

Kidnapped and Freed!

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[0 : 00] We're going to turn back together to that chapter that we read, Romans chapter 5, and think together about words that you find in verse 18, page 1135 and verse 18, Romans chapter 5.

Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men.

Last week, if I had mentioned the name Charles Ramsey to you, none of you would have had the slightest clue of who I was talking about, not even me.

He was a complete unknown to anyone apart from, I guess, his family and his close friends.

Famous for nothing. But last Tuesday, in a period of a few hours, he became known to hundreds of millions of people all over the world.

[1 : 44] Tonight, he is a household name. Because he was the man who, when he heard the cries of three captive women in Cleveland, Ohio, he, who had been held prisoners since they were kidnapped ten years ago, went to help them and became the person responsible for their release.

And because he broke into the house where they were living and he set them free, he has become an international hero.

The story became internationally known. And within hours, Charles Ramsey's interview on YouTube had gone viral.

When I saw it the next day, there had been four million hits. And I guess that his colorful account of what had happened helped him to become what he is today and what he was then.

I couldn't help watching and listening to that story but think of the whole theme of salvation.

[3 : 22] Here you had a classic rescue operation. You had a before and an after. You had a house of captivity and condemnation.

And in a split second, those who were held captive, they were set free. And the whole world rejoiced. I couldn't decide whether to rejoice or to be utterly appalled.

You had that kind of mixed emotion, didn't you? On the one hand, you couldn't believe how great it must be to be set free from ten years of misery and who knows what else.

And on the other hand, you were filled with anger, weren't you? And how ten years of a person's life can be destroyed by the actions of one particular individual, allegedly.

But for them, the three women who had been set free, their nightmare had become a reality until the week and the moment and the day when they tasted freedom for the first time.

[4 : 36] And when them and a young child were set free and they were allowed to go home and they were allowed to resume some degree of normality, although I'm quite sure that it will not be easy for them.

Romans 5 is a story of salvation, of rescue.

There is a before and an after all the way through the chapter. Paul talks about the before and the after.

And everyone here tonight who follows Jesus in our hearts, we can testify to the before and the after.

The misery of the before and the joy of the after. That's what the Christian faith is all about. It's not about being nice or being respectable or being good.

[5 : 42] It's about Jesus and what he has done for us. And with all due respect to Charles Ramsey, while I applaud his actions and while these women owe him their very lives, he just happened to be in the right place at the right time.

It didn't cost him anything. I'm not saying he's not a hero. He is. But it didn't cost him anything. And when you compare what he did with the greatest act of rescue of all time, where the Son of God gave himself and his own life in order to set us free from where we were being held captive and in

order to bring us home to where we truly belong.

That's what the gospel is all about. It's about God in his love reaching down to a lost, miserable world. A world in which people believe and like to believe that they're not miserable because they've learned to make the most of the world and all that the world gives them and all the pleasure that the world gives them, knowing nothing of the reason why we were created in the first place, which was to enjoy God.

And you will know nothing of what really living is until you discover what it is to enjoy God and to come home to what God created us for in the first place.

So all the way through this passage, you have the before and the after. For example, verse 8, God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, there was a time when we were, the Bible calls it, dead in trespasses and sins.

[7 : 32] We were held captive. We were kidnapped. And then there was a moment in which we were set free. Verse 10, For if while we were enemies, looking back to when we were enemies of God, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.

A before and an after, a house of bondage and pain and darkness and misery, and then a place of freedom and life and joy and home to where we are loved and cherished by God himself.

So I want us to look particularly this tonight for a few moments at the verse that we've chosen that describes the before and the after.

I want us to look at four things. Two about the before and two about the after. Two about the misery and the captivity and the darkness, the before, and two about the life and the freedom and the forgiveness and the hope and the joy that we have in God himself.

First of all, I want us to look at the origin of our misery, therefore, as one trespass. Then I want us to look at the nature of our misery, which is condemnation for all men.

[9 : 06] Then thirdly, I want us to look at the origin of our freedom, one act of righteousness.

And then I want us lastly to look at the nature of our liberty, which is, Paul describes it here as justification and life.

Four things that I hope will help us to understand what the gospel is and by which I truly hope and pray that God will open up our hearts to ask where we are this evening.

Are we in the before or are we in the after? And if you're in the before, then how do I become set free and liberated by the Son of God?

The origin of our misery then, which is in verse 18, one trespass, one trespass. Let's look back to, I'm not entirely sure how these poor women were kidnapped in the first place.

[10 : 16] I read in Reuters news agency that at least for one of them, she was stopped by the gentleman in question who offered her a lift.

That was the moment that changed her life, probably the biggest mistake that she has ever made, the moment in which she entrusted herself to the deception of one particular individual, only to be dragged into ten years of pain and utter despair.

Does it remind you of anything? It reminds me of what Paul is describing here when he says one trespass. What Paul is doing is he's going all the way back to the Garden of Eden when God created the heavens and the earth in perfection.

And he's describing the moment when God having told Eve and Adam not to eat of the forbidden fruit and the serpent having worked his way, having slithered his way into Eve's confidence.

Eve took him at his word and made the biggest mistake that she ever had made and paid for it for the rest of her life. Not only her, but her husband who disobeyed with her and the whole of the human race thereafter.

[11 : 54] She walked straight into it. I suppose some people are kidnapped when they're forcibly ambushed. Other people are kidnapped when they are deceived.

Genesis chapter 3 tells us how the human race was kidnapped. When the devil, in the form of the serpent, spoke to the woman and he tricked her.

I'm not saying she wasn't responsible. She was responsible and paid the price. Her and the whole of the human race. And she walked straight into the house where she was held captive for the rest of her life.

The first foolish thing, of course, she did was to listen to the wrong voices and taking on board what he told her. And before you knew it, things had changed forever.

In a single moment of sheer madness, she walked into another world. Read it for yourself. And think about all the misery and the pain and the suffering and the death that has taken place in the world ever since that story of the Garden of Eden all these years ago at the very beginning.

[13:12] A world of guilt and pain and sickness. A world in which not only she was to suffer, but her husband and everyone who was to come after her. They both walked into it together.

But that was also a world that was destined to condemnation. Look at the other word that Paul uses in verse 18. One trespass led to condemnation for all men.

Adam and Eve made themselves guilty of disobedience because they represented all humankind. That meant that when they fell, the whole of mankind fell with them.

Every other person to be born in this world was born in sin. Even before they took their first breath. Even to this day, thousands of years later, as soon as a person is born, as soon as a person comes out of their mother's womb, that person is born in sin. That's what the Bible tells us in Psalm 51.

[14:15] David says, I was conceived in sin. Which means that sin has become part of the human race. It was never meant to be part of the human race when we were created in the first place.

God did not create us as sinful people. It was because of Adam and Eve's foolishness. Because they chose to listen to the deceiver, to the being that deceived them, that they themselves fell, and they took the whole of the human race with them and became captives.

They were kidnapped evermore to be held, not against their will. That, I guess, is the difference between what we've heard this week and what the Bible teaches us, that the human race is not held captive against our will.

We choose to be held captive. We're not aware of the fact that we are slaves and that tonight we are in darkness if we don't have the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, there are questions which people raise over this. First of all, there are people who ask, is it fair? Is that fair that just because Adam and Eve at the very beginning chose, made a choice, they made a wrong choice, is it fair?

[15:39] I can understand how they have to suffer the consequences, but what about the rest of the human race? Is it fair that we should be held accountable for their sin and for their act of foolishness?

Now, that's a very common question for anyone who's taking the Bible seriously. In fact, I hope that when you read Romans chapter 5, that that is the very question that rises in your mind.

It's a question that naturally arises, and it's a question like last week, I don't have all the answers to. I can only say that sin, it's like a congenital disease.

I suppose that's the easiest way of describing it. It has become part of the fabric of the human nature, although human nature itself was never meant to be sinful.

Sin has adhered itself to us. It's stuck to us, so that we can't get rid of it from the very beginning of when we were conceived.

[16:44] We cannot get rid of our sinful human nature. The other question, of course, is, well, if you're going to say that we're born in sin, then what about infants?

Infants who die in infancy. They've never heard the gospel. They've never heard about Jesus. They don't have the mature enough minds to be able to reason, to be able to discover that they are sinners, that they need to have Jesus.

They've never heard that Jesus died for them, and they wouldn't be able to understand it anyway because they're only maybe a day old or two days old, and I certainly don't want to upset any of you who have had this experience, a very painful experience, one which takes many, many, a long, long time to come to terms with, just like the death of anyone in the family.

Some of you have, I know, experienced the pain of an infant that dies or that is stillborn, and you might ask, well, what about such a person?

Well, I'm quite happy tonight to leave both of these questions in the hands of God. I'm quite happy to say tonight, as I've said many, many times before, we are not fairer than God.

[18:16] We have no, our standards are not higher than God. We can't, we can't intrude into the mind of God and say, well, well, is this fair?

God, our sense of fairness has come from God, God, and I'm quite happy to leave those who have died unaware of even the fact that they're alive in the first place.

I am quite happy to leave them into the hands of the mercy and the grace of God. The question is tonight, not what about infants, but what about us?

And the question tonight is, what am I going to do with God's provision for my salvation? And am I going to listen to the voice of God?

And so the Bible tells us in this chapter that the entirety of the human race stands condemned, every single one of us. And when we're talking about being condemned, we remember that the Bible tells us that the wages of sin is death.

[19 : 28] In the Old Testament, you read that verse that the soul in sin, it shall die. And when the Bible talks about death, it's not just the natural, bodily, physical death that every one of us is going to have to face.

It's eternal death. It's separation from God. Heaven and hell. That moment when Jesus himself said, that the day will come when the entirety of the human race will stand in front of the throne of Jesus Christ and in which he will say to those on his right hand, come, you blessed of my father. But those on his left hand, he'll say, depart from me, you workers of iniquity. So that's where we stand tonight. I don't want to pull the wool over anyone's eyes.

The easiest thing in the world is to gloss over the awful truth that by nature, you and I, if we get what we deserve as human beings, we are condemned before God.

But the Bible doesn't leave it there. The apostle goes on in verse 18 to describe the origin of how God has set us free.

[20 : 49] It doesn't tell us just that God has offered to set us free. It tells us how our freedom has come about. A moment.

just like that moment last week when these women, they cried. They took their opportunity and they cried out some crack or some window or out the door or whatever.

And that was the moment when Charles Ramsey went over to them and opened the door. That was it. The defining moment. The Bible tells us that there was also a defining moment in our freedom and in our rescue.

And Paul describes it like this. He says, one act of righteousness. And when he uses that term, he's talking about Jesus and his death on the cross as an act of righteousness.

Now, what does this mean? Why does Paul use this kind of terminology to describe? And I put it to you like this. Don't be content with simplistic terminology when it comes to the gospel.

[22 : 05] The way to grow in your understanding of what the gospel is and what a Christian is and what the Bible is all about is to try and grasp the precise sentences and words which the Bible uses.

that way we become and we're able to see in more detail and in more depth what God has done.

Don't let's dumb down and be content with the odd phrase here and there like, Jesus died for me.

Now, of course, he did. and that lies at the heart of the gospel. That's the basis of the gospel. But it doesn't actually explain why Jesus had to die and what was wrong with me that Jesus had to die for me.

It doesn't explain that Jesus had to die. It doesn't explain, it doesn't tell us anything about the nature of how God rescued us from the grave, from the captivity of sin.

But this is one of these places where Paul does give us some information. He gives us further information. He calls it one act of righteousness. Let's stop for a moment and try and explain that in terms of what happened originally.

[23 : 23] Remember how we were talking before about how Eve walked into a condition of misery and pain and death because of one act of gross foolishness, an act of disobedience.

She deliberately chose not to act upon what God had told her to do. She listened rather to the wrong voice and she chose the opposite.

That was an act of disobedience. Now Paul is saying Jesus came into the world and he undid that. He reversed it where one man and woman chose to disobey God the only solution to our condemnation and our punishment was that one man who is righteous before God could unravel the mess and he did that by paying the price that we deserved the price of death.

And so while Charles Ramsey became a national hero by pushing a door open Jesus Christ became the savior of you and I tonight if we trust in him by laying down his life it cost him his life it cost him the misery and the suffering the dereliction the loneliness the pain which he suffered the unimaginable pain that he suffered on the cross of Calvary my God my God why have you forsaken me that's what it cost the Lord Jesus Christ that was Jesus act of righteousness which he carried out on our behalf because just as Adam and Eve they stood to represent the entirety of the human race so Jesus represented you and me when he died on the cross it was our sin that he took upon

himself that the father made him guilty of and it was the wrath that your sin and my sin deserved that he had to suffer so that I could be liberated and set free from my house of bondage the house in which

I've been held captive all these years in my life one act of righteousness costing him everything and lastly Paul talks about the nature of the new life the nature of the after so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men and once again Paul talks about he uses terms that help us to understand what the Christian life is all about he's not content with simplistic terms he wants to go into the depths he knows that it's important for the Christians in his day and the Christians in our day to understand what God has done for them it's important that you and I understand what God has done for us he talks first of all about justification which first of all means that every sin that I have ever committed is cleansed by Jesus because

[27 : 04] Jesus' blood was shed on the cross I can say tonight that by faith in him I am set free from sin which means my guilt is taken away and which means that God will never ever again visit the guilt that makes me culpable and that makes me deserve God's wrath can you say that tonight that's what justification means but it doesn't just mean that it means that God has taken me into his family into his kingdom and he when God looks at me tonight it means he sees someone who actually he declares as having the righteousness of Jesus Christ see the problem is it's not just the things that I do that have made me guilty it's what I haven't done what I fail to be

I have failed to be a righteous person you have failed to be righteous people God's not looking just for the things that we have done against his law he's looking for what we have failed to be God created us to be like himself holy righteous truthful reflecting his image in his image reflecting his nature we have failed but when a person becomes a Christian God makes a particular declaration about that person it's like he stands that person before him and he says from this moment onwards your sins and your wrongdoings are all forgiven you are restored into a right relationship with me in which you can come to me at any moment in time and in which I am your father and in which I love you continuously every day as my son and as my daughter and in which listen to this you are righteous that's what he says

I tell you it's hard for me to believe that it's hard for me to accept that especially when I become conscious of my own wrongdoing the deceit in my own heart and there will be times also when you will be conscious of that same deceit and that same corruption it's hard for us as Christians to come to God's word and to accept that not only our sins have been forgiven but God looks at us tonight as people men and women who are righteous with the same righteousness as Jesus Christ possesses that's what justification means it's rather like this if I can put it this way if you're bankrupt or rather if you're in debt that means that your bank statement will be in red or maybe let's say you're in debt by 10,000 pounds now let's say another person kind person says to you look you're in debt there's no way you can get out of it

I'll cancel the debt you'd be very thankful for that wouldn't you and I guess you would make every effort to show your gratefulness to that person but all that person has done has cancelled your debt now for many people that's what they think the Christian life is they think being a Christian is God cancelling your debt let me tell you something there's more to it than that when God comes into a person's life he doesn't just cancel the debt he puts money in that's that's what the righteousness of Christ is that's what it means to be justified now tell me that that's not a wonderful situation to be in before God and tell me tonight that you don't want that would you not love to

I can't understand anyone that doesn't want to be right with God I can't understand anyone that is not conscious of the debt that you're in and the fact that you can do nothing about that debt all the good efforts and the good works and the attempts that you ever try to make will do nothing to cancel that debt the only moment in which you will be right with God is when the Lord Jesus comes and when he sets you free and says to you I have not only cancelled your debt but I have made you righteous I have said the judge of all the earth the one who knows your heart he knows everything about you and he has cancelled everything and he has said from now on you are righteous it's no surprise then that Paul opens this chapter have you ever noticed the way that Paul here was a man who tried his utmost to please

[32 : 46] God by how he lived and he discovered he couldn't do it just like many of you have discovered you can't do it until the moment that he met Jesus and he was shown for who he really was the bankrupt pathetic specimen that he was thinking for all these years that he could work his way into God's favour until God met with him on the road to Damascus and showed him that he was

even more corrupt than he ever imagined him to be in the first place and that was the moment in which he discovered what Jesus had done on the cross and that was the moment in which his life was changed and he rose again from the first thing he discovered was this that all these years he had been trying and trying to be right with God but the first thing he discovered after he became a Christian was that he had peace with God why because he was now justified and that's why he said therefore since we have been justified by faith we have peace with

God through our Lord Jesus Christ here's a man who could boast all his life of his own goodness and uprightness and diligence and knowledge if ever there was a candidate who could have you might say earned his way into heaven it was Saul of Tarsus and when he came to meet with God the one who he really wanted to be right with when he came to meet with him he discovered that he was nothing he hadn't done anything but in discovering that he also discovered what Jesus had done to save him and to change his life on the cross and that was the moment he that everything turned on its head and he realized that if he was going to be right with God it had to be what God did for him rather than what he did for God the other word that the apostle uses to describe the Christian life what is life

I guess there's two levels in which you can talk about it you can talk about the sort of animal life in which you feel and you see and you hear and you touch and you experience yeah I suppose you could describe that as life you could describe it chemically or scientifically in these terms the senses and the chemical processes that operate within us and operate within other living forms to make them alive and to keep them alive and to constitute what life is but you and I both know that that's only half the story in fact this doesn't even go anywhere to describe life you know that life is far more than that life is about living the reason for living our thoughts our loves our hearts our emotions our pleasures our joys our experiences in this life you put them all together that's what life is all about and you know that life can be a mixture of the highs and the lows the depths and the heights the darkness and the light the good times and the bad times and the average times I guess that's the way that you and I would describe life but when Jesus came into the world he said I have come that you may have life and have it to the full and he was able to promise that because he alone knew how we could have life to the full I'm not doubting for a moment that all of us here tonight are alive but do you have life life as God intended you to have life as only he can give it to you that level of life that dimension in which we discover the greatness and the wonder of God and in which everything falls into its right perspective and in which we're set free from everything that we had become slaves to beforehand so how can I have this life this liberty this salvation this forgiveness how can I be right with God you know what

Charles Ramsey said you'll have heard his interview he said I knew something was wrong when a white girl ran into the arms of a black man that's how she was saved and that's how we're saved you run into the arms of Jesus you call upon him the problem is of course if you don't know if you don't realize that you're in the house where you're being kidnapped then you don't need to call to anybody the problem is that our kidnapper is far more clever than the gentleman who is alleged to have kidnapped these three women our kidnapper has made the conditions in the house so pleasant for us that we think this is real life this is all I want this is what's familiar to me so why should I want out and so only when we listen to the voice of God telling us showing us the hopelessness of where we are tonight that we're under his condemnation and the day will come where whatever satisfaction we get from this world and this life it will all disappear and we will have to stand before God and meanwhile you've missed out on the life that God can give you here in this world a life that extends beyond this life into eternity you're missing out because you haven't listened to God telling you to get out of the house and the problem also is this that our captor is in the house and the moment we begin to listen to

[39 : 36] God telling us that we are being kidnapped that we've been held there our whole lives our captor says to us you don't want to listen to that it's a lie you know where you're used to you know where you're accustomed to you know what makes you happy you go out the house you'll never be the same again you will not be any better off outside of where I can make you happy stay where you are is that what it is I'm asking you tonight stop and listen to what God says ask him to rescue you and run into his arms let's pray our father in heaven we ask tonight that you will speak to us clearly and powerfully give thanks for the way in which your word describes in such depths what you've done for us on the cross and we pray that we will gain an understanding but not just a intellectual understanding but a heart love for the gospel pray that what we hear from your word will

change us as your spirit works within us and as your spirit opens up our hearts to make us see that where we are is not going to last and the kind of pleasures we get out of this world are pleasures that only last for the time being and that take our minds away from what you want for us we pray Lord that you will open our eyes each one of us but especially tonight anyone who doesn't know you anyone who needs to be rescued from the house oh Lord we thank you for breaking down the door we pray that you will forbid that we will refuse to run away our father in heaven bless your word to us tonight in Jesus name amen we have■■■ how do things j about it I love