

“I Will Bear Your **DARK SIDE**”
God’s Promise in the Soldiers’ Spit

How many of you remember the Incredible Hulk? It was first a comic book, and in the late 70’s, a TV series. The incredible Hulk was about a mild mannered guy, who, when something would set him off, would turn into this huge green shirt-less, muscle-bulging, MONSTER! I remember seeing the TV show a time or 2, and suddenly the mild man would get angry, and his eyes would change colors, his pants would rip, his shirt would tear as green muscles would bulge through, and he’d grow about 2 feet taller, and then he’d beat up on the bad guys and throw stuff around. But the man was constantly on the run - moving from town to town – because there was this monster inside of him that he couldn’t control.

It’s not Halloween time, but in the Fall we hear stories and see scary movies about werewolves. Werewolves are supposed to be people who, when the moon is full, suddenly turn into a half human / half wolf-like beast. And they have hairy heads and wolf-like teeth. And supposedly they go around howling, and growling. And, see, we’re supposed to be scared because the werewolf could be any normal-looking person – (it might even be YOU!).

Incredible Hulks, and Werewolves are fairy tales, but they’re popular because they remind us of ourselves. There’s a beast within each one of us.

It wasn’t always this way. In the beginning of time, God made the first people with no beastly nature inside. But that was before Adam and Eve fell. Ever since, we’ve been different. Beastly. Ugly. Defiant. Angry. We do things we shouldn’t do, and we wonder why we did them.

I saw the beast a few weeks ago. I had been working on getting my Mother set up with phone, TV, and internet in her new apartment. I didn’t expect there could be so many ways her cable company could mess this up, and how many hours I would spend on the phone trying to get things straightened out. On one of the

hour-long phone calls, and being transferred to 3 or 4 different departments, the person on the other line told me that there was nothing they could do for me, ... and I lost it. I blew up. I could not keep my cool. I yelled through the phone. I think everyone on my street heard me. After I calmed down, the person on the other end said, "Oh, I made a mistake. We CAN help you." But I felt bad. I wondered where all that anger came from. I felt like the beast came out of me and reared it's ugly head. I was embarrassed. I felt bad about that for the rest of the day.

Now, why did that happen? Ever have the beast show it's ugly head from inside of you?

In this series of messages from now until Easter, we're using Max Lucado's book, He Chose The Nails as a resource. In his book, he tells a personal story about a time he was driving down a 2 lane road that was about to become a single lane. He says, "A woman in a car beside me was in the lane that continued. I was in the one that stopped. I needed to be ahead of her. My schedule was, no doubt, more important than hers.

"So I floored it. Guess what? She did, too. When my lane ended, she was a fender ahead of me. I growled and slowed and let her go ahead. Over her shoulder she gave me a sweet little bye-bye wave. Grrrr.

"So I put a little high beam in her rearview mirror. She retaliated by slowing down -- to a crawl. This woman was mean. She couldn't have cared less if the whole city ... was late; she wasn't going to go beyond 15 miles per hour. And I wasn't going to take my lights out of her rearview mirror. Like two stubborn donkeys, she kept it slow and I kept it bright. After more unkind thoughts than I dare confess, the road widened and I started to pass. Wouldn't you know it? A red light left the two of us side by side at an intersection. What happened next contains both good news and bad. The good new is, she waved at me. The bad news is, her wave was not one you'd want to imitate."

Can you relate to that story? Sorry to say, I can. Why do we do that? We're typically calm people. But then we can turn into

beasts. The apostle Paul had similar struggles. In the Bible he wrote: ***“I do not do what I want to do, and I do the things I hate.”*** Rom 7:15

Ever felt like saying those words? If so, you're in good company. Paul wasn't the only person in the Bible who wrestled the beast within. It's hard to find a page in Scripture where the animal doesn't bare its teeth. If the Bible is called the “Good Book,” it's not because the people mentioned in it are good. They aren't. The Bible paints a picture of real life and real people who do real evil.

Cain got jealous of his brother, Abel, and committed the first murder. Noah built the arc because the people of that time were so bad that God said, “every inclination of their hearts is evil.” Then after Noah got off the arc, he got so plastered drunk that he was lying on the ground naked and his sons had to cover him up. Abraham, the great patriarch, lied about his wife, Sarah, saying that she was his sister. Isaac, his son, learned well from his poppa, and did the same thing with his own wife, Rebecca. Shechem raped Dinah, so Dinah's brothers murdered Shechem and his friends. King Saul hunted down young David with a spear. King Herod murdered the toddlers of Bethlehem, and another King Herod put John the Baptist's head on a platter.

But the evil of the beast was never so raw as on the day Christ died. The disciples who vowed they would stick with Jesus were fast asleep, and then fast afoot when they ran.

The High Priest was so jealous of Jesus that he drummed up false witnesses, rigged the jury, and pushed for the death penalty.

Pontius Pilate, the Roman Governor, he didn't care that Jesus was innocent. He just wanted out. So he gave in, and sentenced Jesus to be crucified.

And the soldiers -- they wanted blood. So they scourged Jesus. The Roman whip was made of leather straps with lead balls, and sharp pieces of bone on each end. It was intended to cut and rip the flesh and muscle off of the back. The goal was simple: beat the accused person within an inch of his death .. and

then stop. Thirty nine lashes were *allowed*. But most people wouldn't survive that. Jesus, however, got all 39. No doubt Jesus was near death when his hands were untied and He slumped to the ground.

The whipping was the first action of the soldiers.

The crucifixion was the 3rd. (No, I didn't skip the 2nd. I'll get to that in a minute.) Although Jesus' back was mangled, the soldiers loaded the crossbeam on Jesus' shoulders and marched Him to the Place of the Skull, and they pounded spikes through His hands and His feet as they executed Him.

We don't fault the soldiers for these 2 actions. After all, they were just following orders. But what's hard to understand is what they did in between. Here's Matthew's description from the Bible:

“Jesus was beaten with whips and handed over to the soldiers to be crucified. The governor's soldiers took Jesus into the governor's palace, and they all gathered around Him. They took off His clothes and put a red robe on Him. Using thorny branches, they made a crown, put it on His head, and put a stick in His right hand. Then the soldiers bowed before Jesus and made fun of Him, saying, ‘Hail, King of the Jews!’ They spat on Jesus. Then they took His stick and began to beat Him on the head. After they finished, the soldiers took off the robe and put His own clothes on Him again. Then they led Him away to be crucified.” Matthew 27:26-31

The soldiers' assignment was simple: Take the Nazarene to the hill and kill Him. But they had another idea. They wanted to have some fun first. So strong, rested, armed soldiers encircled an exhausted, nearly dead, Galilean carpenter and beat up on Him. The whipping was commanded. The crucifixion was ordered. But who would get pleasure out of spitting on a half-dead man?

Spitting isn't intended to hurt the body. Spitting is intended to degrade a person – to hurt the spirit. It does.

What were the soldiers doing? Weren't they elevating themselves at the expense of another? They felt big by making Jesus look small.

Ever done that? Maybe you've never spit on someone, but have you gossiped? Told lies about someone? Ever raised your hand in anger? Or rolled your eyes to show how stupid you think the other person is? Have you ever blasted your high beams in someone's rearview mirror? Ever made someone feel bad so you would feel good?

That's what the soldiers did to Jesus. And when you and I do the same, we are like the soldiers doing it to Jesus too. Jesus said: ***"I assure you, when you did it to one of the least of these My brothers and sisters, you were doing it to Me!"*** Matthew 25:40 What this means is, how we treat others, is how we treat Jesus. When you show the beast inside of you to others, then it's the same as if you are standing with the soldiers spitting on Jesus.

Do you like to hear that? I bet you don't. And believe me, I don't like to say it. But we must face the fact that there is something beastly within each and everyone of us. Something beastly that makes us do things that surprise even ourselves. Haven't you surprised yourself? Haven't you ever wondered, "What got into me?"

Oh, there are people who try to explain the Evil Actions of Humankind. You've heard those explanations before. It's ignorance. They say, people act like the beast because they don't know enough. So, we offer diversity sensitivity training.

Others say it's poverty. Not having money, not having opportunities for the future, not having the right role models. Some say it's too much internet or watching the wrong kind of movies.

Now all of those things are important – they are! But sometimes we fool ourselves with the idea that if we just make better schools, a better economy, better movies, if we just censor the internet, and books, if we drive the riff-raff out of town, then we'll make ourselves better. We'll perfect ourselves – Get rid of the beast. Will it work? No.

God has an explanation for the Evil Actions of Humankind. It's a 3 lettered word spelled S-I-N. There is something bad,

something beastly within each of us. We are ***“by nature children of wrath.”*** Ephesians 2:3 It’s not that we can’t do good. We do good! It’s just that we can’t keep from doing bad.

Although we were made in God’s image, we have fallen. We are corrupt at the core. The very center of our being is selfish and perverse. David said, ***“I was born a sinner – yes, from the moment my mother conceived me”*** Psalm 51:5 Each one of us was born with a tendency to sin. In THEOLOGICAL TERMS, we call it

Total **DEPRAVITY** ! Depravity has become a condition of every human being.

In the Bible, God says it clearly:

“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, everyone, to his own way.” Isaiah 53:6

“The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?” Jeremiah 17:9

“There is none righteous, no, not one All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Romans 3:10, 23

Some would disagree with such strong words. Some of us look around and say, “Compared to everyone else, I’m a decent person.” And that’s probably true – compared to others you are a decent person.

You know, a pig might say the same thing. It might look around at the other pigs at the trough and announce, “I’m just as clean as all the other pigs.” Compared to us humans, however, that pig is a mess. AND COMPARED TO GOD, we humans are a mess. The standard for being decent isn’t found in comparing ourselves with one another. GOD, HIMSELF, is the standard! ***“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”***

We are beasts. 500 years ago, Martin Luther said: ***“The worst enemies we have are lodged in our own heart and in our very flesh and blood. They wake, sleep, and live with us, as an evil guest whom we have invited into our house and now cannot get rid of.”***

Our actions are ugly. We don’t do what we want to do. We don’t like what we do. And what’s worse -- yes, there is something worse – we can’t change! Like a house guest we can’t get rid of, we can’t get the beast out from inside of us. Through Jeremiah,

God said: ***“Can a leopard change his spots? In the same way, Jerusalem, you cannot change and do good, because you are accustomed to doing evil.”*** Jeremiah 13:23

Still disagree? Then how about a little test, OK? Here’s the Test: Can You Stop the **BEAST**? For the next 24 hours, lead a sinless life. I’m not asking for a perfect decade or year ... or even a perfect month. Just one perfect day. Can you do it? Can you live without sin for one day?

No? How about one hour? Could you promise for that for the next 60 minutes you’ll have only pure thoughts and actions?

Still no? Then how about the next 5 minutes? Five minutes of worry-free, anger-free, unselfish living – can you do it? Neither can I.

Then WE HAVE A PROBLEM! The problem is we are sinners and ***“The wages of sin is death.”*** Romans 6:23 We have a problem: we are not holy, and ***“Anyone whose life is not holy will never see the Lord.”*** Hebrews 12:14 What can we do?

Well, we can See What Jesus Does With the Spit! Allow the spit of the soldiers to symbolize the beast, the filth in our hearts. And then see what Jesus does with our filth. HE CARRIES IT TO THE CROSS!

Long ago, it was prophesied of Jesus: ***“I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting.”*** Isaiah 50:6 On the cross, along with His blood and His pain, was the spit – the essence of our sin.

God could have worked the plan otherwise. In God’s plan for the day Christ died, Jesus was offered wine for His throat. So why not work into the plan a towel for Jesus’ face? But there was none. Simon carried the cross for Jesus ... but he didn’t wipe the cheek of Jesus. Angels were just a prayer away. Couldn’t God have let them take the saliva away? They could have. But Jesus never commanded them to. For some reason, Jesus who could have avoided the cross, out of love He chose to go the way of the nails, and He also chose to go the way of saliva. And He carried

it with Him to the cross, where He paid for the sin of the beast with His own life.

Do you remember the story *Beauty and the Beast*? In the story, the Beast was once a handsome prince. Once everything at the palace was perfect. But within that handsome prince, was the heart of a selfish, conceited beast. So he was cursed. And he became like his selfish heart – a hairy, drooling, roaring beast. But then came Beauty. She was stunningly gorgeous. Contagiously kind. And she fell in love with him. Who knows why, but she did. She loved him. And in the end, Beauty kisses the beast ... and then the beast turns into a handsome prince.

Jesus does much more than Beauty ever did for the Beast. Jesus **became** the beast so the beast can become the beauty. Jesus changes places with us.

“God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.” 2 Corinthians 5:21

What a wonderful truth! Jesus took the spit – the symbol of our sinful beast within, and He **became** that on the cross, so that you and I might become INNOCENT as He is!

In the story of *Beauty and the Beast*, what if Beauty had not come? What if the Beauty had not cared? Then the beast would have remained a beast.

What if Jesus had not come? What if He had not cared? BUT JESUS HAS COME! AND HE DOES CARE!! And now He’s taken your beastly nature to the cross. The sinless One took on the face of a sinner, so that we sinners could take on the face of a saint.

Now God sees you as the beauty. If that’s how God sees you, how will you live? As a BEAST? Or as a Beauty?

AMEN.