

WD May 22, 2023

“Sorry”

This year’s VBS theme is Highs and Lows with the theme of “Roll with Jesus through the Highs and Lows.” We’re trying to give the program a board game feel in order to teach kids that sometimes things don’t go like we want them to. This is especially true when one plays many board games. A friend of mine in Jr. High would come over often just to play monopoly. We would play pretty cut throat; no grace. By the time one of us had most of the property and hotels usually the other would concede defeat just to start another game and do it all over again.

One of the games many of us may know well is the game of “Sorry.” It was released in 1928. The goal is to get each of your four pieces out of “Start” and around the board to “Home” faster than any other player. To achieve this, you follow instructions on cards which you draw at the beginning of each of your turns. The instructions on the cards range from your first move on the board (‘1: start or forward’ or ‘2: start or forward and draw again’) to how many moves your piece can go (backwards or forwards). But the card that everyone looks for from which the game gets its name is the ‘Sorry!’ card, which allows you to send a rival’s piece back to the beginning to start all over. When this happens, a player is supposed to say “sorry!” But of course, this is not really true. It is more like, “sorry about your luck, loser.”

When it comes to real life sorry is not a game at all. Just ask Peter who denied Jesus three times. When Jesus asked Peter if He loved Him in John 21:15, note how Jesus asks the first time. “Peter, do you love me more than these?” Peter once braggadocious about being more faithful than the rest now humbly responds simply “Lord you know that I love you.” As he answered Peter left off “more than these.” We can see how Peter was truly sorry when He wept bitterly when the rooster crowed and Jesus looked at him from across the courtyard of the High Priest in those early hours. By this point we can also see Peter’s humility as he answers Jesus. And notice Jesus never asked Peter if He was sorry. He asked Peter, “Do you love me?” Peter also did not say he was sorry. He simply responded in a fashion that showed he understood the real picture of himself. We can see that He was sorry. And that is the point for this today. Sorry is something that we see not just something we say. It is not like the game of Sorry where one says it but actually does something completely the opposite of sorry.

Consider the Ninevites in the book of Jonah. Chapter three reveals something remarkable. Nineveh was the capital of Assyria, a nation known for its brutality and cruelty. In the eyes of Jonah and perhaps many others Assyrians were the worst kind of people. Jonah did not want them to have God’s grace and initially rebelled and tried to sail in the opposite direction. He was famously swallowed up by the giant fish and for three days He was in the belly of that creature. While inside the fish Jonah realizes his condition; his life was ebbing away within. And so, he is apologizing and praising God. “What I have vowed I will make good. I will say, ‘Salvation comes from the Lord.’” How do we know that he meant it, meant that he was sorry? Jonah keeps his vow and goes to the city of Nineveh and preaches a message of repentance to people he did not like.

Curiously, these worst kind of Gentile people who were known for worshipping idols at their temples in the very city Jonah was preaching in...well, they repented. They never said that they were sorry. They simply took steps to demonstrate it. Starting when the common folks and working all the way up to the king, everyone was instructed to put on sackcloth and fast. And so, the king himself took off his royal robes and put on a burlap suit and sat in the dust far from his throne. And amazingly the Lord forgave the city and did not destroy it. Once again “sorry” was never said. “Sorry” was demonstrated by their actions. They willingly interrupted their daily routines to fast before the Lord.

Back when I was young and I did something to hurt my sister or my cousins I was usually brought before them and told to say, “sorry” to them. You probably know this drill. Reluctantly, and even defiantly, we would fold our arms and say “SORRY!” And then came the second part of how this works which is to say it “nicely.” Which I usually did holding on to a little bit of attitude while I said it.

Truth is...genuine sorrow does not come naturally to sinful people. Sinful people prefer the game of “Sorry” over genuine sorrow. Genuine sorrow does however, have deep meaning and it is always best demonstrated more than said. Genuine heart felt sorrow, called contrition, lays claims to the cross of Jesus.

Peter's sorrow led to become a more humble disciple who was more ready to follow Jesus than before. Jonah's sorrow led him to follow through on his call.

Likewise, when a marriage is struck by a betrayal of trust genuine sorrow must be demonstrated. Once a couple came to me rather randomly while I was serving in my last congregation. Money was tight for them but somehow the young fellow thought it would be okay to buy an expensive bow without letting his wife know. He brought it home and tried hiding it on the porch as if his wife wouldn't find it. It did not take long for her to find it of course. She felt betrayed. This bow was only a symptom of deeper problems that were becoming a pattern that needed to change. She felt that if their marriage was going to make it a greater transparency and trust needed to be practiced. So, we talked about this for a couple of visits. Happily, it worked out. He demonstrated a sorrow by taking the bow back to the store for a refund. They started communicating more about their purchases and when they had the money, he got his bow. Trust was restored and the last time I remember seeing them at the county fair they talked about how well things were going.

Simply saying, "sorry" and then keeping the bow would not have meant anything. However, taking the bow back and showing a willingness to work together demonstrated a sorrow. And this again is the point.

In a world that is consumed with 'justice this' and 'justice that' our Lord calls us to practice repentance and grace. We are called to a life of repentance. We are called to a life of humility that is reflective of Jesus. And when we do, we demonstrate in our sorrow whom we truly love.

Pastor Matt Woods
John 3:30