

Having Been Set Free
Romans 6:12-23

Luke 2:1-20

Galatians 5

Responsive Psalm 147:1-10

Closing Hymn What Child is This

This morning we will be finishing up chapter 6, in this chapter there is some pretty weighty concepts being taught that if we can grasp them they can be some life changing truths. At its core, the message of chapter 6 is our status which is found in Christ. We talked last week about how there is only 2 potential outcomes for humanity, you are either in Adam, lost in sin, and condemned, or you are in Christ, redeemed and counted as one who is holy. There is no other option, the concept that all religions are the same, that all lead to a higher calling and a better life and paradise is simply a false deception of Satan. The word of God teaches, that all men have sinned, all are condemned and worthy of eternal everlasting death and are separated from God. As Paul wrote in chapter 5, “Therefore just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned. Death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgressions of Adam, who is a type of him who was to come.” All have sinned, all are condemned, for the reality that all sin separates us from God, for he is holy, and righteous, and just and can not approve of, or have any part in the sinfulness of mankind.

But we know the story doesn't end there right? Verse 15 of chapter 5, “But the free gift is not like the offense. For if by the one mans offense many died, much more by the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one man Jesus Christ, abounded to many. And this free gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned. For the judgment which came from the one offense resulted in condemnation, but the free gift which came from many offenses resulted in justification. And this was the point of last weeks message, Since now, the free gift has come resulting in justification, that is, forgiveness and righteousness, we are now in Christ having been reconciled, brought out from the sin and condemnation, to live upright and holy lives worthy of the calling for which we have been called. Having now been enabled by the spirit to do that which is pleasing to the Lord. In his mercy, he has taken that which is broken, that which is cursed and condemned, and made us righteous and holy by his blood. Paul teaches that we are partakers, that we, who are his, have shared in his death. This was a personal, intimate, transaction. Christ did not die so that you may merely have a chance to be saved and reconciled to God, no, he died so that you will be saved and reconciled to God. When he died, he died for you, specifically, and personally, it is your sins that put him there, it is your sins that he took upon himself and nailed to the cross, It was not just some mere concept of sinfulness that he paid, nor did he die for the sins of the whole world, otherwise the sins of the whole world would be forgiven, but he died, specifically, and personally for each and every sinful desire, thought and action that you have, and will commit.

And further more, this plan of redemption, of drawing his people whom he has chosen since before the foundation of the world to himself is the reason and the purpose that Christ came. Over 2000 years ago, he was born of a virgin, God in the flesh, so that he may be raised up on a cross for you. Reconciling you to himself, paying for your sins, so that you may be the recipient of the blessed love and mercy of God. This is the Christmas story, this is the reality that we celebrate this time of year, this is why we have the tradition of giving gifts, it is to be a reflection, and a reminder of the greatest gift that was given to mankind on that night when Christ was born. The promised Messiah has come, the seed of Abraham, the offspring of David who has come to rescue his people from bondage.

“For there is born to you this day in the city of David, a Savior who is Christ the Lord. Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men.” Peace with God has been established, it has been given through his Son Jesus Christ. In whom we have been baptized into his death, through him we have died to sin so that it may no longer have rule and reign over us by but his blood which was shed we have the power over sin through the conviction of the holy spirit which actively works in us to will and to do that which is pleasing to our father. Since Christ has now come, establishing peace between us and the father we no longer live in bondage to sin and death, but are now alive in him. Verse 12, in Roman's chapter 6 (read v12-23) In the first half of this chapter Paul is instructing his readers, that if they are in Christ they are indeed dead to sin, that guilt, the shame, the punishment, has all been paid for by Jesus on the cross. And we, in a very real sense have died with him, that is our old nature, our sinfulness, which he took upon himself and bore upon the cross. And now, in this last half Paul is explaining what it means to be dead to sin, explaining the stark contrast between those who are still dead in Adam, and those who are alive in Christ.

The reality is, we are no longer a slave to our sin, that is we have been given the ability to pursue righteousness, to strive for holiness, which is not something that is inherit within natural man, but is only through the gift of faith, and love given by God to all those who have been baptized in the death of Jesus Christ. This is what Paul writes to the Galatians which we read this morning, “Walk in the spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh.” What does he mean, to walk in the spirit? As we have seen in Romans, we who have been given this new birth, having been made alive in Christ have been given his spirit so that we may walk in the newness of this life, not as those who are dead, but as those who are alive. Reckoning ourselves dead to sin, living as those who are dead to sin, having our hearts and our minds focused upon the things of God. As we had mentioned last week, in this body we will never reach a point of sinless perfection for though we are dead to sin though Christ, in a very real sense as long as we are in this world we carry with us that old baggage, and sometimes it sorta leaks out into our hearts every now and then. Until that blessed day when we are reunited with our Savior this is the state that we are in, a state of war and conflict within ourselves which is why Paul says reckon yourself dead to sin, know that the sin that is within you has no power, it is dead, therefore actively pursue righteousness, and put to death the sin which arises within you.

Paul understands the human condition all too well, for after he instructs the Galatians to walk in the spirit, he says, in verse 17 of chapter 5, “For the flesh lusts against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.” This conflict between flesh and spirit is the state in which we live, but look again , verse 24 what Paul says, “And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.” Again, we have died to sin, through Christ on the cross so that it may no longer rule and reign in us, but rather that the spirit which was given may keep that dead flesh in check. In our passage this morning Paul describes again, the state of mankind, starkly divided and he speaks of being slaves to that which rules us. A slave is subject to his master, and has no power over his master. There is a pressure in today's sensitivities to do away with all slave/master language, but there is nothing that articulates the human experience and condition more than that relationship. The terminology of being in bondage, being a slave, is the harsh reality of mankind under the weight and burden of sin, and through Satan's deception and the cursed fallen nature we gladly submit ourselves to that bondage. The Israelite's in Egypt, enslaved and in bondage, once freed even after all God had done at one point desired to return to that bondage. Often times I think that we can underestimate the power of sin and Satan, and the falleness of mankind.

It truly is a slavery, a generational bondage that we are all born into. Shackled into a life of sin which we gladly chose for it is apart of who we are, it is our very nature. But Christ, who is rich in mercy and grace, looked upon our state just as he looked upon Israel while captive in Egypt, and he had compassion toward us, and he purchased us so that we may be his servants, but unlike the Satan who is a cruel and deceptive master leading all of his followers to death, Christ, who has purchased us has set us free, so that we may live. This is the language that Paul uses, verse 16 “Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness? But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that for of doctrine to which you were delivered.” The reality of mankind's situation is simply we are enslaved to Satan by nature, for by nature we are children of wrath. Unable, and more over unwilling to be free from that bondage, for in it is Satan's deception of freedom, thinking ourselves free, being blind to the reality that we are slaves to a nature which condemns us, thinking we are the authors of our own fate making excuses in our own morality, while being a slave to sin and Satan all along. Scripture says, no one seeks after God, no, not one, because no one in their natural mind wants God. Satan has deceived the world to see God as a slave master, as a moral prude who inflicts rules and regulations upon his followers believing that following God is to limit oneself from the experiences of life. We hear it in the smocking of the world, in their attempt to belittle the faith, and liken serving God to being controlled.

This deception and blindness runs so deep, mankind is neither able, nor are they willing to see their own plight, not being able to understand that the very nature which guides us through this life in our natural state, is the nature that condemns and separates us from our creator, and that separation ultimately brings death, not just in the body but in the spirit, an everlasting eternal suffering being cast away from God. Think on that a minute, in this life there is suffering, there is pain, but for the relatively short time we are on this earth we are in a sort of limbo that upon our death we will either be in the presence of God, or cast into outer darkness in the furthest reaches away from him. You think that separation that is felt and experienced in this world is bad, that which awaits those who deny and reject him is far worse. That is why there is the call to repent, there is the call that goes out to believe to be saved from this wrath to come which is poured out on all unrighteousness, and would except by the grace of God and his imputed righteousness be poured out upon us as well. If it was not for God and his sovereign work in the lives of his people, there is none who would escape the wrath coming upon the sinful nature of mankind. The bible likens salvation to a new birth, a quickening in the heart, which is necessary for as was already stated, in our nature state we are lost and are more then happy to be. It isn't unless and until God awakens us to the bondage of sin within our very nature that we even know that there is something to repent of. Until we are given an image of God that is from him, and not of our own making, we don't understand, nor can we understand the vile nature of our sin.

We are slaves to our nature, until Christ comes and purchases us. This is apart from our desire, apart from our work, none of us chose to be born or who our parents would be, no one asked our permission or consulted with us about the families that we would be born into, our parents, our siblings, we had no say but where rather simply born into it. I think that is why the example of salvation is that being a new birth, it is not a choice that is made, it is something that happens to you, we can not merely chose to be born again and chose by a sheer act of will and determination if we are children of Adam, of Children of God. It is God who chooses, and it is God who adopts for it is he who has paid the price to free us from the bonds of sin.

And as Paul points out, that purchase has a double effect, it kills that which is alive in us, and revives that which is dead. Through him we are dead to sin, dead to Satan no longer being held captive but instead have become alive in him. In verse 18 Paul says, “having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.” now that we have been bought by the blood of Jesus Christ our nature has changed, no longer at the mercy of our sinful nature, but have been given a new nature of righteousness through Jesus Christ, now being willing and able to do the things which are pleasing to him. The life that we have in him, is not just a life after death on this earth, but a life after the death of our old nature, it is here, and now, a life lived in the spirit working in us to will and to do. Paul implores his readers to take on this life, put on the love of God and live as those who have been made righteous. Verse 19, “I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness. Though our nature has changed, though we are a new creature in the new birth born out of the grace and mercy of God, we must still strive to put to death the old nature and pursue the new.

For as long as we live in this body, who we were is still a part of who we are, and we through the work of the spirit, and by the grace and mercy of God need to work to mortify sin, that is to reckon ourselves dead to it and see it has having no power over us, for through him, we are more than conquerors, Christ has defeated death, hell, and the grave and as Paul points out, we have died with him and share in that victory. Verse 20, “For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness.” That is, while slaves to sin, you are incapable, unable, to have righteousness before God. Having our works tainted by the curse, being puffed up, arrogant, full of envy and pride so that even the good works that we may do, feed into that pride and a false sense of holiness. Verse 21, “what fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death.” Without Christ, all our works, all our desires, are like filthy rags as Isaiah wrote. Sin brings with it shame, but we as humans have gotten pretty good at suppressing that shame and guilt, and instead we celebrate it as freedom, and our right, but the fact is we are slaves to it, and its end is death. Verse 22.”But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Salvation is more than a get to heaven free card, it is a life lived worthy of the calling, and the everlasting life is the gift that is given for faithfulness. As the Author of Hebrews wrote, (12:1)“Since we are surrounded with such a great cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.” That race is to endure in this life through faith, trusting and believing God, looking to Jesus the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” It is finished, it is accomplished and he has returned victorious to a place of high honor with the father. Death has been put to death, and life has been given through the son, who was born on this earth by a virgin, to live and die as one of us so that he may be the perfect sacrifice to pay the price for his people. Continuing in Hebrews 12, the author says, “You have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first born who are registered in heaven and God the judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better than that of Abel.

Salvation has brought you into his presence, into the general assembly and church of the first born, that is Jesus, the first born of all who are the promise given to Abraham, that through his seed, through the one that many would be born again and made alive in him. Continuing on in Verse 25, in Hebrews 12, "See that you do not refuse him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused him who spoke on earth, much more shall we not escape if we turn away from him who speaks from heaven, for those who are in Christ, have not come to the mountain that may be touched and that burned with fire to blackness, and darkness, and tempest but we have come to mount Zion in the hope of the grace and mercy given by the Father. If you are hearing his voice today, calling, do not harden your hearts but turn, repent, and believe, be free from the bondage, the guilt and shame of sin, and be made alive in him to walk in a newness of life having the everlasting love and peace of God working in you. There has been no greater gift given, than the peace which God has made between himself and mankind for all those who are his, and who believe. And right now is the time that we observe his birth, and that peace that was given, a celebration of the salvation that God has provided in the birth of his son on that night. Who came, so that we may be reconciled, brought into the family of God. And there is no greater joy, no greater peace, than that which is given to those who believe, and no greater gift than the son so that we may believe.