

Topical - More than ice cream - the seven deadly sins - Part One ::

STEVE CREE looks at how the Bible tackles the seven deadly sins

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Aim Of The Series

The aim of this series was to present the church with specific challenges about godliness. Of course, all these challenges surface from time to time through expository preaching, but often more in an incidental way. Whether it's lust or laziness, greed or gluttony, the Bible has plenty to say, but often in interwoven amongst other themes. The aim of this series was to isolate each theme in order to deal with it more thoroughly. A bit of a biblical theology shape was given to the series by spending some time in Genesis in the first few weeks (pride in Genesis 3, anger in Genesis 4, and envy in Genesis 37). Also, the 'dying and rising with Christ' theme ensured that the series wasn't just moralising, but about being transformed by Christ. Rather than rabbiting on here, however, the introduction to the first talk best sets out the logic of the series. Finally, no ice creams were harmed in the making of the series (it was done last year before the Magnum promotion). The same can't be said for illustrations, and sermon ideas from various sources including previous issues of Perspective – which have been pillaged at will!

Talk 1—Dying to Pride; Rising to Humility (Col 3, Gen 3, Phil 2)

1.1 God Bought Us To Change Us

Have you ever bought something and then not used it? Well, there's at least one sort of product where that happens all the time, and the marketers know it. It's the world of home-gym equipment. This is the world of the 'tummy trimmer', the 'fat-fighter', the 'gut-gouger', the Orbitrek, the Physitron, the Ab-cruncher, the Ab-slide the Ab-doer. In this wonderful world of television shopping, never have so many, paid so much, for something they will use so little. Tummy trimmers sit in their boxes in the corners of garages while Ab-crunchers used once gather dust under beds. And Physitrons used three times now sit behind the Trinitron, rusting away in the corner of the lounge room. The intentions were there when you first bought your Bodyflex. Back then you'd never dream of not using it. Bodyflex: "where losing is winning!", "where results are now!" "Burn 5 times the calories than on a treadmill! – and do it all at home, right in front of the telly!". But of course Bodyflex's resting place is behind the telly.

This is another way that we are not like God. When God pays for something he really wants it. God never loses interest in something he's bought. God has bought us and the price of that purchase was the blood of his Son. Is God an impulse buyer, who has bought us only to lose interest in us? No! God cares about us, about how we live and he bought us for a purpose. The price was high—it's one thing for you to pay \$199 for an Ab-cruncher you're never going to use but it's totally absurd to think that God would pay for us with the precious blood of his Son (1 Pet 1:18-19) and do the same. There are hundreds of unused Ab-crunchers sitting in garages—that's a waste. But Christians sitting around in churches unchanged by God's mercy and love and forgiveness—that's worse than a waste that's offensive. That'd be continuing in the very sin we've been saved from.

God hasn't just saved us from something, he's saved us for something, an intimate relationship with him and a life spent honouring him (1 Cor 6:19-20) This series is all about honouring God who bought us at a price. As a church we need to realise that he didn't buy us just to sit around but to make us into his people. He didn't just save us from something, he's saved us for something— he's saved us from the penalty of sin for an intimate relationship with him.

Sometimes I think our thinking is a little wrong. We say that Jesus died on the cross so my sins can be forgiven and that means that, when I die, I'll go to heaven. This, of course is true, but does that mean nothing changes now? Is the time between becoming a Christian and Jesus coming back just a kind of limbo? Is our church just a corral for Christians, a holding pen for heaven? Like God's bought us and just shoved us here in the garage and one day in the future he'll get interested in us again, as if his return to earth is picking up a toy he put on lay-by? Of course not! The New Testament says that God has forgiven our sin but now he wants to kill it! He's removed the penalty for your sin but now he wants to remove the presence of sin as well.

1.2 Dying and Rising With Christ

The Bible says that we need to put sin to death (Col 3:5) because that stuff was then and now we belong to God. Colossians also says that we don't just die a death, we rise to a new life too (Col 3:1). Being a Christian is all about dying to sin and rising with Christ. When we become a Christian one life ends and a totally new one begins (Col 3:9-10)—one with new priorities and one in which we follow God's way. You've seen the Larson cartoon: first pants then your shoes? In the Christian life we must first put our trust in Jesus and be forgiven. Then we must put on the character of Jesus and be transformed (Col 3:12).

In Christ there's an 'Under New Management' sign sitting over our lives and there's countless changes God wants to work in you. He definitely bought us for a reason—to truly make you his—and this series is about going under the knife, opening ourselves up to the living and active word of God to do some serious work deep in our hearts. Are you ready for some radical surgery on your sinful nature as you let your Creator become your surgeon? What is it that most needs treatment for you? What death and resurrection is needed most in your life?

- dying to pride: rising to humility?
- dying to anger: rising to patience?
- dying to envy: rising to kindness?
- dying to impurity: rising to purity?
- dying to gluttony: rising to self-control?
- dying to laziness: rising to zeal?
- dying to greed: rising to generosity?

We could use any list of sins from the New Testament but these seven are a pretty good summary. My guess is that at least one or two stand out for each of us. You see, you've become a Christian, you've put your trust in Jesus, you've opened the door to Jesus and let him into your life, but maybe you've kind of left him standing in the hallway and there's all sorts of rooms you've locked the door to. God doesn't just want to forgive your sin, he wants to kill it as well and as we submit to his Word, God's Spirit will change us.

1.3 Pride

The sin that our surgery needs to start with is pride. In fact pride is really at the heart of all sin—

confidence in ourselves instead of God, a focus on ourselves instead of others. That's where all sin flows from. In understanding this first sin you'll understand the nature of all sin.

Pride is behind the birth of sin in the fall in Genesis 3 is pride. Adam and Eve have been placed in the garden of Eden by God. Life is perfect, i.e. it is lived under God's word. It's a life where God knows best because God is God and they obey. God says that they can eat from any of the trees they like except this one tree in the centre of the garden. [Because they don't belong at the centre—only God belongs at the centre.] This tree is the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and that's why Adam and Eve have no business eating from it. The idea of 'knowing good and evil' really means to determine good and evil, to decide for yourself what's right and what's wrong.

That's God's job, not ours. By eating from this tree you're saying that you want God's job. That's exactly what the serpent offers Eve. The serpent casts doubt on God's word (Gen 3:1), the first step to sin. This is followed by denial of God's word (v 4), the next step to sin. The final step to sin is making the decision to make the rules ourselves (v 5), that's the appeal to sinful pride. The temptation's not just to become a lawbreaker, the real temptation is to become the lawmaker. What do Adam and Eve do? They take and they eat (v 6) and in doing so they declare that from now on we'll make the rules, from now on we'll be God. This is sin, this is pride: ascending to the position of ruler of the universe, grasping for the crown, the power. Sin grieves God (v 13), his law isn't the only thing that is broken here, his heart is broken too. So he measures out his judgement on his rebel creatures—not just the judgement and future destruction that sin brings but the present destruction as well. What happens next? They become pretend gods, proud rebels, self-centred to the core accusing each other and soon killing each other. No holds barred as we scramble for the controls trying again and again to ascend God's throne. The pride principle is rampant. My first thought is me and my desires. Just like the compass needle points north, the needle of the human heart points to getting your own way.

1.4 Humility

Jesus brings the great reversal in human history (Phil 2:3-8). The answer to sin, the answer to pride, comes in Jesus. Where Adam and Eve grasped, he did not grasp. Where they reached for God's crown, he surrendered his. He reverses their ascent with his descent. He replaces their ladder with his cross. Instead of proud grasping hands, grabbing for self, here are humble, nailed, outstretched hands – dying for us. Total reversal of our future as he takes the penalty for our sin, replacing our judgement with forgiveness.

Jesus also reverses our present as well because not only does he take our death and judgement but he also gives us a new life to live, a new attitude, a new self. Our attitudes should be the same as that of Jesus—this is the huge attitude reversal God wants to work in us. Jesus climbed down the ladder of humility: rung after rung after rung, he gave up the majesty and glory of heaven and comes down to the sweat and dust of the earth, not as a king but as a servant. He doesn't just give up his comfort, he gives up his life. Not just dying, but crucified. Not for friends, for enemies.

The model we are to follow is in verse 7: he made himself nothing. He wasn't pushed, it wasn't an accidental fall. Step by deliberate step Jesus chose this path: this path from the peak of creation to the shame of the cross. He embraced a life of giving, serving, losing and dying. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.

The attitude reversal we need here is – quite simply the difference between up and down as we die to pride and rise to humility. In an upwardly mobile world we follow a downwardly mobile Saviour.

We give up our pathetic pretensions to be God. We confess he's at the centre and seek to revolve around him. As we grow as a Christian we keep climbing down. Dying to pride means taking up your cross as Jesus commanded – being so dead to yourself, to your own wants and desires, that you become alive to the needs of those around you. Turning from self-centredness to other-centred people.

1.5 Attitude Reversal

Look at how different we should be as God's people. We should be counter-culture people (v 15-16):

So that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life.

Pure amongst the depraved, light amidst the darkness, life in a world of death ... and doing what? Holding out the word of life. Not reaching up to be God but reaching out with His Word. Not hands trying to grab for me but turning out to you. Open hands, hands prepared to get nails in them, hands just like Jesus, and an attitude just like Jesus. It's a huge reversal isn't it? Honestly we're far too much like the world, aren't we? Same priorities, same selfishness, same pride.

It's drastic surgery by God's Word we need isn't it? The only thing the world will teach you about sin is how to do it. The only mention of sin you'll find out there is on a dessert menu: wicked cake, chocolate sin. An American newspaper ran a headline recently: 'why nothing is wrong anymore'. Couples in marriage preparation don't have problems with sin anymore – they have growth areas! And pride isn't seen as a sin. Songs celebrate it, adult education courses teach it. The actress Kirsty Alley said in an MTV interview: 'I don't think pride is a sin, I think some idiot made that up'. But how different are we? How different are we prepared to be? A Christian satire magazine asks: if there was a Christian convention called "Humilityfest 2001" who'd actually come? Who'd sign up for seminars: 'God needs you ... to wash feet'; 'learning to shut up and listen'; 'take up your cross but don't make a big deal about it'.

h3. Talk 2—Dying to Anger, Rising to Patience (Gen 4, Lk 23, 1 Pet 2, Rom 6)

2.1 Burning Anger

I love baseball. But let me tell you about one particular game of baseball that I'm glad I wasn't part of. In spring 1894, over 100 yrs ago, when the Baltimore Orioles came to Boston to play a routine baseball game. But what happened that day was anything but routine. The Orioles' John McGraw lost his temper, got angry, got into a fight with the Boston 3rd baseman and before you knew it – the anger spread. Within minutes: all the players from both teams had joined in the brawl: letting off steam. The warfare spread to the grandstands, as the anger spread like fire – literally in fact: because someone set fire to the stands and the entire ballpark burned to the ground. Not only that, the fire spread to 107 other Boston buildings as well. Because of one man's anger half a town was destroyed! And to think that it all started with a little altercation at third base. John McGraw couldn't even remember later just why he got so angry yet the damage from his anger spread and just about destroyed a whole city.

Mockers stir up a city, but wise men turn away anger (Prov 29:8). Anger sure stirred up the city of Boston 100 years ago. But God's word knew all about it 1000s of years ago. God knows the destructive power of our anger and His Word warns us to control it (Prov 29:11). If only John McGraw had kept himself under control the destruction that would've been prevented. And if only you didn't unleash your anger on your friends, or people you live with, or people you work with, or... if only we could control our anger. If only we'd treat seriously the commands of God's Word (James 1:19-20):

Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.

Our ways are not God's ways and we need to change from being slaves to sin to being servants of God, we need to die to anger and rise to patience. How can we die to anger? Count to 10? Hold our breath? Bite our tongue? No, we've got to go deeper than that. We need to let God's Word do radical surgery in our lives, as we seek to live new lives with Jesus as our boss.

2.2 The Problem

Where does our anger come from? We see the birth of anger in Genesis 4. Anger hits the landscape of this fallen world very early. Sin is born in Genesis 3 where Adam and Eve decided to reject God, decided to put themselves at the centre of the world instead, decided to grasp for God's crown and become their own boss. God's good creation was intact for just two chapters. Now we see anger being born in Genesis 4. If pride comes before a fall, it's anger that follows hot on its heels. And, as surely as Eve now gives birth to Cain, pride gives birth to anger. In some ways this is a surprise isn't it? Genesis 3 ended with a promise of a good birth. With the birth of sin, a hideous and terrible birth, came the promise of a great birth a wonderful birth (Gen 3:15), the birth of one who will crush the serpent. Her offspring will defeat Satan and will put right all that's gone wrong with God's perfect world. If you were reading Genesis for the first time, what are you thinking as you turn to Genesis 4 verse 1? Eve has a son you see, could this be the one? But if our hopes rise with the birth of Cain, they are soon dashed because he is definitely not the one to reverse sin. Instead of Cain crushing the serpent he's taken captive himself. Cain's life is far from a reversal of sin. In fact, we see sin spreading like the Aids epidemic, it's out of control. Sin grows like a hideous monster bringing destruction and death wherever it goes. A few contrasts between chapter 3 and chapter 4 show us just how destructive the spread of sin is. Eve had to be talked into taking the fruit (Gen 3) whereas Cain needs no persuasion (Gen 4). He thinks up his anger at his brother Abel all by himself because it's in his nature. He needs no temptation to play God because he's already ascended to the throne. Cain's anger at his brother comes from his rejection of God.

God has favoured Abel's offering over Cain's. We don't know why – but that's the point – we don't need to know why, and neither should Cain because we're not God – and Cain's not God and he should accept that God is God, that God's at the centre. But Cain's a sinner and from his pride comes anger. His anger at Abel comes from his defiance to God. He wants to be at the centre – he wants things to go his way, he wants to call the shots, he wants to be the judge, he wants to play God. In Cain we see the sinful angry heart inside all of us. Eve was visited by Satan to talk her in to sin but now not even a visit by God will talk Cain out of sin (Gen 4:6-7).

Cain thinks he's God, he rejects the true God's Word, and self-centred and angry, he takes matters into his own hands. Do you see how sin has grown here? Eve had to be coaxed forward to sin but her son, Cain, can't be turned back. Adam and Eve trembled with fear after their sin but there's no

hiding in the bushes for Cain he's not quaking in his boots. Instead it's defiance, back-chat, insolence. Confronted by God with his brother's blood on his hands he fobs off God. He's rejected God's way: he's rejected God's Word, and now he even rejects God's right to question him. But the contrast keeps going. Adam and Eve didn't question the judgement which God handed out to them but Cain grumbles that God's judgement is unfair. He's rejected God's right to be God so completely, hasn't he? Not only does he wilfully and brazenly reject God's way but when God calls him to account and passes judgement he turns around and files for unfair dismissal.

So sinful, so self-centred, so convinced he's got rights. This is the man of sin and, without Jesus, this is us. Consumed by sinful pride, convinced we're at the centre, we will unleash destruction on others. Parents might sometimes be disappointed if their child doesn't become a lawyer or a doctor but Cain's a really disappointing son. Where's the son who'll crush the serpent? Where's the offspring who'll reverse evil and fix the world? Who reverses pride, reverses self-righteous anger? If it's not Cain, and we've seen that, who is it?

2.3 Solution

The answer of course is Jesus and the reversal is illustrated perfectly in Luke 23. Look at the great reversal Jesus brings: they plied him with questions, they hammer him but Jesus doesn't answer. He's not going to take matters into his own hands. Pilate can see Jesus is innocent (v 14, 22) and has done nothing to deserve death (v 15) but they hate this innocent one (v 18). It is the hatred and anger of Cain that leads the crowd to cry "crucify him" (v 21). But Jesus doesn't take matters into his own hands. You'd think he'd have every right to be angry but we're people who want to put ourselves at the centre, who want to play God, who go the way of Cain. Jesus doesn't take matters into his own hands. Instead he allows his hands to be nailed to planks of wood. He submits to God's will even to death. They hammer him again – this time not just with accusations but literally (v 33) as they crucified him. We sing: "Hands that flung stars into space to cruel nails surrendered". Not grasping but giving, not angry but forgiving, not murdering but murdered. Jesus is the total opposite to Cain. And with Jesus' prayer (v 34) the reversal is total. Instead of anger, the most extraordinary patience. You see how he doesn't put himself at the centre? And of course he had the right to be there. But he's here to reverse sin so he cops the mockery. He turns to God – trusts in God – prays to God. Instead of retaliating, he cops our pathetic anger at him. Yet Jesus' anger would be righteous anger, not the selfish anger of Cain and of us. The Son of God being nailed up by pip-squeak sinners is well within his rights to crush us. But he's the one who's here to crush the serpent, he's the son of Eve the world's been waiting for to reverse the sin of Cain and of us. So he prays down not the fire of God's wrath but forgiveness. In fact the fire of God's wrath comes down on him so that his prayer might be fulfilled. Here is the son of Eve who mastered sin. Who, at the cross, paid for our sin. Who, at the cross, was bitten by the serpent and died, but who became the antidote to the serpents bite to put an end to the disease, to put an end to sin's power. Jesus reverses sin through being a role model for us (1 Pet 2:21). Jesus is the one who doesn't take things into his own hands but puts them in God's hands, who doesn't get angry but shows patience. Jesus didn't consider himself at the centre but God (v 23). That's the example for us: to turn from anger and all sin. Second, Jesus is much more than just a model. He didn't just show you how to turn away from sin, he turned away God's anger at your sin (v 24). He bore your sin, he paid the penalty for your sin. Marvel at his example but be grateful he paid the price for your sin and your anger.

We need to understand what happened on the cross. 'Jesus died for me' we say – yes but specifically, Jesus died for you, for your anger, for the way you've run others down, for the way

you've gossiped about people, for the way you've plotted revenge in your heart, for all the ways you put yourself at the centre and played God. They're the things that murdered Jesus, that's how we shed his innocent blood. He died for your pride – anger – envy – lust – impurity – greed. That's what drove in the nails. He's an amazing model, he's an amazing sacrifice we need to see both and put them together (1 Pet 1:22). Your hearts are pure now he says, we've been forgiven, so now you can love from the heart. Now we're fixed with God we can be fixed with each other. So we don't relate in pride, we don't fester with anger but we love one another deeply. Purified hearts are loving hearts, hearts willing to forgive as we've been forgiven. The price is paid now you can follow the example. Jesus is your saviour, now you can make Jesus your character. He's forgiven your sin and now he wants to kill it. He's paid for your anger so now you can turn to patience.

Romans 5 explains how Jesus reverses the sin of Adam. In Adam we're sinners, under God's judgement. Cain's problem was that he was in Adam. But we're in Jesus, we're forgiven with God back at the centre. We don't go the way of Cain, we go the way of Jesus. We're not in Eve's son Cain – ruled by Satan – we're in Eve's son Jesus – the serpent crusher. We don't go the way of Cain, we go the way of Jesus. It's all about dying and rising with Christ, living new lives in him. Jesus has replaced Adam (Rom 6:11-14), we're in him not Adam. We're in the one who's cancelled sin not under sin, and we're to live in Jesus mastering sin not being mastered by it. God is back at the centre, and our self-righteous anger dies with that.

2.4 Learning Patience

But we enjoy anger, don't we? We sometimes want to be back with Adam. Like driving home earlier, from North Coast Christian Convention, thinking of applications for this talk, but getting frustrated by the driver in front of me, "Oh come on, where did you get your license anyway...". Oops, me at the centre again. Now where was that patience? Anger comes from putting me at centre even in self-righteous ways: I haven't been served, I've been gossiped about ... and I want justice! No, I don't want the justice. I want the cross!! If I stay at the centre I die with Adam. I want to put God at the centre and rise with Jesus! I want to die to anger rise to patience, accepting Jesus as my saviour and following him as my example.

h3. Talk 3—Dying to Envy, Rising to Kindness (Gen 37, Mk 15, Acts 7, 1 Jn 3)

3.1 Make a wish...

I want you to imagine two greengrocers. Two men who are bitter rivals. Their stores are right across the street from each other, and they spend each day with an eye on each other, keeping track of each other's business. One gets a customer and he smiles in triumph at his rival. But when the other makes a sale he snarls with bitterness. Two greengrocers: green with envy. But now imagine the story takes a twist, a turn of events that shows just how deep the envy runs. Say one of these men gets an opportunity like on the Tim Tams ad, to make a wish and it'll be granted. But here's the real twist, because here's how the offer's put to him: "I'll give you anything you ask, but whatever you get, your competitor will get twice as much. Maybe you'd like to be massively rich? You'll get it, but he'll be twice as wealthy. Do you wish to live a long and healthy life? You can, but his life will be longer and healthier? What is your desire?" The man frowned, thought for a moment and then said, "Here's my request ... strike me blind in one eye".

A heart of peace gives life to the body but envy rots the bones (Prov 14:30). Resentment of others, jealousy of their success, envy – says God’s Word – rots the bones. In the last talk we saw that, just as surely as Eve gave birth to Cain, pride gave birth to anger as the proud heart becomes a destructive heart. But see how envy takes its place in the sin cocktail: Anger is cruel and fury overwhelming, but who can stand before jealousy? (Prov 27:4) Who can stand before jealousy. Envy rots the bones. The Bible couldn’t sound a stronger warning—the sin of envy is deadly.

Let’s be honest – it’s in all of us. From the cradle to the grave envy’s in our hearts and you see it come to the surface in the things we think and say. ‘Its not fair, Tommy gets to stay up till 8 o’clock and I have to go to bed at 7:30, I wish I had his parents.’ ‘I wish I could look like she does, she’s so popular.’ ‘I wish I was a muso, I’d be appreciated more – like she is.’ ‘I see Bob’s got a new car, latest model! It must’ve cost him a bit – I wish I had the cash for that.’ ‘Now that’s a job I could handle: short hours, long holidays – he gets money for nothing while I slog my guts out.’ ‘Why can’t you be more like Rita’s husband? he’s so caring and a good handyman – he’s well... useful!’ ‘Everything seems to be so easy for them, God seems to bless them so much, it doesn’t seem fair.’

Envy you see, perhaps more than we realise, is deep in our hearts and we need to come to God’s Word today to cut it out. God’s word warns us that “where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice” (Jas 3:16). God’s word challenges us not to “become conceited, provoking and envying each other” (Gal 5:26). But how can we do that? How can we die to our envy and really change?

An article from the Herald I read was all about envy. It’s called “taming the green-eyed monster” and it said that ‘jealousy can burn you up: these tips will help you cope’. The article is all about feeling better about yourself. Is that it? Thinking positive thoughts about ourselves? Or is there a better way to deal with envy? Well, only God’s word takes us to the heart of the problem, to where our envy comes from. And only God’s Word takes us to the real solution, and how we can really deal with envy.

3.2 The Problem

Where does our envy come from? We say pride born in Genesis 3 with Adam and Eve. This quickly spread to anger in Genesis 4 with Cain and Abel. And this spreads to envy by Genesis 37 with Joseph and his brothers. Did you see the overseas news last week the runaway train? This train got going with no driver and without a driver, it was out of control, destructive. That’s what we’re seeing here in Genesis with the effects of sin. Sin has made the entire world like a runaway train. God was meant to be the driver but we ejected him and thought we’d take the driver’s seat. Here we’re seeing that we’re hopeless drivers of this world. Sin’s running rampant and we just can’t find the brakes. Genesis, the Bible, doesn’t hide the ugliness of sin from us. Sin spreads: from pride and anger to incest and murder and rape. Don’t let anyone tell you the Bible’s old and out of touch. All the issues faced in our world today are right here in the first book of the Bible.

As the Bible story rolls on from sin to sin to sin, the classic story of envy is Joseph and his brothers (Gen 37) where we see envy in all its ugliness. Joseph is a shepherd boy, just seventeen years old, the second youngest of twelve brothers (v 2). And Jacob, his father, loved him more than any of the others because he was born when Jacob was old and he was the first son born to Jacob’s beloved wife, Rachel (v 3). Jacob had a special place in his heart for Joseph and he showed it by making him a richly ornamented robe. Because Joseph was his father’s favourite his brothers hated him deeply

and they showed it firstly with their words. After Joseph's dream (v 5) his brothers begin to show their hate with their actions as well. Envy is deadly.

But we don't like tall poppies do we? Showponies? Or shepherd boys that get around in ornamented coats! And I don't know about you, but let me take a risk here: I reckon we relate to the brothers here pretty well. Sure, we might draw the line at murder, but we reckon they've got a right to feel a bit miffed. Because in one way or another we've been there. We've had this profound envious feeling. It's not fair! Why is he getting treated that way? Why not me? But who made us the judge? Who appointed us to decide what's fair and what isn't? Well, we did of course! Because we've decided to play God. This is the heart of sin: we make the rules, we hop into the drivers seat, we put ourselves at the centre of the universe. We decide who gets what, we decide what's fair, we even decide: someone should be dropped down a peg. We've got the right to mow down the tall poppies, got the right to the blood of the one in the special coat. So what if Jacob favours Joseph? So what if God plans to use Joseph in some special way? And so what if your neighbour has it better than you? We might not understand it but why do we need to? We might not like it but why is what we like the issue?

Why is envy the way we respond? I mean, before Joseph got his coat, do you think one of his brothers ever even thought, 'Gee, I wish dad would give me a decent techni-colour poncho to get around in'. No. It's like Paul says: 'I wouldn't even know what it means to covet, if I hadn't heard the words "do not covet"'. Or put it this way: if my neighbour didn't have it, I probably wouldn't even want it because I wouldn't know what I'm missing. But for some reason, that's how envy works. Happiness in others produces sadness in me. Favour on others, produces resentment in me (remember Cain?). Just like favour on Joseph produces hatred in his brothers. You know, a song we sing – 'Brother, let me be your servant'. It says: 'I will weep while you are weeping, when you laugh I'll laugh with you'. Seems to me we find it much easier to weep with the weeping, than to laugh with the laughing. It's easier for me to sympathise with your suffering than to celebrate your success. Why is that? Well, here's the really sick thing about envy. Here's why envy is even more deadly in some ways than greed. If greed say "I want more", envy says "I want you to have less". All sin is selfishness, but envy is so insidious, so gross. I'm not just obsessed with my own happiness, I resent yours. Somehow your blessing is my curse. Why? Because I've put myself at the centre of the universe. So, everything's about me. Which means I can't just say, 'Good for you'. I find myself saying, 'I wish that was me'.

3.3 Solution

For the solution to envy we need to turn to Jesus. But it's not enough for us just to say, "Jesus died to forgive my envy". We need to say this as well: "Jesus died because of my envy". My envy lifted Jesus up on that cross. Just as his brothers' envy murdered Joseph, our envy murdered the son of God. If we face in the cross of Jesus the reality of our sin, if we see in the death of Jesus the judgement we deserve, if we realise that our envy drove in those nails, the conviction of God's Spirit will start to drive our envy out. Because here is Jesus, more innocent than Joseph, the holy, perfect, sinless, Son of God, the one with total favour of his heavenly Father but also the one who is despised by his own, rejected, misunderstood and falsely accused.

A re-run of Joseph's life: Jesus' death was plotted (Mk 15:1), envy was the motive for the murder (v 10), and, just as God used Joseph's suffering to save Israel, so God used Jesus' death to save sinners from all nations. But as striking as the similarities are between Joseph and Jesus, there's one massive difference: although Joseph offers forgiveness to his brothers, just like Jesus prays for

forgiveness for his murderers, and although his brothers do indeed bow down to Joseph, just as Jesus' disciples bow down to him the difference is that Genesis ends with the announcement of Joseph's death but the gospels end with the announcement of Jesus' resurrection. Here in Jesus, is the one who doesn't cheat death but beats it. Here is the one who doesn't bring temporary salvation but salvation that is permanent, one who doesn't relieve famine and feed our stomachs but who brings forgiveness and feeds our souls.

In Acts 7 Stephen gives an amazing history lesson in how God's people always killed off God's messengers. Joseph even gets a mention (v 9) because he copped it out of jealousy, and God rescued him. The history lesson ends with "you even betrayed and murdered Jesus – the Righteous One" (v 52). But where's Jesus now? Jesus is standing at the right hand of God (v 56). Not just rescued from envy but victorious over it! Here is the one who was killed by our envy, for our envy, to deal completely with our envy. He died to forgive our envy. He died to kill off our envy. And he rose to bring us to lives free from envy. He rose to give us new lives to live: lives not of envy, but of contentment, kindness and love.

The problem with envy, like all sin, is that it puts me at the centre. So you're forever looking at people and saying: 'I wish that was me'. The truth is: there's only one place we can look and say that. Only one place where we can say, 'that should be me' and that's the cross of Jesus. Forget your neighbour, your brother your workmate, your friend. Look at Jesus – hanging there on the cross and say, 'that should be me'.

Christians are people who have surrendered what we deserve, not people who claim what we deserve. We are people who are glad we don't get what's fair. Rather than calling out "it's not fair" over what we haven't got, we should be stunned at what we do get from God, that we don't deserve: forgiveness. You know the title of that Herald article was a good one – "envy: taming the green-eyed monster". That is the problem. But they got the solution all wrong. The solution's not about me, and feeling better about me, the solution's about Jesus, and feeling better about him, being convicted that our envy put Jesus on the cross and being overwhelmed that right there he forgives it.

3.4 Rising to Kindness

As we trade in our green with envy lens for looking at the world for a Jesus lens to look at everything through everything changes. For starters, looking at life through Jesus, I will never envy the person who doesn't know Jesus. We can rule that one out straight away. Because what could be more precious than forgiveness? What could be more precious than eternal life? What could I count better than that? What about us who do know Jesus? How should the Jesus lens change the way we view each other? The answer's in 1 John 3:16-17. John says that because Jesus died for us we should die for each other. We're not rivals or competitors, we're fellow beggars at the foot of the cross. If we hang on to our envy we'll never be a team, we'll destroy each other because "from envy comes every evil practice" (Js 3:16).

Envy is not just a deadly sin it gives birth to all sorts of other sins. Envy divides us, and sets us apart and against one another. Rather than focus on serving God and rejoicing in how the talents of another help us do that, we are jealous of them. Envy leads to competitions, put downs, gossip, hatred. It stops us from working as a team, rips apart the family as we walk around in our sin. But we died to that, we said "no" to that. By accepting Jesus' death we said we didn't want to stay there. And when we do that, when we look at everything through Jesus' death, we're driven out to serve

others not ourselves, we turn from selfishness to “otherishness”. We die to envy and rise to kindness.

More than that, we acknowledge that God is in control. We simply quit trying to play God. “God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything” (1 Jn 3:20). Why would we play God? Why would we be at the centre? We died to that and have been set free from ever having to envy. And in that, what we gained was being set free to serve others. Through Christ we have died to envy, rising to kindness.

h3. Talk 4—Dying to Impurity, Rising to Purity (Gen 1-3, 2 Sam 11, Ps32, 1 Jn 1)

4.1 The Chase ... and the Kill

In 1875 three balloonists left Paris with one thing on their mind: to set a new altitude record. Tissandier, Spinelli and Sibel wanted to rise higher in their balloon than anyone before them. They’d been warned to take pressurised oxygen and so they loaded their oxygen gear for the flight. But as their balloon rose and rose as they gained altitude, hypoxia set in making them delirious. By the time they reached 7500 metres, they were in serious trouble. Tissandier sat helpless on the floor of the basket. Worse, the lack of oxygen had affected his mates’ reasoning. Not only were they still dumping ballast to gain more height, but they also threw their oxygen equipment overboard. By the time the balloon landed, Sibel and Spinelli were dead. Only Tissandier survived. He said, ‘towards 7500m the numbness you experience is amazing, you become indifferent; you no longer think of the danger, you just want to rise and rise’. Chasing the thrill beat their logic, with deadly consequences. They literally threw away their lives.

If you’re struggling with the sin of lust, that’s the danger. Lust is that deadly. Just about all Christians face sexual temptation at some stage. If you are you’ll see yourself in that story. Not because you’ve ever been ballooning, but because that’s the perfect picture of how your lust consumes you, drives you, and clouds your thinking. The grip of lust on your heart, it’s just like starving oxygen to the brain, it leads to thinking just as irrational, actions just as foolish and consequences just as deadly. “Do not lust in your heart after her beauty or let her captivate you with her eyes, for the prostitute reduces you to a loaf of bread, and the adulteress preys upon your very life” (Prov 6:26). They say the chase is better than the kill. Well, with lust, not only is the chase foolish, but the kill is you.

4.2 The Problem

Make no mistake as we hear God’s Word on lust, this sin is deadly. It destroys lives, it destroys families, it destroys children, it destroys you. Proverbs 6 concludes that “a man who commits adultery lacks judgment; whoever does so destroys himself”. But what is the problem? What is the sin we’re to turn from? Is it just sex – full-stop? Does the Bible saying sex is wrong? That’s the impression some Christians give you. In fact some people even came up with the silly idea that sex was the original sin. And as for the world, they think they invented it! Magazines like Cleo and Cosmo seem to think sex was only discovered in the 1960s. But we find a very different story in the Bible. We find that God made sex and that it was part of the world he called good, it wasn’t an accident. Adam and Eve didn’t think it up! They didn’t have to hide it from God. In Genesis 1 we see that God made the great gift of sex. God makes Adam and Eve male and female, sexual beings. And he says to them “be fruitful and increase in number”. The first command from the God of the

universe to humankind is ... have sex! God is very pro-sex, he commands it! Sex between the man and the woman is a good and proper thing. Don't believe the lie that God's some kind of cosmic killjoy. From page one of the Bible, God says of sex, go for it!

But there's a pattern isn't there? There's a context, there's a place sex belongs. Go for it – yes, but in this way: one man and one woman, in relationship together. That's where sex belongs: one man and one woman in a lifelong, monogamous, committed, exclusive, relationship. That's God's chosen place for the expression of sexuality. You can read more about God's design for sex in 1 Corinthians 7, it's a great chapter about marriage. It's about how a husband and wife are to look after each other. They're to serve each other. And because they're sexual beings, a big part of serving each other, is serving each other sexually (1 Cor 7:4). The wife's body belongs to her husband – for his enjoyment. The husband's body belongs to his wife – for her enjoyment. She's to serve him sexually. He's to serve her sexually. It's not just so children can be born, it's also for pleasure, for satisfaction. Sex is for a man and woman to express their love for each other, to give to each other, in the context of marriage. It's a great gift from God, that's how it's to be used.

Which brings us to the real sin of impurity. The sin of impurity isn't sex itself but the wrong use of sex, taking the good gift of sex and treating it like its worth nothing. The original sin of Adam and Eve wasn't sex, or anything to do with sex originally. It was disobedience against God and His Word. The management revolution came first, followed by the sexual revolution. First we rejected God then we rejected his plan for sex. Sex, like everything else, turned bad very quickly. We now use God's good gift in all the wrong ways. Shows like Big Brother celebrate promiscuity. Music "videos" are glorified pornography. Bill Clinton can do what he likes with a junior staffer and people say, 'it's a private matter – it didn't make him a bad leader'. What's the message? 'It doesn't matter how you use sex!'. A media release from the National Council on Aids this week renewed the call for homosexual men to use condoms. That's all our world's got to say on sex: use a condom!

Society's got plenty to say about making sex safe but absolutely nothing to say about making sex good. Any fool can have safe sex but only God's Word shows us good sex, right sex. Sex belongs in a committed, lifelong, marriage relationship but we live in a world that has rejected God and his Word. Nowhere is that seen more than in the area of sexuality. You're told it's okay to sleep with your girlfriend/boyfriend before s/he's your wife/husband – when God says it's not. You're told it's okay to commit adultery because we just call it an affair, a fling, just finding space – but God says it's adultery and it's wrong. And you're not only told lust is okay, you're beckoned to feed it, to feast your eyes and feed your mind with all kinds of images. The lures, traps, the temptation is everywhere. Billboards, TV ads, newsagents, movies, video clips, and worst of all now: the Internet. Lust is always hungry but now there's so much more to feed on. Pornography's always been there but more than ever you don't have to go looking for it, instead you have to fend it off. And that's the call because God says it's wrong. They're images that God says you shouldn't be looking at because intimacy, even like that, even with the eyes, only belongs in marriage.

Our instinct, however, isn't to fend it off so much as cover it up. It's kind of awkward just talking about it isn't it? It's not a subject we find it easy to be honest about. But it's such a public issue, it's everywhere you look, but we want to make it private, and not talk about it. This is the great cover up. And it's been happening since Adam and Eve. Adam and Eve after they sinned, hid in the bushes, trying to hide their sin and accused each other instead of confessing their sin, pathetically using fig leaves to cover their shame. Lies, accusations, deception: anything but the truth. The great

cover-up begins. It's interesting isn't it? Sin ruins everything, As sin enters the world, it ruins sex straight away. You can see how sex is ruined through Adam and Eve's shame. It had been so pure, but through sin but suddenly their nakedness becomes shameful. They're no longer for each other but against each other, not trusting but deceiving, not serving but using, not open but hiding. The great cover-up. That's how we try to deal with sin, especially sexual sin and temptation.

Shane Warne is esteemed as a role model, but he epitomises what we're talking about. Here's a man that lives by only this rule: thou shalt not get caught. Only if you get caught do you admit to something, and even when you do get caught, you don't admit it's wrong. Listen to Warnie, when he had to admit he'd engaged in phone sex with an English woman: "it was probably the wrong thing to do but I thought it was a private matter. I didn't think it was going to become public and now that it has become public I suppose it's a mistake. If it had stayed private then it wasn't a mistake".

The great cover up. Fig leaves 21st century style. Still trying to hide in the bushes, still trying to say that sin is ok. Just the same as Adam and Eve—reject God's Word, do what you know is wrong , don't confess it just cover it up because the only real problem is getting caught! That's exactly the story of the life of David (2 Sam 11) where he attempts the same cover-up. David who was "a man after God's own heart", yet he fell into sexual sin and thought his only problem was how to cover it up. His slide into sin starts with a lingering look (v 2). He allows a glance to become a gaze – he feeds the lust. He makes enquiries (v3) – fantasy becomes a plan. Even when he's told that Bathsheba is a married woman, it doesn't matter. Lust has replaced listening to God. He's only thinking of now: just the thrill, just the chase. Like the balloonists, he doesn't think of the consequences, he doesn't think the kill will be him. That's the way the devil's temptation works: he shows you the beauty, the excitement, not the destruction, heartbreak, pregnancy, or herpes, or the total destruction of your family. So David has sex with Bathsheba. But then of course, he has a problem because she's pregnant. And that's when the cover up begins. Trying to get Uriah to sleep with Bathsheba, so his sin won't be discovered, getting Uriah drunk and finally having him murdered. One thought: cover-up, hide the sin, don't admit guilt, hide in the bushes. It's the Shane Warne approach: sin but don't get caught.

If we're honest, it's you and me because we cover up too. We try to hide our sin from everyone else but there's a problem with the cover-up— it doesn't work because it doesn't take away the real problem of sin. The real problem isn't just the unwanted pregnancy. The real problem is the sinful heart that caused it, the broken relationship with God. Covering up the consequences, doesn't take away the sin. Trying to hide your sin from God, is as pathetic as Adam and Eve trying to hide in the garden. Your lust, your impure thoughts and desires can never be covered up from God.

David finds this out (2 Sam 12:9) and the real sin is made clear, he's despised the Word of God. That's the heart of sin and there are consequences for sin. David will be punished (v 11) just as God punished Adam and Eve. David's punishment is that he will lose his son. David's tried to hide his sin, his lust and its consequences, but God wants to bring sin out into the open (v 12). God drags it out in the open, judges it, deals with it but he doesn't just pass judgement on David's sin, he forgives it too (v 13). David confesses his sin against the Lord, and then the promise, "the Lord has taken away your sin".

4.3 The Solution

David's confession is found in Psalm 32. About how he turned from cover-up to confession (v 5)

and he celebrates God's forgiveness at the start by saying "Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered, whose sin the Lord doesn't count against him". He stopped covering up and God covered over his sin. But how does God cover over his sin? How is David forgiven for his lust and his adultery? Did David pay for his sin himself – through the judgement of losing his son? No but through a judgement passed on the true son of David. Forgiveness came when God really put an end to the cover-up, where he really brought sin out into the open, where the sin of the world was truly exposed in broad daylight, where Jesus hung on a cross naked and in shame, murdered for our lust, crucified for our impurity.

Don't ever think forgiveness means God turns a blind eye. It's not covered up our way – by hiding it—but by his way— bringing it out, lifting it up, nailing it in, killing it off. God says to end the cover up! Listen to what John (1 Jn 1:8-10) says to us:

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.

4.4 Rising to Purity

We need to end the cover up and let God truly cover over your sin and forgive it. There's no sin that God won't forgive, no sin the blood of Jesus isn't powerful enough to cleanse but you must end the cover-up. Come to God in confession. That's how we become a Christian and that's what it means to live as a Christian. Being a Christian is all about ending the cover-up. Paul says "God did not call us to be impure but to live a holy life", "flee from sexual immorality", "you are not your own: you were bought at a price, therefore honour God with your body". We don't just come to the cross for forgiveness, you come to the cross for a changed life as well. We're not people who cover-up sin anymore. We're glad it's out in the open because Jesus has paid for it. Now we've got to keep it out in the open, for God to work on it.

If you're trying to fight a sin like this on your own, you're foolish. There's plenty of applications we can make in this area: the need to focus deeply on all we have in Christ; to look ahead to the great place we're going so we're less enticed by the temptations of this world; the need to fill our minds with God's Word, to think pure thoughts, because the world is sure filling our heads with rubbish; to look at how Jesus fought temptation with God's Word. God also gives us each other to fight sin. Dirty Harry says "A man's got to know his limitations" and so do we. We can't fight this sin alone. The Bible couldn't be clearer, fighting sin is a team game (Heb 10:24-25, Js 5:16). If there's something I pray about for this church, particularly I've got to say for the men in this church, it's this area of sin. You've seen it in friends. Marriages destroyed. Children abandoned. But how did it start? With a drift from fellowship with God's people. It started with spending less time in God's Word. And so the world's messages won – his own lusts won. And so here's my question: if that's you, if you're not taking God's word and Christian fellowship seriously, if Christian fellowship is just a bonus for you, what makes you think temptation won't destroy you? If you're not committed to hearing God's Word, not meeting with others to study God's Word through the week, if you don't have someone you can confess your sin too, to be honest with, pray with, be accountable to each other ... well, are you stronger than King David? You need another Christian you can talk to. Ask these questions of each other: what did you look at on the internet this week? what videos did you rent? what TV shows did you watch? when did you look at someone the way you shouldn't? Not easy is it? Rather cover up? Well: no we wouldn't! When we asked Jesus for forgiveness, we said,

‘my sins out in the open – no more hiding, please forgive it – please kill it off’. If we’re going to do that, we need each other.

Talk 5—Dying to Gluttony, Rising to Self-Control (Ecc 3, Amos 6, Phil 3)

5.1 Am I a glutton?

Many of you will have heard of the called ‘Dieting Under Stress’ diet. It goes something like this:

Breakfast: half a grapefruit, 1 slice dry whole wheat toast, 8 oz skim milk

Lunch: 4 oz lean boiled chicken, 1 cup steamed spinach, 1 cup herb tea, 1 Tim Tam

Snack: rest of Tim Tams in packet, 2 litres Rocky Road ice cream, 1 jar hot fudge sauce, nuts, cherries, whipped cream

Dinner: 2 loaves garlic bread with cheese, large pizza, jug of coke, 3 Mars Bars

With the late evening news: an entire frozen cheesecake eaten directly from the freezer

I suppose most of us can relate to gluttony in some way. Hunger cravings, desires, longings, appetite—wanting to feed your face. Maybe not quite to the excess of that little diet but in some way or another, we all know what it means to crave something. But are you a glutton? Do you have a problem with gluttony? My guess is most of you would think not. Sure, I like the odd chocolate fix but I’m not a glutton. Or even if you’re not really sure what a glutton is, you might still be reasonably confident it’s not you. In fact, I’d go so far as to say that you were probably surprised to see it even on the list. ‘Gluttony a deadly sin? In the top seven??’ I’ll go a step further and say, that when I asked, ‘which of these seven sins do you think you struggle with most?’ almost no-one put gluttony.

Gluttony. It’s a word that conjures up certain images isn’t it? We have a pretty stereotyped idea of what a glutton looks like, of how to spot the person with a problem with gluttony. So, you know you’re a glutton when: you go to the zoo and you realise that kids are throwing you peanuts; you go to the beach and six people ask you to move because you’re blocking the sun and a kid asks to borrow the life preserver round your waist but you’re not wearing one; or you fall asleep on the beach and wake up to realise people are splashing water on you, dragging you to the water’s edge. Then there’s when an invitation to an exercise class says “wear loose clothing” and you think to yourself: “well if I had any loose clothing...”.

5.2 The Problem

Is that all gluttony is? Eating too much? Being overweight? If it is – well most of you could breathe easy. If gluttony’s something you can just measure with the scales, then many could say, ‘gluttony’s not a problem for me’. But we’re going to see that, even if you don’t have a problem with eating, you may still have a problem with gluttony. In fact, the Bible says every person here today is a glutton. When you see what the Bible says this sin of gluttony’s all about, you might realise that you need to move it up your list of seven even to the top, alongside the other four we’ve looked at so far!

You see, you can look at gluttony just in the narrow sense – and then it’d just be about feeding your face. And the Bible sure has plenty of warnings about that (Prov 23:20). That’s the narrower sense of what gluttony is: the craving of an empty stomach. But the Bible’s also got a whole lot to say

about a broader sense of what gluttony is. Broader than just consuming too much food and drink. And one place you see this in detail is the Book of Ecclesiastes.

Ecclesiastes is all about the bigger definition of gluttony: not just empty stomachs – but empty souls. Ecclesiastes 3:10 talks about God setting eternity in our hearts, that God has made us with a sense of longing, a yearning for fulfilment, a hunger for satisfaction, a kind of a spiritual vacuum: empty souls. The theologian Augustine called it a ‘God shaped hole’. And the point of course is, God’s the one who put it there, so only God can fill it. It’s the gospel: God made us, made us for relationship with him, so we have an in-built wiring to need God, we’ll never be satisfied outside of him. But the problem is that we rebelled against God. We’ve rejected God’s rightful place in our lives. Since Adam and Eve, we’ve taken our God-shaped whole and tried to fill it with all the wrong things. Instead of craving relationship with God, we’ve craved independence from him – and tried to satisfy our spiritual hunger with our own desires. Instead of being hungry for God’s Word and God’s ways, we’ve become hungry for just about anything else. We’ve become, you see, gluttons. Hungry people, but hungry for all the wrong things. Trying to fill the place that only God should occupy, but filling our souls instead – with rubbish.

Here’s the real problem of gluttony. It’s not just that we crave junk food for the stomach. It’s that we crave junk food for the soul. Solomon describes how he filled his soul with junk food (Eccl 2:10). I went for it, I let my hunger go wild, I stuffed myself but I was chasing the wrong stuff, chasing thin air. I was trying to fill my empty soul with junk food. It’s a story repeated through the centuries. Stories like Boris Becker, who, when he was at the very top of the tennis world was also on the brink of suicide. He said, ‘I’d won Wimbledon twice before, once as the youngest player, I was rich, I had all the material possessions I needed. But it’s the old song of movie and pop stars who commit suicide: they have everything, and yet they are so unhappy. I had no inner peace I was a puppet on a string’. That’s the real problem of gluttony. Not just empty stomachs, but empty souls. Taking the craving that should be for God and his Word, and replacing it with cravings for other things: for physical things, worldly things, fleshly things.

So, what are you really hungry for? Your craving might be food or drink, or your craving might be for other things. Your craving might be for clothing, cars, sex, jewellery, holidays, your Sony Playstation, work, sport, popularity, a relationship, or the approval of others. What is it you’re hungry for? What are you craving? Fact is, if it’s not first and foremost the God who made you, and to feed on his Word more than anything else, then you’re a glutton. Gluttony’s not just measured with scales. It can be measured in all sorts of other ways—with your credit card, what you love to spend money on most; the clock, what you love to spend your time doing most and, above all, with your heart, what you’re ‘really longing for. And when you apply those measures, what you find is sin. Our selfishness, our self-centredness, our stubbornness. Rather than returning completely to God to be filled by him and ruled by him we continue in many ways to rebel against him. This is what the Bible calls the sinful heart.

Amos 6 shows a classic case of gluttony which comes at a critical stage of the Old Testament story. Here Israel’s sin has grown so great that God has decided to send them into exile. Just like he removed Adam and Eve from the garden, he’s going to remove Israel from the promised land. And for what sin? Amos 6:4 gives the answer ...

You lie on beds inlaid with ivory, and lounge on your couches. You dine on choice lambs, and fattened calves. You strum away on your harps like David, and improvise on musical instruments.

You drink wine by the bowlful, and use the finest lotions, but you do not grieve over the ruin of Joseph. Therefore you will be among the first to go into exile; your feasting and lounging will end.

Here's the sin that causes God to drive them into exile: their feasting and lounging, their comfort and complacency, their preoccupation with fleshly desires. But it's not just what they are chasing (their furnishings, the food and wine, the music the lotions), it's what they're not chasing – "but you do not grieve over the ruin of Joseph" (v 6). "You care for your comfort but not my plans or purposes. You're letting all those things take my place," says God. Your driving passion isn't to see God honoured, but to serve yourself and feed your desires. You're not hungry for God's Word and it's priorities, you don't crave God being centre stage in your life. It's not just what you are hungry for, but what you're not. And so God sends them into exile because he hates their hypocrisy.

Hypocrisy is what lies beneath gluttony. You claim to be filling your life with God when you're really filling it with other things. They claimed to worship God but they really worshipped themselves. They were very religious people, and they conducted their ceremonies, presented their offerings but God says they are fakes because they "honour me with their lips but their hearts are far from me". Are we claiming to be God's people but not living like it? Hypocrites? Are we focussed on his honour, or our comfort? I was sent a story recently, on just this question, a story that exposes our hypocrisy. The story imagines Satan addressing his demons, announcing his plan for producing hypocritical Christians. 'We can't stop them claiming to be Christians, we can't stop them thinking they're living as Christians, but we can stop them really living as Christians should. Here's how. We keep them busy in the nonessentials of life. Invent all sorts of schemes to occupy their minds. Get them busy in trivia. Tempt them to spend, spend, spend and borrow, borrow, borrow. Get them working six or seven days a week, twelve hours a day, so they can afford their empty lifestyles. Over-stimulate their minds so they don't read the Bible: TV, VCR, CD, DVD, and PC – play them constantly. Jam their minds with junk so they don't think of God. Pound their minds with worldly input 24 hours a day. Invade their driving moments with billboards. Flood their letterboxes with junk mail and sweepstakes and promotions offering free products and false hopes. Give them Santa Claus to destroy the real meaning of Christmas, Easter bunny so they won't talk about Jesus' resurrection. Even in their recreation, let them be excessive. Have them return from their "leisure" exhausted. Send them to amusement parks, sporting events, concerts, movies. Keep them consuming. Keep them busy, busy, busy. And when they meet together, at church, and through the week, just busy them more – but with small talk and gossip, so they're still just consuming each other. Crowd their lives, even with things not bad in themselves, but so those things become their passion, so they just drift away from a focus on God. This plan will work!'. Has it worked in your life?

5.3 The Solution

What's the key for us to turn from hypocrisy? What's the key to get us living according to God's plan not Satan's plan, to die to our gluttony and rise to self-control, to die to fleshly desires and live to spiritual, godly priorities? Philippians 3:18 provides the key ...

many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

The cross of Christ is the key. It changes everything—your priorities, what you’re hungry for—because in the cross of Christ we see God’s judgement on our gluttony. Jesus died for our sins— our gluttony, our wrong priorities and our fleshly desires, how we’ve filled our God shaped hole with earthly shaped things— to bring us back to God, to things that matter, to bring us to new lives with God back at the centre, to lives filled with God and his priorities. When we came to the cross, trusting in Jesus for forgiveness, let’s be clear what we were asking forgiveness for then we’ll be clear what God wants us to turn away from. We said, “Please crucify the things I’ve filled my soul with so that I might be filled with you and your priorities. Make me different to the way I once lived. Make me different to the world around me.” Paul says that to not live that way is to live like enemies of the cross of Christ. If your mind is on earthly things you’re not following Christ.

Is gluttony a problem for you? Taking comfort in the wrong things. Too tired to read the Bible with the kids at bedtime. Too distracted to pray with my wife. I feel hungry, empty. It’s not really for food but I make the nachos. It’s not really for entertainment but I flick on the telly. And what’s the problem? It’s not just that I’m filling my stomach and mind with junk. It’s a spiritual health problem filling my soul with junk. In my soul, as I take my spiritual problem to the fridge, as I worship at the shrine of the TV, I’m living as an enemy of the cross. Not because those things are wrong in themselves but because I’m taking my problems to them instead of to God. And why is that living as an enemy of the cross of Christ? Because I’ve forgotten that Christ died for my worldliness. Here I am, this world’s causing my problems yet I’m turning to the things of this world for the solution. I’ve forgotten the hope that Christ has won for me. The real solution to the worries of today is what God’s got in store for me tomorrow – in heaven. That when I feel dissatisfied with this life, I should respond by longing for heaven all the more and pursue heavenly priorities all the more not withdrawing from God and turning elsewhere.

5.4 Rising to Self-Control

It was a great irony at New Years Eve wasn’t it? The word eternity written in fireworks – so fleeting. God has set eternity in our hearts, but we turn to something that goes up in smoke in a few minutes. Turn to the one who has died and risen to give us eternal life – the real answer to our empty souls. This is rising to self-control. Better having my self controlled by Christ (v 20) because he’s got the power to bring everything under his control. I need to listen to Jesus when he says “do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you” (Jn 6). I need to listen to Jesus who died for me when he says, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, And he who believes in me will never be thirsty”. I need to die to my gluttony and rise to self-control, filling my soul with my wonderful Saviour and Lord. What about you?

h3. Talk 6—Dying to Laziness, Rising to Zeal (2 Thess 3, 1 Cor 15)

6.1 Friday On My Mind

‘Monday morning feels so bad, everybody seems to nag me. Coming Tuesday I feel better, even my old man looks good. Wednesday just don’t go, Thursday goes too slow, I’ve got Friday on my mind. Going to have fun in the city, and be with my girl she’s so pretty. She looks fine, she is out of sight, to me. Tonight I spend my bread. Tonight I lose my head. Tonight I’ve got to get tonight. Monday I have Friday on my mind’.

That is the #1 Australian song of all time! “Friday on my Mind” by the Easybeats was voted Australia’s top all-time song. Yep, it fended off “Pub With No Beer” and “Shudupaya Face” as having the most special place in Aussie hearts, capturing something about who we are and how we think. Monday: I’ve got Friday on my mind. From the day I start working: I’m thinking about the day I stop working.

The Bible warns of the deadliness of laziness (Prov 21:25, 1 Tim 5:13). As one bloke put it: “the lazy brain is the devil’s workshop”. Our lazy days are Satan’s busy days. He loves a sitting target – a sitting duck. Laziness is a deadly sin.

When it comes to laziness Australians are possibly the world leader. We’re known as the land of the long weekend, of strikes, sickies and false compo claims. Where even “early retirement” has become an idol because anything is better than working, even nothing. Our National Anthem celebrates this attitude. It just seems to say, “Boy we’ve got a really nice place here”. It’s much less certain what this nice place is for. When they did a survey in the UK, why the Australian show Home and Away was so popular, it wasn’t cause of the acting or the plot. The reason millions of British people are glued to Home and Away is because the sun’s always shining, the beach is always inviting, and no-one ever seems to be working.

6.2 Laziness—A Blind Spot

Do you struggle with laziness? I suppose if you are lazy you don’t struggle with it do you?! Because the whole point of laziness is that it’s what you’re not doing. It’s what’s called a sin of omission. It’s what you’re not doing rather than what you are doing. So, if gluttony is chasing all the wrong things in life, laziness is more about failing to chase the right things. Where pride, anger, envy, lust, impurity and gluttony are seen in what you do laziness is seen in what you don’t do.

This is why laziness is such an easy sin to fall into. All you have to do to do it, is ... do nothing. It’s always harder to be aware of something you’re not doing, than the things you are doing. When we come to confess our sins, we’re more likely to confess the bad things we’ve done than all the good things we’ve left undone. Laziness is like falling asleep at the wheel. You don’t even know you’ve done it but it’s just as deadly. It’s not what you did: speeding, overtaking, whatever. It’s what you didn’t do – you didn’t stay awake. And if there’s one thing Jesus kept telling his disciples, and the Bible keeps telling us: it’s stay awake, be alert.

6.3 Busy Bodies not Busybodies

2 Thessalonians 3 shows a bunch of Christians who are in huge danger of falling asleep at the wheel. Paul’s been reminding the Thessalonians about the great hope they have as Christians, about the need to live with their focus on heaven ahead, looking forward to a time when everything will be put right. But here’s the problem: focussing on heaven ahead doesn’t mean you just sit around waiting for it. It means you get busy with heavenly priorities. It means you realise all the things God wants you doing as you wait. It seems some of the Thessalonian Christians have decided that they can just sit back, and take it easy (v 11). There’s a little song they do on Play School: ‘It’s nice to get up in the morning, it’s nice to get up in the morning, it’s nice to get up in the morning, but it’s nicer to stay in bed’. That’s the theme song for some of the Thessalonians. As Christians we’re called to share with each other and serve one another, and to care for one another when we’re in need. We saw this in dying to envy and rising to kindness—we should be always be wanting the best for each other and that’s going to mean showing love in practical ways. But there are always some people who say, “Terrific, I can just sit back and take it easy, I don’t have to work, I’ll just

drop round on my mates from church every dinner time”. NB: Paul’s not talking here about people who can’t get work, he’s talking about people who won’t work. And Paul commands the Thessalonians to keep away from those people (v 6).

Paul set an example of hard work: and they ought to follow it. He says “if a man will not work, he shall not eat” (v 10). And he tells them to stop being idle (v 11). They’re not busy, they’re busybodies, using their time to poke into other people’s business. Lazy people become real vultures, not just feeding on their brothers food but feeding on their brothers lives – through deadly gossip. In the end, it’s a reflection of Paul’s gospel priorities, because being a Christian isn’t about taking, it’s always about giving – like Jesus gave to us. Being a Christian isn’t about being served, it’s about serving, because of what Jesus did for us. Which is why Paul goes on to say that we should ‘never tire of doing what is right’ (v 13). He’s saying: get busy with what is right. I’m sure most of us would think we’re busy people. That we’re earning our keep, that we’re not the bludgers Paul’s talking about here. The call here isn’t just to be busy, is it? It’s to be busy doing what is right. You might be the busiest person in the world but be an absolute bludger in God’s Kingdom.

Jesus told a parable about someone like that. A master gives his servant a large sum of money to look after but the servant does nothing with it – he buries it in the ground. And so, he’s rebuked: ‘you wicked lazy servant’. And Jesus’ question is: what sort of servant are you? Faithful? What are you doing with what God’s given you? God’s Word is calling us to be busy people with a purpose. Doing what’s right. This issue is just as relevant today as 2000 years back when the ink was still wet on this letter. Sadly, there are still freeloading Christians today. Maybe you’re one of them. There are always things to be done for God’s kingdom but maybe you take advantage of the generosity of others – who bring morning tea/supper and you never do, and who mow the lawns and you never do, who set up the church every week but you never do, who make meals for others but you never do, who are busy out there telling the gospel and inviting friends to church but you never do.

Maybe you’re not doing what you could be doing for God and you need to repent of that. Laziness is all about the distance between what you are doing and what you should be doing, between who you are and who God’s calling you to be. For Paul the Christian life is a serious business. There’s definitely no room for busybodies. There’s only room for bodies that are busy. Are you busy with the things that count?

6.4 Godliness: Not Half-Baked

It seems to me that we often have a very negative view of what it means to be godly. As if godliness just means not doing certain things. We’re aware of the wrong things we shouldn’t do, much more than the right things we should do. It’s a half-baked view of godliness. God’s people should delight in doing right. We might be tempted to think we’re being godly because we’re not doing this or not doing that, “I don’t drink too much, I’m faithful to my wife, I don’t lie or steal – I must be godly!”. But what about all the godly things you’re not doing? If you’ve just got a negative view of godliness, you’ll actually end up in all sorts of sin. If you’re just hanging around not doing this and not doing that, thinking Christianity is just hanging around until Jesus comes back, you end up idle – you end up a gossip. I was just reading in a book during the week how dangerous this half-baked view of godliness can be. The author reckons the most destructive Christians are those with just this negative view of godliness. They’re so focussed on all the things you don’t do, they end up idle – too much time on their hands. They become busybodies – or whingeing on the sidelines, busy pointing out what everyone else is doing wrong, instead of getting busy doing what’s right. They

don't lie or steal or swear or murder, but they don't encourage either, or get involved, or share the gospel much, or share in the Word much.

That's why this series is all about dying and rising with Christ. Not just dying to sin but rising to godliness. Dying to sin is essential—we've got to identify the sinful parts of our lives and cut them out—but if that's all we think God wants from us, we've got a half-baked view of godliness. Real godliness is turning from sin to God, turning from old priorities to new priorities, turning from sinful ways to godly ways. Not just dying but dying and rising with Christ. Just like the death of Jesus shows us all the things Jesus died for, all the sins we're to turn from, the resurrection of Jesus reminds us of all the things we should be turning to.

Paul spells it out plainly in 1 Corinthians 15:

Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain.

Give yourself fully to the work of the Lord. That's why Paul said earlier in this letter to the Corinthians, "Woe to me if I don't preach the gospel!" He's not just sitting around waiting for heaven, he's trying to drag a few others in as well. He's not just got a negative view of godliness, he's thinking of all the new things he should be doing. Is that you and me? Driven out in service of our Lord Jesus – turning from laziness to zeal, to enthusiasm, to a single-minded devotion and passion to honour Jesus? It's easy for us to go AWOL in the harvest field out there – to forget that salvation is a helmet not a night cap. God wants your service to him the way you like your tea: hot, fired with passion for your risen Lord.

6.5 Dying to Laziness, Rising to Zeal

We're told in the gospels that when Jesus was crucified, lots of people sat down to watch. They made a picnic at the murder of the Lord of all. I guarantee that anyone who was at that picnic that day, if they met the risen Jesus three days later the picnic would be over. Like Thomas when he realised Jesus had risen, not sitting down but falling down, "My Lord and My God!". The picnic was over! But is it for you and me?

One of the worlds most famous pieces of art would have to be the "Last Supper" by Leonardo De Vinci. Most people have at least seen photos of it or tacky reproductions of it on posters or stain glass windows. It was painted as a fresco on the wall of a monastery's dining room. Unfortunately, Leonardo hasn't been too well served by history. The wall began to crumble as soon as he'd finished painting it, because the monks had only built it with loose dirt. And some early friars even cut a door through the wall right where Christ's feet were, and then they converted the room to use as a stable. Can you imagine that? One the greatest pictures in history and its left to a bunch of donkeys to stare at. To add insult to injury, when they finally decided to restore the painting up a little, some of the restoration was so sloppy it was laughable. One artist in particular was so casual about the task he actually gave James six fingers on one hand! The whole art world now mourns that such a treasure could be so neglected, so overlooked, so undervalued and treated so poorly. If it's a tragedy to treat a picture of Jesus like that, how much worse is it to treat the person of Jesus like that? Laziness, sloppiness with our Lord, is sin. So, let us die to sin and rise to new lives lived for him. Let us die to laziness and rise to zeal and passion for our Lord.

h3. Talk 7—Dying to Greed, Rising to Generosity (Luke 9:25, 12:13-31, 16:13-15, 18:18-30)

7.1 Reading the Price-tags

You're in Pacific Fair, shopping at its greatest level, you walk through the stores browsing at stuff. Finally something really catches your eye. You're excited about it, you hold it, you want it. Only one final hurdle remains—the price. So you reach down for that postage stamp size tag dangling from the treasure in your hands. This is it, the price tag moment. Numbers come into focus—is it that much? 50% more than you guessed, 100% more than you can afford, and 200% more than you need to spend on this kind of thing. But still you stand there making your decision: to buy or not to buy. And you ask the question: “Is it worth it?” We face price tag moments all the time in everyday life, we're constantly doing cost-benefit analysis, always asking the question: “is it worth it?”. Because we live in a consumer world and we're being constantly bombarded: buy this, buy that. And we weigh up the values, and we make our choices. One price tag moment after another.

7.2 Warnings from Jesus

Into this consumer world Jesus asks his own price tag question: “What good is it for a man to gain the whole world yet forfeit his soul?” (Lk 9:25) A recent survey asked people what they'd do for \$10 million dollars—25% said that they'd abandon their families, 23% said they'd be a prostitute for one week, 16% said they'd leave their spouse, 3% said they'd put their kids up for adoption. They eyed up the money, they had their price tag moment, they did their maths, and said “Yep, that would be worth it”. But into their greedy world comes the voice of Jesus, challenging their upside down priorities, calling them to take a closer look at the price tags and work out what's really valuable. Jesus says to them, “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions” (Lk 12:15).

Greed affects us all in one way or another. Greed is a huge blind spot for people like you and I because it's the most socially accepted sin in our culture. A movie a few years back featured the famous line “Greed is good”. And that's the motto of our society. Australian entrepreneur Rene Rivkin put it this way: “he who dies with the most toys wins”. And that's exactly how most people are living their lives. Here comes the voice of Jesus again, to the man who's building his bigger barns, to the person who reckons life's about gathering toys, “You fool, this very night your soul will be required of you” (Lk 12:20). You've read the price tags all wrong. He who dies with the most toys, still dies and, as you stand before God's throne of judgement, he puts a zero value on the material things you've chased. You should've looked closer at the price tags. And worked out what's really valuable.

Greed affects everyone, definitely not just the rich. Just have a close look at the lottery line down at the newsagent. People convinced that more money would solve every problem and meet every longing in their life. Greed motivates us all—to earn more than we need, to own more than we can use yet still ache for more. Because of greed: we muck up the price tag moments. Not just the little decisions but the biggest one of all. Because we exchange the Creator for created things and we swap eternity for things that don't last. And Jesus' warnings against greed couldn't be stronger. “What profit is it?” he asks. “Watch out” he calls. “You fool” he rebukes. And then he says this: “no-one can serve both God and money”. Money is the biggest rival god there is: God or money – you can't sit on the fence (Lk 16:13) You can't serve both God and money: we hear it from Jesus, and now we meet it in person.

7.3 Getting the Price-tags Wrong

It's the man we meet in Luke 18:18. This bloke comes to Jesus with a question: "What must I do to inherit eternal life?". This guy's a first century yuppie—drives a Porsche, carries a mobile, wears Italian suits. And what does the guy with everything want? He's got the fortune, he's got the status, but eternal life – that would definitely top things off. Does he really know what he's asking? And that Jesus is going to ask him some questions of his own? You've got to notice as you read through this story, the way Jesus eggs this guy on, lays landmines, sets traps. Jesus challenges where his focus is (v 17). Why are you asking me? Hasn't God already spoken? Hasn't he already told you what he wants you to do? You want eternal life – well, where do you stand with God? Is the God who made you your God? Is he first in your heart?

Now remember, Jesus is stringing this guy along, testing him so he reels off a list from the ten commandments. The guy breathes a sigh of relief. "You beauty", he says, "I've never killed anyone, I've never committed adultery, can't remember stealing anything, haven't told a lie since I was a kid, I'm in!!" (v 21) But Jesus hasn't finished with him, because he knows the real answer hasn't come out yet – is God really first in this bloke's heart? So now Jesus shows the answer to that question by putting his finger on the real issue for this guy – exposing the thing that's really first in his heart (v 22). The test of whether someone can have two masters – a walking, breathing, living test of what Jesus taught. Jesus said it point blank: a choice in front of each of us. It's interesting, the first of the 10 commandments, the key to the rest—"you shall have no other gods before me" – hasn't been mentioned yet. But it's been on the agenda from the moment Jesus first spoke.

I don't know what it is about money: but it's powerful, makes you do all sorts of things and Jesus puts his finger on it as the single most dominating thing that takes you away from God. I know plenty of people who want to test out what he says for themselves. "Sure, Jesus says 'you can't serve both God and money', but I'll just give it a try for a while to make sure, just in case he's made a mistake: or didn't really mean it". And at that point they're a bit like the guy in the Land Rover ads they ran on TV a while back: he gets in for a test drive and he's off. "He'll be back when he gets to the gate" – and he keeps going. "He'll be back when he gets to the bitumen" – and he keeps going. And you can stand there and say "he'll be back soon" all you like. "He'll be back when the new job settles down, back as soon as he's got the business problems sorted out, he'll be back when the renovations are finished, he'll come back to God when he's got a bit more spare time. He's busy at work just now but it won't stay like this. The over-time's there and you've got to take it, haven't you? He'll be back soon". Serving the money god is addictive and before you know it he's gone for good.

Jesus says you can't serve two masters and now he's face to face with a guy who thinks he can. He's never stolen but he doesn't want to give either. He says he's serving God but he's also serving money. And, Jesus says, when push comes to shove both won't last. So what'll it be? Who does he really serve? God or money? Jesus puts it to him in black and white terms, you still lack one thing "sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me". It's the ultimate test, isn't it? Where's his loyalty? Is he going to store up his treasures on earth, or is he going to go for the treasures in heaven? You don't have to wait long to find out. "when the young man heard this he went away sad because he had great wealth" (v 22). He's reading the price tags all wrong isn't he? He's so blinded by what he's got that he can't see what he's turning down.

Clinging to his toys he misses out on eternal life. It's how they catch monkeys—just put shiny foil in a jar, the monkey puts in his hand and grabs the foil but now he can't pull his fist out of the jar opening. He'll sit there clutching the foil and won't let go. The hunter can just walk on up and grab him because nothing will make him let go, not even the cost of his life. Same with this bloke here—he's blind to the real price tags. When it comes to the choice between Jesus or the money, he'll take the money every time. When it comes to the choice between riches in heaven and riches on earth, he'll take the now every time. Talk about failing the price tag moment and valuing temporary things way too much and eternal life way too little. No wonder Jesus says such strong things about money. It blinds you to the real value of things. Like a problem gambler – you just don't see the consequences. No wonder Jesus says that rich people have got buckleys of turning to God (v 24). So, who then can be saved? Well, what's really needed is a miracle, what's needed is for God to step in and make it possible (v 27).

7.4 What makes the difference?

And what does that bring you to? The cross of course! What's the miracle that can change a sinful greedy heart? Jesus death! So, what does Jesus talk about next? He tells his disciples about his death (v 31). What is impossible with men is possible with God. And here's God's answer to our sinful hearts, here's the miracle that can thread the needle with a camel, here's God stepping in to do what we could never do. Because none of us have kept the commandments, none of us have really served God first in our hearts. What's the miracle that can change the money-minded-man to read the price tags the right way, to see that the god of money is luring him to death and that death is exactly what his idolatry deserves? The death of Jesus, that's where you see what your greed deserves. That's where you see what God thinks of your idolatry. That's where you see what you deserve—death—and the offer of what you don't deserve—forgiveness.

The chance to let go of the all the things that don't matter to receive the one thing that does matter. The death of Jesus is where you really see the price tags. The price he paid for your greed, for all your sins—death—and the price you have to pay to receive forgiveness—nothing. The death of Jesus is the ultimate price tag moment and, if you read the price tag moment properly, if you read the cross of Jesus properly, you'll grab it with both hands. You'll let go of all the things you thought were precious and consider them nothing compared with eternal life. You'll let go of them with hands as open as the hands nailed to the cross because you worshipped them. You won't be sad about giving up the money god like this rich yuppie was because, when you read the price tags right, and you see what Jesus is offering you, sadness will be replaced with gladness. But could that really happen? Where someone could be glad to give up their money, see what Jesus is offering and grab it with both hands, so they drop all the things their hands were filled with? Can God really work that miracle? Can someone really turn from greed to generosity? Can the camel really go through the eye of the needle?

7.5 Getting the Price-Tags Right

Can someone really turn from greed to generosity? Almost straight after Jesus' encounter with the rich, young yuppie he's passing through Jericho and meets a guy called Zacchaeus (Lk 19:1-10). We're told that Zacchaeus is wealthy just like the rich ruler. But we're also told something else, something that makes him a bit different to the other rich bloke ... Zacchaeus is a chief tax collector. Definitely no need to even bother asking Zacchaeus if he's kept the commandments. He's a tax collector and that means one thing—he's a sinner. And doesn't everyone know it (v 7) because everyone's muttering, "Jesus has gone to be the guest of a sinner". But in the end what makes

Zacchaeus really different to the rich young ruler, as far as Jesus is concerned, is not that he is a sinner but that he knows he's a sinner. Zacchaeus knows, as well as anyone, that he's a sinner. Zacchaeus knows more than anyone that he needs forgiveness. He sees it the way the other rich bloke couldn't. Jesus doesn't need to put the challenge out to him because Zacchaeus really sees his need for Jesus. Here's the rich man who doesn't walk away from Jesus in sadness but welcomes him into his house with gladness. Here's the one who sees his need for Jesus as so massive that nothing else matters. Here's the one who reads the price tags the right way.

He can run a spiritual audit because when you see your need for salvation and you see that Jesus is offering it freely to you, then you see that you're lost, but Jesus has come to seek and save you. Anything else is just junk, dirt, chicken feed, nothing. He's not going to cling to what he's got – it's nothing. He's not going to cling to who he is – he's lost. Because he knows he's a sinner he knows he needs Jesus. He sees what Jesus is offering and grabs it with both hands, and he drops all the things his hands were filled with, he gladly gives up his money, he gladly gives away half he has to the poor, no doubt it'd probably be the whole lot except he's got to repay all the people he's cheated as well.

So did you see it? Did you see what just happened? The camel just went through the eye of the needle. Salvation says Jesus has come to this household (v 10). The money miracle just happened. Someone just turned from worshipping money to worshipping God, from worshipping false gods to worshipping the true God. A rich man just turned from death to life. The greedy man just became a generous man. You see, money as master just became money as servant. What happens when you accept Jesus as Lord and Saviour, when you realise the extreme, massive value of forgiveness, when you have your own price tag moment at the foot of the cross? You turn from death to life, from greed to generosity, from money as your master to money as your servant. It's the forgiveness miracle—wanting to be like Jesus, and wanting to thank him for paying the price for your sin.

7.6 Dying to Greed, Rising to Generosity

If you claim Jesus as your Lord then he's your only master and the only place for money in your life is as a servant. It's a useful servant: Zacchaeus doesn't just throw it out the window he uses it for those without – he uses it to put wrongs right. It's a useful servant for the Lord's work but it's only a servant. The Bible says there's a huge difference between using your money and serving your money. Between using money and money using you. It's a trap all of us can fall for, but Jesus says you can't serve two masters. It's a deadly trap. So often you can see it happening, people so blinded by materialism, they lose the plot. All they can think is the next scheme to make a buck. And when push comes to shove, just like the rich ruler, they're ruled by riches, whether they've got them yet or not. Their decisions, their priorities, their time: it's actually under the control of something other than God. Money talks: and it's the one telling them what to do.

How often do we see Christians who are prepared to take Jesus seriously, and turn from greed to generosity? Treat Jesus so seriously they'll let go of the purse strings, and start using what they've got for the Kingdom of God, instead of themselves? How often do you? How often do I? 'Of course I'm giving enough' – or am I? Do I just do what's comfortable and easy and not too threatening and not really sacrificial. Look at the price tags, what did Jesus give you. Look at his sacrifice for you, what exactly would you hold back from him? Look at the price tags, people without Jesus are going to hell – how much are you giving to send workers into the harvest?

This isn't about rules. This is about your heart. 10% was the guideline for giving in the Old Testament but the New Testament calls us to go way beyond the law. Look at the cross, did Jesus give us just 10%? So if we're dying and rising with Christ, if we're becoming like Jesus, how generous are we prepared to be?

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