

Hope for the Sinning Saint

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Preacher: Steve Jeffrey

[0 : 00] Welcome, everyone. Let me add my welcome. My name's Stephen. I've met you before. I'm the lead pastor here at St. Paul's. And if you just joined us, you have joined us at the time just as we're finishing up our Easter series for this year and the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the hope that it produces and the life that it produces for us and as being the central message of Christianity.

And so what I really want to land on today is what the death and resurrection does for us is it produces hope for the sinning saint.

So Romans 7. We're grateful for that passage in front of you as you go through today. The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde is a gothic horror novel written in 1886 by Robert Louis Stevenson. You may be familiar with it, hopefully. Dr. Jekyll is a well-to-do, moral, respectable citizen who sometimes, and in fact often, feels that he's battling between this good persona, this good person, moral, upright, rising person that he is, who does good in society, and this inner evil within himself. And this internal battles, which is a real struggle for him, is between Dr. Jekyll, who he is, and this other persona, Mr. Edward Hyde.

[1 : 37] And Jekyll has spent the great part of his life trying to suppress the evil urges that are there, that are not fitting for someone who's such a respectable member of community.

And so he makes this potion, and whenever he drinks the potion, Jekyll transforms into the smaller, younger, cruel, remorseful, and evil Edward Hyde.

And the idea that what he's trying to do is Jekyll's trying to rid himself of this hide, so I can separate this personality, which is me, of both good and evil.

But what he finds, as the story unfolds, what happens is, that as he drinks the potion, over time, the evil Hyde grows more and more and more in power, to a point where Jekyll can no longer control Hyde and this inner evil.

And so what forms for him is this identity crisis. Who am I? Am I really Dr. Jekyll, or am I Edward Hyde?

[2 : 54] Who am I? It's one of the most famous pieces of English literature ever written. It's had a substantial impact on popular culture with the phrase, the Jekyll and Hyde, being used in the vernacular to refer to people with this outward, good performance in life, if you like, presenting well, and yet, at times, performing shockingly, terribly, and you see it on the news, where, you know, something happens, someone's been caught out doing something wrong, and they say, I'm so embarrassed, I can't believe that this happened, this is not who I am.

And, well, actually, yes, it is. It is who you are. And so it's used in this Jekyll and Hyde trying to work out, which one am I?

And it is often used as an allegory in the Christian life, that there is a war in our hearts, a constant conflict between the old and the new, between vice and virtue, between sin and obedience.

And in actual fact, Robbie Lewis Stevenson grew up in a devout Christian home, and it is said that Romans 7 was the inspiration for him writing, or at least one of the inspirations for him writing this novel of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.

And it's a description of, in fact, Stevenson's own life, where he found that he could not live out the Christian faith and its parameters, and instead preferred a life of evil and wickedness and sin.

[4 : 52] So Romans 7 reveals to us that life is a battle between two selves.

And when we become a Christian, we don't move from a state of battle to a state of peace.

We move from one battle to an entirely new battle, a new struggle. And so that's the three points we're going to go through as we look at Romans 7 this morning and hope for the sinning saint.

So first of all, the struggle before Jesus. Verses 7 to 13 is a description of the struggle that goes on in every human being that they've got going on inside of them.

And this is before Jesus. And the question is, which is, you know, the big question that's been kind of, Paul's been dealing with, if God gave people his law and his law is not able to be obeyed and doesn't lead to a life of righteousness, well, is therefore the law sinful?

[6 : 14] And Paul's short answer to that is absolutely not, certainly not. And then his long answer is what we have here in verses 7 to 13. And he's referring here to the Old Testament law.

You see, the whole thrust of Romans 1 to 5 is that people are justified, they're made right with God by faith in Jesus Christ, not by obedience to the Old Testament law, not by obedience to, you know, Ten Commandments, you know, live by the Ten Commandments and God will be, you'll be right with God, he'll find you approved.

And so the question here is, if the law is not a means for salvation, then doesn't that mean the law's bad? And so here's the long answer.

The main thrust of the law, the summary of it, is in verse 7. Therefore, I would not have known what sin was had it not been for the law.

Thanks, Nick. That's the summary. And here's the four explanations, if you like, of that summary.

Firstly, what the law does for us is it defines sin.

[7 : 31] Verse 7 again. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, you shall not covet. That means, what that means is the very concept of coveting is outlined by the law.

And without that standard, Paul would not actually have understood what coveting actually was.

And he would not have known that it was a sin. Secondly, what the law does is it reveals sin in us.

Verse 8. But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of coveting. For apart from the law, sin was dead.

When a commandment of God comes to us, is what he's saying here. Verse 7. It aggravates. It stirs up in sin in our hearts.

It doesn't show us what sin is in a general category kind of way. It shows that sin resides in us.

[8 : 44] It's not out there, but it's in here. However, the law made sin in Paul's life, as it does for everyone, much worse.

And it makes it, therefore, totally inexcusable. Because what the law does is it exposes our need to be saved from it.

And without the law, we will deny the depths of the nature of our sin. We will consistently deny the depths of it.

The third thing is, the sin is stirred by its exposure to the law. What it means is it's provoked.

Romans reveals the bleak condition of every human heart. And what it says in the early chapter of Romans is that the human heart, there's a perversity about every human heart.

[9 : 50] And the description of perversity of the human heart is that it actually enjoys sin for its own sake.

That's the perversity. The great Saint Augustine writes about this in his Confessions, the Confessions of Saint Augustine.

And he describes in there a time when, as a boy, he stole some pears. He writes this, And this was not to feed ourselves.

We may have tasted a few, but then we threw the rest of them to the pigs. Our real pleasure was simply in doing something that we were not allowed.

I had plenty of better pairs of my own. I only took these ones in order that I might be a thief. Once I had taken them, I threw them away, and all I tasted in them was my own iniquity, which I enjoyed very much.

[11 : 26] That is Saint Augustine's, his own illustration of a description of the perversity of every human heart. He's saying there, there is a deeper motive in every act of sin.

That underlying motive, that underlying motive is to play God. We have a deep desire to be in charge of our world and of our lives.

Every law God lays down, every single commandment, is an infringement on our perceived absolute sovereignty of our lives.

It's the very essence of the first sin in the Garden of Eden, and it was to be like God. And from there, it's the essence of all sin. The more we are exposed to the law of God, the more that sinful

force will be aggravated into reaction.

That's what sin does. Whenever I see a law, I had no intention of breaking it until I see it.

[12:46] Put a sign up, don't touch, wet paint. I have to find out if it's still wet. Don't sit on the grass.

Why not? I wasn't going to, but why not? There's a sin that stirs up in there. Even if I might not sit on the grass, I'm still asking the question, why not?

Don't park in the car park. It's private property. There's a vacant spot. Why not? And this leads to the fourth thing that sin does, an overwhelming conviction of guilt.

Verse nine, Once I was alive, apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life, and I died.

Before he was a Christian, Paul, what he's saying here is, Paul did not know what the law actually really required of him. That's what he's saying.

[14:02] And this is a Jewish lad. This is a Jewish lad who was fluent in the law. And what he says here is, you know, summary version is, I saw a bunch of rules, but I didn't see the thrust of what the rules were getting to.

He didn't know what it meant to love God supremely. He actually thought that he was morally good, that he was in fact pleasing God by obeying the law, and that God must therefore be satisfied with him.

And then he says, the commandment came, and I died. What he says there is, the commandment came home to me.

It's like the chickens came home to roost. The commandment came home to me, and I realised when the commandment came, I was spiritually dead in that moment.

He came under the conviction of sin in that moment. That is, the Lord did for him what it was meant to do in that moment. But which commandment came home to him?

[15:22] You shall not covet. Why that one? Why that one? Those familiar with the New Testament will see that this is the commandment that Jesus used with the rich young ruler, another upright moral citizen, the Jewish citizen.

You see, as a morally upright, law-abiding Jewish Pharisee, Paul thought of sin only in terms of external actions, obedience to rules.

He would have thought of it, that if I didn't commit that act, if I don't commit murder, I'm not a murderer. Tick the box, that commandment completed, fulfilled, obeyed.

Don't break the law, and therefore I'm morally good. That's the default position. And then along comes Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, and he teaches all of the Ten Commandments, and the entire law refer not only to external behaviour, but to an inward attitude and motives of the heart.

And Paul had never understood sin as a matter of inward longings and idolatrous drives and desires. And of all the commandments, coveting is entirely about inner motive of the heart.

[16:57] It's about heart issues. Coveting is to be discontent with what God has given you. Coveting, it includes things like envy, selfish pity, grumbling, murmuring.

Coveting is not just wanting, it is an idolatrous longing for more beauty, for more wealth, for more approval, and for more popularity and everything else than you currently have.

That's what coveting is. And Paul had never seen sin as essentially coveting against God, as failing to love God enough to be content with God.

And when the command came home to him, he saw the depths of his sin. And he saw that the flaw was not in the law of God.

The flaw was in Paul, the sinner. It was in the sin. Externally, he was compliant.

[18:12] He looked good. He was a, you know, more upright than Dr. Jekyll. But internally, he saw Edward Hyde bigger and bigger and bigger than he'd ever seen him before.

He realised the law is good, but he is not. And that is the human condition according to Christianity. All of us dead in our transgressions and sins, more sinful than we'd ever hoped to imagine. And so that's the first half of this chapter.

He's looking back at how God's commands caused him to look to Jesus for rescue, look to Jesus' righteousness for his rescue, rather than him rescuing himself through his own righteous acts.

And so from verse 14, Paul's now writing about his current experience struggling with sin as a Christian.

[19 : 26] Now let me just say, this section has been debated by theologians and Bible scholars for many, many, many years.

And this section, and the real debate is, is Paul still talking now about his pre-Christian experience or is he talking about him as a Christian?

That's really the primary issue of the debate. And let me say, there have been plenty of thoughtful, wise, godly people on both sides of the debate. For instance, some find it very hard to reconcile that any Christian could write, as Paul does in verse 14, I am unspiritual, I am sold as a slave to sin. Especially when in chapter 6, he refers himself as a slave to Christ and righteousness in Christ. He also confesses that he sins regularly in verses 15 and 18.

So here's four reasons, and I want to do this as quickly as I can, why I think he's writing about his current Christian experience of battling with sin, and this is the very, this is the experience that every Christian has in battling with sin.

[20 : 49] And I would say that the reason, you know, the summary reason, which I've not, this is not one of the four reasons, but the summary reason is the primary issue here is not the law.

It's not the word of God. The primary problem for the Christian is indwelling sin. That's the primary problem. That's what this passage is addressing. But here's the four reasons.

Firstly, there's a change of verbs in the text. In verses 7 to 13, every single verb is in the past tense. From verses 14 onwards, every single verb is in the present tense.

That's the first one. Secondly, there is a change in situation. Verses 7 to 13 is Paul referring to sin as killing him, putting him to death.

From verses 14 onwards, it's he's referring to his wrestling with sin, his struggle with sin. It's a battle that he refuses to surrender to, but he's not dead, he's not dying, and it's not a battle that he is losing.

[21 : 55] Thirdly, he delights in God's law in verse 12, sorry, verse 22. For in my inner being, I delight in God's law, even though sin is at work in him.

And in the very next chapter in Romans, in Romans 8, verse 7, Paul writes that the non-Christian mind cannot delight in God's law.

It is impossible to do so because they see God's word as bad, as evil, as wrong. Fourthly, Paul admits that he is a sinner in verse 18.

Now, I know plenty of people who acknowledge that they are not perfect. They acknowledge that they are imperfect, that they're flawed.

You know, you find someone, you know, someone gets discovered by doing a wrong thing. Well, none of us are perfect. That's a standard line. Plenty of people, most people can do that.

[22 : 58] But, in every instance, they would mostly put to the point, they would mostly conclude that they are basically good. Basically good.

This is not really who I am, you know, even though I did this bad thing. I don't know but here, Paul admits that he is a sinner.

Before Jesus, none of us are aware that we are so sinful that we not only cannot save ourselves through obedience to us any form of moral code, but that even our attempts to do so only add to our condemnation.

and the depths of our sin. And that is why I think Paul is laying out here his inner struggle in these verses. He admits that he is a sinner.

Not that he's imperfect, you know, like everyone, but that he is a sinner. Only a Christian could do that. And that's why I think he's referring here to the struggle that is the struggle and the experience of every single Christian.

[24 : 22] The experience is that on the one hand we now see God's law as spiritual, verse 14, as good, verse 16, and we have a deep desire to keep it and to obey it and to please God in verses 15 and 18.

You see, what Paul is saying here is before he met Jesus, he thought he was a saint. He was obedient.

He thought he was right with God. And then in Jesus, he actually becomes a saint and now he wrestles for the first time in his life with being a genuine sinner.

his sense of sinfulness is so much stronger, so much more profound for him, so much more disturbing for him.

You see, the person who trusts in Jesus rejoices in God's word. In our deepest self, we love the word of God.

[25 : 36] God. But on the other hand, so many of our actions are against the God we love and his word.

And it's only when we come to Jesus for our rescue does this struggle become so real for us, so real in such a way that we start to doubt the, we can doubt the effectiveness of our salvation and question it all together.

Who is me? Am I, am I really Dr. Jekyll or am I Mr. Hyde? Which self do I want the most? Am I a sinner or am I a saint?

Well, for the Christian, the question is settled even though the struggle continues to rage. In verse 23, the God, Paul says that God and his law is his utmost delight and it is our utmost delight.

And yet, despite that for the Christian, there is still a powerful force of sin and rebellion within us.

For those desires, but those desires, whatever they are, are not the deepest sense of your identity.

[27 : 12] They are no longer who you are. Verse 20, if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it's sin living in me that does it.

As a Christian, we have an identity transformation. Even while sin remains in us with a whole lot of strength, it no longer controls our personality and our life.

You see, Christianity, the Christian faith, is about being someone before it is doing something. It is becoming a whole new self, as I said recently in our Ephesians series.

It is a comprehensive, when you come to Jesus, what happens to you is a comprehensive revolution to change who you are before it is a revolution in how you live.

a revolution in changing your identity and your status. You are perfect in Christ. And I think this is possibly the biggest and most common mistake people make about Christianity.

[28 : 42] I remember sitting at a table with some extended family one day and I made a comment that revealed very much the old man, Steve, and very quickly was shut down by a non-Christian on the table.

Wow, Steve, that's surprising. I didn't think Christians said things like that. No, Jesus doesn't, but I do. But that's the mistake we make, is it?

So many of you, well, Christians are just good people. Morality is not Christianity. Christianity is not about becoming more moral.

A Christian is becoming a new person, an entirely new person, before it is living with a new set of behaviours and attitudes.

And the change is gradual, and it will never be completed this side of the presence of God. The strength of the remaining corruption in our lives will still lead us to disobey God, even in the same ways we did prior to becoming a Christian.

[30 : 05] And this behaviour goes against our new and our deepest identity, and that struggle will grow. growth in the Christian life is a growth going deeper, deeper in knowing who you are in Jesus, and deeper in awareness of your need for Jesus, because you see your sin deeper and deeper and deeper.

And that is the struggle. And we will often feel discouraged, we will often feel defeated, but it doesn't change who you are in Jesus.

and Paul seems to write as if he is defeated in verse 14, I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin.

But he's not, he's not defeated in those words. He's saying that even though there is this new identity in Jesus, a new love and delight in God's law, he's saying a Christian will still completely be incapable of obedience and of that law.

A Christian is still totally incapable of sinlessness. You, the Christian, do not have the power to defeat sin. Jesus does.

[31 : 27] And so the battle will rage. Friday was a very busy day for me. and I tried to finish off this message at the end of Friday, but I didn't get it done.

I was entirely frustrated by that. My plan was to go home, have some dinner and then, you know, finish off the message.

On Friday night, our household was all in different directions for all sorts of different reasons. And so there was an opportunity for me and a couple of my girls to head out for a quick dinner. It didn't go well, that dinner.

What would normally be a delight for me, personally, turned into a total disaster. Dinner did not happen and by the time we got home, we went in three different directions, in silence, in tears and in anger.

And it was entirely my fault, my sin. the thing that I wanted to do, that I would normally delight in doing, that I knew that I should do, I didn't do, even though I knew in the moment that I should be doing it.

[33 : 09] And it went badly. And frankly, if you had seen me in that moment, or seen me driving home during the course of that moment, a drive home, which was scary by all accounts, partly enjoyable for me, but not enjoyable for anyone else sitting in the car, you would have been appalled by that lunatic on the road.

You would have been absolutely disgusted that that was in fact our lead pastor. As I was disgusted two days earlier by someone driving in a similar manner, I think I referred to them as an idiot.

When I got home, I was still seething, but at the same time disgusted in my behaviour.

Unable to take it back, all I could do was to go to one of my girls and say, it's not your problem, it's my problem, I'm sorry, but I want you to know I'm working on it and it'll be okay.

And from that, to apologise to both of my kids and acknowledge my failure. There's two reasons I'm telling you this now.

[34 : 50] First of all, you need to know that I, that like Paul, like Saint Paul, as he's known in history, that I, your lead pastor, am imperfect.

Now, I don't need to convince you of that if you've been under my leadership for 17 years, but I am more imperfect than you realise, or that you've ever seen in 17 years.

I am fallible, and Sunday by Sunday, as I come up here, I'm an emotionally embattled sinner who needs a saviour, and I need it, not just Sunday by Sunday, but every single day of my life.

So therefore, beware of thinking too highly of any person, including me. That's the first thing.

Secondly, the second reason I say this, is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, which we have celebrated just recently at Easter, are precious to me, not because they turn my life into a string of sinless successes, but because the death and resurrection of Jesus keeps me from collapsing under the string of my constant failures.

things like that. That's why the gospel is so precious to me. And that's why point three is so important.

[36 : 43] these verses are both a warning and a comfort. The first warning is that no one ever gets so advanced in the Christian life that they no longer have sin.

If we ever think that we've conquered sin and are pretty good Christians, then you're deceived and you're actually losing the war.

The more we grow as a Christian, the more we see our sin. The more we become aware of our own unrighteousness than other people's unrighteousness.

The more holy we become, the less holy we will feel. The more at peace we are with Christ, the more struggle we will have within.

Even as we make progress against many bad habits and attitudes, we will grow more and more aware of the rebellious, selfish roots that are deep inside of our hearts.

[37 : 48] And the second warning is linked to that, is that no one grows to a point where they no longer battle with sin. It is absolutely important that we expect the Christian life to be this constant internal battle between our two selves.

In fact, if I may draw upon my past experiences and my past profession as a feral animal control officer, a wounded feral pig is much more dangerous than a healthy one.

Much more dangerous. And so it is with sin. The great comfort of this passage is that the struggle itself is testimony to our new identity in Jesus.

And so if you are not currently struggling with your sin, beware. That's the warning.

Beware of where you stand with Christ. God will beware to sin. This chapter here encourages us that temptation and conflict with sin even relapses into sin are not inconsistent with the growing Christian.

[39 : 05] The Christian heart cries two things at the same time. There is the desperate cry of discouragement and despair. Verse 24, Paul's cry, what a wretched man I am.

Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? You see, when we judge ourselves by God's standard rather than our own, that is our only conclusion.

When we compare our imperfection against Christ's perfection, that is our only conclusion. And it's only when our hearts cry out about our wretchedness can we actually know and experience the hope and the liberation of looking away from ourselves to what God has done for us in Jesus. That's Paul's desperate cry in verse 24, who will rescue him and here is his salvation and his hope. Verse 25, thanks be the God who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord. There is no hope in ourselves for our salvation. Our hope only is to look to Jesus dying on the cross for us. Our only hope is to rest in his righteousness because it is Jesus who became wretched for the wretched man so that we might receive his righteousness.

[40 : 33] And so I assume some of you in this room are frustrated and discouraged and disappointed and confused with that daily struggle. embarrassed even when someone points out a failing we automatically go no I'm not and we justify rather than doing I think what the great Charles Spurgeon encouraged people to do was and he himself did was when someone pointed out his many failings he would go I'm just so glad I haven't seen the rest.

Christ has you need to know that this struggle is normal it will continue this struggle will continue to your final healing and that final healing is as far away as your own resurrection of the dead in Jesus when you were made whole and complete and perfect and alive as he is now that's when the struggle will be over that's when every tear will be wiped away that is when joy will be complete but you also need to know that there is an invincible joy of hope for you right now and that hope is as close to you as the risen Christ Jesus is to you through his word by his spirit pointing you to the gospel of hope so for the struggling sinner sorry the sorry for the sinning saint amongst us don't pull back from the struggle as your sin becomes more aware know that while others may be ashamed of you and you may be frustrated and ashamed of yourself he is not he is not he you are his sinning saint and my vision for us as a church is that we would be a church that would grow in such humility that we would be we would acknowledge our flaws and our mistakes and our failures and our sin rather than covering them up and that we would grow more and more in his grace embracing his grace and therefore display to our world the beauty of the Christian faith and its goodness who