

"Gospel Renewal & Ourselves"

Exodus 20:1-17

~ Delivered at Central Baptist Church on October 2, 2016

INTRODUCTION

- **(SHOW SLIDE)** Please open your Bibles to Exodus 20.
- Robert Louis Stevenson wrote the famous story *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. It's actually quite a terrifying story. We meet the good Dr. Jekyll who is struggling because he sees a dual nature in himself. One half wants to deny himself and do good but the other half is corrupt and selfish.
 - Jekyll says, "*I thus drew steadily to that truth...that man is not truly one, but truly two.*"¹ He realizes that what is wrong with him, and what is wrong with every person, is that we have these two selves within us.
- So Jekyll comes up with a potion that separates the two natures. When he drinks it, he transforms into Mr. Hyde: "*his every act and thought centred on self.*"² When this first occurs he is shocked to discover just how wicked this side of him really is: "*I knew myself, at the first breath of this new life, to be more wicked, tenfold more wicked, sold a slave to my original evil.*"³
 - During the night he drinks the potion, turns into Mr. Hyde, and indulges in whatever depravity he wants. In the morning he transforms back to Dr. Jekyll who now only seeks to do good in the world.
 - But Dr. Jekyll finds that he cannot control Mr. Hyde who ends up murdering two people.
- Jekyll is repulsed by this and so stops drinking the potion only to find that he starts to involuntarily turn into Hyde. He tries to keep Hyde at bay by being really good and doing good things. This works until one day, in a park, he starts thinking about how good and compassionate he is in comparison to others.
 - With this prideful thought he shudders and suddenly discovers he has turned into Hyde again. Hyde is winning the battle. Hyde is taking over entirely.
 - Jekyll knows this and so the story ends with him committing suicide.
- That's a bleak story. But Stevenson has captured human nature so well. We all know the Mr. Hyde within us. He comes out in all our self-centred actions. When we're honest we realize we are ten times more wicked than we thought. Even our goodness is so often tainted by pride and self-righteousness.
 - Is there any hope for change? Christianity agrees with Stevenson that this is a war that cannot be won on our own.
 - But the good news of Christianity is that when a person becomes a Christian, God begins to renew our very nature so that Mr. Hyde is gradually defeated and we become more and more like Jesus himself.
- This transformation of our inward nature is at the heart of our proposed 5-year vision. Our vision is to be **(SHOW SLIDE)** "*renewing our community through the gospel.*" We define Central's community as ourselves, our city, and those places in the world where we have influence. So we are admitting right away that we are in need of renewal. And we are saying it is the gospel that renews us. So today, I want to focus on how the gospel renews us – not the city or world but us.
 - I want to radically change how you think about the gospel. Most Christians think of the gospel as the basics – the elementary truths – that you must believe to go to heaven when you die. But once you believe the gospel then you move on to deeper things. This could not be more misguided.
 - Today I want to show you that the gospel is not just something non-Christians need to hear in order to be saved; the gospel is also something Christians need in order to mature. The gospel is what defeats Mr. Hyde and enables you to become like Jesus.

¹ Robert Louis Stevenson, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde and Other Stories*, (New York: Everyman's Library Alfred A. Knopf Publishing, 1992), 61.

² Ibid., 66.

³ Ibid., 63.

- So in order that you might experience the renewing power of the gospel in your lives let me develop this by asking three questions:
 - First, what is the gospel? Second, who is the gospel for? And third, how does the gospel renew us?

WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

- If it is true that it is the gospel that changes us then we must begin by asking, (**SHOW SLIDE**) “What is the gospel?”
 - Most people think Christianity is an ethical system. It is about following the Ten Commandments and trying your best to be good. But I want to show you right here from the Ten Commandments that this could not be farther from the truth.
- Without looking at your Bible, let me ask you this question. “*what is the first line of the Ten Commandments?*” Don’t look. What is it?
 - Is it, “***you shall have no other gods before me***”? No. Absolutely not. That is the first command but it is not the first line.
 - I’m not trying to play word games with you. This is actually really important. What is the first line?
- Look at the passage. Verse 1 is the narrator’s preface: “*And God spoke all these words, saying...*” Now here comes God’s first line as indicated by the quotation marks. **READ 2 - “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.”**
 - Now that is not a law. That is an announcement of good news. It is God announcing the wonderful thing he has done in rescuing his people from slavery.
- Now here is the million-dollar question. Getting the answer right is the key to understanding Christianity and, as I will show you later, the key to growing as a Christian. The question is, “*Which comes first – the law or the gospel?*”
 - Clearly it is the good news first and the commands second. It is first what God has done and second what his people must do.
- Right here we see what makes Christianity unique among all the world religions, spiritual paths, and secular ways of thinking. Every other path reverses this order.
 - Every other path says, “*First, here is God’s law or here are the teachings. And then second, if you can follow them, if you can be a good person, then God will accept you, or you will enter paradise, or attain enlightenment, or whatever.*”
 - Every other path says, “*Be good/obey in order to be accepted.*”
- Right here we see that, (**SHOW SLIDE**) the gospel is not, “*Obey/be good in order to be accepted.*” God did not come to Israel while they were in slavery in Egypt and say, “*I am giving you these Ten Commandments. If you can obey, then I will deliver you from Egypt. If you obey, then I will consider being your God and loving you as my people.*”
 - No. First, God acts on their behalf. And then even before God utters one single command, he speaks of his grace toward them.
 - He says, “*Out of grace, I rescued you from bondage when you could not rescue yourself. I set my love and favour upon you. You are my beloved people and I am your God. In light of this wonderful news, here is how I want you to live.*”
- All of this is the Bible’s grand story in miniature. The Bible says we are all slaves. Slaves to an evil tyrant named Satan. Slaves to our own sinful nature – the Mr. Hyde within us. And slaves to death who will kill us all in the end.
 - God does not come to us and say, “*If you can get rid of Mr. Hyde within you and become good, then I will accept you.*” He does not say, “*If you can clean up your life enough then I will love you.*”
 - No, the story of the Bible is that God has done for us what we cannot do for ourselves. God sent his Son Jesus, whose name means “YAHWEH to the rescue.” Jesus died and

rose again to deliver us from sin, to conquer Satan, and to defeat death. It is all part of God's grand plan to restore and renew his fallen creation.

- So what is Christianity all about? It is about good news. It is not fundamentally about what we must do but about what God has done. It is not first of all an ethical system; it is first of all a wonderful announcement of what God has done for us in Jesus.
 - And what is this good news? To put it in a short sentence, (**SHOW SLIDE**) the good news is that, through Jesus Christ, God is renewing his fallen creation (particularly in reconciling us to God).
 - To expand that a bit, (**SHOW SLIDE**) the gospel is the announcement that through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, God is making all things new both personally for those who repent and believe and cosmically as he renews all of creation.
 - So I begin here because, as I hope to show you, it is the gospel that will transform your life. If we are going to see how that happens we must first be clear on what the gospel is.

WHO IS THE GOSPEL FOR?

- Now let's build on that and ask the second question, (**SHOW SLIDE**) "Who is the gospel for?"
 - I think most people get that Christianity says all people must believe this good news in order to be saved.
 - But what most people don't get is that the gospel is also for Christians. They view the gospel as the basics or as the elementary truths of Christianity that get you in the door but then think that a Christian moves beyond the gospel, like a child moves beyond basic addition and subtraction to algebra, and calculus.
 - So when such people hear our vision statement saying that we want to be "**Renewing our community through the gospel**" they think we saying we only care about non-Christians hearing the gospel. They feel this is very elementary and does not focus on helping Christians grow.
- But what I am seeking to show you today is that this is not only a fundamental misunderstanding of the gospel, it is also a fundamental misunderstanding of how to grow as a Christian.
 - So in this point I am seeking to revolutionize your thinking. I want to show you that the gospel is also for Christians.
- You can see this plainly in our passage. Again, did God speak this message of good news *before* or *after* he delivered Israel out of Egypt? This is after. He has already rescued them. They are already his people. And yet God clearly thinks it is critical that they hear again the good news of what he has done for them.
 - Furthermore, the Ten Commandments were to be at the heart of Israel's life. They were to read them over and over again. Which means God wanted his people to hear the good news of what he had done for them over and over again.
- It is the same thing in the New Testament. In Romans 1:15 Paul writes, (**SHOW SLIDE**) "**I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.**" Now whom is Paul writing to? Whom he is so eager to preach the gospel to? Is he writing to non-Christians in Rome? No. He is writing to the church in Rome.
 - So Paul believe that it was just as important for Christians to hear about all that God has done for us in Jesus.
- We see the same thing in 1 Corinthians 15. Paul writes, (**SHOW SLIDE**) "**Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received.**"
 - Paul says they have already received the gospel but and yet he says they need to be reminded of it again.
- In Phil 1:27 Paul says, (**SHOW SLIDE**) "**Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.**"

- Again, Paul is writing to Christians. He is saying, “*As Christians, you need to make sure you know the gospel so well that you can connect it to every single area of your conduct.*”
- In Gal 2, Peter gives in to his need for approval from people and his racist tendencies when he refuses to eat with Gentiles for fear of what others would think.
 - When Paul sees this he rebukes Peter in front of everybody because his “*conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel.*” In other words, Peter had not yet seen how the gospel should impact racism or his need for approval. As a Christian, Peter still needed to hear the gospel.
- J.D Greear captures what I am trying to get at when he writes, (**SHOW SLIDE**) “*For many evangelicals the gospel has functioned solely as a rite into Christianity; it is the prayer we pray to begin our relationship with Jesus; the diving board off of which we jump into the pool of Christianity. After we get into the pool, we get into the real stuff of Christianity: mastering good principles for our marriage; learning rules and regulations of how to behave.*”⁴
 - Tim Keller says the same thing in another way: (**SHOW SLIDE**) “*The gospel is not just the ABCs but the A to Z of the Christian life. It is inaccurate to think the gospel is what saves non-Christians, and then Christians mature by trying hard to live according to biblical principles. It is more accurate to say that we are saved by believing the gospel, and then we are transformed in every part of our minds, hearts, and lives by believing the gospel more and more deeply as life goes on.*”⁵
 - Alright, we are now ready to get practical. Remember the big point here is how we can experience life change. How do we grow when Mr Hyde is so strong within us? How do we become more like Jesus?

HOW DOES THE GOSPEL RENEW US?

- We have said it is through the gospel so now let's come to our third question, which is, (**SHOW SLIDE**) “how does the gospel renew us?”
 - The answer is that (**SHOW SLIDE**) the gospel renews us by changing the very core motivations of our hearts. The good news has a unique power to change us in a way that commands do not.
- You can see that right here in our passage. God does not begin with, “**You shall have no other gods before me.**” He doesn't say, “**I command you so now do it.**”
 - He does not do this because he knows our hearts are divided. Mr. Hyde is very powerful. A command to love God with all our hearts will not defeat the self-centred Mr. Hyde. We all know this. Just trying harder to obey a command doesn't stop you from being bitter against someone.
 - We need something that has the power to change us on the deepest level possible. The gospel is that power. That is why Paul calls it “**the power of God unto salvation.**”
- This is why the gospel comes first in the Ten Commandments. God says, “**Before I command you I want to fill your hearts with joy. Remember that I set my love on you. I acted on your behalf. I freed you and made you my people.**”
 - It suddenly becomes easy to keep the first command because your heart is so filled with joy over this good news that why would you ever want to follow another god?
- You see, our hearts are like a metal rod that has been bent out of shape. How would you go about making such a rod straight again? Well you can try and apply force to it. This works to a certain degree. It does bend it but when the force is removed the metal rod snaps back to where it was. Or you may just apply so much force that it eventually just breaks in half.
 - This is what commands do. They apply force. And you can bend people's behaviour's a bit by applying enough force. You can squeeze dollars out of them by telling them to be generous, or make them attend church by telling them God says they have worship him. But the heart is not changed and so it quickly snaps back to where it was.

⁴ J.D. Greear, *Gospel: Recovering the Power that Made Christianity Revolutionary* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2011), 21.

⁵ Timothy Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in your City* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), Kindle Edition, Location 1084.

- And sometimes people just break. They try to hard to be follow God's commands or to be good but as Stevenson's story shows us, Mr. Hyde cannot be pushed down forever. Often after trying really hard for awhile they break – meaning they reject everything and start living a completely opposite life.
- But of course the way to straighten a bent metal rod is to use the power of heat to melt it. Then it becomes pliable and when it cools remains in position. The gospel is the power that melts our hearts.
 - This is why the Scriptures always seek to change Christian's hearts, not by just emphasizing commands but by reminding them of the gospel. We see this everywhere.
- Let me give you some examples. Let's start with forgiveness.
 - We all know we should forgive. Even Oprah will tell you it is a good idea. In Eph 4 God commands us to forgive. This all sounds wonderful but as C.S. Lewis writes, "***Every one says forgiveness is a lovely idea, until they have something to forgive.***"⁶ You see, the Mr. Hyde within us delights in bitterness, justifies anger, and craves to pay others back.
 - So how will you get the heart to forgive when you are so angry and embittered? Through having your heart melted by the gospel. Is that not what Paul does in Eph 4? He does not just say, "***forgive because God says so.***" He says, (**SHOW SLIDE**) "***Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.***" So Paul says, "***Christian, if you are having problems forgiving you need to hear the gospel again. Remember all your sins before God. Remember all that Jesus did to forgive you – how he forgave you a massive debt. Let this melt your heart so you can forgive others their debts.***"
 - The Christian needs to hear the gospel because it has the power to renew our bitter and angry Mr Hyde hearts into hearts that forgive.
- Or let's take generosity. Again, we all know we should be generous with our money, that we should care for the poor, and not be greedy. God commands it and most people would agree it is a good thing.
 - But the Mr. Hyde wants everything for himself. We see this clearly in the fact that we will easily and gladly give thousands of dollars to things we love like vacations, hobbies, new cars, nicer cars, but we finds it so hard to give money away in large amounts to Christ's causes. So how do you defeat selfish Mr. Hyde get a heart that is truly generous?
 - When Paul is seeking to make the Corinthian's generous he does not just command them. Rather, Paul seeks to melt their bent and greedy hearts with the gospel. He says, (**SHOW SLIDE**) "***For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.***"
 - The Christian needs to hear the gospel because it has the power to renew our selfish and greedy Mr Hyde hearts into hearts that give joyfully and sacrificially to Christ's causes.
- Jesus does this as well. He is always seeking to first melt our hearts with the gospel in order that we might be changed. Think of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7. Here Jesus is portrayed as the greater Moses who goes up on the mountainside and he speaks about how his people are to live. But notice he does not begin with commands such as, "***You shall not lust***" or "***love your enemies***" or "***Be perfect for your heavenly Father is perfect***". No, how does he begin?
 - Just like the Ten Commandments, he begins with good news. He says, "***blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.***" He announces the good news that everyone who admits their sin, who says they are needy, gets the entire kingdom.
 - Before Jesus ever speaks of how his kingdom citizens are to live, he takes great pains to be sure that all who are in the kingdom know just how blessed they are. In fact, he goes on to speak eight statements of blessing so that by the time he gets to the laws our hearts are exploding with joy and we want to obey him.

GOSPEL RENEWAL AND A CRAZY NEIGHBOUR

⁶ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, chapter 7.

- This all makes me think of the day we had to call the police on our next-door neighbour in Vancouver. He was a single man who was around fifty-five years and had many personal difficulties including a history of alcoholism.
 - It all came to a head one day when Heather bought a little water fountain for our deck. I guess we forgot to turn it off at night. The next I was in the backyard and he started yelling at me saying, ***If you don't turn off that fountain I will come and break it over your head.*** He was yelling so much that neighbours started gathering to see what was going on.
 - He got so angry he challenged me to a fight. I probably shouldn't have laughed when he said this but I did. This only infuriated him more and he started climbing the four-foot fence between our properties and yelling that he would put in the ground. Thankfully he turned around and stormed into his house.
- Needless to say, we called the police. The next few weeks were filled with stress. I started running scenarios in my mind on how to defend myself if he attacked me.
 - But I confess that Mr. Hyde appeared and many times began to take over my heart. You see the scenarios did not just end with me defending myself. They ended with me beating him into a pulp. I was so angry. Some of this anger was justifiable but I confess that my heart hated him and every imaginary beating that I gave him felt so good.
- But I also knew the commands of God. I knew that I was to love my enemy. I knew that as far as it depends on me I was to strive to live at peace with all men. That all sounds wonderful until you have a real enemy.
 - It was the gospel that gave me the heart I needed. For it was God who loved me when I was his enemy. Jesus faced tremendous violence for my sins. Slowly my heart began to melt. I began to truly pray for my neighbour. I would say hello to him when I saw him even when he glared back at me. Heather and I returned the fountain and gave him a note declaring our desire to live at peace with him.
 - It took about a year for him to speak to me but, by God's grace, we eventually had a cordial relationship again. Only the gospel could renew my heart which was filled with anger, hatred, and a desire for vengeance.
- This is an example of the gospel renewing our community. It renewed me and then it brought renewal to a strained relationship. It is this kind of renewal that we are praying will take place all across Victoria.
 - The gospel alone has the power to change the very core motivations of your heart.