

B E S T I L L
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STARING INTO THE DARK

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us. (2 Cor. 5:21)

You've probably never heard of Dr. John Bradford, but you may recognize the names of some of the people he has worked with:

Paul Bernardo, Robert Pikton, Russell Williams

These are some of Canada's most notorious criminals; men who committed horrific crimes with no remorse. John Bradford was the criminal psychologist assigned to their cases. He spent hours interviewing them and watching videos of their crimes. It was his job to get inside their minds and to make sense of the twisted pathways he found there.

Dr. Bradford was regarded as the best in his field, so he was called upon for every high-profile case in the nation. That changed a few years ago when he was asked to work with Luka Magnotta . . . and refused.

I heard a radio interview with him shortly after he had made this decision, during which he revealed the destructive toll that his work had taken on him personally, emotionally and physically. While driving home one night after a long day of troubling interviews, he came undone and started sobbing uncontrollably on the highway. The following months were marked by heavy drinking, some suicidal episodes, and a diagnosis of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

John Bradford had stared evil in the face, and it overwhelmed him. He came undone under the weight of sin and evil.

This is an unsettling story but, on this of all days, we should be honest about the ugliness of sin. We should be sobered by the reality of what it costs. What it destroys, and the wounds it leaves.

For most of us, sin takes more subtle and socially acceptable forms: a harsh word, a judgmental spirit, a clenched fist. These may be more subtle, but they spring from the same root as the unmasked evil John Bradford confronted. In our more honest moments, we sometimes feel the downward drag of sin in our lives and see the damaging consequences that it wreaks in our homes, hearts, and world.

Truly, sin is ugly and costly.

John Bradford knows this better than most. When I heard his story, my first response was sadness. But this was followed by a more surprising response.

Worship.

His experience brought to mind someone else who stared into the heart of darkness. Someone who experienced the full weight of sin and death but was not undone by it. Someone who, amazingly, was able to transform the darkest of experiences into a source of healing.

I think you know who I'm talking about.

Reflecting on Jesus' cross, the Apostle Paul writes that "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:21). Jesus not only beheld sin - he became sin. And rather than that being his undoing, he broke the power of evil at its root and made his overcoming victory available to us.

This is good news for our gravest needs. If Jesus can enter into the very heart of darkness and overcome it, he can enter into the darkest regions of your life and transform them.

**No wound is too deep for Jesus to heal.
No grief is too immense for him to comfort.
No shame is too great for Jesus to cover.
No sin is too vile to be forgiven.**

As you "survey the wondrous cross" today, let it speak to you about the seriousness of sin. But don't stop there - let it assure you of God's grace that is greater than all our sin.

Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.

FURTHER READING:

Isaiah 53

KEY VERSE:

“But he was pierced for our transgressions;
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was on him,
and by his wounds we are healed.” (Is. 53:5)

CALIBRATING PRAYER:

Crucified Saviour, on this dark day it seems crass and opportunistic to think of your death as an advantage to us. And yet, we call this Friday good because through your death, our old selves are crucified, put to death, buried with you, and no longer rule. Today, we dedicate our lives as an offering of gratitude to you.