

## Victory of the Lamb – Who Told You That – People Are Basically Good – Romans 7:14-25

May 3, 2020 – Pastor Bill Limmer

Sarah Lavine is a 26-year-old worker at a California Trader Joe's has come up with a way to fight the health and economic battles in the pandemic. She takes all the precautions she can to keep herself healthy in the public environment of a grocery store. She started thinking about people who couldn't leave their home. People undergoing cancer treatment, or who have a newborn, or the elderly. So she posted on a neighborhood website the following message – "If anyone needs anything and is unable to leave their house to get it please feel free to message me and I will do what I can do to get it to you . . . Please do NOT use this as a free delivery service if you're able to leave your home. (So sad but you know she had to post that, right?) It's vital that we do what we can to support each other; . . . and I want to help however I can." In the last 6 weeks, a lot of people have gone beyond the call of duty.

Today we are continuing our series, *Who Told You That*. And we are going to unpack Scripture, specifically Romans 7 as we consider the commonly held belief that people are basically good.

Let's begin with one of the more familiar tales in all of literature- The drama of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. Dr Jekyll has a secret. And he must keep it hidden. The stately and well-respected Dr. Jekyll does his best to hide the crookedness of Mr. Hyde. This secret is the inner conflict that he has with one Mr. Hyde. This relationship is unhealthy but inseparable. Dr. Jekyll can't stand that things that Mr. Hyde does and wants to do most of the time. Then there are those times with Dr. Jekyll gets an adrenalin rush of excitement and pleasure from Mr. Hyde. We could say it this way: Dr. Jekyll wants to do good but the evil Mr. Hyde is always there and sooner or later ends up getting the best of him. The conflict and tension of this love hate relationship rages through the story. The actual discovery that Jekyll and Hyde are the same person in life is not the surprise. The surprise is realization of the nature of evil in all people. Dr Jekyll never imagined that he could or would become the chief of sinners.

Can you relate? The Apostle Paul could. For those of you who maybe don't know the Apostle Paul, let me share a few details of his life with you. Before he was the Apostle Paul, he went by the name Saul. Saul was a rule follower. He was a menace to people who believed differently than he did. He was intent on showing people how ignorant and vile they were. He was zealous in ripping part Christ and Christianity. He was so into evil that he watched a gang murder a Christian. And he thought it was great. Saul would go from town to town to round up and arrest people who were Christian so that they could suffer a similar fate as that man who was murdered.

And then when he was on such a round up, God appeared to him in a light that figuratively and literally knocked him off his horse. Through this experience of the light of God he was shown his unbelievable self of coveting, desire for self-glory, ego, fear, pride, and violence. Paul then converts to Christianity. He uses the same zealousness that he used to persecute Christians to share the good news of Jesus world-wide. No exaggeration, people say he is the GOAT of world missionaries. He is a published author. And his books are in the Book of all books, the Bible. He was resilient and full of determination. And this is what the Christian Apostle Paul concludes about his Christian self. And as I read this see if you can see yourself in any of these words:

Romans 7:15-25 <sup>15</sup> **I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.** <sup>16</sup> **And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good.** <sup>17</sup> **As it is, it is no longer I myself**

who do it, but it is sin living in me. <sup>18</sup> 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. <sup>19</sup> For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. <sup>20</sup> Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.

<sup>21</sup> So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. <sup>22</sup> For in my inner being I delight in God's law; <sup>23</sup> but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me.

<sup>24</sup> **What a wretched man I am!**

Paul, like Dr. Jekyll has this inner conflict. He wants to do good but blows it. He doesn't want to do evil and he does it. He can't stand it. The GOAT of world missions is left humbled if not distraught by this inner battle. Can you relate?

I mean, how good are you? Is there anything you are hiding or are ashamed of? Just between me and you: have you ever lied . . . to anyone? Me too. Have you ever taken anything from someone else without permission. A piece of candy from your brother or sister, a few bucks from your mom or dad without their knowledge, an office supply or tool from work? I have, you too. Have you ever looked at someone lustfully? Guilty. Have you ever hated someone even for a second? Oops. Like Adam and Eve, we try to hide.

There is a deep core of evil. Genesis 6:5 **every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time.** Our capacity to do evil and not even think about it, is far greater than we get. And yet we tend to believe that there are a number of really good people. And then there are serial killers. But the rest of us are basically good.

But there is a horrible evil inside of each of us and you will never deal with it appropriately if you try to deal with it by your own will power. I'm not telling you anything you don't already know, right? You have said and you have promised, "I will never do that again." but you have and you did. Just like me. The struggle is real. Trying hard to do good doesn't beat evil. The more we think of not doing something, the more we end up being enthralled and controlled by it, we become a slave to its evilness. It only makes evil stronger.

The law is good but it is powerless to help. Moral will power doesn't help. When it comes to the human heart, if you want it to do something, tell him it's wrong. Straight up: You can't win this battle. And you know this too, don't you: sin will take you farther than you wanted to go, keep you longer than you wanted to stay, and cost you more than you wanted to pay.

So what is the solution?-Christianity brings us a solution that is outside of ourselves and changes our hearts. As we learn in the Scripture from the Apostle Paul, the chief of sinners, that battle is won by Christ. The battle, the conflict, the tension is won not through our effort but through the gospel, the work of Jesus Christ: Romans 7:24,25 **What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? <sup>2</sup> Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!** Did you ever stop to realize that in confession you are at your closest to God. Confession is the mark of the spiritual mature. If you were to ask Hitler if he was a bad guy, he would have said no. If you would have asked Lincoln if he was great, he would have said no. To a great degree the better you are, the more

sinful you will see you are. The closer you are to God the more impure you will see yourself. The closer you get to the light the more readily you will see the smudges. Story of black and brown shoes.

Jesus did what you and I didn't do. God put him in the world and the devil raged against him, the devil enraged people against him and led them to kill him. But Jesus never gave in. He always loved. Just as when David fought Goliath and the victory counted for all the people so all Jesus victory counts for all. God loves you as if you had done it all right.

The good news of Christianity is not that you give God goodness and then he owes you, but that God through Christ gives you a goodness called righteousness. He forgives, saves, and rescues you and then you live a life of gratitude for Him. Christ loves is so amazing it compels you. Paul said, before I became a Christian, I did the law so I could feel good about myself, or feel better than others, and I kept that law so God would owe me. He hated the law. But now Paul delights in the law because he sees it as God's good will for him and a way that he shows thanks to God. Here is the thing: at the moment of temptation, you can say, I am going to try harder or because of what Christ has done for me, I am going to thank God and rejoice that Jesus has addressed my need. Jesus is the way to God not a moral or immoral life.

You know what is better than a good person, a great God who forgives you unconditionally in Christ. **In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace.** The battle for good isn't won on the field of comparing ourselves to others but it is won on the cross. The good news of Christianity is not about our goodness but God's forgiveness. Good people don't go to heaven, forgiven people do. Which one do you want to be?