

Arrhythmia

Scripture: Romans 7:14 - 25

8/21/22

In early American history we had a sermon given by Jonathan Edwards entitled 'Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.' It was given on July 8th, 1741 and it established an era in American Christianity called 'hellfire & brimstone' preaching which still survives today.

Jonathon was a revivalist preacher who was regarded as the original philosophical theologian. He had a Puritan heritage and he played a critical role in shaping the First Great Awakening in the USA.

His message was spellbinding as it painted a picture of a sinner as a spider over the pit of hell or a sinner as the victim of a flood of God's vengeance. It left an indelible mark on America. I do not do this style of preaching - Hellfire and Brimstone'!

Have you ever heard a preacher give a 'Hellfire and Brimstone' message? This style of preaching can be disturbing and it can make you scum in your seat!

The Bible is clear that there is sin and our lives prove it. The problem is that 'the fear approach' to sin causes people to do what is already a natural tendency - to hide in self-denial or self-deception. 'The fear approach' to sin does not stop us from sinning, it just causes us to deny that we would sin. 'The fear approach' to sin does not stop us from sinning, it just causes us to deceive ourselves that we would never sin. The 'no not me' attitude comes out in 'the fear approach' to sin!

Thus, we end up stuck in our sins not just as personal attitudes and actions, but even more often as attitudes and actions of groups and nations. Because of sin, we find ourselves caught up in cycles of personal brokenness, family brokenness, community brokenness, and even global brokenness.

Yet God invites us to take a look at what we think about. Yet God invites us to take a look at what we say. Yet God invites us to take a look at what we do.

God invites us to face our sinfulness, not because God is angry at us, but because God loves us. We are sinners in the hands of a loving God.

A startling realization awaits us when we take that look. Here is the question - does a spring bring forth good water and foul water at the same time?

When it comes to the human spring of life, the answer is yes!

In our scripture reading today from the Book of Romans, Paul uses some confusing words - *that which we would not do, that is what we do.*

We have within us an inner war between the part of us that is highly responsive to God and the part of us that is resistant and self-absorbed. I am reminded of this idea when you see in a movie the image of a devil on one shoulder and an angel on your other shoulder.

One of the ways Paul deals with this spiritual split personality is to write the old carnal nature no longer really exist. Paul is not trying to lie to himself. He readily admits that he talks one way and ends up living another. Rather Paul is trying to teach us a skill for life that is very important.

We have to decide what we are going to allow Christ to claim in us. We need to be able to say to ourselves and to others that some of our thoughts, words, and actions are not worthy of us.

We need to be able to say to ourselves and others that we are selfish individuals who are not worthy of Christ's love but Christ will always love us.

The 'BC' in our lives, that is 'Before Christ' is a sinful nature. The 'AD' in our lives, that is a life we take on when we decide to follow Christ because of his amazing grace in which holiness and love reign. The time between 'BC' and 'AD' is a transitional time between who we once were and who we are yet to become.

Many of us are living between the 'BC' and 'AD' time. We are living 'Before Christ' and 'After Taking Christ into our Lives'.

Let us decide to live in the 'AD'! Let this be a new era in which we will live!

We can all admit that the road to hell is paved with good intentions. For some of us that road is not only paved but striped, lined, and beautifully landscaped with good intentions! We are hopelessly self-disappointing. We are hopelessly stuck on this road to destruction.

So we understand Paul when he says in our scripture reading - 'What a wretched person I am! Who will rescue me?'

Who indeed? For the war within is not one that can be wished away. The war within is not one that can be corrected by a resolution. The war within is not one that can be overcome with the latest self-help technique.

We have a heart problem! This heart problem is one that leads to death.

Every year, we learn of outstanding athletes who die on the court or on the field in the midst of a practice or game. The doctors report later that the athlete has an arrhythmia.

You and I are much like those super athletes with such great giftedness and potential. And at the same time, we also have a tragic flaw - arrhythmia. The result kills us and those around us.

For this arrhythmia that we have, there is no cure in ourselves. But the good news is there is an outside cure. It is not a pill (I hate taking pills anyway). It is not a shot (I hate having a shot too). Paul knows the cure for arrhythmia, do you know it?

Paul says quickly - 'Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

Jesus Christ is our spiritual cardiologist who has the treatment for us. Jesus Christ is our spiritual surgeon who can give us a needed bypass. Jesus is the great physician who leads us from what will kill us to what will make us eternally and wonderfully alive!

Life is about becoming all that the grace of God can create in you and through you. Like all heart disease, early detection and treatment is better. For our arrhythmia, Jesus is the cure. And it is never too late to get a new heart!

Let us pray:

O God, thank you for our cardiologist, Jesus Christ. May we always come to him to cure us of our hatred and anger to other people. AMEN.