

Walking by Faith!

Romans 14:18-23

Introduction

Pastor David Jeremiah shares a story from his past that haunted him for a number of years. As a teenager – he worked for a hardware store as an after-school job. One day while at work – there was a customer wanting to make a purchase and no one to help him but young David. He made the transaction and put the man's \$20 in his pocket – and got back to his duties. When he arrived home later – he found that \$20 there. He hadn't intended to steal it – just forgot to get the money put where it belonged.

However – as he got to thinking – he began to create a rationale in his mind as to why he should keep the Twenty dollars. He was underpaid. He worked hard. He hadn't been paid for overtime. So – he kept the money and went on with life. But the strangest thing: 'I didn't think about the money except in those times when I wanted to do something for God. And the issue of the twenty dollars always sprang into my mind.'

He said that he wanted to repay the money – but he couldn't think of a way of doing it without embarrassing himself and his father who was the president of a Christian university. Time passed – he went to seminary – was now pastoring his first church. While on a trip – that required him to be driving for quite a while alone – the incident of the twenty dollars arose from the grave where he attempted to bury it. All the guilt came back and he was overwhelmed with remorse.

So – this time – he decided to figure out what the interest on twenty dollars would have been over that time – at his next stop – he took \$60 out of his wallet and stuffed it in an envelope and made out the address to the hardware store – no note or explanation. 'Now' – he thought he could have peace. He had repaid the money, etc. But – there were some things he had not done – he had never confessed his sin to anyone – he found that the blot had still not been completely washed away.

More years passed – he became a pastor in Fort Wayne IN. One week some hardware dealers were in town for a convention. That Sunday – a visitor came to church – his old boss – Fred Lutenberger and his wife. They sat in the third row. Jeremiah struggled thru the sermon – afterwards asked the couple to come to his office. He then asked, 'Do you remember receiving an envelope with \$60 in it?' 'Well – yes' said Fred – 'that was a rather strange thing'

Jeremiah: 'Then I lost my composure. I began to weep and told them the whole story. **I'd been carrying the burden for all these years. A little thing - a few dollars, is enough over time, to bring about misery, even destroy a life. I confessed everything and asked for their forgiveness.** They wrapped their arms around me and told me they loved me. They thanked me for doing the right thing. And **I felt such a joy that it's difficult to put into words . . . an old heavy weight had been lifted, and I was free.'**

There is nothing greater than having a clear conscience before our God and men

Micah 7:18 - 'Who is a God like Thee, who pardons iniquity?'

Micah 7:19 - 'He will again take pity on us . . . Yes, You will cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.'

Corrie Ten Boom: 'When God forgives our sins, He casts them into the depths of the sea and puts up a sign that says, 'No Fishing Allowed.'"

And – there is nothing more miserable than having a conscience that condemns us

John Bunyan in the Allegory - the Pilgrim's Progress – portrayed sin as a heavy burden which Pilgrim carried around on his back until the day He came to the hill called Calvary and looked up to the cross - - - and the burden fell from his back and rolled down the hill into the empty tomb – where he saw it no more

If we do stain the conscience – the path of restoration is always thru repentance and confession – the remedy is the cross of Jesus Christ

In this passage of Romans - - - the Apostle Paul gives us a beatitude we can add to the eight which Jesus gave us in the Sermon on the Mount

Romans 14:22 - 'Happy is the man who does not condemn himself in what he approves.'

i.e. – Happy is the man who has a clear conscience in his behavior

If we want to experience all the joy the Lord has for us in this life – all the joy the Holy Spirit wants to give us – then we should be a people who pay attention to the voice of the conscience / follow it / and return to the fount of cleansing when we need

I. The Pursuit of Peace - vv. 18-20

Paul has told us [v. 17]

Romans 14:17 - 'For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.'

This next section builds off of that

Paul reminds us that this kind of faith / this kind of living is pleasing God

- The kind of faith that obeys the conscience – v. 5
- The kind of faith that knows the difference between trivialities and moral precepts

There is always the danger in religion to overemphasize certain trivialities

That's where Jesus corrected the Pharisees in their practice of religion

Matthew 23:23-24 - 'Woe to you Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. You blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!'

What an indictment – they strained out a gnat and swallowed a camel

MLJ: 'What impression are we leaving on others as to what Christianity really is? What makes men and women Christians . . . Is the kingdom of God eating and drinking or is it something else?'

Some people give the impression that Christianity is all about . . .

- A Christian is someone who does not have nose rings or tattoos or blue hair

But – the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking – but righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit

v. 19 - 'Let us pursue the things which make for peace . . .'

One thing that pleases God is when we walk in peace – particularly with our brothers in Christ

Proverbs 20:3 - 'Keeping away from strife is an honor for a man, but any fool will quarrel.'

R.C. Sproul has written a book on Christian living titled: 'Pleasing God'

R.C. Sproul: 'Every Christian should have a passion to please God.' [Pleasing God, p. 7]

II Corinthians 5:9 - 'Therefore also we have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him.'

God's people desire to please Him / to glorify Him

If you look back over the previous week - is there something you were involved with where you can say - 'that was pleasing to God.' In your life?

- A sin resisted / temptation fought and won!
- An act of service in His Name
- A sacrifice of time / talent or treasure for a kingdom cause
- An act obedience to His Word
- A time of worship / devotion / Scripture reading / meditating
- A humble / heartfelt prayer
- A conversation about Jesus with another
- Extra patience shown towards a challenging person

Paul reminds us living in peace with one another in the church is pleasing to God

One pastor asked a missionary who had served the Lord for a number of years – He asked: ‘What are some of the things that hinder or destroy peace in the churches?’

The missionary thought for a moment as he reflected back over time - - - then responded: an unforgiving spirit / a critical spirit / a domineering spirit / impatience with others / pride / playing Holy Spirit for others / festering resentment [sounds like the ingredients to a poison stew]

The biblical model is far different:

Colossians 3:12-13 - 'And so, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.'

II. The Walk of Faith - vv. 21-23

Whatever is not from faith is sin – v. 23

As Christians we make choices daily to do certain things / to refrain from certain behaviors

Sometimes we fall / we fail / sometimes we gloriously hit the bullseye by God's grace

The Apostle Peter – after he denied knowing the Lord – 3x – then heard the rooster crow – went out and wept bitterly – he blew it – and he knew it

C.S. Lewis: 'A Christian is not a man who never goes wrong, but a man who is enabled to repent and pick himself up and begin over again after each stumble - because the Christ-life is inside him.' [MC, p. 63]

Walking by faith is a daily event in the life of a believer – involves not going against our own conscience

Romans 14:22 - 'The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves.'

v. 22 – Blessed is the man who does not do what he knows in his heart is wrong

When David – went out on his palace roof and saw Bathsheba bathing

He did not walk by faith that night – but went against the conscience

The whole incident became a blot on his record in the Scriptures – and brought trouble in his kingdom the rest of his days

II Samuel 11:27 - '... the thing that David had done was evil in the sight of the Lord.'

It was a moral failure

Admiral William McRaven took the opportunity to seek out on one occasion – an interview with retired Army Major – Dick Meadows

Meadows had been involved in Operation Eagle Claw – which was the failed attempt to rescue American hostages from Tehran in 1980

Over 50 hostages were held for 444 days – released on President Reagan's inauguration

What went wrong?

When the hostages were taken in November of 1979 – Special Forces later began planning a tactical rescue mission

It was an extremely challenging mission involving 8 helicopters launching from the aircraft carrier – US Nimitz [60 miles off the coast of Iran] – flying to a designated spot in Tehran – and taking trucks into downtown where the US embassy was located – and the hostages held.

During the raid – one of the helos collided with a C-130 causing it to explode – killing 8 men – and the rescue mission was aborted

The fiasco ended Jimmy Carter's presidency and called into question the military's competency

Dick Meadows some 30 years later still carried mental scars from the failures of that day

What caused the failure?

They were not careful / focused in their planning

Meadows blamed the failure on a hurried atmosphere to get the mission of the ground – they didn't plan properly / train properly

A Colonel Beckwith made the final call – when Meadows begged him for a couple more days to train – the colonel said they were running short of time - - - and they rushed it through

The army's own investigation lauded the courage and sacrifice of the soldiers, airman, and marines - - - but added there were massive failures in planning, equipment, intelligence and training

Paul once exhorted Timothy to carefulness in the Christian life

I Timothy 4:7b - 'Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness.'

R.C. Sproul: 'Like Olympic athletes, Christians are called upon to train, to make sacrifices, and to embrace certain disciplines in order to give God "our utmost for His highest."

Scripture plays a crucial role in our training – whether it's Bible study / Scripture memory / meditation

C.S. Lewis portrays this in one of his Chronicles of Narnia

In The Silver Chair – Aslan instructs the children

C.S. Lewis: 'Remember the signs. Say them to yourself when you wake in the morning and when you lie down at night, and when you wake in the middle of the night. And whatever strange things may happen to you, let nothing turn your mind from following the signs . . . Here on the mountain I have spoken to you clearly: I will not often do so down in Narnia.'

i.e.- remember what I told you – this is the path to blessing!

Joshua 1:8 is one of the classic texts on the believer's relationship to the Word of God

Joshua 1:8 - 'This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success.'

The children [like us!] got sidetracked - - - struggled to recall and completely botched the first three signs due to distraction and weariness, but they finally remembered and obeyed the crucial final sign just in time to save Prince Rilian.

They learned – like we do at times – they should have been more attentive / more careful to memorize the signs / the word of God

David was careless on that fateful night

He violated his conscience – and then his conscience took his peace and joy from him

David finally prayed in Psalm 51 – after Nathan had confronted him

Psalm 51:3 - 'My sin is ever before me.'

He had lost his joy – his spiritual wounds - still open

When someone has scars on their body – some degree of healing has taken place

For David – this was still an open wound

There will be no healing / no joy until sin is confessed and acknowledged before God

Psalm 51:4 - 'Against Thee, Thee only, I have sinned, and done what is evil in Thy sight, so that Thou art justified when Thou dost speak, and blameless when Thou dost judge.'

He confessed his sin – asked for forgiveness

Psalm 51:12 - 'Restore to me the joy of Thy salvation, and sustain me with a willing spirit.'

Why had joy fled from King David during that period of 9 months or so?

*** Sin and the conscience have that kind of power – to steal our joy / weigh us down with guilt / crush our spirit

*** People bring extra hardship and unnecessary burdens into their lives when they go against the conscience

Sin never goes away by ignoring it

But the message of the cross is that for the truly repentant sinner – God can – in His grace cleanse and forgive the sinner

Salvation is the removal of that heavy burden

And – we need cleansing at times *after* salvation

Jesus visually portrayed this truth in an acted parable with the disciples - - - when He washed their feet – shortly before He went to the cross

Jesus set out to wash their feet – and Peter protested - - - no way, lord – you shall not wash my feet – that’s the work of a servant!

Jesus said – if I don’t wash you – then you will have no part with me

John 13:9, 10 - 'Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head." Jesus said to him, "He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you."

Jesus is telling Peter and the disciples – as we walk in this world - - - our feet are going to get dirty

- A temptation here
- A stumble over there
- Sin will sneak up behind you when you were not looking / play upon your emotions
- Maybe you went against the conscience and you haven’t confessed or asked forgiveness

Dr. Laura says the most common reason people called in to her radio show was to seek some way to evade the consequences for doing what they knew was wrong – but they went ahead and did it anyway

When she reminds them of the consequences of sin [reaping and sowing] – they often reply – ‘Yes – but - - - I was . . . unhappy / confused / frightened / in love / vulnerable / needy / stressed out / exhausted / etc.’

*** Sin does not care about your emotional state

In fact – sin would prefer to find you in a vulnerable state – it does its best work right there

If you have stumbled – there is one remedy

The remedy is not to run from Jesus – but to run to Him!

The Good Shepherd *restores* the soul / He washes our feet / cleanses us – to go out and do better the next day

That is what it means to walk by faith

When Jesus spoke the Beatitudes – He was telling us how to be blessed

The Hebrew word for blessed is Asher – ‘Happy’ – [The Beatitudes]

Matthew 5:6 - 'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.'

Blessed are the peacemakers

David spoke of blessing:

Psalms 32:1 - 'How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered!'

You are blessed – if your sins are forgiven! / if your trust is in Jesus

He cleanses and forgives us in salvation - - - He will also wash our feet when they get dirty from the daily battles and temptations we face in this life

Our every sin has been laid upon Jesus – on Calvary – He cried – ‘it is finished’

Conclusion

The English architect – Sir Christopher Wren once built a structure in London. His employers claimed that a certain span Wren planned was too wide, that he would need another row of columns for support - - - Since they were paying the bills - - - Sir Christopher – gave in and added a row of columns. But – he left a space between the unnecessary columns and the beams above.

The ‘experts’ could not see this space from the ground. To this day – the beam has not sagged. The columns stand firm, supporting nothing but air – and validate Wren’s conviction that nothing else was needed.’ [Leadership is an Art, pp. 147, 148]

We are saved by the blood of Jesus Christ alone

*His blood can make the foulest clean
His blood availed for me*

Once we enter that life of faith - - - we continue to walk by faith thru the ups and downs / hills and valleys – thru dark times and sunny days

As Chuck Swindoll expressed: ‘three steps forward – two steps back’

But – we ever move forward / onward / upward to that glory God has prepared for us