

Romans 7:1-6

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[0 : 00] Take out your copy of God's Word. I hope you have it with you today. Romans chapter 7. As you're doing so, I'd like to say welcome to our guests. It's really good to have you here this morning.

! I hope that your family time is precious as you're visiting the area. We've been working our way together as a church through the book of Romans, verse by verse, as we love to do. But before I read Romans chapter 7, verse 1 through 6, I'm going to tell you that we're not going to spend a lot of time in it this morning. As a preacher, I've been doing this for a while, and there are times in my preparation that I'm led to do something a bit different than what the original plan was. I have notes actually prepared. I can scroll on down and see them for this text. This morning, though, as I was reviewing them, I was led elsewhere. So we're going to read this together. It doesn't totally depart from the text and the meaning of the text, but we're going to spend a little bit of time in the book of Luke this morning.

Let's begin this morning by reading verses 1 through 6 of chapter 7. Let's read some of those.

[1 : 43] And if she marries another man, she is not an adulteress. Likewise, my brothers, you have also died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, nor that we may bear fruit for God.

For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the spirit and not in the old way of the written code.

Let's pray together. Father God, I thank you very much for this morning, and I thank you for your written word. And I pray, Father, this morning you will add to us knowledge and understanding that yields itself in wisdom for righteous living.

We look to you for these things. We are incapable of speaking your word, of understanding it, of applying it, knowing it whatsoever apart from you.

So we look to you to intervene this morning. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen. Well, not to completely neglect our text this morning, we have been led up to this point by Paul through a rather logical and linear argument to essentially say to us that there is a law of God given to man to expose our sinfulness.

[3 : 12] We worship a holy God who is entirely set apart, who dwells in righteousness. And the law was given to us to show us how short we come of that righteousness.

I told you last week that the law demands two things of us. It demands fulfillment and it demands condemnation.

It demands fulfillment and it demands condemnation. Look at Romans chapter 2, verse 12 through 15. First part of 15. For all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law.

And all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law. So those with the Mosaic law, those without the Mosaic law. Anyone who sinned will die by that law.

For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified. For when Gentiles who do not have the law by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law.

[4 : 16] They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts. So we have working here throughout Romans two different types of law, if you'll allow me.

The Mosaic law, those ten commandments and the commandments surrounding it that were given to Moses on Mount Sinai to give to the people of Israel. But we also have what's been commonly called the moral law.

Those things that are written on our hearts. Those things we know are right and those things that we know are wrong. Interestingly, there's no article in the original language.

We read all through the book of Romans, the law, the law, the law. There is no article, but in order for it to make sense in English, we must add an article to it. So he's simply saying law, speaking generally of both types of law.

And both types demand fulfillment and condemnation. Just because we have to place our faith in Christ doesn't mean that the law doesn't need to be fulfilled any longer.

[5 : 17] Understand that the law must be kept. But it's kept in Christ. I'll explain that a bit more in a bit.

But also because the law has been transgressed. It demands condemnation. Those who have transgressed the law must pay the due punishment for that transgression.

Now this is the beauty of the person and work of Christ. Because he meets both of those requirements on our behalf.

Because he lived a perfect life. It's so important to our Christology that we understand that Christ lived a perfect, blameless life.

But he fulfilled the law. And because he died and bore the wrath of God for the sins of the church, he also met the requirement of the condemnation of the law.

[6 : 24] Now for us it's impossible. We can not fulfill the law on our own. Nathan, I can work my darndest. I could spend all of my time trying to obey the law.

And it is impossible. Because of the sinful inclination of my heart that I inherited from Adam. Impossible. I will not accomplish it.

But in Christ, my faith placed in Christ, it has been fulfilled. Such a beautiful, beautiful truth. 2 Corinthians 5:21 Paul writes, For our sake, he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Christopher Hitchens, you guys know who that is. An outspoken atheist. I think he actually at one point called himself a militant anti-Christian.

Very well known for much of what he said against Christianity. Passed away this week. And you get online, there's some wonderful, wonderful articles written about that.

[7 : 37] But he believed that Christianity was immoral. He believed that for us as Christians to place our guilt upon the shoulders of Christ is immoral.

That we ought not give away what is rightly ours to bear. The guilt of our sin against God. It's a man that doesn't believe in God, which is ironic in that case. So that Christianity is immoral.

But the problem with this thinking is that he believes that we cast our guilt on Christ's shoulders. And the reality of it is that Christ took it from us. You have no choice in that matter.

If you are his, he took it from you. Oh, what a Christ we praise. So as I was thinking about these truths, as we see in Romans chapter 7, that we have been set free from service to the law and we've been bound up with another.

That is Christ. In him. To serve him. And that in that, we will live righteous lives. As I'm thinking about this, my mind is just pulled to my favorite parable.

[8 : 51] And that's where I want to spend our time today. In Luke chapter 15, the parable of the prodigal son. So if you'll please turn there with me. Because the intention to do this this morning came to me at about 645.

I don't have notes. So this will be a new experience for you and for me. I'm just going to stop as we read through this together and give you my own commentary to it.

And we'll sum it up at the end. But I want to start by having you look at the beginning of chapter 15 at verse 2. Because this is the stage that's set for this parable to be told.

It actually comes after two parables before it. Verse 2 says, And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, This man received sinners and eats with them.

They've got a group of people that were very religious for our terms. They believed that they followed the law to the letter. They believed that their righteousness was found in their effort to keep the law.

[10 : 03] And they gather around Jesus and they say, Look at this man. He eats with sinners. How dare he? How could he possibly make himself unclean by even associating with people such as these?

And these parables are the parables that Jesus tells in response to that. And so read with me, beginning in verse 11. And he said, Jesus, There was a man who had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me. This story was a shock and awe story. For the group he was speaking to. And I'm going to show you along the way why it would have been that way. But here's the first point. As these Jewish people are gathering around him. The son says to the father, Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me. In Jewish culture, this would have been him saying to his father, Father, I wish you were dead. There is something due me when you die, but I want it now. [11:14] In Jewish culture, that would have been him saying, I hate you. I wish you were dead. I wish you would just go ahead and kick off so I could have what is mine. Got your attention? And the father, he divided his property between them. Not many days later, the young son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country. And there he squandered his property in reckless living or licentious living or prodigal living. It simply means extravagant. He spent it, boy. We see later, the other son points out that he spent it on prostitutes. Verse 14. And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. [12:15] And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate. And no one gave him anything. Now understand at this point in the story, once again, the shock that would have come upon these Jewish listeners to this story. He had brought himself so low that in their society, he got the lowest possible job. The worst job you could have. I'm not going to list jobs in our society because somebody may have that job here. But think of the worst possible job in your mind to have in our society. That's the one he had. He had been brought so low as a son of Israel. He had gone to another country and hired himself out to feed pigs. And he was in such desperate need that he wanted what the pigs were eating. Now the pods that the pigs were eating is something that we couldn't even digest. They were fed to the pigs because the pigs have a special, I don't know, stomach. [13:19] Pigs are special in this way and they can consume all kinds of stuff that we cannot consume. And these pods were one of those things. He was so desperately hungry that he even wanted to eat that to fill his stomach. Verse 17, but when he came to himself, and this is such an interesting phrase in the original language, literally means when his mind was made right. When his mind was made right. He said, how many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger. I will arise and go to my father and I will say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants. And he arose and came to his father. He was brought so low, but when his mind was made right, what does he say? I have a father who's so generous, whose mercy abounds to his servants. It would be better for me to be one of them. And he humbles himself. His mind is right. [14:25] Father, I have sinned against you and God. And he goes to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion and ran and embraced and kissed him. Third shock moment for the Jewish culture. This man was a wealthy man, which meant that he would have had a house in town. And he also would have had a house out in the country. He would have had a place that the servants stayed out in the country to tend for his fields. But he would have had a house in town where he could trade and be a well-to-do and have parties and people would know him. And he could be social in that way. What's implied here is that while the son was returning, the father was watching for him. That the father cared enough for him that he was pacing the front porch of his town home looking for him to come.

Otherwise, why would he have seen him coming from a long way off? And what does he do? He has compassion and he runs to him. Rich people didn't run.

[15:38] In this day. You did not run. You had servants that ran for you. You said, go run and grab me my ledger. And they were the lowly ones that took off running.

This man would have been wearing a long robe. In order for him to run, he would have had to pull it up, hike it up high enough for him to run. And he ran. He disgraced himself for the sake of his son. You guys getting who the father is in the story? He's Jesus Christ. He's Jesus Christ who disgraced himself on the cross for us, who was stripped naked and beaten and hung as a spectacle for all to see on our behalf.

Also in this culture, you know the Jews had, by Mosaic law, had the right to stone to death a disobedient child? Children, you hear that?

They had the right to do it. The child was disobedient. They could take him outside the gate and they could stone him to death. Now, very few, I would even venture to say, no parents actually did that.

[16:46] I believe the law was in place to show the children how important it was to obey your parents. However, a very common practice for a disobedient child was to lock them in the town square in stocks.

You've seen that in the medieval times. Head goes through a hole, hands through a hole, and they get locked. And they become a spectacle, a disgrace. The father would put his son on display for everyone to see.

Disobedient child. Look at this son that I have that doesn't obey me. This father disgraces himself, and he runs out of the town to meet his son before any disgrace can be delivered to him.

Before any of the town folk, who I'm sure knew by now what had happened, jested and jeered at him, demanded that he be locked in the stocks.

He runs out beforehand and meets him. As he's coming in. Look at the joy that the father has to see him too, as he's waited for him for all this time.

[17:52] Run out to embrace him. And to kiss him. Verse 21. And the son said to him, as he had planned to, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you.

I am no longer worthy to be called your son. But the father said to his servants, bring quickly the best robe and put it on him. And put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet.

And bring the fattened calf and kill it. And let us eat and celebrate. For this my son was dead and is alive again. He was lost and is found. And they began to celebrate.

So he has a servant run back to town. Bring out of town, before he escorts him in, the best robe. Clothes him.

In that thing that would have said to everybody, this is still my son. He will not be locked in the stocks. He will not be made a disgrace of. Because he is mine.

[18:54] Put on him a ring. The significance here would have been that it would have been one of his rings. A signet ring. That ring that had his stamp, his seal in it. So when he wrote a letter and sealed it with wax and stamped his sign in that, people knew this is a message from the rich man.

He placed that ring on the son's finger. The ring that would have said, this son speaks for me. And then he put shoes on his feet.

It was a sign of wealth. Welcome back to the family's son. And they take the fattened calf. A rich man always had a calf hanging out.

Doing no activity. But being fed very well. Those of you steak lovers out there know, how good meat is when it's being prepared to be eaten.

For no other reason but to eat it. It's much better that way. And he would have had this fattened calf. It would have been kept waiting for a big celebration.

[19:59] The biggest thing that could have happened. Possibly the older son being married. That could have been why it was being prepared that the older son was approaching that age. But it was slaughtered for the sake of the prodigal son.

And they began to celebrate. Verse 25. Now his older son was in the field and he came and drew near to the house. He heard music and dancing.

And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. And he said to him, Your brother has come and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has received him back safe and sound.

But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him. But he answered his father, Look, these many years I have served you and I never disobeyed your command.

Yet you never gave me a young goat that I might celebrate with my friends. But when the son of yours came who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him.

[20 : 59] And he said to him, Son, you are always with me and all that is mine is yours. It was fitting to celebrate and be glad for this your brother was dead and is alive. He was lost and is found.

So here we see the older son who isn't even willing to approach the house. His father is throwing a party and he's not going to go to his father to ask why. He asks one of the servants, What does this mean? What is going on at the house?

Why? Such a charade going on there. And he's mad. He's furious at what has happened.

His father comes out to him. Note that. His father comes out of the house to him and says, Please, come in. Join us in the celebration. My joy would be complete if my sons were together.

Once again, he says, Father, all these years I have served you. And what have you done for me? Nothing. But yet, you'll give everything to the son.

[22 : 03] What a picture this is of grace to us. What a beautiful, beautiful story it is. And my question for you this morning is, which of the characters are you in the story?

I believe there are three you can be. You can be the prodigal version of the younger son. You can be that person that says to God, I hate you.

I wish you were dead. Just give me what is mine. Let me go on my way. Your ways mean nothing to me. Your law given to me, that's not the way for me to be happy.

I'm going to follow my own philosophy of happiness in this life. I'm going to chase it with all that I am. If you're that person, I would say to you, you're going to be brought low.

Whether in this life now or eternally, certainly eternally, you will be brought low. You will beg to be satisfied on things that will not satisfy you.

[23 : 15] are you the prodigal son returned? It's the second person you could be.

The prodigal son returned. Have you placed your faith in Christ? Have you said humbly of yourself, I have sinned against you.

I'm not even worthy to be called your son. but yet you have found yourself clothed in the righteousness of Christ.

You've been given a ring that you might speak on behalf of him who has loved you with such a magnificent love. I hope that's where we all find ourselves this morning.

That's the place we want to be with our identity wrapped up in the personal work of Christ because Christ is the only person that can meet the demands of the law.

[24 : 22] Are you the older son? I'm the older son sometimes. I hope not all the time. I hope not the majority of the time.

But I'm the older son. I believe I have some right to the things of God. I believe that I have earned that. And I get mad when I see him merciful towards other people.

God, look at all that I do for you. What do I get in return? I don't even get a goat to party with my friends, and yet you've killed the fattened calf for him or for her.

I believe that the job of the older son in this story should have been to pursue the younger son. To love the things that his father loves.

To have been about that work. Here's his father pacing the porch of the town home. The son should have been out there finding the younger son, reminding him of how merciful his father is, and bringing him home.

[25 : 35] too often we don't do that. We hold holy club meetings. We feel so entitled to so much as Christians rather than saying, Father, I have sinned against you, and I do not deserve to be called your son, but I praise you that I am, that you have clothed me in this way, that you have given me your way, that you have put shoes on my feet.

What a blessing that is. Look up a bit in chapter 15 to the parable of the lost sheep.

This is how he immediately answers that question. This man receives sinners and eats with them.

He says, so he told him this parable, what man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the one that is lost until he finds it.

And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, rejoice with me, for I found my sheep that

was lost.

Just so I people who didn't need repentance.

[27 : 02] He doesn't mean that. What he's talking about are these Pharisees, these people who didn't think they needed repentance, who sought to reach to God by obeying the law.

There's no rejoicing over heaven for them. There's great rejoicing for that person who realizes through faith that they can't and believes by grace that Jesus can on their behalf.

I want us to be a church. Those of you who are guests, wherever you go, I want us to be believers who act as the son upon his return, who are about the work of our father.

I don't want Christ Family Church to be a club. In so many ways, it's not, but in some ways, it is. We need to be searching our hearts, asking God to expose the sinfulness of them, that we might come together in this way.

Our text, Romans 7, 1-6, which we will get back to probably after Christmas. Verse 4 says that we've been bound to Christ, that we belong to another in order that we may bear fruit for God.

[28 : 34] And in Galatians 5.13, Paul wrote, For you were called to freedom, brothers, set free from the bondage of sin. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.

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