

Set Free

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Date: 26 November 2016

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[0 : 0 0] Well, let me add my good morning. My name is Sam. If I haven't had the chance to meet you yet, hopefully I will. As Jimmy has already expressed, we have just finished four weeks of soaking in our vision as a church and trying to get clear on where it is that God is leading us. And I get the joy of a little gap, a little breath for us before we launch all into the craziness and excitement that is Christmas. And so we're going to soak in Romans 8 for two weeks. And as I've started preparing this week, I kind of wish that we were soaking in Romans 8 for about 10 weeks, because there is a lot in there that is just incredibly life-giving. But we've got two, so we're going to try and make the most of it. So let me pray and ask that God would say the things that he needs to say so that we can get the life that he wants to put into us today.

Father God, we thank you for gathering us. We thank you for your word. We thank you for the gift that we can open it, confident that we are loved by you because of Jesus. Please give us the ability to focus our hearts and minds now and to hear what it is you want to say. Amen.

Now, in a room this size, I can fairly confidently say that there would be some people in this room who would identify as Christians. So you love Jesus. He's important to you. He's a big part of the way you make decisions about your life. He's fairly central. It's not a question for you. You're in. That's who you are. There would also be some people in this room who aren't sure where they stand. It could be that you kind of want to be in, but you're not really sure if you're in, or maybe you're not sure whether or not to take that final step to say, okay, I want to be a Christian. I want to make that part of who I am. And then as well as those two groups, there would be in a room this size some people who aren't Christians, who are confident that they're not Christians, who might even be confident that they don't want to be Christians. They don't want to follow Jesus. But there is something that all three groups would have in common.

And that is the awkwardness around the gap between the things that Christians say and the lives that Christians live. If you're a Christian, it could be that that is a source of doubt for you. It could be your own gap between this is what I know Jesus says, and this is what I did this week, or the way I treated my mother, or the way I treated my boss, or the way I responded to the person who overtook me in traffic. You know the gap. And for you, if you're a Christian, it could be that that is a gap that makes you ask questions about just how real your faith in Jesus really is. If you're not sure if you're a Christian, this doubt, this guilt could be why you're not sure. You might have this nagging question of could God actually love someone like me when I'm so far away from the obvious and explicit standard that he gives. If you don't want to be a Christian, it could be because of all those Christian hypocrites who say one thing and don't deliver. Or maybe it's just too intimidating. Jesus sounds great, but to actually sign up to try and live what looks like an impossible standard. Gandhi expressed it when he used these words. He said,

I like your Christ. I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ. Said from the outside, but it's not just outsiders throwing stones. Christian musician Brennan Manning said, the greatest single cause of atheism in the world today is Christians who acknowledge Jesus with their lips and walk out the door and deny him by their lifestyle. That is what an unbelieving world simply finds unbelievable. If you've been a Christian for more than a few minutes, you know this tension.

[3 : 53] You know this struggle. It's not just the expectations that others have placed on you. It's your own expectations of what your life as a Christian would be like. You know it doesn't always line up.

You know you fail. You know you make mistakes. You know that driving pressure of guilt to try harder, to serve more, to give more, to go to church more, that guilt that weighs us down and is sometimes even used as a motivator. I remember when I was growing up as a teenager, that was when I first started really engaging what Jesus was about. I would hear testimonies, so stories of how people had placed their trust in Jesus. And almost without exception, they could be summarised as, before I met Jesus I was bad, I met Jesus and now I'm good. Now I don't think it was malicious, but I would hear these stories time after time after time. And I mean, even apart from the pressure to have to be good, to measure up to this picture that was being painted, I was feeling pressure to go and develop a drug habit so that I had a decent bad as contrast to my good for afterwards. Like I thought my testimony is not legit unless there's some, you know, real light and shade in there. I've got to go and invest some time in my bad so that my good looks better, or maybe so that it lowers the bar of good. It can drag the whole thing this way and then maybe the pressure won't be so crushing. It seemed like it then as a teenager, and to be honest with you, sometimes it seems like it now. The thing that's apparently supposed to change when you become a Christian is your behaviour. That's supposed to be the obvious shift. Christians have a worldwide reputation for being hypocrites. And if we're honest, it's probably a fair criticism.

But what does God say to the one who's unsure? What does God say to the one who is crushed by guilt and struggling? What does God say to the one who's pointing the finger at the Christian and calling them a hypocrite? Into the pressure to be good enough, into the fear of failure, and into the hurt and anger that comes from being hurt and mistreated by those who claim to follow Jesus, God says this. Romans 8 verse 1.

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. See, what changes when someone becomes a Christian, first and foremost, is not behaviour. It's verdict. You see, the line that's drawn when somebody starts following Jesus is not good to bad. It's, they are declared innocent.

Condemnation is the thing that's removed. Christians are set free. But set free from what? Because the hypocrite charge comes because sometimes we say, and sometimes people hear, that what we've been set free from is the bad that we used to be. But it can't be that.

[7 : 07] It can't be that we've been set free from being bad because otherwise none of us can stay. That's not our experience. But even more than that, if we look back just a few verses into Romans chapter 7, which Rach read out for us when we were singing before, we've got the apostle Paul giving his testimony.

And it's not a good, bad testimony. I mean, remember, this guy is possibly the greatest missionary the world has ever known, possibly the greatest church planter and pastor of all time.

And listen to his frustration. That his heart's desire to obey God just doesn't line up with his day-to-day actions.

And this is even for a guy that most of us would have looked up to when it comes to his godliness. Listen to his own words. He says, verse 15 of chapter 7, 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's no longer I myself who do it, but it's sin living in me. For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature.

[8 : 17] 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's no longer I who do it, but it's sin living in me that does it. So I find this law at work. 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, 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? You can feel the burden that he is carrying.

In his inner being, in his deepest desire, he wants to live for God. He wants to honour God with his actions, but he looks at his day. He looks at the things he's done and thought and said, and it's just not the same.

[9 : 25] Remember, this is a man who encountered Jesus dramatically. He met Jesus in a blinding light with an audible voice. There's no question for him about whether or not Jesus is real.

His desire is legitimate. But day to day, his life is one of frustration and struggle, and he longs for rescue. But he finds it. Verse 25, In Jesus, there is deliverance.

There is freedom. But that can't mean that he will no longer do these things that are frustrating him. Because having just thanked God for this freedom that he's found in Jesus, the very next thing he says, this is the verse before we get to chapter 8, the very next thing he says in verse 25, he says, Thanks be to God who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Having been rescued, so then I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in my sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.

Having been rescued, there is still a battle going on for Paul daily. His desire and his actions still do not meet up in the way that he wants them to. He still lives the life in this tension of guilt and failure.

[10 : 45] Even though he wants to do what is right, his natural inclination is to go back to the way he used to live without Jesus, to live for himself.

And if you're a Christian, you know this battle. It doesn't take a lot of self-reflection to recognize that we are not what we should be, not even what we want to be.

You know the crushing guilt of failure, especially in light of all that God has done for us in Jesus. But you need to listen again to Romans 8.

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 you free from the law of sin and death.

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 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.

[12 : 08] You have been set free from condemnation if you are a Christian. There is no fear of retribution. There is no worrying that there will be some sort of payment you have to make.

No penalty. Why? Because it says Jesus has taken your condemnation. He has taken your penalty and you are free. That's what you're free from.

You are free from sitting there at the end of a day where you have had a fight with someone, where you know you have dishonored God, and feeling like somehow God is going to punish you for that one. Because it says there is no condemnation.

It's gone. It's done. It's dealt with. It's exhausted. God sent Jesus in the likeness of sinful flesh. That's a really important phrase. It's telling us that Jesus was flesh.

He was human. But the like bit is the sinful. He was human, but he wasn't sinful like us. Which means he was the sufficient substitute.

[13 : 09] God sent someone like us so that he could take our place. So that instead of sitting there covered in guilt, we can actually hand those things over to Jesus. That's what's going on in the cross.

This is what it means to be a Christian. This is the measure of whether or not you are legitimately in. This is the thing you've got to choose on if you're unsure whether or not you're going to follow Jesus.

When you become a Christian, Jesus takes your condemnation and sets you free. What changes is not your behavior. What changes is your verdict.

What changes is what God sees when he looks at you. You are no longer somebody deserving of condemnation. That possibility is gone. What changes is the way that God sees you.

You are set free from guilt and fear and shame forever. What makes a Christian a Christian is the freedom from condemnation.

[14 : 13] Freedom from punishment. But the fact is it's even more than a verdict change. It's more than just going from guilty to not guilty.

It's an identity shift as well. It's not like, you know, the hammer's over your head and God just takes it away. It's more than that. He does at least that. But then there is an identity shift. Condemnation is removed but then it's replaced with something.

Fear is removed but it's replaced with something. Instead of punishment God gives us his spirit. God gives us his life-giving power to strengthen us, to lead us, to comfort us.

And then he says in verse 14 those who have the spirit, those who are led by the spirit are children of God. You're not just no longer the naughty child. You're now his child.

You're now adopted into the family. Verse 15, the spirit you receive does not make you slaves so that you live in fear again. It's not exchanging one fear for another fear.

[15 : 21] Rather, the spirit you receive brought about your adoption to sonship and by him we cry, Abba, Father. The spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.

Now, I just want to pause here for a second because I think the whole adoption metaphor has a different connotation in our context. I grew up as one of five kids and my oldest sister was adopted in our family.

She was fostered from when she was three weeks old so I don't know life without her as my oldest sister. She's more part of our family than I am. But if I'm honest, there was the odd occasion where, you know, as siblings, we would give her a bit of stick about being adopted.

Now, I'm not condoning this. You know, I've had to repent of this at some point and I'm thankful that there is no condemnation for this. But there was points where my oldest sister, Tally, would, you know, be a bit emotional or be a bit dramatic and we would let her know that the reason she was going through this situation was because she was adopted.

Just to be clear, I love my sister. She's great. But what it does say is probably something that is true even if it's not spoken of us.

[16 : 38] There is a part of us that kind of looks at adoption as this concession. It's not quite the same as being, you know, born of the flesh, being a natural-born child.

That's the way that we view it in our modern context. I mean, reality is in Australia it's almost impossible so we barely view it at all but the way we view it is we would never say that out loud but there's just this bit of us that does a double take.

How do I treat you then if you're adopted? How do I refer to you? Is it my sister or is it my adopted sister? Is it my half-sister? Is it my step-sister? We think through these qualifiers to make it different but in the first century, adoption was nothing like that.

adoption existed as a means for people to choose the child that they wanted to carry on their family.

They would choose somebody who would be the inheritor of their estate. They would choose somebody who they wanted to be the one that would bear their name going forward.

[17 : 39] It's a privilege. It almost needs to be escalated like everybody else needs a little prefix to brother and sister because adopted was chosen.

God adopted us. That means God chose us. That means that it's not just are you not in trouble anymore?

God has chosen you and drawn you into his family so that you might inherit from him. It's verse 17. We're now heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ.

Not just condemnation gone. Condemnation is gone but now in the place of condemnation is all the promises of God. The promises of eternal life.

The promise of forgiveness. The promise of access. The promise of eternal love and fellowship. The promise of everything good. God has exhausted condemnation.

[18 : 47] He's poured it all out on Jesus as our sin substitute and instead we have been drawn into his family. And all of that for a bunch of people who still make mistakes who will continue to make mistakes at least until they die or Jesus comes back.

Sure one day Christians will be made perfect but it won't be this side of heaven. We're going to talk about that a little bit more next week. But until then what you see is what you get.

Christians are and will be imperfect. So if you're a Christian you need to hear and believe these words.

There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. If you're sitting in this room and you're unsure whether or not you're in whether or not you want to be in you need to hear that if you follow Jesus the first thing he will do is remove the possibility of condemnation.

He will never let you go. He will offer you peace in his unconditional and irreversible love. So does that mean that God doesn't care what we do?

[20 : 18] Does that mean behaviour is irrelevant? It's unimportant? Does that mean that Christians should be comfortable with the title hypocrite? At least I'm a forgiven hypocrite. Look back at verse 3.

What the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh so the law wasn't wasn't capable of enabling us to be good enough for God.

But the problem wasn't the law it was weakened by the flesh it was weakened by you and me. The issue was the way that we approach the law as this oppressive force. But 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 he condemned sin in the flesh.

Here's the key bit. Verse 4. Why did he do that? Why did he take away condemnation? What was the point? Was it just so that we could dance around and go hey I can't get in trouble?

Verse 4. 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.

[21 : 38] In order that that's why Jesus died. That's why God takes away condemnation. So that we don't walk through life feeling crushed by expectation and guilt.

Jesus died in your place and set you free so that you could start the process of change. So that with the verdict already decided so that with the punishment possibility gone with the security of being a child of God you could then begin the process of growing in your holiness.

Now I've been struggling all week to figure out how to articulate what I feel when I say that. Because it feels like attention doesn't it? Hey there's no condemnation.

Jesus has died so you can be forgiven regardless of what you've done or will do. And nothing you can do can undo what Jesus has done. But hey by the way the whole point was so that you would start doing some stuff.

So that you would change. So that you would be a little bit different. I mean isn't that like an irreconcilable tension? Doesn't it sound strange to be completely free with conditions?

[22 : 56] It feels like an oxymoron. The best word that I can give for this I was going to say it's kind of an apparent tension a perceived tension but I think what it is is it's an experienced tension.

Because we do experience this. We know that God has died for us. We know that forgiveness is in Him alone and yet even knowing that we experience the guilt of maybe wandering too far in one direction and holding these things apart.

So I'm either forgiven or I'm guilty and I need to try harder. We really struggle to hold those things together but Paul writes them in this chapter which is designed to make you feel secure as a follower of Jesus.

Every verse in this chapter is supposed to feed you and make you walk out of here feeling invincible because God's love for you cannot be taken. Because His power dwells in you because no failure no opposition nothing can stop you from God's good plan.

And in the middle of that with a straight face He says you need to become more like Jesus. He puts a standard in there. So He doesn't see it as a tension and yet we experience it that way.

[24 : 10] And the reason is I believe because the issue isn't with the rules themselves. The issue isn't with the command to love your enemy or to love your neighbour or to honour your parents.

The issue is that the laws and the rules and the standards which are good feel oppressive because we never ever meet them.

Because we hold them up as a means by which we might somehow please God or make Him happy they become something that has power over us. which means we've heard forgiveness but we haven't understood what we've been freed from.

That's what it says at the beginning of chapter 8 we've been freed from the power of the law. The power of the law is that it can crush us with guilt and oppression. The power of the law is that it can hold us captive but can't actually deliver the thing that we want to please the God who made us.

See the reason this is an experience tension is because we look at the law as if it still has power without understanding that what Jesus does on the cross as well as remove penalty as well as draw us into His family is transform the law into what it's always supposed to be a good gift from God to show us what it looks like to walk the life that He designed.

[25 : 40] It goes from being this oppressive bar that we have to meet to being a map to guide us through life.

Augustine articulates it very helpfully he says law was given that grace might be sought grace was given that law might be fulfilled the law was never going to deliver but it drives us to Jesus who does and Jesus takes us back to the law to show us what it was always supposed to do anyway to lead us to show us that there is blessing in loving your enemy that God will bless you as you seek to obey Him and do things the way that He designed.

Now a life that lines up with God's law is not the means by which you become a Christian it's not even the measure of whether or not your Christian faith is genuine but it is what it looks like to live as somebody who's been freed.

That's why it says in verse 12 therefore brothers and sisters we have an obligation okay we're free but brothers and sisters we have an obligation but it's not to the flesh to live according to it the flesh is death the flesh delivered nothing for us the flesh is that guilt and oppression for if you live according to the flesh you will die but if by the spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body you will live the obligation of the Christian is to live free you can't accept freedom from God and then put the shackles back on that's rejecting freedom you can't hold them together the obligation we have is to recognize that what Jesus has done is released us to begin obeying those laws not as oppression but as encouragement as opportunity it's no longer a weight to be carried it is a torch to guide the way because the reality is before Jesus there wasn't even the possibility of obedience that's what makes the rules and laws so oppressive verse 7 says the mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God this is the life before we know

Jesus it does not submit to God's law nor can it do so those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God without Jesus the word that hangs over our life that summarizes everything we do even the apparently good things is death we are incapable of ever pleasing our creator in our own strength but having removed condemnation he gives us his spirit that we might know the blessing of walking the path that he designed for us that we might understand what he meant when Jesus said I've come that you might have life and have it to the full now the struggle with sin is going to continue as long as with this side of heaven it's still going to be reality verse 10 he says it again he says if Christ is in you even though your body is subject to death because of sin that is it's still around you're still dealing with the pain and consequences of your own disobedience and stupidity in that context the spirit gives life because of righteousness the war will continue to wage but it's a battle that's already won because verse 11 if the spirit of him who raised

[29 : 36] Jesus from the dead is living in you he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his spirit who lives in you the power of sin and failure its power to condemn us both within our conscience and before God is nothing compared to the power of the Holy Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead the same Holy Spirit that's now living in us empowering us to progressively win the battle against sin it's not that you become a Christian here and your holiness level is here and then you're going to be on a pretty straight 45 degree angle until one day you hit perfection that'd be nice because at least you could chart your progress you might have moments like this and flatline you might win your struggle against sin and then lose and then win and then win and then lose and then lose and then win and then it's not a clean line like that but however the line goes the possibility of condemnation is gone the power of sin when you lose to drag you deeper and further and to create doubt is gone because however your line goes it will end up in the same place as everybody who trusts

Jesus verse 29 says those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his son God's doing the work and then verse 30 those he predestined he called those he called he justified that's the condemnation removed and those he justified he glorified that's heaven it's inevitable because the condemnation is gone the end point of your life is heaven if you trust in Jesus there is no tension between God's grace to us and our obligation in this passage this chapter is assuring us it's building our confidence in what God has done so that when we fail when we struggle there will be peace that we might continue and that peace is found in living by his spirit living by the spirit is not perfect living but it is active living look at verse 12 this is where

I want to finish therefore brothers and sisters we have an obligation but it's not to the flesh to live according to it for if you live according to the flesh you will die but this is what it looks like but if by the spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body you will live put to death the misdeeds of your body that's fairly serious language you don't tend to kill anything through being passive actively fighting with and killing sin in your life actively resisting the things that try and drag you away from what Christ has done for you this is not competing with verse 1 no condemnation and put to death sit next to each other how do we know the deep confidence of being loved by God through

Jesus death and resurrection how can that verse there is no condemnation be imprinted on us so deeply that we might never forget that truth by putting to death the misdeeds of the body by living according to the spirit and if that's the key what does that look like for you how do you do it how do you kill sin verse 2 through Christ Jesus the law of the spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death 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 he condemned sin in the flesh Jesus is the one who kills sin it's not something you have to do he empties it of its power he condemns it he puts it on the cross and leaves it behind in the grave we must stop trying to do this on our own the greatest source of guilt for the

Christian the greatest source of discouragement for somebody who's trying to follow Jesus is trying to do what God doesn't ask you to do if you want to kill your sin if you want to put it to death if you want to stop being controlled by it then hand it over to Jesus because he condemns it in the cross he defeats it he destroys it confess it to him specifically explicitly don't hold on to it don't don't try and improve a little bit before you lay it bare before him don't be like oh hey God I was being really greedy with my money a few months ago I'm in a slightly better place please forgive me for that greed before you don't mean it you mean look at how well I did God you're trying to kill it yourself don't hold on to it hand it over confess it to him to the one place where it can be killed the cross of your saviour

[35 : 31] Jesus because as a child of God no matter how many times you come to Jesus with sin that you need to confess no matter how many times you fail you will always be welcomed as a child no matter how many times you come to him in inadequacy and weakness there is no condemnation for you when you confess and hand your sin and failure to Jesus you will always find grace always find forgiveness and as Romans 8 promises in him there you will find life and peace right now we're going to share in the Lord's Supper together the whole point of this meal is Romans 8 it's for us to remember that because of Jesus life and death there's no condemnation for those who trust in him it's an opportunity for us to put to death sin right now as we eat and drink for us to specifically and explicitly hand to

God the things we know are not in line with those who claim to follow him hand them over and watch him put them to death as these elements come around I want you to hold on to them so that we can eat and drink together but as they're coming around prepare yourself to hand over whatever it is that you need to hand over is there a sin that you've been carrying yourself maybe a really deep one that you've been keeping secret is there a weight of guilt that is driving you right now that you need to let go of is there a fear of judgment get ready to hand them over to the one who loves unconditionally and then once everybody's got the elements we're going to eat and drink and celebrate together all how to forget what you have to hold on and have what you have to give time and give a speech and give them and if you have them have to invite them to franchise and offer them is