

## 204 *It's a caricature, I know*

(Spoiler warning: Please don't read this if you haven't yet watched last week's episode of the 1960s sleuthing cleric drama, 'Grantchester'!)

The scene is the body of the church where an 8-year-old boy is scratching some initials into the back of a pew, and the grumpy old housekeeper catches him and screams, "You wicked, wicked boy! You're desecrating the church, and you'll burn in hell for this!"

Eventually, we discover that the boy is inscribing the initials of his recently deceased father, and that the housekeeper has been diagnosed with cancer; God is punishing her, she thinks, because as a teenager she was encouraged to have an illegal abortion.

OK, it's a caricature, but Someone Else used caricature and hyperbole (see: camel, eye, needle) to make us stop and (re)think; Jesus wants us to 'repent', i.e. to *change our whole way of thinking*.

But I'm still on about the difference between the churches in the 1st and 21st centuries; why is ours such a pale reflection? Could part of it be our total obsession with sin?

Confession time: The service leader asks us to "Call to mind those wrongful thoughts, words and actions that we have committed," but try as I may I can't think of any! Sure, I'm not perfect and I tend to be selfish but I honestly can't think of anything specific. Is that just me?!

Maybe this is part of the 1/21 contrast? Were the early church thinking about *personal* sin and *personal* salvation when they prayed ("as Jesus taught us"): Forgive **us our** trespasses, as **we** forgive those who trespass against **us**?

Another of my 'stuck records': we have perverted Romans 6:23, "the wages of sin is death" (addressed to **believers**); we memorise it and use it to tell **unbelievers** that they will go to hell if they don't believe in Jesus.

Here's how I see our current unhelpful (unbiblical?) model of the Christian life:

### **Faith as personal salvation**

SIN = going against God's way – it's built-in, at birth!

But God loves us and so sends Jesus

We 'have faith', i.e. we believe what (the preacher tells us) 'the Bible tells us'

We can now enter the fold: 'Narrow is the gate'

Then as new believers we have to be discipled

(*church leaders know what a difficult job this is*)

– read the Bible!

– pray!

– go to church!

– witness to others!

– do some good works!

Yes, OK, a caricature, but how about something like this instead?

### **Faith as knowing a person, Jesus**

People hear the story of this amazing man

They sense the love of the community of believers

They hear more of the historic story of how God relates to people

Gradually they begin to feel they belong to the community

Those who suffer through the sins of others find understanding

They come to realise that they are not sinless

They grow in love and trust of Jesus

Together we fight valiantly under the banner of Christ against sin, the world, and the devil

OK, this is an un-thought-out model, but it recognises the problem of ‘**sin**’ and suffering, as distinct from just ‘my sins’.

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