

Monday, February 2, 2009

Why is it so hard to choose life over death?

This weekend we looked at how each of us enters into life moving toward death. The minute we are born the clock begins ticking and our life rushes toward conclusion with no exceptions.

We are born into spiritual death.

We are born into a jail cell on death row waiting the day of final execution. And somehow we get used to it and we start to like it and it becomes comfortable. It gets harder and harder to make the decisions that lead to life because we do not listen to the voice that lead us to life.

We make the choices that feel pleasant and we fill our lives with little temporary pleasures as opposed to the pleasure of living a holy, moral life. What are the little pleasures that you allow to replace the genuine pleasure God has designed you for?

Choosing the little pleasure is choosing the cell on death row. So, how much effort do you place in running after stuff that brings you death? Each of those things keeps you from knowing God.

There is nothing apart from God that will bring you peace.

There is nothing apart from God that will bring you joy.

There is nothing apart from God that will bring you life.

There is nothing apart from the pursuit of knowing God that will bring you rest.

Nothing.

Please read John 5:31-40, especially focus on verses 37-40.

This is an interesting passage where Jesus is talking to the leaders who said they were trying to seek God. They were not.

They wanted to look like they were acting right, but they wanted to set the boundaries. They wanted to know about God without having to know God.

In verse 40, Jesus basically tells them they could not see the forest for the trees. They were looking so hard for details they missed the whole point.

Jesus is life! You cannot find it anywhere else. So, where are you looking? To what are you looking to bring the feeling of life into your existence? There is nothing more important for your life than to know God.

It has been that way since the beginning. Look at Deuteronomy 30:19-20.

Choose life so that you may live, so that your kids will live, so that you may love God, so that you may listen to His voice, so that you can hold fast to Him-because He is your life!

Are you living these verses in your life?

Do you love God? Really? Do you really love God?

Do you listen to His voice? Really?

Do you hold fast to Him? Really? Do you really trust only Him?

Are you choosing life?

Family Discussion Question: Is God my life?

Tuesday, February 3, 2009

I wonder why we resist pardon. Apparently, in the spiritual realm, it is not uncommon for those who have been incarcerated to commit crimes so that they can be back where they feel comfortable.

Let's take some time today to look at the passages that speak about our freedom from the chains that had us bound and the cell we were in. As we look at these passages, allow the truth that you are free to wash over you. Reflect on the burden that has been lifted from you and consider what would make you want to return to that situation.

Grab your precious Word and come with me.

Psalm 119:32

Psalm 116:16

Psalm 119:77

Psalm 124:7

Job 12:18

Psalm 107:14

Romans 10:9-13

Psalm 118:5-6

John 8:32-36

Romans 8:1-2

Galatians 5:1

1 Peter 2:16

Colossians 1:22

Psalm 129:4

Psalm 146:7

What are the common things that you see in these verses?

Each of these verses and passages speak of the nature of God to set us free from the chains that bind us and the burden that keeps us from his love.

God sets the prisoner free.

God redeems the lost.

It is His nature.

He frees us and then watches us climb back into the jail cell. He looks, and He sees the door open and He waits for us to come out into the marvelous light of the freedom of being in His presence. It is in His presence that we experience the joy of living (John 15:9-11). Is your joy complete?

Family Discussion Question: Are we living a life of pardon?

Wednesday, February 4, 2009

Please read the 6th chapter of Romans.

God reveals so many deep truths in this letter. One of those is the beauty of Baptism as understood by the early church. See it there in verses 3 and 4? It helps us in our ability to choose life.

I see in this text that Paul is using a technique where he explains, illustrates and applies a teaching. The main point that Paul was trying to make up to this point in the letter was that we have a different relationship to sin because of the death of Christ-we can choose life. The reason that we have a different relationship to sin is because we who believe have died to sin as well. Paul wants his readers to understand that in a real way. There is no way that sin has power over them because they have died to it. This is the explanation.

How is baptism the illustration of this explanation?

The early church in Rome would have been made up of people who understood and valued the ordinance of baptism as being almost an element of the conversion experience. Paul has made it clear that it is faith that justifies, so they would not have viewed this as a necessary step for salvation.

Yet for the first century believer baptism would be viewed as almost a concurrent event with conversion. So Paul was able to use it as an illustration to solidify his point that sin has lost its power over the believer.

The act of baptism was a visual expression of the spiritual death and rebirth that they had experienced. It was a visual expression of their death to the power of sin in their lives!

What is the application?

For the early church baptism would be a marker to the believer.

When the followers of Christ at Rome were tempted to fall back into sin, the recollection of their baptism would remind them of the victory they had over sin. It would serve to remind them that they were no longer under the power of sin because they had died with Christ, they were buried with Christ and they were assured of resurrection to new life because of His resurrection.

They had died to sin and to the condemnation of the law. They could choose not to sin because they had died to sin.

What about us today as believers?

The same things are true for us. We can forget to choose life.

Sometimes I think it is because we forget that we have victory over the death that our sin choice brings. We need reminders in our lives. That is one of the beauties of baptism. Many times we can view baptism as an outdated, unnecessary ritual. Paul shows us here that it is much, much more. It is a gift presented by God-it is a marker in our life to help us remember the victory that the death and resurrection of Christ won for us-the victory of real life-the ability to choose not to sin. It guides us to remember that we have and serve a new master because of our rebirth.

If you have been baptized-use it to remember-if not; is now the time?

Family Discussion Question: What does baptism mean to us?

Thursday, February 5, 2009

The mystery that God would choose to live in us in the Person of the Holy Spirit is amazing. It reveals the love that He has for us. It is possible because of the death of Christ. Our new life has come at a great cost-but it was a price willingly paid. Our life is secured in Christ's death and resurrection (Romans 6:4). We looked at that yesterday.

Please reread chapter 6 of Romans. Today I would like to have us look closely at verses 12-14.

Part of choosing life is choosing what to do with the parts of your body. These verses show us that the parts of our body are instruments that we control and that those instruments can be used for evil or for righteousness.

This means all the parts of your body. Your eyes-what are you looking at (Psalm 119:37; Matthew 6:22)? Your tongue-what are you saying (James 1:26, 3:5-12)? Your ears-what are you listening to (Proverbs 2:2, 28:9)? Your mind-what are you thinking about (Romans 12:2; Philippians 4:8)? Your hands-how are they touching (Mark 1:41)? Your feet-where are they taking you (Romans 10:15)? Think about all the parts of your body. Are they serving as instruments of God who has given you life; or sin that brings you back into death? Paul makes the point here that the ways you use the parts of your body indicate where your allegiance lies. He tells us that for us to use our parts as instruments of evil is to go back to serving the evil master of sin.

Sin is no longer your master (verse 14).

You no longer need to serve it.

You are dead to sin and you have been brought from death to life because death to sin is life (verse 13)!!!

There is a much bigger idea to this. If you are a child of God, the parts of your body are parts of His body (1 Corinthians 12:27). You are part of the body of Christ and what you do with your body (or rather what you consider to be your body) you are actually doing with the body of Christ (the church).

No pressure there.

We are all one body. What we do affects all the others. And what happens to any one of us should affect all the others. When one is hurting it is important for all the rest of the parts to feel that and help carry that. That is a very real part of what it means to offer up the parts as instruments of righteousness.

Choosing life is choosing to allow the life of God to flow freely and tangibly through the parts of your body so that they freely flow through the entire body of Christ.

Family Discussion Question: How are the ways we are using our parts affecting the body of Christ?

Friday, February 6, 2009

This weekend we will be taking communion in our services.

These are special services of worship. All of our services are designed for worship, but communion is special. It is a time set aside to remember and to celebrate what the death of Christ brought to us-life!

I wonder if we aren't able to come to that service just a little bit different this week. We have looked at the life that is available and how that life plays out in our lives. It truly is a magnificent mystery.

Romans 12:1 tells us this:

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God-this is your spiritual act of worship.

Do you see some of the things we learned from this week in that verse?

First, we are to offer our bodies-the parts of our bodies to God as sacrifices. But the second point is that these sacrifices are living!

We are offering as sacrifices the bodies that God made spiritually alive. That is why it is a spiritual act of worship-ascribing worth to God because thirdly, it is in view of His mercy-He brought us from death to life because of His love.

So as we go into the thought of communion, I wonder if we are ready. This verse tells us that we should present ourselves holy and pleasing to God. How can we possibly do that?

Would you please look at 1 Corinthians 10:14-22? This is a pretty intense passage.

See verse 17? We are coming to the table of communion as one body. But is that body ready. Are there any idols in your life that you are worshipping? Those would be the things to which you are offering the parts of your body that are not bringing the life of God to you. Behind each of those things (which are not from God) that take control of your thoughts and your actions are demons. This passage is pretty clear (verse 21) that you should not come to the communion table with that going on.

I know what you are thinking. There is no way you can come to the table of communion that pure.

You are wrong. You can come that pure, because it is God who makes you pure. He makes you a living sacrifice. It is up to Him. But you need to allow Him to do that. You need to submit to His cleansing hand.

Pray Psalm 139:23-24 to the Lord and wait for His response.

Pray Isaiah 6:5 to the Lord and then experience the beauty of Isaiah 6:6 in your life and realize that 1 John 1:9 is real. In doing this you have been cleansed from all unrighteousness and the great Lover of your soul has made you pure. Now come to the table holy and pleasing to God and worship the King!

Family Discussion Question: Are we each ready for communion?

Pastor Chuck

Pastor Chuck Cervenka

February 2 - 6, 2009

Living the
*Magnificent
Mystery...*



Choosing Life



A Disciplemaking Tool
**DIGGING
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