

SERMON 3: Do You Believe? DO THE WRONG THING

Pastor Jon Haakana

Let the words of my mouth and meditation of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

A Pastor in the Philippines, a much loved man of God carried the burden of a secret sin he had committed many years before. He had repented but still he had no peace, no sense of God's forgiveness.

In his parish there was a woman who deeply loved God and who said she had visions in which she spoke with God and he with her. The Pastor however, was somewhat skeptical. To see if it was true he said to her, "The next time you speak with God, I want you to ask him what sin your pastor committed while he was in seminary." The woman agreed.

A few days later the pastor saw her and asked, "Well, did God visit you in your dreams?" "Yes, he did," she replied. "And did you ask him what sin I committed in seminary?" "Yes I did." "Well, what did he say?" "He said, 'I don't remember'"

The Book of Romans contains one of the greatest promises in all of Scripture in 8:1. (Pause) "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." There is something in those words, in that promise of God that makes your heart yearn for his presence. The significance is the fact that in spite of our sin, God does not condemn us. It is overwhelming.

Because of Jesus, I am not condemned. Jesus came to earth to live the perfect life I could not, and willingly died the death that I deserved because of my sin. So therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. I now live because of Jesus. I now serve and worship and praise because of Jesus. I will now go to heaven because of Jesus.

Simple, right? Our text for today in chapter 7 says, "not so fast!" Listen to verses 22-23: "For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members."

There is a battle that goes on within each of us between the life God offers and sin which lives in us. I know what Christ did for me, and what he expects from me in response as His child. But, sometimes the temptations to do the wrong thing are greater than my desire to live like Jesus. I know what I want to do, but end up doing the opposite. I know what I shouldn't do, but end up doing it anyway. That is sin, the Old Adam as Luther describes it, which still lives within each of us. And there are other times in which I dwell upon my past life and cannot move into the life and freedom which Christ won for me on the cross.

We have been talking about the movie "Do You Believe?" which some of us have seen. I want to share another scene from that movie with you today. In this scene, J.D. and Teri have lived in active grief for twenty years because their daughter was killed in a car accident by a drunk driver. J.D. has decided it is time for a change. But Teri wants to stay in her grief and is still very angry with God. J.D. describes "where God was" when the accident happened. **Take a look...**

The drunk driver made the wrong choice. This couple who had stopped living in the present because of the past, made the wrong choice. Yet Paul takes us to victory in Chapter 8, verse 1. The greatness of the promise, this promise of grace, is that even when we fail again and again, even when we have trouble escaping the past, we have the assurance that right now there is NO condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. There now is no condemnation for who? (Slow) For those ...who are in Christ Jesus.

History does not define the future. In fact, we have history in order to rewrite the future. If you have made mistakes, done the wrong thing, missed those moments Jesus was holding out for you to seize, move on. Old things are gone—the new is here in Jesus! Embrace it! We will talk more about how to specifically do that next week. But for now, be assured of this...

There is security in our relationship with God. Sin enslaves us, forgiveness frees us.
REPEAT.

A little boy who was visiting his grandparents was given his first slingshot. He practiced in the woods, but he could never hit his target. As he came back to Grandma's backyard, he spied her pet duck. On an impulse he took aim and let fly. The stone hit, and the duck fell dead. The boy panicked. Desperately he hid the dead duck in the woodpile, only to look up and see his sister watching. Sally had seen it all, but she said nothing.

After lunch that day, Grandma said, "Sally, let's wash the dishes." But Sally said, "Johnny told me he wanted to help in the kitchen today didn't you, Johnny?" And she whispered to him, "Remember the duck! So Johnny did the dishes.

Later Grandpa asked if the children could go fishing. Grandma said, "I'm sorry, but I need Sally to help make supper." Sally smiled and said, "That's all taken care of Grandma. Johnny wants to help with supper." Again she whispered, "Remember the duck." Johnny stayed while Sally went fishing.

Finally, after several days of Johnny doing both his chores and Sally's, he couldn't stand it any longer. He confessed to Grandma that he had killed the duck. "I know, Johnny," she said, giving him a hug. "I was standing at the window and I saw the whole thing. I forgave you at that very moment because I love you. And I wondered how long you would allow Sally to make a slave of you."

If we realize we've done the wrong thing with a defining moment, it's never too late to make a change. Faith requires action, movement, response . . . otherwise it's just knowledge. What action do you need to take this week?

Perhaps you need to confess something. The Bible tells us there is healing in confession. So find a trusted friend or pastoral counselor and let go of the past or the sin or the issue you keep hanging on to.

Maybe you need to repent and make a change. If you know in your heart you have missed a defining moment, ignored the chance to make a difference, or walked away from a faith moment you should have seized, simply repent. Turn around. Do something new. Like J.D., pack it up and turn over a new leaf.

Sin enslaves us and forgiveness frees us. Beloved in the Lord, seek forgiveness and release that which enslaves you and holds you back. "There is NOW no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." In order to break the power of the old nature of the past, you must see yourself as God sees you. Then and only then will you begin to understand the vastness of the Father's love. Then and only then will you fully understand all that Jesus did for you. You are loved; you are forgiven. You are a son or a daughter of the King of Kings. Don't live in the past. Hold on to God's Promise: "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Do you believe it? Do you truly believe it? You should and you can! In Jesus... Amen!