

## INI

Romans 6,19-23

Trinity 7 — 19 July 2015

**Greeting:** To those who are called, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ; mercy, peace, and love be multiplied unto you. Amen.

We hear a portion of the Epistle lesson from Saint Paul's Letter to the Romans, which was read earlier:

But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, to sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life. <sup>23</sup> For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

**So far the reading. Let us pray:** Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of our hearts, be acceptable in Thy sight, O LORD, our Strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

**Introduction:** In today's Epistle lesson, the apostle Paul is using language that is both familiar and unfamiliar. He's speaking about slavery, sin, and death — words which may sound strange to modern ears.

For example, Paul is speaking about "being free," about "freedom." To us, "freedom" is a familiar word. We're the "land of the free and the home of the brave." New Hampshire's state motto is: "Live Free — Or Die!" We do well to remember, however, that the state is the guarantor of our freedoms, but not the author of our freedoms. The authors of our Constitution believed that our freedoms are given by God and we have "inalienable rights."

But Paul also speaks about slavery, and to most of us slavery is either an idea or its practice is unfamiliar. We may have read in the paper or heard on the news that slavery still exists in some parts of the world, such as in Sudan, a country in North Africa, where Muslims in the northern part of Sudan make war on and capture and enslave Christians and others who live in the southern part of that country; but for most of us this is a world far away.

But for Paul, and even for Jesus, slavery was part of every-day life in the world ruled by Rome. To be a slave meant being owned by some one else and being at the owner's beck and call. People who were free, such as Paul, were proud of their freedom and their Roman citizenship. People did not take their freedom for granted.

But he's also speaking about "sin." In today's world to speak about sin is to sound almost as if you're living in the Middle Ages. And to connect death to sin sounds as if you're really living in the Middle Ages.

Perhaps we are surprised to hear Paul say that when it comes to our relationship with God there are no "free people" any where. This brings me to my sermon theme for today, "**What Does Paul Mean When He Speaks About Slavery And Death?**" I'll develop this theme in three parts:

- 1) Enslaved By Sin;**
- 2) Freed By Christ;** and,
- 3) Living In Christ**

**1) Enslaved By Sin.** All of us, by nature, that is, apartt from Christ, are enslaved by sin. But to understand what that means, we'll first look at the nature of slavery, then the nature of sin, and finally sin's payment — death.

What about the nature of slavery? Slavery was a normal part of the Roman-Mediterranean world of the time of Jesus and Paul. In fact, the Roman empire can be called a slave economy, because at least about 1 out of three people in the empire were slaves; however, this slave economy started in Greece several hundred years before the birth of Christ. Slavery seems to have been a part of mankind's history and has existed in all parts of the world since time immemorial.

Under Roman law, slaves had no rights. None. Zip. They did not even have the right to life — an owner could kill them and not worry about the law. For most owners, however, slaves represented an economic investment, so it would make as much sense as killing a slave as refusing to change the oil in a brand new car or truck. Many slaves worked beside their owners in small businesses, and were paid wages and could even buy their freedom after a period of time. Some, however, were worked to death in the

mines; the cost of working them to death was less than the cost of new slaves.

Slavery was based on economic necessity. People became slaves by being captured in a war — and this was one of the major reasons for Roman military expansion — or by selling themselves and their families into slavery to pay off debts.

In the Roman empire, regardless of how well or how poorly treated they were, slaves were property. And as property, slaves had no rights.

Now, what about the nature of sin? Paul and the rest of Scripture clearly teaches that all people by nature are enslaved by sin. Sin exercises its lordship over humankind.

Scripture teaches that all people are born sinful. That is, all people participate in Adam's sin; and just as Adam sinned, so all people not only inherit this sin, but commit actual sins. People are born enemies of God. People are born with a lack of an ability to fear, love or trust God. We call this original sin, and original sin gives rise to actual sins of thought, word, and deed. All people are born with sin, and therefore are under the dominion of sin; and if we are under the dominion of sin, we are slaves to sin.

Original sin has never been a popular idea. It has not been popular because it goes against human reason. And because it goes against human reason, that is why God has clearly revealed this in the Bible.

Who, for example, can look at a new born baby, and say that this infant cannot by its own reason or strength fear, love, or trust God; and that as it grows it will manifest the works of the flesh, that is, the works of sin? Probably no one. But yet we know that even infants and small children, as well as adults, can become ill and even die. That's sin's wage at work.

Unfortunately for us, the wage that sin pays is death. It is interesting to note that Paul uses the word for payment that is normally associated with the daily wage that a soldier received. The implication is quite clear that sin not only has a final pay out, it has a daily pay out as well, not only in actual sin, but also in all sorts of sickness and illness of both body and mind. Sin's payment is continuous and casts a shadow over every aspect of our daily

lives.

Even though people may wish to deny original sin, for the most part, they cannot deny the reality of death. Oh sure, some people teach reincarnation, or a special light at the end of the tunnel, all in an effort to minimize or even deny the reality of death itself. But reincarnation and a light at the end of the tunnel are not Scriptural concepts, and are rejected by God.

God's original intention for humankind was life. But with sin came death, and as Paul teaches, sin and death spread to everyone because all sin. It is our nature. And the payment is death.

First of all, sin has us dead to God, or spiritual death. Secondly, it pays out physical death. And thirdly, its ultimate payment is eternal death.

**2) Freed By Christ.** But if the payment of sin is death, the Good News is that the free gift of Christ is eternal life.

Thus, we see that Christ has redeemed us. If all of us by nature are weighed down and claimed by sin, then the only way out is to look for someone who can buy our freedom for us.

We cannot by our own reason or strength free ourselves from the Lordship of sin and death. In the language of slavery, this means we have to have someone who will redeem us from our bondage to sin and death, who will pay the price to free us and take us away from the Lordship of sin and death.

The debt is so large that we cannot ever pay it on our own.

But there is one who has purchased us, not with silver and gold, as precious and as costly as those metals are, but with His holy and innocent suffering and death, with his precious blood, worth more than all the silver and gold that ever was or will be in this world of ours, and that is none other than the Lord of Life Himself, Jesus Christ, our Redeemer.

On account of His Holy and sinless life, and innocent suffering and

death, Jesus has freed us from the Lordship of sin and death.

One of the most important things always to remember is that this freedom, this redemption which Jesus won for all of us, is His gift. There is nothing you or I can do to either gain it or earn it; if there was, then it wouldn't be a gift, would it? As Paul writes, this is "the gift of God." Furthermore, Jesus did this once for all. He paid the price that sin demands, he paid the penalty.

Now that we have been freed from sin and death, we are not only freed from something, we are freed to have a new Lord of our lives, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Last week's Epistle lesson showed us that we were baptized into Jesus' death and resurrection, so that we were baptized into His death to die to sin and into His resurrection to rise to newness of life.

In the world, sin promises life but pays out death, as a matter of fact, death on the instalment plan. Jesus, however, promises life even in the face of death.

**3) Living In Christ.** But in this new life we live in Christ is a life of tension.

As I've said before, God looks at this world through the Cross of Christ, and in this Cross sin, death, and the devil have been decisively defeated, once for all. We, however, while sharing in that victory, know that the final victory will be ours only after we have passed through the final enemy, an enemy who has lost his sting, the final enemy of death.

We live a life of tension between the now, a life in which we wrestle with sin and death, and the not yet, when the victory is completely realized.

It may seem paradoxical, almost contradictory, to say that all of us in Christ are at the same time both saint and sinner. But this is the clear teaching of Scripture. On the one hand, the apostle John says,

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in

us. (1 John 1,8)

On the other hand, John goes on to say,

Whoever abides in Him (that is, Jesus) does not sin.

Which is it? Is it either or? No, it is both.

On account of Jesus, God does not reckon the guilt of sin to us. As Paul writes later in Romans,

there is no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus. (Romans 8,1)

On the other hand, as Luther explains in the explanation of the fifth petition, “forgive us our trespasses,” “for we daily sin much and deserve nothing but punishment.” Again, Paul writes, “For I know that in my flesh dwells no good thing” (Romans 7,18).

So how do we deal with sin? How do we deal with the temptations that daily beset us?

First, we cannot do it on our own. We know that God tempts no one, but we daily pray that God would guard and keep us, so that the devil, the world, and our flesh, may not deceive us nor seduce us into misbelief, despair, and other great shame and vice; and though we be assailed by them, that still we may finally overcome and obtain the victory,

We pray. We listen to God’s Word. We read God’s word. We gather in worship. We make use of the Sacraments. We daily remember what Jesus has done for us, remembering that as He died to sin once and for all, that we too have died to this evil,. praying the Holy Spirit to enlighten our lives through the Word and to strengthen us

Luther used an example that is instructive. He said that while we cannot keep the birds from flying through our hair, we can keep them from nesting there. If a particular sin troubles us, then we should look up specific Scripture passages, re-reading the Catechism to assist us.

To live in holiness as saints is to live knowing what God has called us to be. Previously I quoted the apostle John; in that scripture passage John goes on:

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1,9)

Confession means knowing that we have sinned. We do not minimize our sin by looking around us and trying to determine who is better or worse than we are, and then take comfort in that. No, we always look at ourselves. This is what Paul meant that we work out our “own salvation with fear and trembling” (Philippians 2,12).

In our text, Paul writes that

For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness.

The term “members” refers to our whole bodies, all of us. It is derived from a Greek word which first means “instruments” or “weapons.” Paul employs such military words because Paul knows that we are in a war, a war not against flesh and blood, such as in Iran or Afghanistan, but against principalities and powers, sin, death, and the devil. Against such spiritual adversaries, we use the Spirit Himself Whom Jesus has sent to us so that we may acknowledge Jesus as Lord, the triumphant Lord Who has conquered His enemies and our enemies. Jesus wishes to be the Lord of every area of our lives — no ifs, ands, or buts.

**Conclusion:** Slavery still exists in our world. But it is more than something that exists in a world far away, for example, the Sudan. In the Sudan, Christians from North America are going there and buying the freedom of fellow Christians who have been enslaved; Christians are setting other Christians free.

Slavery exists all around us, but it is the slavery to sin which would deceive us and countless others. It wishes to have dominion over us, it wishes to be the Lord of our lives and make us its slave. But thanks be to

God that His Son Jesus Christ once and for all broke the grip of sin, death, and the devil, so that as Jesus died to sin once and for all, and rose again to newness of life, so we too might daily die to sin and daily walk in the light of Jesus resurrection, forgiven, and restored.

Jesus died and rose from the dead once for all, but we struggle daily. We struggle with being both saint and sinner, with the ills and afflictions that surround us; with temptations and deceptions that would if it were possible draw us away from the Lord of Life Himself.

But God does not abandon us. Jesus promises to be with us, each day, each hour, each minute. Jesus has bought our freedom so that we might be His and live under Him in His kingdom in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness.

Jesus is our Lord, the Lord of Life, who has conquered so that we might share that life now and be assured of that life forever. Amen.

Now, the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.'

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