

Sermon for Sunday, January 17, 1971 by Andrew A. Jumper, Pastor
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"OUR SECRET SINS"

Psalm 90

Text: "Thou hast set our iniquities before Thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance." Psalm 90:8

In the 90th Psalm, the writer speaks of secret sins. All of us know what he is talking about. Everyone of us this morning has secret sins--sins we hope to heaven no one finds out about. It maybe some secret desire, some hidden vice, some covered-up lust, some dark deed. But whatever it is, each of us has secret sins. So when the psalmist speaks of secret sins our ears perk up--he is talking about something we understand.

Notice first that to call a sin "secret" implies that it is hidden. And we have all sorts of ways of hiding our sins. For example, a business man may be dominated entirely by the desire to make a buck, but he hides his sin of greed behind a false front. He regards himself as a benefactor to society because he is providing employment for others. Or he will claim that his product is helping mankind or is beneficial to society.

Or, again, we may hide our sins behind our prejudices. We say such things as, "he doesn't know any better." Or, "He is happy the way he is." Or, "They really want to be by themselves." We excuse lack of opportunity or poverty or sub-standard wages by saying such things as, "He could do better if he applied himself." Or, "He really doesn't want to work." Or, "He is lazy and irresponsible." We quite ignore the fact that the person may be an economic or educational or cultural prisoner, a victim of crushing circumstances.

Again we hide our sins behind rationalizations. To rationalize is to justify some act or some attitude which the conscience knows to be wrong. Few of us are willing to accept the blame for our mistakes or failures and we shift the blame to something or someone else. David did this in his affair with Bathsheba. When he called her husband Uriah home from the battlefield to cover up a royal scandal, he was trying to shift the blame. When that failed, he put Uriah in the most dangerous part of the battle and he was killed. David tried to rationalize to his general Joab by saying, "Let not this thing displease thee, for the sword devoureth one as well as another." By the same token the man who excuses his excessive drinking on the grounds that he must do so with business associates is rationalizing. The student who blames his poor grades on the fact that someone cheated and broke the curve or that the teacher doesn't like him is rationalizing for the fact that he has not studied nor applied himself.

Again, we hide our sins behind our good deeds. A man will say, "I may not go to church, but I believe in God." Or, "I may not be very easy to get along with at home, but I have to work hard at the office." Or, "I may cut corners in business, but I do a lot of good with my money." In doing this we are balancing one good trait against a bad trait and making the whole thing come out in our favor.

So, the first thing we can say about a secret sin is that it is hidden and we may use many devices or go to any lengths to hide them from the world and even from ourselves. The second thing we can say about a secret sin is that it is not repented of. This is what makes a secret sin so dangerous. When Peter denied Jesus, the Bible tells us he repented and went out to weep bitter tears of repentance. On the other hand, Judas tried to hide his sin away unrepented and it destroyed him. You see, as long as we excuse our sins and try to hide them behind some respectable facade, we store them away unrepented. And when a sin is hidden and unrepented of,

it is consequently unforgiven. Like an unexploded shell it lies within us, full of danger and potential destruction.

The third thing we can say about our secret sins is that they are not hidden from God. Our text for this morning says, "Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance." That's a sobering thought. There is no human act, no human deed, not even any human thought that escapes the surveillance of God. Our iniquities are set before him. The darkness of our secret sins is lighted by the light of his countenance. Louise Edwards in her little poem entitled, "My Shadow," puts it this way:

I dug a grave and laid within
Its secret depths one secret sin.
I closed the grave, and know full well
That day I shut myself in Hell!

Many years ago when Stanford University was first built, it was proclaimed one of the finest universities in the country. Soon afterwards, however, the new stone building began to crack and give way. As it turned out, the massive stone walls were not what they appeared to be, for the contractors had put only a veneer of stone and the interior of the walls was filled with chipped stone and poor cement. The great memorial arch, which was praised as one of the finest bits of mural work in the country was a complete ruin, showing glaring pieces of rotten masonry that no building inspector would have passed. The buildings had a secret sin that destroyed them. To the eye the buildings were firm and strong, but inside they were filled with trash. God sees behind our "fronts" and our external appearances and sees underneath our pretensions the real us. He sees our inner trash. No, our secret sins are not secret from God.

The fourth observation I would like to make is that our secret sins are not only not secret from God, they are not really secret from us. Dr. Weatherhead in his book Psychology and Religion, tells us there are three levels of the mind. First is the conscious level. Your conscious mind is, I hope, occupied at this moment with what I am saying. Then, second, there is the subconscious mind. Here is the region just below the conscious mind where we store all the memories that we can call up at will to the consciousness. It is the place where we keep familiar names and places, recent events, and even old memories that are readily called to mind. Below this level of the mind there is a third level, the unconscious mind. Here lives old memories, old events, old incidents, old repressed things--hidden away from the conscious mind, we think we have forgotten them, but they are very much alive. Psychologists tell us that we never really forget anything, but that all we do and say and think is hidden away in the unconscious mind. A great many of our fears, for example, may be due to some incident that happened in childhood that has been pushed down into the unconscious mind. We think we have forgotten it, but it still has its effect upon us. We feel fear or distress or uneasiness and we can't really put our finger on what is bothering us. Actually, something down deep in our unconscious is very much alive and very much at work. Often, it is our secret sins that we ourselves have not really forgotten. Buried in the unconscious mind, sin has a new, dark area in which to continue its readful work, creating misery and anxiety. We may have forgotten them, but they have not forgotten us. We may have buried them, but they are still dreadfully alive.

What do we do about our secret sins? The New Testament gives us two texts. The first is James 5:16 which reads, "Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another." This does not mean to run around willy-nilly confessing to every Tom, Dick and Harry. It does mean that within the context of the community

of believers we must dare to be honest about ourselves and to pray for each other. Genuine fellowship with other Christians is possible only when we are willing to run the risk of letting ourselves be known for who and what we really are. We must be willing to run the risk of exposing our true selves to others--to run the risk of vulnerability. You see, there is another vulnerability--the vulnerability from within. When we are unwilling to expose our true self, we are betting that this hidden sin, this inner vulnerability, this private brand of duplicity, will not make us mentally or spiritually ill; we are betting that it will not isolate us and estrange us from others--and it is a bet we are likely to lose. If you do not have at least a few fellow Christians with whom you dare to be utterly honest and who will love you and accept you as you really are and pray for you, you are indeed a person of great poverty. True Christian fellowship is possible only on the basis of a daring honesty. The Prodigal Son could go home only when he determined "I will go to my father and say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and against thee....."

The second text the New Testament gives us is this: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (I John 1:9) God has provided a way to deal with our sin. He sent his son to die for our sin. The Bible tells us that God so loved the world that he gave his only son. Jesus on the cross is God's answer to your sin and mine. God has a way of dealing with our sin. God never turns his back on us. God never breaks fellowship. But we turn our backs on God, we break fellowship with Him when we hide our sins, when they are unconfessed.

God can't deal with a hidden sin. God can't forgive an unrepented sin. God can't cleanse us of a secret sin. I dare say that most of us this morning have secret sins in our hearts--they are not secret from God and they are not even secret from us. The only way to deal with a secret sin is to confess it, to repent of it, to turn from it, and to let God cleanse us of it.

Whoever you are, whatever you need, Jesus on the cross is big enough for your sin--but he is the only one who is. I invite you this morning right where you are sitting to confess your sins to God right now--to get them out in the open before God--and he will cleanse you from all unrighteousness. You will never know what joy life can really have until you do.