

I like all sorts of kind of movies but one of the kind of movies I really like is the heist movie. You watch the heist movie there there's all sorts, some my favorite fall into these categories: there is the 11 guys rob three casinos simultaneously movie; there is the steal classified information from a computer terminal at Langley movie; there is the steal money from a French bank from a stage in Las Vegas heist movie; and perhaps one of my favorite is the robbing the guy who helped you rob the last guy but then robbed you – all with a guy named Rob as one of your team. And so there's all these different heist movies and I'm not suggesting that you try any of these things in real life or endorsing that you go out and try and steal something but they do make for a rather intriguing show. You watch the movie and you wonder how they do it? How will they bypass the security? How are they going to escape with the loot? What is that one unexpected thing that's going to happen in almost blow the whole operation? And in the end will they get caught or will they actually get away?

And so this week I did a little research on real-life theft and robbery. I looked up what the 10 biggest robberies in world history were and I thought I'd share with you some of my favorites - it's right to say my favourite - but there are a few that I'm going to share with you this morning. The first one was for a measly \$108 million. Someone broke into the Harry Winston store in Paris and stole a bunch of jewelry. I thought an interesting one was the \$300 million theft of artwork from the Boston Museum in 1990. Also in 1990 in London someone stole \$480 million worth of bearer bonds from a guy who was walking down the street with them in a briefcase. I'm not sure that is very wise security. At the time of the list this was number one. It happened the day before the coalition forces invaded Iraq and Saddam Hussein sent his son Qusay to the central bank about with a hand written note asking to make a withdrawal. For the next five hours his son saw oversaw hundred dollar bills being loaded into boxes and taken away. It's estimated that he walked out of there with the equivalent of \$1 million US. Later on about \$650 million of that was found hidden inside the walls of his palace but about 350 million of that just kind of evaporated into the wind and was never found again.

Thievery runs rampant in our modern society. There are muggings and simple break and enters. There is the traditional bank robbery and there are car thieves enjoy riders. There is the stealing of computer data, even identities gets stolen these days. Now most of us would feel fairly innocent when it comes to theft - we never really stolen much of anything, besides perhaps they the odd office supply from your workplace or maybe you've pirated the occasional movie or music or something like that, but for the most part we feel fairly innocent when it comes to the category of theft. But our slate becomes much less clean when we consider the fact that every wrong we commit against another person could be restated as an act of theft. Every wrong I do to you in some way takes something away from you. It could be a physical tangible thing. It could be a financially valuable thing or it could be something like hope or a promise or a dream. It could be peace or comfort or security or I could rob you of love and confidence and self-worth. And that immediately creates for us a debt, an imbalance between us. Perhaps a monetary debt is a by-product of my action, but there's always a debt of the heart that is created by my theft. And there is no mistaking in this equation who owes who. When I wrong you I steal from you and therefore I owe you. And if there is any doubt about it are vocabulary betrays our heart because when we wronged another person we say things like "Well I really owe him an apology." "I need to try and make it up to her." or "If there was only a way that I could buy some peace between us." When my heart feels the debt of IOU we label that feeling guilt.

Perhaps you have noticed as you observe the way people talk every now and then a noun will become so commonly used and so influential that it will actually become used as a verb. An example of this is if I asked you to recite some abstract minor point of trivia all of you with smartphones and iPads this

morning you would whip them out and what would you do? You would Google it. That's right and is actually it's just the name of the company, a noun, a thing, but it has become so synonymous with searching the web for information that we now actually use it as a verb. Go back a little bit in technology and say if I took a piece of paper and put it on a machine and printed out 20 exact copies of it. And you asked me "How did you make 20 exact copies of that page?" I might reply I xeroxed it, right? As it happens the photocopy machine at the church building actually is a Xerox, but even if it was a Canon copier or something else you still might go ahead and say that you Xeroxed.

Well, believe it or not Webster's defines the word "guilt" only as a noun. It says guilt is either one of two things: the responsibility for a crime for doing something bad or wrong or the bad feeling caused by knowing or thinking you have done something bad or wrong. You see guilt is a noun, it's a thing, it is a feeling, it's an emotion, it's a state of being. But it is such a powerful and influential thing that we use it as a verb. You all heard this expression, probably been in this conversation, when somebody says something like "why did you volunteer for that?" and the other person responds "well she guilted to me in to it." Guilt has become a verb, it has become such a powerful and influential thing in our life that if we have enough of it, it can easily control our actions, it can direct our thoughts, it can color our words, and it can shape our hearts. Guilt is the heart debt that constantly says "I owe you." It is born out of an imbalance that is created when I have wronged you in some way and thereby I took something from you that did not belong to me. And I will carry the weight of that debt until it has been fully and properly paid.

Almost from the beginning of time people have been carrying the debt of guilt. When Adam and Eve ate of the fruit that was forbidden to them in the garden they felt guilt. When Cain killed his brother Abel he felt guilt. When Ruben and his brothers threw Joseph into the well and later sold him to slave traders they felt guilt. Time after time, in story after story, person after person, when wrongs were committed debts were created and guilt was carried. Because we as people are hardwired to feel guilt. Guilt is the alarm that tells us something wrong has happened. Now some of us have cut the wire to the flashing lights and some of us have maybe muted the volume on the sirens but guilt is meant to be there to notify us that a debt has been created and to remind us that it needs to get repaid.

Remember the story of Peter in the courtyard at Jesus trial? He realizes that he is just denied Jesus three times, just like Jesus said he would, just like he swore he would never do, and when that happens and the rooster crows Peter runs out and he weeps bitterly. He is weeping over the guilt that he feels. He is weeping over the debt of love and loyalty and support and trust and being there when he needed him most - all the things Peter felt he owed Jesus - his friend and his Rabbi - all the things that Peter felt he had taken from Jesus in his most desperate hour.

You know, when I'm a poor husband to my wife I steal from her I steal from her notions of a happy marriage. I steal from her the comfort of being cared for and loved and protected I even steal her perception of her own value and self-worth. But I also in that same moment steal from my kids. I steal an example of what marriage is supposed to be like. I steal from them a happy home to grow up in. I steal from them a decent model of how a real man is supposed to act. I steal from them many good lessons on how to treat a lady, how to deal with frustration, how to handle your anger, how to put other people first. And that creates in me a heart and I feel the need to somehow make it up to them. I feel the temptation to somehow buy back their love from that debt.

If you happen to be one of those people who is a workaholic, who spans all almost every waking hour at work and every other waking hour thinking about work. If you're that kind of person then you are

robbing your husband or your wife of their spouse. You take from them those feelings of love and priority and value. You steal away the opportunity to be close and intimate with them. You rob your kids of feelings of love and priority and value. You rob them of lessons and examples of what it really what really matters most in life, about setting boundaries and limits, about learning to say no. You steal from them the notion that there are things that are more important in this world than money, that there are some things that money can't buy, that some things just aren't worth the price you have to pay to get them. And that creates in our heart a debt, so we try to make up for absence by becoming permissive parents the never saying no and never saying limits. Or by spoiling them with treats and trips and toys.

Have you ever noticed how you never see the guy who owes you 50 bucks? Generally speaking we try to avoid those we owe. Sometimes we do that financially, almost always will do that relationally. You see when people are in a relational IOU position brought about by poor choices or whatever they look for any excuse to be absent rather than face those they owe and that tends to create for us, this snowball effect of guilt. You see: I feel guilty about not being there, about letting you down, about not holding my end up my end of things and because I feel that guilt I decide that I'm going to avoid you because it's uncomfortable for me and so I avoid you more and then I feel more guilt about even being there less.

You know if I have at times been a jerk to you, if I have said mean things and hurt your feelings, if I've made snide remarks or cutting jobs at your expense, if I've gossiped about you behind your back, if I've taken a cheap shot at you and then laughed it off as nothing or no big deal, if I've done any of that then I owe you I have a big ugly stinking debt to pay back to you. And as long as that debt remains I feel guilty, at least I should, I feel miserable and hopefully ashamed and therefore I am really uncomfortable being around you because being around you makes it harder for me to ignore the debt in my heart

You remember the story of King David and Bathsheba. When David slept with her, he felt guilty about it even more so when he found out that she was pregnant. And those feelings of guilt caused him to do all sorts of unscrupulous things in an effort to get out of it. He even went to the point of murdering her husband Uriah but none of these things make him feel better only worse them of these things removed his guilt only added to it none of these things repaid his heart debt they only compounded it.

And that's how guilt works. Guilt makes the absentee more absent. Guilt makes the liar lie more often. Guilt makes the angry person more frequently angry. Guilt makes the grumpy person more sour. That's what guilt will do to your heart. When my heart feels guilty it is because I owe you a debt that needs to be repaid. One of my favorite verses in the Bible is first John chapter 1 verse nine says, "If we confess our sins he is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." This verse is filled with hope and promise. No matter what I've been or how bad I have messed up God will forgive and purify. But like many good things if it's misapplied it can become a crutch. If I just have to apologize to God and the slate is wiped clean. It takes a little of the heat off when I'm tempted to indulge where I should restrain knowing that even if I do forgiveness is available later. Actually is a great relief to know that if I confessed today's sin to God before bedtime even if I know that one of the first things I'm going to do when I wake up in the morning is repeat one of those same sins well, it's okay because tomorrow night I can repent once again. And subtly God's promise becomes a spiritual loophole for us: if God's grace is going to perpetually wipe away sin then I don't have to try quite nearly so hard to resist it. However if that's really is true, if I sins are really completely forgiven, then why do I still carry the guilt for some of them?

I read a story this week about a preacher who was likely in his late 30s. One Sunday morning he was up preaching in front of his congregation and he was speaking about being blameless and beyond reproach and as he was speaking right in the middle of his sermon he became overwhelmed with guilt as his mind was flooded with an incident of something he had done as a teenager. He said he could barely make it through the entire sermon to get to the end because the guilt was almost overwhelming. When the sermon was over he went back to his office and he immediately fell on his knees and began to pray. He asked God for forgiveness like he had done dozens and dozens of times over the years before and he said even though he prayed in the even though he asked God for forgiveness and even though he believed that God would forgive him, days later he still felt this sense of guilt within him.

Maybe you have felt that kind of guilt in you at times as well. The remedy for guilt is confession and sometimes we play the confession game: we confess the same sins over and over even resisting sin a little bit less at times knowing that forgiveness is available because somewhere along the way we were taught that the purpose of confession was conscience relief really. We confess so that we will feel better about what we've done and somehow we told ourselves that our confession will actually make God feel better about what we've done. Can you imagine that? You all know that guy who always loses his temper and blows his top at the drop of a hat and then comes back and says sorry, but even as he says those words you know that it's just a matter of time before he goes off again. You all know that woman who is sarcastic and is always talking about people behind their back until she gets caught or called on it at some point and then she says "oh well I didn't mean anything by it", but you all know that the next conversation she has is going to be the exact same. How do you value those apologies from those people? That's what some of us are tempted to do with God at times. Moreover we do that and then we have the nerve to ask him to come help us when we get in a jam.

The problem is that we don't really fully understand what confession is meant to be all about. You see confession is more than just admitting our mistakes. Confession is not about conscience relief but confession is about life change. It is not just about feeling better and getting off the hook. It is about making things right. The English definition of confession is all about admission but the biblical definition of confession is all about change. In early Catholicism you there was a rule that you were only allowed to confess a sin one time. You could not come back and confess the same sin over and over again. The reason was that once you confessed it was supposed to bring about some kind of change in you. With your confession there can always come some of penance that was expected to bring about change. The word penance actually comes from the word repentance. Penance is not just meant to be some random punishment, but penance is meant to be something that actually helps you defeat the sin you are struggling with, something that creates a new habit in you that combats the temptation you are succumbing to. Biblical confession is always tied to repentance and restitution and restoration. Listen to the instructions God gave the Israelites in the Old Testament in Numbers 5 he says say to the Israelites:

Numbers 5:6 - 7 (NIV & NLT) 6"Say to the Israelites: 'When a man or woman wrongs another in any way and so is unfaithful to the LORD, that person is guilty 7They must confess their sin and make full restitution for what they have done, adding an additional 20 percent and returning it to the person who was wronged.

Many of you have heard the story of Zacchaeus in the New Testament we read it in Luke chapter 19. Here's how the story goes:

Luke 19:1 - 10 (NIV) 1Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. 2A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. 3He wanted to see who Jesus

was, but being a short man he could not, because of the crowd. 4So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore—fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way. 5When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.” 6So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.

7All the people saw this and began to mutter, “He has gone to be the guest of a ‘sinner.’” 8But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, “Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.” 9Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. 10For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.”

God instructs the Israelites and he says if you wrong someone you need to make it right with them and then when Zaccheus confronted with Jesus and sees who Jesus is and is convicted by Jesus he says “I will give half of what I have to the poor and if I wronged anyone I’m gonna give them back four times what I cheated out of them” Biblical confession is not about feeling better it’s about making things right.

Some of you may have seen the show on TV called Holmes on homes. It is a home-improvement show about this guy named Mike Holmes and Mike comes into a house where previous contractor either didn’t complete the job or did a terrible job building and constructing the place and so there’s all sorts of problems now. These homeowners have spent all they could spare to purchase a house or to complete a random and now they are faced with an even costlier repair. One of Mike’s main catchphrases is “we’re gonna make this right.” He even has a foundation called “the make it right foundation.” Over the course of a single episode you will hear numerous times Mike will say something like “we’re in a make this right,” “were going to fix this,” “we’re gonna make this as good as new,” or “we’re going do what he should have done the first time around.”

And that’s what true confession is all about. That’s where you will conquer your guilt. That’s where you will pay off your debt. When you wrong someone - make it right. Where you have damaged relationship - fix it. Where you have hurt someone - make things as good as new. When you didn’t do what you should have done - go back and do what should’ve been done in the first place.

That story I told you about the preacher who felt guilty in the middle of his sermon, the end of the story says that he couldn’t get escape that feeling of guilt and so he eventually went to the house of the man he had wronged 15 years earlier. He went up and knocked on the door. He went inside to talk to this man who eat hardly seen or talked to in years and years. He apologized and he told him exactly what he had done. In the story he says, “I thought he would call the cops or at least take a swing at me I actually told him I would feel better if he did.” When the guy told the story the man he had wrong didn’t swing at him, didn’t call the cops, didn’t get angry. He smiled and said “I had a hunch it was you.”

We have to confess to those we’ve wronged face-to-face and make amends for what we’ve done. If we do we’re much less likely to be repeat offenders because after all we don’t want to have to go back to that same person and apologize for the same thing again and again. Which, lets be honest, is why we like confessing to an anonymous person behind the screen or to a close friend who we know is committed to be encouraging to us or even to God himself in secret because we know he’s not going to tell anyone else. That’s a lot easier for us is and the reason we still feel guilty about things is because they are unresolved. Confessing our sins to God isn’t enough because he’s not the only one I’ve wrong. God loves me unconditionally, he forgives me freely but I can’t necessarily expect or demand that

everyone else will do the same thing. If I owe you then I will never be guilt free until I make things right with you.

You may never be able to repay God for what he's done for you but you can certainly make efforts to repay the people around you for what you've done to them. James writes in his letter:

James 5:16a (NIV) Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.

Now what if James doesn't mean a generic each other in this passage? What if what James is really suggesting here is confess your sins to those you have sinned against pray for those who have sinned against you so that you both might be healed? Now I'm not tired entirely comfortable with that interpretation. And the reason I'm uncomfortable is not because is inconsistent with the New Testament or any of Jesus' teaching - in fact it's very consistent with what Jesus taught. Jesus was the one who said if you're on your way to the temple and realized that your brother has something against you such a gift aside and go make it right with him and then come back to worship. Jesus is the one who said love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. What makes me uncomfortable about that interpretation of this passage is the notion of having to actually do it consistently. In the end God will eventually lead us to a place where we are willing to own and resolve our debt with others but you will never be fully free of guilt until your heart is repaid, until you restore what you have taken, until you make right what you have done wrong.

And sure it is painful and inconvenient and embarrassing and absolutely humiliating at times but just remember Jesus suffered horribly painful inconvenient terribly humiliating death on the cross. And in the shadow of the cross all my excuses, all my griping, all my rationalization are dwarfed by the love Christ has shown to me and the grace that God has given us.