

“Freed From Law”

Romans 7:1-13

June 29, 2014

3rd Sunday After Pentecost

In the movie, *Double Jeopardy*, a wife is accused, convicted and sent to jail for the murder of her husband. While in jail, she learns that her husband is still alive, having faked his own death. Furious, the wife seeks revenge. A cell mate tells her not to worry because of the legal protection of double jeopardy which protects someone from being tried more than once for the same crime. Since she's already been convicted for the crime of murdering her husband, the cell mate says she could shoot her husband in Time Square and the government couldn't do anything about it because they couldn't try her again for the same crime. The rest of the movie is spent showing her hunting down and killing her husband and apparently getting away with it. The law gave the wife a break because her husband was “dead.” It protected her legal rights against double jeopardy.

Although the civil law may protect us to some extent while we are living, the Law of God does no such thing. The Law of God is not primarily our protector but our master. The Law establishes the standard by which we are acceptable to God: “You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.” (Lev. 19:2)

We might take that to mean we must lead an exemplary life with our actions being good and right. But it is much more than perfect actions. Jesus fully explains the Law of God in the Sermon on the Mount to show us that the Law of God regulates not only our actions, but our words and thoughts as well. For example, Jesus says that the commandment against murder not only forbids the taking of a life, but also anger and insulting words. The commandment against adultery not only forbids sexual intercourse outside of marriage, but lust as well.

The Law doesn't just establish the standard. It beats us over the head with it, as well. In our text for today, Paul says that the Law is neither sin nor even a bad thing. However, the Law of God does two things which result in bad for us. First, the Law shows us what sin is. Paul says, “If it had

not been for the law, I would not have known sin. I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, 'You shall not covet.'"

Knowing this leads us to sin. Paul says, "Sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness." Earlier in the text, he says, "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." It's like when you see a sign that says: "Wet paint. Do not touch." What's the first thing you do? You touch it. The sign is not at fault. But, because of the sign, you touch it.

Secondly, after being used by our sinful natures to lead us to sin, the Law of God convicts us of our sin. In confirmation class, we learned that the Law is like a mirror. As a mirror clearly and accurately reflects back to us our physical appearance, so the Law of God clearly and accurately reflects back to us and to God our spiritual appearance. The mirror of the Law shows that you and I have sinned against God in our thoughts. We have sinned against Him in our words. We have sinned against Him in our deeds. Under the Law, we are separated from God, under His wrath, and doomed to His eternal condemnation.

We chafe under the Law as our master. We want to be free from it. Some try to be free from the Law by working harder and harder to overcome it. Maybe you are in this group. You think that if you can just be better and more obedient to the Law then you won't feel the weight of the Law on you. But that doesn't work.

Many more people, I think try to be free from the Law by simply ignoring it. Maybe you fall into this group. You think if you just don't think about the Law and its standard of holiness and its requirements of you in your thought, words, and deeds, that maybe it will just go away. Ultimately there's no peace either.

Paul says there is a way out. There is a way to be free from the Law as your master. The answer is simple: death. Paul says that "the law is binding on a person only as long as he lives."

The Law controls you as long as you live, but it has no authority to control you or condemn you after you die. Death releases us from the lordship of the Law.

Paul uses the law of marriage as an example. He says, “A married woman is bound by law to her husband while he lives, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law of marriage.” This means that she is not obligated to the Law because of death. Paul says that she would be called an adulteress if she lived with a man while her husband was still alive. However, because her husband has died, she is free to marry another man and live with him without being labeled an adulteress.

In the same way, we are freed from the Law and its obligations as our master through death. How? Paul says, “You also have died to the law through the body of Christ.” What is He saying here? We haven’t died, have we? We have deserved to die because of our sin. But Jesus fulfilled the Law and all of its requirements in His body while He lived here on this earth. The Law was His master, not by necessity, but voluntarily. He was doing that for you.

Then, even though He did all of that perfectly, Jesus accepted the Law’s judgment and condemnation for your sin and my sin in His body on the cross. As Isaiah prophesied of Him,

Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. (Isaiah 53:4-6)

Jesus is the one who has died. Through His death, Jesus overcame the violations of that Law which each of us has done. By doing this, Jesus has taken away the power which the Law has over you. It cannot set standards for you which you must meet to be accepted by God. Jesus has already fulfilled those standards. The Law cannot judge and condemn you for the violations of its standards. Jesus has already paid for those violations with His life.

You *have died* to the Law, not somewhere in the future when your body dies, but now, when you are individually joined to the body of Christ. That happens in baptism. In the chapter prior to our text, Paul says, “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were

baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death.” When you were baptized, you were joined to Jesus, joined to Jesus’ death, joined to Jesus’ burial. In baptism, you died to the Law. It does not rule you any more. You live under the grace and forgiveness of Christ and not under the Law and its condemnation.

But that’s not all. Just as God the Father did not leave His Son, Jesus, dead in the grave, so He has not left us dead, either. As He has raised Christ from the dead to new life, He has also raised you and me to new life. As Paul writes in Romans 6, the reason we died to the Law and were buried with Christ was “that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.”

This is an active new life, not a passive new life in which we just sit around and wait to go to heaven. Our text says that the reason we have died to sin and become alive to grace was “so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God.”

Having died to the Law is not an excuse or a justification for living in violation of the Law. That would be foolish. There has been a lot of discussion in our state about the case of Barry Beach being freed from prison where he is confined on a conviction of murder. Do you imagine if he was ever free, he would use his freedom to now murder or do anything that would break the Law? Never! Having been freed from the condemnation of the Law, I’m sure he would lead an exemplary life out of gratitude.

The same is true for us. We have not died to the Law so that we would be free to break the Law. We have died to the Law so that we might be free to serve God. We now have “the new life of the Spirit.” We are free to be obedient to God, not in order to be saved but because we have been saved. The Law no longer condemns us because of what we must do and failed. The Law now guides us to do what we are free to do. We are free to live lives of good works that please God and benefit our neighbor without the Law’s standard hanging over us or the weight of the Law crushing us.

In various online discussions about the movie, *Double Jeopardy*, most everyone expressed the opinion that there was no way the wife could have actually gotten away with murder because of the double jeopardy provision in our legal system. Still, even if it was wrong, it made for a fascinating premise that death could free someone from the provisions of the Law. While that movie might not be true, the Word of God is true. We, in a sense, enjoy freedom from a case of spiritual double jeopardy. We cannot be convicted and condemned for our sin because Jesus has already been convicted and condemned. We are free from the Law's condemnation. Use your freedom wisely and well. You are free to live the new life given in your baptism. You are free to be obedient to the Law of God because you have died to the Law in your baptism. You are free to do good and serve your neighbor because you have been freed from the requirements of the Law. Live freed from the Law by Christ. Live freed from the Law for your neighbor. Amen.