

## **BREAKING THE CHAINS**

### **Romans 7:15-25**

We're in the second part of our series we're calling "Living with Power Beyond Yourself." Last week, I said that the only way we can live with power is to look to a power beyond ourselves. And I said that the Holy Spirit is a person, not just a force, who has the power to change us and help us to live victorious lives. He is beyond us but at the same time in us because he started to reside in us when we accepted Jesus as our Lord and Savior.

But you know what, there is another power that is inside of us that competes with the Holy Spirit. That is the subject of my message this morning. This kind of power is the thing that keeps us bound in chains. It is the power that makes us slave to do what we don't want to do. I'm talking about the power of sin. If you're like me, I sometimes let this power of sin take control of me instead of the Holy Spirit. It is a continuing menace. It follows me everywhere.

I'm sure that's the experience of a lot of folks too. And many of us want to break the power of sin in our lives. You see, even Christians can still be in bondage to sin. Yes, we are freed from sin and are on our way to heaven but, the way we live our lives, it's like we don't like to leave earth. It's because we're still living the way the world does. Someone said, "Our eyes are on Canaan, but our minds are still in Egypt." As we know, Canaan represents the Promised Land and Egypt represents the land of slavery.

Are you in slavery or in bondage to some kind of sin? What is it that is out of control in your life? What do you have a hard time controlling? Maybe your temper? Maybe your gambling? Your drinking? Illicit relationships? Improper sexual desires? Selfishness? Gossiping?

This morning I want to lay a foundation. I want to look at the problem. Why can't I change? And then I'll go into God's promise of freedom and the procedure for getting started. That's why this message is entitled "Breaking the Chains."

So, let's start by looking at

## **I. THE PROBLEM**

Paul summarizes it in Romans 7:15-16, 18, 24 (J. B. Phillips) "*My own behavior baffles me. For I find myself not doing what I really want to do but doing what I really loathe...I often find that I have the will to do good, but not the power...I don't accomplish the good I set out to do, and the evil I don't really want to do I find I am always doing!... It's an agonizing situation. Who can set me free from the prison of this mortal body?*"

If you remember I dealt with this passage a little bit last week but from another version. This version I just read makes clearer what's happening in this passage. And I want to deal with this passage a bit more deeply.

Can you relate to the apostle Paul? He's saying, "All the things I don't want to do I end up doing and all the things I want to do I end up not doing. I want to do what's right, but I don't. I don't want to do what's bad, but I do. Folks, we're in a civil war. Part of me wants to do what is right. Part of me doesn't want to do what's right. It's a clash, like Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.

Jesus says in Mark 14:37 "*The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak.*" Have you ever started a new habit or broken a bad habit but only, in a few weeks, to be back in the same position? Been there, done that...That's why I stopped making New Year's Resolutions. You see, good intentions are seldom good enough. Why? Because the results are predictable. What are these? It results in

1. Confusion. Pauls says, "It baffles me. My own behavior baffles me. Why do I keep making the same mistakes? Why am I so resistant to change?"

Why can't I figure out why I do what I don't want to do? I don't understand myself. Why do I act in ways that I know are bad for me?" It results also in

2. Frustration. He says, I have the will to do what's right, but not the power. Most people who are on a diet start the morning with great intentions. But as the day goes their resolution starts to slip. By the time the clock hits 12 midnight, they're having a midnight snack. And this is repeated the next day although they say "I'll never do it again. I'll stick to the plan. I know I can make it!" But that's the problem. We're highly motivated but we're lacking determination. I want to change but I don't know how.

Years back, I wanted to build muscles. I even bought a body-building machine. But if you look at me, you know I had the motivation but I didn't have the determination. I had the desire but I didn't have the power. And that's frustrating.

Finally, it results in

3. Defeat and discouragement. *"It is an agonising situation, and who on earth can set me free from the clutches of my sinful nature?"* (Romans 7:24-25 Phillips)  
Paul is pretty desperate. He says, "I'm losing the battle. My life is a mess, a failure. I just can't change!"

How many promises have I made to God, or how many promises have I made to myself that I've broken? Finally you just get so tired you say, "Forget it! I'm tired of trying!"

If you've felt this way, have I got good news for you! You can change. The power is there. You don't have to stay in this cycle of failure and defeat and failure and defeat... You can change. The Bible makes the principles very, very clear through the promise of Jesus.

## **II. THE PROMISE**

In John 8:32, Jesus said to the people as he preached, *"Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."*

Notice that the secret to personal change is not will power. Will power doesn't work. It's not fat farms, pills, resolutions, gimmicks. Jesus said that the way you break the chain is by knowing the Truth. How?

The way you think determines the way you feel. The way you feel determines the way you act. If I'm acting depressed it's because I feel depressed; if I feel depressed it's because I'm thinking depressed. Most of us try to work on the actions and change the external behavior – like I'm going to force myself to quit. God says you start with the way you think. And when you know the truth, it comes out in your life. Bad beliefs cause bad behavior. Everything you do, good or bad, is based on a belief. It's based on a value that you're holding either consciously or unconsciously. If you want to change the way you act, you have to change the way you believe, the way you think. You've got to have the truth.

Jesus says *“Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”*

Now, I want to talk with you about three things you need to do to break the chains. I call this

### **III. THE PRESCRIPTION**

#### **A. ACKNOWLEDGE the root of my problem**

This is the starting point to breaking the chains. Whatever you want to change in your life you must first acknowledge the root of the problem. Most of us have some vague feeling, "Something's wrong with me. I don't know what it is. I can't put my finger on it. But something's wrong." God says the basic problem is the basic attitude you have toward life, toward God, toward yourself. It's a basic attitude and response toward life that is the root, regardless of what your hang up is.

This attitude has a name. It's not a word you hear much anymore. Nobody likes to talk about it. No one mentions it. The word is unhip, uncool, unsophisticated, we don't like to say it. But it defines what this attitude is.

S-I-N. That's the problem. What is sin? Sin is a heart attitude that says, "I'm in charge and I don't need God." That's the basic attitude. It's the root of all our wrong attitudes. Again, this basic attitude says, "I'm in charge and I don't need God." It's man's oldest problem. It comes from inside, from the heart. It's been around since Adam and Eve. "I'm going to ignore God and go do my own thing."

What is in the center of SIN? The letter I. I is in the center. It's about me, myself. When I sin, it is focused on me. The reason I gossip is because I want people to know I know a lot. Or I want to take revenge. Or I'm bitter against that person. The reason I gamble is because I want to accumulate money to spend on my desires. The reason I get drunk is because I want to forget my troubles. Or because I feel good inside. The reason I have an affair is because my wife doesn't satisfy me anymore. The reason I look at pornography is because I want to satisfy my sexual desires. The reason I lose my temper is because I want others to get on my agenda. The reason I lie is because I don't want to look foolish. Any sin committed is because of our selfish nature.

James says, "*...each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin.*" (James 1:14-15b)

Now, it's not easy to admit we commit sin. Some people say "It was a mistake." And some people just ignore it, because everybody is doing it anyway. But I John 1:8 (Living Bible) "*If we say we have no sin we are only fooling ourselves and refusing to accept the truth.*" We make things worse when we pretend it's not a problem. Nobody's perfect. You're not fooling God. You're not even fooling other people. The only one you're fooling when you say, "I've got it all together" is yourself.

In order to stop defeating myself, I must first stop deceiving myself. The root problem is I think I'm in charge and I don't need God. We weren't made to live

that way. If you'd go to Alcoholics Anonymous the very first step of AA is "Admit that I'm powerless to control my situation and my life has become unmanageable."

The problem is that too often we have to hit bottom before we admit anything. Nobody likes to admit that they can't control it all on their own, so we get desperate, we hit bottom, we feel the heat. Then we say, "Maybe I do need some help."

The first step to breaking the chains then is to admit it and admit that you don't have control of the situation. Why? Because Jesus says in John 8:34 "*Everyone who sins is a slave to sin.*"

Is there any hope then? Yes, Step 2.

## **B. BELIEVE that Christ can change me.**

Romans 7:24-25 (Phillips) "*Who on earth can set me free from the clutches of my sinful nature? I thank God there is a way out through Jesus Christ our Lord.*" Paul is saying the answer is a person. God has the power you are lacking. You don't have the power to change but God does. God's got all the power in the world. Christ wants to help you change. He wants to help you over those hang ups and habits. But you've got to believe that Christ can change you.

You see, God has already done the hard work in tackling the sin problem. Because of the cross, sin is defeated. Satan's greatest threat to any of us is a permanent separation from God because of our own sin. Satan sets the trap, and hopes we'll fall into it. But when Jesus gave his life up for the sake of sinners, the ultimate power of sin was defeated once and for all. Even though all of us have sinned and fallen short of God's glory (Romans 3:23), when we accept the gift of God's grace we can still experience God's glory as if we had never sinned at all.

I read a story about a Chinese Christian who came to America to share his Christian testimony. He says, "I'd walked through the road of life and I'd fallen into

a great ditch of sin. Buddha came along and said, 'Here are seven steps by which you can get out of the ditch. If you climb and struggle you'll come out.' I strove but I could not get out. Confucius came by and said, 'Here are ten steps to self-attainment by which you can get out of the ditch. If you'll come half way, I'll come the other half way and help you out.' Struggle as I would I was still in the pit of sin of hopelessness and helplessness. Mohammed came along and said, 'Here are the five things you should do. Pray. Give alms to the poor. Fast, etc. etc. When you're done, let me know and maybe I'll come pick you up. I did and he didn't come. One day Jesus Christ came by. Jesus saw my condition. Without a word of advice, He stripped Himself of His regal robe, got down into the ditch, into the muck, into the sin. He got down and lifted me up. Thank God, what I could not do for myself, Christ did for me."

That's the good news. That's exactly what Paul says in this next verse here, Romans 8:2, "*Through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.*" There is a way out.

That's what he's saying here. God wants to give us power. Jesus says, "*The truth will set you free.*" and in John 14:6 Jesus says "*I am the Truth*". He doesn't say "I have it, I'm pointing to it, I'm searching for it -- I'm IT!" The truth will set you free and Jesus says, "I'm the truth". That brings you to step 3.

### **C. COMMIT all I am to Christ.**

This is the foundation so we can get into the specifics. Commit all I am -- the good, the bad, the ugly, the hurts, the habits, the hang ups. You say, "Give me one good reason why I ought to do that." Because you've tried everything else and nothing else works. Why don't you try Jesus? Jesus Christ is the answer. There are millions and millions of people throughout history who are living proof that He changes lives and nobody else does. As the Together 2016 event proudly declared yesterday, "Jesus changes everything."

In 2 Cor. 5:17 (TLB), Paul says *"When someone becomes a Christian, he becomes a brand new person inside. He is not the same anymore. A new life has begun!"* This is real change. You plug into God's power.

Some years back, *Time* magazine's cover said "Who Was Jesus?" Isn't it amazing that 2000 years later, Jesus is still making the cover of *Time*? A couple of weeks after this article where the scholars debated Who Was Jesus? there was a Letter to the Editor that said, "As far as I'm concerned the liberal theologians can keep their historical Jesus in their cut and paste Bible. I'm a former alcoholic and adulterer, set free by the power of Christ Jesus. Who cares about higher criticism when the resurrected power of the Son of God can transform you here and now?"

You say, "If I become a Christian, won't God make me a fanatic?" No. II Tim. 1:7 *"For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline."* God doesn't want to make you a fanatic. He wants to give you self-control. He says, I want to give you power to make the changes I need to make, love to build lasting relationships, self-control to stop defeating myself.

My question to you is, "Are you tired of trying to force yourself to change and coming up short? You say, "I'm not pulling it off when I try to force myself to change." Will power does not work! My advise to you is Stop Trying and Start Trusting. 2 Cor 3:17 *"Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom."*

I don't believe anybody is here by accident. I believe that even before we were born, God knew that all of us were going to be in this cafeteria. Today could be the turning point in your life. Maybe a friend dragged you into church -- it doesn't matter why you came. The fact is God wants to say something to you -- You matter to God! He loves you. Today can be a turning point in your life. It doesn't matter where you've been, what matters is the direction your feet are headed right now. You don't have to be the same. You can change. You may feel stuck in a ditch. It may be a financial ditch, an emotional ditch, a relational ditch, a physical-

health ditch. You say you can't get out. You're tired and you want to give up. What do you do? Acknowledge what the basic problem is. "I've been trying to run my own life without God."

Then you say, "Jesus Christ, I want to Believe that You can change my life." Doubts are OK. Didn't anybody ever tell you that you can come to God with your doubts? It's OK to have doubts. One day a guy came to Jesus and said, "Lord, I want You to heal my son if You can." Jesus said, "What do you mean, `If you can'? If you believe all things are possible." The guy said, "Lord, I want to believe. Help me with my doubts." Jesus said, "That's good enough" and he healed the guy. Nobody ever said you have to have all your doubts solved to become a Christian. You just have to have some faith. "Lord, I want to believe that You can change my life. Therefore I commit everything I have to You -- the good, the bad, the ugly."

Friend, you can come to Jesus though you may have feelings of doubt. You may feel like you've done the worst thing ever. But be assured that Jesus will always welcome you, just as you are. You don't have the power to change. Only Jesus can change you.

Let me close by sharing this story by Lee Strobel in a sermon he preached sometime ago:

Shortly after the Korean War, a Korean woman had an affair with an American soldier, and she got pregnant. He went back to the United States, and she never saw him again. She gave birth to a little girl who looked different than the other Korean children. She had light-colored, curly hair. In that culture, children of mixed race were ostracized by the community. In fact, many women would kill their children because they didn't want them to face such rejection.

But this woman didn't do that. She tried to raise her little girl as best she could, until the rejection was too much. She did something that probably nobody in this room could imagine ever doing. She abandoned her little girl to the streets.

This little girl was ruthlessly taunted by people. They called her the ugliest word in the Korean language - "tookki" - alien devil. It didn't take long for this little girl to draw conclusions about herself based on the way people treated her.

For two years she lived in the streets, until finally she made her way to an orphanage. One day, word came that a couple from America was going to adopt a little boy. All the children in the orphanage got excited, because at least one little boy was going to have hope. He was going to have a family. So this little girl spent the day cleaning up the little boys - giving them baths and combing their hair - and wondering which one would be adopted by the American couple.

The next day the couple came, and this is what the girl recalled.

"It was like Goliath had come back to life. I saw the man with his huge hands lift up each and every baby. I knew he loved every one of them as if they were his own. I saw tears running down his face, and I knew if they could, they would have taken the whole lot home with them.

"He saw me out of the corner of his eye. Now let me tell you, I was nine years old, but I didn't even weigh 30 pounds. I was a scrawny thing. I had worms in my body. I had lice in my hair. I had boils all over me. I was full of scars. I was not a pretty sight. But the man came over to me, and he began rattling away something in English, and I looked up at him. Then he took this huge hand and laid it on my face. What was he saying? He was saying, 'I want this child. This is the child for me.'"

With all our scars, with all that is wrong with us, with all the terrible consequences our sin has laid upon us, God still wants us. The cross is the proof.