

Walking in the Spirit

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[0 : 00] Where is the worst place to be when disaster strikes?! I think many of us try to plan and prepare for that day.! We make preparations.

I want to remind us of a story, one that we probably have long since forgotten. It's the story of Harrison Okene. He's a Nigerian guy. In 2013, he found himself in a disaster. He was unprepared. He was in the bathroom. The disaster that he faced was he was working on a ship, a tugboat.

He was working as a ship's cook. And an errant wave came and washed the tugboat and it fell over and it sank to the bottom of the ocean.

And Harrison, trapped in the bathroom, who dreamed of one day owning a house on the ocean, was trapped at the bottom of that ocean.

[1 : 06] As the ship settled beneath the ocean surface, a hundred feet below, it settled on the ocean's floor. And as he groped his way to the door to try to get out of this tugboat, it was locked.

And so he swam and made his way back to an air pocket. Not in the bathroom, but a small other office. And there he was for three days, trapped at the bottom of the ocean.

He survived on only sardines and a can of Coke. He got desperate. He was running out of air, but he sat waiting. He tried again and again to go open the door.

He tried to save himself, but he couldn't do anything. The door was jammed shut. Eventually, he came to the end of himself and just sat and waited.

Air slowly going out of that small air pocket. Survival was unbelievable that he survived three days. Rescue, of course not.

[2 : 10] He's at the bottom of the ocean. It was unlikely. He was lost without hope. Waiting. Helpless. Helpless.

That feeling of helplessness is one that we are familiar with. Maybe not at the bottom of the ocean. Maybe not trapped under a car. I guess most of us have not been trapped on a desert island. Or found ourselves in a shipwreck. Or trapped at the bottom of the ocean like Harrison. But all of us, like Paul, have felt that sense of helplessness.

Not when it comes to being at the bottom of the ocean. But when it comes to our own sin. We think to ourselves, I am wrestling with this. I don't know what to do.

The struggle between sin, the battle that we have between the spirit as Christians. And doing what we don't want to do. Because we're not yet in glory.

[3 : 10] Because we still have sin. And we feel helpless. We feel trapped. We feel like we're running out of air. We're like Paul at the end of chapter 7.

As we march our way through Romans. If you were with us last week. Romans 7, the end of it. Paul is undone. And he cries out, Oh wretched man that I am.

He's helpless. He needs a rescuer. Not in the form of a salvage diver that rescues Harrison. But he needs something more. He needs rescue from his own sin.

And all of us are like that. Stranded and exhausted. And we're all like Paul.

Feeling that sense of hopelessness. If we're fighting against sin and we want victory. But it's not yet come finally and fully. We can identify with Harrison.

[4 : 09] And we know from this text this morning that we all battle against sin. That's how Romans 7 ends. But here in Romans 8, there is rescue.

There is hope. There's not the sense of sinking. There's not frustration of knowing what is right and not doing it. There's not discouragement.

There's not discouragement. Because we've not yet beat that sin. That continually drags us down. Again and again. But there's rescue in the spirit.

Freedom in the spirit. That we're united with Christ. There's no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. As Paul reminds us.

As we heard earlier. That blessed promise. That's the focus of what Paul's talking about. Because he's felt this sense of hopelessness. And now there's this sense of deliverance.

[5 : 09] We have in Romans chapter 8. Trying and failing. And if you're a Christian this morning. You know that battle. And the answer to that battle is in this text as we mentioned.

The spirit sets us free in Christ Jesus. Free from the law. Free through the flesh. And then free to fulfill the law. We'll talk about that at the very end.

Seems like a contradiction. First, free from the law. That's really obvious. There's in verse 1. He says there's no condemnation. Therefore, there is now no condemnation.

He's linking it back to what we talked about last week in chapter 7. He's very clearly connecting to that struggle that he articulated.

That we know as Christians. That it's a war with our flesh over and over again. Fighting and winning. Sometimes fighting and losing. He describes it as a war.

[6 : 13] He describes it as being in bondage and slave to sin. And Paul comes to the end of himself and cries out. It should point us in this fight against sin.

That there is a struggle. But yes. There is punishment for sin. But the Christian. As Paul reminds us in verse 1.

There is now no condemnation. That seems really wordy. He's saying that if you have faith in Jesus, you're justified. Condemnation means there's punishment.

There's a guilt. There's a verdict against you. But he's saying that doesn't exist anymore. Because you've been justified by Christ. That you're united with him in faith.

And now there is no condemnation. It's the exact opposite of justification. Condemnation. The guilt.

[7 : 10] The shame. But they are no more. It's a crowning moment of this build up of this tough sled. Through Romans 7, yes.

But through Romans in its entirety. Think about how we have marched through. Romans 1 through 3. Like everybody has sin. And we need a savior.

But then there's this glorious promise that has echoes of what we see in Romans 8 and chapter 5. Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God.

The connections don't end there. Paul is reiterating this idea of the freedom that's found in knowing Christ. And that's fueled by life in the spirit.

That's what he walks us to in verse 2. For the law of the spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.

[8 : 12] If you remember, the starting point of chapter 7 is something like this. But we are now released from the law, having died to what held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the spirit.

And not in the old way of the written code. Life in the spirit is life in the freedom of Jesus. And Paul continues that rationale in verse 2.

He's pulling forth that contrast between the law of the spirit of life and the law of the spirit of death. Sin and death. It's not a law in the sense of Moses' word is law or God's word is law.

It's law in the sense of general principle. We saw that last week. And here he's saying the spirit's application of the person and work of Jesus to your lives happens through the spirit.

And through that the Christian has been granted freedom from the law of sin and death. We're freed from that because we're justified. We're free from that because we have the spirit.

[9 : 21] So not only is the Christian free from condemnation, guilt, shame, the punishment of sin. But instead, the Christian is indwelt by the spirit.

The spirit lives inside of us. So that same power that raised Jesus from the grave now lives inside of us. And that's the means by which we fight against sin.

The power of the spirit is the controlling principle. Not the law of sin and death. If you notice in 7, if you have your Bible and you're reading through it or you've been walking through us.

Paul gets to this point where it seems like he's describing his own experience. And we can say, yeah, I know that too. I know what it's like to struggle against sin.

And he's describing something that we felt and that we've walked through. And here, some of your Bibles, most of us, have a Bible that will say, you.

[10:24] It changes from him, Paul, to now you. Now whether it says that explicitly or not, Paul is talking about our common experience. That we're all free if we have faith in Jesus.

Free from the law of sin and death. And we should be encouraged in that. It's not first person anymore. It's not just Paul. It's you as well. Many of you have had this experience.

Whether it's at work and you're presenting to your boss and he comes to you and says, oh, that's great. But tell me what it means. Or if you've turned in a paper at school and you've tried to write an essay and your teacher says to you, but what does it all mean?

Why does that matter? Or if you're in the military, we teach young soldiers, young officers to give the so what. Synthesize information and give why it matters.

The same is true in preaching. We try to do that week after week. What is the so what of this text?

The so what of chapter seven, the struggle that Paul has against sin is here in verse one and two.

[11:37] It's here at the beginning of chapter eight. There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. That's the so what against the battle against sin.

Christian, you are free from the penalty of sin. It's great news. If you struggle as a Christian with sin, you might not feel that freedom.

You might say, I see what Paul is saying, and I don't feel that freedom at all. In fact, I look at the life of Paul and I think, gosh, that looks like hard work.

That sure sounds burdensome. But deliverance from sin is one of those parts of union with Christ.

That's a concept that we talked about in Romans chapter six, that when we're united with him by faith, we get the benefits of who Jesus is and what he has done.

But often we skip too quickly past Jesus himself and think about benefits. We think about salvation or freedom being free from punishment. Like I don't want to be punished.

[12:48] Of course not. We think about the Christian life as fire insurance. I don't want to burn. But we miss the fact that in the gospel, we get God.

We get fellowship with him. And when we're united with Jesus by faith and indwelt with his spirit, I have fellowship with the almighty.

Yes, I get all those benefits and those are great. And those are worthy. But I miss the fact that in the gospel, I get God. I get Christ Jesus.

Paul reminds us of this fact later in the New Testament when he says, Christ suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring us to God.

Romans eight verses one and two remind us of that. They remind us that we get fellowship with God himself.

[13:46] That's the so what of chapter seven. That's the so what of what we've read so far in Romans. In verse one is the crown jewel of this idea.

There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Christian, you are free. You are no longer condemned by the law.

A Christian is free from the law, but you're also freed by the flesh. Think about that. That's a curious phrase. If you look at verse three, you'll see what I mean.

For God has done with the law weakened by the flesh could not do by sending his son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin. He condemns sin in the flesh.

This verse is one of the clearest explanations of the tension between the law and sin. The law could grant life, but it can't because it's compromised with sin.

[14:45] The thing could never save because of sin. It brings death. It brings futility. We know that experience, but God did something outside the law to bring life.

He sent his son. And that's glorious. And that reality gives rise to the good news of the gospel. The law's inability to grant life is overshadowed by the coming of sending his son in the flesh.

Sending his son to secure our salvation. To give us freedom from the law of sin and death. And he did so in a curious way. He sent him in the flesh.

Now, up until this point, we know that flesh is kind of a code word for sin, for that struggle. But here, Paul speaks in a way that he doesn't earlier in chapter seven.

He says in the flesh, rather the law was weakened by the flesh. So the law can't grant life because of sin. It's not going to work. But now he sends his son in the likeness of sinful flesh.

[15:50] His son came in the flesh. It's a play on words. It's a great reversal that the law weakened by flesh no longer can grant life. And now flesh is the means by which the son comes and gives us life.

Him coming fully God and fully man. Now you might ask, why does it say in the likeness or some, some Bibles might say in the appearance of the flesh.

Paul is making the point that he comes in the flesh, but he is without sin. So it looks like sinful flesh, like you and me are flesh.

But instead, it's in its perfected form, without sin, without the stain of sin, without the hint of sin. But yet he was fully human.

It's that great truth we confessed earlier from the Nicene Creed, that he came incarnate for us and for our salvation. And so when we hear that, we know that God coming in the flesh in the form of Jesus was with an eye towards the end, towards his death for us.

[17:02] It arises in this text as well, but it does so a little more subtly with this phrase for sin.

When Paul uses that phrase, he's calling forth all these ideas throughout Leviticus and Isaiah, that sin and the sacrifice for sin is really the reason that Jesus came.

And he's pointing back to all those realities and saying, the blood of bulls and goats can never satisfy, but my son is the ultimate sacrifice. My son came in the flesh to be put to death.

It's kind of unlikely if you think about it. There's one part of Harrison O'Kanee's story that I didn't tell you, that after he went through that, what did he do?

He became a salvage diver and went under the ocean again and again for the rest of his life and is continuing to do so to this very day. The thing that almost took his life, the thing that scarred him for the rest of his life, he now does for work. It's his great life's work. It's a reversal of unfathomable understanding. Why would he go back to the ocean to do that thing? I would never even go in a swimming pool again. I wouldn't go near the beach. I wouldn't want a house by the ocean.

And he's done all of these things and more. It's the same way with the flesh in which Jesus comes. The flesh that causes us to sin is now in perfect form and it's reversed and it gives us life. In fact, it is the sacrifice for sin. The same flesh that was weakened or that weakened the power of the law to save in its perfect form now offers salvation to all who follow after him. That's the core message of the gospel. It's unlikely. It's a reversal of epic proportions. That's the truth of the gospel. That God gives us his spirit and opens our eyes to the beauty of scripture, to the beauty of Jesus. So it's no longer silly or fanciful or unbelievable.

[19:27] This morning before I came in here, I got a text from, I won't call him a friend, but he's a former co-worker, a guy who used to mock my Christian faith. When we first met, he said he graduated from Virginia Military Institute. And when you graduate from VMI, you get two things. You either get a Bible or you get another book or you get another book. And he very clearly told me and reminded me when he graduated, he got that other book. We had discussions about the gospel over years. I never thought he would come to faith. He often mocked me for my faith. We had different priorities in life. I had kids.

He wanted his freedom. He wanted to travel the world. That's not a bad thing. But he didn't want anything to do with God. But by his spirit, he's been working in him. I haven't seen him in three or four years. But he's come to faith in Jesus. God works in unlikely scenarios and reverses course. The man who so wanted his freedom has now found freedom in Jesus Christ. God is at work to show all of us the reality of his son and how he works to deliver us from the punishment of sin. So if you're here this morning, that sounds new or it's a fresh in a new way. I'm glad that you're here, but God is calling you to put your faith and trust in Jesus Christ for the freedom, not that this world can provide, but freedom from the law of sin and death that will alienate us from God. Believe in my son who bore the punishment for your sin. Come to him. God calls us to freedom, freedom from the law, freedom secured by Christ, and freedom to fulfill the law. Now wait a sec. I thought you just said we were free from the law. I'm saying what Paul is saying. Look with me at verse four.

In order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us. The script has been flipped as kids say. Paul tells us that we're free from the law, we're freed through flesh, and now we're free to fulfill the law. Let's look at this verse slightly out of order. The condition that changes as at the back half. Those who walk not according to the flesh, but according to the spirit. There's a status change in the Christian that you're no longer laboring and toiling under the law to try to earn your salvation, but instead you're walking according to the spirit. And when that happens, there's freedom in that. One theologian wrote that the relationship to Jesus is the constant tenor throughout all of this section. And then when we understand that, we can understand how to relate to the law. Has your relationship to Christ changed your view of the law? William Cooper, the hymn writer that we talked about a little bit last week, he wrote this about that relationship. To see the law by

Christ fulfilled, to hear his pardoning voice, changes a slave into a child, and duty into choice. The law didn't change. The status of the Christian did. Went from under the penalty of sin and death to united by faith in Jesus. Now to that beginning part of verse four. Paul writes from this flow of thought. Jesus condemned sin in the flesh. He made it no more in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fulfilled in us. That status change that we just talked about changes how the Christian relates to that. It's the fulfillment of all those Old Testament promises about the gospel. Think of Ezekiel.

I'm going to give you a new heart. I'm going to put a new spirit within you. Those great gospel promises point us to this reality. There's something that changes inside of us so that we can have faith in Christ, yes, but also our relationship to the law. But what about that righteous requirement part?

[23 : 57] It's kind of a euphemism. Paul uses as a code for this. One of the greatest parts of the greatest commandment to love God, yes, but also pointing us back to others. He summarizes like this in Galatians.

For you were all called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the law is fulfilled in one word. You shall love your neighbor as yourself, freed from the law to fulfill it. As Augustine wrote, the Christian is given grace that the law might be fulfilled. Obedience to the law. Far too often we think about Jesus and our life of faith as stumbling through the dark, not knowing what to do now that we've been saved.

But God has given us a roadmap. In fact, he's kind of hardwired it into our faith. He's given us a car with a new GPS and the destination in it. It's not like he sets us on a trajectory not knowing which way is north or south or east or west or how to drive a car at all. He tells us what we're going.

And that roadmap is the law. It's the law of God. It's the path to holiness. It's the path to joy and a fulfilled life. It's not seeking out the world's freedom in all of its experiences.

It's realizing our status, our relationship to the law has changed. We don't get salvation through the law. We do it out of joyful obedience because we've been changed from a slave into a child. Freed from the law. Freed by the flesh and freed to fulfill the law.

[25 : 42] If you have faith in Jesus, that's your mission. Not standing under the law's demands because those have been paid by Christ, but instead delighting in that freedom. Delighting in walking by the spirit of freedom that's found in Christ Jesus. Paul asked us this morning, will we follow, will we live in that freedom? Let's pray. Lord, we're thankful that this day for the freedom that's found in knowing Christ. We pray that you might work into our hearts a sense of joyful obedience, but more than that, Father, we would see the freedom from the law's demands have been paid by Christ.

Paid by his coming as a man, fully God and fully man, coming in the flesh as we confess this morning. To die upon a cross, a death that we deserved, but instead he has paid it for us. And Father, may we live and walk in holiness, holiness and joyful obedience to your word. And we pray this in Jesus' name.

Amen.