

Romans 6 – Sunday 16th December 2007.

Slaves Become Like Their Master

Introduction

A

I want to begin this morning by recapping - taking a brief look at what has gone before in this amazing book of Romans. And it seemed to me as I was considering how best to do this, that a story told to me some time ago by my High School science teacher - a Canadian - has been waiting for an occasion such as this.

The story concerns a truck driver attempting to get his Truck Driver's licence sitting an oral exam. The examiner says to him:-

"You are in your double articulated lorry, driving down a very steep section of the Rocky Mountains. Nothing but a cliff face on one side and nothing but a sheer drop on the other. A bus load of school kids is approaching you in the opposite direction. Just at the moment when it becomes too late for you to brake to avoid a collision, a reckless young man, with five of his friends in his car does a very silly thing and decides to overtake the school bus. Now, what do you do?"

The truck driver thinks about it and says, "sheer cliffs either side, school bus being overtaken by an idiot and 5 of his friends, too late to break?"

"Yes, that's right", says the examiner, "what do you do?"

The truck driver says, "I wake up my buddy Joe, sleeping on his off-shift."

"The emergency of your life and you're going to wake up your buddy Joe? Now why on earth would you do that?!!!"

"Because Joe's never seen an accident like the one that we're about to have!!!!"

Segue

Now that seems to me to be the combined effect of Romans Chapters One and Two!!

A1.1

You see, in these opening two chapters, Paul argues that no matter what side of the road you are on the news is bad. If you are a Gentile (that is, a non-Jew) then you come under God's judgment because of what you should have known about God from the world around you- ample evidence - and you have deliberately rejected even that. If you are a Jew, then the news is, if possible, even worse, because you have inherited the law, and yet you do not obey it.

This argument finds its summary in Romans 3:23 "For all have sinned and fallen short of God's glory."

Segue

So it is that Paul drops the first boot. The bad news is exceedingly bad. If this was all that Paul had to say, then, like truck driver and his friend, we are about to witness a very bad accident. But thankfully, Paul drops the second boot - the good news is exceedingly good.

A1.2

In Chapter 4, Paul demonstrates that salvation is by faith and in Chapter 5, gets lost in a flurry of words as he tries to describe the depths of God's love. How exceedingly good is the good news? In v's 6-8, Paul comes up with this:-

"You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

Here Paul ponders the incredible depths of God's grace. We deserved death, Christ died that death. Christ rose from the dead, we share in that resurrection.

Segue

At this point, you have to ask yourself, how could anyone fail to get lost in the wonder and the glory of God's grace? And yet, as we arrive at Chapter 6, we see that some are already attempting to pervert, to twist grace.

Paul opens Chapter 6 with these words.

B

What shall we say then? Shall we go on sinning that grace may increase? By no means!”

And repeats almost the same words in verse 15:-

“What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!”

How can anyone possibly think to run such a silly argument? Can I say that the pages of history are littered with people in the church who openly embraced this kind of thinking.

For example, in the 16th century, the practice of the church of selling indulgences was at its height. The church sponsored and ran the idea was that you could have some of your sins dealt with by the payment of a sum of money to the church.

Then the church issued you with an indulgence, covering that sin.

But Paul here quietly insists that grace is not to be abused - that grace is meant to promote righteousness, not sin. He sets it out for us this way in verses 13 & 14:-

¹³Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. ¹⁴For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.

We are not under law, but under grace.

Paul urges us to pay attention to God's grace, to understand what it is about and to seek to respond to His grace daily. Why? Why. Because if we fail to pay attention, the exercise of our faith quickly descends into a cynical and jaded attempt to remain on God's good side either by obeying a few laws (go to church, try not to do anything really bad) or by doing what you like on the basis that God doesn't care how we live and that his grace will cover us in any case.

Paul presents us with a straightforward choice in verse 16.

! ¹⁶Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?

And here we come to Paul's really big point, I think. ***Slaves become like their masters***. Either we are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or we are slaves to righteousness, which leads to obedience.

Segue

Allow me to illustrate.

B1 (Slavery to Sin)

We have had a wonderful rose in our back yard for two years now. Pierre de Ronsard. But it never has done very well. So, like any male gardener, I trimmed it back to a single cane, tied the cane in place vertically and then fed it up. Compost, rose fertilizer, dynamic lifter, soluble fertilizer, the works. And guess what. It sprang into life, 10, 20, perhaps 25 buds, all set to become canes, bursting with flowers. Then one morning I got up... A possum had eaten the lot. Everything that Rose was and was going to be, gone in one night.

This is what it is like when we give ourselves over to sin. It eats away at us, taking away all we are and all we could ever be. In the end it ends in death, *because slaves become like their masters*. Our poor old rose didn't have a choice - it couldn't move out of the way, it couldn't fight off the possum. But Paul here is asking us to make the choice daily to put off our sinful habits and to choose obedience.

Slaves to obedience become righteous just like their master. And this is an encouraging thought. As we allow God's grace to work in our lives, he makes us more like Him, and this in turn, leads us on.

(Slavery To Righteousness)

Another story, if I may. Although the story is from when I was a lad of 16, I have not told it before, and I think that makes it fresh. Just after I became a Christian, the guy who led me to Christ, Jim Demolar and I started meeting with a friend of mine, Richard. Richard carefully investigated the gospel story, the claims of the Bible and made a decision to accept Christ as his Lord and Saviour. Jim drove us

home that night - we dropped off Richard first, and then we probably said a prayer of thanks and dedication before Jim dropped me home. I saw Richard the next day, a bit shaken and ashen faced.

“What happened to you, I said?”

Richard said something like this. “Dad was very angry with me for becoming a Christian. He said he no longer considered me his son. He threw me out onto the street. I've just been wandering about the streets all night. My brother says I'm an idiot and weak. My mother was very upset and blamed me for causing so much upset in the family. But it's not going to stop me; I'll take whatever they give to me. I'm going to love them and respect them.”

Only a few hours old in Christ - and yet here is Richard, freed by grace, governed by grace full of the works of grace.

Richard continued to seek healing and reconciliation in his family. It took a while, but guess who won out? Richard was reconciled to his dad, his brother changed his mind about Christians and his mother got over the pain of that night - eventually. Grace was at work in Richard's life. You see, *slaves become like their master*.

So, let's not take grace for granted. Let's not sin more that grace might abound. In a way, grace is not something that we can be taught, say like maths. It must be lived out, in our homes, at our workplaces, in the community of believers. We must pay attention to grace, to remain alive to its reforming and refreshing character in our lives. Why? Because it is this kind of daily living faith that saves us from the slide into sad and lonely slavery to sin. Why? ***Because Grace is God's sole means of spiritual formation.***

Can I say that as I look back on this last year, that there is much for which we can be thankful to God. By grace, we are growing into a community of believers. We are being spiritually formed. I find it very encouraging.

How can we demonstrate our thankfulness and a growing understanding of the workings of God's grace among us? Is there a person in our congregation that you could get to know better? Is there someone that you could invite to your place for lunch? Is there another way that you could take this Sunday community and turn it into a weekly community? As we live out our lives together, by his grace, becoming more like our master.