

“And Now, the Rest of the Story”

Roman 6:12-23

During VBS, Caleb the Camel would talk about the appointed portions of the Bible for each day, but in order for the listeners to understand what was really happening, it seemed that there was always a “back story.” You have to understand the back story – we often call this “context.” Or as Paul Harvey would say, “And now, the rest of the story.”

Our Old Testament reading from Jeremiah begins, “O Lord, you have deceived me, and I was deceived;” that is a verse that needs some context. Jeremiah is not accusing God of acting underhandedly toward him. He is telling God that when he was appointed by God to be His prophet that he didn’t quite know the fullness of the job description. You get a taste of it in our Old Testament reading. Read all of Jeremiah and Lamentations if you want the full context.

Jeremiah’s ministry to the people of Israel was not easy. Then again, God did not promise that his ministry would be easy. In fact, God is very specific that the kings of Israel will fight against him, but he tells Jeremiah, “Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, declares the Lord” [Jer. 1:8]. God is upfront with him. It’s just that Jeremiah didn’t realize how much anger there would be from the kings, from which the Lord would need to deliver him.

As we read Romans 6:12-23, we really don't get the full picture of what Paul is saying without the context of the rest of Romans, especially Romans 6:1-11. The beginning of Romans 6 is all about how Baptism buries you with Jesus, kills you (your Old Adam) with His death on the cross, and raises you (by faith alone) with His resurrection to a new life in Christ in His church on earth and on the Last Day will raise you in the resurrection to life eternal.

Romans 6 verses 12 and following ask the question, "Since I know this, what does this mean for me here and now in this life?" Paul says: this is what it means. You are still a sinner; you still see your sin; but because your sin is dead in Jesus, and your sin is going to remain in the grave when you rise from the dead. Therefore, don't let your sin, your Old Adam, tell you how to live your life now. Don't let sin reign in your mortal body. Don't let sin be the thing that decides what truth and falsehood is. My Old Adam wants to do something that God says is sin, I am baptized into Jesus; I know my sin is paid for, crucified, and buried with Him. I know that my sin is evil; it is bad; and I am going to rise with Him and be separated from that sin once and for all in the future. Therefore, in the here and now, I need to reject the passions, the desires of my sin. How can I look at what God says is evil and call it good?

Paul says, let God's Word be your guide. "Don't obey your passions." Don't let what you want (that is, don't let what your Old Adam wants) be the guide for conducting your life within the church on earth. Instead, submit to the Word of God. And, as Luther says in the catechism, "the Old Adam in us should be daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that

the new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.”

This is the life of God’s baptized children. Every morning, rise to live before your neighbors as the eternally redeemed perfect person that you are. That is who you are, so Paul says act like it. But all of this is within the greater context of his letter to the Romans. We get to Romans 7 and he is quite clear that this fight is not an easy thing. Far from it. You are not going to be perfect. Paul says of himself, “I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate . . . I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out . . . For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. . . Wretched man that I am.” Paul does call himself the “chief of sinners.”

The end of this will be a return to the beginning, a return to repentance, and our confession “I am a poor, miserable sinner.” I am in need of God’s grace. But this is not an excuse that it is OK for me to do as I please, that it is OK for me to do harm to my neighbor, because grace will abound.

The issue is not what you do. You are not saved by your works, and you lack of works does not exclude you from God’s grace. The issue is your desire. Paul says, “Don’t obey your passions.” This word “obey” (hoop-akuo in the Greek) always seems to get translated into English as “obey” yet rarely should be. This is that “hear, listen, guard, keep, cherish, place myself under the authority of, have faith in” word. I am listening to and placing myself under the authority of something.

Paul says, “Don’t let sin rule over you so that you listen to your passions as the authority in your life.” You cannot serve two masters. As a baptized child of God, forgiven all of your sin, you are not called

upon to keep God's Law perfectly. However, you are called upon to believe God's Law to be perfect and desire to keep it. This is Paul's message in Romans 6. It needs to be looked at in context, and "No" it is not going to be easy.

Nowhere in Scripture is the life of a Christian said to be easy. Jesus says, "The broad and easy road leads to destruction . . . Desire to enter through the narrow gate." Just as God told Jeremiah that the kings of Israel will fight against him and his ministry will not be easy, God has told you that the devil, the world, and your sinful nature (your Old Adam) will fight against you and your life in Christ's church will not be easy. In fact, Jesus says the world will hate you because it hated me first.

And we often feel like Jeremiah and say, "O Lord, you have deceived me," This is not what I thought a baptized life in Christ was going to be. But when we feel that way, and we feel the devil's hot breath on our neck and world closing in around us and our own sinful passions welling up from within, remember God's word to Jeremiah, "Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, declares the Lord" [Jer. 1:8]. Do not be afraid of them. As Jesus says, "Do not fear the one who can kill the body but cannot kill the soul."

Your context, your back story is Romans 6:1-11. The beginning of Romans 6 is all about how Baptism buries you with Jesus, kills you (your Old Adam) with His death on the cross, and raises you (by faith alone) with His resurrection to a new life in Christ in His church on earth and on the Last Day will raise you in the resurrection to life eternal. That is the rest of your story. Amen.