

ROMANS - DEAD TO SIN
A SERMON BASED ON ROMANS 6:1-14
PREACHED AT CHIPPAWA PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
NIAGARA FALLS, ONTARIO
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10:00 a.m.

It's something I expect of my faith.

I want it to work.

I want the purpose, plan and peace

that comes from having a faith that works.

The right software, for the right operating system,

to run and operate this life God has given me.

I think it can be part of what first brings us to church,

that desire to see our lives work,

to get faith right

in order to get life right.

It was why Martin Luther went to church.

Martin Luther was a German who lived in the 1500's.

After a near death experience with lightning,

he decided he was going to get his life together,

and get it right with God.

Never one to do something halfway, he became a monk.

He threw himself into the disciplines of the monastery full force.

Prayers were seven times daily.

They rose at one in the morning,

went to the sanctuary, and started their first service.

He settled into the routine of monastic life

and seemed to have found peace.

But there was another thunderstorm, this one in his spirit.

After a number of years in training,

it was Luther's turn to say the mass, to lead the service.

As Luther started into the service,

he got to the words,

'We offer unto thee, the living, the true, the eternal God...'

Right then and there

he had a powerful sense of the holiness and otherness of God.

Luther says this about his experience,

‘At these words I was utterly stupefied and terror-stricken.

I thought to myself,

‘With what tongue shall I address such Majesty,

seeing that all men ought to tremble

in the presence of even an earthly prince?

Who am I,

that I should lift up my eyes

or raise my hands to the divine Majesty?

The angels surround him.

At his nod the earth trembles.

And shall I, a miserable little person, say ‘I want this,

I ask for that? For I am dust and ashes and full of sin

and I am speaking to the living, eternal and the true God.”

It was his Isaiah 6 moment, standing in the throne room of God, trembling.

It became a driving question for Luther.

How could a person abide God’s presence

unless they themselves were holy?

So Luther pursued holiness.

He would make it work.

He would fast for three days at a time without a mere crumb.

He did more praying than required by the order,

and they prayed a lot.

He slept without the blankets he was allowed,

and nearly froze.

Despite doing all these things,

he did not have assurance.

He did not have a sense that his sins had been compensated.

He was working to make up for his sin,

he never felt he had done enough.

He never felt his good works were enough to satisfy God.

Believing confessed sin is forgiven by God,

he tried confession as a means to attain peace with God.

So he went to confession,

often daily, sometimes six hours at a time.

I would have hated to have been the priest on the other side

of the booth when Luther came in.

There is a story that Luther was so thorough,
his confessor said to him one time,
'Look here, if you expect Christ to forgive you,
come in with something to forgive,
Killing your father
calling God names
or adultery,
something worth confessing
- instead of these peccadilloes, these little sins.'

Luther began to realize
that he couldn't possibly do enough confession
to become entirely clean before God.
Because as soon as he was finished confession,
he would have an impure thought.
He knew he was in constant danger of forgetting a sin,
or being unaware of a sin.
He saw that he needed a forgiveness of his whole being.

He had reached a state of crisis in his faith.

Sins, to be forgiven, must be confessed.

To be confessed they must be recognized and remembered.

If they are not recognized and remembered,

they cannot be confessed.

If they are not confessed, they cannot be forgiven.

In his fruitless search for peace,

Luther became frustrated with his inaccessible,

judging, damning, God.

Upon receiving advice to simply love God,

Luther proclaimed in his frustration,

“Love God? I hate him.”

It wasn't working.

Following all the rules wasn't working.

The faith he had constructed wasn't working.

The head of the Wittenberg university put Luther to work

trying to refocus him in the midst of his spiritual crisis.

He put Luther in the position of chair of the Bible.

His job would now be to teach the Bible at the university.

He began lecturing on Paul's letter
to the Romans and then to the Galatians.

In these letters Luther had his third great spiritual moment.

Except this wasn't lightning,
or saying his first mass,
this was his daily study of the Bible,
in preparation for lecturing his students.

From Romans and Galatians he was struggling to understand
the phrase,
'the just shall live by faith.'

Luther had lived his life in fear of a just God,
a God who would deal justly in punishing the unjust.
Who would live if there was no one just no one righteous?

All the rules.

The law.

Prayers seven times a day,

pilgrimages, confession, asceticism,

Luther did them all and couldn't find peace.

Luther followed the rules so intensely,

even the other priests told him to lighten up.

Despite that - he never found peace before God.

In his continued prayer and study over the Scriptures,

he finally got it.

What he understood turned the church on its ear.

And was a catalyst for a major reform of the church.

What he got eventually led to the Protestant movement.

He writes,

‘The justice of God

is that righteousness

by which

through grace and sheer mercy

God justifies us through faith.

God makes atonement for us.’

God does it for us. God does the justifying.

What he came to understand was that

God pays the penalty, takes the punishment,

for us.

God's justice is carried out in Christ.

We are given the status of righteous, holy,

because God simply gives it to us, in Christ.

In Christ, we are redeemed.

By grace we are saved.

Salvation is a gift to be received.

Getting a faith that works,

comes not from keeping the law perfectly,

comes not from trying to be good, or at least good enough,

a faith that works,

is a faith that receives.

It is one of the most famous Bible verses.

Ephesians 2:8 says,

“It is by grace you have been saved,

through faith,

and this not from yourselves,

it is the gift of God.”

It comes as a gift.

The body of Christ broken for you.

The blood of Christ shed for you.

Saved by grace.

Not by your ability to get it right,

because sometimes we can get it so wrong.

Not by the wrongs you haven't done.

‘Haven't killed anyone, not as bad as that guy – I'm good.’

Saved - not by your own goodness,

because you can never be good enough

to stand before a holy God and say, I deserve your love.

I've earned it.

We all need grace.

Saved by grace.

Amazing grace.

We all need grace.

Luther says when he came to the realization

that only grace would save him,
only by the acceptance of God's grace in Christ,
he said,
'I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors,
into paradise.

The whole of Scripture took on a new meaning.
If you have a true faith that Christ is your Saviour,
then at once you have a gracious God,
for faith leads you in and opens up God's heart and will
that you should see pure grace and overflowing love.'

Luther's faith came alive with trust in Christ.

Grace brings us to God.

Grace works.

We worship out of a place of gratitude for God's love and goodness,
simply given to us.

We live out of a place of knowing
we have been given another chance.

So then, living the Christian life, following Jesus' teaching,

doing the things he shows us,
these are not a way to earn God's favour,
but how to stay close to God.

This is what Romans 6 is about.

It is about staying close to God.

It is about how you live having received the gift of amazing grace.

Paul asks the question,

'Well if grace is a gift, and costs us nothing,
shall we go on sinning
so that we can receive even more grace?'

This shows up in the thinking,

"It doesn't matter what I do,
God will forgive me anyway."

It shows up in the behaviours where we compromise on
honesty, and truth, and integrity,
because we have equated God's grace,
with indulgence,
God's forgiveness, with lack of consequence.

Paul makes the point,

if you have died to sin,

he is referring to the action of baptism,

if you were baptized as an adult,

or have seen the baptism of an adult,

there is a symbolism associated

with being tipped back into the water,

and that is of descending into the grave,

and coming up again,

a new person, a new life, reborn, born again.

Paul says in Romans 6,

‘Don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus
were baptized into his death?

This is so we can live a new life.

The old self was crucified with him,

died with him

so that we are no longer slaves to sin.

No longer slaves.

No longer struggling under the shackles of trying to be perfect

like Luther was attempting,

but neither so lazy as to think that there could be no change,

no transformation, no growth to being good,

righteous, holy, other.

Here is one of the things in the Bible

that when I first considered it, was a bit of a jaw dropper for me.

And I don't remember if I read it somewhere,

or whether it surprised me in my own thinking.

But it has to do with the 10 Commandments.

But its not just the 10 Commandments themselves.

It's where they land in the story.

I've told you this before.

It's important for When did the Israelites get the 10 Commandments?

Was it before or after they left Egypt?

Was it before or after they were delivered from slavery?

God delivered them from slavery first.

It was a gift.

Their freedom was not something they earned or deserved.

God delivered them.

In Exodus 20 he said,

‘I am the Lord your God, who brought you up out of Egypt,
who delivered you from the land of slavery.’

Grace.

It is after they are set free that he gives them the 10 commandments.

It is in their freedom that he gives the law.

You shall have no other gods before me.

You shall have no idols.

You shall not take my name in vain.

You shall keep Sabbath.

Honour your father and mother.

You shall not murder.

You shall not commit adultery.

You shall not steal.

You shall not bear false witness.

You shall not covet.

Grace brought them out of slavery.

The Law, all the rules, so to speak,

would keep them out of slavery,

in what is a sort of spiritual irony,

the limits and boundaries God gives, keep you free.

Grace works.

It brings us back into relationship with God.

Grace is what frees us.

But the Law keeps us free.

It is the Psalmist who prays,

“Keep me from wilful sins.

May they not rule over me.” Ps. 19:13

Paul says count yourself dead to sin.

Don't let sin reign in your mortal bodies so you obey its evil desires.

Don't offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness.

Offer yourself to God as those who have been brought from death
to life.

Offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness.

Sin is no longer your master.

This is what Paul was after in Romans chapter 6.

You are not trapped.

Not at all,

you are dead to sin.

You are no longer slaves.

You are not under law, but under grace.

And grace works.

The Law, following Jesus, following his teaching,

is a path, not to limit you,

not to restrict your rights, your choices, your freedom.

If you think of people you know,

or experiences you've had,

where you have seen limits disregarded,

and God's direction ignored,

ask yourself, did it ultimately lead to increased freedom?

Or did the consequences lead to things like

addiction,

broken relationship,

debt,

compromised health.

God's guidance, his law, is a path, not to limit you,

it is intended to keep you free,

and staying and dwelling in that place of grace.

Love God first.

No idols.

No murder.

No adultery.

No coveting.

Some will abuse God's grace.

Some will think, "What I do doesn't matter,

because God will forgive me anyway.

Philip Yancey calls it 'grace abuse'.

Grace abuse can leave us lost again, and back in slavery.

Grace abused can leave us lost and enslaved all over again.

In Romans, Paul says, 'You are slaves to the one you obey.'

Don't go on sinning thinking grace will increase.

Don't abuse grace.

Understand that while grace sets you free,

Following the commands of God,

the teaching of Jesus,

staying with the way,

holding to the truth,

pursuing the righteous life,

pursuing a godly, Christ-like,

a holy life,

will keep you free.

Amen.