

Making Prayer Your Second Language

“The Beauty of Brokenness”

1st John 1:9

I don't know of a more important question you could ask this morning than this one: *“Lord, how is it between us?”*

Do you remember what happened with Joshua and the nation of Israel after their great victory at Jericho? You find this story in 7th chapter of the book of Joshua. Jericho had been a very strong, well-fortified, seemingly invincible city. The walls around this ancient city were 30 feet high and 12 feet wide.

Israel was just a band of wandering nomads at that time trying to somehow reach the land of Canaan. They didn't have a well-organized military force. They didn't have sophisticated weapons. They weren't powerful warriors; and yet Jericho, this mighty, formidable and seemingly unconquerable city stood between the children of Israel and the Promised Land.

And although Israel didn't have military might, let me tell you what they did have—they had the Lord God with them. You may recall from your Sunday School days as a child how that God delivered this powerful city of Jericho into the hands of Joshua. *Remember that little song we used to sing as Sunday School children?*

**Joshua fought the battle of Jericho,
Jericho, Jericho,
Joshua fought the battle of Jericho
And the walls came tumbling down.**

Actually, Joshua and the men of Israel didn't have to do much fighting at all. God is the one who brought this victory at Jericho. Somehow He supernaturally imploded those seemingly impregnable walls of Jericho; and Joshua and the children of Israel merely went in and wiped up what was left and gathered up the spoils of victory.

Now it's the next part of the story that I really want you to focus on. As Joshua and the nation of Israel marched on toward Canaan and the

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Promised Land there was another enemy that stood in their way—the tiny little nation of Ai. After such a magnificent victory as they had experienced over Jericho, the people of Israel were feeling pretty confident, rather sure of themselves.

They sent out spies to check out the enemy and when these spies returned they said, *“No problem! This will be an easy victory. In fact, we don't even need all of the soldiers of Israel to be a part of this battle. Why weary everyone? Just send two or three thousand men and we'll wipe them away just as we did Jericho.”*

And so that's what Joshua did. He sent three thousand men out to conquer this tiny little nation of Ai...and Israel was pummeled. The Bible says:

At this the hearts of all the people melted and became like water. Then Joshua tore his clothes and fell facedown to the ground before the ark of the Lord, remaining there till evening. The elders of Israel did the same, and sprinkled dust on their heads.

And Joshua said, “Ah, Sovereign Lord, why did you ever bring this people across the Jordan to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites to destroy us? If only we had been content to stay on the other side of the Jordan! O Lord, what can I say, now that Israel has been routed by its enemies? The Canaanites and the other people of the country will hear about this and they will surround us and wipe out our name from the earth. What then will you do for your own great name?”

Joshua 7:5-9

Joshua assumed that the Lord was with him when he went into battle. He assumed that everything was all right...that he would just defeat this enemy like the Lord had helped him to defeat all the others. But there was a problem. *Do you remember what the problem was? **There was sin in the camp.***

God had clearly told Israel when He had delivered Jericho into their hands and they began to gather the spoils of victory that the silver and the gold and the articles of bronze and iron were sacred to the Lord and they were to be put into His treasury.

But one of the Israelites, **Achan**, just couldn't resist the temptation to

keep some of this sacred treasure for himself. He ignored God's Word. He did what he knew was wrong and sinful. He coveted that which belonged to God. He took some of the gold and silver and sacred articles and kept them for himself, hid them in his tent, and went about living his life as though nothing was wrong.

Sin had entered the camp and here was the problem—Joshua and the children of Israel assumed that the Lord was with them when they went out to face the enemy, but He was not. They assumed everything was all right when, in fact, things were very wrong. And Israel suffered a devastating defeat at the hands of an enemy they should have easily defeated.

Do you remember what God says to us in His Word about sin? Listen to the words of Psalm 66:18. "If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened" (NIV).

Or how about Isaiah 59:1-2? *"Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear"* (NIV).

Or Proverbs 28:13 – *"He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy"* (NIV).

So let me say it again. I don't know of a more important question you could ask this morning than this one: *"Lord, how is it between us?"* We are in the front end of a series of sermons entitled **"Making Prayer Your Second Language."**

I'm convinced that prayer is the very life-breath of true Christianity, that the greatest thing anyone can do for God and for man is to pray. And so my hope and desire for you as your pastor is that you will become proficient in the language of prayer; that it will be so natural to you and so common to your life that it will be like a second language you have learned—**PSL**, Prayer as a Second Language.

Now one of the little tools that has helped multitudes and multitudes

of people to understand the basics of prayer is a simple little acronym that anyone and everyone can remember. **A-C-T-S! ACTS!** Just remember that it is one of the books of the Bible.

- **A** stands for **Adoration** or praise, and we looked at that last week.
- **C** stands for **Confession**, to acknowledge and/or admit the truth.
- **T** stands for **Thanksgiving**, which is the topic for next week.
- **S** stands for **Supplication**, or this matter of making requests of God.

Now this morning I want you to focus your minds and your hearts upon this matter of **Confession**. When you begin to really delve into the meaning of this word in the original New Testament language, the Greek language, you discover that what this word literally means is to agree with someone else that what they say is true. It is to speak the same thing, to agree with, to be in accord with someone else.

Now when you apply this to prayer and to God it literally means to agree with Him that He is right and you are wrong. Now I don't know about you, but I have discovered that three of the hardest words to utter in the English language are, *"I am wrong."*

They get stuck in your throat. They hide behind excuses and explanations and rationalizations. But God will not play games with us. He will not let us dwell in Fantasy Land. He is not interested in carrying on a conversation with us that is artificial or false or insincere. The Bible says of God, *"Surely you desire truth in the inner parts"* (Psalm 51:6 NIV).

So if we're going to make prayer our second language, if we're really going to commune with God, if we're going to make sure that prayer is not just a form but a real force in our lives, then **Confession** will have to be a very important element and component of our prayer life.

I believe it was **E.M. Bounds** who once said, *"The real power of prayer is not that we succeed in changing God, but that God succeeds in changing us."*

Although I don't agree with his lifestyle or many of the things that he did, I believe that **Oscar Wilde**, the famous Irish poet and playwright, was absolutely correct when he wrote, *"A man's very highest moment is, I*

have no doubt at all, when he kneels in the dust, and beats his breast, and tells all the sins of his life.”

Confession! I believe one of the most important and one of the most encouraging verses in all of the Bible is the simple verse that is found in **1st John 1:9**, **“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness”** (NIV).

Now a genuine confession of sin before God has three elements to it.

First – There Needs To Be An Awareness Of The Seriousness Of The Offense. We live in a very calloused age—in an age in which we have become insensitive in many ways to the seriousness of sin.

Every day we are bombarded through images on the television and movies on the big screen and network news and magazine articles and daily newspaper stories about crimes and violence and morally despicable habits and practices and lifestyles until we have just become numb to it all, desensitized.

Things that would have at one point in our lives would have just seemed outrageous to us, wrong, sinful, immoral are now just accepted as normal, common, all right, just the way it is! In the name of tolerance, we accept just about anything today. So much so that it prompted **Karl Menninger** to write a book several years entitled **“Whatever Became of Sin?”**

That’s part of sin’s seductiveness. As **Dr. Stephen Olford** has noted, **“The most deadly things in life do not leap upon us; they creep upon us.”** Little by little, inch by inch, slowly, seductively, imperceptibly, until we become numb to moral sensitivity.

I just finished reading a book by **Tony Dungy**, the head football coach for the Indianapolis Colts who won the Super Bowl last year. It’s entitled **“Quiet Strength.”** In this book he tells how he and his wife adopted an infant baby boy whom they discovered when he was about two years of age was insensitive to pain.

He would run down the hallway into the living room, bump his head on the corner of a piece of furniture and he wouldn’t even feel the pain or the damage. Blood would be streaming down his face and a big bump would raise up on his head and he was totally oblivious to it.

He would take a cup of hot chocolate and not realize that it was boiling hot, drink it down, and completely burn the insides of his mouth but he didn’t realize it. He wouldn’t feel a thing. There is a blessing in pain.

There is a blessing and beauty in brokenness. It is one of the fundamental elements in genuine confession. *Do you recall from Scripture how the people of Israel responded to Nehemiah after they had finished rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem and had gathered together to celebrate the completion of the work and to worship God?*

Listen to the words of **Nehemiah 8:8**.

They (the Levites, the priests) read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was being read. Then Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who were instructing the people said to them all, “This day is sacred to the Lord your God. Do not mourn or weep.” For all the people had been weeping as they listened to the words of the Law.
Nehemiah 8:8-9 NIV

Let’s face it. In today’s church there doesn’t seem to be all that much weeping over sin. I don’t think it is because there are no sins being committed. My guess is that it is because sin is just more easily excused in our contemporary setting.

Well, let me just remind you that one of the fundamental elements of genuine confession is an awareness of the seriousness of sin.

Now Here Is A Second Element Of Genuine Confession – A Deep Appreciation For The Length To Which God Went To Make Forgiveness Possible. Listen to what the apostle **Paul** writes in **2nd Corinthians 5:21**. **“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God”** (NIV).

Jesus went to the cross for one reason – so He could utter from the
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depths of His soul, ***“Father, Forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing”*** (Luke 23:34 NIV). That verse of Scripture that most of us learned as small children says it all. ***“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life”*** (John 3:16 NIV).

This is a moral universe. God created it that way. And He had to wrestle with the problem of how to legitimately forgive. Apparently, it wasn't as though He could just speak the words and that was that. Scripture teaches us that ***“without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness”*** (Hebrews 9:22 NIV).

I don't know why that is true but the Bible says it and I believe it. So in Old Testament times countless lambs were sacrificed, their throats were slit open, and they bled to death. And it was this blood that temporarily atoned for the sins of the people. Of course this was just a symbol or a picture or a representation of the One who would someday come to earth as the spotless *“Lamb of God.”*

The writer of **Hebrews** goes on to say, ***“It is impossible for blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. Therefore...Christ came into the world”*** (Hebrews 10:3-5 NIV).

Now listen to these verses from **chapter 10**. ***“He (Christ) sets aside the first (the Old Testament pattern) to establish the second (the New Testament fulfillment of the blood of Jesus being shed). And...we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once and for all”*** (Hebrews 10:9-10 NIV).

This is what it cost. This was the length to which God the Father was willing to go to provide forgiveness for you and for me. Let me ask you this: **Would you give your child to die for someone else's sin?**

If you were that only child, would you agree to the Father's plan? Not just to die, but to be sacrificed—nailed to a cross like a common thief?

That's the only way it would work. There had to be blood. I don't
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know why. But it just seems from Scripture that there was no other option if the curse of sin was to be lifted.

Do I understand all of this? No, not totally. But if that's what it took, as one who has done my share of sinning, I have to admit I'm overwhelmed that God went ahead with the plan!

Charles Wesley wrote in his great hymn ***“And Can It Be?”***

***‘Tis mystery all! The immortal dies!
Who can explore his strange design?
In vain the first-born seraph tries
To sound the depths of love divine!***

***‘Tis mercy all! Let earth adore!
Let angel minds inquire no more.
Amazing love! How can it be
That Thou my God, shouldst die for me!***

Don't ever take lightly the sacred blood of Jesus. When you ask for His forgiveness just remember what it cost Him. Confession can never be a matter of casually snapping our fingers at God and saying, ***“Hey! I need that forgiveness thing again.”*** It can never be just a matter of saying routine words or routine prayers. Genuine confession includes a deep, heartfelt appreciation for the length to which God went to make forgiveness possible.

Now Here Is The Third Element Of Genuine Confession – Turning Your Back On The Given Offense Plus A Serious Commitment To Walk God's Way In The Future. Genuine confession is always accompanied by true repentance. And, as someone has written, ***“Repentance is being sorry enough to quit.”*** It involves a real turning from that sin.

All too frequently we find themselves confessing the same sin or sins over and over and again, right? For weeks and months and maybe even years on end. If there is really no true concern over what has been going on, little (if any) remorse, and no real intent or expectation to see any

change in your future actions, then whatever it is, the one thing it isn't is true confession.

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Let me illustrate what I mean. Suppose you have this neighbor that just has all of these annoying habits. He blows his leaves over into your yard. Several days later, he says, "**Hey! I'm sorry for doing that.**" And then a couple of weeks later he does the same thing again. I mean over and over again, year after year.

He has a short fuse. He's always hollering at your kids for playing too loud outside. He grumbles about how poorly you keep your yard. You never know what kind of mood he is going to be in. He just drives you up a wall.

But at the same time, he can be friendly, occasionally, and he asks favors of you, wants to borrow your tools, and wants you to take care of his pets when he is away on vacation. And you do that. You try to be as nice as you can, hoping that somehow your kindness will change the way he interacts with you.

So you keep his dog while he is gone, even when you don't want to, and then the week he gets back home he runs into your mailbox, knocks it down, but never says anything to you or offers to fix it. *Now what would be your response?*

You would probably feel like saying, "**Hey! What is with this guy?**" *Don't you think that might be God's reaction to some of us, to certain believers, who never practice the prayer of confession or who say to Him, 'I'm sorry,' but just keep doing it? Don't you think God sometimes thinks, "What is with this guy? What is with this woman?" when He hears us pray and ask Him for things or sing His name in worship?*

Do you think or prayers of adoration mean much to Him when we never practice the prayer of genuine confession? Do you understand what I'm saying?

Allow me to take us to a place this morning as we close this worship service that has great meaning to Christians. It could well be where some of us need to return to before we head home this morning. I'm

talking about Calvary, Golgotha, the "place of the skull," the spot where Jesus went to the Cross and died for our sins.

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In New Testament times its location was outside the city walls of Jerusalem. Today no one really knows where the actual historic site is, but that doesn't matter, because I'm asking you to go there in your imagination.

Can you see Him there on the Cross? Beaten, battered, bloody? Someone has put it like this:

**They borrowed a bed to lay his head
When Christ the Lord came down.
They borrowed an ass in the mountain pass
For him to ride to town.
But the crown that he wore,
And the cross that he bore were his own,
The cross was his own.**

**He borrowed a ship in which to sit
To teach the multitude.
He borrowed a nest, a place to rest
He had no home, 'ere so rude.
But the crown that he wore,
And the cross that he bore were his own,
The cross was his own.**

**He borrowed a room on the way to the tomb
The Passover lamb to eat.
Then borrowed a grave, it was just a cave,
And borrowed the winding sheet.
But the crown that he wore,
And the cross that he bore were his own,
The cross was his own.**

**The thorns on his head were worn in my stead,
For me the Savior died.
For the guilt of my sin were the nails driven in
When him they crucified.
And though the crown that he wore,
And the cross that he bore were his own,
They should have been mine.**

They should have been mine. They should have been yours. I thought as I prepared this message, *“If people truly understand what genuine*

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confession is and truly pray the prayer of confession, there may be some tears here this morning like there were in Nehemiah’s day. There may be some weeping. There may be some remorse. There may be some guilt. But burdens are lifted at Calvary.

The instruments are going to play softly. We are going to sing unto the Lord, but I invite those of you who want to meet the Lord to just come to the front of the church and kneel quietly. Let us know if you need someone to help you pray. Otherwise I suggest that you simply put the prayer of confession into practice.

Experience once again the miracle of the cleansing power of the blood of Jesus.