

Cheltenham
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The Entitlement Trap

Romans 12:2 - Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Cringe hearing the expressions, being honest, I know at times I have said one or two of them. In good company.

Ps Jim McMillan's message last week took us through the temptations of Jesus. Three temptations which spoke of three patterns that this world is ingrained with.

Romans 12:2 tells us clearly that we are not to be conformed by the patterns of this world.

It's paramount that we speak of cultural patterns and we challenge them against with what the Bible says.

We can't renew our mind on these matters if we are not consciously aware of where the tide is moving. We can't swim upstream if we don't give voice and challenge thinking that is contrary to God's Word.

And so as a segue to Jim's message, I want to shed light on one pattern that I believe our western culture is ingrained with, that we need to be aware that it doesn't seep into our attitudes and behavior as Christians.

Tonight's message - THE ENTITLEMENT TRAP.

Visiting developing or third world nations such as Thailand, Mozambique and Indonesia, struck by how privileged we are in Australia. Amazing resources and benefits available to us simply because we live here - schools, housing, available healthcare, social security benefits and we live largely at peace. Aware of these privileges when I return because they largely don't exist in other countries. Thankful to God when I come home however, I know at times because I have grown up in an affluent Western country I expect those privileges to always be there and somehow I believe they are my right.

Those rights start from the moment we are born. We grow up believing that we can be and do whatever we want in life, that we will live a long life, that in those years we will make something of ourselves, we will have a job that we really love, we will get married, have children, even grandchildren, we will have a comfortable life. There may be one or two tough times in life, but by and large life is about being happy and comfortable. We are told this and so we grow up thinking that this will all fall into place. This is our 'right'. It's what society and even God "owes us".

Now I'm not saying those things are not right, however this 'owing' mentality mixed in with our consumer culture of buying more stuff to be happy, I believe contributes to an entitled mentality. An entitled mentality is not just something that the young possess, it can affect anyone of any age.

The fact of the matter is there are millions of people who don't live life like this:

Tim Everton a youth worker in South East Melbourne puts it well in his blog "Born with a sense of entitlement".

"There have been millions on earth who have never experienced the love of a true parent or even the companionship of a single true friend. There have been countless numbers who have been born and raised in slavery (and still are). There are many this very day who sift through garbage dumps daily for food and live short and sick lives. Where are their rights? Where is their comfy warm house, 'meat and two veg' on the table, their 90 years and their soft retirement package?"

So what is entitlement? And how does this thinking creep into our walk with Christ?

Definition of entitlement: *The condition of having a right to have, do or get something. The feeling or belief that you deserve to be given something (such as special privileges).*

Straight up I can tell you God does not treat us as we deserve. God doesn't owe us anything.

The Bible tells us what we deserve:

Ephesians 2:1-3 - As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.

Due to our sinful nature, we were considered enemies of God. We were deserving of God's wrath. Thank God in his mercy and compassion, he turned this around by sending Jesus to pay the price that each one of us deserved.

1 Thess 5:9-10 - For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him.

God didn't appoint us to wrath because he wanted us to be in relationship with Him. But the sin issue needs to be addressed. Holiness and sin can't live together. And so Jesus paid the price. And if we receive Jesus into our lives, we live together with Him – that is great news!

This is the Gospel, pure and simple. God has made a way for us, we don't deserve it, we haven't worked for it or earned. It's been freely given to us.

But the moment we accept Jesus as Lord, we are choosing to die to self – our passions, our fleshly desires and we are surrendering to Jesus' lordship. We are choosing to die to entitlement.

Galatians 5:24 – Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.

Anyone here belong to Christ? Great consider yourself dead - to self. Your passions, your entitlements they are dead. That's what baptism is all about. When we go through the waters of baptism, it represents our old life gone. No longer can you operate the way you used to. Life is no longer the same. But just as we have died with Christ, we are also risen with Him to a new life.

How exciting! That's why baptism is so profound. It's totally contrary to how this world thinks. I encourage you if you have never been baptised, no matter how old, to consider being baptised on 11 & 12 October.

So we come to God through Jesus, we are fully accepted by Him, but He loves us too much to leave us that way. We come usually 'blah' (sin, fleshly desires, attitudes) and we now have to work at becoming more like his Son.

Now here's the problem. As Christians we read that God wants us to live life more abundantly (John 10:10). And He does. But sometimes we need to realise that JUST having God in our life IS living life more abundantly. God doesn't owe us anything.

We expect that living life more abundantly will come in a certain package of 'physical blessings – like a double storey house, sharp car, a pool and a holiday twice a year'. Or click our fingers and we get what we want. Almost an easy street of promotions and comforts. We don't have to do anything because we're God's kids and He wants to bless His kids with good gifts ALL the time. Right? Thing is abundant living can be interpreted in a myriad of ways – such as healing, forgiveness of sins, peace, joy, God watching over us and his provision of our needs.

This incorrect expectation is nothing new. We see it in full operation in the Old Testament in the form of the:

10 ENTITLED SPIES

Numbers 13 sets an incredible scene.

- Moses travel with children of Israel for 40 years in the wilderness, out of Egypt; to take them to the Promised Land flowing with milk and honey that God wants to give them.
- Expected to get their sooner, had a few attitudinal issues along the way.
- 40 years is nearly up, God now says to Moses “Okay it’s time, send men to check it out the land I’m going to give you.” 12 men go in and come back with a report.
- Of all the 12 spies, Caleb and Joshua are the only two that believed they could take the promised land as God had said. All other 10 said they couldn’t do it. It’s a study on identity and fear, but it’s also a study on entitlement.
- The 10 Spies believed they didn’t have to do anything to receive their promised land. They expected that God would somehow supernaturally clear out the problems and they could just walk in. When they realised that they had to actually fight to take what was theirs, they changed their tune.

The Promises of God are yes and Amen, but it does not mean for we don’t have our own Hittites, Jebusites and Amorites to conquer first.

We all have our enemies to conquer. Do we want the promise but not necessarily what it takes to get there?

The problem with entitlement is that it breeds laziness, fear, victimization and feelings of deprivation, resentment and mistreatment.

The 10 spies wanted to go back to Egypt. They wanted to die as slaves in Egypt rather than attempting to grab a hold of a new future.

After 40 years, they still didn’t get it. They didn’t get that God was more concerned about getting Egypt out of them than them enjoying a few creature comforts. They didn’t want to shift out of

their victim mentality, they didn't want to take hold of the future that God had prepared, they felt entitled to it.

The Promised Land is going to take work, a kind of 'do whatever it takes' attitude rather than I'm owed this. It's going to take surrendering your plans and your expectations and allowing God to shape them.

Much like Joseph had to.

Read Matthew 1:18-24

Let's imagine this. Here is Joseph, approximately 20 years of age. Joseph is a Jew, comes from the Davidic line, he comes from Nazareth, He is known as a righteous man. He is betrothed to Mary.

A betrothal was more binding than an engagement is today. The groom usually paid a bridal price to the family. (I'm sure grooms are happy that they don't have to do that today)

The betrothal meant that the bride and groom for at least a year were officially pledged to each other but had not yet consummated the marriage; seen as practically married without the fun stuff. So any sexual advances to anyone else during this period was regarded as adultery (Deut 22:23-27).

Mary comes to Joseph and tells him that she is with child (now we don't know if she told him whether the father was the Holy Spirit), but it's likely if she did that he would have thought she was crazy.

So Joseph's world crashes around him. I imagine he is wondering what he has done to deserve this. I'm sure he is questioning God in the process too because as he sees it he has led his whole life in a godly and upright way.

I'm sure there are Christians here who have been raised in church their whole life and maybe something has happened out of your control, or maybe your world has crashed around you and you're questioning God.

It's okay to question God. God likes you to ask him questions. Good boy Joseph was asking God questions, about bad girl Mary.

Maybe he had a bit of that, “why me, God, kind of lament going on”. And that’s all okay, God can handle it.

You see Joseph had an expectation and he felt entitled to a certain comfortable future because he lived by the Torah. He was a righteous and godly man.

Joseph deserved a respectable God-fearing woman, he didn’t deserve shame and humiliation, certainly not now or the rest of his life.

Mary’s life was in Joseph’s hands. What Joseph didn’t expect was a visit from an angel telling him to take Mary as his wife because the child she carried was conceived by the Holy Spirit. Imagine telling that one to the boys on the weekend at Synagogue.

Joseph makes a decision and the decision was a righteous one – , not an entitled one.

Joseph forgoed his entitlement, realising it or not, that for the rest of his life he would live with the shame from his community that he had either slept with Mary or that his wife had slept with someone else. Rest of his life not comfortable.

His reward - knowing that he raised and protected the son of God, who would become his personal savior and the world’s.

Let’s not lose sight of the fact that forgoing entitlement changes your world and those around you.

ATTITUDES THAT PROTECT FROM ENTITLEMENT

- **Servanthood**

Matthew 20: 26-28 - ... whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave - just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

You want an amazing Church community, you want to stand out from the rest of the “I, me and myself” pack, then serve. Look at how you can give to others, rather than focusing on what you think you deserve to get from others.

- **Work**

Proverbs 13:25 – The soul of the sluggard craves and gets nothing, while the soul of the diligent is richly supplied.

The quicker we realise that yes salvation is a gift, but everything else in life takes work, the better. It takes work to develop a relationship with God, to have a marriage, to have a job, none of it just comes, it takes work! Don't expect to get a promotion for just doing the bare minimum of what you get paid for, you deserve a promotion when you go above and beyond. Take responsibility for what you do and for what you choose not to.

- **Humility**

James 4:6 – But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”

If you think you are more deserved than someone else, maybe just check reasoning behind that and eat some humble pie.

- **Contentedness**

Philippians 4:12-13 - I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

Don't whine, but rather cultivate gratitude everyday by counting your blessings, starting with the blessing of existence! Yes you exist, that is a blessing. Next count the blessing of air in your lungs, start to work in every part that works. Then realise just maybe you have nothing to complain about. Yes life is not always fair, I don't know why

you got this lot and so and so got it easier, however we don't live in a perfect world and you have your own race to run, so run it.

The Bible speaks of coming alongside those who are weak in our community. I believe that we as a community need to come alongside and help people who are doing it tough, who may be struggling. We have to make sure that as we help and we do all to help that we are also not breeding entitlement in others.

Conclusion

Life doesn't owe us anything and certainly God doesn't either.

To be a true disciple Jesus tells us that we must deny ourselves and take up our cross and follow him.

If we carry any attitude of entitlement we have to be aware of the cost. As every cause has an affect.

Author Criss Jami sums it up:

“Man is not, by nature, deserving of all that he wants. When we think that we are automatically entitled to something, that is when we start walking all over others to get it.”

My prayer is that if we see this attitude at work in us that we take it to God and focus on the fact that Jesus didn't use any of his entitlements of being the Son of God – denied himself. Look at the powerful legacy that he left.