

How To Be Set Free from Sin

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Preacher: Phil Meulman

[0 : 0 0] This is the evening service at Holy Trinity on February the 7th 1999 the preacher is Phil Merlman his sermon is entitled How to be set free from sin and is from Acts chapter 13 verses 13 to 43 Well you may like to follow along on Acts chapter 13 on page 897 so if you've got your Bibles open keep them open let's pray God open our hearts and our minds help us to understand what this passage says and help us to be excited by it and to live it out for Jesus sake Amen Well if you were to go out into the streets and do a survey with passers-by asking them what they had to do to be free from sin what do you think their response would be?

Could be a range of things couldn't it? Could be someone might say well do the right thing whatever that means someone might say don't interfere in people's lives except when they are in need don't steal don't steal don't commit adultery keep the peace wherever possible obey the law a whole range of things that people might say you can probably think of some things yourselves and there would be many responses I think in this society today because our society is a very pluralistic society very multi-faith people think of all sorts of ways to be saved and there would also be responses from people that say there is no such thing as sin I've had it said to me I've been hit in the arm by someone saying to me there's no such thing as sin well

I might be right according to that person now if you were to ask a law abiding Jew what they had to do to be free from sin their response would go something like this obey the law of Moses make animal sacrifices for the sin that you have committed against God and so on and these are the sorts of things that the apostle Paul did before his radical conversion to following Jesus Christ and now that he is a committed follower of Jesus we see that his whole approach to telling people about how they may come into a relationship with God is radically different to his former way of life and understanding yet Paul is committed to the word of God to the scriptures he's committed to what he's been brought up with and understood from scriptures he's committed to that because he sees that scripture points to salvation and points to forgiveness of sin which is brought about through the Lord Jesus Christ and now that he knows that salvation is brought about through Jesus his job is to preach that message his job or his mission is to preach that message at whatever opportunity he has given so verses 13 to 43 here of Acts chapter 13 is a great opportunity for us and for him to show how the scriptures point to Jesus and how they point to Jesus as the way the truth and the life and how they point to Jesus and say that through Jesus we can be set free from sin the opportunity for Paul is brought about as they go on their first missionary journey they leave Antioch and they head out and he's with Barnabas and with John and then John leaves them at a point and they get into another place

Antioch another city of Antioch in the region of Pisidia which is a little bit further up and they are there for some time and they enter into a Jewish synagogue there where they hear the scriptures read and a great opportunity comes before him a great opportunity it is because he is invited by the officials of that synagogue to give a word of exhortation as this passage says to speak to those present in the synagogue after the reading from the scriptures of the law and the prophets so they probably come to church much like you or the synagogue much like you have heard the word read and then he's asked to speak well just imagine if you were given an opportunity to speak a word of exhortation what sort of exhortation would you give in this day and age would it be to say buy commonwealth bank shares because they're doing so well would you want to say that would you want to suggest or exhort someone that you should send the kids to private schools because they're much better than state schools you get better education is that the right sort of exhortation you should give do you want to exhort

Holden's over Ford's or do you want to exhort the Swans footy team well that would be a good thing to do but I don't think that would be the right thing is that the sort of exhortation that you might give if

someone gave you an opportunity to speak in a public situation or would you want to share about the freedom that we know as Christians that we have through the Lord Jesus Christ well that's what Paul does here in this passage but as we look at this passage I want you to notice where he starts preaching his sermon from he doesn't start with Jesus he starts at a place where his audience will identify and for all of us as Christians I think that this is something very important that we need to consider when we have an opportunity to preach or to speak about the gospel of Jesus Christ we need to start at a point where the people whom we are speaking to will identify with what we're saying so Paul starts his sermon here where the people are at they're Jews they know what the situation's all about and Paul has a captive audience and he says in verse 16 he begins his sermon you Israelites and others who fear God listen in some respects

[6 : 41] Paul's task is rather easy because this audience already has a belief in God and in fact the God that Paul is talking about is the God of their ancestors and it looks as if this word of exhortation that they are about to receive is all about Israel's amazing history notice how Paul frames it here in verses 17 to 22 you Israelites and others who fear God listen the God of this people Israel chose our ancestors and made the people great during their stay in the land of Egypt and with uplifted arm he led them out of it for about 40 years he put up with them in the wilderness after he had destroyed seven nations and land of Canaan he gave them to their land as an inheritance for about 450 years after that he gave them judges until the time of the prophet Samuel then they asked for a king and God gave them Saul son of Kish a man of the tribe of Benjamin who reigned for 40 years when he had removed him he made David their king notice here the emphasis is on God who is it that made Israel great while captive in Egypt it's God who is it that gave them their land

Israel their land as an inheritance it's God who gave them judges until the time of the prophet Samuel it's God who gave them a king God now when King David comes to the throne it's one of the high points of Israel's history and again it is God who made David Israel's king calling him a man after my heart who will carry out my wishes so Paul gives this history of Israel and he's no doubt got their attention with this recapitulation of the history and the people would really like would really have liked what they heard he's preaching good stuff here he's telling the history and he's got it right it's really good stuff so he's got their attention they're hooked now having reached

King David having reached David Paul jumps he skips over the next 800 or so years of Israel's history and he jumps straight to the promised Saviour Jesus who was descended from David's line as verse 23 suggests and mentions he moves to a guy called John the Baptist who we read about in the beginning of the Gospels he mentions John the Baptist as his immediate forerunner who pointed away from himself to this bloke called Jesus John the Baptist ministry decreased so that Jesus' ministry could increase John sort of fades away so Jesus' ministry is able to sort of flourish and Paul is now able to follow John the Baptist example and direct his hearer's attentions to this same Jesus that John the Baptist spoke about as well well there are some good things here for us all to think about firstly when we have an opportunity to speak about the

Gospel of Jesus Christ we should know our audience and that's why I think it's important that we have friendships and build up relationships when we speak about to be able to have opportunities to speak about the Gospel of Jesus and we need to know where those people are at so know your audience when you have an opportunity to proclaim the Gospel there's a great little book written years ago by a guy called John Chapman called Know and Tell the Gospel and it gives you some really good starting points about how to understand your audience how to sort of lead into speaking about the Gospel and so on it's a good book read it and it'll give you some ideas as well as the Bible that gives you really good ideas as well about how to preach the Gospel so know your audience secondly when you have an opportunity to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ preach about Jesus so often when we get opportunities to speak about our Christian faith the focus is lost as we get sidetracked into all sorts of secondary issues issues such as church practice you know whether I should be up here wearing robes right now whether what denomination we should belong to and all those sorts of things whether or not we should pray with our eyes open or closed when we're praying the sorts of hymns that we should sing should we sing dirgy hymns because you know they've been singing them for hundreds of years or should we you know be happy clapping all those sorts of things we get so caught up in those sorts of church practices that the focus of what we're meant to do gets lost when we have an opportunity to proclaim the Christian gospel we should preach

Jesus not church politics and we should follow John the Baptist example and Paul's example here and focus on Jesus when speaking about our Christian faith well in verses 26 through to 37 we see Paul's focus here as he preaches and it's a twofold focus he preaches the death and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ I'm not going to read those verses to you but I simply want to ask a question what does Paul do here quite simply he tells the story of Jesus just as he is told the story of Israel and in doing so he focuses on the two great saving events of Jesus his death and his resurrection and he demonstrates that both were fulfillments of what God had predicted in scripture and he concedes in verse 27 that the residents of

[12:50] Jerusalem and their leaders did not recognise Jesus nevertheless he adds that in condemning Jesus which is what they did these people condemned him they fulfilled the words of the prophets which were read every Sabbath as verse 27 says now they condemned Jesus these leaders condemned the Jewish leaders condemned Jesus because they didn't like him they condemned him even though they were unable to find a legitimate reason to have him put to death and they condemned him because they didn't like him so they went and asked Pontius Pilate said we don't like this guy can you get rid of him maybe not those words but similar sorts of expressions and in the same way that the Old Testament prophets were rejected if you know some Old Testament history if they were rejected for the message they proclaimed so too was Jesus he was rejected by the highest authorities now the curious thing that is going on here is that while

Jesus death is brought about in one sense by the hands of sinful human beings the other thing that we see here is that all that is done is done in fulfillment of prophecy and so Paul's words here to his Jewish audience is that this is good news that Jesus has been put to death although Jesus died a cruel death we know all about his death on the cross we also read that God raised him from the dead as verses 30 and 33 state God raised Jesus from the dead and it's because of Jesus death and resurrection that Paul goes on to say God has fulfilled for us what he promised to our ancestors and in order to substantiate this claim Paul goes on to quote three scriptures three verses of scripture from the Old Testament which was the only scriptures he didn't have the New Testament when he went around proclaiming the gospel he reads three pieces of scripture the first one comes from the second psalm psalm 2 verse 7 it says you are my son today

I have begotten you or today I have become your father psalm psalm psalm psalm psalm 2 is psalm and Paul uses it here to talk about Jesus as the king and he's not just an earthly king who fades away as king David did and as monarchs do over the centuries and we've heard in the news how king Hussain has he died on his death beds still in a life support system.

We've heard in the news how people sort of fade away and so on. Jesus is more than an earthly king. He is an eternal king because he is risen from the dead.

His body did not decay, wasn't corrupted. And Paul has also probably linked this psalm here with God's promise to King David that his descendant whose throne would be established would be his son.

[16:16] Now Jesus is a descendant of David. In verse 34 Paul goes on to quote the second passage of scripture. He paraphrases Isaiah 55 verse 3.

He says, I will give you the holy promises made to David. He's talking about as to the raising him from the dead. I will give you the holy promises made to David.

But what is the promises made to David? The promise is a kingly throne which would be established forever. A throne which would go on forever, would never fade away.

And this kingly throne is established by Jesus and his resurrection. It is permanent. Jesus' throne and reign is permanent.

It's eternal. eternal. And thirdly, Paul quotes from Psalm 16 about the nature of God's holy one. He says, you will not let your holy one experience corruption.

[17:20] Now, a better reading or a better understanding for me of the word corruption here is decay. It will not decay. You will not let your holy one experience decay. Jesus' body didn't decay, did it?

He rose from the dead three days later. King David's body decayed, but the son of David, Jesus, whom God raised from the dead, did not decay.

So, Paul uses scripture to point to who Jesus is. The Old Testament points to who Jesus is. And he uses texts which are familiar to those he speaks to.

Not misconstruing them, but helping his audience to understand that God has fulfilled what he said he will do. After all, God is a God of promises.

Made big promises and he's kept them all. And this is all good news. Jesus is the Messiah. But it's not just automatically passed on to everybody.

[18 : 27] And for this reason, Paul's sermon concludes here with an invitation to eternal life for those who are listening. So in verses 38 and 39 he reads on, Let it be known to you therefore, my brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you.

By this Jesus, everyone who believes is set free from all those sins from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses. Jesus is the one who frees us from our sins.

Through Jesus as the Messiah and the Saviour, the forgiveness of sins is made possible. Through him, everyone who believes is freed from all things from which they could not be freed through the law of Moses, says Paul.

The apostle here, Paul is referring to justification, the divine act whereby a holy God declares a believing sinner to be righteous and acceptable to be before him because Jesus Christ has borne his sins on the cross, borne that person's sins on the cross.

And the sinner, the person who accepts this and believes it, is thus made righteous in Christ. The forgiveness of sins therefore is based on faith alone in Jesus Christ.

[19 : 56] It has absolutely nothing whatsoever to do with the works of the law, of the Mosaic law, or any law for that matter. The holy God allowed his wrath to come upon people because of their sin and rebellion.

And the only way people can return to a relationship with God is through the blood of his son, Jesus Christ, through Jesus' death on the cross. we can't by our own efforts keep the law because just one breach, just one tiny little breach of that law makes us a law breaker and a sinner.

Now in Old Testament times the lamb was slain for the forgiveness of sins, foreshadowing the lamb of God who was to come. In order to be acceptable before God one must accept the finished work of Jesus the lamb of God on the cross.

At the cross Jesus took all our sins upon himself. And when we accept that we come into a relationship with him.

And that is when according to Isaiah, the prophet Isaiah, God clothes us with garments of salvation and wraps us with robes of righteousness. Isaiah says in chapter 61, I will rejoice in the Lord.

[21 : 22] My whole being shall exult in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation. He has covered me with the robe of righteousness.

God no longer extends his wrath upon the person who by faith comes to Christ. But rather he declares that person righteous before him and he never again condemns them.

that person who comes to God in that manner is wrapped in Jesus Christ himself, his robe of righteousness.

And this is the only hope, the only hope for humankind despite what others would like to say. Well, Paul now gives us a warning in verses 40 and 41.

He says, Beware therefore that what the prophet said does not happen to you. And he quotes, Look you scoffers, be amazed and perish, for in your days I am doing a work, a work that you will never believe, even if someone tells you.

[22 : 34] Paul concludes his message of the good news of salvation in Christ Jesus by quoting a warning from the Old Testament prophet, a guy called Habakkuk. It's like saying, remember, Pearl Harbor, this guy is saying.

Remember Pearl Harbor. Now the Jews in Habakkuk's day refused to believe in the impending invasion by the Chaldeans, but it came. It came.

And he's saying, Won't you respond to the good news? Won't you respond to the good news? Take these warnings and respond. Do not reject the Saviour whom God has sent.

Paul responded to Paul's powerful invitation.

As Paul and Barnabas were going out in verses 42 and 43, as Paul and Barnabas were going out, the people urged them to speak about these things again the next Sabbath.

[23 : 37] When the meeting of the synagogue broke up, many Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas who spoke to them and urged them to continue in the grace of God.

The meeting spilled out onto the street and they said, please come back next week. Please come back. These people had heard the word of God spoken.

This word was spoken by men of God through the power of the Holy Spirit. Well, God has not rejected his people, has he?

God here has chosen the fathers as a testimony of his love, of his care, protection, deliverance and salvation despite the human condition of weakness, failure and rebellion.

God has chosen a saviour, Jesus, who is the fulfilment of all of God's promises to Abraham and to David. Jesus is the king of kings.

[24 : 42] He is the Messiah. He is God's anointed one and in him, in Jesus Christ, in him alone, we can be set free from sin.

He is the justifier of all and he acquits all that place their faith in him. Well, today is a day of salvation.

We live in the days since Jesus' death on the cross and his resurrection. We know and have heard about that. Jesus has risen. Perhaps some of you here are in the same spiritual condition as many in the congregation who heard Paul in the synagogue nearly 2,000 years ago.

You too have a choice. Accept Jesus Christ, the only one who has power to set you free from sin. The only one who can offer you a relationship with God.

If you've already done that, then you will never again be condemned by him. You are free from sin. Continue on in the grace of God.

[25 : 53] Your heart will forever be filled with joy now and in eternity because you have a relationship that no one, nothing can destroy.

If you haven't done that, tonight's another opportunity. You have one more opportunity to come to Jesus by faith. Come to him and receive your robe of righteousness, the forgiveness of your sins. If you refuse him, you are still not free from sin. It's your choice. One of the great hymn writers, a guy called Isaac Watts, wrote a hymn called When I Survey the Wondrous Cross and talks about Jesus' death and the amazing thing that he's done.

If you grab your blue hymn book and turn to number 146, seven, we're just going to sing it. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

[28 : 51] Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

[33 : 51] Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.