

“Unstoppable” - Romans 7-8

May 24-25, 2014

Pastor Matt Messner

Memorial Day Recognition

Baptisms (Saturday night and Sunday at 9:30)

At the start of the service -- Begin with the video and have Stuart conclude the video by leading us in prayer

<http://www.worshiphousemedia.com/mini-movies/38439/A-Memorial-Day-Prayer>

Offering: VBS Announcement, marriage class announcement

Introduction

- A nun admitted to her archbishop: “There is such terrible darkness within me, as if everything was dead. It has been like this more or less from the time I started ‘the work.’” “In my heart there is no faith—no love—no trust—” (Taken from *Mother Teresa’s Darkest Night*)
- A man here in Eureka says, “I absolutely know what is right and wrong. There is no question about that, especially when I am sitting in church. I love Jesus. I know that obedience is BEST for me. But, at times I take the bait of sin like a hungry fish. What is right, goes into the background and my sinful nature determines my decisions. I hate this about myself, but it is the truth.”
- Lastly, a very influential church leader says, “What I don’t understand about myself is that I decide one way, but then I act another, doing things I absolutely despise...I obviously need help! I realize that I don’t have what it takes. I can will it, but I can’t *do* it. I decide to do good, but I don’t *really* do it; I decide not to do bad, but then I do it anyway...Something has gone wrong deep within me and gets the better of me every time. The moment I decide to do good, sin is there to trip me up. I truly delight in God’s commands, but it’s pretty obvious that not all of me joins in that delight...**24** I’ve tried everything and nothing helps. I’m at the end of my rope. - (Romans 7, The Message)

The quotes that I just read; one is from Mother Theresa, the other is from someone here at Faith Center, and the last one is from the Apostle Paul. What do they have in common with you and I?

They all admitted to an inner struggle - the struggle between the sinful nature and God’s Spirit. This struggles is vividly described in Romans 7.

I. Romans 7 - The Struggle

¹⁴We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. ¹⁵I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. ¹⁶And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. ¹⁷As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. ¹⁸For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. ¹⁹For I do not do the

good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. ²⁰ Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.

²¹ So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. ²² For in my inner being I delight in God's law; ²³ but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. ²⁴ What a wretched man I am!

What happened here? What about being dead sin?

This passage has been the subject of much debate. Was Paul just writing from the perspective of his past struggle, before he became a Christian, or is this truly his present struggle?

If you read all of chapter seven, you will see that he writes about the law -- the Old Testament "moral code" which is a reflection of the holiness of God. These verses give us a glimpse into the deep struggle that Paul felt and that we all must face, as we before a holy God, and as we stand before a "law" that no one in history, other than Jesus Christ, has come close to keeping.

In fact, *the law (God's commandments and moral code) mirrors God's holiness and our sinfulness. It even magnifies our imperfections. It's like a makeup mirror.* When you look into one, all of a sudden, every flaw becomes obvious. Suddenly, I am a lot uglier than I thought I was. This is what happens when we spend time reflecting on the perfect holiness of God.

This contrast reveals our sinful nature. That is what it does. When we try to keep the law we fail. We become more aware of our sinful nature.

- We are caught in the middle of a struggle -- torn between God's holiness and the sinful nature.

Have you ever noticed:

It's usually easy to know what the right thing to do is, but it isn't always easy to do it.

It's easy to know when you're headed down a path that is wrong, but there have been times when in spite of that knowledge, you feel powerless to get off that path.

It's every person's struggle. Imagine for a moment that I am an atheist and I am struggling with my "sins". I might go to a therapist and say,

"Doc- here is my problem: 1) I find myself playing Angry Birds when I should be doing things that are more productive. 2) I am a nutritionist and I call myself a vegan but once a week I go to McDonalds and I eat a big mac. I am such a hypocrite. 3) I'm married and I believe in faithfulness. I love my wife. But I sometimes lose my mind and catch myself flirting with other women. I do this often even though I know I should stop."

He says to me, "You are suffering from "cognitive dissonance"....

Cognitive dissonance - When a person is conflicted because their actions do not align to our stated beliefs or values. aka - sin)

It's a disease that affects everyone!

Even as Christians, we can easily "relapse" back into living according to the flesh. This is a little discouraging.

When you read Romans 7 (written by the Apostle Paul), how does it make you feel? A part of me actually feels good! If Paul felt way, then I guess it's not unusual to have a bad day.

You will continue to struggle. Everyone does. That is why this is written in the present tense. It is the daily battle. This is real Christianity. There are times you'll feel defeated and think "Maybe I'm not cut out for this." "What a wretched man am I!"

II. The Hope

Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? ²⁵ Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord! (From a cry of utter despair, to a cry of great triumph!)

We come to that place, of dependance on God where we admit, "I can't. God can. I need Him."

I am rescued by Jesus Christ!

Paralyzed by sin, He stretches out His hand, grabs mine, and he pulls me up out of my chair and says, "Walk...in the Spirit." We don't have to "get stuck there" in Romans 7. God pulls me towards a life not of failing to keep the law, but rather, walking in the Spirit:

Galatians 5:16-18

16 So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. **17** For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. **18** But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

III. **Live according to the Spirit, not the sinful nature.**

The flesh and the sinful nature are the same thing. This statement here is a common theme in New Testament/Christian ethics. Be led by the Spirit

8:1-8

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, ² because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. ³ For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

Continue to read through verse 8.

IV. **There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus - Rom. 8:1**

There is no need for penance. You don't have to serve a prison sentence in purgatory for your sins.

- **Guilt and conviction can help us.** They help us change behaviors that are destructive and they draw us closer to God. Condemnation though, moves beyond guilt, and makes people feel defeated and leads them into the isolation of shame.
- **Shame and condemnation come when we listen to the wrong voices in our lives.**

Shame is a ploy of the enemy. Satan says to us, “You cannot be forgiven. That was the last straw. You’re a failure. Quit trying. You’re a hypocrite.” God says, “Don't listen to that voice. Don't be defined by your past. There is no condemnation...”

The problem is the “tapes of the past” that continue to haunt us (media files) and to define our self perception.

Verses 5-8 describe the current battlefield of the mind and what it means to be led by the Spirit. Now, in our minds we have been given the power and the freedom to choose to do what is right, submitting to the Spirit of God. This is what it means to be led by the Spirit. You have now been set free from the law of sin and death.

8:28-30

²⁸ And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first born among many brothers and sisters. ³⁰ And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

Really God? All things?

A week and a half ago on Thursday, it was “Bike to Work Day”. I have ridden my bike to work on that day for the past 12 years or so. This year, on the way home, I stopped briefly, locked up my bike, and when I returned to it at 6 p.m., my bike wheels were gone off my bike. Stolen. It ended up becoming “walk your bike home from work day.” All things work for my good???

Then, on Monday, I was out surfing, having a great day off, and I return to my car and see a text message from my wife and it contains a picture of her car in the ditch on highway 199, and it says “call me”.

Then on Tuesday morning, I am out on my morning run, and I step on a rock. I twist my foot and I hear a “pop”. Oops. I painfully and slowly limp my way home.

Note the Word of God does not say “all things” work for my good. It says “in all things” God is working for my good. He is in it with me. “The good” is not the stuff we typically look for. We think of “the good” as being health, financial prosperity, the fulfillment of our desires. But, what is “the good” in this passage? The good is the unstoppable purpose of God for your life.

In my situation it was clear -- Obviously someone doesn’t want me to get to my destination. I know that God does not kill, steal bike tires, or destroy feet. I knew how to pray and I knew that there would be a grace and an opportunity through the circumstances to grow spiritually and to overcome.

In every situation, there is an opportunity to see God do something GREAT.

- I have a destination that is sure - Romans 8:30
- I will face transportation difficulties along the way.

If God is working on my behalf, what are the implications? I don't have to despair, panic or worry.

V. Superheroes - 8:31-39

³¹ What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us who can be against us?

³² He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? ³³ Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.

Explain: **There is no prosecutor who has any authority over those who are in Christ.** The testimony of the accuser is thrown out. If God is on our side, there can be no accusation. He is the judge.

³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ³⁶ As it is written:

“For your sake we face death all day long;
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”

³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

Obviously we may face great hardships, but,

We are more than conquerors (Romans 8:37) Hyper-nike – super victorious ones. I like that word picture. It's as if I am wearing the best Nike's ever! God has taken us from defeated to super victorious and I will get to that destination as I walk with Him.

³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

What about this list? What does it include? It includes everything --

- **Absolutely nothing can separate us from His love (Romans 8:38-39)**

We can mistakenly believe we are separated from His love. Our perception can be off. Even if we turn our back on Him, He follows you. You cannot shake Him. If you feel separated from God, who are you going to believe? Your feelings? Your thoughts? Or God's Word? If it is by your own choices or sins (guilt and conviction) that you feel distant from Him, just know that He is right there offering you forgiveness and help.

Nothing can separate you from His love!!

Summary and application

I was watching a MLB game recently and the home team was down by three runs after two innings, and with announcers said with great confidence: “It looks like this is going to be a great

game.” The pitcher was struggling. Things looked really bad. But, sure enough, the home team came back and won the game in exciting fashion.

If you’re down right now, “It looks like this is going to be a good game”.

This passage reminds me of the fact that we can be down, but we’re never out.

I am victorious in Christ

We are unstoppable, as believers. We are unstoppable, together.