



The Real Smell of Sin

Caty Berry - March 28, 2010

We are bombarded with choices every day. Paper or plastic? Go to class or sleep in? Name brand or store brand? Finish that project or watch LOST? Do the laundry or ...don't? Our days are comprised of thousands of little choices, some of which seem insignificant to our lives as a whole and some of which could change the course of our lives, as we know it. Some choices we make are difficult, some easy, some we go back and forth on. Some choices we make are good ones, and then there are the bad ones. Those decisions that leave us with a bitter aftertaste. We've all made them, myself included. Some are life-altering, some are not. Some bad choices we make when we have no idea of the outcome, so we just pick a route only to find out later that that was the wrong choice. Then there are those times that we know exactly what will happen if we make this wrong decision but go ahead with it anyway.

You all are in luck, friends, because I happen to be a master of both. I have made more of these bad decisions than I can count...and I'm a math major. One instance that I am pretty sure we can all relate to is procrastination. Leisure time's ugly cousin. The problem I have with procrastination is that 10 times out of 10 I know it's a bad idea. I know I shouldn't do it, but that doesn't stop me. Oh I still have math homework, a project proposal due, and two exams all tomorrow? Well...clearly that means I should watch that movie I've seen 27 times already instead of getting work done, right? Wrong. It's a bad choice...every time I make it. Does that stop me from watching Forrest Gump again and again? No.

The reality is, some of the time we make choices only to gratify ourselves. I know I do. These choices can have pretty negative repercussions in the end, but at least we feel good for a while right? I know I will enjoy myself watching Forrest Gump a whole lot more than I will doing homework...but in the end my grade suffers. If I decide to have Panda Express for lunch today it will certainly taste good, but I probably won't feel that great for the rest of the

day. Or, moving to a more serious note, if someone committed a heinous crime against me and I chose to murder them in return...there would be negative repercussions. I would go to prison, for one. Then there's the fact that I took another man's life; that has to take a toll. I don't have a lot of experience with murder, but I can imagine it having a pretty major effect on you. Whatever the case may be, when we make a choice to gratify ourselves in the present when we know that later we will regret the decision when we deal with the negative repercussions, it's usually a bad choice.

Which brings us to sin. Sin, like pretty much everything else in our lives, is a choice. Just like with any choice we make, we are responsible for the consequences of that sin and, more importantly, the effect it has on our relationship with God. A lot of times we look at sin as a breaking of the "rules." Like there's some list of do's and don'ts that we have to follow, and when we stray from that list, it's a sin. This perspective is distinctly unhelpful when considering the idea of sin. Last week Kris talked about how "the list" does not properly convey the seriousness of sin. We need to think about what it is like to sin. What does it feel like? What does it look like? What does it smell like? What is the rotting stench of sin? We need to consider what it smells like to us and more importantly, what it smells like to God. In order to see the full repercussions, we must truly understand the disparity between how we "smell" our sin and how God smells our sin.

Sin is like a conflict between God and us. As with any conflict, it is important to see both sides so that we can understand why what we do is so damaging. The thing is, this conflict isn't just with some colleague, professor, friend, or what have you. This conflict is with family, the most important family we will ever have, in fact. Because we are family, it is valuable to look at our relationship with God in a family setting.

In fact, when Jesus spoke, he would often put his teachings in terms of family. Consider a few examples of verses where Jesus used this very analogy:

Luke 15:11-12 reads: Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them.

Then in a completely different place there is the parable of the two sons in Matthew. Matthew 21:28 reads: There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, "Son, go and work today in the vineyard."

In Matthew 6, Jesus tells us how to pray: And when you pray do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them,

for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. This, then is how you should pray: Our Father in heaven...

All of these have something in common: family. In each of these parables and verses, Jesus is painting God as our Father. Each different verse may be talking about different points, but each one portrays God as our Father, and that is very important when we look at how God sees our sin. What is imperative to take away from Jesus' message in these verses is that when we sin, we're not just hurting someone who doesn't really make a big difference in our lives. We are wronging a member of our family. Someone who has real influence and significance in our lives.

So let's imagine, for a moment. Close your eyes. You are back home. You awake from a deep, untroubled sleep to the enticing aromas of coffee and bacon. You lazily roll out of bed and stumble down the stairs, drawn there by the intense smells wafting up through the vents. When you round the corner into the kitchen, your family is sitting at the breakfast table waiting for you to arrive. You sit down in your seat to behold in front of you an amazing spread of everything you could want. A pile of steaming, crispy bacon, a huge pitcher of freshly squeezed orange juice, a four-egg omelet with cheddar cheese oozing from the sides, stacks of soft and delicious hot cakes, the smell of syrup is thick in the air. Now you look to your mom who is just pulling a tray of hot, freshly baked cinnamon buns from the oven and sets them down on the table with gooey icing covering each one. Their aroma fills you up and warms your soul. Your mother looks at you with eyes full of love and she gives a little nod to encourage you to go ahead and start digging in. But instead, you immediately walk over to her and spit directly into her face.

That's what sin is like, according to Jesus: spitting in Mom's face.

That's what we do to God. That is what He sees when we sin. He sees the wonderful gift He has made for us, and our subsequent spitting in His face. He sees this amazing, perfect spread that He has carefully laid out for us, and when we sin, it's like we turn around and slap Him despite everything He has done for us. To God, sin smells like our warm, sticky, morning-breath ridden saliva. Gross. But sin doesn't stop there. No, we aren't only hurting our relationship with God when we sin; we are hurting ourselves. We are depriving ourselves of life. Consider this story about a girl and her parents at a picnic.

READING: THE PICNIC

That's what sin is like, according to Jesus: eating rocks. That's what it smells like to God. Like the clay underneath our fingernails after digging in the sand. Like the gravel that coats our yards. I can say that because we live in Arizona where gravel is the new grass. But, that is

what it looks like to God. He sees us killing ourselves. And for what? Rocks? Why? Why would we eat rocks, He wonders, when we have this beautiful meal all laid out for us? All we have to do is sit on the blanket and claim our share. Instead we eat rocks. Instead we crack our teeth and rip open our gums on jagged pebbles. So when we sin, not only are we spitting in God's face; we are killing ourselves in the process. If you don't believe me, ask Jesus.

Look at John 15: 5-8:

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

So according to Jesus, we are the branches and He is the vine. I don't know what kind of gardening background any of you have, so this may be news to you, but when you cut off a branch of a vine/tree/bush of some sort...it dies. It withers and then dries up until it's crispy. So when we sin, it would be sort of like a branch of a vine saying "You know what vine... it's been a slice but umm you're kinda cramping my style right now so...I'm gonna peace out." No. That's crazy, right? I would imagine, if branches had brains, they would know that they need the vine to survive and would therefore stick with the vine. As silly as it seems for a branch to up and walk away, that's what Jesus says it is like when we sin. We turn our backs on the one being whom we absolutely need to survive. We spit in His face and decline his nourishment for gravel. When we sin, we are hurting ourselves and hurting our relationship with God.

Now I don't know about you...but I don't eat rocks very often. I can't imagine them being too nutritional, or tasting very good for that matter. On that note, I also don't ever see myself spitting in my mom's face after her making me breakfast. And there in lies the rub. We can sit here and examine these analogies and say "Oh, yeah that breakfast sounds good, I would never spit in my mom's face if she did that for me." We can think, "I would never eat rocks, that's gross...and I happen to like my teeth the shape they are." The problem is that these analogies explain how GOD sees our sin. They describe how when we sin God sees us killing ourselves when we could be healthy with Him. It isn't that clear to us, though. Do you think that daughter knew she was eating rocks? Do you think she was under the impression that gravel was a tastier choice than watermelon? That it would be more beneficial? No, of course not. But that is the whole point. These analogies describe how God sees sin, what it smells like to Him. Not how we view it. If we saw sin as spitting in the face of someone who loves us, or eating rocks...obviously we would be much less inclined to do it and I wouldn't be talking

to you about this right now. But that isn't how we approach sin. This is not what we smell and the fact that what we smell is so different is frankly a little scary.

So what do we smell? What does sin look like to us, if not eating rocks and spitting on our mothers?

Think of a carnival. Games galore, rides that spin you until you puke, stuffed animals, fried anything. What could be better? It's just fun, right? Enjoyment and happiness. So why can't we join in this carnival of sin? It doesn't seem so bad. Everyone else who doesn't follow Jesus gets to go and play ski ball and eat deep fried snickers while we Christians are left out. All those "sinners" get to have all the fun and we just have to sit at home reading our Bibles and twiddling our thumbs. This is obviously not reality, but it is sometimes how we view it. We want to have fun, too. We want to join in the party. I mean, it's just a harmless carnival, right? It's all fun and games.

To us, sin looks like something that will give us gratification. Something that will fulfill us, if only for now. It looks like fun and seems harmless. Now, this is a pretty general statement—obviously not all sin is like this for us. There are some sins that do not seem like fun to me... like murdering someone. Not really into that myself. It isn't something that I struggle with daily.

It is the sin that we struggle with every day, the sin that plagues our thoughts until we either act on it or learn to push past it. That is the sin that we see and smell so differently than God. That is the sin that looks and smells like a carnival. I just want a funnel cake, I won't stay long.

But sometimes it isn't like a carnival. Sometimes we know it's a bad idea, and we do it anyway. It's like that hole-in-the-wall Chinese place that has the best mushu pork in town, and even though you know you'll be on the toilet all night if you go there...it's worth it for that 20 minutes of bliss. This is sin at it's most dangerous. When it is an addiction. When we know we will pay dearly for our choice, but we do it anyway because we just can't stop ourselves.

Addictions are scary things. The problem is, when you have an addiction to something, you have this dependence on it. You're enslaved to it. As if you need it to survive. Take drug addicts, for example. They have to notice the effect it has on their system every time they shoot up or pop a pill. They have to see that it's killing them. But by that point it doesn't even matter anymore. It doesn't matter if it's wrong or bad for them...they are addicted. It can give them instant gratification.

Morgan Spurlock, from the movie Super Size Me, has this show called "30 Days." He goes around and does various things for 30 days and documents his experiences and such. In one particularly memorable episode, he went to prison. There, he met this guy named Travis.

Travis seemed like a nice guy, he was personable and was welcoming when Morgan had to move into his cell. Then the night came. The entire night he was shaking and shivering and rocking back and forth. He was going through withdrawal from heroin. The next morning Travis confessed that he started shooting up when he was only 15-years-old.

When I was watching the show and I found that out I started thinking about what I was doing at 15. I was a sophomore in High School, I ran cross country, played soccer, went to school... heroin seemed to be missing from my list. It's strange to think that when my biggest worry was getting a B in English, Travis was turning to hard drugs. He told Morgan that he wanted to stop and he wanted to get a job and get back on his feet because his father kicked him out and had barely spoken to him for years. He didn't want the same life he had set for himself the past ten years. He wanted something different, to start over. He wanted to be someone his Dad might be proud of, and then perhaps he would let him come back home.

Travis was released while Morgan was still there and at the end when they have the little "where are they now" blurbs, it said that not 3 weeks later, Travis had been incarcerated for drugs again. This was extremely hard to watch, and it is probably hard to hear as well.

The worst part is, this is exactly what we do with sin a lot of the time. We say "Okay, I'm not going to do this sinning thing anymore. Jesus gave His life for me so the least I can do it stop sinning, right?" Then invariably 10 minutes later you have told another lie, or lusted, or gossiped about someone, the list goes on. The issue is, the cure to our addiction is right in front of us but we don't even try to see it sometimes. Jesus led the way and continues to guide our hearts towards Him. Even though we know this, we sin anyway. Why is that? It's kind of ridiculous when you think about it. Why would we willingly give up this perfect gift for dirty, smelly sin?

Let's take a look at John 11, the story of Lazarus, in a different light. Lazarus was the brother of Mary and Martha. He died, and by the time Jesus arrived, Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days:

John 11: 38-44: Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. "Take away the stone," he said.

"But, Lord," said Martha, the sister of the dead man, "by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days."

Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me."

When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go."

I'm sure many of us have read or heard this story many times. And if not...you're welcome. Jesus performs a miracle, raises Lazarus from the dead. Amazing, right? Yes, but imagine if when Lazarus rose from the dead and was about to have his grave clothes removed just said "Yeah, actually....is it cool if I keep these on? Only I've just gotten used to them. Also...I think I will just hang out in my grave for a while, I just prefer it. Oh but hey, Jesus, thanks for saving me...that was great." How insulting.

Lazarus was dead and Jesus brought him back to life. Why would he hang around the grave? If I was raised from the dead, the first thing I would do is get as far away from that grave as possible and find some new clothes. Maybe take a shower or something. I don't think anyone here would hang around the place that reminds you of the fact that you were DEAD. That's absurd.

Unfortunately, it's what we do every day. We let our skewed view of what sin is like, whether it's an addiction or a carnival, get in the way of our relationship with God. Sin is a heart condition. It is our own diseased hearts that show us sin through this distorted lens. The smell of sin comes from within us and follows us wherever we go and contaminates everything we do. In order to fight this, we must realize how it appears to God.

Romans 6:23 says: For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

It matters to God how we live our lives, not only because it hurts him when we are "bad", but also because it hurts Him to see us living our lives apart from Him. For instance, say you struggle with lust. Sometimes it's hard to see that sin the way God does because it makes us feel good. Or even if we do see why it's wrong, it's too hard to stop because it's so addicting. We just want to feel good and we want it right now. Lust can be an addiction and when it is, we rationalize the smell when in reality we should be trying to smell if from God's perspective. Whatever sins you struggle with most, try to examine it from God's point of view. To smell what He smells.

When we sin we are investing ourselves in things that cannot and will not last. We seek fulfillment in places that simply cannot sustain us the way God can; the way we need. We need to start conditioning ourselves to smell sin the way God does. Once we start understanding His reality, as opposed to our own version, we will better comprehend and recognize the true smell of sin.