

# A Matter of Life and Death

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 12 February 2012

Preacher: Mark Chew

[0:00] 13. Well, friends, over the next three weeks, we'll be looking at God's word together from Romans 8.

And if you are familiar with Romans 8, you would know that this is something of the climax, the Mount Everest in the letter of Romans. Paul reaches the climax in his defense of the gospel, which was summed up in Romans 1, verse 16, where he said, For I am not ashamed of the gospel. It is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. And so over the last eight chapters, he has shown how all have sinned and therefore deserve the punishment of death, that no one is able to, by their actions, keep God's requirements and his perfect law, and that it is only by having faith in Jesus which brings righteousness before God. Well, now in chapter 8, Paul brings it all together in summary, but he also takes it one step further and he begins to talk about what it means to have this life.

So that's our agenda for the next three weeks. What does living in Christ and living for Christ mean for us? Well, let's, as we begin, let me pray.

[1:37] Father, giver of all life, we ask that as we look at your Bible today, that the words of life will bring us joy, will bring us hope, and will spur us on to live for you.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Well, I wonder whether you've ever been put in a life or death situation. where a decisive action or critical choice was required and that would result in either the difference between death or life.

I guess if you're a doctor or a nurse or a paramedic, one of those professions, then you probably face that on a daily basis. But if you're like me, now a minister, but used to be working in an accounting firm, then that's probably not something that you face ever or even occasionally. Well, the one time when I did face such a situation was when my 18-month, my then 18-month-old daughter, Lauren, suffered an anaphylactic reaction. We were on holidays in the Gold Coast and Lauren had tasted some kiwi fruit for the first time and we had no knowledge that she was allergic to that.

Well, over the course of two to three hours, our fears grew as we saw her body reacting to the kiwi fruit and then eventually going into an anaphylactic shock.

[3:14] Well, thankfully, we had an EpiPen with us that day because if not for that, I'm pretty certain that she would probably not have made it. Well, this passage may not sound as dramatic as Lauren's encounter, but I want to suggest that it is similar in that it presents us with the same life or death situation.

So just glance with me over this passage and see how clearly this great dividing line is that runs through the passage. So on the one side, there are those who are still under the law of sin of death, verse 1, who live according to the flesh and therefore set their minds on the things of the flesh, verse 5.

And to set their mind on the flesh is death, verse 6, because it is hostile to God and does not submit to God's law. That's verse 7. And then finally, in verse 13, if you live according to the flesh, Paul says, you will die.

On the other side are those who are in Christ Jesus. And so in verse 1, are freed by the law of the spirit of life from the law of sin and of death. Verse 5, these live according to the spirit and set their minds on the spirit.

For them, there is life and peace, verse 6. And so even if the body is dead because of sin, verse 10, the spirit is alive because of righteousness, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies through his spirit that dwells in you.

[ 4 : 44 ] And so finally, in verse 13, if by the spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. So it seems to me that there is one way that leads very clearly to death and another that leads very clearly to life.

And Paul's train of thought is actually quite clear. We are not free agents able to decide or choose between life and death. We're actually tied to sin and death needing to be rescued.

We have life only when we have the spirit because firstly, it is only the spirit of life that can free us from the law of sin and death. Secondly, it's only the spirit that can help us live in peace and in a manner which pleases God.

That's from verses 5 to 9. And finally, in verses 10 to 11, only the spirit can raise us up and give life to our mortal bodies. So tonight, we're going to look at those three points.

So firstly, the spirit of life freeing us from the law of sin and death. I want you to imagine for a moment that there's a hostage situation.

[ 6 : 00 ] Let's say, actually, let's say you're President George Bush on the day of September 11th. And let's say you were not sitting in that classroom as he was, but that you were in the situation room with your generals.

And let's say instead of having no prior warning, you had two hours before you knew that the first plane was going to fly into the first tower. What would you have done?

You would be in a bit of a dilemma, wouldn't you? For one, you could, I guess, and that's what they probably tried to do, scramble up a few fighter planes and try and shoot down the airliner before it hits the towers.

But you know that if you did that, many innocent lives would be killed on board the airline. People that you were trying desperately to save as well. There aren't too many acceptable alternatives, are there?

Perhaps, perhaps maybe if you had an air marshal that was on the plane already and somehow he or she was free and was able to overcome the hostage takers, perhaps then you could take the plane down safely.

[ 7 : 16 ] Well, I think that this is the sort of same dilemma that God is faced with with regard to sin and humanity. God's problem, just like it is with President Bush on September 11th, is how do you eradicate sin without condemning humanity at the same time?

And that's no easy task because, as we read in Genesis chapter 2, ever since Adam sinned, sin and humanity has been hopelessly entangled. As it were, humanity has been taken hostage by sin. And to speak of being human is to speak of being sinful as well. And therefore, for God to judge sin, he had to judge humanity as well.

And we often hear people wanting God to come and to eradicate all the injustice in this world. Well, the problem is that if God came and did that, the only way that he would succeed is to have a world without people.

And the only way that God could solve that problem was, verse 3, to send his son in the likeness of sinful flesh. And I want you to notice how carefully Paul uses his language.

[ 8 : 33 ] God did not say that he would send his son in sinful flesh because Jesus had to be sinless in order to condemn sin. But at the same time, in order that victory could be applied to all humanity, Jesus had to be like us in our humanity.

He had to be fully human and not superhuman. He had to be, in a sense, like that air marshal on the plane, somehow bound by the effect of sin and death, and yet, at the same time, sinless himself.

He had to infiltrate humanity and be one of us in order to be able to defeat the enemy from within. And thus, God sent his son in the likeness of sinful flesh.

You know, if Jesus had so much as given in to one single temptation or entertained an evil thought, the game would have been all over. And so, from the inception, his inception in Mary's womb until his death on the cross, Jesus had to lead and die as a blameless man, filled by the Spirit.

Jesus had to do this while at the same time retaining his humanity in full, not relying on, as it were, a superhuman effort in order to do that.

[ 10 : 05 ] And what happens is that having achieved that through his death and resurrection, the Spirit that filled Jesus is now the same Spirit that is given to us who are in Christ Jesus to free us from the law of sin and death in order that the just requirements of the law might be fulfilled in us.

And so, notice again how carefully Paul chooses his words in verse 4 and 5. He says that the just requirement of the law is not just fulfilled for us or on our behalf, apart from us, but also in us. And yet, it is in the passive. Paul does not say that we fulfill the law. We do not fulfill the just requirements of the law. It is Christ's work alone, his life, his death, his resurrection, that allows us to be righteous in God's eyes.

But yet, at the same time, that righteousness is in a sense not alien to us because the Spirit of life that is in us somehow achieves a transfer of Christ's righteousness from his life into ours. We have Christ's righteousness in us because we have Christ's Spirit. Friends, do you have many things that you might be ashamed of in life?

[ 11 : 27 ] Evil thoughts, selfish acts, unkind words, not to mention some of the bad habits that we seem to want to get rid of but never seem to be able to.

Well, the truth is that these are things that indeed we should be shameful of. but the more powerful truth is that for those of us who are in Christ Jesus, we no longer face the condemnation for having done these things.

There is now, therefore, no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus for the law of Spirit of life has set you free from the law of sin and of death.

But secondly, the next thing that happens is that when we have the Spirit of Christ, not only are we free from condemnation, we are also free to walk according to the Spirit. So all of a sudden, whatever we do is no longer tainted by sin in God's eyes.

When in verse 5, Paul says that we no longer walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit, he is not saying this as a command. Paul is not saying that if you walk according to the Spirit, then you will be in Christ.

[ 12 : 40 ] Neither is he saying if you walk, if you are in Christ, then you will need to walk according to the Spirit. Rather, Paul is saying that you will walk according to the Spirit when you are in Christ Jesus.

So suddenly, everything we do, the mundane even and the insignificant, can now be something that we glorify God and please God with. So you can clean toilets and do it according to the Spirit.

You can wash the dishes and do it according to the Spirit. So in that sense, all work has become sacred work. Our entire lives become an offering holy and pleasing to God.

But more, at the same time, when you live according to the Spirit, you begin to set your mind on the Spirit as well. The Spirit begins to transform the way we do things.

You now do it increasingly in a manner that is consistent with God's Spirit. So whereas you could clean the toilet grudgingly in the past, you now do it in a selfless manner.

[ 13 : 49 ] If you are a doctor or a lawyer, you start exercising your profession with the heart of God. You combine compassion and justice with your technical expertise as well.

And when you set your mind on the Spirit, you also begin to turn your life more and more towards the things which please God. You begin to desire to tell others about Jesus.

You increase your commitment and love towards God's people to build them up and to encourage them. You cultivate a greater love for prayer and for God's Word because you appreciate more the grace of God in your life.

Now, none of this, of course, is instantaneous. and sometimes we get, I guess, we grow impatient and we want to see dramatic results in our lives. That may happen, I guess, from time to time.

But the picture here is one of slow, even unnoticeable transformation, like the work of the water and the wind on the Great Ocean Road coastline or the Grand Canyon.

[ 14 : 58 ] At any moment, it doesn't seem like anything might be happening. but over time, as you look back, you see the full effect of what the Spirit has been doing in your life.

The converse is also true. Without the Spirit, what shapes us is the flesh and the law of sin. We are not masters of our own destiny, thinking that, you know, we can choose between right and wrong, life and death.

Instead, we are shaped by one of two powerful forces, either by God through His Spirit or else by the flesh which is enslaved to sin.

Without Christ, nothing we do pleases God because in verse 7 it says, it does not submit to God's law. It is not so much what we do that is hostile to God, but the fact that we are doing it without the Spirit.

we are doing it tenaciously, clinging to the fact that we can do it our way. Lastly, we come to the part where the Spirit gives us life and raises us from the dead.

[16:14] Friends, imagine your life to be like that of a laptop computer. Many of us think that we are alive because, like a computer, we are plugged into the hole in the wall.

And we are living because we have unlimited access to the gigawatt power of the generators that are down there in the Latrobe Valley. And then somehow when death comes, we think that, you know, the cord is pulled out from the wall and then our screen goes blank.

Well, I think a more helpful image to have is to see that without the Spirit, all we are reliant on is the battery pack in the back of our laptop. You are not so much alive as in the process of death and decay.

Kept alive by a dwindling source of life which God in His grace has given to us for this life. The thing is, unlike the laptop computer, we don't know where or how full this battery life is, whether we are at 98% or whether we are at 2%.

But if we are in Christ Jesus, then verse 10, if Christ is in you, though the body is dead or dying or decaying because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness.

[17:35] That is, it is only through the Spirit that we get plugged back into the wall, into that never-ending source of life which is God. For if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through His Spirit that dwells in you.

Friends, I want you to see the amazing parallel that is happening here. Paul is saying that what gives us life and raises us even from death is the same Spirit and the same power which God raised Christ from the dead.

The power of the single most amazing event in history is being repeated in each and every one of our lives if we are in Christ Jesus because of the Spirit that dwells in us.

To me, I find that that's mind-boggling that what God did in Christ on the cross or rather from the tomb as He rose from the dead is something that is happening in each and every one of us.

And so I want to say that my faith is actually tied up with the reality of Jesus' bodily resurrection. It is the one event on which my faith rises or falls.

[18:59] And if you want to convert me into an atheist, then all you need to do is convince me that Jesus did not rise from the dead. Of course, the converse is also true.

if you are still trying to work out Christianity, then can I suggest that it is the resurrection of Jesus on which you should judge the truth of the Christian faith.

If Christ did rise from the dead, then there must be a God and this God must be the Father of Jesus Christ. And as we've seen tonight, this question goes to the heart of life and death itself.

If this is true, then you've found life. And you mustn't tarry in trying to work it out. So please, if you have any questions tonight about Jesus, please come and talk to me or one of the leaders after the service tonight.

And we'd love to help answer your questions. Or else, put your name on the response lips in the newsletter and put it in the white box. And we'll be more than happy to get in contact with you.

[20:09] Well, for the rest of us who are in Christ Jesus, Paul concludes in verse 12 by saying, So then, brothers and sisters, we are dead not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh, you will die.

But if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. And this is the message that I would like to encourage all of us tonight. and that is that Paul is encouraging us not to take the Spirit's work for granted.

Yes, we are in Christ Jesus. Yes, that means the Spirit has freed us and is working in us to enable us to live for Him. Yes, that means that we will be raised from the dead with Christ.

But how do we respond? Do we become blasé about it? Or are we put on to live our lives in light of that truth? Knowing that we are no longer dead as to the flesh, do we live according not to the flesh but to the Spirit?

Do we continue the daily discipline of putting to death the deeds of the body, to say no to what displeases God, and to cultivate a life that does?

[21:23] We don't do this because that's what we need to be in order to be in Christ Jesus. but we know that because God is already working in us, then all the more we should do these things.

Let's pray.