

Written Copy for: Romans 7:21-25 The Battle Raging Within

Proper 9-5th Sunday @ Pentecost

Sunday, July 5th, 2020

Text: Romans 7:21-25

²¹So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. ²²For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, ²³but 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. ²⁴Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? ²⁵Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

Exegetical Statement

As baptized believers in Christ the sinful heart that used to control dies so that it no longer holds absolute control. We rise with Christ and are given a new reborn heart that desires to serve Him out of love and obedience. The law given by God is good and useful for describing and informing us what this loving obedience means. But existing in us still is the old Adam, no longer reigning supreme but fighting for a voice in our decision making and for control of our thoughts and actions. This sinful self exists along side our reborn nature and is always ready to gain a foothold. But unlike before our conversion we now love to obey God's laws and hate when we do not. We know what we are supposed to do in order to sacrificially love God and others and desire to act out this love in our lives. At times we succeed, and the fruits of the Spirit are seen in what we say and do. But often, when we examine what we actually think, say and do we fall far short, seeing our thoughts words and actions serving sin and evil, and we hate ourselves for it. This is the war that continues to rage in all baptized believers. Paul includes himself as having this war raging too so that we know that believers are truly saints and sinners at the same time. This war within makes us feel beaten down and hopeless because we cannot defeat and cast the old Adam from our midst. But Paul points us to the one who can and will: Jesus Christ. On the Last Day the sinful Adam will be gone, and the redeemed and remade heart given to us by Christ will reign in us forever, no longer living in a body of death but living with a body and soul for life everlasting.

Focus Statement:

As baptized believers we know by faith that Christ has defeated the reign of our sinful hearts. He has taken the death it earned for us and has given the life now and eternal life He won for us in His obedience. His Spirit keeps us desiring God's laws and seeing them as what is best. He forgives every time we fail to keep them. He lifts the burden of guilt and heals the brokenness that comes in our Confession of sins. His steadfast love keeps us pointed to His death and resurrection as proof of where we stand with Him. He continues to undo the damage our disobedience causes and counters the devil's lies that we are not saved. He promises on the Last Day to vanquish and remove the sinful heart forever and restore us to the perfection of His original creation

Function Statement:

Why it's important to know:

As baptized believers we know what it means to love God and love others, and yet examination of our life through God's Word shows we do what we know is wrong. The battle between our sinful Adam and our new heart rages within us. And the Devil wants us to believe I am the only one suffering. In fact, I may not really be a Christian at all

What the hearer should do as a result:

Continue to take an honest look at our lives with respect to God's Law. Delight in reading and learning what it says. Honestly admit how we fail to keep it. Hold fast to Jesus declaration that we are God's forgiven children knowing that our love for His commands evidences the work of His Spirit, who keeps us looking forward to our complete restoration on the Last Day

Subject Sentence: Christ will end the battle raging within on the Last Day

Introduction: Desiring, But Unable to Follow Through

How many times have you heard these sayings growing up: “You can make it if you keep trying”, “If at first you don’t succeed try, try again”, “If you want it bad enough you will succeed.” “If you apply yourself you can do and be anything you desire.”? There are some truths in these. Because I kept trying, I learned how to ride a bike. But unlike what many of us were told in school it’s not true for everything. There are somethings that, no matter how hard we try, we will never succeed at.

When I was in 6th grade and continuing on through the 10th grade I played trombone. I had the desire to not just play good enough to be a member of the school band, but to be the best trombone player in the band. Maybe I could even play professionally. I remember listening to the rock band Chicago and hearing James Pankow, playing trombone on a number of their earlier songs. In fact in the song “Beginnings” he has a solo. Here was a rock n roll band that made playing trombone cool. I remember talking my parents into spending the money to buy me an “F Stop Trombone” It had extra piping that allowed the player to reach more notes with the same slide position. It had a smaller bore that many Jazz players used because it was supposed to have a sweeter sound. I thought this was the key for me to make my dreams and desires come true.

I had grown up being told that if I dreamed it I could do it. I just needed to keep at it and not give up. I was first chair trombone in the High School band. I thought I was pretty good. That was until I went to band camp one year. Everyone at band camp was supposed to pick a piece of music to learn and practice to the best of their ability. Perhaps as part of my dream to play in a band like Chicago I picked a song Stevie Wonder had written called “Sir Duke”. It was a challenging piece. But I thought I could master it. I learned it well enough to get most all of the notes. But when I heard back on tape what my best effort sounded like, I no longer felt so confident in my abilities. Then I heard what another, more talented and accomplished player, who had chosen the same piece, sounded like. He sounded much, much better than me. My world came crashed down around me. I learned that it didn’t matter how much I desired to sound great, I didn’t have the talent to follow through. Paul would’ve understood. He had a realistic look at how desire does not necessarily lead to perfect performance.

The Battle Paul has raging within himself

In our Epistle Lesson Paul is showing us the truth about our lives as Baptized Christians. In Romans Chapter 6 he described our baptism as uniting us with Christ so intimately that, in His death on the cross, our sinful heart dies as well. This brought an end our total enslavement to sin. Then as Christ rose from the grave on Easter, never to die again, so too we rise to live as resurrection people-those who have new hearts, that have the will and desire to obey Jesus command to love God and love others. But when we look back on our lives at what we’ve done and left undone, they don’t reflect our desire to obey. They don’t

resemble someone who has been born again to a new life. Instead they look like someone who is still living out the old sinful life.

In our text today Paul describing what's going on in the life of the baptized Christian. And it's important to note that he relates this to us in the first person. He is telling us what's going on in his life even as he writes this Epistle. He confesses his love and admiration for God's Law, even though it judges him unacceptable to God when he sins. He still confesses the law is very good because it's a tool in the hands of the Holy Spirit to guide him in a life of loving obedience to his Savior, and in serving others through Jesus' love. For him the law is the roadmap for how he should deal with the daily temptations of life. He knows all this, and yet he still does not do what the law says. He hates his sinful disobedience. And yet, very often, disobedience describes his thoughts, words, and actions.

He describes a battle that is raging within him. There is within him love for Jesus Christ his Savior and the desire to demonstrate that love through obedient thoughts words and actions. When he does obey, he admits that life is better, and he feels the joy of living in conformity with God's will expressed in the commandments. But also living inside him, always present alongside his desire to obey, is the desire to please his old sinful self. To do the opposite of what the law commands. He knows what is right and yet he sins. But It's not because he has fallen from faith. If that was the case, he would no longer care about God's law anymore. Even when he sins, he still admits that God's law is the good, right, and salutary, that it's what he should be doing. Yet he simply does not do it. That is the battle that rages within him. He puts up a fight to do the right thing, and yet often he loses.

Paul is telling us this not just for confession's sake. He wants you and I to know we are not alone. We too know what the law says. We know that if we could just faithfully follow it our lives would be much better. But we can't. There is a song by the Irish rock band U2 called "God Part 2". In it, Bono, the lead singer admits: "Don't believe in excess. Success is to give. Don't believe in riches. But you should see where I live." I know that when it comes to my time, talents, and treasures that giving with a generous heart makes me feel really good. And yet when I look at my bank account and think about all the expenses that are to come, I hold back. I know that is wrong and yet I do it anyway. Bono goes on to sing: "Don't believe in forced entry. Don't believe in rape. But every time she passes by, Wild thoughts escape." I know that it is wrong to look lustfully at a woman, and I try my best to keep provocative images from my eyes. And yet when one crosses my field of vision, knowing it's wrong, I turn to get a second glance. I know gossiping is wrong. But when I hear a story about someone else's personal life it's hard to walk away, let alone tell the person gossiping not to continue. If you are honest with yourself, you will admit this is a battle that you fight as well I some area of your life or another. Just as even Paul the super apostle did.

This is important because the devil loves to use your failure in this battle to discourage you in your faith. We all have sins that regularly trouble us, those that we don't readily admit to one another. And the devil wants you to believe that you are the only one who struggles in this way. He wants you to think that everyone else has pretty much mastered these willful sins. That most of their sins are of the "things they have left undone." While they may rarely in times of stress slip up, they almost never, knowingly do what is wrong. You are the only one. You are weak. In fact, you may not be a Christian at all. Paul wants you to know that is a lie from the pit of hell.

The Victory Christ Gives Now and On the Last Day

So Paul shares with us the answer that he was given. **Romans 7:24-25a** ²⁴ **Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?** ²⁵ **Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!** It's the Sunday School answer. And it is the right answer. It is Jesus. God the Son, who came down to earth because He knew we could never save ourselves from sin and unbelief. He brought the work He accomplished on the cross and in the resurrection to bear on your life through the Gospel Message. That message which describes how He, through unselfish love, gave His perfect life in place of yours to be your one and final sacrifice to forgive your sin. All God's wrath for your disobedience was poured out on His only Son. On the cross you see just how much God hates sin. But you also see and how much God loves you and me.

Jesus also knows about the battle that still rages in us. He doesn't want us to continue in sin. But as we daily lose the battle to obey Him, His final word us is not condemnation. His Spirit point out how we disobeyed, but not in order to condemn us, but instead to bring us to repentance. He hears our cry of wretchedness, how our inability to obey tears us apart and crushes us. He hears the whisper of the devil questioning us, making us wonder if we really and truly are saved. And His response to you and to me is **(Matthew 11:28-30)** ²⁸ **Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.** ²⁹ **Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.** ³⁰ **For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.** Through the Spirit that He gives in our Baptism He speaks into our troubled hearts "Stop thinking you must conquer sin all on your own. Stop listening to the lies of the devil. Come to me. Come to my words of promise. Hear my Gospel Message. I have taken the weight of your sin that would crush you upon myself. I allowed it to crush me. It crushed me so that by faith in me and my free gift of salvation you might find rest for your troubled hearts and souls. Rest now in this life and eternal rest to come. Even though you daily lose the battle, take heart for I have won the war.

When Paul speaks of deliverance from the body of death in **Romans 7:24**, he is pointing us to the final deliverance that we all yearn for. He is reminding us of that Last Day to come. The day when whatever shape our earthly bodies are in; even if they have been long dead for centuries, He will restore them by the same power that originally created them. He will raise them up and make them better than they ever were. And not just our bodies. Our souls, our spirit, will be finally cleansed from that old Adam that loves to sin, and loves to encourage us to please its sinful nature. On that day we will no longer have a battle of wills to fight. We will joyfully and eternally do nothing but live in obedience and love with our Heavenly Father and with each other. Every day truly will be a day of worshipful praise to our Triune God.

Living Now in Baptismal Grace

But what about now? We are to fight against the desire to sin that still exists in our life. We engage in battle against the sinful desires and attitudes that are still with us. But we do not fight alone. Our Lord fights with us. Whenever we lose a battle, he points that sinful loss and then to our Savior on the cross, and to the empty tomb. His Spirit assures us that through the faith He gives, our losses have been replaced with Christ's victory. Although we deserve to be separated from God now and into eternity, that is not your future or mine. Because of the gift of grace we have in Christ Jesus all of our past, present, and future sins no longer exist in God's record book. He remembers them no more, and neither should we allow guilt to remain over them

This is the gift we have in Confession and Absolution. We confess the war that rages and our inability to overcome. We confess our knowledge that God's Law is good and that we, knowing what is right do the opposite. We confess that we are poor, wretched, sinful human beings. But in the Absolution, the Spirit opens our eyes to see the truth as God sees it. He shows us who we really are through our faith in Christ. We stand washed clean and forgiven. We stand in Christ's victory. We stand with a new confession on our lips (**Psalm 145:8**) "**The LORD is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.**" We stand in His steadfast love that abounds in our life through the Gospel which conquers even that sin that we continue to fall into.

Conclusion

Who knows? If I had kept at it, I might have been able to play in small jazz band after school. Perhaps I would be good enough to accompany Jon when he plays on Easter Sunday. But no matter how much I desired to improve, God did not give me the talent to match my desire. As Christians, we desire to show our love for our Savior by obeying His commands. When we fail it hurts our hearts. And the devil is always there to encourage us to question our faith, to make us wonder if we have what it takes to really be a Christian, to make us wonder if we are really saved. Paul has the answer and it's found in Jesus and what He gives to us in our baptism. The Spirit that He gives is the reason we feel brokenness over

our sinful disobedience. But when He shows us that brokenness, He then turns our head toward the cross and the empty tomb. When we, in anguish over our sins cry out “Who will deliver me from this body of death?” He moves us to cry out even louder by faith Paul’s answer: “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” Christ has defeated sin, death, and the devil for you and for me. His love is steadfast and without end. His grace, mercy, and forgiveness is more than enough to win out over our continued failures to disobey. His final word is “You stand forgiven.” And by the faith we have been given in our Baptism we will stand with Him on the Last Day with newly restored bodies and souls. And just as the Lord through our baptism sees us now, so too we will finally see ourselves on that last day. We will remember our sins no more. Grant this dear Jesus to us all. Amen.