



This week at Magdalen Road Church we began a new series in Romans 8. We'll be here for the next 6 weeks as we dig deep into the chapter.

We began by considering the fact that most of us as believers are discontent with the state of our lives. Why are we not more joyful? Why are we so anxious? Why do we still struggle with *that* sin? Or that pattern of behaviour? Or that cycle of thinking?

And New Years' resolutions can be both helpful and unhelpful in this matter. Helpful in that they can be an honest identification of where we would like to be different, but unhelpful in that we can end up bullying and cajoling ourselves with rules and regulations that in the end are not rooted in grace, and so ultimately don't work.

Romans 8 is a chapter for people like us who are dissatisfied with our Christian lives. We briefly looked back at the letter to see that Paul has so far asked two big questions

- (1) how can I be right with God? (Chs 1-4) and
- (2) how can I live a new life as a Christian? (Chs 5-7).

In chapter 8 we find an answer to both. We also looked ahead to the whole chapter and noted that in the first four verses (this week) he points **back** to a specific point in history, from verse 5 to 17 he reminds them of their reality **now**, and who they really are now whilst in v18 to the end he points **ahead** to the hope that they have (as well as dealing with any doubts that we might have as to whether we will actually get there).

We hung the verses off two main headings:

... our penalty has been removed

Rather like the 1863 emancipation proclamation in America where slaves were forever freed, so as believers our status in Christ has been changed for ever. to understand exactly why we need to understand both concepts of 'sin' and 'law' that Paul has been dealing with already in the letter.

Firstly 'sin'. It's not the tabloid-papers-out-there-somewhere, what-other-people-do-thing. But rather a trajectory and focus, it's our natural way of living. It's the car with the tracking off which means it always veers towards me and away from God. It's us when our selfish-self rules - when what we care most about is me.

Secondly 'law'. As Paul has been describing the Law of God he says it's as if it's a greenhouse that means that sin thrives in blossoms there, or else a highlighter so that through the law we become conscious of our sin. at least to death because we cannot keep it and so when you walk out on the God of life incomes death and chaos.

At the heart of this idea is the fact that God does not reward **good** people but rather rescues **bad** people. The Christian faith is not about what **we do** but rather about what **he's done**.

How does he do that? By taking on flesh and coming in our likeness (note he was like us but not completely like us) and so became a sin offering. 'Sin offering' is loaded language. If we want to understand how God rescued us through Jesus, we need to understand something of the sacrificial system. It was God's gracious provision in making a way for his sinful people to be in relationship with him. In a sacrifice, sin does result in death (as God said it would), but not in the death of the one who sins. The animal dies in the place of the people. This was God's gracious initiative so that reconciliation was possible. It's a kind of visual aid pointing us forward to a final sacrifice. We (assuming we're in Christ) are not condemned because Jesus was.

God does not condemn you. We know what it feels like to be condemned by others, perhaps even other Christians and maybe even to condemn ourselves but in Christ the God of the universe looks at you and says "I do not condemn you".

...our purpose has been restored

The gospel is not simply a get out of jail free card which comes into play at the appropriate moment, but rather it brings life **now** as well as life forever. It answers the fundamental question of what we're here for, the whole thing the Bible has been pointing towards and that's the freedom to live with and for our God.

More on this in the weeks to come but when you know you're not condemned, when you know you are loved and safe and accepted and not constantly worried about your status or whether you've done enough or not, then you're free to live.

Which means we might have much battling to do but we can know that it's not just us alone in our fight against sin anymore. Which means Romans 7 is not just the way it is anymore. Which means we don't have to live a life dominated by fear that means we will be condemned anymore.

Of course the story is not finished yet, we still get it wrong and muck up and it's frustrating and as we'll see next week that's not because the plan has failed, but rather because the plan is not yet finished...

What aspects of your Christian life would you like to grow in? Where are you disappointed with yourself? Why?

What does it mean to be condemned? When do you feel condemned?

What does it mean to be 'in' Christ Jesus?

Why was the law unable to bring life? What did the law end up doing?

Why do we (as those in Christ) have life? What does that look like?