

It's About Time...

...You Killed a Persistent Sin!"

Matthew 18:7-9

This morning I want to continue in our current series entitled "It's about time" We have been looking at things in our lives that it's about time we did something about. We can go through our year talking about what we "should" be doing and get absolutely no where. How many of us can agree this morning that God wants us to be good stewards of our time – to make each day count?

This series is to spark within us changes that can make 2008 and the rest of our lives effective, changed, transformed, progressing, avoiding a stagnant life. And this morning I want to look at a topic that effects all of us and it is the topic of sin. In a world where we try to avoid the topic of sin because it makes us feel uncomfortable or uneasy, sin is a reality and its effects are limitless.

The psychiatrist M. Scott Peck wrote the best seller *The Road Less Travelled*. As a psychiatrist it's his job to try and understand what makes people tick. Here's what he says in another book, *What Return Can I Make*:

"Sin has not been a very fashionable word these past few years...It would seem the doctrine of the day is that all that is needed in this world is a little more affirmation. I'm OK, You're OK is the title of one of the leading pop psychology best-sellers.

But what happens if I'm not OK?... The reality is that this world is not all OK. Evil is not the figment of some medieval theologian's imagination. Auschwitz and My Lai and Jonestown are actual places and actually happened. Human evil is real.

The reality is that we do betray God and ourselves and each other. We do it routinely. The worst of us do it blatantly, even compulsively. The noblest of us do it subtly and self centeredly, even when we think we are not trying to do it. Whether it is done consciously or unconsciously is of no matter; the betrayal occurs."

We all have a problem and it is called sin. What is sin? How can it be defined? **Sin is the desire or act to avoid, deviate from, or violate the law or character of God.** It is going against the will and order of God and living contrary to how Jesus showed us how to live. Just look around you and you can see people living without God, people living against God and people going against the heart of God.

I want us to get away from the idea that God's ways are merely a list of do's and don'ts because that isn't what it is. Even though many would simply hear judgment, all that God has done for us has been done out of love.

God has designed life to function a certain way, and his love has shown us what it means to live a life of love and rightness. **God wants the best for us and it is in living out his design and his ways that we find a life of peace and purpose.** But we have all struggled with living out God's design and his heart haven't we? The Apostle Paul wrote in **Romans 3:23**:

23 For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard

All of us struggle with sin. All of us struggle with living out God's design and his heart. Yet it is one thing to struggle with our propensity to sin, and another to keep feeding it. It is about time we stop feeding a persistent sin and live in the freedom purchased by God. This morning I want to look at the words of Jesus and his teaching about sin and our responsibility. We read in **Matthew 18:7-9**:

7 "What sorrow awaits the world, because it tempts people to sin. Temptations are inevitable, but what sorrow awaits the person who does the tempting. 8 So if your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It's better to enter eternal life with only one hand or one foot than to be thrown into eternal fire with both of your hands and feet. 9 And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It's better to enter eternal life with only one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell.

First, notice that the world tempts people. **Although we may have sin in our hearts, this world has a way of drawing out that sin in each of us. Temptation is inevitable.** Paul wrote to Timothy in **2 Timothy 3:1-5** and said:

1 You should know this, Timothy, that in the last days there will be very difficult times. 2 For people will love only themselves and their money. They will be boastful and proud, scoffing at God, disobedient to their parents, and ungrateful. They will consider nothing sacred. 3 They will be unloving and unforgiving; they will slander others and have no self-control. They will be cruel and hate what is good. 4 They will betray their friends, be reckless, be puffed up with pride, and love pleasure rather than God. 5 They will act religious, but they will reject the power that could make them godly. Stay away from people like that!

Sounds a lot like today doesn't it? This world has a way of drawing out the worst in all of us. The more we get consumed with this world, the more materialistic, the more judgmental, the more prideful and arrogant we get. This morning I want to look at three ways to counter sin in our lives.

Three Ways to Kill a Consistent Sin.

1. Limited Exposure.

The solution isn't to isolate ourselves from the world but to limit what we need in this world. **1 John 2:16** tells us:

16 For the world offers only a craving for physical pleasure, a craving for everything we see, and pride in our achievements and possessions. These are not from the Father, but are from this world.

In order to work on the sin our lives we need to cut off the source that keeps feeding it. Don't get me wrong, there are a lot of good things in this life and in this world, that if used properly can do a lot of good. But there are a lot of things that we would be much better off without. There are temptations all around us, and instead of feeding it, or pouring fuel on that fire, we need to extinguish it.

We know within ourselves those things that easily trip us up – whether it be lust, drunkenness, pride, materialism – we all know where our weak points are. We also know that there are times in our lives when we are at our weakest points and we know where those times or places are. **We need to know where we are weak and avoid putting ourselves in those circumstances or situations.**

Sometimes it will require turning our head and not seeing things with our eyes, or not being at a certain place that has things that will cause you to fall, or even hanging around certain people that tend to lead us down the wrong path. We need to put limits on our lives. **Hebrews 12:1** tells us:

1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us.

You will not find victory over a persistent sin if you are constantly feeding it.

2. Preventative Care

We mostly fall when we are weak. Since we have just learned that this world is going to tempt us, preventative care is necessary for any victorious living. It needs to be a normal part of our everyday life. David wrote in **Psalms 119:11**:

11 I have hidden your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.

*21 For I have kept the ways of the Lord; I have not turned from my God to follow evil. 22 I have followed all his regulations; I have never abandoned his decrees. 23 I am blameless before God; I have kept myself from sin. **Psalms 18:21-23***

a. Fill Your Heart With God's Word.

Having knowledge and understanding help us make educated decisions in life. Instead of reacting with animal instincts, we need to be making choices with reason. It is what separates us from the animal kingdom – we can reason in our minds.

Allowing God to teach us about who he is and what his design in life is all about help us to make educated choices. **The more I understand God and his ways, the more I will be willing to live it out in my life.** Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 15:34**:

Think carefully about what is right, and stop sinning. For to your shame I say that some of you don't know God at all.

Living a life that doesn't keep caving into the same sin time and time again shows a true understanding of one's relationship with God. The more you fill your mind with truth, the less room there is for anything else.

b. Confess Your Sin

Jesus' brother James tells us in **James 5:16**:

16 Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.

Although we don't believe in the necessity to confess your sins to a priest, we do believe in confessing our wrongs to God. It is clear according to scripture that if we do we receive forgiveness. But what if you have a sin that you struggle with and you need help? **Admitting your sin to a trustworthy person, for the sake of finding help and prayer, brings with it a sense of support and accountability.** **Proverbs 27:6** tells us:

6 Wounds from a sincere friend are better than many kisses from an enemy.

The key is not that we glorify our sin, but that we move forward and get the support and help we need. Finally this morning, the third way to kill a persistent sin is:

3. A Heart Transplant

Clearly, we need help beyond ourselves when it comes to sin. We need the life changing power of God. **Ezekiel 18:31** tells us:

Put all your rebellion behind you, and find yourselves a new heart and a new spirit.

What we need is the Spirit of God to live in us, the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead, can take our weak frail hearts and transform them. **Romans 8:12-14** tells us:

12 Therefore, dear brothers and sisters, you have no obligation to do what your sinful nature urges you to do. 13 For if you live by its dictates, you will die. But if through the power of the Spirit you put to death the deeds of your sinful nature,* you will live. 14 For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children* of God.*

Only Jesus can help change our hearts and our desires and our passions. Only he can show us the real causes of our struggles and hurts, and bring release and freedom. **We need a heart transplant, a new heart that desires the things of God and to live life with purity and purpose.**

Three ways to kill a persistent sin is to limit our exposure, do preventative care, and rely upon God to change our hearts. Our text in Matthew doesn't end with just the idea of taking care of our own sin, but continues on and talks about how our sin affects others. Look at verse seven of our text, "what sorrow awaits those who do the tempting."

As we live out our lives, how we live speaks to those around us. If we aren't careful we can teach the wrong things to others. We may even become a stumbling block for someone else. **1 John 2:10-11** tells us:

10 Anyone who loves another brother or sister is living in the light and does not cause others to stumble. 11 But anyone who hates another brother or sister is still living and walking in darkness.*

The most loving thing I can do to you is to live my life free from habitual sin that could cause you to stumble, and walk in the ways of God.

It is better for me to cut out anything in my life that will make me fall, and eventually cause you to fall as well. It is about time I gave up sinful habits that have held me for so long, and that have possibly caused others to fall as well. It's about time I asked God for his help and allow him to change my heart.

It's about time I put boundaries in my life so that I am constantly bombarded with temptation. And it's about time that I did some preventative maintenance and allowed the truth to truly set me free.

That sin that has for so long held onto your life, doesn't have to anymore. It's up to you!