

August 4th, 2019

The Enemy of an Experimental Christian

Psalm 119:25-32

Experimental Christianity

We return to our series this morning on Psalm 119. If you missed any of this series, we are studying what's called Experimental Christianity. This was a phrase the Puritans used. There are two main parts to experimental Christianity. **First** experimental Christianity is *experiential*. Meaning, only those who truly experience Jesus Christ in the soul through the new birth are Christians. This is not because experience *itself* saves, but rather "...because the Christ who saves sinners must be *experienced personally* as the foundation upon which our eternal hope is built."¹ Christianity is not external religion, or mere moralism. God always condemns religion that cleans the outside of the cup. Jesus said to the Pharisees in **Matthew 23:25** "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence." Why did Jesus condemn them? Because they reduced religion to external concerns. They did not *experience* the life of God in the soul of man. So that's the first part of experimental Christianity, it is experiential.

Secondly, experimental Christianity is *operational*. Meaning, God through His Word is testing us, examining us, operating on us. My dad and I were talking about Psalm 19 the other day, and it provides a perfect picture of this. **Psalm 19** begins by saying "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork." And then for five more verses David explodes in worship in how God displays all His wonders in creation. This display of God's magnificence covers the earth. He says in **v.3** "There is no speech, nor are their words, whose voice is not heard." Then David turns to the glory of

¹ Joel Beeke, *Puritan Reformed Spirituality*, (Webster, NY: Evangelical Press USA, 2006), pg.426

God's word. He says "The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul" (v.7). David is so captivated by God's word that he says in v.10 that it is "more to be desired...than gold, even much fine gold." That covers the first 11 verses of Psalm 19—the glory of God in creation and the glory of God in His Word. But then David turns to his own heart. With a God so great as this God, he is humbled at all of his shortcomings and he pleads with God to do a work on his soul. He says in v.14 "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer." Do you see? He wasn't content with merely thinking about God's glory. He wanted to be changed by it. That's the second part of experimental Christianity, it is operational.

The Enemy of an Experimental Christian

Now Psalm 119 is going to navigate between both of those aspects of experimental Christianity. Sometimes it's going to be more *operational*. He's going to challenge us. He's going to test us. He's going to call us further up and further in, in the Christian life. At other times it's going to be more *experiential*. He's going to show us what the Christian life looks like.

That is what we see this morning. Just a cursory look at v.25-32 and we see that the Psalmist is in despair. Very similar to how Christian in Pilgrim's Progress falls in and sinks in the Slough of Despond. Remember the story? Christian in Bunyan's allegory is traveling to the Celestial City, and he comes upon this swamp, this deep bog. This bog is un-mendable. Though the king's men have for sixteen hundred years labored to patch it up, using vast resources—twenty-thousand cart-loads of earth and building materials, all of it has been in vain. This bog is the most dreadful place the world. And Christian falls into it. His companion Pliable abandons him. So he finds himself all alone, left to struggle through the scum and the filth and until the haunting realization comes over him that he is stuck and there is no way out. You can hear that desperation in the Psalmist's own words this morning. v.25 "My soul clings to the dust; give me life according to your word!"

What is Bunyan and the Psalmist speaking about? What does this Slough of Despond represent? Well it represents the greatest enemy that we face in this life. And it may surprise you. Our greatest enemy is *not* this present world with all the lusts that are in it. It's not that ancient serpent, the devil and all his angels.² It's not even death as irrevocably final as it is. The greatest enemy we face in this world is our own heart. Or rather the sin in our heart. It is the Slough of Despond. That fallen nature, that traitor within, that thief that comes in the night. That's Bunyan's meaning behind it. He says "...there is nothing but despondency and despair in the fallen nature of sinful man: the best that we can do, leaves us in the Slough of Despond, as to any hope in ourselves."³

He set my feet upon a Rock

How do you fight when the enemy is within? Oh how relevant this text is. Some of you right now have your feet fixed like cement in the slough. Some of you are up to your neck. How do we escape? How can we have our feet planted on solid ground? Oh dear saint, don't despair. Christian gets out. He is rescued. And so is the Psalmist. Yes it's true that He beings with his own soul clinging to the dust in **v.25** but by the time he reaches **v.32** he is running again with a heart bursting with joy in His Redeemer. That's a picture of you. Sin will not have the final say in your life. There is a Rock to set your feet upon. There is a Fountain that can wash all your guilty stains. You cannot out-sin this Savior. Take heart. No matter how you came in this morning, no matter how many times you have failed the Lord Jesus Christ, He will not let you sink. The Psalmist shows us how rescue comes from the Slough of Despond.

² I love this quote from the Webster's 1828 dictionary under the word "properly - The miseries of life are not *properly* owing to the unequal distribution of things." It caught my attention because in our culture today, this is exactly what we are taught. It is inequality that is the cause of all our miseries. Inequality is our greatest enemy, our culture says, not sin.

³ John Bunyan, *The Works of John Bunyan Vol. 3*, (Carlisle, PA.,: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2009), pg. 92

The Big Idea...

The Christian's greatest enemy is his own sin, but relief comes from the Redeemer when we cry out to Him

- ☆ The Misery of Sin
- ☆ The Un-Masking of Sin
- ☆ The Mortification of Sin

I. The Misery of Sin

The enemy within

First, I want to prove to you that personal sin is what is in view here. In our last message: *the Exile of an Experimental Christian*, the Psalmist showed us *who* his tormentors were—the accursed ones (v.21); those who brings the Christian under scorn and contempt (v.22), those who even plot against him (v.23). But in this section, there is no external enemy. The Psalmist is speaking about the enemy within. Look at v.25 “My *soul* clings to the dust...” v.28 “My *soul* melts away for sorrow...” And then it becomes clear what is vexing his soul in v.29 “Put *false ways* far from me...” False ways, or sin, are tormenting the Psalmist. He is waging a war within himself. This is exactly what Paul said in the **Romans 7:22-23** “For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.”

Christian you have two hearts. One heart that wants to love Christ Jesus, and the other that wants to love only yourself. You are not safe. These two hearts are always fighting for dominance. **Galatians 5:17** “For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.”

That is the war the Psalmist is in, because it is the war that every Christian is in. The war against sin.

What is sin?

So then, what is sin? The greatest threat that I believe is facing the church today is our defective definition of sin. Martyn Lloyd-Jones once said “A defective understanding of sin...[is] the main hindrance in stopping people depending on Christ alone...”⁴ If we get the definition of sin wrong, we will get everything else wrong. So how are we to understand sin? Sin can be seen in three different dimensions 1) man to man; 2) man to himself; and 3) man to God.

C.S. Lewis likens these three ways of looking at sin to a fleet of ships sailing in formation. He says:

“The voyage will be a success only, in the first place, if the ships do not collide and get in one another’s way...If the ships keep on having collisions they will not remain seaworthy very long.”⁵

That’s the first dimension of sin, *man to man*. We have a moral obligation not to crash our ships into one another—not to sin against each other. Now the world is willing in a *limited way* to adopt this first dimension of sin. The one irreducible morality that we can find in every culture is that ‘you can do what you like as long as it doesn’t hurt anyone else.’ But the problem of course is that this is entirely too reductionistic. Lewis continues:

“When a man says about something he wants to do, ‘It can’t be wrong because it doesn’t do anyone else any harm,’ he is thinking only of the first

⁴ Iain Murray, *D.M. Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith*, (Carlisle, PA.,: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprinted 2009), pg. 407

⁵ C.S. Lewis, *The Complete C.S. Lewis Signature Classics*, (New York, NY.,: HarperCollins Publishers, 2002), pg. 46

thing. He is thinking it *does not matter* what his ship is like inside provided that he does not run into the next ship.”⁶

Lewis is touching on the second dimension of sin, *man to himself*. What does sin do to *you*? That’s the problem with reducing morality to merely how it affects other people: sin hurts *you* long before it leaks out onto others. Sin brings misery.

The misery of it all

The Psalmist expresses the misery of sin in 3 ways. **First**, sin is miserable because it is a living death. He says in v.25 “My soul clings to the *dust*.” This is vivid imagery. What does he mean by dust? Dust is often used as dying in Scripture. God told Adam in **Genesis 3:19** “...you are dust, and to *dust* you shall return.” God’s telling Adam he’s going to die. The Psalmist here is saying that living in sin is a life of death. That’s why he follows up with the second part of the verse with “...give me *life* according to your word.”

Secondly, sin is miserable because it *clings* to you. “My soul *clings* to the dust.” Meaning sin is strangely attached to you, and you are strangely drawn to it.⁷ In *The Odyssey*, Odysseus is traveling home with his crew after the Trojan War. They sail past the island that was inhabited by the Sirens—those creatures who were half birds and half women. These Sirens would sing their beautiful song to lure the sailors to the island. The problem was that the island was surrounded by spiked rocks that brought every ship to its destruction. “Odysseus wants to hear the Siren’s song, so he plugs the ears of his crew with wax while ordering them to tie him to the ship’s mast. He finds their music so alluring that he pleads with his men to release him. He almost goes mad as the Sirens entice him. If free, he would have risked all to respond to their song.”⁸

⁶ *ibid*

⁷ Most of the time you know how you *ought* to be. And as a Christian you truly desire to know Christ better and to love Him more. But what happens so painfully often? Paul says “I want to do right [but] evil lies close at hand” (**Romans 7:21**).

⁸ J. Stephen Yuille, *The Path of Life: Blessedness in Seasons of Lament*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: Reformation Heritage Books, 2019), pg. 48

That's how sin clings to us. We know that sin is a living death, but it clings to us, it calls to us. We know better, but the invitation is so alluring, that we often risk all to embrace it.

Thirdly sin is miserable because it is humanly incurable. Look at v. 29 "Put false ways far from me..." Stop. What's the implication here? What is he asking God to do? To do what he can't. To remove his sin. Now remember the Psalmist is a Christian. It's true that non-Christians can't remove their own sin. The Holy Spirit must do the work of regeneration in order to make them clean. Jesus said in **John 6:63** "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all." A Christian has this life. Yet he is still unable to remove his own sin *experientially*. The Psalmist cry out "Put false ways far from me." He's saying "Lord I will walk in sin, unless you do something." Sin is humanly incurable whether you are a Christian or not.

The third dimension of sin

That's what sin does to you. Which is why it is too reductionistic to say that morality is limited to not hurting anyone else. So let's return to Lewis's ship analogy to see the third dimension of sin.

"Let us to back to the man who says that a thing cannot be wrong unless it hurts some other human being. He quite understands that he must no damage the other ships in the convoy, but he honestly thinks that he he does to his own ship is simply his own business. But does it not make a great difference whether his ship is his own property or not? Does it not make a great difference whether I am, so to speak, the landlord of my own mind and body, or only a tenant, responsible to the real landlord?"⁹

This is third dimension of sin, *man to God*. This is the deepest of them all.

This is why the world is in such a miserable state. Because everyone believes that they are the captain of their own soul. They suppress the plain

⁹ C.S. Lewis, *The Complete C.S. Lewis Signature Classics*, (New York, NY,.; HarperCollins Publishers, 2002), pg. 46

truth of the universe. **Psalm 100:3**: “Know that the LORD, he is God! It is he who made us, and we are his.” There is no greater sin than to act like one is lord of their own lives. This is the root sin, the deepest sin, the sin of all sins. Paul says it like this “For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him” (**Romans 1:21**).

Sin destroys our enjoyment of God

Do you see why the Psalmist is so sorrowful in his soul? He says in **v.28** “My soul melts away for sorrow.” Why? It is because his sin, no matter what that sin is,¹⁰ isn’t *primarily* against others, it isn’t *primarily* against himself, it is *ultimately* against the Lord of Glory.¹¹ David said in **Psalm 51:4** “Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight.” And it’s not just the knowledge of his sin against God that torments his soul. It is that sin has made a separation between him and God. God tells His people in **Isaiah 59:2** “...your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.” Beloved, when you sin

¹⁰ It is noteworthy that the specific sin(s) in view are not mentioned. Because all sin grieves God and all sin disrupts our relationship with him.

¹¹ Every sin, no matter how small or how large is ultimately against God.

against the Lord, your enjoyment of Him vanishes. You can feel His favor evaporate, and His lovingkindness seem to disappear.¹²

Experimental Theology

So let's look to our own hearts. The Psalmist is telling us the experience of all Christians. There are no sinless Christians. There are no super Christians. There are only ordinary Christians who still find themselves saying with the Apostle Paul "[O] Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death" (**Romans 7:24**). What do we do with our sinning hearts? Did you come in here this morning defeated from this past week? Painfully aware of your failures? What should you do? Well there is a strange comfort we can take from this sorrow. If you don't feel *any* trouble over your sin you are in great danger. As Charles Bridges says, that is "the black mark of a sinner, [one who is still] dead in sins [and] dead to God."¹³ The truth is that *as* I confront this holy

¹² A tricky truth: God's love is unconditional and conditional

Now this is what Stephen Yuille calls a tricky truth. God loves his people in two ways, unconditionally and conditionally. First let's think about how God loves his people *unconditionally*. Let's ask ourselves: "Does God love us even when us sin?" Yes, without a doubt. For those of us who have been born again, the banner of **Romans 8:39** is the final word to all our doubting hearts "[Nothing] will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." Or take **Romans 5:8** "God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." God loved us at the beginning of our salvation *while we were yet sinners*, and He loves us now *while we are still sinners*. Even when we show ourselves to be unfaithful, we hear those wonderful words from **2 Timothy 2:13** "...if we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself." So God's love is unconditional for the believer.

But there is also a sense in which God's love is *conditional*. Let's ask ourselves another question: "Is God ever angry or displeased with believers?" Yes. The Scripture is full of such statements. When Israel complained in the wilderness, **Numbers 11:1** tells us that "when the LORD heard it, his *anger* was kindled." When David stole Bathsheba and killed her husband, **2 Samuel 11:27** says "But the thing that David had done *displeased* the LORD." In the NT, Paul warns us not to "...*grieve* the Holy Spirit of God" (**Ephesians 4:30**). So clearly, God can be angry, and displeased, and even grieved over His own people. Jesus said it like this in **John 15:10** "If you keep my commandments, you will *abide* in my love." Meaning we will experience greater or lesser degrees of God's love based on our obedience. We can lose the sense of God's love when we sin against Him. That's what is happening here in our text. [J. Stephen Yuille, *The Path of Life: Blessedness in Seasons of Lament*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Reformation Heritage Books, 2019), pg. 46]

¹³ Charles Bridges, *An Exposition of Psalm 119*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2002), pg. 56

God, and contemplate the life that He wants me to live, and see how much I still fall short, then “I must mourn the fact that I am like that.”¹⁴ But this is evidence of being a true child of God. Jesus said in **Matthew 5:4** “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.” This is a bit of paradox. Jesus says that if we are those who mourn over our sin, we are actually blessed, because that means we are truly His. Only Christians mourn over their sin. That’s our **first point**. Though our sin is indeed the greatest sorrow that we face here, it’s this sorrow over sin that is a true mark of a Christian.

II. The Un-Masking of Sin

God is waiting for us to confess our sins

So then *how* do we deal with our sin? Let’s look at how the Psalmist deals with it in **v.26**. He says “When I told of my ways, you answered me...” When I *told* of my ways. What is he alluding to? Confession. He’s saying “When I confessed my sins to you, you answered me.” There are three implications that flow from this.

The **first** implication is that God is waiting for us to confess our sins. We could insert the word *then* in this verse. “*When* I told of my ways, [*then*] you answered me.” God was silent until he confessed. That is the worse kind of silence: the silence of God. To call on Him but not have any sense that He is listening. **Isaiah 66:18** says “If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.” God is waiting for us to confess our sins.

“My bones wasted away”

The **second** implication is *nothing* good comes from hiding your sin. Listen to how David describes what happened to him when he refused to confess his sin to the Lord. **Psalm 32:3-4** “For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away

¹⁴ Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies In The Sermon On The Mount*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976) pg. 47

through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer.”¹⁵ Nothing good comes from unconfessed sin. That’s why we see the Psalmist in such torment. Then why are we so slow to confess? Well it is because we still have so much of the world in us.

You are the worst person you know

The world hates to confess weakness and wrongdoing. The message we are constantly being bombarded with is self-reliance, self-confidence, and self-expression. The world says believe in yourself.¹⁶ But to confess your sins is to fall down with Peter at Jesus’ feet and say “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord” (**Luke 5:8**). That’s why confession is so hard. Because it is to admit that you truly are a wretch. That you are the worse person you know. It is to admit that all those grand thoughts you have of yourself are nothing but delusions. It is to admit that even your worse enemy always thinks of you better than you deserve. Confession of sin is perhaps the hardest thing a Christian has to do. But nothing good comes from unconfessed sin.

God always responds to confession

The **third** implication of **v.26** is that God always answers us when we confess our sins. Please look with me again. He says “When I told of my ways, *you answered me...*” Oh how glorious this truth is! God comes running to us in our confession. He is just like the Father in the story of the prodigal son. Do you remember how Jesus put? When his son started to make the journey home after his life of sin, his father saw “...while he was still a long way off...and get

¹⁵ Notice how David was in torment before he confessed his sin. **v.3** “...when I kept silent, my bones wasted away...” Unconfessed sin affects our physical bodies. David said it felt like his bones were dissolving. He groaned under the distress of it. **v.4** “...for day and night your hand was heavy upon me...” Day *and* night. In waking hours unconfessed sin eats away at your conscience like a worm in a piece of rotten fruit. And there is no escape in sleep because God’s invisible hand haunts you there as well. David says, this was so severe for him that his “...strength was dried up as by the heat of summer.” Nothing good comes from unconfessed sin.

¹⁶ *ibid*, pg. 35

compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him” (**Luke 15:20**). Oh dear saint that is what the Father is like when we confess our sins. It’s true that we so often depart from Him, and that if He treated us as we deserve, we would be banished forever from His presence. But He has compassion. He has a tender heart towards you. While you were a great way off, He sees you, and He runs and comes forth to meet you, to embrace you, to give you the kiss of peace. **Isaiah 30:18** says “Therefore the Lord waits to be gracious to you, and therefore he exalts himself to show mercy to you.” Confess your sin beloved. You will not shock Him. Rather, He will shock you, because He will answer you. He will forgive you. He will wash your wounds. He will put His robe on you, He will give you the family ring. He will prepare a feast for your return. And you will once again taste and see that the Lord is good.

Confessions of a great sinner

So then how do we confess sin? What I have found very helpful is to confess to the Lord *more* than the particular sin I have committed. Consider praying like this “Yes Lord, I’ve done *that again*. I’m so sorry, please forgive me for Jesus’ sake. But Lord I’m so much more worse than that. That is but the smallest portion of my sin.”¹⁷ I promise your confessional life will undergo a revolution if you start to believe that you are a worse sinner than you can imagine. What can you possibly defend in your life? The best things you have ever done are stained with sin. **Isaiah 64:6** says “We have all become like one who is unclean, *and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment.*” John Bunyan once said “The best prayer I ever prayed—had enough sin to damn the whole world!”¹⁸ If you start to believe that about yourself, about your own sin, then you will start to confess so much more quickly. And it will enable you to move on. What do you have to prove? You are a sinner saved only by the grace God.

¹⁷ That’s even how I deal with sins that I have already have asked forgiveness for. My conscience is very tender sometimes, and the devil will bring up sins from my past, sins that I’m so ashamed of. And I’ll be struck right to the core of who I am. What do I do? When God’s grace is upon me, I’m able to say “Ah but I’m way worse than that, and Lord you love me in Christ so much more.”

¹⁸ Source: https://www.gracegems.org/30/short_pithy_gems_from_bunyan.htm Accessed August 3, 2019

Are you going to sin? That's not even the right question. You've never not sinned. You've never repented perfectly. You've never believed fully. You've never loved without hypocrisy. And God already sees it all. That's our **second point**. We must drag our sin out in the light. It is only there where we can find a gracious God waiting to heal us.

III. The Mortification of Sin

A greater victory?

How do we kill sin? Or maybe a better question is this: is it possible to have a greater victory over sin in this life? I believe the answer is yes. We already saw the Psalmist confessing his sin and turning to the Lord. That is the vital the first step. But does he gives us more help? Yes. He gives us three things in particular. **First**, he gives us the Word. We'll look at that in our application section. **Secondly**, he models to us a life of prayer.¹⁹ God-willing we'll see that next week in **v.33-40**. It's the **third** thing that I want to focus on. Let's begin at **v.30**. He says "I have chosen the way of faithfulness; I set your rules before me." I think to some of our current evangelical culture, this sounds like the Psalmist is boasting. But he's not. He's simply saying 'Lord I have believed in You and Your Word.' This becomes clear when we read **v.31** "I cling to your testimonies, O Lord; let me not be put to shame!" That is very much the language of faith. But it's **v.32** where I am suggesting we'll find help to have a greater victory over sin in our lives. He says "I will run in the way of your commandments *when* you enlarge my heart!" What a contrast between how this Psalms starts and how it ends. He begins in **v.25** with his soul clinging to the dust, *but* he ends here in **v.32** with his feet running on the path of God's commandments. How?

¹⁹ "He who would become might in the Scriptures, must in godly sincerity beg to be taught by the Holy Ghost, vv.26, 27. All other teaching, without this, will but make us learned infidels, or practical unbelievers." W.S. Plumer, *Geneva Series of Commentaries: Psalms*, (Carlisle, PA.,: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2016), pg. 1034

Help in the Slough of Despond

In Pilgrims's Progress, do you remember how Christian was freed from the Slough of Despond? He was left to tumble in the slough alone. The more he struggled, the more he realized he could not free himself. Bunyan writes "But I beheld in my dream, that a man came to him, whose name was Help...Then said he, "Give me thy hand;" so he gave him his hand, and he drew him out, and set him upon sound ground, and bid him go on his way."²⁰ Who was this man named Help? The parallel between this Man and the help we find in **v.32** is so important. This message this morning would be an absolute failure if we didn't make the connection. When you and I are buried in our own sin, in our own Slough of Despond, is *mere* confession of sin enough? No. Christian could have confessed his hopelessness, and that by itself wouldn't have freed him. Confession alone doesn't put our feet back on the path. Like Christian, we must have this man named Help. Who is this Man?

The man of sorrows and the man of dust

Dear congregation, this is what makes the Christian message so utterly unique from every other religion on the planet. Every other religion tells you that the way you free yourself from the Slough of Despond is that you become a better person, or you do more good than bad, or at least you do the best you can. That's not the gospel found in the Scripture. The gospel is this, that Someone *must* exchange places with you. Someone else must put themselves in your place. This Help, If He is to free you, He must have His own soul melt away for sorrow (**v.28**). There was such a man. The Scripture says that He was "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief...surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows" (**Isaiah 53:3-5**). If this man is going to free you, He must have his own soul cling to the dust (**v.25**). That's what He did. **Isaiah 53:8-9** says "...he was cut off out of the land of the living...they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence,

²⁰ John Bunyan, *The Works of John Bunyan Vol. 3*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2009), pg. 92

and there was no deceit in his mouth.” That is who our Help is—the LORD Jesus Christ. “Who...made himself nothing, taking on the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (**Philippians 2:7-8**).

But Jesus didn't stay dead. **1 Corinthians 15:20** says “But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.” The whole Bible is pointing to this message. That in Christ, you have all the Help you will ever need. Dear Christian, this exchange has already been made for you. The God-man has become your substitute. His righteousness has become yours, your guilt has become his, and all of God's wrath towards your sin has been fully satisfied. That this the only reason why a Christian can confess his sin with full confidence. It's not the confession itself that clears away our guilt, it is the Lord Jesus Christ that clears away our guilt.

The gospel is the power of God

And it's this gospel that enables you to have greater victory over sin in your life. Consider **v.32** one last time. We read “I will run in the way of your commandments *when* you enlarge my heart!” How does God enlarge your heart? Through the sight of His Son! “And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being *transformed* into the same image from one degree of glory to another” (**2 Corinthians 3:18**). Did you hear it? As we behold the glory of the Lord—seen supremely in Jesus—we are transformed, from one degree of glory to another. Or to say it as the Psalmist does, God enlarges our hearts *as* we see with our spiritual eyes more and more of Jesus. When the awe of Jesus Christ rules your heart, sin becomes less and less attractive. When you receive fresh sight of this Christ who left Heaven and laid down his life for you, and rose from the dead for you, and who always lives to intercede for you, and who will one day return for you, your heart can't help but to be enlarged for Him. The gospel is meant to continually enthrall you. Dear saint, it is the wonder of all wonders that Christ would choose to love someone

like you. That's our **third point**. The fight against sin begins by seeing Him who already defeated it on your behalf.

Application

1. What kind of a Word has God given us?

He has given us a word that revives us. Twice in our passage as the Psalmist is in sorrow over his sin He speaks about the life-giving power of God's word. In **v.25** he says "...give me life according to your word!" and in **v.28** he says "...strengthen me according to your word!" Yesterday I felt so discouraged because of my own sin, my own failures, my own wretchedness before God and Monica and I went on a run in the morning. I listened to a sermon by Joel Beeke, and it was good, really good. But the most encouraging thing about the sermon was the Word of God in it. It was that Word that brought life to my despondent soul. He read Psalm **130:3-4** "If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared." That was enough for me. God's Word instantly reminded me that yes I am a sinner, a grave sinner, and yet God has forgiven me in Christ. I was a new man by the end of the run. That's the kind of Word God has given us—a Word that gives us life.

2. What kind of a world do we live in?

We live in a world in which unbelievers have a defective definition of sin. If you are here this morning, and you don't consider yourself a Christian, consider carefully what our claim is. You need to be saved. You are in peril. Not because you have some little personal problems. Not even necessarily because you are going to die someday—all men will die. No it is because you are not glorifying God that you need to be saved. That is the sin of all sins—to act like God is nothing in your life, to act like you answer to nobody except yourself—to seek only your own pleasure and not the pleasure of Him who created you for His glory. God will be glorified in your life, whether it be in your

calling out for His mercy, or whether it be in your just punishment on that dreadful day of judgment. You will never be able to rob God of His due. The only way to find mercy for your sin is in the LORD Jesus Christ. He alone is able to forgive you. He loves sinners just like you. And He has promised “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life” (**John 5:24**).

3. What kind of a church should we want?

We should want a church where we can have godly sorrow over sin. One of the tragedies of the consumerism and secularism that has infiltrated the church is that we have largely lost a true sorrow over sin. We have largely become superficial and trivial. We have largely forgotten what sin means to God. We have largely ignored that God abhors and hates all sin. We have largely neglected that sin “...stabs, as it were, into the heart of God.”²¹ True revivals cannot take place so long as the church has superficial notions of sin. Superficial notions of sin create superficial notions of God. So long as sin is seen as a little thing, God will be seen as a little thing. May God grant us a true sorrow over sin. Not that we would be miserable or morose. Not that we would be cold or critical. But that we would have true sorrow over the fact that God is so ignored and so marginalized in the world. That it would drive us to prayer, pleading with God that more people would love and thirst after Him, that He might be honored as He ought.

4. What kind of Savior do we need?²²

We need a Savior that sees all our sin and loves us still. It is truly amazing that Christ would ever love people like us. John Stoughton, an English pastor in the nineteenth century said it like this in a prayer: “O Lord, we have not only

²¹ Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies In The Sermon On The Mount*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976) pg. 48

²² With the exception of the first question, the last three are from Christopher Ash, *Job: The Wisdom of the Cross, Preaching the Word Series*, (Wheaton, IL.: Crossway, 2014), pg. 17-23

sinned against our consciences, but against Thy word; not only against the law, but also against the gospel; not only against Thy commands, but against our own professions; not only against righteousness, but against love...[but] Thou has given Thy Son to be a propitiation for our sins. Oh that we may come to Him by faith, and rely on His mediation.”²³ That’s the kind of Savior we have. That though we sin against Him, He loves us still. “God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (**Romans 5:8**).

²³ John Stoughton, *The Daily Prayer Book*, (Middletown, DE.: Leopold Classic Library), pg. 183-184