

Jekyll and Hyde
A Sermon for July 9, 2017
Romans 7:14-25
Lansdowne UMC

We're continuing in our sermon series on Romans.

We've been talking about the amazing grace that God's give to us. God's ability to bring about complete transformation in someone's life. We've been talking about that fancy word justification. And last week we added to it another fancy word: sanctification. I guess we're just getting really fancy. But these are core concepts for Christianity. We've talked about how, roughly speaking, justification is what God does *for* us, while sanctification is what God does *in* us. Paul describes justification as peace with God, as a sharing in Christ's death and resurrection, and as God *liberating* us... liberating us *from* slavery to Sin and liberating us *for* obedient service to God. Sanctification on the other hand, is God's work in us to make us more like Christ. It's a process that begins in earnest at justification and continues until, by God's grace we're able to perfectly love God and humanity.

My plan is to stick on this Romans track for about 3 more weeks. I know, Romans is hard, and summer is a laid back time, but I look at it this way: these days you've got more time to think this all over! And next week, we'll enter into what many Christians consider to be one of the greatest chapters in all of scripture-- Romans chapter 8. I'll speak to this more next week, but I find Romans 8 to be well that never goes dry. It just keeps on providing encouragement, challenge, confirmation, and clarity. So I think you'll really want to be here for these next few weeks

if at all possible. And hey, while you're at it, why don't you pick up your Bible when you get home and read Romans 5 through 8. Review what we've been talking about, on lansdowneumc.org, and prepare yourself for the next couple weeks.

Well, if Romans 8 is the chapter that a universal *encouragement* to Christians, then maybe Romans 7 is the chapter that best voices human *discouragement*.

Just listen again to how it starts out. "I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate."

Pretty early on in my preparation for this message, I thought of that story of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. Do you know something of that story? Jekyll makes a potion to try to split apart his good and evil selves and the evil self ends up going and doing horrible things. I think I had probably seen a cartoon version of the story when I was a kid, but I actually decided to go read the book by Robert Louis Stevenson this past week. It's a short book and it's in the public domain, so you can read or even listen to it for free online.

For most of the story, what's going on with Jekyll and Hyde is a mystery, but at the end of the book, you get to hear from Jekyll how the events of the book transpired from his point of view.

Jekyll was known for being this really great guy. And he *enjoyed* being known for being a really great guy. He did have this problem from early on, though, of wanting to laugh at inappropriate things. And so he discovered that if he wanted to be respected in public, he needed to put

on a sort of mask. And so he began to have a public side of himself and a private side of himself.

The way that Jekyll describes it makes it clear that the resemblance to Romans 7 is deeper than a passing resemblance. Jekyll says that his scientific pursuits “shed a strong light on this consciousness of the *perennial war among my members*.” Paul puts it this way, “I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but *I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind*, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.”

In other words, both Jekyll and Paul understand that there is a war going on in humans being between the moral side and the immoral side-- a good side and a bad side.

And so Jekyll says, “If each [of these side] could but be housed in separate identities, life would be relieved of all that was unbearable; the *unjust* delivered from the aspirations and remorse of his more upright twin might go his way; and the *just* could walk steadfastly and securely on his upward path, doing the good things in which he found his pleasure, and no longer exposed to disgrace and penitence by the hands of this extraneous evil.” In other words, if he could separate out the two identities, then the good part isn’t inhibited by its evil desires-- it’s free to be truly good. In turn, maybe the evil part would just go its own way, since he wouldn’t be inhibited by that party-pooper good side.

And so this is exactly what Jekyll endeavors to do. He makes himself a potion that will separate out his good and evil sides. But soon as he

drinks the potion, it's clear to him that things have not gone as planned. He says that at that moment, he knew that his evil self was 10 times more wicked than he had imagined. And look at how Robert Louis Stevenson echos Paul in Romans through the mouth of Jekyll. Jekyll realizes that the evil side of himself was "sold a slave to [his] original evil;" Jekyll understands the depth of his personal captivity to sin.

Edward Hyde is created. And whereas most human beings are a mix of good and evil, Edward Hyde was pure evil. There was nothing to keep him from falling into a temptation. To be tempted was to fall. And the more Jekyll exercises his evil side, the stronger it becomes. To make matters worse, the potion seems to only split out the evil part of Jekyll. When he's Jekyll, he turns out to still be a mix of his good *and* evil selves. A purely good Jekyll wouldn't want anything to do with the potion. But the mixed identify Jekyll actually enjoys the opportunity to exercise some of his repressed, sinful urges. The good life became boring for him. And all he had to do was drink that potion and he could put on his evil self, inhibition free-- "free in regard to righteousness," as Paul would say. Jekyll says "my new power tempted me until I fell in slavery."

We've talked for several weeks about the human slavery to sin apart from the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. In previous chapters of Romans we've learned that sin isn't just actions we do that are outside of God's will, but that Sin is a real *power*-- an enslaving power. But what is new in Romans 7, and what I think this Jekyll and Hyde story brings out, is that sin is not merely an *external* power, but an *internal, indwelling power*. Paul refers specifically to "Sin that dwells within me" three times in this short passage.

Where I think Robert Louis Stevenson goes wrong is that it seems like he truly believes that the fate of humanity is to have this mix of good and evil identities. In this case, the only hope is to emphasize the good as much as possible so that it can generally mediate the evil. I think he probably fell victim to the poorly chosen divisions that the lectionary gave to us for Romans 7 today.

The lectionary is the name for a schedule of scripture readings that are shared by a lot of different denominations. It walks through a substantial chunk of the Bible in 3 years of Sundays. I'm usually pretty pleased with the way that the lectionary divides things up, but this week, in my opinion, the text from Romans 7 has a really major omission. We need the prior verse and the whole verse at the end to be read together with what we read this morning.

Without those verses, the only option is to say that Paul is describing his own struggle as a Christian. Now, struggling Christians have long taken a lot of comfort in the idea that even the great Saint Paul says things like, "I can will what is right, but I can't do it."

But what is really happening is that Paul is speaking *in character* as a person who has not been justified. Verse 14. "We know that the law is spiritual; but I am of the flesh, **sold [into slavery] under sin.**" And then again in verse 25: "with my mind I am a slave to the law of God, but with my flesh I am a slave to the law of sin."

Paul has just spent virtually all of chapter 6 of Romans telling us how Christ liberates us from our slavery to sin and we become enslaved to

God. Remember that verse we focused on last week? It's chapter 6 verse 22. "Now that you have been freed from sin and enslaved to God, the advantage you get is sanctification."

Now back in the first century, when a new letter from Paul would show up in one of the churches Paul was sending it to, it would come with a messenger. It's likely that for Romans this person was Phoebe, introduced by Paul in chapter 16. But the messenger was more than just the letter carrier. The messenger was the letter performer. And so you can imagine the church in Rome gathered around as Phoebe performs Paul's letter, which she had probably memorized.

My point is this: the letter wasn't read over a period of 10 weeks. You'd hear the whole thing at once. And so by the time they get to what we call chapter 7, it was just a couple minutes ago that Paul was harping on Christians not being enslaved to sin. And so when Paul says, "I am of the flesh, sold into slavery under sin," he's clearly entering the character of someone else. By the end of the passage Paul cries out in the character of an unconverted person, "Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?" This is the person who is at stage 3 of those 10 transformational stops that we talked about last week. They're "worried about their sin." They know that Jesus is able to save them from it but they haven't received that grace yet. They recognize that they don't just need to be forgiven, but they need to be liberated.

This is the plight of humanity apart from God's power. It's not just that we sin from time to time even though we don't want to. The problem is that apart from Christ, sin *indwells* us. Paul is setting up a deep contrast. On the one hand, we have a life indwelt by sin-- the human condition

apart from Christ. It creates this split personality, Jekyll/Hyde situation. Romans 7 ends with this seeming to be the ultimate reality apart from salvation: “So then, with my *mind* I am a slave to the law of God, but with my *flesh* I am a slave to the law of sin.” That’s a Romans 7 life.

On the other hand, Paul will explain in Romans 8 that humanity indwelt by the Spirit of God is liberated to love and serve God. Not to steal next week’s sermon, but check out Romans 8 verses 8 and 9: “those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But *you* [Christians] are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God *dwells* in you.” You’re not indwelt by Sin like that guy from Romans 7, you’re indwelt by the Spirit of God.

Let me just break this down, because this is on the list of things that I really wish I had understood a long long long time ago. It would have saved me a lot of heartache in my life. God does not want you in bondage to sin. God does not want us to just get comfortable with that bad part of ourselves so that we put on the a mask in public-- especially at church-- and then we go home or go to work and the real nasty person that we are comes out.

I would venture to say that most people don’t actually think that anything more is possible. We say, “oh that’s just the way I am, and God forgives me for it.” We don’t even get the point where we cry out “Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?” We just say, “I’m not perfect, just forgiven.”

Do you believe that Jesus Christ can rescue you from your inner Edward Hyde? Or is that too much for Jesus? This is what faith is. It is to believe

that Jesus is able to do what he says. Do we really believe what Jesus says?

Jesus (not Paul) says in John chapter 8, “Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a *slave to sin*. ... [But] if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.” Jesus also says in that chapter “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.”

When we dwell *on* the word of Jesus, we will come to know Jesus who *is* the the Way, the Truth, and the Life. And when we know the Truth, the Truth will make us free. Having dwelled *on* the word of Jesus, Jesus sets us free, and we come to be *indwelled* by the Spirit.

Are you weary of your inner Jekyll and Hyde war? Jesus says, “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you *rest*. Take my yoke upon you, [that’s Jesus’ teaching] and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”