

Sunday Morning Sermon

October 11, 2020

“A Slave Called and Separated”

Romans 1:1-7

Pastor Marc Brashear

1 Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God 2 which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, 3 concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, 4 and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead. 5 Through Him we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name, 6 among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ;

7 To all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The title of our sermon this morning is “A Slave called and Separated,” Romans chapter 1, verses 1 through 7. Well, it is our blessing, it’s our privilege once again, our joy to return to this towering letter of the Apostle Paul to the Romans. Having completed last week a general introduction to the letter, as well as completing a general introduction to the man who wrote the letter, we move on now this morning to our consideration of Paul’s greeting contained in verses 1 through 7.

Now, there are basically three sections to the opening of this letter. 1) Paul’s Greeting, 2) Paul’s Purpose, and 3) Paul’s Premise. Paul’s greeting is found in verses 1 through 7, Paul’s purpose we’ll learn about in verses 8 through 15, and then Paul’s premise is stated in verses 16 through 17; that short outline in the opening of this letter will set us up well to then go through the body of the letter beginning at the end of the chapter.

Now our plan, with the Lord’s help, with the Lord’s blessing, will be to work slowly through these opening three sections in order to provide a good foundation for our understanding of the rest of the letter. Now, it’s going to appear this morning as though we’re going to walk exceedingly slow, but it won’t always be exceedingly slow. We’re going to take our time initially. We’ll move along a little faster as time goes on, as time permits, but we’re not in any big hurry, are we? This is not a sprint. This is certainly going to be a marathon and we’re going to enjoy every mile of it. We’re going to work slowly through these opening sections.

If you can lay hold of the opening, if you can grasp the opening to Paul’s letter, then you’ll have a solid foundation for apprehending then, the book as a whole. This opening becomes exceedingly important to that purpose. As we work through the opening of this letter, including Paul’s greeting, Paul’s purpose, and Paul’s premise, we’re going to learn a lot about the letter itself from start to finish. Okay. We’re going to learn about the author more. We’re going to learn more about Paul. We’re going learn more about the recipients of the letter, the date, the occasion of the letter. We’ll learn about the purpose of the letter, the structure of the letter. We’re going to learn about the primary theme of the letter. We’re going to learn

about what moved the Apostle Paul to write a letter like this. We'll going to learn much about what's on Paul's heart as he writes to the saints who are in Rome. In other words, this opening has much here for us to consider, much for us to learn that will prepare us well for the rest of the letter, the body of the letter which is to come.

Now, in addition to that, however, we're going to be learning much about ourselves from the opening of this letter; not just about Paul, not just about the purpose or the occasion or the theme of this letter. We're also going to learn about ourselves, as you would expect, and the faith that we profess. This opening lays a good foundation for that theological study which comes after. Even the very opening of this letter challenges what most Christians believe and think about the Christian life. What most Christians, professing Christians today presume or assert about the Christian life. How is it that you think about the Christian life? When you think about the Christian life, what is the character of the life that you are considering? What's the nature of the Christian life? What do you believe about the Christian life? How does Paul in his opening here describe the Christian life? How are we to understand it? How are we to see it? More importantly how are we to live the Christian life and worship the Lord Jesus Christ in it and through it?

All of that is going to come in some measure through a slow and careful and methodical exposition of the opening section of this letter. In other words, even the introduction "***is given by inspiration of God.***" And even the introduction "***is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.***" This is not merely information given as the outset. It's not a simple greeting only. There's much more here than that. This is information that is necessary for transformation.

Now, I'm going to say it again as I did last week, this letter will change your life. This letter will change your life. More specifically, God, by His Spirit, will change your life though the means of this letter. And so, we don't want to rob ourselves of any blessing associated with rushing though the introduction of this letter. We want to take our time and work through the introduction.

And with that said, we begin; learning first about the servant in this introduction and then later about his subject. First about the servant, then about his subject. In customary fashion Paul begins this epistle to the Romans by introducing himself as the author of our letter in verse 1. ***Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God*** – Now, we know that from the time of his conversion on the road to Damascus to this point, we know that Paul has never been to Rome. Paul has never visited the church there. He knows a couple of Christians from Rome, but the majority of Christians in Rome he himself has never met. He doesn't know them, they don't know him.

In verse 13 – drop down to verse 13 – Paul says, ***I often planned to come to you (but was hindered until now),*** – He hasn't yet been to Rome. We also know that no other apostle has served in Rome to plant and establish the church there, and that certainly includes the Apostle Peter. In chapter 15 – if you'll flip over to chapter 15 – in chapter 15, and in verse 20, Paul says there that: "***I have made it my aim to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build on another man's foundation, but [verse 21] as it is written: To whom He was not announced, they shall see; and those who have not heard shall understand.***"

For this reason [drop down to verse 22], ***I also have been much hindered from coming to you.*** So, we know that Paul has not been to Rome, and we know that no other apostle has been to Rome. In other words, it was Paul's practice not to go into areas where another apostle had begun a work for the gospel, and then to build on that apostle's work. Paul's practice rather, was to go to places where no apostle had

been and to work there, to establish believers in the faith. So, the fact here that Paul has decided, has desired to go to Rome, is planning to go to Rome tells us that the Apostle Paul saw the church at Rome as a place that needed to be established in the faith. It was a place where no apostle had yet been. A people were there, believers were there that still needed apostolic preaching, apostolic teaching.

Chapter 1, look at verse 11. Paul says, ***For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established***— Now imagine, Paul says “I want to come to you. I want to preach, teach, serve among you, that you may be established in the faith. Much of the New Testament hasn’t been written yet. This is largely a Gentile congregation in Rome. We’ll hear more about that later. There are genuine believers there. Those believers are genuinely converted. Verse 8, their faith is spoken of throughout the whole world. But they’ve not been established in the faith by apostolic preaching, apostolic teaching. They need the New Testament. They need New Covenant teaching and preaching. They need instruction. They need to be established. They need Paul to come. So, Paul has desired, Paul has determined to go to Rome.

Now, Paul has heard of them but Paul doesn’t know them. They certainly – the church at Rome has obviously heard of Paul, but the church at Rome, those people have never met Paul, nor do they know Paul. And so, how does the Apostle Paul then, choose, determine to introduce himself to these dear people? How does Paul choose to introduce himself? Verse 1: ***Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God*** – That’s Paul’s introduction. Notice, the three descriptions that Paul uses there for himself in verse 1. We’re going to consider each of these three descriptions individually. 1) Paul is a bondservant of Jesus Christ, 2) he is called to be an apostle, and 3) he is separated to the gospel of God. A bondservant, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God.

Now notice first, Paul chooses to describe himself, he determines to describe himself, to introduce himself as a bondservant of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Greek word is δοῦλος (dōulōs) and it means “slave.” It means slave. Paul, a slave of Jesus Christ. So now, think with me. Imagine, think of what Paul has already said about himself. Paul, circumcised on the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews, concerning the Law a Pharisee, concerning zeal once persecuting the church, now an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, concerning righteousness which was in the Law, Paul would have considered himself once to be blameless, a Roman citizen; now Paul, a bondservant, a slave of Jesus Christ.

Paul would have gotten a Greek education at Tarsus. Paul would have gotten the best of Hebrew educations at the feet of Gamaliel in Jerusalem. And now Paul, a slave of the Lord Jesus Christ. There is much that Paul could have boasted in, much that Paul could have gloried in, much that Paul could have mentioned in his introduction to this dear church in Rome; much that could have bolstered his reputation in the eyes of this church.

In 2 Corinthians chapter 12, verse 1, Paul says, I’ve come to visions, revelations of the Lord. I was caught up into the third heaven, into paradise, heard inexpressible words, words which is not lawful for men to utter. “I’ve seen the resurrected Christ,” Paul could have said. “Signs and wonders done through my hands,” Paul might have said. “The same Spirit who worked effectively in Peter for the apostleship to the circumcised,” Paul says, “has also worked effectively in me toward the Gentiles.” Paul could have said, “I’ve planted churches all over the Mediterranean.” “I Paul,” he could have said, “I am a somebody!” – in the eyes of this world maybe. But that’s not where Paul begins.

Have you noticed that those things that this world would often command are those very things that are despised by God. ***But he who glories, let him glory in the Lord.*** Paul says, "I am a slave of Jesus Christ." It's not he who commands himself who is approved, but he whom the Lord commands. Amen?

Paul says in Philippians chapter 3, verse 7 – All these things that were gain to me, all these things that I once considered gain to me, ***these I have counted loss [rubbish] for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him,*** – Paul says, "I am a slave." It was in this way that Paul deliberately chose to introduce himself.

Now notice, the use of this word "slave" communicates both association and attitude. It communicates both association and attitude. First, Paul uses the word to refer to an association. The word "slave" describes Paul's relationship to the One who had become the very center, the very sum, the very substance of Paul's life. This is how Paul thought of himself in relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ. That's very instructive. We need to understand that from Paul. This is how Paul thought of himself in relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ. This is how Paul thought of himself, and this is how Paul wanted others to think of him. He uses this in the introduction to his letter to the church at Rome. Paul wanted them to think of himself as wholly, entirely, completely possessed or owned by a Master. That's what Paul is wanting us to see in his use of this term. Paul belonged to Jesus Christ. His life, his actions, his activities, his conduct, his speech, his worship, his thoughts, his mind, his heart shaped by the will of another; namely the Lord Jesus Christ.

Martin Lloyd Jones said that "*Paul's whole being revolved around this Person...and he could not think of himself apart from Him.*" That is awesome! That is glorious. And brothers and sisters, that's how we should think of ourselves. We should not contemplate anything about ourselves apart from Him, apart from the Lord Jesus Christ. We are not our own! We've been bought at a price. I am Christ's slave!! He is mine! I am His! He has bought me! He owns me. I am a slave. Do you see? And I'm a slave to Jesus Christ. Jesus – emphasizing the Lord's humanity. The human being who lived on this earth. A Man. Fully Man, fully God. God in the flesh. The human being, the Baby who was born in the manger. The Boy who grew in stature and favor with both men and God. The Man who was the carpenter who lived, breathed, slept, laughed, cried, and died on Calvary. And Christ – Xristos – the Anointed One of God. Speaking of the Lord's mediatorial office, Christ, the Anointed One of God to be Prophet, Priest, and King to His people. The promised Messiah, the very Son of the Living God, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Jesus Christ.

Paul says, 'My relationship to Jesus Christ is one of a slave to his Master.' Now critical to our understanding of Paul's use of this word "slave," is the concept of ownership. You can't escape that connection, that implication. Critical to our understanding of Paul's use of this word "slave" is the concept of ownership. The grammar of the text shows possession. It's a genitive of possession. Paul is a slave belonging to Jesus Christ. Not just Paul's labor. Not just Paul's work. Not just Paul's mission, but Paul's person is owned by, possessed by Jesus Christ.

Now, this ownership associated with slavery took place in four basic ways in the 1st Century. There were four basic ways in which someone could be a slave. 1) You could be a slave through birth. You could be born into slavery. If your parents were in slavery, you were born to your parents, you were born into slavery. 2) Secondly, you could sell yourself into slavery. If you had debts to pay and couldn't pay them, you could sell yourself into slavery. 3) Third, there were slaves that were captured. They were taken prisoner. And 4) fourth, slaves were purchased. They were purchased into slavery.

Now, first, someone may have become a slave by birth. The metaphor of becoming a slave by birth is at once helpful for understanding Paul's conception of the Christian life. We become slaves through new birth in Him. All people are born slaves. Do you realize that? Do you recognize that? You and I were born slaves. You and I were born slaves of sin. You're a slave of sin, born as slaves of our father the Devil. All people are born in servitude to sin.

Romans chapter 6, verse 22 describes the believer then, as one who has been set free from slavery to sin. and having become then a slave of God. Do you see the transfer of ownership? Born anew in Jesus Christ you become a slave of God, a slave of righteousness, out of bondage, out of slavery to sin. You go from one form of slavery to another form of slavery. Now those two things are on such opposite poles. We'll discuss the difference in a moment. One horrendous, one that leads to destruction, one that leads to death – the other leads to glory and life everlasting. So, those two things are on opposite ends of the spectrum, but it is a transfer of slavery none the less.

1 Corinthians chapter 7, verse 22: – ***he who is called*** [that word "called" there, speaks to the new birth, regeneration. It's the calling of God upon the life of a new believer. – ***he who is called while free is Christ's slave.*** It shows divine action. Shows divine work in the life of a believer.

So, 1) someone may have become a slave by birth. Secondly, someone may sell themselves into slavery. In this case it shows human action. There's a willingness on the part of a person to give themselves voluntarily to slavery. Human involvement is involved here. The believer is to be active in this. The believer is to present – as Paul would say later – present their members as slaves to righteousness. If you think about that text in Romans chapter 6, in verse 16, it's active. Listen to verse 16: ***Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, [to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey] you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?***

In other words, the believer's slavery to Jesus Christ, the believer's slavery to righteousness could well be described as voluntary; a willful act on the part of the believer to enslave themselves, to present their members as instruments of righteousness.

3) Third, someone could be captured and made a slave – captured. This would have been very commonly understood in Rome in the 1st Century. Roman victories on the battlefield ensured that thousands would have been taken captive and brought into the slave markets of Rome. Thousands would have been taken prisoner. Paul joyfully refers to himself, he revels in referring to himself as a prisoner of Christ Jesus. He does so in Ephesians chapter 3, verse 1. He calls himself a "prisoner of Christ Jesus." He is a "prisoner of Jesus Christ" in Philemon verse 9. He's a prisoner of the Lord ("His prisoner") in 2 Timothy chapter 1, verse 8. Paul rejoiced to consider himself a prisoner of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, Paul describes himself as a man who's been taken captive. He's been captured, taken prisoner, so to speak, by Jesus Christ. Listen to Philippians chapter 3, in verse 12. Paul says: ***Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but [Paul says] I press on, [so] that I may lay hold*** "katalambano" – to seize with force] ***I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.*** Jesus Christ laid hold of him – took him, captured him. This is referring to Paul own conversion, isn't it? If you read Acts chapter 9, and Paul's testimony of his own conversion, you see that's exactly, exactly what happened to Paul on the road to Damascus. Paul says that Jesus Christ laid hold of him, seized him. Jesus arrested him. He took Paul into His possession.

Paul was on the road to Damascus. The Bible says that he was continuing to breathe out threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord. And the Lord knocked Paul off his horse and took possession of him. That's what the word means – seized him. And then what did Paul do? What was Paul's response? Paul – trembling and astonished – Paul said, "Lord, what do You want me to do? That's the response of a slave to his Master, isn't it? "Lord, what do You want me to do? "Lord, what do You want me to do? Jesus Christ seized him. Paul is now His slave. He belongs to Jesus Christ now. He belongs to Jesus Christ.

So, a slave may become a slave by birth. A slave may have sold himself into slavery. A slave may be captured. But the most common way – number four – that someone became a slave in the 1st Century was through the payment of a purchase price – was through the payment of a price. In reference to the metaphor of slavery in the New Testament for the Christian life, the most common word used for this payment of a price is the word "redemption" – agoradzo is the term. It's a commercial word. It's a word taken out of the marketplace, referring to a payment made for property. A payment made in the market.

Those worshipping the Lord in Revelation chapter 5 sang a new song of praise to Jesus Christ saying this, listen: "***You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You [Jesus Christ] were slain, and have redeemed us*** [agoradzo, purchased us] ***to God by Your blood*** [the payment of a price] ***out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation...***" Do you see?

1 Corinthians chapter 6, verse 19. Paul asks the Corinthian believers, – ***do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God,*** [do you not know that] ***you are not your own?*** In other words, there's been a transfer of ownership. Paul says, ***For you were bought at a price;*** [you were redeemed] ***therefore, glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's*** – "which are God's" – It speaks of possession. It speaks of ownership. Critical to our understanding of Paul's use of this word "slave," is the concept of ownership.

The word "slave" is the word chosen by Paul to communicate his association with the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul is saying in his use of this word, listen: That Jesus Christ went into the agora, the marketplace, where Paul was enslaved to his sin, and Jesus Christ agoradzo – He redeemed, He purchased the Apostle Paul out of the slave market of sin. Jesus Christ shed His own blood! He gave His own life! He delivered up His body in death to purchase, to pay the price to redeem the Apostle Paul. He gave His own life, a ransom for many. He purchased Paul out of the slave market of sin. He redeemed Paul for Himself. Now, Paul His own prized possession. And what is true of Paul, brothers and sisters, is true of you and I – it's also true of you and I. If you've been redeemed, purchased, bought by the blood of the Lamb you are no longer your own. You've been bought with a price. You are His now. And a word that could be used to rightly describe your association to the Lord Jesus Christ now, is "slave."

Peter says, 1 Peter chapter 1, verse 18: [We] ***were not redeemed*** [we weren't bought, we weren't purchased] ***with corruptible things like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but*** [we were purchased] ***with the precious blood of Christ, as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot.*** Therefore," Paul says, thinking of this word and using this word, communicating his association to the Lord Jesus Christ, Paul says, 'I'm not free. I'm not free. I have been bought by Jesus Christ. I am His. He is my Master. He is my Lord. I,' Paul says, 'I am a slave.'

Listen, we don't accept Jesus Christ as Savior and then later make Jesus Christ Lord. What an absurd thought. If you think about what's being communicated here, what an absurd and ridiculous thought that is. He is Lord! And the moment He calls you out of the slave market of your sin – the moment that He pays that price for you, you are His. Do you see? He is Lord. The moment that He purchases you out of the slave market of sin, He is Lord. He liberates you to serve Him.

Now you think about that relationship in the Christian life. You are liberated from sin! Set free from bondage to sin to be slave to Another. You know, there is this notion that is taught in so many churches today, that you are saved and that you are under the Lordship of Jesus Christ and yet you can live however you want to live. It's just an absurd, ridiculous notion that you set your own agenda, that you do your own thing, that you can live as you want to live and do as you want, is an absurd idea when compared to Scripture.

Now, the joy, the glory of the Christian life, is that when Jesus Christ purchases us out of the slave market of our sin, He gives us a new heart. He renews our mind. He makes us a new creation and gives us new desires. He puts His Spirit within us and He causes us then, to walk in His statutes and in His judgments, and to keep His commandments and to do them. He gives us a hunger and a thirst for righteousness. He gives us a fruit-filled faith, a wonder-working grace, and the very desire of our new heart in Him is to obey Him and to keep His commandments. And the evidence of that is that His commandments are no longer burdensome. We once walked according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience. If you're in Christ, you once walked as a slave of Satan. We now serve the Lord Christ.

Being a slave or using that word "slave" to communicate our association with the Lord Jesus Christ, our relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ, doesn't negate our status as sons. It doesn't negate the glorious heritage that we have as heirs with Christ, joint heirs with Him. It doesn't negate that. It's not an either/or. Do you see? It's a both/and – It's a both/and. Paul proclaims – and we'll see in this letter – Paul gloriously proclaims our status as sons in the kingdom, sons of our God at the same time that Paul glories and revels in describing himself as a slave of Jesus Christ. We'll talk about that more as we go.

I was witnessing to someone just the other day, and the notion is in the conversation that because we're all sinners... "We're all sinners and so no one can really live for Jesus Christ. The issue really is just salvation, and that we go on living as best we can. But we're all sinners and so..." – we've got this excuse, so to speak, that all sin. No. We become set free from slavery to sin. We become enslaved to, in service to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, secondly, as much as Paul's use of that word "slave" communicates something of our association to Jesus Christ, Paul's use of the word "slave" also communicates something of Paul's attitude in serving Jesus Christ. Verse 1: ***Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God*** – The very fact that Paul begins with this description tells us that this wasn't a description that Paul was ashamed of. It wasn't something that he found distasteful about the Christian life. It wasn't something that he had to apologize for. Paul gloried in this truth! Paul reveled in it! He exalted in it. It's the very first description that Paul uses to introduce himself in the letter! ***Paul, a slave*** – and not just a slave, a slave of Jesus Christ.

The metaphor that Paul uses here comes with none of that disgusting, deplorable, reprehensible abuse that characterizes the cruelty of slavery among men. It comes with none of that. We serve a gracious, and loving, and patient, and forgiving, and merciful, and loving Master! It wouldn't be the crack of a slave-master's whip that would compel Paul. That's not the case. Paul's faithfulness, Paul's devotion would be fueled by love. And not his own love, mind you. Remember 2 Corinthians chapter 5, verse 14. Listen to Paul's heart attitude. Paul says – **the love of Christ compels us**, [It's Christ's love for us that constrains me, Paul says. Christ's love for me compels me] **because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves**, [as a slave to sin, as a slave to their lusts] **but for Him** [as a slave to Jesus Christ] **who died for them and rose again**.

Paul isn't for a moment, not one moment, begrudging in his devotion to his Master. It's His love for me, Paul says, that constrains me, that compels me! Paul says, "I can't do, I can't be anything else! I can't go anywhere else. I can't think any other way. I am a willing, devoted, rejoicing slave! His love compels me. I have been captured. He has won me! I am His! He is mine! I am a slave of Jesus Christ!"

Turn with me to Acts chapter 20. In Acts chapter 20, Paul is about to meet with the elders from Ephesus, from the church at Ephesus, in a place called Miletus, and Paul describes his service there to the Lord Jesus Christ. And Paul's joy – keep in mind, right? – Paul rejoices in this ministry. Paul revels in the fact that he has been given over in slavery to the Lord Jesus Christ, that he has been called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God. Look at Acts chapter 20, and drop down to verse 17:

From Miletus [Paul's] sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church. And when they had come to him, he said to them: "You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among you, – Now, he's going to call upon their witness of his own life and ministry. Brothers and sisters, I would submit to you, we need to be able to do the same thing. We need to be able to say to our brothers and sisters here, "Listen, you know, you know what manner I've lived among you. I'm not perfect. We sin in many ways. We're going to offend one another. There's going to be conflict to resolve. There's going to be difficulty to resolve. We are human. This side of eternity we'll always have sin to deal with. But listen, we need to be able to say, you and I, "You know how I lived among you." We should be able to point to the testimony of our brothers and sisters and say, "You know what manner of life I've lived among you since the time I came here, since the time I set out to serve the Lord Jesus Christ." We need to live to have that kind of testimony.

He says, verse 19: ***serving the Lord with all humility,*** [His service to the Lord Jesus Christ was a humble service.] ***with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews;*** [His service was one that was persecuted. Verse 20] ***how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you,*** [His service was fully, wholeheartedly devoted. He kept back nothing from them. But he taught them] ***publicly and from house to house,*** [verse 21] ***testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me.***

Notice how Paul characterizes that in verse 22: ***I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem*** – Paul was a slave of the Lord Jesus Christ, and where the Lord directed, Paul went. What the Lord commanded Paul to do, Paul did. Paul saw himself as a slave of Jesus Christ. He goes bound now, in the Spirit to Jerusalem, knowing – knowing that chains, that tribulations await him.

Verse 24: ***But none of these things move me;*** [I'm not concerned with anything else. There's nothing else that is important in me.] ***nor do I count my life dear to myself,*** [Even if it means my life, I'm going to go! Why?] ***so that I may finish my race with joy,*** [What was Paul's joy? Paul's joy would be that he would finish his slavery, so to speak, to the Lord Jesus Christ in its fullness, obedient to the Lord, faithful to the Lord, faithful to his calling, faithful to his ministry, until the very end, when the Lord calls him home. And it would be Paul's joy to finish his race in that way; to finish the race with joy in] ***the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.***

What was he called to do? He was called to preach the gospel. And Paul's was going to finish his race with joy. And it was Paul's joy to serve the Lord in that way, even if it meant he gave his life in Jerusalem. I don't even count my own life dear to myself. Do you see? That was Paul's heart attitude. 'I have one aim,'

Paul would say, ‘one purpose, one goal, one end with the life that I’ve been given, and that is to finish the ministry that I’ve been given by the Lord Jesus Christ.’

“Only one life, t’will soon be passed. It’s only what’s done for Christ that will last.”

Paul says, ‘I’ve been called to testify to the gospel of the grace of God!’ Nothing more dear to him than this mission, not even his own life. ‘I know that chains and tribulations await me, but I press on in joy to finish my race.’ There was no begrudging attitude toward Paul’s association to the Lord Jesus Christ. There was no begrudging, despairing, discouraged, “woe is me,” apathetic indifference, cold, calloused, hard heartedness toward the commands of the Lord Jesus Christ. This was Paul’s joy. It was Paul’s joy to lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus had laid hold of him. Well, you see how Paul viewed his association to Jesus Christ? Do you see Paul’s heart attitude about that association? All of that is communicated through the use of this word “slave,” dōulōs.

Let me ask you a question: If you were going to sit to write a letter, would you, could you use this word to identify, to introduce, or describe yourself? Would you? Would this be the word that would come to mind? What word would best describe you? What word would best characterize the nature, the experience of your Christian life? What word would you choose? What word would others use to describe you? What would someone else say? “Oh, that guy, he’s a patriot; loves his country.” Not a bad thing. If it eclipses your devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ it is idolatry. “Well, he’s a great student that one, very professional. Yeah, he’s going places, that one.” “A good businessman, really smart. Knows how to run a business.” “Wonderful husband.” “Loving, devoted wife.” None of those things are bad in and of themselves, but when they eclipse our identity, who we are in Jesus Christ, they are idolatrous. Would this word “dōulōs,” would this word “slave,” make the top of the list in describing you? What word would you use? Would you start with Paul and say: “I am a slave of the Jesus Christ my Lord!”?

If we would but lay hold of this truth, lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has laid hold of you and I. If you profess to be in Christ then Jesus Christ has taken possession of you. You were bought at a price. You weren’t redeemed with corruptible things like silver and gold. You were redeemed with the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ has taken possession of you. You’re not your own. He has laid hold of you, and if you and I would but lay hold of that for which Jesus Christ has laid hold of us, then it would transform the way that we think about the Christian life. It would transform the way that you think, the way that you believe, the way that you live, the way that you obey, the way that you worship, the way that you pray, the way that you read, the way that you organize and structure your time, the way that you spend your money, the things that you do, the people you’re involved with. It would impact your zeal wouldn’t it? – have an impact your fervor, your earnestness, your desire, your willingness, your thoughts about obedience.

We are not our own, brothers and sisters, we’ve been brought at a price. We are so quick, aren’t we? – to enslave ourselves to the empty pleasures, the empty pursuits of this world; easily, freely, often going after them. And none of those things bring lasting joy. None of those things bring lasting peace. This life is fleeting! It is passing away! And what will last is that which is done for Christ; that which is done bearing fruit to eternity, fruit to holiness, and in the end, everlasting life. Lasting joy, lasting hope, peace, glory is found in being entirely possessed by Another. Your entire life, my entire life directed, shaped, controlled, compelled, constrained, by the One who bought me with His own blood!

Or, as you sit here this morning, would you characterize yourself as a slave to sin? Would you think of yourself as a slave to sin? You are a slave – of that, there is no doubt. You are in slavery. You are a slave. Whose slave are you? That’s the question. Kids, listen to me. Young man, young girl, listen to me. Often,

kids think to themselves, ‘I can’t wait to be free, be free from Mom and Dad, free from these rules. Why can’t I do this? Why can’t I do that? Why can’t I go? Always telling me what do and controlling me.’ Listen. You believe that you desire freedom from Mom and Dad, but your desire for what you think is freedom is actually enslavement to your sin. You are a slave. And the freedom from that responsibility, freedom from that accountability that you think that you crave, is actually enslavement to your lusts, enslavement to your sin.

You’re always a slave. Always a slave. Are you in bondage to anger? Are you in bondage to bitterness? Are you in bondage to physical lusts? What is it that most consumes your thoughts? What is that most consumes your interests? – your time? – your energy? Whose slave are you? Are you enslaved to the cares of this world?

Matthew chapter 6, verse 24, the Lord says: ***No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.*** And somebody says “Well, I’m enslaved to my physical lusts over here, but I don’t hate the Lord Jesus Christ.” No. Your enslavement of your physical lusts is an evidence that you hate the Lord Jesus Christ. You cannot serve two masters. You’ll love one and despise the other.

Are you enslaved to man’s approval? Or are you a slave to God’s approval? Galatians chapter 1, verse 10, Paul says: ***For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a [slave] a bondservant of Christ.***

Paul would later say in Galatians chapter 5, verse 13: ***For you, brethren, have been called to liberty*** [freedom]; ***only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve*** [the word is δούλεύω (dōulēūō). It means “to give a slave’s service to.” It means “to serve as a slave.” Through love serve as a slave]***one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”***

You see, slavery in the Christian life in the way that Paul describes it is freedom from slavery. And at the very same time slavery in the Christian life is freedom for slavery. Freedom from slavery, and freedom for slavery. It’s a bit of a paradox. Just like strength through weakness. This is freedom for slavery. We find this set side-by-side in Romans chapter 6. Turn over to Romans chapter 6 with me and look there beginning at verse 15.

Romans chapter 6, verse 15, Paul sits these two concepts, ‘freedom from slavery’ and ‘freedom for slavery’; he sets them side by side. ***What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? [May it never be!] Certainly not!***

It’s similar to verse 1. Look at verse 1: ***What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? [Similar question, isn’t it?] Certainly not! [By no means!] How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?***

In other words, does grace, does the grace of God accommodate the believer’s sin? God’s forgiven me, God has saved me, so I can live however I want to live. Now that wouldn’t necessarily come out of a person’s mouth, but by their actions – their actions speak louder than their words – by their actions, they’re professing that very thing. They live however they want to live, and it doesn’t matter because God has shown me grace. Paul would say, “By no means! May it never be! Certainly not!” You have ceased being a slave to sin. Now you are a slave to God.”

Look at verse 16: ***Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?*** [Two camps, two forms of slavery, two ends in mind. It's either sin leading to death, leading to destruction, leading to hell; or of obedience leading to righteousness. Verse 17] ***But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.***

Now, this isn't preaching... Paul isn't preaching a salvation by works. Paul is preaching a salvation that works. It's a salvation that works. Having been set free from sin – transferred out from under slavery to sin, set free from the power of sin – you've become now, slaves of righteousness.

One of the key indicators, the key marks of conversion in the life of a Christian is their desire, heart, soul, mind, and strength, to serve the Lord Jesus Christ; to be holy, to put off sin, and to put on righteousness. That's a mark of genuine conversion. As soon as a person is genuinely saved, a war begins as a result of that. My desire is holiness, my desire is to live for Him, and yet I see this other principle – we're going to see that in Romans 10 – this other principle of my members that now wages war against the law of my mind, and I am afflicted over sin now as a result. I don't do the things that I want to do. I do the things that I don't want to do. You become a slave of righteousness. You don't turn away from that.

Paul says in verse 19: ***I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness.*** Transfer from one form of slavery to another form of slavery.

For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. [You didn't have this compelling interest, this hunger and thirst for righteousness; this drive from God's Spirit, driving you to obey. You didn't have that. You were free in regard to righteousness.] ***What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death.*** [Verse 22] ***But now having been set free from sin,*** [set free from sin as a ruling power, as a reigning power in your life] ***having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.***

Freedom from sin does not give you the freedom to sin. Freedom from sin brings an obligation to turn from sin. Do you see? The theme of the passage is a contrast between two forms of slavery. You are a slave of one, or you are a slave of the other. The old slavery to sin, from which believers have been set free, and new slavery to righteousness to which believers have been delivered; to which believers are now under obligation to commit themselves with the heart attitude of Paul.

1 John chapter 5, verse 3: ***For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.*** It's amazing today, right? that you, even reading a verse like that from the pages of Scripture itself, and many will rise up in objection, "That's legalism!" You're talking about the Apostle John who said those words. But as soon as you mention obedience in the Christian life and the unconverted, natural heart bristles against it. Why? Because they are a slave to sin and not a slave of righteousness. The Christian with a new heart in Christ cries out in rejoicing, "Thank You Lord! Help me! I need strength! I need help. Deliver me from the presence of sin, Lord now. Please!"

Paul's instruction in Romans 6 is because believers need to be reminded of this. Brothers and sisters, we too often, shamefully, we forget. We need to be reminded of these things constantly. We need to be

reminded of Who we belong to. You can't do anything you want with your body. You can't do anything you want with your time, with your resources. There are things that we desire in the flesh that are not good, that are sinful. We need to obey the Lord in those things that we desire with our mind, agreeing with the Law of God which is holy, just, and good. We need to obey the Lord as slaves of righteousness. You're no longer your own. You were bought with an unimaginably high price. He paid for you with His own blood. His own life.

Here's a man, Romans chapter 1, verse 1 who could have begun his introduction in so many different places in so many different ways, saying so many different things; but where did he start? ***Paul, a slave of Jesus Christ***, – We need to understand who we really are. Amen?

All praise, honor, glory, and blessing to Him who has bought us with His blood.