

Freedom

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[0 : 00] Our second reading, it comes from the book of Romans, Paul's letter to the Romans chapter 6. It's on page 1132, and we're going to read the first 14 verses.

We hear God's word together again. What shall we say then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means. We are those who have died to sin.

How can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who are 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.

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. For we know that our old self was crucified with him, so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with.

That we should no longer be slaves to sin. Because anyone who has died has been set free from sin. Now, if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.

[1 : 19] For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again. Death no longer has mastery over him. Death no longer has mastery over him.

As an instrument of righteousness. For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace.

Amen. This is God's word. So we're going to think this evening about freedom, and Christian freedom in particular. But I think it's fair to say at the beginning that the idea of Christian freedom can be confusing.

Even when we come to Romans chapter 6, we find Paul in verse 1 having to defend himself against an accusation. If you preach a religion of grace, that will lead to sin and immorality.

That was one of the charges against Paul. And so we need to understand that freedom is not the idea of a free pass. Jesus is not our get-out-of-jail-free card.

[2 : 51] But it is the freedom to live a whole new life as those who have been given a new heart, given new desires, given a new power that comes from God. So that can confuse.

But for some, the confusion lies here that the whole idea of Christian freedom might sound and seem ridiculous. If your conception of Christianity makes it about rules and limitations and barriers to people having sort of joy and freedom, then it's going to come across as confusing.

And again, freedom is not, Christian freedom is not, here's how to enjoy a life without any limits.

That's not really freedom. This is a particular kind of freedom.

Like when we have a piece of technology and we understand that that technology works best when we follow the maker's guidelines. You know, our mobile phones are excellent communication devices but not so good as a Frisbee.

We understand that principle. Christian freedom is the freedom we find in following the guidelines of God, our maker. That's the way life works best. There's freedom in that. So we need to think about what are we being told about Christian freedom here in Romans 6.

[4 : 10] And it's interesting that all of this also involves Paul reflecting on the significance of the death and the resurrection of Jesus. So what is Christian freedom in light of Easter?

What difference does it make? A few things to say. The first thing to say, and it's right here in the center of our text, we know freedom through union with Christ.

There's an idea repeated twice. Verse 5, If we've been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. Phrasing a slightly different way in verse 8.

Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. So that key idea is repeated. Now what does Paul mean? This idea of union, which is so important within the Bible. Well perhaps we can think about a proxy. When it comes to voting, if you're off on your holidays, you can elect a proxy to vote on your behalf.

[5 : 12] In history, it was possible even to have a proxy to represent you at your own marriage ceremony. I only discovered this this week, but there are a number of kings of the UK who were not present at their own wedding.

King James VI and I. He was the first to do this. When he was getting married to Queen Anne of Denmark, he wasn't there. He sent George Keith, the fifth Earl Marshal, in his place. That's a very different set of wedding photos, isn't it? So there's the idea of a proxy that represents someone. Or think champion. Think about champion. So those occasions when two armies would come to war, and rather than the whole army be involved, there's the choice of a champion to represent either side.

And whoever wins, wins for the whole army. We think David. We think Goliath. Now take that idea into what we mean by being united to Jesus by faith.

He is our proxy. He represents us. He is the champion who wins a victory for us. And what is true for Jesus is true for those who have faith in Jesus.

[6 : 26] When it comes to death and resurrection, Christopher Ash puts it this way. Just as Jesus' death was once for all, and his resurrection irreversible, so it is for us in him.

So we go back to Good Friday. Christ died for sin on the cross, and when we are united with him, we too die. Our old nature dies. We die to sin's enslaving power and the penalty that is due.

And now we find ourselves here at Easter Sunday. Christ rose to new life and united with him.

There is the promise that in the future, we too will enjoy physical bodily resurrection life in the new creation, and in the present, we enjoy new life with and in Jesus.

Notice the certainty in verse 5 and verse 8. If we've been united with him in death, we will certainly also be united with him in our resurrection. If we died with Christ, we believe that we will live with him.

One necessarily follows the other. There's no room for doubt. John Piper has a very helpful image, I think. He has this idea of the keys of death hanging on the inside of the tomb of Christ Jesus.

[7 : 45] Think about that giant stone, and there's the keys hanging on the inside of the tomb. To secure our resurrection from the dead, Christ must die for sin, Christ must enter the tomb, Christ must rise again and unlock the door of death from the inside.

That's what Jesus did in the gospel. And in his resurrection, now we have proof, now we have the gift that Jesus' work is finished, and God accepted it.

And so we have freedom. Think about that. If we are united to Christ Jesus, nothing can keep us in the tomb.

We are free to live. We are free to live without the fear of death. We are free to live with the hope of heaven. And so there is this vital connection between Jesus' death and resurrection and how it affects our freedom.

When we read our Bibles, when we read our own hearts, we know that we all sin. Lost sentences sinners to eternal death.

[8 : 55] When we read our Bibles, we learn about Jesus' life and death. And Jesus there meets the demands of the law in full, perfect obedience, and then a perfect substitute sacrificing for us.

Jesus is punished for me. Jesus is perfect for me. And in those actions, sins are removed. The sting of sin, which is death, is removed.

So now it's not eternal death that is our prospect, it's eternal life that now belongs to us. And this is what we mean when we talk about freedom with Christ, freedom in Christ, that one day, we have the sure hope that Jesus will return, and Jesus will make everything new, and Jesus will take his people to be with him, to live in that perfect new world forever.

So we know freedom through union with Christ. There's a second idea to do with freedom in our text. We know freedom from the power of sin. And I think we see how related that is.

There's a repeating theme in these verses. Because of the death and resurrection of Jesus, first of all, sin is rendered powerless. Verse six, for we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with or might be rendered powerless.

[10:17] Sin's rule is broken, that we should no longer be slaves to sin because anyone who has died has been set free from sin. And then down in verse 12, sin's reign is ended.

Therefore, do not let sin reign in your mortal body. Now how does this happen? Again, we see it in verse six. Our old self was crucified with him.

This freedom from the power of sin comes because Jesus died on the cross as that sin-bearing substitute and the reality of our having been crucified with him.

And that freedom from the power of sin, it also comes through the resurrection of Jesus. Verse seven, that he has died and then risen and we have died with him and now we're alive so we're set free from the power of sin in our lives.

Our chains have been broken with him and in him and so the events of Easter bring to us real freedom so that we are able to sing of our sin.

[11:26] My chains are gone. I've been set free. My God, my Savior has ransomed me. There is this decisive moment that has taken place in our lives there at the cross and the resurrection.

Now to help us picture this, we can go for a few moments to the Red Sea and to the story of the Exodus. Because when we read the Old Testament, we know that the Exodus event, the Red Sea, that was the defining moment for the Old Testament believer.

This was the line in the sand. This was the before and after for the Old Testament believer. So there on the banks of the Red Sea on the far side of the sea, what were they celebrating?

They were celebrating God delivering them from Egyptian slavery. They were celebrating the fact that they were now separated forever from that threat. They were celebrating the truth that they had a new identity, no longer slaves under the tyranny of Pharaoh.

now they're set free to enjoy life with their God. Fast forward to our experience. The Easter events for us are the Christians defining moment.

[12:42] Here is the moment that we look back to where we can recognize as the Old Testament believer did, God is good. God is utterly committed to me and my salvation.

I can trust this God. As Jesus said, if the Son sets us free, then we are free indeed. Now think about what that means for our day-to-day life.

Perhaps we know what it is to feel enslaved. There are so many addictions that can catch us in their grip.

Even as Christians, there are so many harmful habits and patterns we find ourselves constantly returning to. We can find ourselves a slave to our past, our failures, our regrets.

Guilt is that prison that's locked from the inside. But at the same time, we can be slaves in the sense of having a great fear about our future. And there's great good news that in Jesus, there is freedom and we can change, that we don't need to be defined by those things because they are no longer our masters.

[13:58] We have a new freedom purchased for us through Jesus' death and resurrection. Not that we can ever say, well, I will never sin. You know, that we've broken free from the presence of sin in our lives.

That will come, but not until we are glorified. But here's what we can say. Right now, or in a particular moment, I do not need to sin.

We have, we have as Christians, a new power, a new desire, a new heart, a new spirit, a law written upon our hearts that gives us the ability to say no and to pursue righteousness and to delight in it.

And it's important for us also to learn to look back as Christians, to recognize this, that between us and that sin that would love to enslave us stands not the Red Sea, but the cross of Christ.

And so we understand in the gospel that yes, there are times when sin will tempt us and we will fail. Sin can never condemn the believer, can never kill the believer.

[15:20] So we know freedom from the power of sin. Look again at the death and resurrection of Jesus. Because in this there is freedom from anxiety and insecurity.

If the Father from all eternity wasn't just willing but delighted to do that, to send his Son to come, to become one of us, to take our place, to take our penalty, to bear God's wrath, if he was willing to do that, what will he not do for you and me now?

It's the logic of Romans 8, isn't it? Let me read, if you've got your Bible, you can flick over to Romans 8, verse 31. What then shall we say in response to these things?

If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also along with him and graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who then is the one who condemns?

[16:34] No one. Christ Jesus who died, more than that, who was raised to life, is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.

Do you hear what Paul is saying? As Christians, we can believe and know Jesus died for me, Jesus rose for me, Jesus sits at the Father's right hand for me, and Jesus prays for me.

God holds nothing back. And we can use Easter as that vital reminder, use those events to remind ourselves just how much love God has for us.

The Puritan John Owen said this, challenging words I think, the greatest insult you could ever give to God after the cross would be to doubt God's love for you or his commitment to care for you.

We need to see how those events of Easter can transform our sense of self and give us freedom from insecurity and anxiety and from the sin that would enslave us.

[17:47] We can let Easter be that reminder, see how much he loves us, that we would trust him and rest in his love. Here's a third way Paul puts this freedom in view.

As we discover in this section we can know the freedom of a new identity. There is a sense I think in which creating a new identity is a pretty modern phenomenon.

You know in the past, typically, people lived in the same place as their parents, often times took the same work as their parents, lived in the same community, shared the same cultural values, perhaps married within the community.

Sometimes that might feel like a goldfish bowl but often that provided a sense of security. But now we live in a time when we can go anywhere, we can do anything, we can be anything that we want and that becomes a real pressure and a burden for some.

How do I keep up with cultural trends and values? What happens if I'm sold this idea, I'm free to be whatever I want to be but I'm not matching up to my expectations and I don't seem to be getting there?

[18:59] It's not always freedom when we're told have it your own way, it doesn't just apply to burgers but it applies to all of life. There are many doctors, many psychologists identifying, it's not creating a joyful generation, it's creating an anxious generation, locked into a digital world, a whole new load of social pressures, lifestyle stressors that it can be really hard to escape from.

And then we get this wonderful message from Paul and the Bible that there is a better freedom, there is a more secure and joyful identity to be found in knowing the risen Lord Jesus.

And again I think for us as Christians our daily task and perhaps sometimes it's our daily struggle is to preach the gospel to ourselves, to understand that no one talks to us more than we do.

How do we talk to ourselves about ourselves and more especially how do we talk to ourselves about our God and our Savior? Are we reminding ourselves of the reality of our union with Christ?

Are we talking to ourselves about the life transforming impact of the cross and the resurrection? Because look at the language here in Romans 6 and verse 11.

[20:17] Romans 6 verse 11, in this same way count yourselves or reckon yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

There's an accounting word. You'll take stock of what is in the bank right now. And it's the reality that if anyone is in Christ he is, present tense, a new creation.

That idea of being transformed, of being a new creation, that's not a future label that will be placed on us, it is the present identity of the believer today.

And so Paul here calls us to line up our thinking with God's truth about who we truly are. And so much of this passage is about the death of Jesus and the resurrection of Jesus and our union with Jesus so that every day we would be thinking about ourselves in light of Jesus' work.

To be thinking about Jesus walking to the cross, carrying your sin, your punishment, so that your old nature is dead and buried.

[21:33] And then Jesus walking out of the tomb, carrying new life for you. We're given another picture to help us towards that new identity.

It's the picture of baptism. It's there in verses three and four. Don't you know that all of us who are 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.

Shortly after Jesus' resurrection and then his ascension, the Holy Spirit is sent. And when you read the book of Acts, we see that in those few weeks after Jesus died and rose and returned to heaven, we have a lot of the apostles preaching.

Maybe we think of Acts chapter two. Here is Peter, he's preaching, and as he preaches about God's foreknowledge and the plan to send his son, that he would be rejected and would be killed but then be raised.

People are cut to the heart. And people confess Jesus as Lord. And what's the sign that they are given as they confess Jesus as Lord?

[22 : 48] It's baptism. So baptism in the book of Acts is at least in part a way for someone to publicly say, I identify with Jesus as my Lord. What happened there on the cross happened for me.

What happened at the empty tomb and the resurrection, that impacts me. baptism. And so every baptism includes that idea of being identified or needing to be identified with Jesus.

And so Paul uses that idea and takes us back to those key Easter events. To Jesus dead and buried for sin and for sinners. To remind us that we've been baptized into his death.

And that the power of sin over us is now dead and buried. And therefore we are to count ourselves dead to sin. It's no longer our master. Jesus rose to new life, Paul tells us.

And in him we too live a new life while we await future resurrection life. And again he's telling Christians this in the first century.

[23 : 52] We need to hear it in the 21st century because here is a freedom and here is an identity worth pursuing. It's a way to escape the rollercoaster of being in and out with God.

You know how does that happen? You know he loves me, he loves me not when it comes to God. It happens when we make it about us. My feelings towards God.

My obedience towards God. And our great need is to see that Christ is always only and forever our basis of faith.

He never changes. He never fails. His love is constant. Our security is in a fixed identity. And you and I need this.

We need this secure identity for when we sin. When we sin badly. We can still believe in a God of faithful love.

[24 : 54] Again, here the wise counsel. I've been borrowing a lot recently from Thomas Goodwin. If you're interested, he's definitely my new favorite Puritan.

He's got a lovely book called Christ Set Forth. Basically looking at Romans 8.34. Here's one of his phrases. By virtue of Jesus being justified as he represents us from all sorts of sins, even so shall all sorts of sinners be justified in and through him also.

And therefore, should you not also hope to be justified from yours? It's wonderful to think of the resurrection as God the Father justifying and then delighting in his son.

And in Jesus, we too are justified and the Father delights in us. When we look beyond the events of the cross to think about God's intended outcome of those events, we see the Son of God loved me and gave himself for me.

And that, that's Christian freedom. To enjoy the love of God as our Father through the saving work of Jesus, his Son. One last thing to say, and it's the little turn that happens in verses 12 to 14, where Paul moves from here's some things that are true to here's the consequences of what's true.

[26 : 33] And so as we close, think about this, go to live out our new freedom in Christ. I read a sad interview this week. There was a guy who had spent 38 years, I think it was 38 years in prison for a crime he didn't commit.

He went into prison in 1986. And so he was interviewed after his release. And so part of the interview was talking about how much the world has changed.

It's hard to imagine. Imagine almost four decades. You know, you go in, there's no internet, the iron curtain is still there. He was talking about having to learn about smartphones, how you have to do everything on your phone.

So it's hard work. But the sad part was when he talked about how institutionalized he'd become. He got so used to the regime of prison life.

So one morning when he was in his new home, he wanted to go outside. So he got himself all ready. But rather than opening the door, he went and sat back on his bed.

[27 : 37] And he patiently waited. Now why is he waiting? He was waiting because he was expecting a guard would come and release him. He had become institutionalized.

Even when he was free, he was acting as if he was still in prison. And he talked in that interview asking himself, what are you thinking? But he was discovering it was hard to live out his newfound freedom.

As Paul closes, he moves from all those wonderful truths about freedom and Christ's death and resurrection. So here's how to live in light of the truth.

Verse 12, Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life.

And offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness. For sin shall no longer be your master because you're not under the law, but under grace.

[28 : 41] Don't live as a slave to sin, he tells believers, because you have a new master. You have a new power within you. You have a new freedom to enjoy. Notice he doesn't say to us, work really hard to break free from sin, because that would still be to be in chains.

But he makes plain Christ has set you free. And the proof of that is the cross and the empty tomb. Because that's true, he can say joyfully live out of that freedom.

But he also makes that moral call, because you've been set free, don't give any of your faculties to sin and to wickedness. Now whether we're thinking about our emotions, whether we're thinking about our intelligence, whether we're thinking about our finances, our energies, the things we do or say or think, we are not to give any of our faculties to sin and wickedness, but rather, what are we to do?

We are to give them, give ourselves to God. We are to lead a new life by God's grace with Jesus, not sin and death as our master. And because that is true, you and I can gratefully live in obedience and service.

You and I have now been set free to freely give ourselves to the one who gave everything to save us. It's a wonderful freedom as we trust what Jesus did.

[30 : 16] To trust that what he did, he did for us. There's a wonderful freedom as we remember. By faith, we are united to Jesus. Those chains of sin have been broken.

We've been given a new identity and we have grace to live for him. Let's take a moment to give thanks as we pray. Our Lord and our God, once again, we thank you for the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

Now we thank you in particular for the way you are.