

Sermon- 4-19-2015
Text- Colossians 3:1-11
Title- Victory Over Sin

Today is our second week in a series we're calling: *Victory*. We are just two weeks removed from Easter, a day that marked the most pivotal event of our faith. On that day we celebrated our risen Savior, but what about every other day? What does the resurrection of Jesus mean for us on a Monday morning when we're facing a pile of work? What about days when we feel burdened or broken? Does the resurrection of Jesus mean anything on those days? Does it hold any power for us in the everyday? What does it mean today? In this *Victory* series we hope to answer those questions. Last week Jed taught us that, in Christ, we have "Victory Over Condemnation." We learned this simple, yet profound verse from Romans 8:1. Can you quote it together with me? "*So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus.*" If you have your Bible and want to turn to the book of Colossians, today we're going to look another area where we can experience *Victory*. (Colossians 3:1-11)

1 Since you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits in the place of honor at God's right hand. 2 Think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth. 3 For you died to this life, and your real life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 And when Christ, who is your life, is revealed to the whole world, you will share in all his glory. 5 So put to death the sinful, earthly things lurking within you. Have nothing to do with sexual immorality, impurity, lust, and evil desires. Don't be greedy, for a greedy person is an idolater, worshiping the things of this world. 6 Because of these sins, the anger of God is coming. 7 You used to do these things when your life was still part of this world. 8 But now is the time to get rid of anger, rage, malicious behavior, slander, and dirty language. 9 Don't lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old sinful nature and all its wicked deeds. 10 Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him. 11 In this new life, it doesn't matter if you are a Jew or a Gentile, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbaric, uncivilized, slave, or free. Christ is all that matters, and he lives in all of us.

Victory over sin, that's our topic for today. Aren't you excited? We're going to talk about SIN! I can assure you that I approach the subject with the same reluctance. We don't like to talk about sin—I don't like to talk about sin. I want to be known for the One I'm moving towards, not the things I'm moving away from. Plus sin is complicated. In a room this size, I'm guessing there are a host of different perspectives on what constitutes "sin," and some of us might not even choose to believe there is such a thing. Just a cursory reading of all the misdeeds that Paul lists in this text can be overwhelming.

So let's all just take a deep breath. I promise you that in spite of the fact that this might be a sensitive topic, there's hope and joy at the end, ok?

Let's start by asking a few questions. What is sin? In verse 5 of our text Paul says we should, "*put to death the sinful, earthly things lurking within you.*" So what does he mean?

Aaron Hernandez, former star tight end for the Patriots was convicted of the murder of Odin Lloyd this week. He was sentenced to spend the rest of his life in prison, a prison that is less than two miles from Gillette Stadium. It's hard to wrap your mind around. I didn't watch any of the trial, so I'm in no position to talk about a person's guilt or innocence. This much I know. A young man was shot—his life was taken by another person. When this happens we know it is not right. No one has to explain it to us. The law establishes murder as a crime, but we know it's wrong, regardless.

An ESPN reporter was suspended from her job this week after she was caught on video berating a

towing lot attendant. In the video she demeans the attendant's weight, her education, her teeth, and more, all the while trumpeting her own position as a successful, beautiful person on television. She issued an apology, of course, noting that it was a stressful situation, but that she had no excuse for treating another person so poorly. And we agree, internally, intrinsically, without having to have be told. Somehow we simply know.

Anger, rage, malicious behavior, slander and lies when we see evidence of these, our antennae go up and we know, inherently, that such behavior is not right. These are all sins of commission—things that we do, but we recognize sins of omission too. I used to keep a quote up in my office by the French playwright Moliere. He wrote, "It is not only what we do but what we do not do for which we are accountable." Laziness, inaction, not doing the thing we know we should have done, these too are hardwired into our hearts—we know they're the opposite of how things should be.

Sins of commission and sins of omission, we recognize these, but there is a third category. It's one that Paul alludes to here in our text. If you look at verse five again there is a phrase that is key for us to understand. It's two words, "evil desires." The word 'desires' is the Greek word, *epithumea*. It's a hard word to translate into English because we don't really have any compatible synonyms. It means an "epi-desire," a "mega-desire," an "over-desire." When the word is translated simply, "evil desires," it gives a slightly wrong impression. We tend to think it means desire for something evil. But what it actually means is to take our natural desires (even good things) and to overinflate them.

The problem with our hearts is not simply an ordinary desire for bad things, it's over desire for good things too. You know this when you see it too. People choose things that are good things and overinflate their importance all the time. Sometimes it happens with work—a person's time and energy are so dominated by their job that every other area of their life suffers. Sometimes this happens with sex—commitments and hearts are broken because lust goes unchecked. Sometimes this happens through the overuse of a substance—what was once a trivial habit, gains complete control over a person's life.

Ok, how are we doing so far? That wasn't so bad. Sin exists. It happens. We recognize it when we see it. Sometimes it's punishable by the law, sometimes not. In certain forms it's almost as though a social contract has been broken. You won't get thrown in jail for it, but it's frowned upon. These are the public responses to sin. It's pretty easy to talk about sin in these terms because it's a bit more clinical. It's other people. Things get prickly when we start to talk about our own sin.

When sin is someone else's problem we can generally find agreement. When it's our own issue, that's when we start to get testy. Some of us wear feelings of guilt like a cement truck on our backs. Whether you were brought up in the church or not, it's possible to feel burdened by the weight of our own mistakes and deceptions to the point where it's easier to just throw your hands up in the air and say, "if you can't beat em' join em." Some of us get defensive. "Who says that what I'm doing isn't right? It's nobody's business but mine!"

For some of us it's the opposite. We've been so diligent and rigorous in our desire to avoid even the perception of sinfulness, that the sheer strain of it all has us feeling just as burdened as those we sometimes look down upon for lacking our degree of willpower. Some of us have been trying make God and everyone else happy for so long that it feels like the life has been sucked out of us.

There is a difference between a changed heart and a restrained heart. The characteristics of a changed heart—one that has been transformed by the Spirit of God—are sometimes called the fruits of the spirit. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. The restrained heart knows only the burden of having to get it all right one more day.

Let's stop here and ask a question that is significant. We know that punishment awaits criminals. We know the way society looks down upon sin publicly. We know our response to the sins we commit, but how does God look at sin?

Some of us think we know the answer, but I think it's important for us to look at Scripture. In Samuel 2:2 we read: "There is no one **holy** like the **LORD**; there is no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God."

God is holy, which is another way of saying complete, or without blemish. Our Creator God is perfect in every way. He was, He *is*, and He will ever be holy, blameless, perfect in every way.

I think it's safe to suggest that sin represents a lack of holiness—something that is not as it should be. As a result, sin separates us from God. In the book of Romans chapter 6 verse 23 we learn that the wages (or you could say the cost) of our sin is death. That's pretty direct, but think of it this way, how can something that is completely perfect, without blemish or defect, co-exist or be intertwined with something that is not perfect, blemished, not as it should be? It can't. To do so would mean that it was no longer perfect in every way. And so it is with God and us. Our sin, our "missing the mark" separates us from God.

This is bad news. I'll allow for the fact that it's difficult to swallow. It probably has prompted several questions. "Why would God make us at all if our flaws demand separation?" "How is it possible to please a God with standards such as these?" "If our "abuse" of the life He granted us was going to result in such catastrophic pain and loss and brokenness, why didn't He just start over—why does He let it go on?"

These are huge questions, and it's fair to ask them, though I can't possibly give each a fair answer—at least not now. Feel free to find me after and I'll gladly discuss them at length. For our purposes today, I simply want to answer one question. What do we do about this? What do we do with our sin if it means we are cut off from the one who made us?

When I was in my teens, my family lived in a small farming community in Missouri. Population 4,000. It was a curious existence—a bit like living in a fishbowl. Everyone knew everyone. Entertainment was tough to come by, so it shouldn't surprise you to learn that the drive-in movie theater on the edge of town was extremely popular. I recall on one occasion that my youngest brother wanted to join me in visiting the theatre, but we did not have enough money between us for two tickets (everyone in the vehicle had to purchase a ticket). This did not deter us. I devised a plan where Trevor stowed away in the trunk of my vehicle. I was going to knock on the trunk when it was time for him to crawl out—he to find his friends and me to go find mine. Now, I'll admit this was ill advised. If we had simply asked my parents they would have given me the money—but that would be too easy. Right?

The plan worked to perfection—until it didn't. When trying to sneak your younger brother into the drive-in it's important not to park next to a drive-in employee. They saw Trevor rolling out of the trunk of my car and brought the two of us to the concession stand while they made two calls, one to my parents and the other to the police. If they would have given me the option, I would have left it at the police. My parents were furious. My dad was the minister at the largest church in town—everyone knew who we were—this was going to rule town gossip for a week. "Minister's kids caught breaking the law at the drive-in!"

Fortunately, the law chose not to get involved, but my parents made up for the lack of prosecution

by having us show up at the drive-in owner's home the next morning. We had to apologize and then clean up all the trash in the lot. They told us we were banned from the theatre for the rest of the year, but that wasn't the worst part. The worst part was the realization that I had so disappointed my parents. I was a reflection of them in that small community, and my poor judgment, my mistake, or you could say, my sin, reflected poorly on my family. It wasn't so much what I had done, a slight offense to be sure, it was what it communicated about me and about them.

I find myself, when I face the consequences of my own sin, echoing the words of Paul in Romans 7:18-24, where he wrote, "**18** And I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want to do what is right, but I can't. **19** I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway. **20** But if I do what I don't want to do, I am not really the one doing wrong; it is sin living in me that does it.

21 I have discovered this principle of life—that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong. **22** I love God's law with all my heart. **23** But there is another power within me that is at war with my mind. This power makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me. **24** Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death? **25** Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord.

What are we going to do about our sin? We cannot find victory if these behaviors are competing for and polluting our hearts. What are we going to do? Most people think that we're going to deal with these issues by willpower. But that's not what Paul would have us do.

Here's the problem, our sin, the things we've put in the lead position of our hearts instead of God, these things can't be eliminated, and they cannot be erased—they can only be replaced.

If we think that we can control our sin and the over-desires of our heart through sheer willpower you may conquer one area only to replace it with another. It's a cycle that I'm familiar with in my own life. Are you? No. What we truly need is to replace the things that can never satisfy with the one thing that truly can.

You want to know the truth? I cannot claim victory over sin, but Jesus can, and by His grace, He lets me share in His victory.

Paul writes in verses 1-4, "*Since you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits in the place of honor at God's right hand. **2** Think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth. **3** For you died to this life, and your real life is hidden with Christ in God. **4** And when Christ, who is your life, is revealed to the whole world, you will share in all his glory.*"

We replace the sin in our lives by setting our hearts on things above. By giving our worship to the God who deserves it and who alone can bring fullness, grace, restoration, and yes, victory. I love how Jed expressed this idea last week. He encouraged us to fix our eyes on the cross. Again and again. Over and over. To see the lengths to which Christ was willing to go to overcome our sin draws me into worship, it humbles me, it changes me.

In fact what we're doing right now, is directing our worship to God. We are aligning our hearts with His at this very moment. And each day beyond this one we have the same opportunity. We might not always be assembled together, but each day we draw breath provides us the chance to direct our eye's to Christ—to make Him our life, just as Paul says in verse four, "*And when Christ, who is your life, is revealed to the whole world, you will share in all his glory.*"

We often misplace our worship, in some ways, I suppose that's what sin really is—misplaced worship. What we need to do instead is look up and respond to the grace of God, made possible through Christ's death and resurrection. Today, as every day, we need to give Him our worship, and as we do He grants us victory over sin. It's peace, but not like the world gives. Instead, it's one that cannot be stolen, a joy that fills us and restores us and gives us hope.

Today, I claim no victory over sin in my life, it is Christ's victory, and by His grace he lets me share in it. The filthy rags of my sin that once gave me my identity have been replaced with His holiness. I am not the same, I'm a new creation. This is true not because my willpower proved I could be good enough to merit God's favor, but because of His love and mercy toward you and me.

Some of us may feel like we've run too far away, we've been too willfully disobedient, for God to ever allow us to experience His forgiveness. Here's the truth, **6** *When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners. 7 Now, most people would not be willing to die for an upright person, though someone might perhaps be willing to die for a person who is especially good.*

8 *But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.*

Application-

I can't, He can, I think I'll let Him.

Yesterday was my birthday, and in my 42 years on this earth I have come to desire one thing, that my family and friends and those who know me would find victory over sin, condemnation, brokenness and death through the saving work of Christ. Let's close by putting these two truths to memory:

-Romans 8:1

"So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus."

-Colossians 3:10

"Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him."