

This Sunday's Sermon

SLAVERY!! – ROMANS 6:15-23

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What then? Shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace? By no means! Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness. I am using an example from everyday life because of your human limitations. Just as you used to offer yourselves as slaves to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer yourselves as slaves to righteousness leading to holiness. When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.



This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it,

In 1995, the movie *Braveheart* came out. It was a popular movie that year, winning 5 Oscars. The movie *Braveheart* embellished on the historical account of William Wallace, a 13th century Scott who rebelled against England. The English had taken over the land of Scotland after the Scottish King did not announce an heir. The rule of the English is seen to be corrupt and oppressive on the people of Scotland. The war becomes personal for Wallace, played by Mel Gibson, when his wife is taken and executed by the English. He sets out on a vendetta against the English soldiers, and encourages his fellow Scots to do the same. Wallace is eventually betrayed by some of his own countrymen into the hands of the English and is tried for treason in London and is found guilty. The punishment for his crime is public torture and beheading. He is given one last chance to ask for mercy and a swift death. But Wallace gathers up the energy he has left and shouts the famous line – Free-dom!!

It makes sense, doesn't it? He has fought for his country's freedom, his own freedom, a little thing like torture and death isn't going to make him change his mind. How different it would have been if William Wallace's last words were: SLAVERY!! Servitude!! It seems like something from a *Monty Python* movie. It wouldn't make any sense. And it seems like the only people that would ever cry out that would be the ones doing the enslaving, not the ones who are being enslaved and oppressed. That's what makes the apostle Paul's words this morning so

unique. Because he is really crying out and promoting SLAVERY in this section, and not the SLAVERY of others, but the SLAVERY of all people. He reminds us all about SLAVERY:

1. Its rules
2. Its results

So often we are used to hearing about our lives as Christians being free. We have been freed from sin, we are free to love God, we are free to do a lot of things. And Paul himself talks about the freedom that a Christian has through faith in Christ. It was earlier in this very chapter of Romans that Paul is talking about the freedom we have since we are no longer slaves of sin. But in this section Paul changes gears a little bit. This is partially because of the impression that Christians can get that they are free to do whatever they want, and also to remind both believers and unbelievers of the slavery or servitude that is the story of every person that walks on this earth.

It can be easier for us, and for the world, to see Christians as slaves for Christ, being obedient to Christ, following the “rules” of God – going to church, giving to church, listening to whatever the church tells you to do. It’s a little bit more difficult to see the other side of slavery. Many people are turned off by giving up their “freedom” to serve someone else, even if it is God, so they call themselves free to do whatever they want. But is that really freedom? Because they have set up a false dichotomy, thinking the only slavery, is a slavery to God, when in fact there are two slaveries. And as I have said before, it doesn’t matter who you are, you are a slave to something. If you are a slave to God, you are free from sin, if you are free from God, you are a slave to sin.

(1)

I think before we go any further, we need to discuss a little bit about the slavery that Paul was talking about. In our country we have one idea of what slavery was like, but this is not exactly the same as slavery was in Paul’s day. In Paul’s day, there were some people who, to pay off their debts, would sell themselves into slavery. In addition to manual labor, some slaves were put in skilled professions. In many cases slaves could own property and earn their own money, but as a slave, they were still subject to their master’s orders. If a slave could earn enough money he could buy his freedom, Roman historians record several examples of this happening. Roman law even allowed freed slaves the ability to become citizens of Rome. So while not a glamorous living, being a slave in Rome was on average better than the idea of slavery we are familiar with here in America.

One place where slavery was the same was in the obedience to their masters. This was the primary “rule” of slavery that was in place. It was a rule that Paul mentions in this SLAVERY section of Romans. **“Don’t you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey?”** Paul then goes on to list the two slaveries you can be obedient to: **“whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness.”** The point Paul is making is that you are never free from a master, and those non-Christians who think that they are free are under an illusion

created and sustained by Satan. The choice with which people are faced is not ‘should I retain my freedom or give it up and submit to God?’ but ‘Should I serve sin or should I serve God?’

When you put it this way, the world seems pretty black and white, you’re either serving God or you’re serving sin. If you are free from sin, you are a slave to God, and if you are free from God you are a slave to sin. Even though it’s different to think this way, this is what Paul is bringing out here in Romans. But as we begin to think this way, we can see how it makes sense. The world around us worships sin (they don’t call it sin of course, but it still is sin). Just this last week on the radio I happened to be listening when they talked about a segment called “swingers” – couples or individuals who have arranged one night stands with other couples and individuals, this segment included a guy who spent a year “researching” this for a book. The world sees this as freedom, but in reality they are slaves to their primal sinful urges.

But slaves to sin do not just lurk outside of these church walls. We are all slaves to sin. Yes, as Christians we have “given up” certain things that would be pleasing to us, in order to follow God – some of our income for offerings, our time, some bad habits. But we also have to remember that we continue to sin every day. And this still all lines up with what Paul is saying, he says **“you are slaves to the one you obey.”** Jesus says, **“Every person who is committing sin is a slave to sin.”** As Christians we realize that to sin is to submit ourselves as slaves to sin. It doesn’t matter if it’s that sin in a moment of weakness, it doesn’t matter if that sin didn’t hurt anybody else, it doesn’t matter if it’s our sin of habit. And our cheap excuse of “I tried not to sin” isn’t going to fly in God’s courtroom. Because even as good as we try to be, it is not enough for God, because we are still slaves to sin. We don’t just need a new heart transplant, we need a new body transplant.

But Paul goes on to say, **“But thanks to God that...you used to be slaves to sin.”** What happened here is key. Paul doesn’t say that you saw the path that slavery to sin was leading, so you jumped from that path onto God’s path, or even that God helped you to “see the light.” Instead he says this, **“you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance.”** In other words, it was God who claimed your allegiance, who picked you up and plopped you onto his path. He did this through his Son Jesus Christ who was a complete slave to God’s will. His life is the life that we need, and God gives him to us. Heaven is already won for us, it is already completed, nothing we do can get us more heavenly. Because God has made us slaves to him. And the obedience Paul is talking about here is not our acts of obedience, but our faith. Earlier in the book of Romans Paul talks about the **“obedience of faith.”** Our faith connects us to the perfect obedience of Christ.

(2)

We can rejoice that we are slaves to God, so now, what are the results of our being slaves to God? Paul says, **“Just as you used to offer yourselves as slaves to impurity...so now offer yourselves as slaves to righteousness leading to holiness.”** Maybe you remember what it was like before you knew God, how you lived for yourself, live like that Paul says, except for God. If you can’t remember a time you lived only for yourself, look at the world around you and see how they vehemently worship the god of sin, worship God in the same way. And for what

purpose is this for? It is to lead to holiness. But this holiness is not talking about doing things to get to heaven, this is talking specifically and directly about the work we do as Christians to please God because we already have eternal life.

This is in stark contrast to the way we used to live, it is in stark contrast to the way the world lives. And because we are slaves of God we can please God naturally. We have a holy desire to please God – with our worship, with our offerings, with our time, with our abilities. That's what we sang about in our first song this morning. This is the holiness Paul is talking about. They are the fruits of us being connected to Christ, this path that we have been placed on has the end goal of eternal life. Why wouldn't we want to have others join us on this path?

Now I don't every think we are going to be able to use SLAVERY as our catch phrase in order to get more people into church. But if we remember it in our own minds and hearts, not in the way the world views slavery, but in the way that God views slavery. We are all slaves to someone, someone whom we obey. We were all born as slaves to sin, not being able to stop sinning even if we wanted to, and the wages of being slaves to sin is death. But God had something else in mind for us. By the grace of God, by the mercy of God, by the love of God, he made us his slaves. So, while the wages of sin may be death, the gift of God, the slavery of God, is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.