

"A Little Is All Right"

Matthew 26:69--75

March 30, 2011

Lent 4

I read a story about a three year old boy named MIKEY. MIKEY was curious and always doing things without thinking and without permission. Most of the time, his family laughed at his misdeeds and didn't really do any thing. One time, he got into his family's car when the motor was running and backed the car away. Nobody was hurt. The family laughed and thought it was cute.

Now, that family is not laughing. Mikey got a hold of a cigarette lighter, started his bedroom curtains on fire, and burned down his house. Mikey was not hurt, but his father was seriously hurt. Later, Mikey was moved to a foster home because someone complained that Mikey had no supervision.

How did this happen? Was Mikey born a terrible boy? Probably not. Did Mikey suddenly decide to burn down his family's home? No. His behavior changed little bit by little bit. His parents did not supervise him, but allowed his behavior to change more and more. Then, one day, with his home burned down, his parents probably wondered, "How did this situation come up?" It happened little by little.

Jesus' disciple, Peter, probably wondered the same thing. When Peter finished denying Jesus for the third time and his eyes met Jesus' eyes and he remembered Jesus' prediction, "Tonight, you will deny me three times", he wept bitterly and probably wondered, "How did this terrible situation come up?"

These terrible situations arise because Satan is very clever and lies to us. When he tempts us to sin, he does not tell us, "Go ahead and do terrible wrongs!" Satan fools us into thinking that paying attention to him a little is not so bad and doing a "little wrong" is not all that bad. However, these "little wrongs" which lead us to great sins. And great sins lead us from God and to Satan and hell forever.

Adam and Eve are good examples. Eve did not run up to the tree in the middle of the garden and willingly grab some fruit and eat it. She never wanted to do that. First, Satan caused Eve to doubt God's word. Satan said, "Did God really say not to eat fruit from that tree?" Eve said, "Yes, we cannot eat that fruit", but a little doubt was growing inside of her. Then Satan lied, "You will not die. You will become like God." Eve began to disbelieve God's words. She then believed Satan's words. Finally, Eve ate the fruit and sinned against God. Her behavior had changed little by little until she had sinned.

Another Biblical example is King David. He was the most famous Jewish king. He was a good man and had a strong faith. The Bible said that he was a man after God's own heart. Yet Satan fooled him in the same way. One hot night, David was walking on his roof of his palace, looking out over the city. He saw a woman bathing on the roof of her home. She was very beautiful. He probably thought looking at her with lust was not all that bad. Then he sent a soldier to get the woman and bring her to him. Nothing wrong with getting to know each other. The two of them engaged in sexual intercourse. She became pregnant, but she was married to another man - a soldier in the king's army. Even though David was king, he was still embarrassed and afraid. So, he ordered his commander to send the woman's husband into a dangerous battle and he died. So, David - a good man - became an adulterer and a murderer. He never wanted that, but Satan fooled him to change his behavior little by little: Looking at a woman led to lust. Lust led to adultery. Adultery led to murder.

Then there's Peter. Peter never meant to deny Jesus. Peter never meant to curse and swear and say, "I don't know Jesus! I never met Jesus before!" Peter had been very bold in professing that Jesus was the Son of God and Savior. Peter had been very unafraid in promising to go to jail with Jesus and die with Jesus. Peter had even drawn his sword and tried to fight and protect Jesus in the garden. Yet, when Peter was in the court yard by the fire, Satan began to influence Peter to change little by little. People tell Peter that he was with Jesus and one of his followers. First, Peter says, "I

don't know what you mean." Secondly, Peter says, "I don't know the man." Thirdly, Peter curses and swears and says, "I don't know that man!" And Peter had denied Jesus - not once, not twice, but three times. He wept bitterly, probably wondering, "How did I get involved in this situation?"

We may feel the same way at times because Satan lies to us and fools us in the same way. He influences our behavior to change little by little until we are involved in great sin. For example, people never plan to get divorced. Two people marry intending to live together forever. But Satan influences them: then there is a harsh word, a little insult, a minor disagreement, an argument, a fight -- it increases and increases until they decide to divorce.

Students get into trouble at school – suspended or expelled – but they don't mean to do that. But Satan influences them -- a little bad behavior, a little cheating, a little rebellion, more bad behavior, more cheating, worse rebellion - it increases and increases until the school suspends them or expels them.

Many families are breaking down. Do they want to? No. But Satan influences behavior to change little by little. A parent says something to a child. The child ignores the parent. The parent speaks louder. The child becomes angry. The parent becomes angry and punishes. The child rebels. In a little while, there is no communication, but only anger simmering below the surface.

There are many more examples: watch a little porn, miss church a few times, become drunk once in awhile. All are the same: a little wrong begins and it grows, little by little, into a big sin. In all of these examples, we wonder, "How did we get in this situation?"

A more important question is "How do we get out of these situations?" Only Jesus can help us. And He did not do just a little to rescue us. He did it all.

Jesus knew Satan's clever ways - influencing change little by little. That's the reason Jesus never gave into Satan and his temptations, not even a little. When Satan tempted Jesus to use His power just a little for Himself to change stones into bread, Jesus did not make a single crumb. When Satan tempted Jesus to jump off the temple and show off His power, Jesus refused. When Satan

tempted Jesus to avoid suffering to save people, Jesus did not escape even a little. Jesus suffered the full pain and agony on the cross.

Satan fought Eve, King David, and Peter and won. Satan fought you and me and won. We gave in little by little, sin, and lost. Satan fought Jesus and he lost. Jesus won. Jesus rejected all of Satan's lies and attempts to deceive. And He did that for you. He did not avoid suffering, pain, and death on the cross, but willingly accepted those things. Why? So that God the father would forgive you for giving in to Satan. He forgives you for allowing Satan to dupe you. He forgives all your sins and makes you clean in His eyes.

Jesus also obeyed all of God's Laws for you because God still requires perfect obedience. Jesus obeyed every single rule and law because you did not, could not, and would not obey. His obedience helps you. His obedience, perfect behavior, and holiness - God gives to you and me. When you trust in Jesus, He does not see your failures and disobedience. God sees only Jesus' success and obedience in you. And, Jesus continues to live in you and through you to help you actually ignore Satan's lies and temptation to sin just a little bit. He helps you obey God more and more.

Satan says that a little is okay. But that is a lie. If you have trouble controlling your weight, a little sugar is not good. If you are an alcoholic, a little liquor is not good. If you are a student, a little "F" is not good. And, if you are a Christian, a little sin is not good. Do not believe Satan's lie about a little sin. Instead, turn to God's great love, trust in Jesus' great sacrifice on the cross for your sins, rely on Jesus' great and perfect obedience in your place, depend upon His power and you will be saved. Amen.