

Sunday 06 December 2009 Sermon - King's Centre Christian Church, Sheffield, UK

Romans 7: Romans 8

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Intro

SO FAR:

Laid the foundations for our faith. Dealt with the necessary big questions – God is holy. How can a holy God call an unholy people to himself? What is the consequence of ignoring God and living a self-focussed life? What about the Jews in all of this?

We've clearly presented the gospel message –

- the good news that IS Jesus Christ.
- The good news that THROUGH Jesus Christ any person can come back into relationship and freedom with our holy God, and fullness of life.
- The good news that its not about what you can DO, not about how much you KNOW, or how much of a GOOD life you lead (which is the way probably most of the world thinks you live a life 'good' life)
 - Instead, the good news that right relationship with God comes as a gift direct from God, by grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.
- The good news is that you and I when we become Christians become IN Jesus Christ (Covt)
 - All the benefits he gains because he fulfils the Torah law
 - All the benefits he carries as the son of God – the rights, inheritance, freedom
 - Even the resurrection from the dead of Jesus
 - ALL these things become ours, because now we have a new identity, now we are IN Christ.

So Chapters 1-7 answer the question of 'what' and 'how'. Then having set the scene Ch 8 onwards begins to answer the question of 'so what?' What purpose do you and I have, now this good news is in place? What's the meaning of life? What should I DO with my short life on earth in light of this incredible reality of salvation and friendship with God our creator and King? Now should I live and think?

Today – Ch 8 (in short – can't do it justice in 1 sermon to one of the greatest passages in NT)

- Begins to answer the 'so what'?
- It is focused on the Trinity
 - The Father adopting us into the rights & privileges of being His children
 - Jesus the son – the gateway to glory – the hinge on which us being saved, becoming children sits
 - The Holy Spirit at work in us & through us (mentioned 21 times)

Reading Romans 8:1-39

¹Therefore,

In light of Ch's 1-7

there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, ²because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.

³For 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,⁴ 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.

⁵Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.

⁶The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace;⁷ the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. ⁸Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.

⁹You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. ¹⁰But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness.

¹¹And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.

¹²Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation—but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. ¹³For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, ¹⁴because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

- **Now we get into the ‘so what’.... Adoption into God’s family**

¹⁵For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." ¹⁶The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. ¹⁷Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

¹⁸I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. ¹⁹The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. ²⁰For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.

²²We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. ²³Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? ²⁵But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

²⁶In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. ²⁷And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.

²⁸And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. ²⁹For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

³¹What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³²He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?

³³Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen?

It is God who justifies. ³⁴Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. ³⁵Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ³⁶As it is written:

"For your sake we face death all day long;

we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." ³⁷No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Blessed assurance

Who here has been part of an Alpha course? One of the sessions is entitled ‘how can I be sure of my faith?’ I expect we’ve all asked ourselves that question once in a while.

- What is this mystical, intangible thing? All about faith, belief.... is it all in my head?
- “On top of that... I struggle with sin. I’m far from perfect, it’s almost as if my body and my desires are at war with my faith and my spirit.”
- This chapter is about assurance. How it is that we CAN be sure.
 - It starts with ‘no condemnation’ (v1)
 - And it ends with ‘no separation’ (v.39)
- In between, he says the way to live with assurance is to live by the Spirit. Then we’ll be certain of the glory that we are heading towards
- Then the focus shifts to suffering – in our lives, in humanity, in creation itself – things remain very much in tension
 - Yet, even within this reality, we are still pointed to the future glory
- And there is a glorious conclusion – one of the most famous passages in the bible. You can’t help your spirit lifting as its read out, or sung out. “Nothing can separate us from the love of God”
 - What Paul does here is link the subjective stuff – the ‘airy-fairy’ stuff – the things which are hard to pin-down like love, faith, spiritual feeling – he links them with **hard grounded objective fact** – the cross of Christ
 - It’s the cross that guarantees for us that God loves us for ever, in Christ

As Mark Stibbe says

- We are to be people of faith, not of fear!
- We move from worry to worship – as does Romans 8
- Fear is believing something BAD and invisible is heading your way
- Faith is believing something GOOD and invisible is heading your way!

So let’s look briefly at each of those 3 sections in turn.

Life in the spirit (8:1-17)

The first few verses, v1-11 are a re-run of the discussion Paul has in Ch 5 & Ch 7 – which we’ve preached about in the previous 2 Romans sermons.

All about the apparent battle that goes on – my spirit is willing, but my flesh is weak. I struggle with sin. The whole of the nation of Israel struggled and failed to keep the Torah, the law, because of their sin. On the face of it, you'd think that condemned you to the consequence of sin, of falling short of God's holy standards – death.

But Ch 5 & 7 say that actually, “there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, ²because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.”

- I'm no longer bound to those rules – because they've been met by Jesus, on my behalf.
 - Since I am IN CHRIST, I can share in the fact that He HAS lived up to God's standards.
 - I can have assurance that I'm OK with God (and much more than OK, as we'll see in a minute)
- This will only make sense when you grasp that without Christ (as we saw in Ch 1:18f) the situation is perilous – we are heading for death and detachment from God, the source of all life and goodness.
 - In the big picture, it doesn't matter that you are caught in a funny in between situation – still stuck in a body that likes to sin – because the big picture is that you are IN Christ, that's what counts.

This raises a classic question for us: Does that mean I can go on sinning? Since I'm stuck with this body and this mind, why not just let it take me over? Since there is forgiveness available, why not take advantage of it by sinning lots in the meantime?

- There is a classic answer that Paul gives several times in his letters
 - ABSOLUTELY NOT!
 - “⁸Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.” (message of 2nd half of Romans Ch 1, from v18)
- Whatever you give yourself to – (sin/righteousness) you are a slave to.
 - “¹²Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation—but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. ¹³For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, ¹⁴because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.” (12-14)
- You see, Assurance is not arrogance. Assurance is hope, and it is humble acknowledgement of just what God has done for us

The message is: we are set free

- No condemnation FOR sin, no compulsion TO sin
- We're called to live with **responsibility** – make the choice to follow God's ways
- We're called to be **ruthless** – put to death sin in your body, wherever you can
- We're called to live in **reliance** – rely on the Holy Spirit to help you
- We're called to live in **relationship** –
 - Don't only see God as the judge [the motivator = fear]
 - God is the world's greatest father [the motivator = love]

So we have the holy spirit in us. And the spirit gives hope, both in the now and in for the future.

- It's not a vague hope. It's not a shaky 'well maybe' kind of hope.
- **If you think Christianity is a crutch, let me say – yes it is!**
 - I'd much rather **lean on** what Jesus Christ has done, than **rest on my laurels** and hope to please God.

- In fact, it's a titanium crutch, it's the strongest crutch, the strongest foundation you'll ever hope to find
 - You've got the same spirit in you that raised to life the divine son of God, through whom all things in heaven and earth were created
 - Just as he raised Christ, one day He will raise your body and spirit again to a life of glory, in Christ's presence and service, which will never end.

V11 - They say Christians die well.

- Some of you will remember John Parker who was a lovely older man in KC who sadly died a couple of years ago from very quick onset bowel cancer
- 3 things. Assurance, faith, hope, peace, (and in his wife too) John died well. I'm sure many of you have seen the same thing?

At his funeral service, I shared that Marjorie and I visited him and Doreen after John's initial diagnosis that he most likely had some form of cancer. **I don't think I'll ever forget what he said to us that day**, along the lines of:

- "there are 3 outcomes for me now.
- I know God in his power can miraculously and instantly heal me if he chooses.
- Or I could recover through the process of treatment and medicine – the process of which I'm not particularly looking forward to.
- **Or I'm too good for this world, and its time the Lord called me home.**"

One of the most mature responses I've yet heard from someone in that position

- To me, that revealed a **man of solid foundations and faith**, who was **looking his future in the face**, and yet, wasn't afraid.
- It's testimony to John and Doreen's faithful years of following Jesus, learning to trust in Him

John Parker died well. He had a titanium assurance because he knew and followed Jesus Christ.

- And it is only through Jesus that we can be called Sons of God. That may be a hard message for some people to hear, especially in this multicultural, multi-faith society. But the bible clearly says that only Christians – disciples of Jesus Christ – are sons of God, children of God.
- **And you may need to take that decision today**
- Good news – when you take that decision, an extraordinary set of adoption papers are signed and exchanged
 - We become children of god
 - Heirs
- Not going to say more on that – because we've preached on it extensively in 2009 – Prodigal Father sermons (partic 9 Aug 09
http://www.kingscentreonline.com/archive/mp3/09aug2009_sonship_and_spiritual_adoption.mp3)

Assurance – rich words of famous old hymn

**Blessèd assurance, Jesus is mine!
 O what a foretaste of glory divine!
 Heir of salvation, purchase of God,
 Born of His Spirit, washed in His blood.**

Refrain

**This is my story, this is my song,
Praising my Saviour, all the day long;**

Future glory – present suffering

Suddenly in v18, Paul says – “lets be realistic here folks”.

This hope of glory, this assurance, doesn't get us away from the fact that we live in a present time and present lives which alongside the love, hope and peace we enjoy are torn with trouble, suffering, imperfection, greed and struggle.

We live in the real world! The bible is the best book to acknowledge that. The Psalms are poems of living with the hope of God, amidst the trials and tests of life. Paul the apostle lived a life of far more suffering for the sake of the gospel than I've yet lived – shipwrecked, beaten, hounded out of cities, hungry, in prison.

- And yet, he says elsewhere that “I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. ¹²I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation” (Phil 4:11-12)
- How can Paul have such an outlook on life?
- Because he understands that to follow Christ means that we share in his glory by sharing in his sufferings (v17)
- The true gospel is no sugar-coated gospel. It's a realistic gospel. Paul says “come to Jesus and suffer with him. Come to Jesus and your life will probably become tougher in all sorts of ways.” (Ash p.305)

Why is this? We live in a situation of tension. The 'now' and the 'not yet' of being citizens of God's kingdom which has begun, but is not yet fully realised - we eagerly await its completeness.

Not just you and me, the whole of humanity and the whole of creation know that it is out-of-kilter in this present age, this present situation.

- Revival isn't just amongst humans!
- It is 'groaning' for its redemption – to be put right, to be “be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.” (v21)
 - Note this - The pain is described as labour pains – not death throes
 - Pain with a purpose
- Because its present situation is not how God intended it to be. The fall of the world has alienated God's creation from God's perfect presence and peace.
 - And yet, the glory that we all look towards is this: From the beginning, God has set in place a plan to set this right – to call the world, the cosmos, and you back into righteous existence.
 - The plan is covenant, and covenant culminates in the cross.
- And since the cross, we know the first-fruits, the down-payment of the holy spirit, that foretells that once again God will perfectly restore “all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ” (Eph 1:10)

And in the meantime, the people of God, the body of Christ are part of the solution to the world's pain and groaning.

- The attitude is this: Not ‘look what the world is coming to’ – but ‘look what is coming to the world!’
- You can moan about the church and the world, or you can ‘groan’
- Our groaning is a prayer partnership – with the HS to help us (v.26-27)
- Because we can have hope, have assurance, even in despair.
 - And I know that some of you are living with such hard situations at the moment.
 - Personal tragedy is a real thing for some of us.
 - Hold on, and look up
 - God’s promises are like stars – the darker the night, the brighter they shine
 - Hope really is possible. And the only people I’ve seen it in so far in my life is Christians.

=====IF TIME =====

We’re on the final straight, but we haven’t yet crossed the finishing line.

As a teenager I used to watch Formula 1 motor racing. Who remembers Nigel Mansell famously leading in the Canadian grand prix (1988), he was on the final corner – the guy with the chequered flag was ready and waiting to wave him home, the Brits were waiting to cheer his victory all over the world, and on the final corner he had an electrical failure and his car simply ground to a halt.... It trickled along, and then got overtaken and he missed out completely.

- You might think that’s the state the world, creation, humanity is in today.
- But even now, there is hope of glory.
 - The hope of glory, the reality that one day there will be a new heaven and a new earth, no more pain, no more suffering, no more death
 - This is the power in our engines.
 - This is what can spur you on around the final bend of history, and home to glory and the chequered flag.

=====IF TIME =====

More than conquerors

And that hope and assurance is what leads Paul into his majestic conclusion. He lifts his gaze to take a cosmic perspective on things.

“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” (v28)

- This is not a gospel of fulfilment – all the pieces of the jigsaw neatly in place
- This is a gospel of salvation – keep faithfully following and He WILL come through for you

³¹What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³³Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies.”

- Who can condemn you? (ASK THEM)
 - No one! You have been declared righteous!
 - This is the legal image – remember Ch 1-3 the law court image of the just judge, finding in favour of us – declaring that we are righteous in his eyes

- You can't be tried again for it. When God forgives, he unconditionally forgives, and forgets. "There is now no condemnation, for those who are IN Christ Jesus." (v1)
- Satan will have a go – because he is 'the accuser' (Rev 12:10)
- When the devil reminds you of your past – just remind him of his future!

And that is how we shall conclude...

Paul says 'I am convinced' I am standing on titanium solid ground. The Cross of Christ convinces me...

In all these things, even while we are enduring them, we are more than conquerors.

- Things will come against us, they are part of the Christian life
- Don't just tell God how big the storm is, tell the storm how big GOD is!
- Here comes the certainty, "since Christ proved his love for us by HIS sufferings, so OUR sufferings cannot possibly separates us from his love." (Stott p258)

As I conclude, I ask you to consider these questions

- Can you say today, with assurance, that you are saved from fear and death, that you are in right relationship with our creator?
 - IF NOT – MAKE THAT CHOICE TODAY
- If you can – are you living like it? In the midst of troubles, in the midst of the good life?
 - Do you live like you are saved, set free?
- Are you reaching out to share the groaning of other humans around you, and of the planet itself, to be part of the solution in the short-term, as we await with longing the final glory of God which will surely come.

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ³⁶As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."³⁷No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."