

COMING OUT OF VEGAS

PART I / EVERYTHING HAS CHANGED BUT NOTHING IS DIFFERENT

DAY 2 — THE VEGAS THEORY

MAIN IDEA

You are a product of choices and you are now different

SCRIPTURE

“Yes, Adam’s one sin brings condemnation for everyone, but Christ’s one act of righteousness brings a right relationship with God and new life for everyone.”

Romans 5:18 NLT

THE VEGAS THEORY

Las Vegas is known for its infamous slogan, “What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas.” This slogan communicates that if you come to this city you can do whatever you want here, and no one has to know, it will keep your secrets. It gives the impression that your choices will not have consequences, that whatever you choose to do and whatever you experience will simply just be a memory. Life as you know it can go back to normal. Your trip is an experience that will not taint the rest of your life. You can keep your experience here and your real life completely separate.

I believe this saying is more than a slogan, but is a theory our human hearts want to believe. We believe if by our own choices or the choices of someone else, that what has happened in a moment, what was said at one time, what we experience, or what we choose to do stays in that place, in that time and in that moment, that it is just a memory, that it will not affect our lives. The reality is what happens then and now can stay with us for a lifetime. What has been done and what has been said positive or negative can shape the lives we live, our desires, and our identities.

For me, what happened in Vegas stayed with me for a long time. I was a product of this city. It was a part of who I was. All I ever knew is what it showed me, that town raised me. It was a part of my identity. I hiked up its mountains, walked through its valleys, went to its casinos, ate at its buffets, watched its entertainment, went to its parties, and ran through its streets.

I was proud to be a Las Vegas to the point I never saw any reason to leave. I had no interest in traveling the world or seeing what else was out there. I was content staying where I was. I thought everything I needed was here.

Las Vegas had a huge influence in who I was and who I became. I had Vegas stained all over the imprint of my mind and heart. Everything it exposed me to, all that it revealed to me, and all that it offered came to brand my mind, heart and will.

I wish all that we experience could just be moments and memories with no lasting effect on our behavior or personality.

I wish the Vegas theory could be true, that the choices made wouldn't affect our lives or others. These choices would just be an experience, but nothing would have to change.

I wish what happened in the garden stayed in the garden with Adam and Eve in Genesis 3. Because of one man's decision we are left with the consequences. We now live in the result, the product of all that happened that day.

Since sin entered the world, death, disease and disaster entered the world. We became separated from God and it has tainted, twisted and distorted our true identities.

Since then we all have multiple experiences, memories, words, people and things we have idolized, that we have identified with and that have shaped and molded our personality, our beliefs, our opinions and theories.

When we look in the mirror we see a distorted version of who we really are, who God really designed us to be before the effects of sin and pain marred our hearts and dulled our minds.

When Jesus came and died on the cross and was resurrected from the grave I am really glad that what he did in Israel didn't stay in Israel, but made a way for generation after generation to have a relationship with God, reverse the power of sin from our lives and exposed the truth of who we really are.

His one decision didn't stay there, but changed the world for the rest of time.

The point is that “The Vegas theory” is false.

One decision can change the course of our lives and affect the lives of others.

We tend to apply this theory even to the altar when we first made that decision to receive Christ into our hearts. Many believe the experience at the altar was just an experience, just a moment, just a memory with God, but nothing has really changed or has to change.

The truth is when we made that decision we changed.

You may be thinking as I once thought, “am I really different though?”

I remember when I first got saved at the age of ten I remember messing up, one time and immediately thought I wasn't “saved” anymore. I felt I had to keep answering the altar call every week. I thought my salvation could be so easily lost.

Yet, when Jesus died on the cross, he died for all our sins. He died for all our past, present and future sins. We no longer have to beg for God's forgiveness or beat ourselves up, or do a lot of good things to make up for what we did.

We stay forgiven.

All we have to do is receive his forgiveness and make a decision to not do it anymore, which is repentance. By his grace God gives us the power to turn away and never look back.

We think it is in trying really hard that we can do what is right without understanding that it is God doing the work for us and as a result it becomes who we are and overflows into our daily lives.

Most of us believe being a Christian is in what we do instead of understanding it is now just who we are.

We think in us doing certain things, that is what makes us a Christian, or that is what makes us truly different. Doing good works is a by-product in which we have become Jesus.

Before your behavior changed, before you could do any good work, before you left the altar after receiving Christ into your heart you were different, life as you know it has changed.

You may be thinking, "That's a little dramatic."

Not at all, because the first lie a new believer could think to themselves is "nothing has changed, I am not different."

The truth is when you genuinely ask for forgiveness, believe in your heart and confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord (Rom 10:10), something changed.

It was so big there was a party thrown in heaven, you were given a new nature, the Holy Spirit now lives inside of you and you now became an active participant in a huge spiritual war. Many things are happening that you cannot see, but change has happened.

This change was the beginning of a journey. God has begun the process of separating you from all that you ever identified with and known and has begun to shape your identity in Him.

You have been a product of the world around you, but when you received salvation your identity completely changed.

You no longer identify with Adam our very first Father, through this one man we were all made sinners (Romans 5:17), but your identity now is in Jesus, your true identity can only be found in God.

You are no longer just a product of your upbringing and your environment. Your past, family, friends, city, and neighborhood has branded you, but it no longer has to define you, it can just be a part of your story. It is a part of your journey.

So if you think nothing in your life has changed, something has — your very nature and identity.

God now lives on the inside of you and now you and Him are one.

The hardest thing to do is to embrace all that has changed within you.

Most of us feel this change and respond to it, but the problem is many things on the outside are still the same.

Your family, friends and life are not different and your mind and heart have still been branded by the world you live in which continues to influence your choices.

This causes us to live in this conundrum, a contradicting feeling that everything has changed, but nothing is different.

The battle lies with a choice, do I continue to embrace that which is not different and continue like nothing has happened?

Do I choose to believe “The Vegas Theory” that whatever experience I had with God or decisions I made for Jesus doesn’t have to affect my day-to-day life?

Or do I choose to live out this decision I made and embrace that which has already changed?

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

1. Write down negative choices that you made or someone else made that really did affect you. How did it change you?
2. Notice how you have been stained by choices and environment.
3. What experiences, people, places, or circumstances have shaped the way you see yourself?
4. Have you allowed something from your past to become your identity?
5. What would it look like to allow your decision to follow Jesus to actually affect your everyday life?

CHALLENGE

Say it out loud:

“My past is part of my story, but it does not have to be my identity. Because of Jesus, I am now different.”