

“I Want It All”
Romans 7:15-25a
July 6th, 2008
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America just a few days ago, celebrated its 232nd birthday. The fireworks, and parade here in town marked that day, as well as many other celebrations all cross the country. We take this time to observe the sacrifices many people have made over those years and to be thankful for what we have. We have much in this country, and much of which we deem necessary. As I was watching the Today show a few weeks ago, that was out into stark prospective. They ran a story on a new class of rich. In 1985 there were 13 Billionaires in the US. Today there are over a thousand and several hundred thousand millionaires. We all know of Donald Trump, Steve Forbes, Bill Gates and those entrepreneurs. But they highlighted one of several thousand billionaires who made their money quietly through corporate investments, the stock market etc. He said in the interview that nobody needs that kind of money, after a while it comes down to the challenge.

While we can look at this as sport we also must take a look at the consequences of our actions. We tend to think of this world as having unlimited resources and unlimited possibilities. So we go for them whatever our desires might be. Sometimes they can be harmless and other times they can be deadly. In acquiring wealth we can fail to see or realize the effect it is having on the other, whose job it might cost. We fail to see how sometimes our happiness comes at the expense of the others happiness.

Paul talks of this in his passage regarding what we do. Even as Christians when we try to do what is good we wind up sometimes hurting the our sisters and brothers and even ourselves. Paul says specifically that no matter how hard we try, there are always going to be times when we fall short. Even when we seek to do what we want, which is to please God, we end up doing what we don't want, which is to fail to live up to those expectations. But even less fortunate for us, we may not know it until all is said and done.

Paul gives us a stark reminder of our need for God's grace in our lives. Even in the Christian life we are not perfect. The problem is that for too many we try to pass ourselves off as though we are. Instead we are forgiven and that is the difference. No that is not an excuse to say we can proceed to sin because God will just forgive us. It instead reminds us that in our struggle to serve God, and at times it is a struggle, we will not always succeed. We will disappoint others and even disappoint ourselves. That is why we rely on Gods grace to carry us beyond doing what we want to do.

In this country we want it all. John Jewel in his work *Knowing God* commented about something quite important for us to understand as we celebrated Independence Day. "In the spirit of this years presidential election there is a "flip flop" quality to understanding today's scripture. It goes counter to our usual way of thinking. America is the home of Davey Crocket who conquered the "wild frontier" and Wyatt Earp who tamed the "wild west." We honor and value independence, self-sufficiency, strength and the glory of a "self-made" man or woman. Surrender is what we did not do. With brains and brawn we became a super power in the world.

"Yankee Ingenuity" is the brilliance that made us great.

Resisting the yoke others would put on us is the strength that made us free.

Now Jesus comes along to say that wisdom and intelligence did not cut the mustard when it comes to knowing God. Not only is the yoke not to be resisted, we are to voluntarily take this yoke upon ourselves and surrender to one who is greater than us!

How counter-cultural can you get? We cannot fight, or think or power ourselves into the kingdom of God and the peace of Christ. We may want it all but God calls us to give our life."

So how do we reconcile this situation? If as Paul says we are incapable of doing what we want in pleasing God, but more than able to please ourselves at getting what we want, why bother. Well, we bother because God bothered first. It's a sappy story but does illustrate a good point.

It's about a little boy who was out helping dad with the yard work. Dad asked him to pick up the rocks in a certain area of the yard. Dad looked over and saw him struggling to pull up a huge rock buried in the dirt. The little boy struggled and struggled while Dad watched. Finally, the boy gave up and said, "I can't do it." Dad asked, "Did you use all of your strength?" The little boy looked hurt and said, "Yes, sir. I used every ounce of strength I have." The father smiled and said, "No you didn't. You didn't ask me to help." The father walked over and then the two of them pulled that big rock out of the dirt.

When we want it all for ourselves, we find ourselves wanting. But through the grace of God, we can do all things. Even when we fall short we can have it all, but that all is not about cars in the garage, or billions of dollars or vacation homes, the call is about a relationship with God that forgives us loves us and encourages us to continue in the struggle, for making Gods reign a reality in this world. Thanks be to God for this grace given to us even when we do what we want. Amen.