in the Garden of Gethsemane, and He felt the overpowering weight of what He was being asked to bear (i.e., our sins). So He asks His weak unfaithful disciples to pray with Him and then stumbles a bit further and buckles to His knees. And in deep anguish, He cries out, "Abba! Father! All things are possible for You; remove this cup from Me; yet not what I will, but what You will" (Mark 14:36).

What we see here is that God being Jesus's Father was not mere theology. It was the deepest intimate truth for Him. And in the hour of His toughest struggle, Jesus drew even closer to His Father, calling for His Daddy. "Abba" was what Jewish children were first taught to call their father. The closest in the English language is Daddy.

I was appalled by the video of a policeman pressing his knee into another man's neck. But then the Lord also showed me that I was responsible for the deep anguish of Christ at Gethsemane. As Jesus was gasping in the Garden of Gethsemane, it was the knee of my sin that was pressing into my Savior's neck. I was reminded of these precious words from Frederick Faber:

Ever when tempted, make me see, beneath the olive's moon pierced shade,
My God, alone, outstretched, and bruised, and bleeding, on the earth He made;
And make me feel it was my sin, as though no other sins there were,
That was to Him who bears the world a load that He could scarcely bear.

There is zero doubt that every act of prejudice and bias is pure evil. But the Lord still showed me that the greatest evil by far was what MY SIN did to my Creator and the only sinless Man. And I was personally responsible for that. So even as I desire justice in every human situation, I never want to forget the immensity of just my sin (as though no other sins were there) toward the Lord Jesus Christ, who died for me (even if there was no one else to save; Luke 15:3-7).

3. Standing up for that which is true, amid anything

There was a quote from a famous civil rights leader in the U.S. (Martin Luther King Jr) that I read recently: Deep down in our non-violent creed is the conviction there are some things so dear, some things so precious, some things so eternally true, that they're worth dying for.. A man might be afraid his home will get bombed, or he's afraid that he will lose his job, or he's afraid that he will get shot, or beat down by state troopers, and he may go on and live until he's 80. He's just as dead at 36 as he would be at 80. The cessation of breathing in his life is merely the belated announcement of an earlier death of the spirit.

A man dies when he refuses to stand up for that which is right.. A man dies when he refuses to take a stand for that which is true.

Those secular words for human freedom struck a chord with me spiritually.

I asked myself, "Lord Jesus, am I just as dead at 46 even though I might still be breathing physically? Have I allowed myself to be so afraid of being killed (physically or on social media)? Is there anything in my life that is so dear, that I believe

eve to be eternally true, and that is truly worth dying for?â€

And I am realizing that I am still a coward in some ways. I am still a bit hesitant to fearlessly proclaim the beauty and perfection of Jesus because I am still concerned about being tolerant. I have a fear of what man can do to me, and so I don't hold high the light of Jesus's unique beauty. I am afraid of people's reactions to the exclusivity of Jesus and words like "reborn again."

So I am realizing that I most of all need to repent of being ashamed of Jesus Christ. Yes, I want to be a better neighbor to those who are disenfranchised, and I want to be a better co-worker to those who face bias and racism. But far, far more than all of that is the good news of Jesus. The One who fixed the stinking sewer of my broken heart and who redeemed the very one who killed Him, is a message worth dying for. Jesus has shown me a way to address the stinking sewage of my evil heart by His love. And He is increasingly opening my heart to spread the perfume of His love to others around me.

So I want to be more and more unashamed of that. Galatians 6:14 "But may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world."

I desire that every single human being would "lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity." So I want to look up to God and raise my hands up to God just as a child reaches up to its Daddy for help "making entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings.. on behalf of all men.. and for all who are in authority.. lifting up holy hands, without wrath or dissension" (1 Timothy 2:1-8).

1 Timothy 1:15 - It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all.

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