

Sermon Subject: "The Sin Of Doing Nothing"

Scripture: Luke 10:30-37

When we think of the word "sin," we think of things that are against God. Many of us think of The Ten Commandments found in Exodus 20, where God says, not to kill, steal, covet another man's wife or possessions, worship a graven image, commit adultery, and so on. So when we think of sin, we think of things that we actively, deliberately do.

But if you think about it, sin doesn't just consist of actions. It also consists of omission. There are, to use terms many of us would know, sins of commission (what we do) and sins of omission (things we forget or neglect to do). So, while committing adultery is a sin, or intentionally flirting with another person other than one's husband or wife is a sin, it's also a sin not to ward off that person's advances or refuse the affair. If you entertain the flirtations, just saying "I'm not flirting" isn't good enough. For, your words are saying one thing but your actions another. If you don't want to flirt, you tell the other person to stop, leave me alone, and take legal action against them, if it goes to that extreme. But you don't entertain flirtation as if "to be nice to them." There are plenty of other ways to be nice in godly fashion than to entertain their romantic and sexual advances.

It's a sin to take God's name in vain, as God says in Scripture, but it's also a sin to fail to pray. The Lord tells us in 1 John 2:9 that God will forgive us of our sins if we confess them, but if we don't confess them, how can we expect forgiveness? To neglect prayer is to commit sin.

There are other things we neglect that are also sin. You may say, "Well, I didn't lie about certain things," yet, you fail to speak up and tell the truth when someone lies about them. "It's their fault, they lied," you may say. And yet, the truth of the matter is that you're just as wrong for, when they lied, you were standing there -- and you could have spoken the truth. You could have witnessed, testified to the truth, and you didn't. That is another

example of sin: when we fail to tell the truth. Lying is a sin, but so is failing to tell the truth. If you don't tell the truth, you're consenting to the lie, which makes you just as guilty in the eyes of God as the liar.

So, if you're not telling lies but remain silent, you're consenting to them, for, as the saying goes, "silence means consent." Only those in disagreement speak up, and only those in agreement shut up. Let me say that again: only those in disagreement speak up, and only those in agreement shut up. If you don't speak up, you consent to what's going on -- even if you never say, "I agree with it."

There are two major sins: there is the sin of doing something (something wrong), and the sin of doing nothing (about the wrong). Even if you don't do something sinful, if you don't speak against the sinful act, you're consenting to it. In God's eyes, to fail to speak on evil or sin is the equivalent of committing it yourself. I'm not trying to encourage crime, but you might as well be the perpetrator of the act if you don't speak against it and call it out for the sin that it is.

We see these two types of sin in Jesus' Parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:30-37. In this parable, Jesus tells the story of a man beaten by thieves and left for dead. The thieves were guilty of the sin of doing something wrong. They stripped the man of his clothing, the text says, physically beat the man, hurting his body, and wounding him. Then, they left him for dead, an intentional act that showed they cared nothing for him.

But we also see the sin of doing nothing. We see the priest and the Levite in the parable, that they see the man is helpless and hurt, yet choose to leave him in that state. They do nothing to help him. Keep in mind that the victim is naked, wounded, and has no bandages for his wounds or clothes for his body. He's just laying out in the open, for everyone to see that comes by. The priest comes by first. He sees the naked, beaten man, and continues on his merry way. The Levite does slightly better. Luke 10:32

says that the Levite “came and looked” before going on about his business. He didn’t just see him and pass by, but rather, came to where the man was, looked on him and took note of his condition. In other words, he not only saw the man but he observed more and saw more detail. So clearly, if the priest was too busy to care, the Levite cared some. “Almost doesn’t count,” as the saying goes, but he does slightly better than the priest.

So many of us have taken the Parable of the Good Samaritan and paid attention to certain parts while excluding others. We’ve seen the Good Samaritan and how he cares for the helpless man, how he cares for his neighbor. And yes, Jesus applauds the Good Samaritan for his love and concern for his neighbor, a man he didn’t know personally. And, while the Good Samaritan is indeed the commendable person in the story, it would behoove us to give more attention to the wrong priest and Levite than we have in our teaching of this Parable.

We’ve spent so much time looking at the Good Samaritan and focusing on him, to the exclusion of the roles the priest and Levite play in Jesus’ argument. For, Jesus does not teach the parable to show us what is acceptable only; He desires to show us that when you do what is wrong, “almost” getting it right doesn’t count. When we look at the priest, we see that he doesn’t take any time to consider the helpless man. He glances over at him and then goes on, as though the helpless man wasn’t his problem. The Levite is a bit different. At least he comes to where the helpless man is and looks on his condition. He takes some care of observation, yet concludes the same as the priest and continues on.

The problem with our understanding of the priest and Levite is that we’ve made them the same person without considering their stances. The priest is the person that glanced and ignored. And there are some of us who fit that description: we see the helplessness and needs of others and have just decided to “stay out of it.” We’re not gonna get our hands dirty with the obstacles and hardships of others. It requires too much investment from us,

an investment we're just not willing to give. And so, we keep on passing by. We're just "passers-by" when it comes to the conditions and plight of other people. Shame on us.

But some of us think that being like the Levite is good enough. Like the Levite, we have compassion. We can't just glance at the helpless and keep moving as if we've seen nothing. No, we observe the suffering of others because we have compassion. We know what it's like to suffer, so we hate to see others suffer. But still, like the priest, we're passive in our compassion. We feel sorry for the helpless, but our sorrow for them doesn't move us to help them. We're not cold-hearted, but we're not motivated to help, either. And so, like the priest, while we observe more and our hearts bleed more for the sorrows of others, we eventually keep moving on down the road of life. What we see, the sorrow of others, doesn't motivate us to help the helpless.

Two weeks ago, a man by the name of George Floyd was killed by a Minneapolis police officer who got him out of his SUV due to what a store clerk said was a fake \$20 bill he paid. The police officer put his knee on George Floyd's neck for 8 minutes and 46 seconds as the other 3 officers held down his legs and pressed down on his back. With his oxygen stunted, Floyd continued to say "I can't breathe." He called the officer "sir" as he begged and pleaded for his life. He was in distress, helpless, and he needed someone to have compassion on him. All four policemen have been charged in his death. They are responsible for what happened to him. In the last 2 weeks, we've been told that the video also records the voices of some of the other 3 policemen asking the leading officer (Officer Chauvin) to turn George Floyd over to see if he was still breathing. But notice that they didn't tell Officer Chauvin to get off the man and remove his knee from George Floyd's neck.

It doesn't take a graduate with a degree in anatomy or pre-med to understand that cutting off someone's oxygen flow for that amount of time would kill them. And yet, these officers heard him beg for his life, his breath, and just stayed on top of him. They were guilty as sin for helping Officer Chauvin kill the Fayetteville, NC native. And yet, what are the other 3 now saying? They're saying that they were just following orders. How does "following orders" as an argument suffice when you've taken the life of an innocent man who didn't deserve to die? George Floyd was an unarmed man who paid with a fake \$20 bill according to sources. What about his stance merited him losing his life? \$20? The drugs in his system?

It's saddening to see that they heard the man's cries, how he cried out for his mother, how he begged them to give him a breath and release him, yet Officer Chauvin kept his knee on his neck as though it was a routine stop and search for him. That's the sad part: this wasn't the first innocent man Chauvin killed. And, if it wasn't for George Floyd's death, I'm afraid to say Floyd wouldn't have been the last.

We can blame the 4 officers in George Floyd's death. There's no denying that they are guilty of murder. Whatever reasons they come up with to try and get away with this murder, there's no denying their responsibility. But let's not blame them without taking a look in the mirror at ourselves. What would many of us have done? White Christians (I'm talking to my Caucasian people now), what would we have done? Would we have spoken up, tried to throw Officer Chauvin off George Floyd? Would we have yelled, "Hey, wait a minute, you can't do this! Don't you realize you're killing him? Get off his neck!" Would we have risked being written up in an effort to save George Floyd's life? Would we have put our job at risk to save a man we didn't even know?

Some of us will say, "Well, yes, I would've tried to save him. I'm a Christian, I love the Lord, I love people, I try to help everybody. I'm a good Christian." Yep, lots of us, though, can be good Christians when very little is expected

of us. And during those seemingly easy times, many of us are. You may say, “Well, Pastor, I’m white but I’m not racist. I love people. I go to work with black people. I go to church with black people. I even work with the youth ministry in the church, and there are a few black kids in it. Some of my best friends are black or African-American. I’ve gone to church with my black friends a few times.” And yes, I’m not denying that you have some association with African-Americans or black people. You very well may. And you very well may care about them.

But, if you had to sacrifice yourself for their sake, would you? That’s the ultimate question, white Christians. Would you have sacrificed your police job if you saw Officer Chauvin squeezing the life out of George Floyd? Would you have intervened and said something? Would you have told the other officers to get off George Floyd? I doubt it.

And do you know why? Because we, my white Christian brothers and sisters, are the same ones that don’t speak up against racism and prejudice in other things. We say we love our black friends, but do we go back to the police station and send a message to police officers when they pull our black friends over due to racial profiling, because they “look like” someone the police are after? Do we stop something racist or prejudice from being said or done to our black colleagues at work? Do we speak up for them when they’re being looked over for a managerial position because the corporation wants a white face at the helm instead of a black face that would endorse racial diversity?

Do we speak up for them not caring about the repercussions to ourselves? Or do we remain quiet because we fear the loss of our job and finances? Do we remain quiet when certain associates of ours are laughing at black people because we want to “go along to get along”?

As honest as we want to be, we can’t be entirely honest about those questions. And as much as we want to be the Good Samaritan that Jesus

commends, we're forced to admit that, if we're honest, we're not the Good Samaritan, but rather, nothing more than a bad Levite. You want to see the suffering and sacrifice what you have for the good of others, but let's face it -- if the price is too high, and the going gets tough, then we "get going". But the first step to fixing a problem is to detect the nature of the problem. White Christians, if we can see that, at the root of our desire to help and our decision not to get messy with the plight of black Americans is something called "white privilege," we'll see what African-Americans truly think of us. We'll understand that they see us as people in a place of privilege with money, honor, rights, and social status in America that we've never had to defend. Not. Even. Once.

In our white privilege, we've never had to do anything to defend it. And so, when we see our black brother and sister defending theirs, we feel for them. We're not stone-cold people. We're moved with pain and hurt behind their racial discrimination. Sure, we don't raise our kids to discriminate and hate, but to love everyone as God does. And that's good. But our black brothers and sisters understand the nature of why we don't speak up for them: it's due to white privilege.

And yet, what we white Christians fail to understand is that blacks don't think we're justified in not speaking up for them because, well, we're in a place of privilege. If whites don't work to bridge the racial divide, who will? How can blacks be expected to bring about their own racial equality with whites when whites don't care to see it come about? How does racial equality come in America when whites, who rule the country, don't care to bring it about? It's like asking Republicans to pass a bill favoring the poor when they, in the senate majority, refuse to pass it. We don't have the sin of doing wrong in that we intentionally do racist things. No, we have the sin of doing nothing at all to stop the racism we see and hear. And in the eyes of our Lord, seeing something and saying and doing nothing is just as bad. We want to be The Good Samaritan, but we might as well have beaten the man and left him for dead in the Parable because we've metaphorically

done that to the African-Americans we've seen every day in not speaking up for them and trying to ease their racial discrimination.

"The Parable of the Good Samaritan" is what we call Jesus' story in Luke 10. But the Parable of the Good Samaritan can also be called The Parable of The Bad Priest and Levite. The priest and Levite show us two so-called "Holy" people that don't invest in the plight of a helpless man who needed them. And sadly, white Christians, that's how we are. Let's confess it today. Let's admit that, while we want to help within, our white racial privilege affords us the option not to help. And there in white privilege lies our racism. So even though we don't say racist things and do racist things, our refusal to say something when we see something racist done to our African-American brothers and sisters shows that WE ARE RACIST. We don't want to be racist, but that's what we are. We don't want to be racist, but that's what we do. We White Christians, at the core, are racist. And we despise our racism, we hate our racism, and we want God to remove our racism from us.

The Parable of the Good Samaritan is a parable set in its time, but it still rings true today. While the Parable was told over 2,000 years ago, it's still applicable today. The helpless man today was George Floyd and African-Americans, who have been enslaved and discriminated against in this country for over 400 years. Despite the physical chains of slavery that have come off, African-Americans are still enslaved in the minds of us white people. Officer Chauvin represents the thieves in the parable, as he is the one directly responsible for George Floyd's death. But the 3 officers that refused to intervene to save George Floyd's life are the bad priests and Levites who refused to do good and rescue George Floyd when they had the power to do so. They wore a law enforcement badge, a sign that they were a "good guy," but they didn't live up to that badge. And Chauvin's knee on George Floyd's neck is symbolic of the white man's knee on the necks of African-Americans. Today, the white man's knee is still on the black man's neck --- and unless we see something and start to say

something, to speak up against the injustice, it will continue. More lives will die, and more blood will be on our hands.

The question I leave you with today is this: How many George Floyds will have to die before the white man and woman snap out of their white privilege and do something to fix it?