

Rob Jennings, Jr. Memorial Service
Romans 7:14–25
Thursday, July 11, 2019
Dr. Harry Reeder III

I am under a task from the Lord and also from this family. The life of Rob is absolutely astounding. I not only had the privilege to be his pastor but his friend and I spent a lot of time with him personally in some very interesting situations outside the environment of a church, particularly on battlefields as we would talk about battleship movements and battleship leadership. We talked about Christian manhood and people could see that was a big part of his life. He was a man's man but at the same time he loved kids, his wife and the Lord profoundly. That makes the disconnect even more, doesn't it? The last few days of his life just weren't him, so how do you deal with that? That is the other task the family has given me, the hope in life, the Gospel and that we get our hands around this.

We have three choices in a moment – sudden death and not just a sudden death but self-inflicted. You either cover it over with meaningless platitudes or you come face to face with it. You either get it right or wrong when you come face to face with it. The God of the Word is not afraid of these moments. So how do we deal with it as we try to wrap our mind around it Biblically? We can practice denial or platitudes or we can try to understand it Biblically. Rob's true hope was for people to know about Jesus and that is what the family has asked me as well. To get to the celebration I have to address the conflict, what seemingly is the contradiction?

Many have come with questions and isn't that interesting that we have questions? I have watched National Geographic and I think 'how many ways can a wildebeest die?' They don't ask 'why did that happen' or 'what does that mean' because we're not animals with instincts. We are made in the image of God. We are made on purpose and for a purpose. We are made to try to understand. You have two choices. One is going with the wisdom of man that's always shifting and never delivers for Solomon did that for a while and he wrote it in his repentance in the book of Ecclesiastes. Solomon calls this emptiness. Or you can go with the wisdom of God – His Word in which He addresses issues and gives us not only our problems but the solutions.

I am going to give you my answer to a handful of questions and then where we need to focus. My first answer to your first question is 'yes.' The question, is taking one's own life a sin? Yes. Now it can have contributing dynamics to it. It can be because of medication issues, the challenges of circumstances etc., for it can be because of all kinds of contributing factors. Very clearly the sixth commandment says 'you shall not murder' and that's includes our own life. My answer to your next question is 'no.' The next question is, is it the unpardonable sin? The unpardonable sin was given to us by Jesus and that is when the Holy Spirit is working on us, calling us to Christ and we say 'no' to him. The reason it's unpardonable is because you're saying 'no' to the One who is bringing you to the only One who has the answer to our sin and can deliver you from your sin.

Don't leave this saying 'no' to Him who is calling you. He calls you from His Word and He calls you to Himself. He calls you from sin to a Savior, from death unto life. Suicide is sin for it's taking one's own life and it's self-inflicted, but it's not unpardonable. I want to read a passage of Scripture that is not the normal funeral passage. It's from Romans 7 and it's from Paul who at this time is a converted man confessing that he has a new life, a changed life but it's not a perfect life and he finds himself doing the very thing he has repented of – sin, from time to time.

Romans 7:14–20, 25 says [14] *For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin. [15] For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. [16] Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. [17] So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. [18] For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. [19] For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. [20] Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.*

[25] *Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord (who delivers me from this body of death)! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.*

Paul is telling us that when you come to Jesus Christ you get a new heart for you are born again which breaks the power of sin. You get a new record for your sins are wiped away by His blood and His righteousness is given to you to clothe you. Thirdly, you get a new life. Fourthly, you get a new family. You now not only have your immediate family but you have God's family. The fifth thing you get is a new home and you're on your way to that new home.

In your new life you have a life that puts off the old man and puts on the new man but sometimes you find the old man getting more powerful than your commitment to put him off. It's not our putting off the old man that saves us. We put off the old man because we're saved and we love our Savior, but we don't put him off perfectly. Paul says he finds himself doing the very thing he doesn't want to do. He finds himself doing sin and he doesn't want to do that sin. He wants to be delivered from that. So how does he get delivered from that?

Paul says the key to the Christian life is not his resolve or his self-reliance. He is not a Nike Christian that says 'Just Do It' because he can't without Him. When I try to just do it, it just exposes my weaknesses. My old man is greater than my resolutions but thanks be to God who gives us the victory through Jesus. So instead of being careless in my life, I need to be careful. My number one thing to do is to keep my eyes fixed on the One who saved me. That is where my new life comes from and that's where the power to kill the old man comes from – Jesus. I hope this makes sense to you for I love you and want to get this across to you.

The reason suicide is not the unpardonable sin is because we are saved not by how well we do but by what Jesus did perfectly for us on the cross. Romans 8:1 says [1] *There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.* How can there be no condemnation for us if God has to wait to see how well we do to determine if we're going to be saved? It's not are doing well that saves us but we want to do well because we love our Savior.

Will we falter? Yes, for our obedience will be uneven, imperfect, and sometimes almost imperceptible. God is at work – in our thoughts, our words and our deeds. When we falter we go back to Him, not to get saved all over again for we didn't lose our salvation, but to go back and restore our intimacy with Him. But there are some sins we may fall into that even though we get restored there are still consequences. There are some sins we fall into where the next day we can't walk back from because the next day we're not there, but they are still covered by the blood.

Here is an illustration. Let's say I'm a Christian who had a difficult issue with alcohol. I was addicted to it. When I became a Christian God gave me continued victory but one day all of the affairs of life just overwhelmed me, I got my eyes off of Jesus, I was disconnected from God's people and began to not be around those who I needed at that moment. My answer to all of that was to go back to the bottle over there and I get inebriated. I get drunk. Then I get

convicted thinking 'I can't believe I did that, Jesus forgive me.' Will Jesus forgive me? Yes, but what if I had left that bar in a car and I had a wreck on the way home and I lost my arm. I woke up the next morning in the hospital thinking 'I can't believe I sinned against the Lord by turning to alcohol instead of turning to Him. Jesus forgive me!' Will He forgive me? Yes, but do I get my arm back? No. I won't get it back now but I'll get it back when I get to eternity. There are consequences.

In this particular faltering into sin, in the weakness of a moment, you can't walk it back. There are consequences. It doesn't mean the sin is not forgiven. Jesus paid it all. All to Him I owe. We are saved not by doing penance for our sins, but we're saved through the blood and righteousness of Jesus which is why Jesus says in John 6:47, *[47] Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life.* It is not you have eternal life if you don't make any more sins. Why do we have eternal life? It is because Jesus paid for it.

Here is another illustration. I believe God made Highway 280 for my sanctification. When I leave my house Satan sends everybody in the world in front of me to slow down, on my bumper to ride it and next to me to get close while they are texting. I am ready to say things and do things that I ought not to do as a Christian or as a pastor. About the only thing that keeps me from saying it or doing it is that those people may show up the church visiting next Sunday. I have to say 'Lord, please forgive me for I have the anger of man again for this is self-centered.' Would you like to know how many times I have said that? What does Jesus do? He doesn't go to the Father and say 'there's Harry on 280, he has messed up again but he confessed so how about we forgive him for I did teach this 70 times 7 thing. I think he'll do better.' That is not what happens.

Jesus goes to the Father and says 'Father, here is this Harry Reeder saved by grace, he's on the journey with some ups and downs here, and we're just in a down right now but We can use this, Father forgive him, I paid for it.' It's not my confession that forgives me or my changed life that forgives me but Jesus paid for it and that's what forgives me.

Here is a third question I thought about and the answer to this one is 'yes.' Christians are not perfect, they do sin but what is happened is our desires have changed, and therefore when we do sin we are convicted about it. When Paul says 'the good that I would do I don't do' and that means he has a changed life. Before he came to Christ he didn't care about pleasing the Lord. Now that he is a Christian he wants to please the Lord and so when he falters, it convicts Paul. Paul then says 'I've got to quit trying to do this in my own strength. I've got to be centered on Jesus Christ.'

I have a fourth question and the answer to this one is 'yes.' The question is can self-inflicted death reveal that someone is not a Christian? I remember sitting with Dr. Schaeffer and he talked about he brings people to the emptiness of a life apart from Christ as he brings to the emptiness of this world that is vanity. It has momentary exhilarations but nothing of substance apart from Christ. When Solomon says to us to 'eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow you die' (Ecclesiastes 8:15) then people find out the eating, drinking and merry just doesn't work. So yes a self-inflicted death can be the evidence that you never really knew Christ.

The answer to the last question I have is also 'yes.' Self-inflicted death can be the evidence of a Christian in a moment overwhelmed that made the wrong choice and it's not one you can walk back from, from a hospital bed, but it's still one that is covered with the blood. I've been a pastor now for 40 years and this is my sixth time to stand at this moment – five of them were believers. In some cases they were under medication and trying to medicate themselves and all the wrong signals were sent. Some were just some chemical misfires but

some are moments of carelessness, disconnected and circumstances that seem bigger than the answer and it's a moment where the wrong decision is made.

It's so easy to have a momentary disconnect where all hope seems to be gone and that's why George Matheson wrote that hymn *O Love That Will Not Let Me Go* where he says;

*I trace the rainbow thro' the rain,
and feel the promise is not vain
that morn shall tearless be.*

It's tracing the rainbow in the rain where the storms of life seem so big that you can't really see God's promises for the moment or you have disconnected yourself from the very people you need. It's so important to stay connected, don't get disconnected.

Yes, this is coming from a pastor but don't play 'drive-by' church. You need to be connected in the community of faith and stay connected all the time. Keep developing your family because some time in that moment it's not just a sin you have fallen into but the good that you would do you don't do, but it can be lethal sin and have the implications.

So I know many of you are asking, what about Rob? I am a man and that's all I am. I am a man who has been saved by grace and astoundingly has been called to the ministry. I can't know the heart for only God can know the heart but I know a new heart leaves tracks and the tracks tell you what it is. Because when you come to Jesus you come by getting better, you come to Jesus just as you are but He never leaves you where you are. There will be changes for there is no such thing as a root without a fruit and there was all kinds of fruit that showed me where the root was in Rob's life.

I heard it when we were up in a room, as he was on a team and we were trying to fight through an issue about our ministry to our students. It was going to cost this church some significant resources. It got around to Rob. I would not call him Robbie because he was four inches taller than me and I could not believe he ran track until I saw the guys up here so I think everyone must have done the shot put or something.

Rob was quiet until it got around to him and he said 'Guys let me tell you what is happening in the life of my kids. I don't even think this is a decision. We have to do what we have to do so that these kids know the Lord.' That's why he says to the other coach, 'Thank you for sharing the Gospel.' That's why he would have the prayer time and that's why the letters that came from the kids he coached all pointed back to the Lord. You don't do that without a heart for the Lord.

I remembered when he cornered me because his niece was about to marry a guy who was the son of an elder in my church that I pastored in Charlotte, North Carolina and I had baptized him. Rob said to me 'Harry, I want to know about that guy before she marries him, does he love Jesus? Is he the real deal?'

I've been with Rob on battlefields where we talked about things. I've seen him take friends, men that he knows and loves because he wants them to hear about the Gospel and learn about leadership. I have seen the letters from those he has coached and the evidence within his family. I have seen the love he had for his kids, what has been produced in their life and will produce in their life. So I have no doubt where Rob is, not because he lived a perfect life or that he was a sinner saved by grace.

I know where he is because he knows Jesus and Jesus knows him. I would say that there are lessons we need to learn. Step one is do you know Jesus? That is the most important thing in the world. Sally, his wife, Lindsey, Leslie and RJ, his children, as you all have said, you have

friends, family and we're family in the Lord here. We love you. We praise God for what He has done in your life and what He is going to do in your life. I know this is a challenging moment.

This is bittersweet. We have heard the stories of how Rob is a man that is bigger than life and loves life and then you have to deal with why you don't have him in front of you. But you have a God who has the answers and you have a Lord who loves you deeply and you have every hope of not only knowing your Savior and being with your dad and husband forever, and by the way it won't be long. I think Jesus is coming soon and if not it's not that long until we go to be with Him. Eternity is secure because of Jesus, not because of us. That's what you can know and love.

The other thing I want you to know is that God never tells us in this world that all things are good because we're in a sin, broken world but He does tell us that all things work together for good. He draws straight lines with crooked sticks. Our God is sovereign and mighty. Where you think there is no answer He is has it because the biggest issue of all was how can you and I be right with God and the God who I needed, I didn't want, and the God who didn't need me wanted me. When there was no way He found a way and made a way and that way is His Son Jesus Christ. If He could do that at the cross where sinful men put their hands on the Son of God and out of that give us victory, then our God will use His sovereign grace to do amazing things. From this challenging moment, some of it we will see here but one day we'll see it completely when we no longer look through a mirror darkly, but see it clearly when we see Him face to face.

My friends, if you don't know Him I want to invite you to Him. If you want to talk with me I'm available and I can be reached at (205)776-5200. My last question is, do you know Christ? I didn't ask do you know about Him because I know that you know about Him because you heard about Him today as you read this. Do you know Him personally, intimately? Have you said, 'I'm a sinner. I cannot save myself. Love my church but my church can't save me. I come to You and put my trust in You alone'? Here is what He says to you if you have said that, 'there is nothing that can separate us from the love of God in Christ...'

He also says in Romans 8:37-39, [37] *No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.* [38] *For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, [39] nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.* In Him we are more than conquerors through Him who gave Himself for us, so I invite you to Him.

Perhaps you have already done that. Then stay connected, stay in God's Word and keep your eyes fixed on Jesus, not the circumstances. Jesus is the Christ of Victory. Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through Christ Jesus our Lord. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for moments we could be together. Thank You Father for the privilege to surround this family during this time. There are some astounding people who love You and love them and they want to love them so God for all of us would You not only use us in their life as Your instruments to do that work of Your Spirit which ultimately only He can do because only He can go to places we can't go in the heart and the soul to these whom we love, but God also remind us that we're Your instruments in their lives a month from now, six months from now, a year and a half from now? Thank You for Your people. Thank You for how You use them so that we weep with those who weep and grieve with those who grieve and we rejoice with those who rejoice in the Lord. We ask Father that You would do a great work in the lives of Sally,

Lindsey, Leslie, and RJ. We pray that in the midst of this You would come and meet them and they would know You in the depths even more than they have ever known before. Father, in all of this we'll give You praise, in Jesus' Name, Amen.