

The God of Second Chances

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A long time ago, there were a couple of young brothers in their twenties who got their sheep by stealing other people's in Indiana. They got caught red handed by other ranchers one night. It was the time when the punishment from neighbors was far more severe than the law. The ranchers made a branding iron for them with the letters, "ST" – stands for "Sheep Thief" and they stamped on the brothers' foreheads, so that anyone seeing them would notice "ST" on their foreheads.

The older brother got bitter and left the town and went into a big city and became a true low life. He ended up in a ditch with a knife on his back. But the younger one repented from his crime and decided that he would make up his past by serving and helping the people in the town.

Four decades had passed by, the younger brother got old and became the most respected and loved man in the town. A visitor from another state came to the town and met this remarkable man. After the meeting, the visitor asked one of the town people, "I've noticed the mark of the two letters on his forehead, what is that for?" The townner scratched his head and replied, "I don't know where he got it, but I think it stands for 'Saint'".

I don't know where you are with God spiritually this morning. You might be just fine with Him. You might be so close to Him that you are having a mountain top experience which means that you feel like you are meeting Jesus as Moses did all alone with God on the top of the Mount Sinai. That is great. Stay at it. Keep yourself humble, because your mountain top experience has nothing to do with you, but it has everything to do with the mercy and love of God for you.

Or you might be down in the bottom of the valley of your life where you cannot even make a head or tail out of your messed up situation. Your wrong decisions one after another might have caused you to stumble left and right, and now you are in the place where you feel like God is not going to forgive you and your spiritual relationship with God is over. Take a heart. Our God is the God of the second, the third chance and many more.

Let's hear from the Lord our God what He wants us to learn about that through three examples from the Bible.

A. PETER

John 21:15-17 So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Feed My lambs." 16 He said to him again a second time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Tend My sheep." 17 He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." Jesus said to him, "Feed My sheep.

On this seashore of Galilee, Jesus didn't shove down Peter's face onto the sand because of his denials. He could have. After all, Peter was ever so overconfident

with his loyalty to Jesus previously, yet he denied the Lord three times in fear which brought him to his total misery.

Matthew 26:75 And Peter remembered the word of Jesus who had said to him, "Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times." So he went out and wept bitterly.

But our God is the God of second chances. Instead of kicking sand to Peter's face like Satan would do, Jesus reached out His hands to pick up Peter. As He did to Peter, Jesus is reaching out His gracious hands to you to pick you up.

Three times Jesus asked the same question. One question for each time Peter denied Him. Notice that Jesus didn't call him "Peter", but "Simon". Jesus was taking Peter back to the beginning of their relationship and begins to rebuild the foundation.

John 21:18-19 Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish." 19 This He spoke, signifying by what death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, "Follow Me."

Jesus not only reinstated Peter into His ministry, but also gave him hope. The first portion of these two verses shows that Peter with self confidence and 'me-first-attitude'. But it was replaced with submission and readiness to follow his Savior anywhere, even to death.

According to a Christian legend, when Peter was facing his own crucifixion, he asked his executioner to hang him upside down, because he thought that he didn't deserve to die like his Savior Jesus.

The past cannot be changed as we all know. The future is not certain, because we cannot control it the way we want. But we know the One who holds the future. If we follow His way, our future will stay on the Solid Rock, Jesus Christ. Trust your unknown future to the all knowing God.

B. MOSES

Numbers 20:24 "Aaron shall be gathered to his people, for he shall not enter the land which I have given to the children of Israel, because you rebelled against My word at the water of Meribah.

Moses also had his own share of problems even though he was known as a friend of God.

When he first met the Lord at the burning bush, he was told that he would lead the Israelites out of Egypt. In response to the Lord, he came up with all the silly and flimsy excuses why he was not qualified to be the one. But the biggest blunder came at the end of their journey in the wilderness.

He was commanded to speak to the rock to bring forth water for the people in Kadesh. But in his furious anger, he struck the rock with his rod. By doing so, he misrepresented the Lord to the Israelites. Thus, he was told he could not enter into the Promised Land.

Can you imagine Moses' disappointment after 40 years of journey in the wilderness with the two million of non-stop whining and complaining people who even were

willing to stone him to death on several occasions? I am sure that he was totally heart-broken and even felt that he could not be forgiven for what he had done.

But our God is the God of second chances. The Lord allowed Moses to enter into the Promised Land without the complaining people, but with His Savior Jesus in person.

Matthew 17:1-3 Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves; 2 and He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light. 3 And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him.

C. DAVID

By the power of the Spirit of the Living God, king David conquered the surrounding kingdoms and brought peace into his land Israel. David allowed this conquest to get into his head. At the time when kings went out to battle, David decided that he could kick back and slow down.

On that fateful evening, he walked on the roof of his palace and saw a beautiful woman bathing. At that point, he could retreat back to his room and turn to God, but he chose to stand there and lusted after her. It wasn't so much that David wanted Bathsheba. It was that he could not be satisfied with what God gave him. David and Solomon show us that if one woman isn't enough, 1000 women aren't enough.

1 John 2:16 For all that is in the world--the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life--is not of the Father but is of the world.

Bathsheba's great beauty made the sight very tempting. But the real strength of temptation often does not lie in the quality of the tempting object, but in the state of heart and mind of the one being tempted. For example, Joseph was more severely tempted to commit sexual immorality than David was here, but he fled from that temptation.

David looked at Bathsheba and saw "beauty" but God saw this as "ugly." The pleasures of sin deceive us like the bait hides the hook. We must call it what God calls it - SIN. People want to say, "affair" but God says "adultery"; people want to say, "love" but God says "lust"; people want to say "sexy" but God says "sin"; people want to say, "romantic" but God says "ruin"; people want to say, "new found destiny" but God says "destruction."

After the murder of Uriah, husband of Bathsheba, by his own command, he took her as his wife. A year went by without any prayer, nor any song to the Lord. You don't find any Psalm during this time in the Bible.

Psalm 66:18 If I regard iniquity in my heart, The Lord will not hear.

When prophet Nathan confronted king David by the power of God, David quickly repented and was broken before the Lord. We can see his broken contrite heart in Psalm 51:

Psalm 51:10-13 Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me. 11 Do not cast me away from Your presence, And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. 12 Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, And uphold me by Your generous Spirit. 13 Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, And sinners shall be converted to You.

But our God is the God of second chances.

D. CONDEMNATION vs. CONVICTION

Lamentations 3:22-23 Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, Because His compassions fail not. 23 They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness.

Yes, we all blow our testimonies by doing something stupid against God one time or another. You might have committed sins that no one in this fellowship knows about it and you are being eaten by the horrible memories and guilt. God never condemns you, but He convicts you. Satan is the one who condemns you. If you are listening to Satan's condemnation, you are not listening to God's call in His loving mercy.

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Romans 8:1 There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.

The definition of 'mercy' is God's ministry to the miserable. It is divine compassion in action of love. Because He loves you so much that He is willing to forgive you.

This brings us to the next point: When the Bible, the Word of God says that God forgives you and forget your sins, that is what He means. So when we think that we cannot be forgiven because of our sins, it means we are calling our God a liar.

There is not a sin that God cannot forgive with the exception of the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. Several people asked me the definition of blasphemy of the Holy Spirit.

Some biblically ignorant people claim that it is cursing the Holy Spirit. Recently I read a comment by an atheist who is some sort of leader of the American Atheists Society. He said, "To deny that there is God, you need to curse the name of the Holy Spirit." I think that it is a complete oxymoron. If he doesn't believe in God, why would he be concerned about the Holy Spirit's existence?

Let's make it clear. Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is rejecting Christ as the Savior, because it is the Holy Spirit alone who can invite us to be a born-again Christian.

Remember that there is a tremendous difference between 'REPENT' and "REMORSE". When you repent, you turn from sins and make the relationship with God right. But if it is only remorse, it means that you are just sorry that you got caught. Jesus' blood is powerful enough to cleanse any sin, but is powerless to forgive an excuse.

E. CAN WE CONTINUE IN OUR SIN?

So does this mean we can go on sinning and just repent later and everything will be OK? Romans 6:1-4 tell us that we should denounce our sinful nature because we are to live for Christ.

Romans 6:1-4 What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? 2 Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? 3 Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? 4 Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

F. JUST DON'T DO IT

If I leave you with the thought that God forgives you for your sins and not give you an advice of how not to repeat the same sins over and over again, I am not giving you the whole counsel of the Word. To do that, we need to be aware of what causes us to sin against God.

More often than not, we put ourselves in the circumstances of sins. If we know that a certain situation or person causes us to sin, we should not be in that circumstance or with that person in the first place. But if we can not avoid being there, we still have a choice to sin or not to sin. Martin Luther said, "We cannot stop a bird flying over our head, but we can stop the bird making a nest over our head." Sin is not in the bait from satan, but the bite we take.

Psalm 1:1-3 Blessed is the man Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor stands in the path of sinners, Nor sits in the seat of the scornful; 2 But his delight is in the law of the Lord, And in His law he meditates day and night. 3 He shall be like a tree Planted by the rivers of water, That brings forth its fruit in its season, Whose leaf also shall not wither; And whatever he does shall prosper.

When we have an occasion to sin, God will always provide a way for us to escape or He will give us the strength to resist it. By relying on the Holy Spirit and the Word of God as Jesus did, we can resist temptation rather than be ruined by it.

1 Corinthians 10:13 No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.

For the Christian, there is no such thing as an irresistible temptation. But every temptation is an opportunity to trust God.

When we face temptations, the Word of God shows us how to defeat them.

James 4:7 Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.

Call out the name of Jesus, rely on His mighty strength and change the circumstance. According to the Word, you will win.

G. APPLICATIONS

- 1) Satan wants you to be condemned to destroy you. But God wants you to be convicted to heal you.
- 2) God forgives and forgets our sins when we repent from them.
- 3) We have the power to resist temptations through Jesus because He conquered the sin and death.