Life as Servants

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Preacher: Derek Lamont

[0:00] Okay, we're going to turn back and look at the passage that we read in Romans chapter 6 from verse 15. Now I have to say, I would be pretty disappointed this morning. I'll admit this, I'll be pretty disappointed this morning if you found that an easy passage.

Okay? I think you're a real brain box, a real theological giant if you thought that was an easy passage. Because it's a nightmare passage. It's a really difficult, it's a tough passage.
I can't plummet its depths and I freely admit that and I want to say that at the beginning as a get out. Because it's a tremendously hard passage and what I would like to do is capture the essence of what God is saying through Paul in this part. There's lots, I'm going to have to miss out, there's too much in it to look at this morning. But I felt, it's been a really hard week looking at this. I've felt like I've been working with a pickaxe and thrashing away at rock and not getting very far, hardly broken the surface because the truths are here. But I am confident, don't get me wrong, I'm confident because of the promise of the Holy Spirit. I'm confident you'll get at least one diamond out of it. You might not get much but you'll get something because God is faithful. And there are untold riches in this passage. We certainly don't have the time nor do I have the gifts to unravel them all for you this morning. But if you take away one thing from this service, one thing from this sermon and from this passage that I would really want you to take away is that Christ is unbelievably worth it. Okay? Christ is unbelievably worth it and that's what I would like you to take away as we entrust our lives to Him as Christians. He is the one person that deals with your future death. He's the one thing that gifts you the one thing that is out of your depth. Okay, two things that are out of your depth. True freedom and eternal life. That's what Christ does. And in this passage He also teaches why you can't ignore His rules, His law, His person and what He demands of us. I want you to think and consider how much He loves you with a love that you can't even imagine, a love that will never let you go. We've been looking at that in the previous chapters. The amazing gift of His grace that He freely gives you eternal life, that He freely offers you Himself and we can't earn it. We can't just work up ourselves. We simply can't do it. So I hope and pray that we can consider these things today. And I hope that you will stick with me through this. You can't drift. I really need you because it's such a hard passage.
I need you to concentrate so that I can feel that I'm not losing you. These are great truths that I need your co-operations anyway, but need it maybe in a very special way today.
[3:02] So Paul is dealing in these chapters. We saw it last week and we see it again today. He's dealing with a big question that arises out of the truth of grace, which is that we can't do anything to make ourselves right. Our sins have been finished and dealt with on the cross of Christ, our rebellion and all the things that make us guilty are dealt with. And he's answering some questions that might arise from this. And basically they all mean, therefore, if God has dealt with all our sins, it's okay to live any way we want. It's okay to ignore God's rules and it's okay to sin because our sins have been dealt with. That was at the beginning of the chapter last week that we looked at. Can we say, continue in sin that grace may abound? And then this week it started with the same kind of question, are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? And then he finishes or he goes on in chapter 7, verse 7, which we didn't read. He asks the question again, what then shall we say that the law is sin? And so it's all different angles of the same question. Therefore, it doesn't matter how I go from here today in church and I can live any way I want because sins dealt with, sins being forgiven on the cross and Jesus has paid the price. And Paul's anticipating these dangerous responses to grace and to the cross of Jesus Christ. And he anticipates them and answers them in the sections that we're looking at. And we looked at one last week and we're looking at another this week. And each time when he raises this objection to grace, this anticipated misunderstanding of grace, he answers the same way, no way.

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That's what he says, may it never be, God forbid, however it's translated. He's using really strong language and he says absolutely not. We saw that at the beginning of the passage we read by no means, that's what it's translated here in the ESV here, by no means, absolutely not. It's very emphatic, strong language. And what I want to do is just ask three questions that I'll try and be as succinct as I can to unpack what he says in the section we looked at. And the first question I'm going to ask is a hugely offensive question to you. And the question is, whose slave are you? Whose slave are you? We've prayed about slavery and the work of IgM and then we read about slavery. And Paul is using this illustration of slavery here in this passage. And so I'm asking whose slave are you? A hugely offensive question, isn't it? Well, I'm a millennial. I'm from the 21st century. I'm not a slave of anybody. This is crazy language, this is old language, this is a language I don't understand.

I hate that you would even consider describing my faith as an enslavement, as Paul does here. It's gross. I've been set free, the Bible says I've been set free, I'm not a slave anymore.

Or if you're not a Christian you may be saying I'm not enslaved to anyone. That's why I've not become a Christian so far. I'm my own boss, I make my own decisions, I'm free. I don't like this whole language of whose slave are you.

Well, on this day when we remember the misery of real physical enslavement in this world in which we live, we're reminded biblically by God through Paul that we are all slaves.

[6:52] There is something that controls all of us in our lives. There's something that is our significant other in our lives. There is something we all live for that drives us, that masters us, our motivation, our reason for living. And Paul says that that is, can be regarded as an enslavement. And it may be lots of different things that people live for, but there is their controlling reality, whether it's ambition and career or whether it's a happy family, whether it's popularity, whether it's your health or your looks or pleasure or political or philosophical identity or that one relationship that you crave and that you must have that shapes everything we do and think. It's foundational to us, it drives our thinking, it gives us meaning and direction in our lives and saves us from being what we feel is having meaningless lives. It's what he speaks about in verse 12, which we didn't read as the strong passions that we have to obey its passions. That's not necessarily a word for sins, it's just about a word for desires and our strong desires, he says. It may be good things, it might not deliberately be bad things, but it's things that have become good things that have become ultimate things in our lives. But because we make them ultimate in our lives, whatever it is, whatever takes up our life, they can lead to destructive, sinful or selfish behavior in us. So what he's saying is that if we are not

Christ's and we're enslaved to Christ, then we're enslaved to sin, he's saying, and that's our natural condition. He says, because we are controlled by anything or anyone in our lives, and that might include ourselves, other than God. If God is in the center of our hearts and lives, then we are enslaved to sin, and that leaves us in a place where we're enslaved therefore also to death, because God is the author and the giver of life. And if we are separated from him, we are enslaved to things that only end up in result in death, that cannot save us, that cannot redeem us, that cannot give us life that we look for.

The kind of thing I was thinking, and I've used this, you must think I've ever watched two films in my life, because it's the only two I ever mentioned. And this is saving, it shows my age as well, I'm saving Private Rying. So yeah, okay, it's a good film, but I know I should stop using examples from it. I'll try and watch our films sometime like Parry Potter or something, and try and get some new ideas. And I haven't really watched it for years, don't think I'm at home not wrestling with Scripture and watching Save and Private Rying, I'm not. But as a kind of example of this living and having something as your core ambition in life that really enslaves you, because Private Rying himself, remember he's behind the enemy lines and a group of people is sent in, a group of soldiers is sent in to take him home, because his other four brothers have been killed in the war and he needs to go home to his mum and dad. And Captain Miller is the guy who's in charge of leading that troop, and he gets shot and is dying on the bridge near the end of the film and Ryan goes up to him and he hears Captain Miller's dying words, which is,

Ernit, Ernit. And what he's saying is, Ern the freedom that my death and the death of my colleagues has brought to you. And then the rest of the film, or that isn't the end of the film, and just at the very end, we move forward to when Private Rying is an old man and he's visiting the grave of this Captain Miller who said, Ernit. And he's an old man and he's weeping with his family and his

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grandchildren, children and grandchildren and so on. And he says, every day I think about what you said to me that day on the bridge. I've tried to live my life the best I could. I hope that was enough. I hope that at least in your eyes I've earned what all of you have done for me. See, he was enslaved by that, all his life, trying to live a life that was worthy of the death of these other people on his behalf.
And it enslaved him because it didn't set him free. And at the end of his life, it was a hope that he had no idea was fulfilled or would make any difference for him as he grew old and faced death. Because God says to us in His Word that our dreams die with us.
[11:43] And death remains, it's a hugely unpopular subject that no one can really speak about. But it's the great spiritual megaphone, isn't it, that something is wrong with us or something wrong with our lives that we live when there are 40 million slaves in the world in which we live. We live in a broken society, in a broken world. And he says that not just in societal terms, but in individual terms, we are condemned and we have given ourselves to idols and to lifestyles and to be enslaved by things that can't redeem us, that can't ultimately set us free, that are absolutely unsatisfying, that can't die in our place.

And he says none of these things can make us right before God. Even living like Ryan, the very best he could, it didn't touch the depths of the realities of his need. None of these passions, none of these reasons we have for living can give us the freedom and the eternal hope and the life and the peace that we are looking for in our lives.
So we recognize that we are enslaved to sin naturally. But he also says then that we can become slaves of righteousness here in this passage that we've looked at. And that is really what Paul is saying here, that we offer ourselves to Jesus Christ because he is our only hope. Now in the ancient Near East, there's different kinds of slavery. And I think what Paul is speaking about here, when he talks about offering yourself as slaves, present yourselves as obedient slaves, offering yourself, you know, we don't think of slavery in these terms, you don't think of a slave offering himself to you. But there was a situation in the Middle East, the ancient Near East, where if you were so indebted to somebody that you couldn't pay it, you offered yourself to them as a slave because you couldn't pay the debt. And you were their slave until it was either repaid or you lived as a slave the rest of your life. And he's basically saying that we owe a great debt to God as sinners and we can never pay that debt ourselves. We can never pay it by all the good things we try to do. We can spraff about in life without Him. But we will always remain enslaved and we will always remain those who are dying. But Christ, and this is going back to what he sees in the earlier chapters, Christ, he says, paid the debt. Yeah, you see it? Christ paid the debt. And as we give our lives to Him, we serve Him out of gratitude and out of love for what He has done for us. He's paid the debt, but out of gratitude we come to Him. So we move, last time we looked at moving from death to life, but this time we move from one lordship to another, from being in self-control in the enslavement that brings to being under God's control and being His servant, or, you know, it says, being His slave.
We don't like the language, I know, but I'll go on to speak about freedom, because Paul starts this letter by saying, Paul, a slave of Jesus Christ. And in these verses 16 to 19 he speaks about being slaves to righteousness and slaves to the sanctification and to Christ, in other words, just another way of saying to Christ. And that leads us to true freedom in our lives, verse 22, but now you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, because He is the truth. And Jesus said, it is the truth that sets us free. And that's a hugely significant thing, because there is no absolute freedom, okay? I'll just be philosophical for a very short minute. There's no such thing as absolute freedom, there's only absolute truth, okay? And if there is no truth, there is no freedom anyway, because if there's no truth, everything is relative, and if there is no God, then there is no truth, and if there is no truth, then we are just atoms made up and fused together, and we are determined by all things materialistic around us, by culture, by environment, by physics.
And we have no freedom whatsoever. That's one of the great problems of absolute total atheism, is that it needs to deal with material determination, is that actually if there's no God, there's no truth, and if there's no truth, there's no freedom, and if there's no freedom, then we are enslaved. But He says that we are true, we are free, set free from sin to follow Him. And therein is true freedom. That means we live within the parameters of His laws of love, because we can see Him for who He is, and He becomes our significant other, our identity, our motivation, our governing principle, and we serve Him rather than just serving whatever it might be, or even just ourselves, and He's our

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governing, our governor for our lives. So we see that there's this question, who's slavery, and as a Christian, who's slave are you? Who governs our lives? Not just for the hour we're here, but as we make decisions, as we think about our careers, as we think about our relationships and our marriage and our thoughts and our desires and our longings and our ambitions, do they come under the Lordship of Jesus Christ because He sets us free to live and enjoy them as only we can in Him?
[17:43] So the second question I want to ask, more briefly, is what road are you on? And it's all related, because He goes on at the end of that chapter to say, you become set free from sin, slaves of God, the fruit that leads to sanctification and to its end eternal life, for the wages of sin is death, the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. The wages of sin is death, the free gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ. You say, well, I don't know really what that means, because we still all die. Everyone dies, even the Christian dies, what's he talking about?

He's saying we don't die, do we all just live our lives and then we all die, and that is the way of life, you know, the wages of sin is death, the free gift of God is eternal life. That's true, we all die, and yet we recognize that there are different types of death. And the Bible makes clear that the death of a believer is fundamentally different, and our death as believers will be fundamentally different, because it will not be a spiritual death, it will not be a death that ultimately and eternally separates us from the living God. It's a physical death, body and soul separated, eternally, because we've moved allegiance from death to life, from being enslaved to sin to being enslaved to God. And when Christ died in the cross, our sin and our old nature died with Him. And as He was raised, so we will be raised from the dead, and we remain linked with Jesus Christ who is the author of life. And even in our physical death, our souls will go to be with Jesus Christ, one day to be reunited with our resurrected bodies and to a world of unimaginable beauty. That's why Easter is not about bunnies or wish fulfillment.
We recognize, we sung about it in the song that we introduced the service with, we worship on the Lord's Day, which is the resurrection morning, the first day of the week, because it's based on the historical resurrection of Jesus Christ that is so significant and so important. And the baptism that we will witness shortly is baptism of Anna, it's a baptism that speaks about newness, about freshness, about vitality, and about what Christ has done and that He has brought us into newness of life. The destination where He speaks about the wages of sin and the gift of God. He makes a great comparison, a great contradiction here between the two. It's either a spiritual death, the wages of sin is spiritual death, separation from God at physical death. And He says, that's our wages, that's in other words, that's what we deserve. That's what every one of us deserve in our lives, that separation from God, because we've fallen short of His glory. We have not been able to keep His laws of love to love God and love our neighbor perfectly. So it's either that or it's eternal life. That's the destinations that are offered to you, very clear and succinctly.
And that eternal life is His gift. Spiritual death is our wages, it's what we deserve because of our broken relationship. But eternal life is His gift and it's what we don't deserve.
You see the opposite and the parallel that is given here, it's not what we deserve but and we can't earn it, we simply accept it. Because Jesus Christ knew the only way that He could bring a people back to Himself was if He paid the price, if He died in our place on the cross, which is what the cross is all about, so that we wouldn't need to be separated.
[21:44] That's the extent of His love. That's why it matters for us this morning. That's why we should go from here, recognizing the amazing difference that grace makes, because it changes our whole perspective, our whole living, the whole way we act and work our lives. So what I say, what am I saying? I'm going back to the beginning. Christ is unbelievably worth it. That's what I'm saying. That Christ is worth, He's worth your Lord becoming under His Lordship. He's worth being enslaved to Him because He offers freedom and life that only He can offer. And it's a marvelous thing. And Paul recognizes that so that he says in verse 17, but thanks be to God. Thanks be to God, he's talking about this illustration of slavery. He says, but thanks be to God. So and if our lives can't shout out, thanks be to God. That we do need spiritual glasses. We need to think about who we are and where we are and how we're living if we don't recognize that Christ is unbelievably worth it for us.

So and I'm going to finish with this third point briefly this morning. And this is, he speaks a lot about this and it's a difficult subject. The third question is, my second question is what road are you on? My third question is, are you now above God's law or God's rules?

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You know, we've seen that's the kind of base, the whole underlying basis of the argument that he's speaking about. He says, because Christ has paid the price for our sins, He's dealt with sin in the cross and sin is breaking of the law, isn't it? Because He's done with that on the cross, does it mean that we're above God's law, that God's rules don't matter to us? You know, that's what He introduces this section with. Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? And He finishes the section by saying, so that we serve in a new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code. So what is He saying to you as Christian? This might be a question that's more for you if you've thought through things as a Christian. Do you say, do I just ditch the old way of the written code? Do we get rid of the Old Testament, for example, with all its laws and commandments?

Because we're not under the rule of the written code of God's law, the Ten Commandments, but we're now under the Holy Spirit and that's all that matters. Are we above God's law?

This is a difficult section, but it's a really good section. And God's law, God's laws of love, the Ten Commandments, okay, as they're expressed in the Ten Commandments, among other things, these laws are important and every verse from verse, this section is from verse 1 of chapter 7 through to verse 6, that last section that we're looking at, every verse mentions God's law. So it's obviously the theme is important. And He's speaking about a relationship with God's law, therefore, as believers. What do we do with God's law as believers in our lives? And He uses a provocative illustration about marriage and about being under the law of marriage. And if that is broken by one partner, when both partners are still alive by adultery, then the law is broken and the marriage is broken. But if one of the partner dies, then the other partner is free to marry again and not break the law as far as the law of God in marriage goes. And it's not an allegory and it's not a parable. It's simply an illustration and a lot of commentators have got absolutely twisted in knots with it. And I was twisted in knots for about four hours with it, trying to understand it. But basically what He's saying in this whole argument about the law is that He said, you can't belong to... and using this illustration of marriage, you can't belong to someone else unless there's been a death in your life. You can't belong to someone else in marriage unless there's been a death in that marriage. And your relationship to the law then changes. You're not bound anymore by that law of marriage, but you're free to marry another. The point is not that marriage is a bind. The point is not about marriage. The point is about a relationship to the law. And He's basically saying, we can become Christians unless there's been a death in our life, unless we have died to the old way of the law. And that can only come via Christ at Calvary. And the old way of the law was that it exposed our failure and we couldn't live up to it and we can never please God by obeying the law. And it points us to that. It exposes that we're failed. It says we can't keep the law outwardly, let it be not outwardly. And so it points us to Jesus Christ who did it on our behalf. And when we go to Jesus Christ, we recognize that we put to death that whole way of trying to please Him by our own good works. And we recognize that He alone can justify God's law. And we die to the old way of thinking. And we are then bound to Christ by grace and by love.

[27:26] And that gives us a new relationship to His law, because we are empowered then to love it and to love Him and to love what He has given to us. Our guilty relationship to the law has died. It no longer condemns us. We no longer need to earn our favor with God by good works, but we trust in what Jesus has done. But then through the Spirit, as He says, we can bear fruit by obedience to the law. We're empowered to love Him and to serve, to be willing, and Romans goes on to speak about being willing sacrifices in Romans 12, because they're laws of love that He gives us. We're not to, in other words, He changes our hearts so that we don't think the law is a drudge or a bind or a set of rules or to be trivialized. Jesus said all the law and all the prophets are summarized in these two words, two phrases, love the Lord your God with all your heart so strengthening, and love your neighbor as yourself. And in John 13, He said, I give you a new commandment.

I give you a 11th commandment, love your neighbor as I have loved you. So it's on the basis of His own unparalleled grace and gracious living that we love His laws. They don't condemn us anymore because Christ has fulfilled them on behalf, but we love them and we recognize them as the parameters that give us freedom. It's a bit like recognizing the vows you take at marriage, the vows to exclusivity and to sacrifice and to service and to keeping pure and faithful. You do that voluntarily. You offer yourself to your partner. And so we offer ourselves as slaves to righteousness because Christ is unbelievably worth it.

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So that's what I want you to take away this morning. Christ is unbelievably worth it. No one else can give you what He offers. He is offering this amazing change from darkness to light, from death to life, from guilt to freedom and innocence and forgiveness. And He has done it because He knew we couldn't do it ourselves. We can't change our death.

And whatever we seek to do in life, whatever is our goal, our focus, our ambition, if it's anything other than Jesus, it will let you down. It will fail you at the moment you need it most on your deathbed. And it will be a recognition that all has been in vain without Jesus Christ. Christ is unbelievably worth it. Please take that with you today. And although there's much unspoken in this passage, please remember that truth. And I believe Paul was seeking by God's grace and under God's Holy Spirit to recognize and get that truth across.

And if you're not a Christian, please consider the solemn and yet amazing love of Jesus Christ who was willing to do this on your behalf freely and fully and offer you life eternal.

[30:45] Amen.

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