

Romans 6:12-23

June 25, 2017

- the good news of the Gospel talks so much about grace and forgiveness
 - about mercy without price and without cost
 - salvation is a free gift of God
 - the faith that takes hold of that salvation is itself a gift of God
 - then comes the kicker
 - Paul has this list of all the things I have to do and not do
 - I knew there was a catch somewhere
 - that's what a lot of people think

- this being a Christian isn't going to be any fun at all
 - put away sin, put away wickedness, give yourself to God

- how am I supposed to do all this stuff God wants?
 - how am I supposed to avoid all that stuff my sinful nature wants?
- isn't this Christianity stuff just trading one slavery for another?

- our goal today is to see the extraordinary difference between being a slave to sin and a slave to God
 - what you will find is both a lifetime full of difference and an eternity of difference between being a slave to sin and a slave to God

- when you get right down to it, there is no benefit in being a slave to sin
 - if you are a slave to things and material possessions, there's always more that you want that you can't have
 - and what you do have, you can't keep
 - the opposite of contentment is lust, and greed and covetousness and you won't find contentment if you are a slave to sin
- Paul writes in Philippians 4, "I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation"

-by definition lust is never satisfied ... it always wants more than it has

-that's why lust enslaves people, it holds them captive and leads them into deeper and deeper perversion

-in contrast, contentment sets you free

-there are other things that enslave people too

-fear can never be overcome unless you have someone or something that you can trust completely, with everything

-fear's opposite is faith

-and faith sets you free

-back in the early days of our country, a weary traveler came to the banks of a great river he had never seen before

-there was no bridge

-it was early winter, and the surface of the mighty stream was covered with ice

-could he cross over?

-would the ice bear his weight or would he break through?

-night was falling and it was urgent that he reach the other side

-finally, after much hesitation and with much fear, he began to creep cautiously across the frozen surface on his hands and knees

-he thought this approach might distribute his weight more evenly and keep the ice from breaking beneath him

-about halfway over he heard the sound of singing behind him

-out of the dusk came a man driving a horse-drawn wagon with a load of coal heading for the ice

-he was singing merrily as he went on his way!

-the man on the ice looked at his trembling hands, his fear that the ice would not be strong enough to bear his weight still fresh in his mind

-then he looked again at the driver, the heavy load, and the horses traveling confidently across the same ice!

-which one are you like?

-do you creep and crawl along on the promises of God?

-is your life filled with caution, timid-ness?

-do you face the new day with trembling?

-or do you run with boldness, secure in the promises of God

-God has promised to be with you

-you can believe that promise

-He has promised to uphold us and we can believe what He says

-he has promised to grant us victory over all our spiritual enemies

-you can trust His truthfulness ... you don't have to be a slave to fear

-he has promised to grant us full and free forgiveness of all our sins because of Jesus Christ

-he has promised to take us to His heavenly home

-you can take Him at His Word

-you and I don't have to creep on these promises as though they were too fragile to hold us

-we can stand on them, confident that God is as good as His Word and that He will do what He has pledged

-don't creep ... stand firm!

-greed can also enslave people

-why do you labour for that which does not last, which you cannot keep, which moth and rust destroy and which thieves break in and steal?

-it's opposite is satisfaction

-the only escape from the slavery of greed is to have treasure in heaven

- one of the things I try to do as I prepare for Sunday sermons is to look in advance at what texts and themes are coming up in the next little while
 - it gives the Holy Spirit an opportunity to direct my thoughts and preparations
- so I was thinking about how you explain the difference between being a slave of sin and a slave of God?
 - since a picture is worth a thousand words, let me paint you a picture
 - front porch light fixture had a burned out bulb that needed to be replaced
 - it was a nice fixture, fairly new, and matched the other outdoor fixtures
 - just one problem ... the bulb was stuck in the socket and I couldn't get it out
 - I unbolted the fixture from the wall and brought it in the house so I could work on it with more leverage
 - still couldn't get it out
 - got the pliers ... still couldn't get it out
 - cracked the porcelain socket ... still couldn't get it out
 - one final alternative ... remove the whole socket from the fixture, make the trip to the hardware store and buy a new socket to put in the fixture
- I contemplated a pilgrimage to Home Depot for a few minutes and cringed at the thought
 - find a parking space ... find a store associate who can help me find a store associate who works in light fixtures who can find an associate who knows if they even carry a replacement socket
- then I remembered that there is a small neighbourhood hardware store in Clarkson
 - you can park 10 feet from the front door

- the man at the front cash is the owner so I showed him the broken socket with the light bulb still stuck in it
 - do you have any of these?
 - aisle 2 ... left side ... half way down
- I was in and out of the store in under two minutes

- on the way home, I had this wonderful exciting and liberating thought
 - I'm retiring in a month, so after I retire, I wonder if I could get a job at that store?
 - I'd even work there for free ...

- do you start to comprehend the mind of St. Paul?
 - he had spent a lifetime living as a Pharisee and a slave to the law
 - then he met Jesus on the road to Damascus and discovered what it means to be freed from the slavery of sin and the curse of the law and to live under grace
 - he doesn't have to be a slave to the law any more
 - he has been set free to work for Jesus and the kingdom of grace
 - and he'd even do it for free

- one of my favourite scenes in the movie Forrest Gump is Forrest atop a riding lawnmower cutting the grass in the park
 - he has this huge smile on his face as he goes around and around all day long
 - and he enjoys it so much, he's happy to do it for free

- so, what will it be? ... you can have a slavery to sin or you can be set free to serve God in a most remarkable way
- you can be owned by lust or fear or greed ... or you can be owned by God
- when you become God's child you are set free from the curse of sin
 - set free from the path of death
 - the benefit reaps holiness and leads to eternal life

- apart from the power of God in the gospel, there is no escape from sin and its bondage
 - Paul tries to put it in simple terms
 - apart from God, we are all addicted to something
 - apart from God, you serve an insatiable master
 - you will reap no benefit from it
 - and sooner or later, your sin is going to kill you

- there is only one means of escape
 - to be purchased and redeemed by God and bought free by the blood of Jesus Christ
 - then you can live under grace

- you need to understand the truth about sin:
 - sooner or later your sin will be found out
 - Conrad Black thought he could plead not guilty to charges of obstruction of justice
 - at his trial the prosecution showed the security video of him hauling boxes out the back door of his office building
 - David tried to hide his sin
 - he thought no one knew, no one would find out
 - he thought he had covered his tracks well
 - the truth is, “there is nothing hidden that won’t be revealed”
 - you might fool people, but you won’t fool God

- you also need to understand the truth about the law:
 - it enslaves because it is a master that you will never be able to please
 - it beats you up and it knocks you down
 - the law makes demands but gives no power to obey it

- Luther calls the law a hand that points us in the right direction

- but the right direction doesn't really help if I have no feet to walk its ways, no wagon, no horse, no car, no gas ... you get the idea
- the law shows us the will of God and convinces us that we are not able to keep it
- the law reveals sin but it cannot help us avoid sin nor can it rescue us from them

-in contrast ...

- it is the Gospel which is the power of God unto salvation
- it is the good news that Jesus died for our breaking of the law and rose again for our forgiveness that has the power to set us free
 - free from sin
 - free from death
 - free from the power of the devil
- and also free to fulfil the law

-there's a difference between doing the work of the law and fulfilling the law

- we are powerless to do the work of the law, and any bits of it that we might carry out by our own power don't take away our inner hatred for the law that demands more than we can ever do to satisfy it
- fulfilling the law is different
 - it means to follow the law of God with love and delight and to live a godly life freely, without the constraint of the law
 - this love and desire to do the will of God is put into our hearts by the Holy Spirit through faith in Jesus Christ
 - you have been set free from the futility of salvation as a self-improvement project
 - and if the Son sets you free, then you are free indeed

-this truth about God's love in Christ is so fantastic that you will want

to proclaim it from the rooftops

-it is a truth you have to share ... you won't be able to hold it inside

-like Jeremiah in the OT lesson

-he tried to contain it

-he desperately wanted to keep it a secret, but he could not

-he proclaimed it at his own peril and suffering

-but received the blessing and rescue of God

-you will hurt for all those you see who are still trapped where you once were

-you will want them to know about this one and only gracious God

-but they may not want to hear it

-the message of the Gospel will be rejected by people

-it will cause hostility and opposition

-you too will suffer and be persecuted

-but you need not live in worry and fear

-Christ stands with you and intercedes for you

-most people who believe in some sort of God also believe that all good people go to heaven

-it's a wonderful thought

-if it were true, it would make life a whole lot easier

-but if you examine such a belief, you will discover that it doesn't work

-if all good people go to heaven, just how good do you have to be?

-what some people really want to know is "How bad can I be and get away with it?"

-the Bible says that David was a man after God's own heart

-that would seem to indicate that he would have made the cut and have been good enough to go to heaven

- but the Bible also tells us that David committed adultery and murder
 - can you commit adultery and murder and still be good enough to go to heaven?
 - or, is there a specific number of times I can commit adultery and murder before I become too bad to go to heaven?
- if we choose to think that all good people go to heaven, then we are faced with the challenge of setting a standard to determine how good a person has to be
- apart from Jesus, nobody is good enough to go to heaven
 - that's why the good news of the Gospel so good
- we can all be good enough to go to heaven, not because we manage to do more good than evil, but because God sent his Son to be one with us, to be God with us
 - he sent him to take our place under the law
 - to live the perfect life that the law requires but we can't live
 - to die an innocent death in payment for the sins of the whole world
- all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are made right with God by his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus
- people who believe in their own self-made salvation are guilty of believing a lie
 - and it's a lie that will destroy them
- dear friends, you and I know the truth
 - yes, the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord
- what an incredible gift we have been given
 - freedom from the bondage and the curse of the law

-freedom from the eternal consequences of sin

-but even more than freedom from ... there is freedom to ...

-freedom to be children of God and heirs of heaven

-freedom to love and serve God with joyful and willing hearts