

Sermon 30<sup>th</sup> September 2018

Romans 7: 4-to 8:4

**“So my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God. For when we were controlled by the sinful nature, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our bodies, so that we bore fruit for death. But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code.”**

Let's just stop there for a minute and look at what Paul is saying to us. He's basically saying when you died to your old self and were raised again in new life in Christ, who through His sacrificial death on the cross had made atonement for our sin and opened the way for our personal relationship with God the Father to be restored ; when you did that you are released from the old written code of the law and all the sin and temptation that came with it, and released into the new way of the Spirit to bear fruit for God.

Some preachers have in the past and I'm afraid still do today; stop there and proclaim with a large smile there it is. Give up your old life accept Jesus as your personal Saviour and all will be right with the world. The Apostle Paul says so here and so you can be fruitful for God and everyone will think you're brilliant!

If you only read as far as verse 6 you could be forgiven for believing that and there are some who do.

Paul realised this and rather than stopping there he went on to explain the reality of what that means in totality rather than in isolation. Have you ever come out of a service where the preacher has extolled the virtues of living your life in total obedience and submission to God and casting out every sinful thought from your mind so that you are pure and blameless before God, and of course these are great things to aspire to; but in honesty have you perhaps felt, "well I'm never going to reach those standards so what a failure I am" because unfortunately the preacher has not continued to say these are the standards God wants us to aspire to but knows we will always fall short this side of heaven because we are inherently sinful people and will fall short again and again because of that and God has covered this with His abundant grace and mercy for those who come to Him with truly penitent hearts and will continue to forgive our sins, it is not a one off experience.

If you read the Bible stories of the people God used, each and every one of them, bar Jesus, was guilty of sinful nature rising up in their lives, even after accepting God as Lord. David, bless him, everyone uses David, was guilty of lustfulness, adultery, deceit, envy, greed, murder and a host of others as well, yet God saw his heart and heard his cries for forgiveness and continued to use him. Sin is a reality in our lives and if the devil wasn't interested in you before you became a Christian, why should he be?, you posed no threat to him and he was content to let you just live happily in your sins; once you accept Jesus as Lord of your life, you immediately become his, the Devil's enemy and he will try and use the powers he has, which are lies and deceit, to try and win you

back to his side, and sometimes they work, for a while. This is why the Apostle Paul continues thus from verse 7:..

**“What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, “Do not covet” But sin seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment produced in me every kind of covetous desire (the Devil uses lies and deceit as we said) . For apart from law sin is dead. Once I was alive apart from law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang back to life and I died. I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death. For sin seizing the opportunity (1Peter5:8 tells us “Your accuser, the devil, is on the prowl like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. CJB) by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death. So then the law is holy and the commandment is holy righteous and good. (In other words the law is fine it’s what we allow the devil to do with it in our minds which causes the problems)**

Paul then goes on to expand the point further: verse 13:

**“Did that which is good, then, become death to me? By no means! But in order that sin might be recognised as sin, it produced death in me through what was good, so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful. (Ever since the fall of Adam and Eve, man by his sinful nature has been prone to disobeying laws set out for good. The fact that the law says, “do not covet” is the opening the devil needs to put corrupt thoughts into our minds to overcome the law. In other words much as when a young child is told “no” to certain things and kicks off, when we are told “no”, by the law in this case, the devil will use every ploy possible to try to get us to disobey)**

The apostle Paul continues:

**“We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin (following the fall of Adam and Eve, we are still living in the consequences) 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 is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. (Isaiah tells us all our righteous acts (in our own strength) are as filthy rags. or menstrual rags as the original states, in our own strength we are nothing). For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no 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 is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.**

Paul explains what he means!

**“So I find this law at work:**

**When 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 the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! (In other words an admission that in his own strength he has little if any chance of standing up against the wiles, schemes, deceit and lies of the devil and will almost certainly succumb to them, sound a bit familiar to past things in your and indeed my life?)**

An appeal and thanksgiving.

**WHO will rescue me from this body of death???**

**Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!!**

**So then, I myself (in my own strength) am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin (Satan doesn't just disappear and give up once we become Christians, he tries twice as hard to win us back to his camp)**

God's answer

**THEREFORE, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so HE condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit."**

All would be well therefore if we were to be 100% focussed on God and the Lord Jesus all of the time. But we know, and more importantly God knows that that will never be the case and we will let our minds and thoughts wander and the Devil will have opportunity to once again raise doubts and questions in our minds especially when things go wrong with health, work, family, life in general. It is at these times that we need to remember that God is Lord of our lives and has promised never to leave us or forsake us and as we turn again to Him in repentance He will pour out His love, grace and mercy on us and we can rejoice once more in His presence.

I want to finish this morning by reading you a poem. It has a very special place in my heart as it was shared with me by a member of our congregation who has given me permission to share a little of their testimony with you. When I first met him he was by his own admission self harming regularly, drinking more than he should and was pretty fed up with God as his health wasn't good and the prognosis was that it would deteriorate further. I had the privilege of sharing a ministry time with him and with Suela Brown from Elim, Queens Road one morning some months ago now, here in church, quietly after the service. We prayed not only for his health issues but also for his life generally and his relationship with God. A few weeks later I was able to talk to him at the end of the service again and he told me that he was no longer self harming and he had stopped drinking. We praised God together and a few months later he was able to confirm he was still okay and his relationship with God was much better. He allowed me to share it with Suela who was naturally delighted at what God had achieved.

About three months ago Andre showed me a poem that he has written over several years about the ups and downs of his relationship with God and the point where God has brought him to as a Christian. The honesty of it moved me both spiritually and emotionally and I asked Andre if I could use it in an upcoming sermon on "Keeping going" as it seemed to fit in with that theme really well.

Those of you who were here will know that I didn't use it that day because I knew that this slot was coming up and God really laid it on my heart to use it alongside Paul's honest rendition in Romans 7 of how life in our own strength is nigh on impossible and it is only through the saving

sacrifice of Christ Jesus that we can live our Christian lives, nothing of us and all of Him and that we need to keep turning to Him every day to stop us from falling, it's called Teardrops and Andre I have prayed that I will do it justice for you.

Teardrops

So – it was prayed for

So – it was given

With eyes that open slowly...  
I see the beauty, I feel the pain;  
my tears fell, almost lost in life's rain.

Smile to a whisper, whisper to a scream.  
My reality is a nightmare, never a dream.  
Welcome to the battlefield of obedience..  
to the Spiritual warfare of knowing Christ.

Listen...

For when I die in this world, I'll live in another.  
Dear Jesus...prepare me for battle; I pray and I pray;  
use me to gain souls, 'fore my breath fades away.

A teardrop fell.

It took ten years and more...to realise  
why the angels looked down and cried, so...  
as I dance in the twilight; dear Lord catch my fall

When the spirits mimic You from within,  
and the world outside tempts us to sin,  
when upon the rocks...sirens sing with their luring tones –  
Children in Christ make no bones.  
the devil is at work!  
When demons scream, when they claw at your heart,  
I know Christ and I will never part.  
So when I fail and never call, dearest Lord catch my fall.

Remember always when in doubt,  
"The blood of Christ". Shout it out!

A teardrop fell...

When the evil one comforts you with lies  
all he wants is your soul – and your Jesus' eyes.  
So when you slip for Satan's tricks,  
and his kiss of torment stays on your lips;  
when human nature steals you away,  
and a thought possessed begs you to play;  
when darkness tries to smother the light,  
remember - this is your fight.  
Don't torture yourselves for hours on end,  
give it to Jesus, your God given Friend.  
His smile is the look of love.

A teardrop fell....

Your attention if I may;  
pray for guidance every day;  
Dearest Lord, catch my fall –  
as your battle scarred child – I love you most of all.

So now my search is over....  
upon the cross, Jesus did suffer,  
He wept and He wept;  
countless tears He shed.  
In forgiveness for our sins, with the pain – He bled.

For each fallen tear, a soul was saved.  
Lord I ask in Your name – cry me a river!

Andre Towers