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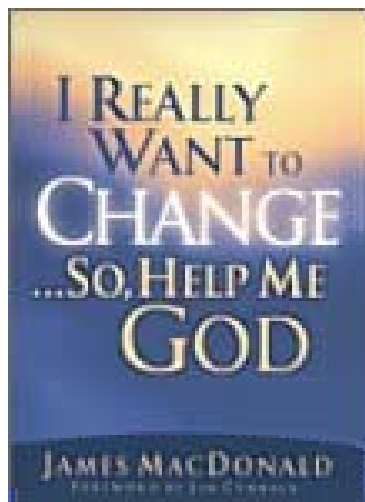
ESCAPE-A-SIN...WHAT'S HOLDING YOU BACK?

[ROMANS 6:15-19 – "LORD, I'M YOURS"]

WEEKLY SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

FEBRUARY 4, 2007

FROM THE *MASTER WORKS* SERIES STUDY OF:



ESCAPE-A-SIN...WHAT'S HOLDING YOU BACK?

[ROMANS 6: 15-19 –"LORD, I'M YOURS"]

How do you escape from a date that has gone sour? For most of us here today dating is a distant memory, but most of us can probably remember those social experiments that went bad quickly. The kind where you spend an evening of awkward, if not one-sided, conversation that seems to last for an eternity. So, again, what are you to do when you find yourself in such a situation? Fake a fainting spell? Food poisoning? A sudden onslaught of the flu?

I have good news for you! Now none of that is necessary thanks to the latest technological advances from Cingular Wireless. Recently both cell phone companies began to offer a new service they are calling "Escape-a-Date." "Escape-a-Date" is a rescue service for those caught in dates-gone-bad. You can preprogram your phone to ring at just the right moment to provide you with a way out if you need one. Imagine the unbearable silence of the awkward date being broken by the ringing of your cell phone and receiving an urgent summons so that you have to leave immediately.

Cingular, and other companies, offer a variety of scripted calls for just such a situation. Your phone will ring and you will hear a prerecorded message that will script for you what to say to get out of your date. Here is one example: "Oh, I can't believe this has happened again! How could you? Okay, I'll be there." That is the script for your roommate who has lost her keys again and you can't bear the thought of leaving her locked out on the porch all night while you are out on the town having a "good time."

There are seven other scripts written to help you get out of awkward dates politely, but quickly. A spokesperson for one of the companies describes the rescue service as a lifestyle accessory for modern people who want their phone to serve them. After all who wants to stay in an uncomfortable situation

any longer than necessary? Apparently this service is already becoming quite popular as it is estimated that 10,000 "Escape-a-Date" calls are being generated every month.

We see something like this at work in the sixth chapter of Romans as we continue our study from James MacDonald's book, *I REALLY WANT TO CHANGE...SO, HELP ME GOD.* In our scriptures this week from Romans 6, Paul is writing to the Roman Christians to inform them of a program designed to help them escape the clutches of something far worse than that of a bad date. This morning we are going to take a look at some more verses from Romans 6 to learn more about what I want us to call our "Escape-a-Sin" program. Last week our focal verse was from **ROMANS 6:11**. Listen and remember what Paul was telling us last week when he said: *¹¹So you also should consider yourselves to be dead to the power of sin and alive to God through Christ Jesus.* The simple phrase I gave you to practice this week every time you were tempted was what? **[I'M DEAD TO THAT]** That's scriptural and I hope you practiced it some when dealing with specific temptations this past week.

But, as we learned this week in our Bible study, just saying I'm dead to something does not make it happen. You may have wondered after we finished our lesson last week, *"Is that the Christian life, just being dead to stuff?"* Thank goodness, there's more. We are clearly worth so much more to God alive than dead and He doesn't want us to just focus on our sin and simply claim the reality of what we are dead to. No, we are to celebrate **WHAT WE ARE ALIVE** to because of God's resurrection. That truth is found in our Scripture this morning. Turn to **ROMANS 6:15-19 (NASB)** and follow along as I read: *¹⁵What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? May it never be! ¹⁶Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness? ¹⁷But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, ¹⁸and having been freed*

from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. ¹⁹I am speaking in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, resulting in further lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification.

One of the amazing truths from this passage is that we are all slaves to something. See verse 16, *"Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are **slaves** of the one whom you obey...?"* As we talked about last week, even as Christians we are freed from the **POWER OF SIN**, but we still serve a master. The question is, which one? And, boy, even a tiny little spec of sin still can have a big impact on our lives. Listen to these words from **GENESIS 4:7 (NLT)**: *⁷"You will be accepted if you do what is right. But if you refuse to do what is right, then watch out! Sin is crouching at the door, eager to control you. But you must subdue it and be its master."*

Radio personality Paul Harvey tells the story of how an Eskimo kills a wolf. When I came across his account this week, I wasn't sure I wanted to repeat it because it is grisly—yet it offers fresh insight into the consuming, self-destructive nature of sin. *"First, the Eskimo coats his knife blade with animal blood and allows it to freeze. Then he adds another layer of blood, and another, until the blade is completely concealed by frozen blood. Next, the hunter fixes his knife in the ground with the blade up. When a wolf follows his sensitive nose to the source of the scent and discovers the bait, he licks it, tasting the fresh frozen blood. He begins to lick faster, more and more vigorously, lapping the blade until the keen edge is bare. Feverishly now, harder and harder the wolf licks the blade in the arctic night.*

So great becomes his craving for blood that the wolf does not notice the razor-sharp sting of the naked blade on his own tongue, nor does he recognize the instant at which his insatiable thirst is being satisfied by his own warm blood. His carnivorous appetite just craves more--until the dawn finds him dead in the snow!"

That is exactly how sin operates, isn't it? Turn to **JAMES 1:14-16** and follow along as we see what the Bible says, *"Each of you is tempted when you are dragged away by your own evil desire and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. Don't be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters."* Indeed, don't be deceived. Recognize the seriousness of your situation. Recognize the seriousness of sin.

Now, look again at **Romans 6:18**: *"and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness."* So, I guess if we are going to be slaves to one or the other, we need to be careful which form of slavery we really want to be in. Right? *A gem dealer was walking the aisles at the Tucson Gem and Mineral Show when he noticed a blue-violet stone the size and shape of a potato. He looked it over, then, as calmly as possible, asked the vendor, "You want \$15 for this?" The vendor, realizing the rock wasn't as pretty as others in the bin, quickly lowered the price to \$10 hoping to make a sale before the man lost interest. The man quickly took him up on his offer. The stone has since been certified as a 1,905-carat natural star sapphire, about 800 carats larger than the largest stone of its kind previously known. It was appraised at \$2.28 million.*

This vendor missed out on the sale of lifetime by virtually giving away a product of immense value all because he didn't bother to appraise its worth – he didn't bother to evaluate it. Let us not make the same careless mistake in our lives. We need to specifically choose to be a slave to righteousness. I hope that since you have come to Christ that you are a slave to righteousness and frequently think about think about sin and your response to it.

OK, Dean, you may be saying, *"So, what's the answer?"* You want to know what to do—specifically! As we learned several weeks ago, we are to have the MIND OF WHO? Yes, CHRIST! OK, so what does that mean in our individual life? Well, if you are truly

a slave to righteousness, the fruit of your life will show it. Did you hear that? **THE FRUIT OF YOUR LIFE WILL SHOW IT.** Let's look at two verses briefly along this idea, **MATT 7:20** and then **JOHN 15:5**.

MATT 7:20 (NKJV)→ *Therefore by their fruits you will know them.*
JOHN 15: 5 (NKJV)→ *I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.*

After repenting of your sin and believing that the power of sin is broken and then choosing to confess the powerful words, "I'm dead to that," there's one more thing you have to do. **YOU HAVE TO ACT!** You have to present yourself to God, offering yourself as a servant of His. Look back at ROMANS 6. Verse 13 in the NASB says it this way: *present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead.* Verse 16, NASB, says: *present yourselves ... as slaves for obedience ... resulting in righteousness.* Verse 19, NASB, says: *present your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification.*

All this *slaves of righteous* talk, as Paul states in verse 19, is simply Paul speaking in human terms so we can understand and comprehend this great big supernatural truth. It's to make sure we don't make following Christ too complicated. If we follow our new Master as well as we followed our old one, we'll be OK. However, don't forget that offering myself to God **IS ALL ABOUT CHOOSING AND DOING IT MOMENT BY MOMENT!**

Turn to **ROMANS 12:1-2 (NIV)** and let's look at HOW we are to do this: *¹Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual[a] act of worship. ²Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

Bottom line, real transformation is about the process—like we've been learning over last four or five weeks in talking about sanctification. Dr. MacDonald told us this week that it's about a thousand choices in the moment. But, remember, that **RIGHT NOW'S THE ONLY MOMENT THAT MATTERS**. ***Each of us must take decisive action—that actual step of faith in the moment to choose God.***

General Stonewall Jackson's army once found itself on one side of a river when it needed to be on the other side. After telling his engineers to plan and build a bridge so the army could cross, he called his wagon master in to tell him that it was urgent the wagon train cross the river as soon as possible. The wagon master started gathering all the logs, rocks and fence rails he could find and built a bridge. Long before daylight General Jackson was told by his wagon master all the wagons and artillery had crossed the river. General Jackson asked where are the engineers and what are they doing? The wagon master's only reply was that they were in their tent drawing up plans for a bridge.

When the Lord comes back you don't want him to find **you** in your tent still drawing up plans for all of the good that you intend to do some day. As we've been learning over the past few weeks, in order to Escape-a-Sin you must (1) recognize the seriousness of your situation; (2) evaluate your available resources; and (3) take decisive action and choose to offer yourself to God moment by moment.

You know, I realize that I am a procrastinator—big time. Ask my wife. If I have to clean out the garage, I "almost" start ten times, but when I look at all that stuff and how long it will take, UGH! On the other hand, if I did it little by little, taking a piece or several items and putting them up over, say, a week, well I'd be done. The big job is overwhelming, so I put off starting. I want to do it all in one sitting...instead of moment by moment, one step at the time. Bit by bit. I guess that's a life lesson for me as I've worked through this Bible study with Dr. MacDonald.

Similarly, sin never gives what it promises—so why not be done with it? *Several years ago the Associated Press reported that a man had robbed a convenience store. He gave the clerk a \$10.00 bill to get her to open the cash register. It worked. She opened it and he forced her to give him the contents of the drawer. He got everything—a grand total of \$4.34—and left the \$10.00! Lost \$5.66 on the deal.*

I remember seeing a movie once where a group of men were shipwrecked and had to spend many days on a life raft in the middle of the ocean. It was hot and their fresh water ran out. Men became thirsty beyond all reason. One night, while the others were asleep, one of the men ignored the warnings and started drinking seawater. He quickly dies. A good drink of seawater contains 7 times more salt than the body can safely take in. Ironically a person dehydrates because the kidneys demand more water to flush salt out. The more you drink the thirstier you get! That's the way sin is—never gives what it promises! So, why not choose, right now, this morning, this moment, to offer yourself totally to God.

This week, I want you to practice our lesson today. It's time to consider a specific area and how we can call upon God for help. Suppose that your struggle is lying. Have you EVER told a lie before? Let's suppose that the Lord has revealed to you that lying is the next thing that He wants to change in you. You have come to a crisis of understanding that. You see that sin for what it is in your life and God in His grace has brought you to a place of true repentance about that. As always happens before you get too far past the crisis, you see it coming, the situation where time and again you fall and lie. But this time, in this moment you face that temptation and refuse to give in, believing that you don't have to fall and fail because Christ has broken the power of sin in your life.

Of course, the sense of temptation does not vanish immediately. So you decide to pursue victory by confessing out loud our little phrase, **I'M DEAD TO THAT.** In that moment, the temptation withers

slightly, but you know it's coming back with a vengeance. Standing still won't be enough for long, so you make the choice to offer yourself alive to God by praying: *"You know, Lord, I used to use my mouth to speak lies, but I'm offering myself alive to You in this moment."* Then open your mouth and speak truth. Any appropriate truth. Truth about God, truth about the situation itself, *truth!* In that moment you are changed.

Now, as Dr. MacDonald says in his book, if you can substitute that story for a thousand different sins, you understand the process of sanctification. See, it's not just a matter of standing in front to those hot Krispy Kreme doughnuts and saying, *"I am so dead to those doughnuts. I am so dead to that. I'm going to kill the person who brought those today. I am so dead to that."* There has to be a turning from that and investing my energies in something else. Moment by moment by moment.

The second part of what we've talked about today is as critical as the first. We can't just say, *"I'm dead to that."* Remember, you are alive to God, so pray, *"I'm dead to that. Lord, I offer myself alive to you."* The point here is simple → GIVE GOD THAT STRUGGLE. Give that usage over to God moment by moment.

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