

Free at last

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Preacher: Glenn Davies

[0 : 00] Let me pray before we look at God's word together. Father, we thank you for your word. We thank you for your spirit who inspired these words for the Apostle Paul so long ago.

We pray that your spirit might take this word tonight, enabling me to speak your word correctly and powerfully, that your spirit might work in our hearts, for we ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. Well, it's great that you're doing a sermon series on Romans. It's a wonderful book in the New Testament and written by the Apostle Paul to a Christian community.

Actually, there was more than one church in Rome. You don't actually find the word church in the opening invitation of the letter, but to the saints at Rome. But there are different churches and different house groups you'll see when you get to the end of the book in chapter 16.

He's never been to Rome before. He's writing to them to encourage them in terms of his anticipated arrival. He's writing to them to explain his gospel, to expound it, and to also encourage them with regard to his ongoing mission work.

[1 : 10] Now, you've been doing a series where you've been jumping from mountaintop to mountaintop, I think. I think last week was chapter 5, verse 1, and we've just picked up the end of chapter 7, and now really looking at 8, verses 1 to 4.

And these mountaintop experiences, you've got the valleys filled in in 6 and 7, but chapter 8, verse 1, starts off with that word, therefore. And the therefore is a way of saying, this now follows from what I've said before.

You might think at first glance, it follows from what's just happened in chapter 7. But in actual fact, it flows back to chapter 5. So you've done very well in your sermon series to sort of see 6 and 7 has got a, in a sense, it's like a digression.

6 and 7 is looking at what, how the law affects God's plan of salvation, and in particular, how Christ has set us free from that law.

But the mountaintop of chapter 5, if you'll recall from last week, we've been justified through faith and we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

[2 : 20] So in chapter 8 says, Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. There's no condemnation.

You see, there were Jews and Gentiles in Rome. And a Jew would know that the law was an oppressive regime which was so demanding.

It was impossible to keep the law sinlessly. Lots of people tried, but in actual fact, it was their promising life, but was unable to fulfil that for the Jewish people.

It actually brought condemnation upon it. It brought condemnation in a way in which if you break just one aspect of the law, then you've broken the whole law.

You know, you can imagine a friend of mine very close to me. It was pulled over for speeding. And I said, sorry, the friend said, and that...

[3 : 28] I said to the officer, look, I may have been going over the speed limit a teensy, weensy little bit, but you know what?

All day, I've been driving under the speed limit. So I reckon you should take all those kilometres per hour I was driving under the speed limit and then you can apply them to this and you'll find that I haven't actually broken the law at all.

That went down like a lead balloon, I might add. It's sort of one of those things, if you break the law, you break the law. You can't say, well, look at all the good things I've done, because when you break God's law, judgment comes, condemnation comes.

So the law brings condemnation. What happens to Christians with regard to the law? You see, in chapter 7, you'll see that the person in chapter 7 is bound by the law, dead to that which held it

captive.

The man of Romans 7 can't keep the law. He's unable to do so. Some people think the man in chapter 7 is all about the Christian struggling with sin.

[4 : 39] I actually don't think that's what it's talking about. I think it's talking about the unbelieving Jew who is under God's condemnation, wants to keep the law, but can't keep the law because he's out of relationship with God.

The law is actually good. In chapter 7, the law is spiritual. There's a good thing about law, but law has to be in relationship.

Unless law is in relationship, you will always want to break it. You know those signs that you've seen on billboards, you know, don't look through this peephole here, and you think, hmm, let me think.

Let me think. Might as well just fix up this thing. Yes. And then by a sign like that, you're automatically enticed to look through the hole, aren't you? Or when it says, bill posters, we prosecute it.

Poor old bill posters, he's always going to get prosecuted. Anyhow, so people put up posters there. Now, you look through, when you get a law like that, you actually want to break it. But if you're in relationship with a lawgiver, it's very different.

[5 : 51] We had a house we lived in, had a very broken kind of concrete pathway coming up the driveway. And my wife has been saying to me, look, you know, why can't you just fix this? You know, can't you fix it?

And, you know, I say, well, I'm not really, I didn't do concreting 101 at Theological College, so I'm not really, I'm not really good at that. And, but then one day, while she was out, I hired a concrete man to come and lay the path for me.

And, because it would be all wet cement, I put up a sign saying, don't step in the wet cement.

Okay? My wife comes home, and she says, goodness, he's finally listened.

He's got the pathway. And he's warned me by saying, don't step in the cement. Because I could easily have stepped in there, not thinking it was actually newly laid.

The warning, the law, don't step on the cement, wet cement, is actually for her good. Because she's in relationship with me, she wants to abide by that law.

[6 : 58] She wants to keep that law. We've got an 11-year-old boy who lives next door. He's not really in relationship with me like my wife is.

When he sees the sign, don't step in the wet cement, whoa, let's go. Let's do those little doggy marks. Anyhow.

Or, you know, so-and-so loves so-and-so, or something like that. Because he sees that law as an invitation to break it, because he's not in relationship with a lawgiver.

That's how the law works for Christians, you see. We're in relationship with God, therefore the law is not oppressive for us as Christians, we actually want to keep it.

I actually asked the candidates tonight about the Ten Commandments. And you passed. Lucky Sam. And then I asked, how many of you actually keep the commandments perfectly?

[8 : 02] And of course, no one can. Except one man, Jesus. You know, because Jesus has kept the commandments perfectly, prevents us from being condemned by the law.

I don't know if you've heard in your classical education, probably the older people would have heard the phrase Damocles sword. For younger ones, probably don't know it, but it's a, it goes back to a story, the Mediterranean king.

And this king had a courtier, a courtier by the name of Damocles. And Damocles would have, you know, meals with the king and he's one of those sort of chatterboxes that just talks, talks, talks.

You have people like that in your church? Anyhow, so people you might invite for dinner and they just chat, chat, chat. And he was just sick of Damocles. So he actually said to Damocles, give me your sword and I'm going to hang your sword over your head and I'm going to hold it up, I'm going to tie it up by a horse's hair.

And then I want you to come and have dinner with me sitting under your own sword. Well, Damocles of course had to do what the king said.

[9 : 14] So, he came in fear and trembling. He could hardly eat his dinner. He had no appetite and what's more, he couldn't even start a conversation up. So the king was delighted.

It worked. And so the phrase being, having, sitting under Damocles' sword, Damocles' sword hanging over your head means the threat of judgment. When Jesus says, people will come from the east and west and sit down and feast with Abraham in the kingdom of God.

Jesus is saying that the feasting table for the people of God includes Old Testament saints like Abraham as well as New Covenant saints like us. Under the Old Covenant, the law was hanging as a judgment over the people of God.

It's like Abraham and Moses and the rest of the Old Testament saints were sitting at the banquet table of God but the sword of God's law was hanging over them.

Not by a horse's hair but something much more secure, the thread of God's promise. They could feast at God's table because they trusted that God would not bring the judgment on them.

[10:37] When Jesus arrives, he comes and sits at the same banqueting table but the sword of God's judgment falls upon Jesus.

He actually satisfies all that the law requires and demands. He keeps the Ten Commandments. He's perfectly obedient to his Heavenly Father and what's more than that, he dies the death that you and I deserve.

So that as New Covenant saints, when we come to the feasting, banqueting table of God, we no longer have the threat of God's law over us with its condemnation.

That's what Paul means when he says we are not under law but under grace. In Romans 8.1, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Why? Because through Christ Jesus, the law of the spirit of life has set me free from the law of sin and death.

[11:47] You see, sin and death hang over us. Paul says elsewhere in 1 Corinthians, he says, the sting of death is sin but the power of sin is the law.

It's a fascinating thought, isn't it? The sting of death is sin but the power of sin is the law. It's the law that condemns. It's the law that judges us.

It's the law that sends us to our death. And what Jesus has done has taken that penalty away, has taken the condemnation that belongs to us as people who sin.

You see, our God is a righteous God. He's a perfect God. He loathes sin even in his people. And he can't just turn a blind eye to sin.

In order to save us, he has to deal with our sins. And the only way he could do it was to sin Jesus. If there was another way, he'd have done so.

[12:57] Such as the depths of God's love is that the most excruciating way, the only way in which we could be freed from the condemnation of the law, is if Jesus stands in our place.

Imagine you four confidants at the day of judgment. Scary thought.

Here is God's throne. And God has a line of people coming up. And as each person stands before the throne of God, Gabriel goes off and gets their DVD of their life.

You've just seen Pol Pot. Idi Amin, a few other awful chaps, and you see a video of their life, you don't have to play for very long, and God says, judgment, death.

Then James, you're next. You're alphabetically ahead of your sister, you see. And you stand before the throne of God.

[14:09] And Gabriel goes off to get James's DVD. You're shaking in your boots. Every thought that you've ever had is captured in this DVD.

Every wrongdoing, every act, every transgression of the Ten Commandments is there, even the ones your parents didn't know about, nor your minister, father.

But you know about it, and God knows about it. And then up on the screen, the DVD, sorry, it's over there, isn't it?

Wow, it's hot, isn't it? Up on the screen, comes the Jesus video, a DVD of Jesus' life, and his death. faith. And God says to James, enter into my kingdom. Jesus has done it for you. He's lived the life you could not live, and died the death that you deserve.

[15:18] That's fabulous, isn't it? If you've put your faith in Jesus, then you can stand where James stands. You can stand where Jesus stands.

and Jesus has done it all. The law that was powerless to do, in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, what the law was powerless to do, God did by sending his own son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering.

That's what Jesus did. That's why the law is spiritual, you see. In actual fact, the law does save us, because Jesus has kept the law for us. I was talking to the Confirmerse beforehand, I was talking about the Lord's Supper, when you take Holy Communion.

You experienced saints who've taken the Lord's Supper for many years would know why you've got two elements in Holy Communion, the bread and the wine. But why do we take the wine?

Jesus said I'm the bread of life, he didn't say I'm the wine of life. So why is there bread and wine? And we don't have soap and water in baptism, as you'll see when I baptise Ali tonight, it's just water. [16:43] So why bread and wine? Well the bread is Jesus' life. I'm the bread of life, his life, his perfect obedience in place of my frail, flawed, sinful life.

But it's not just that, it's also his death. The death that I deserve is what Jesus has undergone for me. So when you take Holy Communion or the Lord's Supper, think of Jesus' life and Jesus' death. It will help you focus on the truths that Paul is preaching when he says there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For he condemned sin in sinful man in order to the righteous requirement of the law.

I don't know why the NIV has requirements, it shouldn't be plural, it's actually a singular in the original. The righteous requirement of the law is the death penalty. He uses that same phrase elsewhere in chapter 2, where he's talking about the death penalty.

So here Jesus has taken the death penalty for us, that's the righteous requirement of the law, in order that we then might live, not according to the sinful nature, but according to the spirit.

[18:12] So the spirit of Christ Jesus has now set us free, not only from the guilt of sin, but from the power of sin, so that we might live as Christ wants us to do.

Tonight is not so much a graduation for these four young people, but rather a step along the path. They've been nurtured in Christian families and we thank God for that.

What a powerful promise it is for Christian parents to know that their children are covered by God's grace and to bring them up and raise them up in covenant love so that now they can profess before you all, not that you had any doubt beforehand, but profess before you that they have turned to Christ.

And we're going to do that symbolically tonight and I'm going to lay hands on them as an indication, an ancient sign of God's blessing and of prayer for these people, that they might continue strong in Christ because God has taken away their sins, as far as the east is from the west so far as God removed our sins from us.

The joy of the Spirit gives us a desire to follow him, a desire to be obedient, a desire to bring forth the fruit of the Spirit and the obedience which springs from faith.

[19:37] That's what Paul is concerned about and elsewhere in this book as beforehand, he talks of the way in which the fruit of the Spirit comes forth by the obedience of faith and that's the work of the Spirit in us.

We'll never be sinless in this life. We'll always need to keep repenting of our sins but there is growth in grace and so Paul elsewhere prays for the saints at Corinth that they might be changed from one degree of glory to another and this comes by the Spirit of God's grace, grace by the Lord who is the Spirit.

So tonight's a great night, great night for you four guys and for your families, parents and godparents that as you profess Christ tonight that you're saying you are no longer condemned, Christ has taken that penalty for you and set you free, free to live a life which honors him and which brings others to a knowledge of the Lord Jesus and if you're here tonight, perhaps you're a friend of the family, don't normally come to church and you think what is that man talking about at the front? Well you know the best person to ask is one of these. Ask them, they've been well prepared for tonight, ask them why they're going to stand up and say to you, I turn to Christ and ask them why it's important that you too turn to Christ because if you don't, God's condemnation will rest upon you and it won't be the Jesus video but the video of your own life which will not stand the test of God's righteous judgment.

Only in Christ are we free of condemnation. Let's pray. heavenly father we thank you for the inestimable gift of salvation in Christ.

[21:45] We thank you for his life and his death on our behalf and we pray for these four young people that you would as you have brought them safe thus far that you would continue to strengthen them as your disciples to the glory of your name for we ask it for Jesus' sake.

Amen.