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Sermon Notes

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Gift or Wages: A Matter of Life or Death

Romans 6:23

I. The Mystery of Life

Planting our crepe myrtle... searching for life

A. What is life? What makes one accumulation of atoms alive, and another one not alive?

1. Biology: study of life... At its core... life is a mystery
2. Two essential functions: **metabolism** and **reproduction**

Nourishment and fruitfulness

B. Essence of life: Fruitfulness centered in God Himself

Nourishment from God, fruitfulness to the glory of God

1. LIFE: More than just “existence”... rocks “exist”, but are not alive
2. God created life on earth on the day... plants first, then animals, then man
3. Life is a principle centered in God the creator and sustainer

John 1:4 “In the word was life, and that life was the light of men.”

Acts 17:28 “For in [God] we live and move and have our being.”

C. God Created Life, Wants Fruit MULTIPLIED

1. Called Israel to bear fruit spiritually... they failed

Matthew 21:18-19 Early in the morning, as he was on his way back to the city, he was hungry. ¹⁹ Seeing a fig tree by the road, he went up to it but found nothing on it except leaves. Then he said to it, “May you never bear fruit again!” Immediately the tree withered.

Israel bore NO FRUIT for God... God declared what He would do

2. Calls a new people to Christ... we must bear fruit for His eternal glory

Matthew 21:43 "Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit."

3. What fruit? Personal holiness, gospel multiplication, deeds done in righteousness

D. Justification produces life, life produces fruit... EVERY TIME

Romans 5:18 "the result of one act of righteousness is justification that brings life for all men."

1. Paul speaks to us as justified people... he says WE ARE ALIVE TO GOD!!!

Romans 6:4 We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

2. Therefore, we should live as ALIVE TO God

Romans 6:11 In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

3. This means something negative and something positive:

Romans 6:13 Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness.

[So, if there's no fruit, there's no justification... if there's no justification, we're still in our sins]

If there is no fruit, there is no life... if there's no life, there's no justification; we're still dead in our transgressions and sins

E. The Vine and the Branches: The Same Lesson

John 15:1-8 "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ² He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful... "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing

Here we see clearly the two-fold principle of life:

1. Nourishment (Metabolism)

The life-giving sap flows through the vine into each branch day after day after day...in CHRIST

2. Fruitfulness (Reproduction)

John 15:8 This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

Same lesson taught by Paul in Romans 6... we are now alive to God in Christ; that means we bear fruit for God

Fruit of growth in holiness... walking day after day in newness of life... doing those good works that God has ordained in advance that we should walk in them

This is **true** salvation

F. Today's Counterfeit Gospel

1. Pray the prayer, Walk the aisle, "Get saved"
2. "Saved" essentially static... like some souvenir you bought on vacation
3. "Once saved, always saved" true enough... but people living like the world, no fruit in their lives, no growth in holiness
4. They "collected" this thing called salvation when they were 11 or 8 or 22, and they have it ready to show on Judgment Day

Paul says "Brothers, this should not be!!!"

True Gospel Is About Life... and the Eternal Fruit that Comes From It

Romans 6: Shall we continue to sin???

- Old slavery to sin lived out in daily habits of rebellion... daily fruit only brought ever-increasing wickedness
- New slavery to God lived out in daily habits of obedience... daily fruit results sanctification, and the outcome of all this is eternal life

vs. 22 But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life.

NOW... this should not shock you. We are NOT teaching justification by works; rather Paul is saying the only kind of life that leads to heaven is the kind that he describes here

Any other kind of life is a sham, a counterfeit, a fake... and a deadly one at that
 There is as much spiritual progress in them as in a rock... NONE

III. Death: The Wages of Sin

vs. 23 “For the wages of sin is death...”

- Paul looks negatively: the nature of sin and death
- Paul looks positively: the nature of grace and life

A. Death the Deserved Wages of Sin

1. “Wages” = lit. daily ration, payment for a soldier
 - a. soldiers enlisting under the command of powerful general
 - b. promised and motivated by daily wages, ultimate reward

Illus. Napoleon: Exiled to Elba by European powers; March 1815, escaped; a large army was sent to capture him, but he met them and persuaded them to join him...

Monthly rations... the **ultimate reward** in booty plundered from their conquered foes

So it is with sin: **daily rations, ultimate reward**

Sin: the vicious powerful commander enlisting us in his vile army... he pays daily rations; he also promises ultimate reward

Daily rations of sin is daily death... **ultimate reward** of fighting under sin’s command: ETERNAL DEATH

2. Key concept: wages are EARNED... it’s what we deserve, what we merit
3. Hell’s Bitterest pill: “I earned this... I deserve it for what I did in rebelling against God”

Luke 23:41 We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve.

B. Death the Decried Wages of Sin

1. In the Beginning: God’s Warning to Adam

Genesis 2:16-17 And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; ¹⁷ but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die."

2. A Permanent Bond: Sin and death
3. The Decree Stands Today: All Sin Deserves the Eternal Death Penalty

C. Death the Universal Wages of Sin

Ezekiel 18:20 "The soul who sins will die."

1. Not Just for Adam
2. All Nations Included
3. All People Included... not just "BIG SINNERS"

Wages of arguing and complaining are death just as the wages of cocaine addiction is death

4. All Christians Included
 - a. the question of Proverbs

Proverbs 6:27-29 Can a man scoop fire into his lap without his clothes being burned? ²⁸ Can a man walk on hot coals without his feet being scorched? ²⁹ So is he who sleeps with another man's wife; no one who touches her will go unpunished.

- b. rephrased

"Can a Christian sin with impunity? Now that we are covered in grace, can we go on sinning and not feel any negative result? Can we scoop blazing coals into our laps and not feel a form of death in our relationship with God?"

- c. the "death" a Christian experiences
 - NOT eternal death... "There is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus"
 - Death to fruitfulness for a period of time
 - Death to the peace of God (NOT peace with God)
 - Death to a clear conscience for a time
 - Death to an utterly unique set of good works that God had laid out for you to walk in TODAY

- Death in your prayer life with God
- Death in your yearning for holiness and the Bible and fellowship with God
- BUT Christ's death atones for ACTUAL death in relationship with God... ultimately His grace restores us after a time of chastening

Lesson: death is the universal wages given to all sin

D. Death the Daily Wages of Sin

1. Adam's Immediate Death

God did not lie... Genesis 2:17 literally says **"In the day you eat of that tree you will die."**

Adam died immediately... spiritually

2. Daily Death

- a. death means separated from God
- b. we can LIVE in death apart from Christ

1 John 3:14 We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death.

Ephesians 2:1 "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins in which you used to live..."

Dead while you live... a living death SPIRITUALLY apart from Christ

- c. alienation... hatred of His person, His laws, His words

Romans 8:6-7 The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; ⁷ the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so.

- d. state of spiritual war between unbeliever and God

The wages of sin is a PRESENT and DAILY experience of spiritual death

E. Death the Growing Wages of Sin

1. Sin is relentless... it grows and grows

vs. 19 you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness

2. The Wage Grows Too

Illus. Prison ministry: sin takes you farther than you wanted to go, keeps you longer than you wanted to stay, costs more than you wanted to pay

- a. increasingly hardened in sin
- b. conscience seared and ultimately dead

Illus. Abortionist doctors & nurses testify to the anguish of early reactions to aborted babies...

3. Sin's wages grow ever more expensive

- a. increasingly dead to purity and holiness
- b. increasingly hostile to God, to spiritual things
- c. increasingly dead to beauty in the world
- d. increasingly dead to pleasure... [even in sin]

Illus. Pleasure and C.S. Lewis "Screwtape letters"

So also the drug addict has decreasing pleasure in the drug

The adulterer decreasing pleasure in the adultery

The materialist decreasing pleasure in possessions

The glutton decreasing pleasure in food

THUS the thrill seeker must always be looking for some new experience... sin deadens everything it touches

Illus. Marie Antionette: lived a life of debauchery as consort of King of France..."Nothing tastes"

BUT all of this merely a daily reminder that a far worse death is yet to come

F. Death the Ultimate & Eternal Wages of Sin

1. Death is present now spiritually

2. Death is promised to us all physically (except final generation of Christians)

Hebrews 9:27 “It is appointed unto men to die once, then face judgment”

3. Hell: Eternal death the wages of sin on that final day

Revelation 21:8 But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars--their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.”

A fiery lake of burning sulfur... the lot of all who refuse the Gospel of Christ, whose sins must now be paid for

O the terror of it!! O the agony of the lost... who can speak of it lightly?

“The wages of sin is death...”

What will they say on that day, when they realize they traded their eternal souls for temporary trash? Was it worth it?

O that God would stir up your hearts even now to repent and trust Christ!!

IV. Eternal Life: The Free Gift of God in Christ Jesus

vs. 23 “... but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

PRAISE GOD that verse 23 has a second half!!!! Were it not for Christ, there would be not “BUT”

Death would have the final word... instead, life has the final word!!

A. Life the Free Gift of God in Christ Jesus

1. “Free gift” in NASB... but redundant: all gifts are “free” or they are not gifts
2. Greek word = related to GRACE... something given by GRACE
3. DEATH comes as a just wage, for it is what we truly deserve
4. New Life in Christ is purely a gift of God’s grace... absolutely contrary to what we truly deserved
5. This gift is simply received by faith in Christ ALONE!!! No payment sufficient

ONLY THROUGH CHRIST JESUS... ONLY IN HIM... ONLY BY HIM... CHRIST AND CHRIST ALONE!!!!

[All of these are in Christ Jesus alone... promised in Christ alone, received in Christ alone, daily experienced through Christ alone, growing in Christ alone, etc.]

B. Life the Promised Gift of God in Christ Jesus

1. Promised when sin first entered the world
2. Promised when God rescued Noah and his family
3. Promised to Abraham and his descendants
4. Promised when God rescued his people from slavery in Egypt
5. Promised with every animal sacrifice who died in the place of a Jewish sinner
6. Promised through the words of the prophets

Isaiah 53:11 After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities.

God decreed that the wages of sin is death... the decree flowed from His justice

God PROMISED that the gift of God would be eternal life... it flowed from his grace

C. Life the Particular Gift of God in Christ Jesus

1. The Wages of sin is death for EVERY SINNER... this is universal
2. BUT the gift of eternal life is only for a particular set of people... those who believe

John 20:31 "... by believing you may have life in his name."

1 John 5:13 "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life."

3. Given to those who submit in obedience to Christ

"... through Christ Jesus our LORD"

Saving faith recognizes that Jesus is LORD with the right to command... eternal life is walking in obedience to the daily commands of Christ as LORD

D. Life the Daily Gift of God in Christ Jesus

1. Previous understanding: eternal life is in heaven alone

This way of thought puts eternal life off in the future at judgment day

2. Actually eternal life begins NOW, HERE, ON EARTH... or it never comes at all!!
3. Eternal life begins the moment you trust Christ... the moment you are justified
4. That is Paul's whole point in Romans 6

Message of Romans 6: "Shall we continue in sin...? MAY IT NEVER BE... we died to sin and are ALIVE to God in Christ Jesus."

5. Christians walk in daily moment-by-moment fellowship with God

"I am the vine, you are the branches..."

Life = nourishment and fruitfulness NOW...

E. Life the Growing Gift of God in Christ Jesus

1. Paul's whole point: just as you used to grow in wickedness, so now you will grow in holiness
2. Daily surrendered members to sin as instruments of wickedness
3. NOW daily surrendered new self to God, individual members to Him
4. RESULT: Growth in personal holiness... becoming more and more like Jesus day after day
5. Just as sin didn't stay put but grew like a tumor, so eternal life doesn't stay put but grows into perfect fruitfulness

vs. 22 But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life.

F. Life the Ultimate & Eternal Gift of God in Christ Jesus

1. The end of this kind of life on earth is eternity with God in heaven

Revelation 22:1-4 Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ² down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the

healing of the nations. ³ No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. ⁴ They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.

2. Essence of eternal life: knowing God intimately and perfectly

John 17:3 “Now this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”

John 17:24 "Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory

V. Review & Application

The wages of sin is death: deserved, decreed, universal, daily, growing, ultimate & eternal wages

The gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord: free gift, promised, particular, daily, growing, ultimate and eternal life

A. Flee Death, Come to Christ for Life

Receive Him today!! Christ death on the cross is sufficient payment for all our sins!!!

B. Live in Christ, Bearing Fruit for Life

Christian: life each day abiding in Christ... don't wander again into sin, lest the principle of death steal your full reward

C. Grow Step by Step in Holiness for Life

Present your members to Christ your Lord for step by step growth in holiness:

Each day, begin with prayer of consecration

Each temptation, resist and grow

Each good deed, do and grow