

GOOD FRIDAY - Dead to Sin

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Date: 25 March 2005

Preacher: Paul Barker

[0 : 00] This is the Good Friday service at Holy Trinity on the 25th of March 2005.

The preacher is Paul Barker. His sermon is entitled Dead to Sin and is based on Romans chapter 6 verses 1 to 14.

It's a few years now, or just a few years, since the Taliban regime was brought down in Afghanistan. Only slowly since then have the Afghan people begun to learn to live in some freedom.

Their fear gradually giving way to freedom. Their terror gradually giving way to music and dancing, to women's education, to feasting, to toys and games and so on.

The old oppression has given way to liberation. They're now dead to Taliban tyranny. They're alive to democratic freedom.

[1 : 14] That one example, relatively trivial by comparison to the themes of Good Friday, shows or reminds us that a regime change leads to a life change.

For that's what Jesus' death is all about. Let's pray. God our Father, teach us today from your word we pray, that our minds may be conformed to your truth and our lives transformed in accordance with the character and life of your Son, Jesus Christ.

May we therefore bring him honour and glory in all that we do and think and say. Amen. From almost the beginning of human existence in the Garden of Eden, at the beginning of time, more or less, humanity has been under the rule or regime of sin.

From the fall of Adam and Eve, as they rejected the commands of God and fell to the temptations of the serpent in the garden and were then expelled from the garden, sin has reigned.

Sin has ruled. Sin has been the master. It's exercised its dominion over humanity. The son of Adam and Eve, Cain, killed his brother, Abel.

[2 : 48] Before he killed him, he was warned by God that sin is lurking at your door. Its desire is for you, but you must master it.

And Cain didn't. Indeed, Cain couldn't. And Abel was killed. And sin took its grip even deeper and stronger.

Sin, of course, sin is not just murder, as Cain did to Abel. Sin is any failure to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength.

And sin is any failure to love any neighbour as we love ourselves. We may be very good people, noble and upright in our community's eyes, and yet in the perfect standard of God, fall short.

That's sin. And from the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden all the way through human history, sin has exercised dominion.

[3 : 55] And it's exercised that dominion especially in death. That was the argument in Romans chapter 5, the chapter leading in to Romans chapter 6 that was just read for us.

It means that humans are enslaved in their sinful lives. It's not just that periodically we choose to do the wrong thing, we make a mistake, but that it's actually more insidious than that.

We're enslaved by sin. We're in its grip. We can't shrug it off. We can't get free of its tentacles around us and in us. We're unable to be perfect in our own strength.

So tomorrow morning you might wake up and decide today's the day that I'll be sinless from now on. Everything I do will be right and perfect. I'll be full of love for God and for my neighbour.

But if you're honest with yourself as your head touches the pillow that night, you will know that you have failed yet again. No matter how hard we've tried, we cannot shake up off the grip of sin from our life.

[4 : 59] It may be even that virtually everything we've done and said and thought has been right and pure and noble. But there may well be plenty of things that we've not done that we ought to have done in an expression of love to God and love to our neighbour.

We cannot master sin as the story of Cain and Abel so graphically and devastatingly reminds us. And through the rest of the Old Testament, a history of a couple of thousand years or so from Cain all the way through to the beginning of the New Testament, the story shows the people of God consistently under the grip of sin.

No prophet that was raised up by God could free them from it. No king that was raised up by God could free them from it. No priest could free them from it. No sacrificial system, no laws of God, no words of God, no psalms from God, no proverbs from God, none of that had the power within it to free the people of God, free humanity from the rule, the dominion, the mastery of sin made evident in a death with a sting.

And we know all too well if we reflect honestly on our own society, especially over the last couple of hundred years, for all the advance in education, in health, in the economy, in world peace, in education, in all those things where human ingenuity and skill shows itself in its great array.

There is no advance morally. There is no advance over sin. There has been no ability to shake off that grip of sin that infests human souls.

[6 : 44] The Old Testament knew that the words of God, of law and the prophets and the priests, they were not going to achieve what God wanted, but they were looking forward to the great liberator from the regime of sin.

And he came, Jesus Christ. And we know very well, I think, that his powerful death on that first Good Friday was a death to deal with our sin.

At least we know it very well to bring us forgiveness for our sins. We know very well, I suspect, most of us, that as he hung on the cross, Jesus died to pay the penalty for our sins so that we don't need to die an eternal death, that we can live with God with our sins forgiven.

True that is, a fundamental truth of the Christian gospel and a fundamental truth of Good Friday, that Jesus' death pays the price in our place as our substitute, that we need not die cut off from God for eternity, but that when we die a physical death, the sting's been removed by Jesus' death and our death becomes a gateway to eternal life with God in heaven.

Jesus dying as our substitute that we may live forever forgiven. And that has been the thrust of the argument in Romans chapters 1 to 5 leading up to this passage in Romans chapter 6.

[8 : 16] But by itself, it leaves itself open to abuse. That if Jesus' death was simply to bring us forgiveness for our sins, well, we might as well continue to sin with impunity knowing that God will just keep forgiving.

And indeed, there might be some who might mount the perverse argument that if it's a good thing for the grace and mercy of God to be evident, then in fact, the more we sin, the more grace and mercy we might see from God.

And surely then you could mount that perverse argument to say, well, keep on sinning so that grace may abound more and more and more. That is a stupid argument.

But many of us in our lives actually live as though that was our thinking. Paul won't have a bar of that. He says in verse 2 of Romans 6, in answer to the question rhetorically stated, should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound by no means.

Heaven forbid, he says. It's very strong language. Not a bar of it. Don't go down that path of thinking, he is saying at the beginning of verse 2. And he argues in the verses that follow that not only is Jesus our substitute in dying for us so that we are forgiven, but in addition to that and in some ways deeper and more profoundly, Jesus is our representative on the cross so that when he died, we die in him.

[9 : 53] When he was buried, we are buried with him. And when he rose from the grave, we rose in him. That is, he is our representative and what he did, in a sense, we did in him.

A little bit like, and again, the example is trivial by comparison. If you're a member of a union and your union rep says, we go out on strike, you go out on strike. He's your representative, what he's declared, you do.

When Jesus died, was buried and rose, there's a sense in which he is our representative means that we died, were buried and rose in and with him.

Now the significance of this argument is this, that sin's power was defeated in Jesus dying to sin, in being buried and rising from the dead.

Sin's power is defeated by its penalty being paid. Not only bringing us forgiveness, but bringing us liberation from its grip and from its claim over us.

[11 : 04] To put it another way, if you're indebted to somebody, they exercise some control over you. It may simply be financial control over you in that the money you have to remit to the bank or the lending institution or whatever it is.

But at its worst sort of form, when we're indebted to somebody, their control over us becomes much greater. We see that graphically described in books such as Uncle Tom's Cabin which portrayed the mid-19th century slavery of blacks in the United States.

so that unable to be freed from debt they just stayed as slaves and then in more modern times in a novel such as The Grapes of Wrath in the depression years of America as people became more and more indebted, their employers exercised more and more control over them and over their lives.

Sin's like that. It exercises dominion over us and control over us because we're in its debt. We can't pay off the debt, the penalty. But as Jesus died paying the penalty for us that grip of sin on us is also loosened.

It's not simply that we're forgiven but we continue plunging into sin but that its hold on us is weakened and loosened as Jesus died on the cross on that first Good Friday.

[12 : 30] Our union in Christ that I've mentioned as he is our representative is in a sense symbolised in baptism. Paul uses that analogy in verses 3 and 4.

So that in a sense in baptism as you plunge down buried under the water we're dying with Christ buried with Christ and we rise up above the waters of baptism to new life. Now that's symbolic of our union that is real in Christ.

Verses 3 and 4 say do you not know that all of us who've been baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death? Therefore we've been buried with him by baptism into death so that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father so we too might walk in newness of life.

For if we've been united with him in a death like his we'll certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. On the cross when Jesus died the grip of sin is weakened and loosened.

Finally we see after 2,000 years of history in the scriptures a human being who exercises mastery over sin the perfect life shrugging off sin dying and rising to defeat it and because we are united in him through faith symbolised in baptism then we too have sin's grip on us loosened by Jesus' death.

[14 : 08] Now all of that that Paul discusses at length in these verses in Romans chapter 6 is speaking about what God has done for us in Christ's death.

It's past tense through this passage in what is already the case since grip on us is loosened we have died to sin because we're united in Christ and we've risen to a new life walking in newness of life.

That's already the past what God has done for us. Embedded in this chapter are clear statements of the purpose for which this has already happened.

The end of verse 4 so that we too might walk in newness of life. At the end of verse 6 so that we might no longer be enslaved to sin.

That's why Jesus died. Not just to forgive us true though that is but so that we might walk now in newness of life so that we might live now no longer enslaved to sin.

[15 : 16] It's a moral purpose and it's not just a purpose of forgiveness and it's not just a purpose of heaven at the end but it's a purpose for each day that we live different new lives day by day on earth.

The cross of Christ is meant to be impacting our daily lives our moral choices our character our words our thoughts and our actions we must no longer be subject to sin in our daily lives is the purpose of why Jesus died for us.

The power of that change is the power of Jesus perfect life the power of his blood shed the power of his resurrection over the dead.

As a result then of what God has done and following on from the purpose of why God has done it this passage finishes with three commands they're the first commands in the whole of the letter to the Romans they are built on what God has done that is in response to what God has done this is what we must do the first command is verse 11 so then as a result of all of what God has done you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus the first command is to think right to consider right to regard yourself as is the case dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus the first thing of practical application then is to make sure what we think is the truth often we

despise our minds and our thinking sometimes people say to me our sermon should be a little bit more practical about what

I should do but time and time again the scriptures tell us first think right before acting right get your mind right for a person who's not a Christian Paul is described in chapter one their mind is darkened and depraved their thinking is not truth their thinking is actually inverted and perverted but as a result of the gospel our minds are renewed Paul makes that statement in chapter 12 so here he's saying get your mind right regard yourself as dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus think on what is true so if you were to obey this command of verse 11 and consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God you've got to fill your mind with the truth the scriptures no less keep on filling yourself with the truth of the scriptures keep on renewing your mind with the powerful words of the gospel of God so that what you think is right and remember that that's in the context of a world in which we are bombarded to think what is not true thinking of yourself first thinking of the values of our world rather than the values of God and so on and so forth we have to keep filling our minds with the truth so that we consider ourselves dead to sin and alive to

[18:47] God in Christ Jesus second command is in the beginning of verse 12 and goes through to the first part of verse 13 in effect therefore do not let sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies to make you obey their passions no longer present your members to sin as instruments of wickedness they're negative commands a prohibition don't do this that is don't let sin rain it used to rain before the cross it used to rain before you were a Christian don't let it keep on raining in your life don't let it keep on exercising dominion over you in the words thoughts actions and so on of your daily living the regime has changed live under the liberator not under the old oppressor is in effect what's being said here how easy it is having been liberated to go on living as though you're under the old oppressor we see that in other ways in society how often somebody who's been abused keeps going back to an abuser how somebody who's perhaps lived with an alcoholic keeps on going back to be with an alcoholic or whatever it may be we've been liberated by

Jesus we're to live under the liberator not under the old oppressive regime of sin don't let sin rain it wants to keep raining in your life it'll try to keep raining in your life don't let it you're under Jesus now and under his dominion not under sin so in your daily life as you speak with people interact with people in your work in your study in your leisure in your home don't offer yourself back to the old regime as verse 13 begins no longer that is stop presenting your members that is your your hands your mouth your eyes your body your life stop offering it back to sin as instruments of wickedness stop doing that because that dominion's been broken by the death of Jesus on the cross shun sin flee it stand against it resist it powerful because of the death of Jesus not in your own strength shaking it off but in the strength of the cross and resurrection of

Jesus that has broken its grip and dominion Paul is also in effect saying here how incongruous it is for Christians to keep on living under the regime of sin sometimes we think of our lives as having a sort of big disjunction when we die so that on earth this is our life it's sort of a continuity and then we die and there's a big discontinuity and we arrive in heaven but it's in fact in one sense truer to say that the big discontinuity is when we became Christian we lived a pagan life perhaps we became a Christian and our Christian life is in a continuity with our heavenly life to an extent so live now the life free from sin is in effect what Paul is saying if Jesus has died to sin and you've died to sin in him then now we should be living a life free from the dominion of sin that doesn't mean that we can be perfect here and now that final end to the presence of sin in our life will only come the day we enter heaven but now sin's dominion has been broken the mopping up operation in a sense is going on we're coming out of living under the old regime to live lives fit for heaven now daily in our life that's the second command and it's balanced by the third which is the positive so often in the scriptures when we're told not to do something we are also told to do something in its place here is a good example don't let sin exercise dominion and don't keep presenting your members to sin was the second of these commands we looked at and the third the positive counterpart at the end of verse 13 rather present your members to God as instruments of righteousness that is our focus is not to be on sin and trying to resist it but positively our focus is to be on

God and offering ourselves to him our members as it's called here the parts of us the functions and the faculties of us our words our thoughts our behavior our character and all of that our whole selves offered to God as Paul will say later in this letter as a living sacrifice to God because of the mercy of God extended to us in Christ one of the big failures in particular of Western Christians is that we are too blasé about sin in our lives so we keep on excusing our envy we ignore our anger

we cultivate lovelessness we foster petty jealousies we indulge in racism we live for today and for our self and not for God and not for Christ when did you last resist some temptation for the sake of Jesus Christ when did you last break some sinful pattern of behavior in your life whether it's anger or hostility to a particular person when did you last reconcile yourself to somebody for the sake of Christ and his death for you when did you last pray for God's power to change you to make you more like Jesus see this is very practical this is about any sin in our life whether it's greed or gluttony pride or envy or anger or laziness some of the seven deadly sins that we've been looking at in the evening service in recent weeks or about a whole host of other sins you see on the positive counterpart when we're offering our members to God as instruments of righteousness as the end of verse 13 says it means that we will deliberately and intentionally be humble be loving even of unlovable people will be hospitable will be patient will be kind will be careful with our weaker brothers and sisters we'll share the gospel with people for the sake of Christ it means that we won't cheat at work that we'll pay our taxes that we'll be honest with our finances that we won't be greedy with our money that we'll be generous with our time and that we'll seek to serve God above all in our lives it means that we'll be careful with what words we use that we won't be lazy with our use of ourself but we'll be generous and sacrificial in working for others and their benefit but when we keep on sinning when we let sin exercise its dominion over us we're actually thumbing our nose at the cross of Christ we're living lives of gross hypocrisy if we claim to be saved by the same cross which we're despising when we indulge our anger our envy our pride and our malice people who are who are living in the cross of Christ so that Christians do not continue in sin a practical purpose for this letter and Jesus died on the cross so that people do not continue now here and now in sin the regime change has come it is meant to bring a life change now consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus offering yourselves to God as instruments of righteousness

[27 : 04] Amen