

Dr. Jekyll Meets Jesus

Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7; Romans 5:12-19; & Matthew 4:1-11

Saint Paul's Memorial United Methodist Church

1001 W Colfax Ave, South Bend, Indiana 46616

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Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7 (NIV)

¹⁵ The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.

¹⁶ And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; ¹⁷ but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die...."

¹ Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?" ² The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, ³ but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'" ⁴ "You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. ⁵ "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

⁶ When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. ⁷ Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

Romans 5:12-19 (NIV)

¹² Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned— ¹³ for before the law was given, sin was in the world. But sin is not taken into account when there is no law. ¹⁴ Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who was a pattern of the one to come.

¹⁵ But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many! ¹⁶ Again, the gift of God is not like the result of the one man's sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification. ¹⁷ For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.

¹⁸ Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. ¹⁹ For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.

Matthew 4:1-11 (NIV)

¹ Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. ² After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. ³ The tempter came to him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.” ⁴ Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”

⁵ Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. ⁶ “If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down. For it is written: ‘He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.’” ⁷ Jesus answered him, “It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. ⁹ “All this I will give you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me.” ¹⁰ Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’” ¹¹ Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

Dr. Jekyll Meets Jesus

Robert Louis Stevenson once wrote an unforgettable story about a Dr. Jekyll and a Mr. Hyde. Most of you know the story well. Dr. Henry Jekyll was a respected member of his community — a gentleman in every respect. But Dr. Jekyll had some secret vices which he kept carefully hidden from public view. Thus Dr. Jekyll had a dilemma faced by some people today — he wanted to maintain his reputation in the community, but still be free to practice the vices that he knew would be repulsive to his neighbors.

So Dr. Jekyll hatched a plan. Late at night in his laboratory he devised a mystical potion that would allow him to transform his physical features at will. In other words, after he drank this potion, he became a different person altogether. Thus he was able to move around town and practice his unsavory vices without his neighbors knowing anything about it. During the day, he was the amiable Dr. Jekyll, a credit to his community. At night he was transformed into a sociopathic monster called Mr. Hyde, caring for no one at all and wreaking havoc everywhere he went.

Initially, Dr. Jekyll was able to control these transformations, but such unrestrained evil could not be kept in check for long. One night in his sleep, without any intent on his part, he was transformed into the infamous Mr. Hyde. Even worse, the evil monster within began to dominate his life, and eventually took over completely. Dr. Jekyll had disappeared and only Mr. Hyde was left.

Stevenson’s point was that there is a battle going on within each of us. Each of us carries around within us a little of Mr. Hyde, and if we do not pay constant attention to our character, we too, can be dominated by our lesser selves.

But why should this be? St. Paul tells us that it is because we are descendants of Adam. Our Puritan forefathers were taught, “Through Adam’s fall we sinned all.” That was St. Paul’s conclusion. Through one man, says St. Paul, sin came into the world.

You know the story of Adam and Eve. It's found in the first few chapters of Genesis. Adam and Eve defied the commandment of God. The consequences of that act of rebellion were not only tragic, but they extended far beyond that first couple themselves.

It is interesting that the first thing the Bible says in Genesis 5:3 about Adam's son Seth is that he was made "in the image and the likeness" of his father. So has it been ever since. We are all created in the image and likeness of the first man. There is within each of us a spirit of disobedience and rebelliousness. We want to go our own way, and do our own thing, without regard to our responsibilities to others or to God. The proper name of this spirit of disobedience is sin.

St. Paul wants us to know that the primary problem in human life is sin. That truth is at the very heart of our understanding of the relationship between God and humanity. More than any other religion, the Judeo-Christian faith is concerned with ethics and morality. Part of being in a right relationship with God is to seek always to do the right thing. Deep in our hearts we know that. That is why we feel guilt when we do something we know is wrong.

How do you please the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob? You do it by obeying His laws. God is a holy God who desires holiness, righteousness and, most importantly, love on the part of his children. Do the right thing at all times and in all places and you will live well in this world and the world to come.

"But how can I always do the right thing?" you may ask, "I'm only human." Yes — and our humanness can be a real problem.

Many of us are prone to chuckle at the idea of sin today. An old story tells about a man who was visiting a strange town. He stopped at a telephone booth to call his motel. In the booth he saw a sticker that said, "If you are tired of sin, read John 3:16." Some wayward scribe had written in below the sticker, "If you are not tired of sin call Klondike 3-3344."

We chuckle at that ancient joke, but the truth of the matter is that the more we know about life, and human nature, the more acutely aware we are of how great a price is often paid because of moral and ethical weaknesses.

Many years ago a large fishing boat sprung a leak. Bringing it in for repairs, the owners discovered a hammer that had been left in the bottom of the boat years before by the builders. The constant motion of the ship had caused the hammer to beat against the insides of the boat until it had worn away the wood and the metal and caused the leak that nearly sank the ship.

You may be surprised to know that a similar incident happened in September 1978 on board a nuclear submarine. A worker accidentally dropped a 50¢ paint scraper into a torpedo launcher of the U.S. nuclear submarine Swordfish, which jammed the loading piston. Since the submarine was still at sea, divers worked for a week attempting to free the piston, without success. Ultimately, the submarine had to be put into dry dock, where repairs ended up costing \$171,000.

Both of these were minor incidents. A hammer accidentally dropped into a wooden hull. A paint scraper accidentally dropped into a torpedo launcher. Yet both led to serious unanticipated complications. Unresolved sin and guilt are often like that. A small act unconfessed can lead to serious heartache and pain later in life. It doesn't seem fair, but we can spend a lifetime paying for a foolish, youthful mistake.

C. Roy Angell once gave a somewhat whimsical example of this hard truth. He told about a farm boy who was angry at a neighboring farmer who had hurt his feelings. The boy tried to think of some way he could get even. The plan he arrived upon was this: Early one morning he rode twenty miles on horseback to purchase a bag of seed — Johnson grass seed. After dark he sowed his neighbor's richest bottom land with Johnson grass. As you may know, Johnson grass has traditionally been a pest, and it is nearly indestructible. So the Johnson grass came up, and the neighboring farmer fought Johnson grass until the day he died. The young man had his revenge.

In the meantime, however, the young fellow grew up and fell in love with the farmer's daughter. They were married, and when the farmer died he left the farm to his daughter. The young fellow who went to such great trouble to hurt his neighbor years before spent the rest of his life fighting Johnson grass as well.

Usually the penalty for our sins is not that obvious. Still, the moral is valid. We can pay a lifetime for a foolish and sometimes petty act of moral impropriety.

By our very nature you and I are sinners. We read in Psalm 24, "Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in His holy place?" The answer of the Psalmist is, of course, "He who has clean hands and a pure heart..." and we have to confess that we have neither. Is there no hope for us? St. Paul's answer is that our hope is in Christ.

THERE IS A SECOND ADAM, SAYS ST. PAUL, AND THAT SECOND ADAM IS JESUS CHRIST.

The first Adam brought death and destruction through his disobedience. In stunning contrast, the second Adam humbled Himself, submitted to the will of His Father and provided for us the means of salvation.

Matthew gives us that unforgettable picture of Satan taking Jesus to the pinnacle of the Temple at Jerusalem. There Satan tempted Jesus to use earthly fame and glory to establish His kingdom.

Later Satan took Jesus to a high mountain where Jesus could behold all the kingdoms of the world. All of this would be His, Satan declares, if Jesus would bow down to him.

The greatest temptation of all, however, came later in a garden called Gethsemane where Jesus prayed, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me."

Each time Jesus was tempted, He submitted His own will to the will of His Heavenly Father. And the impact was this: Just as each of us share in the consequences of Adam's sin, so each of us share in the benefits of Christ's obedience. "For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners," St. Paul writes, "so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous." That one man, of course, is Jesus Christ.

ONLY CHRIST CAN FREE US FROM THE POWER OF SIN!

That is the first thing we learn from today's lessons. Personal discipline is helpful, but there are many disciplined persons who are still captive to their sins. Good intentions are a starting point, but there is much time-proven truth in the adage that good intentions are the paving material for the road that leads to hell.

There is a flaw in the fabric of human character that only God can mend. There is only one way that we shall ever be free from the sin that does so easily beset us, and that is to open ourselves to God's grace, His forgiveness, His love. Only by looking to the new Adam can we escape the curse of the old one.

There was a story in Reader's Digest sometime back about a man named Walter Wyatt, Jr. who was making a flight from Nassau to Miami. Normally this flight only took him about sixty-five minutes. But thieves had looted the navigational equipment in Wyatt's Beechcraft plane. For this flight he had only a compass and a hand-held radio.

Dark storm clouds threatened a fierce storm. Soon his compass began to gyrate. No longer trusting his instruments Wyatt flew below the clouds, hoping to spot something that would tell him where he was. He put out a mayday call. A nearby search plane answered his call and led him to an emergency landing strip only six miles away. But before he could get there his right engine coughed its last and died. He was out of fuel. There was nothing left to do but glide the plane into the water. He survived the crash, but his plane sank quickly. Soon he was bobbing on the water in a leaky life vest.

Suddenly he felt a hard bump against his body. It was a shark. Wyatt kicked the shark away. Somehow he stayed afloat for the next ten hours. When the morning broke, he felt another shark brush against him and he saw two more sharks headed his way. Again he kicked the sharks away. How much longer could he survive like this?

At this crucial moment he heard the sound of an aircraft headed his way. The pilot radioed a cutter, the Cape York, which was twelve minutes away: "Get moving, cutter! There are sharks targeting this guy!" Soon a ladder was dropped over the side from the cutter and Walter Wyatt climbed out of the water and onto the ship. He fell to his knees and kissed the deck. He'd been saved.

St. Paul is telling us that our situation is like Walter Wyatt's. There is nothing that any of us can do on our own to free ourselves from the power of sin at work in our lives. Positive thinking won't do it. Personal discipline will not do it. Christ is our only hope.

THIS IS TO SAY THAT WE ARE SET FREE FROM THE POWER OF SIN WHEN WE ACCEPT GOD'S GIFT OF GRACE WHICH COMES TO US THROUGH FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST.

I know that we don't like to think in theological terms, and freedom from sin may not turn us on. But this is painfully relevant to our lives — more relevant than we suppose.

Many of us are wracked with guilt. Some of us are entangled by destructive habits and practices like addictions to drugs and lust. Some of us are endangering our health and our relations with our families. We've tried self-help programs, we've read magazine testimonies from people who've wrestled with the same demons, but we haven't been able to create a strategy for coping with these self-destructive forces that have us in their grip. Our only hope is to turn to Christ. Only His grace will give us what we need to make a new start.

Maybe a simple story will help us understand our situation: A French writer named Henri Barbusse was in a trench full of wounded men during the First World War. While in that trench he overheard a conversation.

One man in the trench was dying and knew it. He only had minutes to live. He turned to another man and said, "Listen, Dominic, you've led a very bad life. Everywhere you are wanted by the police. But there are no convictions against me. My name is clear, so, here, take my wallet, take my papers, my identity, take my good name, my life and quickly, hand me your papers that I may carry all your crimes away with me in death."

Did you catch that? This wounded man wanted his friend who had made many mistakes to be able to make a new start. So he gave him his identity — his papers, his wallet, his good name. Is there a better example of what Christ seeks to do for us? All we have to do is turn to Him and accept His amazing grace.

AND THAT BRINGS US TO THE FINAL WAY WE ARE SET FREE FROM THE POWER OF SIN: THAT IS TO HUMBLE OURSELVES FOLLOWING THE EXAMPLE OF CHRIST AND SEEK TO LIVE A NEW LIFE BY HIS GRACE.

This does not mean that we arrive at a state of sinless perfection. In this life we never escape completely the nature of Adam. But we do seek by God's grace to be conformed to the image of the new Adam, Christ Himself — to have the same mind that was in Christ Jesus who humbled Himself and became obedient unto God.

The writer of a familiar Gospel hymn stated this principle well: "Trust and obey for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey."

There it is in the simplest formula imaginable. That is the secret to being set free from the power of sin — trust and obey. Look to Jesus and by His power live as fully as you are able according to the will of God.

There is an ancient legend that the cross of Christ stood on the same spot where the forbidden tree stood in the Garden of Eden. It is just a legend, but poet John Donne used that idea for one last poem, written upon his deathbed. It goes like this:

“We think that Paradise and Calvary, Christ’s cross and Adam’s tree stood in one place; Look, Lord, and find both Adams met in me; As the first Adam’s sweat surrounds my face, May the last Adam’s blood my soul embrace.”

This was John Dunne’s way of affirming that there are two natures within each of us, the first Adam, and the second, Jesus Christ. We are both dust and divinity. The central tragedy of our lives is our inability to save ourselves from our lesser nature. But the good news is this: There is One who transcended the limits of humanity, and He has made it possible for us to be free from the power of sin as well. Dr. Jekyll, meet Jesus Christ. He can set you free from the demons that torment you. Look to Jesus, trust Him, obey Him, and you will be saved.

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