

Augustine Joy in Treasuring Jesus

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[0 : 00] have we been so angry and frustrated at our sin? So we often think that our struggle against sin is unique, but we take a closer look at history, we find that we are not only studying historical facts or theological ideas in the past, but rather many go through similar experiences as our own.

So let's look at a man, Augustine of Hippo. It's a town, it's a place for an animal, obviously. Of his struggle with sin and what God did in his life. So go through his history, go through the Bible, and see the change and call us to do the same thing.

We will learn how when we treasure Jesus more than pleasure, he brings us more joy. So just to make Augustine's story a little bit easier to understand, going through at point one, I want to tell you his life story with an Australian twist.

So Augustine was born about 1700 years ago in a small town of Zagast known as Algeria. So it's a little bit like being born in a little Aussie country town.

Augustine was a son of a pagan father called Patricius and a Christian mother by the name of Onika. Patricius was a civil servant, so he was respectable and had a well-paid job.

[1 : 32] So, Monica's family thought it was a great idea to marry someone with connection to the government and knew that their daughter would be well provided for.

So it's a bit like what happens with the arranged marriages these days in many parts of the world.

So Augustine, being Patricius' son, is expected to land a good plum job, government job.

So he couldn't get a good education in that little town. So when he was 11 years old, he was sent to boarding school at Madura, a larger town about 20 miles south.

So just like many people growing in the country, he was sent to a boarding school to get a better education. So afterwards, a rich guy supported him to further his education in Carthage.

It's a bit like getting a scholarship and going to a big city like Sydney. So just like for those that move from a small city to the big smokes, and Augustine is getting to be of age.

[2 : 38] So although he heard the gospel through his mum, who is a Christian, and through many of his friends during his studies, he was attracted to the lifestyle of a big city, and has taken up a concubine, and had a child.

So just like many people these days, he was in a de facto relationship, and had a kid out of wedlock. So let's take a look at Augustine's life so far. So like many people growing up in this area, he was expected to get a good job, to study hard, but at the same time, he wanted to rebel against his mother's wishes, and experience the pleasures of a big city.

So we can see that his desires are pretty much like our desires. So what's the thing that made Augustine turn his life around? So we actually need to look at how Augustine views his own struggle against lust.

So if you look at point two, on Augustine's struggle against sin, Augustine reflected his own conversion experience, and we can see it in a book called The Confessions of Augustine, which outlines his struggles.

So the thing we have to realise is, in Roman times, it's actually not uncommon to get a concubine before you get married. So the thing that stirs Augustine to think about sin is not what is expected in society, because that's pretty much normal, or at least not unusual, but rather, it's actually his inward reflection of whether he can control his lust.

[4 : 17] So you can actually see how Augustine views his lust in The Confessions. He describes his sexual impulses as negative. So he reflects the image of disease, disorder, and corruption.

So I'll just pick up a couple of quotes to see how he describes his lifestyle. For almost nine years followed, in which I wallowed in the mud of the deep and darkness of falsehood.

In another place, he says, and what was it that delighted me except to love and be loved? But I did not hold on to the righted measure, so I did not distinguish the serenity of love from the mist of lust. Both boiled confusedly together, and created off my weak age through the steep paths of desires, and sank me into the whirlpool of crimes. In other places, Augustine describes his desire as chains, thorns, a seething cauldron, and an open thaw that must be scratched.

Desire for Augustine is almost a compulsion, an irrational impulse that he feels incapable of controlling without God's help, a bondage that he is too weak to escape.

[5 : 36] So let's pause here for a moment, and I encourage us all to take an honest look at ourselves. So do we have a continuing pattern of sin, which can be likened to an addiction?

It doesn't have to be loved, which is what Augustine struggled with. It can be an addiction to greed, or to power, or to pleasure, or something else.

When we struggle against these sins, do you echo Augustine's sentiments that it's a bondage that we are too weak to escape from? For those that have struggled with sin, have you tried to stop that pattern?

Have you heard of that advice? Snap out of it. Let me tell you of the danger of your particular sin. And let me tell you how you can help yourself in that situation.

And I'm sure that that advice doesn't work. The reason why that advice doesn't work has to do with our human nature. And Augustine has plenty to say about that.

[6 : 45] So we're up to point three. So he faced a monk called Pelagius. And Pelagius was a rung that was going around the Roman Empire, teaching that the human race was not entirely sinful.

According to Pelagius, there was a residue of uncorrupted goodness in every man. It was properly nurtured, could win the soul back to God.

So that idea that Pelagius was teaching was also actually quite popular in the Chinese culture. In fact, in one of the most famous Chinese texts, it's called the Three-Character Classic, or San Zijing. Actually, the wiki entry is quite accurate. Accurate. This one is so famous, even the ABCs overseas know it. And these are one of the couple of poems that I know.

But let's have a look at what it says. I'll say it in Chinese and explain what it means in English. So it says, So what does it mean?

[7 : 54] It means that he's saying that people are by nature good at birth. So all people, the nature is similar. But the habits make them different from each other.

So it seems that Pelagius, and a popular traditional Chinese view, is quite alike. That people have some goodness in them, and if you teach them the right thing, people can find the good in themselves and change.

So how does the Bible answer that question? Are people inherently good? So that all you need to do is teach them something, and draw the good in the sinner, and lead them to Christ.

So let's see how Romans chapter 7 answers the claims of Pelagius, and the claims about human nature. So a bit about the context of Romans is that Paul is the writer of the book, and the context of Romans is that he spans the first two and a half chapters or so, describing how everyone in the world is sinful.

And the next two and a bit chapters are about how to have a right relationship with God by trusting in Jesus. So chapters 6 to 8, and we are smack bang in the middle, is about how we live in the state of being right with God.

[9 : 20] So this chapter is about Paul's struggle with sin. So firstly, does Paul think that people are inherently good? So from the passage we read, this is what Paul says.

In verse 8, it says, For 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.

So we can see that Paul thinks that there is nothing good within himself that dwells in him. He gives the reason for that, and he gives an illustration of that because he has no ability to carry out what he knows is right.

In verse 21, it says, So I find this law at work. Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being, I delight in God's law.

But I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind, making me a prisoner of the law of sin and work within me. So we have to modify that three-character classic according to the Bible.

[10:35] It will be So people are, by nature, evil, or fallen. So some of us, a lot of people don't know whether this passage in chapter 7 is written to describe Paul's struggle with sin before or after he became a Christian.

But from verse 22, as well as the structure of the book mentioned above, it's a pretty clear indication that he describes the struggle as a Christian.

Since a non-Christian wouldn't by nature delight in God's law. But this should astound us even more. So the thing that helps us to overcome sin is not the label or the tag whether we are Christian or non-Christian.

A Christian, if we rely on our own power, even if we are educated about God's law, we cannot obey the law.

Our sinful nature would try to go right up to the limit of the law. So that's always the case. When you see the speed limit at 60, some of us will ask, is there a GST bonus when there's a police set up the speed camera?

[11:55] So our nature is always to push against the law and try to break it. So from this passage, we see the ability to obey the law is not whether you carry the label whether you're a Christian or non-Christian.

It's about what's inside of us and who we rely on. Since there's nothing good inside us, we have no ability to obey by our own strength.

And more education, whether it's moral education or otherwise, does not help because the problem is in our own inner nature. For the ability to obey the law and change is seen in Romans chapter 8. So if you read from the side of Romans, it says, Jesus frees us from the condemnation of the law because he has done what is needed to be done by the law by obeying it completely.

I'll read a bit of Romans chapter 8 verses 1 to 4. Therefore, there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus because through Christ Jesus, the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.

[13:11] for what by 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.

So this passage answers what Pelagius is actually teaching. Because Pelagius think that people are inherently good, one of the things that he taught was that when Jesus died, it wasn't for our sins as a sacrifice.

It was an example of selflessness that we should imitate, that we have to draw our goodness to imitate that example. But what does the Bible say?

We are sinful. So what do we need? We need someone to not just be an example to us. We need someone to be a sin offering, someone that pays for our sin.

And in this way, Jesus frees us from our sin. What is more, we can see that from this passage, Jesus does not only save us, when Jesus saves us, he changes us.

[14:20] We see that in Romans 8, verse 5, that those who live according to the Spirit have their mind set on what the Spirit desires. What he's saying is that Jesus has the power to free us from being trapped by sin by giving us the Holy Spirit.

And the Spirit helps us to change, to live for a different master if we rely on the Spirit. So can we see that the struggle with sin is not whether we have enough self-control, but whether we have been relying on God's Holy Spirit so that we have the ability to live for God, our new master.

Of course, I don't mean that Christians can live perfectly sinless, because although we are free from the penalty and the power of sin, we presently experience the presence of sin.

So, what is said in Romans 8 somewhat reflects Augustine's experience. I will read a little bit of his biography to see how Augustine has been freed from the grip of sin.

Having been exposed to various friends that challenged him on the gospel, Augustine was filled with a growing sense of personal inadequacy, realizing how empty his life so far has been, and fell into a state of despair.

[15:49] He was torn between the monastic ideal on the one hand, and the pleasures of this world on the other. Wanting to embrace the gospel, but finding it too hard to abandon his lifestyle.

It was then when he was in this condition that he heard the child's voice saying, take up and read.

So much confused, he reached for a portion of the scriptures that he had in hand and read.

let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies or drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy, but put on Lord Jesus and make no provision for the flesh

to gratify his desire.

When he read these verses, all his pent-up emotions broke down, and he surrendered his life to Christ. Can you see that when he read the Bible and saw what Jesus is compared to his life, and he relies on Jesus through the Holy Spirit to be freed, that he finds so much joy.

He wanted to live freely in the daytime, and it's only Jesus through the Spirit has given him the power to be free from his lustful desires. So I want you to help us to see what this joy that Augustine experienced and what is preached through the Bible means for us individually and as a church.

[17 : 27] So firstly, I want to ask a question for ourselves. Are there anyone amongst us that feels just like Augustine did, that we have a sin or an addiction that we can't shake off?

As we can see in Romans, the answer is not to try harder to have self-control or to obey a law or to fix ourselves in some other method.

Instead, the only way that we can be rescued in this state is to turn to Jesus. Because Jesus has saved us from condemnation and the Holy Spirit helped us to change.

Trusting in Jesus and relying on the Holy Spirit's power means that God has the power both to save us and to change us. So Jesus has the power to set a new path for us.

So if you are interested or convinced just like Augustine did 1700 years ago, that only Jesus can change your life, or you're curious about how this path is like, please fill in the card in front of you and tell us.

[18 : 38] James, who was trading the service or myself, will be happy to talk to you after the service. And if you fill in the card, we'll respond to you. So please take this opportunity. Secondly, I want to talk about how we invite people to church or share the gospel.

So I want to pose this question. Are we functionally Pelagian? So I explain what I mean. When we try to think of people to share the gospel or who to invite to church, we might think, this guy, he's beyond help.

He's so different from me. I don't know what he's been doing last night. He'll be too sleepy, too drunk. He won't be interested in church. I'm not going to invite him. I'll invite this more moral neighbor.

He's more like me. Maybe it's just easier for God to convict and convince us person of the gospel. Do we sometimes do that?

Of course, there might be other reasons why we don't invite people that are not like us. Perhaps we are scared to talk to them. Perhaps we are feeling uncomfortable or judgmental.

[19 : 53] But when we understand the full power of the gospel in saving and changing people, we have the confidence to invite anyone to church. So I want to ask you, if you really believe the gospel has the power to save and to change, how does it affect who you invite to church?

In the bookmark that James is saying, how does it affect the person you put on the bookmark that you want to pray for? So thirdly, I want to paint a picture of church.

What would it look like if we really believe in the power of the gospel to save and to change us? So I want to tell you about the church I visited in Dallas.

So I went one day earlier than the rest of the team to visit my friend Calvin and one of the things he did was he brought me to a church called the Watermark Church in Fort Worth on a Monday night because I missed the plane on Sunday so not due to me, due to Quantis.

But there were 500 people gathering in that auditorium. But on a Monday night, it wasn't a church service. There's a ministry called Regenerate.

[21 : 08] So this ministry models itself after Alcoholic Anonymous' 12-step program. But instead of using the traditional addiction program, they replaced each element in the element of the gospel.

In fact, the first step of the program quotes Romans 7-18. And it states that we have to admit that we are powerless to overcome our addiction, brokenness, and sinful patterns.

That in our own power, our lives are unmanageable and unimaginable. So they advertised this ministry openly, not just for Christians, for non-Christians as well.

And people throughout Dallas and Fort Worth come to this place. So they break people up into small groups. And it was in a group of about 20 men. And they share all types of problems.

Domestic violence, marital unfaithfulness, and many other patterns of sin and addictions. And the church was open and ready to minister to these people.

[22 : 16] people. So if everyone here at church believes in the power of the gospel of Jesus and the Holy Spirit, that he has the power to save and change us, what would our church look like?

In order to represent a diverse community of Chastwood, it can't be just about ethnic diversity. It needs to be a diversity of social economic background.

And church is not just for the moral middle-class person. If we can, by a church, be a church that welcomes people of every background, every type of sin and addiction, and share Jesus with them, we can let Jesus change them.

And we can truly echo the vision that treasuring Jesus is for the joys of all people. a sh