

Who are you? Romans 7:15-25a
8th Sunday after Pentecost Pastor Jon Bergemann 7/10/2005

Who rescues us? Thanks be to God – through Jesus Christ our Lord! Amen. The word of God for our consideration this morning is taken from Romans 7 (read text). In the name of our life giving Savior, dear brothers and sisters in Christ.

I had the opportunity to meet my 17 year old niece a few weeks ago up in Falls Church. She was in this area with her high school class from Minnesota on a history tour of sorts. It was interesting to hear their impressions of our area. I can't forget one very nice girl's review of Mount Vernon, "It was OK, but we were there so long. We spent over 2 hours there!" I had to smile at her still forming attention span. The last time I was there I spent four hours and it wasn't enough.

But mediocre review of Mt. Vernon aside, one place that seemed to stand out for all of them was the Gettysburg battlefield. Even though they spent considerably more time than 2 hours in this location, they were all struck by the important and terrible fighting that occurred there.

We might have the same reaction as we visit the numerous battlefields in this area. The War Between the States or the Civil War was a terrible conflict. The fighting was gruesome. The casualties were great. And to think of our nation so divided and warring against itself seems so tragic.

Civil war is terrible. Civil war is tragic. Civil war rips apart and divides.

And you know what the sad fact is? A civil war is still going on.

It's raging right now in our country, but it isn't a war between states, or races, or groups of people. It's raging right now in our congregation, but it isn't between certain members of our church. It's a civil war that's raging right now in you and me.

And the point of contention in this war? It all centers around the simple question, "Who am I?"

You see, each of us has to war or wrestle with this question. Who are you? Why do you do the things you do?

It's a question that demands an answer. In fact, some people have spent their whole lives trying to answer the question. Many go on long sojourns or embark on bold new adventures in an attempt to "find themselves." It can be fascinating to look at our family trees and histories and cultures to better understand where we've come from and what has influenced who we are today. But in the end, we still have to answer this question. "Who am I?" And this question demands an honest answer. As an old saying goes, "you can't cheat the man in the mirror."

Who are you? You see, here comes the difficult part. Because in trying to answer that question, you might feel like you're caught in a civil war within yourself.

On one hand, we look at what we want or desire to be. We want to be a person who loves his or her family and friends more. We want to be a person who is always accomplishing more in life. We want to be a person who overcomes temptation. We want to be a person who has broken free from the addictions of our own pet sins.

And we try to be these things. But then, sometimes just as we think we're making headway, we fall flat on our faces. We find that we've given into that pet temptation one more time. We've failed to love our friends and family unselfishly. We've failed to love our God above all things. And when we look in the mirror, we don't like what we see. We see someone who's wasted potential. Someone who has thoughts we'd be too ashamed for anyone in the world to know. Someone who hears God's Word and yet falls into sin and temptation so often. Someone who wants to be a good Christian. But someone who is capable of thinking and desiring things which are so un-Christ like, so shameful. Someone whose intentions and actions so often don't match up.

Yes, when we look in the mirror, we see someone like the apostle Paul. In our text, he's wrestling with this same question, "who am I?" Look what he says in verse 15, "**I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.**"

He's someone whose intentions and actions don't always match up. Someone like us.

And why is that? Why can we have such good intentions and such poor results? Because we have something very bad that's dwelling in us. An infection of the worst kind. As Paul mentions in verse 17, we have sin living in us. So no matter what we do, sin is always right there. In fact, nothing we ever do on this earth will be absolutely perfect.

And so herein lies our civil war. The good we want to do? We don't do it. The evil we don't want to do? The stuff that hurts others and leaves us in shame? This we so often do. Because no matter what we do, sin is right there with us.

And God hates this sin. He hates every time we lose the battle. And we deserve to go to hell because of this sin. That's why it might not be so pleasant to look in the mirror.

Our sin gives us a constant war. It's a fight that can leave us upset, frustrated, and on our knees. And when we really consider all the things we have ever done, thought, wished, and wanted in our lives, we can often be left exclaiming with the apostle Paul, "What a wretched man/woman I am!"

A wretched, defeated, retreating failure of a sinner. Is that what you are?

I've got some good news from the front lines to report to you. That's *not* the real you.

Oh it's true that the sin that lives in you certainly is wretched and ugly. God hates it and it deserves eternal punishment. But that's not who you really are.

That's because someone else has given you a new identity. Who is he? Who is the one who will rescue us from this body of death? As verse 25 declares, "**thanks be to God – through Jesus Christ our Lord.**"

You see, Jesus went to war himself. He came and lived a perfect life on this earth. And he didn't have a civil war raging inside of him between good and evil. Though he faced temptation in every way just like us, he was 100% good! He had no sin living in Him! He was perfect!

But because we aren't, he went to the cross and died to pay for the sin living in us. And after it had appeared that he had been defeated on that cross, he rose victoriously from the dead!

The significance? It proves without a doubt that we have been given a new identity. His resurrection proves that he really did pay for all our sins. It proves that His work of living perfectly in our place really is complete. So now when God looks at us, he sees Jesus perfect life in place of our sins. We have been covered over with Jesus perfection. How does the man or woman in the mirror look? You look like Jesus! You look perfect!

But we still sin! And we still slip! And we still mess up! Yes, it's true. And it's also true that you will go crazy in life if you don't understand this civil war. You see, sin will still live in us on this side of eternity. We won't ever be completely free of sin and its results on this side of heaven. But remember who you are!

Who is the real you? The one that's been covered over with Jesus perfect life. The one whose every sin, every slip up, has been forgiven. The one who Jesus loved so much that he gave his life to save. And the one who Jesus still loves so much that he promises to be with forever.

To illustrate, check out this board (hold up a white board that has been covered in black marker). This is what your heart looked like by nature. Messy, dead, full of sin. But then Jesus came and worked faith in your heart. He made his forgiveness yours. He clothed you in his perfection. And the result? Your dead heart became alive (erase a portion of black marker). And the more you are into the Word of God, the more you grow in this new life (erase more of the black marker).

But you notice that on this side of eternity, some of the darkness – that sin – is still there. That's because on this side of heaven, you will never be perfect. So you will still sin, still give into temptation. But you know what? That's not the real you, this is (pointing to erased section). This is how God sees you. This is who you are. Yes, sin will still battle against you, and out of love for our God who hates sin we'll do all we can to fight it, but look who the real you is.

You are forgiven. You are loved. And you are perfect in God's sight because of Jesus.

The result? You can take a good long look in the mirror, and see yourself the way that God does (erasing final black marker from board and drawing a cross in its place). Because of Jesus, you know who you are. You're a plus, a positive, and priceless to God (making the sign of the cross). The war is won! Amen.

Romans 16:20 The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.



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