

Get A Clue by Jeff Strite

Matthew 5:29-5:30

OPEN: During WWII Nazi Germany believed they could bomb Britain into submission, so over the years they sent 1000s of bombs down upon London and other parts of England and 1000s of English people died. One of Britain's forms of defense was to build bomb shelters. Essentially these were fortified cellars where Britons spent hours each night in fear and boredom. During this terrible time, an English clerk named Anthony E. Pratt developed a game he could play with his friends while they were stuck in those underground bunkers. It was a "Who Done It" kind of game that he called "MURDER!" And his friends were so delighted by the game that Pratt eventually sold the concept to a British company who renamed it Cluedo.

(http://cluecluedo.wikia.com/wiki/Clue_%28board_game%29)

(We showed a picture of Cluedo on the overhead)

Does that look like any game you've ever played? It should. Parker Bros. bought the game in 1949, and renamed it "CLUE".

One website called "Clue's" game board one of the 7 COOLEST game boards ever created.

(<http://blog.psprint.com/designing/7-coolest-board-game-designs/>)

The regular game has 9 different rooms, 6 different suspects and 6 different murder weapons.

The object of the game is to figure out ... who done it? WHO did it, WHERE they did it, and WHAT weapon did they use?

When one of the players thinks they've figured out the answer, they'll say

"I believe it was done by Prof. Plum, in the Kitchen, with the Revolver.

OR "I think it was Mrs. White, in the Ballroom, with the candlestick.

And, of course, the person who guesses correctly is the one who wins.

It's basically it's a "Who-Done-It" kind of mystery game.

And of course, every who-done-it needs a victim. Do you know what the victim's name is.

It's "Mr. Boddy" (get it, Mr. "Body"?)

Now, the Bible tells us about an entirely different kind of "who done it?"

It's a who-done-it that is addressed by God.

It's not a make believe game or a fictional story... it is a very serious mystery.

And just as in the game of Clue... there is a victim:

Paul told the Ephesians: "... you were dead in your transgressions and sins" Ephesians 2:1

And he told the Colossians the same thing: "... you were dead in your sins..."Colossians 2:13

They were dead.

They were the corpse found at the crime scene.

They had been DEAD... and do you know what killed them?
(THEIR SINS)

They were dead in their transgressions and their sins.

Now, the mystery is this: Who DONE it?

Who DONE the sin?

Well, who DID done it?

Who was responsible for their sins? Can you guess?

The Bible answer is very straightforward and to the point:

THEY done it. It was THEIR sins that killed their souls.

And in the same way, it's our sins that made us dead too, before we became Christians.

You and I done it. We were the guilty party. It Was OUR SIN that caused us to be dead before God.

AND that's what Jesus was talking about here in Matthew 5:

"If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell." Matthew 5:29-30

It's YOUR eye.

YOUR hand.

YOU need to deal with it.

ILLUS: Years ago – when I decided to take my faith seriously – I began to read through the Bible for the first by myself. And, not knowing where else to start – I began in the book of Genesis. It was all very interesting, but it wasn't till I reached the 4th chapter of Genesis that I read something that made me mark in my Bible for the first time. The verse literally stood out for me.

"The LORD said to Cain, 'Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it.'" Genesis 4:6-7

God told Cain - you've got an "anger management problem."

You're angry and you're not managing it. So you've got a problem.

You need to deal with it! You need to master it!

Because if you don't deal with it "Sin is crouching at your door and it desires to have you."

I originally read this in the RSV that said "Sin is COUCHING at the door...." The image that put mind was of sitting in a Doctor's office and just outside the door – in the waiting room – there were couches. Sin was out in the waiting room just waiting for Cain to open the door a little... and it would come in and take over his life.

Now, why did God have to say that to Cain? Why tell him to deal with his anger? Well,

because Cain had already shifted the blame of his anger to someone else. Who do you think Cain was blaming for his anger? That's right – ABEL was at fault. Cain's anger wasn't HIS problem. His anger was his brother's fault. Somehow his brother had cheated him out of God's approval.

And God was basically telling Cain – don't you go blaming your brother for anger. It's YOUR anger. You need to deal with it.

In the same way Jesus was telling his audience: It's YOUR hand. It's YOUR eye that's involved in this sin. It's not someone else's job to fix this. It's YOUR job.

Now the world disagrees with that. The world has kind of a "no-fault" mindset. We live in a world of no-fault divorces and no fault auto accident policies. The world says: Your sin is not your fault. It's somebody else's fault.

The world has always looking for an excuse to blame sin on someone else. I have the following poem in my files:

POEM: I went to my psychiatrist to be psychoanalyzed
To find out why I killed the cat and blacked my husband's eyes
He laid me on a downy couch to see what he could find
And here is what he dredged up from my subconscious mind:
When I was one, my mommie hid my dollie in a trunk
And so it follows naturally that I am always drunk
When I was two, I saw my father kiss the maid one day
And that is why I suffer now from kleptomaniA
At 3, I had the feeling of ambivalence toward my brothers
And so it follows naturally that I poison all my lovers.
But I am happy now. I've learned the lesson this has taught.
That everything I do that's wrong in me... is someone else's fault.

ILLUS: One man observed: "The paradox of our time is that many of the same sociologists and psychologists who insist that we are NOT responsible for our own behavior are adamant about holding us accountable for everyone else's. The sins of the child are visited upon the parent, those of the criminal upon society, those of the protester upon the politician, and so on, in an endless daisy chain of deferred guilt." (Aram Bakshian Jr. in Readers.Digest 3/79 p. 204)

What he is saying is, socialists and psychologists have a tendency to let people pass the buck. A tendency to allow people refuse to take responsibility for our own personal choices.

One person joked: "I assume full responsibility for my actions, except the ones that are

someone else's fault."

One of the big arguments in psychology is called "Nature vs. Nurture".
In other words – does our "nature" (or our genetic makeup) shape who we are?
Or is it our Nurture" (our environment, how we were raised, and what influences we've encountered) that shapes us?

Now the Bible acknowledges both are true.
You are a product of Nature.
You are affected by your genetics.
Your size, your shape, the color of your skin, your abilities, are all influenced by our genes.
These all shape how you respond to the world and how you respond to your life's experiences.

But you are also shaped by your nurture.
By the type of parents you had.
Where you sent to school.
Who you had for friends.
How people have treated you as you grew up.

Nature and nurture are BOTH true. They both shape WHO you are in many ways.

But when you stand before God, God isn't going to ask you about your genetic makeup. And God is not going to ask you about WHO or WHAT influenced your life.

All God is going to ask is this:
What choice did you make?

God will NOT allow us to try to shift the blame to anything or anyone else.
What God WILL ask us– is what choices WE made.
And we will be judged according to those choices.

In short, when psychologists and sociologists embrace the idea that people can't help themselves they not only show that they don't have... A CLUE (Get it? The game is Clue?)
Not only that, but they also end up embracing one of the oldest heresies in the book.

- A woman caught in adultery might say
"I couldn't help myself. We just fell in love. We were destined to be together."
- The man with child pornography on his computer might say
"I couldn't help myself. That's just the way I'm wired."
- And the homosexual might say
"I can't help myself, I was just born that way."

And God says... "I don't think so."
No – you weren't born that way.
And you weren't wired that way.

And you weren't destined to do what you did.
You made a choice... you made a very BAD choice.

Some time back John (a previous preacher here) said something very simple, but very insightful. He said:

"Everyone does what they've already decided to do." (REPEAT)

If I'm angry... it's because I've decided I have a right to be angry.

If I'm lustful... it's because I've decided I want to be lustful.

If I'm selfish... it's because I've decided I have a right to be selfish.

Cain was an angry and bitter man...but he'd decided he had a RIGHT to be angry and bitter.
And so he refused to accept that it is wrong for him to do so.

King David committed adultery with his best friend's wife, but he'd already decided it was ok to allow his eyes to look at things he shouldn't. He realized it is wrong, but he did it anyway.

The Pharisees were religious men... but Jesus condemned them as being greedy and selfish men. These men had decided that since they were religious/holy men, they had an excuse for their selfishness.

All these people did what they did, because they had already decided it was ok to do that.

And Jesus says: Make a different decision.

Decide not to live like that.

If you're hand causes you to sin... cut it off.

If you're eye causes you to sin... gouge it out.

Now, in the day of Jesus, that was a common teaching technique for Rabbis. The whole idea was to confront the audience with such an "in your face" absurd statement that it would make them think about what was being taught more seriously. Thus, Jesus was catching his audiences' attention by commanding an absurdity: gouge it out, cut it off.

We have a phrase like that in our culture. Do you know what it is?

CUT IT OUT!

If you're friends are pulling you away from God... cut them off.

If you're activities are causing you to sin... cut them out.

If you're reading things that make you angry and bitter... cut those things from your life.

Cut it out! Quit it! Make a different decision. Because if you're making bad decisions... if you're making choices that drag you away from God... if you find yourself making excuses for your bad behavior... you could very well end up in hell.

And God doesn't want that.

Essentially people who hide behind excuses and shift blame to others for their own sins begin building walls between themselves and God. And before they know it, they've walled

God out of their lives. That's why Hebrews says:

"If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God." Hebrews 10:26-27

Now, that's the BAD NEWS.

That's downright scary.

But God is very serious about us facing up to our sins.

But the good news is that Hebrews isn't talking about a random sin here and there. It distinctly says that these folks "deliberately DECIDED to keep on sinning"

- This kind of person has made a conscious choice to keep on doing what they're doing.
- They have no intention of "cutting anything out".
- And they continually make excuses for their behavior.
- And they hope they can get past God by saying... I couldn't help myself.

In the book of Romans, Paul tells the Christians there that God loves us so much that He loves forgiving us our sins. He loves to show us grace and kindness. It is His pleasure to cleanse us of our sins.

But then Paul writes:

"What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? (In other words, if God gets so much pleasure out of forgiving us, why don't we sin a lot and make Him really happy? But then Paul continues)

"By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?

Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 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." Romans 6:1-4

The point is – God called us to change our lives so that we are devoted to live holy lives. Not because we are righteous, but because He is... and we now represent Him. We are called to a life where we REFUSE to make excuses for bad behavior. We are called to a life where we DECIDE that are to change. And we are called to a life where – when we do sin – we admit it, we confess it, and then we determine to do better.

When we first become Christians, God washed away our sins when we believed, repented, confessed Jesus as our Lord and were buried in the waters of baptism. But even after we became Christians, we still messed up. We still sinned.

How many of you that are Christians here today have sinned since you were saved?

That's right... we all have.

But for us God has made a very special promise: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." 1 John 1:9

In that promise God is telling us that if we stop making excuses, stop trying to say we can't help ourselves, stop trying to shift the blame to someone else – and then determine to fight

that sin and refuse to accept it as normal in our lives – THEN He will forgive us of all our unrighteousness. Then, He will wipe away our sin and we start all over again. But we can't play games with Him. It's too important. Too critical. Too serious.

CLOSE: I want to close with this true story about a man who learned that. His name was Peter Philpott. It was years ago that he worked in a shop with several other men. It wasn't a "Christian" atmosphere. Philpott, and the rest of the men there, was a rough man. But there was another man there who was rougher than the rest. Peter said The toughest; roughest worker in the shop was "Big Tom". Tom was not only the strongest man in the shop, he was also the most wicked. He was feared by every man and by his own family, and he in turn was afraid of no one or nothing.

Then one day Big Tom came into work came into the shop smiling and happy. He told everyone he'd gone to an evangelistic service the night before and had become a Christian. He said "Men, I am now a Christian. I intend to be different from that you have known me to be. I want be loyal and true to the Lord Jesus."

The men didn't laugh at him to his face (no one would dare), but they began to make bets that Tom's Christianity would not last until noon. But it did.

Then they bet he wouldn't be able to go past the tavern on the way home. But he did.

Then they made bets that Saturday night would find Tom dead drunk in some saloon. But they were wrong. He took his pay envelope and went straight home to his family.

After a while every man in the shop began to believe that Big Tom had really become a Christian.

But then one day it happened! Tom struck his hand with a hammer and turned the air blue with a streak of cursing.

The shop went silent.

Everybody stopped their work and turned toward Tom.

But Tom wasn't looking at anyone else. The men in the shop watched in amazement as Tom sank to his knees and sobbed as he asked God for forgiveness. Philpott said "For several minutes he remained in prayer. Then he arose from knees and, wiping the tears from his cheeks, he smiled at us and said "Fellows, I want you to forgive me. I didn't mean to swear. The Savior has forgiven me, and please forgive me men, everyone."

Philpott then said: "It was the sight of Tom on his knees publicly asking the Lord Jesus for forgiveness that touched my heart so deeply that I could not rest until shortly afterward... I too accepted the Savior."

Tom was a man who understood the importance of his faith. He made no excuses for his sin, no apologies, no attempt to cover it up. And because he was willing to humble himself and even publicly ask for forgiveness, his witness changed the life of another man who wanted what Tom had found.

That is our challenge as believers. To change the world – not because we are "righteous" but because we serve a God who is. A God who is not only righteous but merciful.

But before you can change the world, you need to change yourself first. If you don't belong to Jesus Christ this morning, we offer an invitation now for you to become His child.