

Justice Has Been Served

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[0 : 00] All right, well this morning is the first Sunday of May and so we want to spend some time reflecting on the gospel, on the good news of Jesus. So we're going to push off 2 Timothy and our journey through that till next Sunday.

And we're going to spend some time looking at another passage of scripture this morning. We're looking in the New Testament letter of Romans. This is what we're working through as adults in Sunday school, just before the service every Sunday.

And we've already covered this passage here in Romans chapter 8, but I thought that it was worth spending a little bit more time on it and just drinking in the good news of Jesus.

In case you're wondering, what we're about to read in Romans was written a good while before Paul wrote his second letter to Timothy. It was written before Paul even ever made it to Rome, before his first imprisonment, before his second imprisonment.

And Paul's entire goal in the book of Romans is just to set forth the gospel, the good news of Jesus, so that the people there in Rome can understand it and live in accordance with it.

[1 : 03] And he does it in a unique kind of way. He doesn't tell the story of what happened with Jesus like all the events in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. And those people already know.

And so it's more of an explanation of what's the significance of it. What has Jesus accomplished through his life and death and resurrection? And we're just kind of parachuting today right into Romans chapter 8.

But up until this point in the letter, Paul has already covered a lot of ground. In the first three chapters of Romans, he's made the case that all people stand guilty before God because of our sins against him.

He's made the case that it doesn't matter whether you're a Jew or a Gentile. We've all sinned. None of us is righteous in God's sight. We're all deserving of justice from God, punishment from God. But the good news of Jesus that Paul's been explaining is that there is a way to be made right with God again. There is a way to be spared and saved from that punishment.

[2 : 09] And it comes through Jesus and what he has done. And he goes on at length to explain that. We'll get to hear more of that in just a moment here. One of the big challenges that Paul addresses here in the church in Rome is the mixture of Jewish and Gentile Christians.

And I'm not going to press too far into this, but the Jewish people tended to view a good relationship with God as something that you had to earn by keeping the law, by keeping the commands that God had given through Moses.

That's those first books of the Bible. They saw that as the standard of living by which they could attain righteousness in the sight of God. And this, of course, was just not true.

And Paul has been laboring throughout this letter to the Romans to make this clear. Just one quick statement where he makes it clear.

Romans chapter 9, verse 31. He says there, The people of Israel who pursued the law as the way of righteousness have not attained their goal.

[3 : 16] Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith, but as if it were by works. You cannot be made right with God by keeping the law, by keeping commandments.

We've already fallen short of that. And as we'll see, the law does not even have the ability. It doesn't give us the power that we need to live up to its demands.

And we'll see that in a moment here. In chapter 7, Paul has got quite the discussion of this. He talks about how the law is good, but how there's something going on inside of us that is not good.

Which makes the law almost like fatal to us. And we'll see that in a moment. But there's good news, says Paul. And let's hear what he has to say to us in Romans chapter 8, verse 1.

Paul says, Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Because through Christ Jesus, the law of the Spirit who gives life has set me free from the law of sin and death.

[4 : 30] For what the law was powerless to do, because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his son, his own son, in the likeness of sinful flesh, to be a sin offering.

And so he condemned sin in the flesh in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.

These are some of the most precious words in the Bible. Paul's main point, God's main point through the apostle is simply this. There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. This is a place to pause. This is a place to reflect deeply. There is now no being condemned for those who are in Christ Jesus.

There is now no getting what we deserve for our sins for those who are in Christ Jesus. There is now no death and hell as our final ultimate end for those who are in Christ Jesus.

[5 : 45] There is now no punishment from God for those who are in Christ Jesus. God is telling us that there is a remedy. There is a way to be saved.

There is a way to be spared what we deserve. There is a way to have our status with him changed from condemned to not condemned.

Who does this apply to? Paul says it applies to those who are in Christ Jesus. There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Now you might be wondering, what does that mean? What does it mean to be in Christ Jesus? It's kind of a weird way of saying things. What does it mean to be in a person? Listen, Paul uses this phrase a lot in his letters.

And we're not going to go all over the place and see how he uses it without getting to all those passages. To be in Christ Jesus refers to us being united to Christ Jesus.

[6 : 49] It refers to a spiritual reality in which Jesus Christ lives in us by his spirit joining us to himself so that we are one with him.

So much so that it could be rightly said that we are in him just as he is in us. And this is certainly not an easy thing to explain or to describe or to understand.

But this is the reality for those who are born again of God's spirit. When we repent, when we believe in Jesus, we are born again of the spirit. We are then united by Jesus through the spirit of God to him.

And if this has become the reality for you, says Paul, then there is now no condemnation for you. You will not be condemned.

The punishment you deserve is no longer coming to you. And the next three verses here is Paul explaining how that works and why. Let's see this starting in verse 2.

[7 : 59] He says, In this verse alone, verse 2, there's two laws.

There's the law of the spirit. And there's the law of sin and death. And then if we go to the next verse, there's another law. It's the law of Moses, the commandments. But we'll get there in a minute.

Let's look at these first two laws that are mentioned. The law of the spirit. And the law of sin and death. You could argue that the law of sin and death are two distinct laws.

But probably we can think of sin and death as together kind of making up one law. Because they're very closely related, as we'll see in a moment. It's important to notice here that Paul is not referring to a specific written law when he says the law of the spirit.

Or the law of sin. The law of death. He's talking about a binding principle. A binding set of principles that always applies consistently and has no exceptions.

[9 : 26] Think of the law of gravity. So let's consider these two laws. First, what is the law of sin and death? Well, Paul has just introduced these ideas in the preceding chapter.

In chapter 7. Let's just go back up and look at that for a moment. And I'll read it for you. Look back up to verse 14 of chapter 7. This is Paul writing.

He says, We know that the law, that's the law of Moses, the commandments, is spiritual. But I am unspiritual. Sold as a slave to sin.

I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do, I do not do. But what I hate, I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good.

As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. For I know that good itself does not dwell in me.

[10 : 29] That is in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good. But I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do.

But the evil I do not want to do. This I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.

And here it is. So I find this law at work, he says. Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being, I delight in God's law.

But I see another law at work in me. Waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me.

What a wretched man I am. Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Now I know there is a lot there.

[11 : 35] We could do probably a whole series of sermons right through that passage. But did you catch Paul's statement about how there is a law at work within us?

It is a consistent binding principle that has us enslaved. Where even though we know what is good, even though we know what is right, we do the opposite.

We have this gravity within us towards sin. Away from obedience to God. And it is powerful.

By this bent within us, we all sin just like Paul describes. We all do the things that we know are wrong. And we all fail to do the things we know are right.

This is the law of sin that Paul is talking about. What is the law of sin? It is the reality that we are inwardly bound to do that which makes us liable to judgment.

[12 : 40] And the punishment for our sins is death. And so the law of sin at work within us, it inevitably leads us toward that law of death. That those who break the law will face the punishment that God has decreed for it, which is death.

But now, God has made a way for us to have no condemnation. And how does it work? He says, It's the law of the Spirit.

And the Spirit of God gives life, he says. Yes, we are hopelessly bound by the law of sin that's at work within us. And therefore deserve the punishment of death.

But there's a counteracting law by which we can be set free from that. And it's the law of God's Spirit. God's Spirit who gives life.

And now Paul is going to explain what that even means. What is this law of the Spirit? How does it work? How does it take away the condemnation that we deserve for our sins?

[13 : 59] Well, let's keep going. Verse 3. For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering.

And so God condemns sin in the flesh in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us. So Paul now introduces us to this third law.

He's back to talking about the Old Testament law, the commands that were given through Moses. All those centuries ago, God gave his law through Moses. And Paul says here very clearly that the law given through Moses by God, it was powerless to do something for us.

And we kind of have to skim down to the end of verse 4 to see what it was powerless to do for us. You can see it there at the end in verse 4. However, the law was powerless to make us meet its righteous demands.

Its righteous requirements. So think of the Ten Commandments. Just pick a commandment. You shall not bear false witness. Okay? So don't...

[15 : 33] You shall not lie. Well, that does two things. It describes for us what the standard of righteousness is. Righteousness is never lying. It's never bearing false witness, especially in a court of law.

And it's not just a description of what's right and wrong. It's a commandment. It's actually God telling us, you shall not do this. You must not do this. So he's calling us in the command to obey it.

But just calling us to obey it, there's no power in that to help us obey it. And the reason why is because we have this law of sin at work within us that Paul has been talking about.

So he refers to it again here when he says, For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh. So there's a bit of a metaphor in there.

It's not that the law somehow got weaker. It's that its ability to produce the change in us that should have happened, it was handcuffed, it was tied because there was this law of sin at work within us. [16:37] This propensity to disobey, to rebel, to go our own way. And so he says, What the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh.

And here's the good news. God did. So what the law couldn't do, it could not give us a right standing with God.

It couldn't get us to meet its demands. It couldn't make us righteous. So God did that. He made that happen for us.

How? It says he did it by sending his own son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. He sent his son from heaven into our world to become one of us, to become like us. And we have to read this carefully here.

[17:41] It's not saying that he became a sinner like we're a sinner. It's saying that he took on the likeness of sinful flesh. We're the sinful flesh. He took on the likeness of us in that he became human. He became a man.

He became one of us. Not only that, but he became one of us to be a sin offering.

Some translations say, and for sin. And good translators recognize that phrase that points back to the Old Testament that was used in the sacrificial laws, giving sacrifices, offering them up to God for sin.

That's the same language here. What God did by sending his own son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering, a sacrifice for us.

This is what the sacrifices in the Old Testament law all pointed to. They pointed to this reality that God is just and that sin must be punished. In God's mercy, for a long time, he permitted the Israelites to bring an animal and sacrifice it instead of themselves having to die for the sins that they had committed.

[19:01] And that innocent animal functioned as like a substitute. It was like a stand-in. It got what the man who brought it truly deserved for his sin.

That was provisional. That was for a time. All along it was pointing forward to this day when God would send his own son to be that sin offering for us. To stand in our place and get what we deserved for our sins upon himself.

Listen to how Paul explains the final details of how this worked in the case of Jesus. Jesus. And so God condemned sin in the flesh in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us.

These words are some of the most amazing words. And so God condemned sin in the flesh. What is Paul saying?

God did condemn sin. He didn't leave it forever unpunished. He did condemn sin. He did punish human sin. He punished a man with flesh like we have for the sins of humanity.

[20:24] He condemned our sins in his son's flesh. why? In order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us.

As we've said, the law requires punishment for sin. It requires death. And so God gave the punishment that our sins deserve to his son.

Who, by the way, was willing to take that upon himself. It wasn't a forced thing. God gave the punishment that our sins deserve to his son so that the law would be upheld.

So that justice would be done. And so Jesus, the sinless, spotless lamb of God, received the punishment we deserve for our sins on himself so that we could be set free from what we deserve. So that God would not have to give us what we deserve according to his righteous law.

One of the amazing things about this truth is that this was God's plan all along.

[21:44] Hundreds of years before this, this is what God spoke through the prophet Isaiah in Isaiah chapter 53 verse 4. Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him and afflicted.

But he was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought us peace was upon him.

And by his wounds we are healed. We all like sheep have gone astray.

Each of us has turned to our own way and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. That's what the Lord declared hundreds of years before this moment when Jesus came.

God condemned our sin in Jesus flesh. He satisfied the just demands of his righteous law for our transgressions in Jesus death, in Jesus body on the cross.

[23 : 08] And so let's just trace this quickly back up to the main point. if God has already condemned our sins in the flesh of Jesus in the death of Jesus is there any condemnation now left for us who are in Christ Jesus?

Jesus think about this. In our justice system today every crime has its punishment or at least it should and a good justice system is one in which the punishment fits the crime where you only get what you deserve no more no less.

justice means that the criminal the law breaker gets only what he deserves no more and no less. So God has sent his son and it says that he has condemned our sins in his flesh and so then is there any punishment left for us who have been united with Christ?

No. None. There is no condemnation anymore this is Paul's point for all who are in Jesus who are united with Christ the sentence for our sins has already been served the penalty paid the suffering that we deserve the punishment it's already been meted out and therefore the law of God no longer condemns us it no longer has authority or power over our lives over our future over our final destiny this union with Christ that we now have by God's spirit becomes the new controlling reality in our lives it sets us free from that old law of sin and death as Paul said back up in verse two let me say it another way God's spirit joins us to Jesus to Jesus himself making us one with him and if we are truly one with him then in him and through him our sentence has already been served the condemnation we deserve it's already been done once and for all at the cross which leaves us no longer liable to punishment of any kind from God the power of the law of sin and the law of death is broken let's just quickly glance back up to chapter 7 where we left

Paul a moment ago he said what a wretched man I am who will rescue me from this body of that is subject to death thanks be to God who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord this is amazing this is wonderful and what we notice here is that we did nothing we did nothing to get this to deserve this to earn it I mean you look back over these few verses here in chapter 8 verse 1 to 4 and you look back over those few verses in chapter 7 leading up to it what did we do to save ourselves nothing we were prisoners it says we were we were like slaves we were guilty we deserve death and God's commands his law only helped us to see more of how true that is we did nothing to fix this for ourselves God did what the law couldn't do for us

[26 : 57] God did what we couldn't do for ourselves out of his own compassionate grace and kindness he sent his son to be the sin offering that we needed out of his own love and power he joined us to Christ by his spirit so that what Christ did on that cross would apply to us we contributed nothing all we do to receive this amazing gift is to humbly admit to God that we have blown it we have sinned against him that we're powerless that we deserve to be punished we admit that to God and we cast ourselves on his mercy asking for his forgiveness and trusting that he will save us as he has said and promised and he does and so back to the most important question are you in Christ Jesus this is the most important question no condemnation is for those who are in

Christ Jesus are you in Christ Jesus all of these wonderful things Paul talks about here and throughout the rest of the scripture being raised to life someday after we die is only for those who are in Christ Jesus being adopted into God's family as children and heirs of this wonderful inheritance that he has promised his eternal kingdom it's only for those who are in Christ Jesus are you in Christ Jesus or are you still a slave and a prisoner with God's dreadful words of punishment hanging over you if you haven't done it I want to urge you today humble yourself before him admit that you're a sinner ask for his forgiveness believe be saved and be joined to

Christ and be set free forever from that law of sin and death as we come to the Lord's table this is what the Lord's table is meant to point us to the night Jesus was betrayed before that he sat down with his disciples and he broke bread and he passed it around the table he said this is my body which is for you do this in remembrance of me in a similar fashion he took his own cup with the fruit of the vine in it grape juice wine passed it around and he encouraged them all to drink of it he said this is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for you for the forgiveness of do this in remembrance of me what was Jesus saying in all that he was saying that

God is about to condemn your sins in my body in my flesh my blood is about to be shed to atone for your sins and they watched as it happened the next day an amazing gift of love that's what we reflect on as we come to this table each month as we partake of the bread and the cup if you are in Christ I invite you to partake with us as we remember as we reflect on this awesome gift if not

please refrain we're going to wait until everybody has been served and then we'll partake all together in unison so in just a moment I'll invite and if you don't want to participate feel free to just signal with your hand and they will pass you by so let's go to prayer and let's reflect now mood into or need to take okay everyone could as can said

Oh in I can fly to I can get big I we can go Amen.

[32 : 31] Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Father in heaven, we say thank you that you have done what must have been horrible in your own heart to do in one sense, that you condemned your own son.

And caused him to suffer and punish him for us. Thank you that you have put him forward, the sacrifice that we needed, so that we could be saved, so that we could be forgiven, so that we could have life.

How can we express our gratitude? How can we express our love? We give you praise. In Jesus' name. Amen.