



Saved from Myself – Touchpoint for July 5, 2023

Romans 7:15-25 (MSG) ¹⁵⁻¹⁶ *“I know that all God’s commands are spiritual, but I’m not. Isn’t this also your experience?” Yes. I’m full of myself—after all, I’ve spent a long time in sin’s prison. What I don’t understand about myself is that I decide one way, but then I act another, doing things I absolutely despise. So if I can’t be trusted to figure out what is best for myself and then do it, it becomes obvious that God’s command is necessary.*

¹⁷⁻²⁰ *“But I need something more! For if I know the law but still can’t keep it, and if the power of sin within me keeps sabotaging my best intentions, I obviously need help! I realize that I don’t have what it takes. I can will it, but I can’t do it. I decide to do good, but I don’t really do it; I decide not to do bad, but then I do it anyway. My decisions, such as they are, don’t result in actions. Something has gone wrong deep within me and gets the better of me every time.*

²¹⁻²³ *“It happens so regularly that it’s predictable. The moment I decide to do good, sin is there to trip me up. I truly delight in God’s commands, but it’s pretty obvious that not all of me joins in that delight. Parts of me covertly rebel, and just when I least expect it, they take charge. ²⁴ I’ve tried everything and nothing helps. I’m at the end of my rope. Is there no one who can do anything for me? Isn’t that the real question?*

²⁵ *“The answer, thank God, is that Jesus Christ can and does. He acted to set things right in this life of contradictions where I want to serve God with all my heart and mind, but am pulled by the influence of sin to do something totally different.”*

Grace and peace from the Mystery in whom we live and move and have our being.

“What I don’t understand about myself is that I decide one way, but then I act another, doing things I absolutely despise ... I realize that I don’t have what it takes. I can will it, but I can’t do it. I decide to do good, but I don’t really do it; I decide not to do bad, but then I do it anyway ... Something has gone wrong deep within me and gets the better of me every time.”

It is one of the most profoundly freeing passages in the Bible.

It may not feel like it at first glance. After all, who likes to describe themselves as someone who has had ‘something go wrong deep within them’?

We have so bought into the mythology of the human endeavor. That myth that says we are free to create our own story, our own history, our own destiny. Facebook and Instagram are built on that. “See what a fantastic life I’ve built for myself... aren’t you impressed?”

By the way, ‘creating your destiny’ is an oxymoron... but that's another rant left best to a later time.

We have so bought into the mythology of the human endeavor. That myth that says we are free to create our own story, our own history, our own destiny. And it is killing us. Again, look at what social media is doing to our youth.

But here is Paul, writing these words: *“What I don’t understand about myself is that I decide one way, but then I act another, doing things I absolutely despise.”*

I don't know about you, but I find these words incredibly freeing. Finally, here is some brutal honesty that speaks not to my superficial hopes and dreams, my Facebook and Instagram pages, but to the profound depths of my pain and sadness about myself.

I know where the fault lies in who I have become. I know where the buck stops. It is not in the other. It is not in them. It is not in those people. That is the easy cop out.

“What I don’t understand about myself is that I decide one way, but then I act another, doing things I absolutely despise.”

To paraphrase Pogo, “I have met the enemy and it is me.”

When we talk of being saved, we so often talk of being saved from others, or something outside of ourselves. Something out there in the world. That is where evil lies... in the other. That is what must be defeated... the other.

But Paul speaks of the need to be saved from oneself.

I might be able to save myself from others, but who will save me from myself? I think that concept is so foreign to us and our society. After all, we are not in bondage, we are not the ones who need help. We are not the ones who need to be defeated. We are strong, sturdy, and free to do as we wish. And we should act like it. Just check our Facebook and Instagram pages.

I remember a few years ago, Jesse Ventura, then governor of Minnesota, made the statement that Christianity was for losers, weak people. “Christianity is a crutch,” I believe is how he put it.

And what intrigued me was not so much his statement as the reaction from Christian quarters. So many were angry, upset, infuriated. “Christianity is not for losers and weaklings. Christianity is for winners. It is not a crutch!” many said.

Well, those people were right about one thing. Christianity is not a crutch. It's not. It's a gurney. And on it die all the hopes, dreams, and myths of the human endeavor.

You know... that we are the captain of our ship. That we are the master of our fate (another oxymoron).

Maybe that's why these days I find the most... and words fail me here... I find the most grounded people, the most whole – dare I say ‘holy’ people... I find those people to be the ones who have gone through some kind of death and resurrection experience. These are the heroes of my faith these days.

They have confronted their mortality due to some physical illness or struggle. They have faced the death of their free will over and against some kind of addiction. They have recognized that their greatest struggle has not been with the outside world, but within their very body and spirit.

Christianity is not a crutch for them. It was the gurney upon which they died to self and were raised to a new life.

Perhaps that's why I think it is interesting how Paul ends this passage: "Who will save me from this body of death?" Or, "Is there no one who can do anything for me?"

What is interesting is that Paul doesn't answer his question with "Christ will," "Jesus will," "God will."

No, he simply says, "Thanks be to God for Jesus Christ." Or, "Thank God ... Jesus Christ can and does."

In other words, Christ isn't GOING TO save us. Christ has already saved us. It's done. It's over. To quote Jesus as he hangs from the cross, "It is finished."

It's almost as if Paul is saying that in spite of my sinning, God's grace and mercy stand over me. In spite of all of my inner turmoil and struggles, God's peace stands over me. In spite of me doing all the things I know I shouldn't do, and not doing what I know I should do, God's forgiveness still stands over me.

I have been saved from myself.

It is that word which can free me to look at myself in an honest way. It is that word that can free me to confront my innermost demons. This is what grace does. It frees me to look at myself without fear of reprisal. It frees me to be honest with myself and others.

My dear friend Henry Rojas likes to tell those in recovery that their True Self is not the self that wants to drink. That's their false self. Their True Self is the self that wants to **'not'** want to drink. And as he talks about the ever-present grace of God in their lives, they are freed to honestly confront that false self and know that there is a True Self that is loved and held by a gracious and forgiving God.

These words of Paul could have been written by every person in recovery I have ever met. Those in recovery know what the rest of us are afraid to admit. That we all are addicted to something... being right, being enough, being in control. We are addicted to our standard of living or our station in life. We all could write these words if we were honest with ourselves... as we pursue things in our lives which are not healthy for us, but which society says is normal and acceptable.

Yet, those in recovery know and can speak these words because they have connected to their Higher Power.

There is no way one can speak the words of Paul without knowing there is something greater than one's brokenness. There is no way for one, or reason for one, to speak of one's pain if there is not something greater. It is this grace that allows us to lose all pretense and defensiveness in our lives. There is something greater, someone greater, who can pick up the mess we have made of our lives and transform it into something healthy and whole... which by the way, is what the word 'salvation' or 'saved' means in Greek... 'healing, wholeness.'

Look at this meal.

Who is going to save the betrayer from himself? Who is going to save the denier from himself? Who is going to save the runaways from themselves? Who is going to pick up the mess they have made of their lives and transform it into something healthy and whole?

In the night in which Jesus was going to be betrayed... in the night in which Jesus was going to be denied and run away from... in that night, before it even happened, Jesus forgives. Jesus saves the betrayer, the denier, the runaways from themselves.

Jesus saves them from themselves. Before it even happens.

And so it is for you and me.

Who is GOING TO save us from ourselves?

Well, no one actually...

... Because we've already been saved. It's done. It's over. It is finished.

"Thanks be to God for Jesus Christ."

Amen.

Spirit in the Desert

Opening Song

Be Still

(London Fox Taize Choir)

Be Still, know that I am God.

Spirit of the Living God

(Celtic Spirits)

Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.

Break me, melt me, mold me, fill me.

Bible Passage

(A passage takes us from one place to another)

Touchpoint

(Where God's story touches our life story)

Come, Bring Your Burdens to God (Woza Nomthwalo Wakho)

(John L. Bell, The Wild Goose Collection)

Swahili:

Woza nomthwalo wakho,

Woza nomthwalo wakho,

Woza nomthwalo wakho,

Uyes' akasozathi hayi.

Come, bring your burdens to God,

Come, bring your burdens to God,

Come, bring your burdens to God,

For Jesus will never say no.

The Meal

Our Father (The Lord's Prayer)

(The London Fox Taizé Choir)

Benediction

Christ Before Me

(Keith Duke)

Christ before me. Christ behind me.

Christ above me. Christ below me.

Christ to left and Christ to right.

Christ within both day and night.