

ROMANS 8.1-4: SET FREE TO LIVE

[Chelmsford 22 April 2012]

I SET FREE - TO LIVE!

Imagine turning up at court, with your suitcase all packed, knowing that the jury would have no other option but to find you guilty and that the judge consequently would have no other option but to send you down for life -, and then all of a sudden having the verdict and sentence quashed.

My word, you would be over the moon. You would hug your barrister, kiss your solicitor, and then bounce off to the nearest hotel to celebrate.

Instead of going to gaol and serving time, you were free - free to live.

Yes, you really would have something to celebrate.

With this picture in mind let's turn to the opening words of Rom 8: "**There is therefore no condemnation now for those who live in union with Christ Jesus**" (8.1).

Here is good news. Those who have put their trust in the Lord Jesus is that they are no longer under God's judgment - they have been set free – set free to live.

As the little word "**therefore**" indicates, Paul's opening statement in Rom 8 is based on all that he has written in his earlier chapters.

And in those earlier chapters he has been spelling out some very unpalatable facts.

To be precise, Paul in these opening chapters of Romans states five facts:

1. Fact 1: Everyone fails to reach God's perfect standard – not just people who never darken the door of a church, temple, or synagogue – but also religious people too,
2. Fact 2: Therefore no-one is good enough to be accepted by God
3. Fact 3: Nor has anyone an excuse that will hold water
4. Fact 4: So we have all been judged and found guilty of death.
5. Fact 5: All this is very bad news for you and me!

Yes, the Bible's verdict on people like you & me is pretty damning.

To quote just two verses from Romans:-

- “**Everyone has sinned and is far away from God’s saving presence**” (3.23)
- “**Sin pays its wage – death**” (6.23)

Unlike those school reports which used to say: "*room for some improvement*"; this report on our standing before God says "*there is no hope at all*".

One theologian (Emil Brunner, *Our Faith* 41) put it this way: "*A 'sinner' does not signify that there is something bad in him, as a splendid apple may have a little bad speck that can be removed with a twist of the paring knife... rather, we have been infected with evil at the core. 'All are sinners' does not mean that even the best are not quite saints. It means rather that the difference between the so-called good and the so-called bad no longer comes into consideration*"

This is the context in which Paul declares: "**There is therefore no condemnation now for those who live in union with Christ Jesus**".

Here is good news! Indeed, that is an understatement.

Here is some unbelievably wonderful good news. We have been set free - free to live.

CH Spurgeon once said: "*Too many think lightly of sins, and therefore think lightly of the Saviour. He who has stood before his God, convicted & condemned, with the rope about his neck, is the man to weep for joy when he is pardoned...*"

II SET FREE - BY JESUS

How has this come about? Who has made this possible?
God has – God has sent his Son to free us from sin’s stranglehold.

Paul writes: **“God condemned sin in human nature by sending his own Son, who came with a nature like sinful human nature, to do away with sin”** (8.3).

Or in the words of Eugene Peterson’s paraphrase: *“God went for the jugular when he sent his own Son... In his Son Jesus, he personally took on the human condition, entered the disordered mess of struggling humanity to set it right once and for all”*

God’s rescue plan involved two key events:

(1. We have been set free by the coming Jesus into our world

“He condemned sin in human nature by sending his own Son, who came with a nature like sinful nature” (8.3).

Here we have an ‘incarnational’ statement which corresponds to Jn 1.14: **“The Word became a human being”**.

Yet there is a difference: for Paul goes further than John.

He doesn’t simply state that Jesus took upon himself our human nature - he uses the somewhat strange expression he **“came with a nature like sinful nature”**.

Some have deduced that these words indicate that Paul didn’t believe that Jesus became truly man - & think they indicate that Paul was a ‘docetist’: i.e. Paul was saying that Jesus appeared to be a man, but in actual fact was not.

This argument difficult to swallow - for elsewhere in this letter Paul makes it abundantly clear that Jesus did take upon himself our flesh and blood: in Rom 5 three times he speaks of **“the one man Jesus Christ”** (Rom 5.15, 17, 19).

Jesus involved himself fully in our human situation. Jesus shared our flesh and blood.

- He knew what it was like to feel pain - the nailing of his body to the cross was as much agony to him as it was to the two thieves crucified either side of him.
- He knew what it was like to experience temptation - but unlike you and me, he did not yield to temptation.

Jesus assumed our human nature. Yet our human nature was never the whole story.

He never ceased to be the eternal Son of God.

Hence although tempted, he was able to resist temptation.

In this respect the phrase **“he came with a nature like sinful nature”** is significant.

Jesus assumed our flesh, but without sin.

He shared our human nature, but not our sinful human nature.

As Paul wrote in Rom 5, by his **“obedience” “the mass of people will be put right with God”** (5.19)

The fact is that unless Jesus had been sinless, he could not have been our Saviour; had he shared our sinful human nature, then he would himself have been in need of being saved.

But we are not set free by his sinless life alone - his sinless life is a precondition for the Cross to have saving power:

2. *We are set free by his dying for the world*

“God condemned sin in human nature by sending his own Son... to do away with sin”
(v3).

Paul now pictures sin as a litigant in a law court; the verdict goes against sin and thus sin is condemned. Condemned here means more than that a form of words goes against it. There is the thought that condemnation is brought into effect - as when a derelict building is 'condemned'; it is used no more, and demolition follows. God did away with sin's power by sending his Son to die on the Cross.

But how precisely did Jesus do away with sin?

At this point the metaphor of the court room changes to the metaphor of the temple

Jesus allowed himself to become God's sacrificial lamb

He offered his life as a sacrifice for you and for me.

- In Rom 3.25 Paul wrote: **“God offered Jesus, so that by means of his sacrificial death he should become the means by which people's sins are forgiven through their faith in him”**.
- Here in Rom 8.3 Paul uses a phrase (*peri hamartias*) which in the Greek version of the OT regularly translates the Hebrew expression for a sin-offering: e.g. in Is 53.10 NRSV **“he makes himself an offering for sin”**. So the NEB translates this verse: God sent his son **“as a sacrifice for sin”**; or in the words of the NIV **“as a sin-offering”**. It is often suggested that here we have an allusion to the story of Abraham & Isaac: just as on Mount Moriah God provided a lamb so that the life of Isaac could be spared, so on the hill of Calvary God provided a lamb in the person of his Son that we might be spared (Gen 22.13).

There on the Cross Jesus dealt with sin by taking our place. In the words of the hymn we shall sing after the sermon: *“it was for us he hung and suffered there”*

A pale reflection of the sacrifice of Jesus is found in the story of Father Maximilian Kolbe, a Polish Franciscan priest who was a prisoner in Auschwitz, the Nazi concentration camp. When a number of prisoners were selected for execution, one of shouted out that he was married man with children. At that point Father Kolbe stepped forward and asked if he could take the condemned man's place. His offer was accepted by the Nazis, and he was placed in an underground cell, where he was left to die of starvation.

Similarly there is now no condemnation for us – because Jesus has taken our place He endured in his body the punishment that was due to us.

Or as Paul put it when writing to the church at Corinth: **“Christ was without sin, but for our sake God made him share our sin in order that in union with him we might share the righteousness of God”** (2 Cor 5.21).

Or in the words of our text: **“God condemned sin in human nature by sending his own Son... to do away with Sin”**.

In summary, we are set free - by the coming & dying of Jesus.

I say "we": to be precise **"for those who live in union with Christ Jesus"** there is **"now no condemnation"**.

It is those who have entrusted their lives to Jesus who may experience freedom from sin & death. It is those who have their faith in Jesus, who may hold their heads high on the Day of Judgement.

Where do you stand? Where will you stand?

What will be your destiny? Where are you going?

The Bible clearly states that your eternal destiny depends on your attitude to the Lord Jesus!

III SET FREE - TO LIVE FOR JESUS

BUT Paul is not just concerned with our legal standing before the bar of heaven, but also with life in the here and now.

For here in Rom 8.2 Paul is not just talking about freedom from the guilt of sin, but also freedom from the power of sin:

"For the law of the Spirit, which brings us life in union with Christ Jesus, has set me free from the law of sin and death". Or the words of Peterson's paraphrase: *"A new power is in operation. The Spirit of life in Christ, like a strong wind, has magnificently cleared the air, freeing you from a fated lifetime of brutal tyranny at the hands of sin and death"*

We are set free by the Spirit to live holy lives for Jesus.

As Keith Warrington, a Pentecostal scholar, put it: *"Believers are no longer bound to the mangy dog of sin that rubs against them and sullies their lives, nor are they to be viewed as trying but failing in a constant, nervous fight that leaves them battered and bruised. Paul presents a much more victorious scenario, in which the Spirit enables them 'to revolt against the usurper sin with a real measure of effectiveness' (Cranfield)"*

Paul elaborates on this freedom in v4: God sent his own Son..."**so that the righteous demands of the Law might be fully satisfied in us who live according to the Spirit, and not according to human nature"**.

What are the law's **"righteous demands"**? Acc to Rom 13.8-10 **"The only obligation you have is to love one another. Whoever does this has obeyed the Law. The commandments... are summed up in the one command 'Love your neighbour as you love yourself"**.

To return to our text: **"The law of the Spirit... has set me free"** (Rom 8.2)

The Spirit set us free – to serve the Lord Jesus by loving others.

This is freedom with a purpose - we are not free to run amok, we are not free to live for self, but rather we are free to live holy lives for Jesus.

How does the Spirit set us free? By empowering us to go the way of Jesus

In the words of one old commentator (TW Manson): *"Moses' law has right but not might; Sin's law has might but not right; the law of the Spirit has both right and might"*.

Michael Saward put it this way: *"The Spirit gives me the power to hit the bull's eye"* - in the past, in our own strength, we were missing the mark (sinning), but now life can be different.

We mustn't pretend this meets with instant success

It takes time for the Holy Spirit to produce fruit in our lives – but he will do so, if we will but let him.

Next week we shall explore something of this freedom and this power that the Spirit gives. But we can know nothing of the Spirit's power/presence until we have become right with God; until we know the thrilling truth that "**there is therefore no condemnation now for those who live in union with Christ Jesus**".

Only then can we begin to live.

My question as I end this sermon: have you begun to live?