

Our Struggle with Sin

“What was I thinking?”

Introduction: “I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate!” Have you ever been in a period of your life when you’ve been doing good, practicing a healthy lifestyle, or cultivating your spiritual side, lovingly paying attention to your family, friends or loved ones—and then you trip up and something bad or really stupid? And you say to yourself “What was I thinking?” Well, this scripture speaks directly to me this morning...

Image: In one of Robert Lewis Stevenson’s most famous novels, a kind respectable man named Dr. Jekyll decides to try a terrible experiment. He has discovered a secret potion that will separate the evil side of him from the good. While under the influence of that potion, the evil side assumes its own shape and identity, to which he gives the name of “Edward Hyde” -better known as “Mr. Hyde.”

Dr. Jekyll confesses to a friend, “Late one accursed night, I compounded the elements, watched them boil and smoke together in the glass, and when the ebullition had subsided, with a strong glow of courage, drank off the potion.”

When the doctor first experienced this transformation, he discovered that the evil side of his nature was smaller in size and less fully developed than the good. But the more he allowed Mr. Hyde to roam the streets of London, the stronger he became. After several months, a great reversal occurred. One night he went to bed as Dr. Jekyll—and without drinking the potion—awoke as Mr. Hyde. The doctor still existed, of course, and he was conscious of his better half. But now he found himself powerless to resist his evil urges.

Are you ever baffled by your behavior? You know the right thing to do, but you fail to do it. You resolve to avoid certain things and they become more attractive and enticing. Why? What keeps you from translating your desires into actions?

Indwelling: ¹⁷But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. ¹⁸For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. ¹⁹For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. ²⁰Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me.

Now this portion of Romans sounds like a perfect excuse to everything I have done or will do. At first glance it appears to say “It is not my fault...” Yet look closer and you see Paul admitting the sin that dwells within him. Paul is not saying that he is not responsible rather Paul is saying that your commitment of follow Jesus means there is a split inside of us, two natures that fight against each other; two parts that do not get along. If the great Apostle Paul is struggling with sin; we all have hope. In other words when you feel this way - you are in great company. Even Paul in this confessional moment presents us with a candid view of his struggles of his continuing battle with the flesh. That classic cry: ²⁴**Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?** It is not until we have the truth of what sin is that we begin to break through. If you are one who said: “what was I thinking?” then you also remember moments of feeling sick over the issue.

Some years ago while Tom was vacationing with his family in Minnesota, he decided to visit a small county fair near the community of Babbitt like the one here in Stoughton, this week. There were very few people there in the morning. In fact they were the only ones visiting the carnival rides. So when he climbed into the Tilt-O-Whirl with his three kids, they had hoped the operator would give them a decent ride—even though they were the only ones on it.

Little did he know what he was getting involved with? The first few minutes was rather fun. They laughed and enjoyed the funny feeling inside their stomachs. But after a while, it got to be not so much fun. And after some more time—way past the length of an ordinary ride—he began to feel queasy.

He wanted to get out but he couldn't. He was pressed up against the back of the car and when they passed the operator his eyes pleaded with the operator “Get me off this ride.” He let it ride until a few more people stepped up. The funny feeling inside became a churning concoction that had a faint resemblance of his morning's breakfast. He had no control over his life. He was caught going round and round in circles, held down by a merciless carnival operator. What seemed like hours came to a halt and he staggered off the platform looking rather green, he went about 20' and left his breakfast in the trash barrel. Of course for his kids this was the best part of the ride as they cheered their dad on.

If you have ever felt caught in the grip of a ride that started off fun but has turned into an addiction or has you moving circles powerless to get off—you know the helpless feeling of losing control of your life. You know what it means to need God’s help to stop the movement so you can escape.

Imitation: It is at the recognition of sin and the power of it that Paul screams out “who will rescue me from this...” One of the next steps to victory over sin is when Paul realizes that he can’t do it by himself! He needed Jesus. Jesus is the one who answers the cry for “who will deliver me?” Paul turns his pain into a celebration of the grace revealed in Jesus. He looked to Jesus and remembered that he was loved unconditionally.

Invitation: If you find yourself ever saying: “what was I thinking?” Or find yourself in a period of life where you are shutting down because you are running on your own human steam, and finally realize that you cannot do it on your own. Listen to Jesus’ invitation this morning: “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you 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” (Matthew 11:25-30).

In the end: Following Jesus doesn’t change the fact that we are human and fall short. It doesn’t make us perfect. But it does help us pay attention to the power of love that was at work in each one of us. Jesus was working with Paul to release it. May it be the same for each of you, for that same power of love is at work in you! Thanks be to God! Amen.