

One for All
2 Cor. 5: 8-15

**First Presbyterian Church
Baton Rouge, Louisiana**

**October 8, AD 2017
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Some years ago I was coming back from a wedding in the country. I passed through a small town and looked over at a strip of stores. In the little shopping center, there was a hair salon, a Dollar General, a place to get your nails done and one store that said Accountability Church. I thought about that name. Accountability Church. Kind of a tough sell. I've got enough judgment in my life to make that a weekly stop. It's going to be hard to get them out of that storefront. Then a block or so later, on a prominent corner was a substantial building. The sign gave the name in big letters: Freedom Church! Interesting choice on a Sunday morning. So, kids do you want to go to Freedom Church or Accountability Church? Do you want ice cream or eggplant?

For Paul, though, freedom and accountability go together. He has found freedom in his sufferings because he has such a vivid hope of glory. The resurrection body that Christ has promised gave Paul freedom from fear of death. To be away from this mortal body is to be with the Lord, so we are no longer bound by the fear of losing in the short term. In fact, we have good courage. But the freedom of his future in Christ is also the reality of accountability. This life is not all there is. There's more to come. The God who does not allow me to wink out of existence is also the God who calls me to account for what I have done in my life. Of course accountability is not much fun to choose. I'd really rather go to Freedom Church. But the freedom of our future in Christ creates our accountability for the present moment. And that's what gives our lives more than momentary value. What we do and how we live *matters*.

So Paul writes, "We make it our aim to please him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done, whether good or evil. Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others."

Sometimes when I teach on the judgment of Christ, I get comments from people such as, "I've always heard that Christians don't have to go through the judgement. Jesus has taken the punishment for sin so I don't have to be judged." The Biblical reality is a bit different. Christians do not skip judgment. But we have

freedom from condemnation. We face the evaluation of the judgment seat in the confidence of Christ's advocacy on our behalf. The judge turns out to be our Redeemer. He has taken eternal condemnation away from us. But that does not mean we are not accountable for our lives. Our lives *do* matter in the building of Christ's kingdom. We don't want to arrive before the King as recipients of such great love and mercy, only to be found as those who lived in bitterness and malice. We don't want to be those who received such gifts of the Spirit only to be found as having wasted such grace. We want to please the one who saved us. We want to be found as vigorous participants in Christ's mission of mercy to his world. We do not fear the condemnation of judgment. Our sins have been taken by the judge. But what we do still matters. We still have a purpose that is real. And the only way for life to be significant is if God considers it worthy to be evaluated. *To count, we have to be accountable.*

Paul certainly knew the grace of Christ. He also knew the healthy fear of Christ. He knew the power of the Spirit of Christ within him. That Spirit propelled him forward on a mission. It constrained him. He could not go back to living for other pursuits. He knew he had to make this gospel known, striving to persuade others to see how God loves them in sending Jesus to us. Being accountable did not diminish Paul's sense of God's love for him. It increased his awareness. We matter so much to God that he makes our lives count. So Paul went on, "For the love of Christ controls us..." That word means "The love of Christ *compels* us. It guides us in a direction we simply have to go. In view of this knowledge, everything changes. In view of the fact of Christ Jesus crucified and risen, our lives have to now go this way.

So Paul gets to the heart of his message: "We have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves, but for him who for their sake died and was raised." The entire Christian hope, the whole Christ-project, has been compressed into this one sentence. It's full of depth and passion and mystery. We'll spend the rest of our time trying to explore it.

One died for all, therefore all have died. Somebody did something that affected everyone.

The Christian hope is astounding. Paradoxical. Glorious. God became man. The eternal Son of God took up our humanity. He entered time. He entered the world as one of us. Paul writes elsewhere that in Jesus, God was "taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he

humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Phil. 2: 7-8). God wanted to do something about the plight of the creatures he had made. But he didn’t just want to issue commands from on high. God wanted to change us from the inside out. So he determined to work from within the human race. He came to us as one of us. Jesus was really a man of flesh and blood like every other person. But an ordinary person could not truly affect the course of all humanity. How could what one man did be powerful in every woman and man’s life? Only if that man was also God. Only if that man was also the creator of every man and woman. Only if that man acted not just as an isolated man but as God himself on behalf of us all.

One died for all, therefore all died. Let’s look at it another way. Jesus blazed a path for humanity. He took human being where we had never been before. The mission of Star Trek actually describes what Jesus was doing in our name and on our behalf: he boldly went where no man had gone before. He realized all the possibilities of human destiny. He lived a bigger life than any could live.

He lived a life of faithfulness to his Father that no one had ever lived out before. He kept the law of God. And not just the letter of it, but the spirit of the law. He loved his Father with all his heart, mind and soul. As he had loved him from all eternity, he loved his Father now as a man, from within our world, in the midst of all the suffering and temptation and deprivation and distraction. He lived the life humans were intended to live: faithful, loving worship and obedience and relationship with our Father. He lived the life of loving others as we were always meant to live: caring, healing, blessing, even to the point of giving his life away. Jesus was man fully alive. Living in vivid, robust love of God and neighbor. And we can tell from his words that such a life of love awakened the full power of creativity and insight and wisdom. He was humanity alive again.

But Jesus also went to darker places than any human being had gone before. In the days of his ministry, he did not hesitate to enter the madness and darkness, the sadness and disease of humanity. He touched lepers. Embraced sinners. Stilled the stormy seas of Galilee and the stormy minds of the possessed. But more. He took the venom of human mockery and embraced it, returning not scorn but love. He took the injustice of human power and let himself be unfairly tried and condemned. But more. He went to the crushing crisis of feeling the weight of evil, self-centeredness, and sin upon his soul. He wanted to turn away but did not. So he went to the place of physical pain so horrible we named a word after it: excruciating. To suffer the pain of crucifixion. But more. In his dying he went where no person had gone before. Into the full hell of God-forsakenness. The man

with such a tender heart for his Father went to the hell of being cut off from any awareness of his Father's pleasure or love. He descended into death, but not oblivion. He went to the death of the body and the soul, the absolute isolation of being dead to his Father. No man before had known the full extent of where our sin leads. For Jesus experienced Judgment Day before it has come to pass. He took condemnation as his lot, going deeper and further from his Father than any evil person had yet fallen.

But in his rising, Jesus pioneered a new path. He became what Paul calls the first fruit of resurrection. He was man remade for an everlasting embodied life. So he ascended to heaven in his resurrection body. He went again where no man had gone before. Now a man has been taken into the very life of the Triune God. A man, a man! sits on the throne of heaven. Jesus has plumbed depths we had never known. Jesus has reached heights we have never been. He expanded the range of human experience and capacity beyond anything ever possible before. His life, death, resurrection and ascension opens a possibility for us all. He has broken the curse and cracked the limits. He is a new humanity. He is man remade. He is the beginning of humanity more than restored, but expanded into the robust image of God.

One died. Therefore all have died. In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul wrote, "For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive....Just as we have borne the image of [Adam] the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of [Christ] the man of heaven" (1 Cor. 15: 21-22, 49).

In Romans, Paul further compares Adam and Jesus. He notes that "sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned" (Rom. 5:12). Yet, "if because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who received the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5: 17).

When Adam sinned, death began. No, our first parents did not drop dead right in the moment they ate the fruit. But they died spiritually. And the clock began ticking on their bodies. Mortality entered humanity and indeed all creation. The greatness in the story of Jesus is that he reversed the sin/death process. When this one man obeyed, life began anew. When Christ died, we died to sin's dominion. Death died as the final word. Not that it happens instantly. We still must face mortal death. We still must wrestle with sin. But the reversal has begun.

Christ inaugurated the death of death. As someone said this week, Christ undid death. So in his dying, we “*un-died.*” We come alive again in Jesus.

There’s a wonderful recent song that captures this complexity in a few short lines. Matt Maher wrote,

I'm alive, I'm alive
Because He lives
Amen, Amen
Let my song join the one that never ends
Because He lives.¹

Jesus has run the course. He did it for us. He has dug deeper and ascended higher. He has blazed the trail through the depths and the heights. We can be joined to that journey. We can be taken up in the new humanity he has created. My little life’s song can join the one that never ends. It’s cosmic. Earth changing.

And it calls me to a new way of living. He died for all that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for the one who for their sake died and rose again.

This is the freedom of accountability to a story higher than myself. It seems like freedom when we set out to say, “I’ll blaze my own path. I’ll be my own story-maker. I’ll be my own god.” But we arrive in these pews knowing from hard experience that such freedom is really slavery. In fact, it’s the crushing grind of having always to invent new meaning and purpose. It’s being endlessly disappointed that you can’t make life or the world work like you want it to. It’s realizing we are in bondage to decay we can’t stop and the futility of being mortal which we can’t break. It’s the slavery of bitterness as we have to try to fix everyone according to our ideas of how to save the world.

I need the one who has blazed a better path. One who forged a humanity that has renewed capacity to love God utterly and live life sacrificially for others. One who has taken on death, and known the defeat of condemnation, forsakenness, and shame. Only to pass through that sea of death into life remade. I need to be in the new man, the new Adam, Jesus who died for all and thus freed me from the death of living for myself.

I need the accountability of living no longer just for me, but for the one who lived so utterly for me. Dying and rising in order to destroy death, he freed me from the power of sin and set life at work in the human race once again.

This man's life is the one that matters. Because Jesus was not just an ordinary man. He was God taking up our humanity. A new Adam. And taking us to depths and heights we had never known. He is the man who is God and the God who is man. So he is one acting on behalf of all. We can be taken up into that grand and life-giving story. Our song can join the one that never ends. We can by faith entrust ourselves to such a savior. Every hour, every day. Once and for all for salvation, daily for our renewal and mission. He has freed me to no longer have to live for myself, in that stale bathwater of splashing around in tedious me. We live now for the one who died and rose for us. And that accountability opens up all the freedom of everlasting life.

¹ Matt Maher, "Because He Lives Amen."