

Release from the Bondage of Sin

A Sermon for the Second Sunday in Lent, 17 March 2019

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised” (Luke 4:18).

Christ has already redeemed us from the bondage of sin; Lent is a season for putting that redemption into practice

Scripture References: Luke 4:18; Hebrews 9:28. (No companion service-details sheet was found alongside this sermon in its source folder, so the day's wider lectionary readings are not on record; the date above follows from the sermon's own theme, the Second Sunday in Lent, which fell on 17 March in 2019.)

Today is the Second Sunday in Lent, and the theme for our meditation is “Release from the Bondage of Sin.” Christians around the world use this period of forty days, preparing for the Passion week and culminating on Easter Sunday, by observing a time of fasting, repentance, moderation, and spiritual discipline. The purpose is to set aside time for reflection on the Passion of Jesus Christ: His birth, life, and sufferings, and particularly His redemptive sacrifice and death on the Cross, His burial, and His Resurrection, all of which have had a powerful impact on our Christian walk. As sinners by nature we must remember, “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8). We will reflect on this theme against the backdrop of Lent.

Let us first set aside a few facts we need to know about Lent. The Bible does not mention the custom of Lent by name, though there are several mentions of the practice of repentance and mourning in ashes throughout the Old Testament. In Old Testament times, fasting was observed to express grief and repentance; in the New Testament, fasting took on a further meaning, as a way of focusing on God in prayer. Such a focus can be seen in Christ's own

fasting and prayer for forty days in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-2). During His ministry, He taught us all that we need to know about how to fast rightly. In Matthew 6:1-18, Christ gives us instruction on three related duties — giving alms, praying, and fasting — all to be carried out in a spirit of penitence; in each case He places the emphasis on the heart's motive, and warns against religious pretensions performed merely to impress others.

We believe, as those who have not yet come to know Him do not, that Jesus the Messiah has already come, and has taken upon Himself the sins of the entire human race, and died a sacrificial death to redeem us. Some ask: if He has already conquered sin, Satan, and death, why do we continue to sin? The answer lies here: from the time man fell from the grace of God through disobedience, man has had an unsettled relationship with God. Jesus came to accomplish three things: first, to release us from the death that would otherwise have been an end in itself, by releasing us from sin; second, to make known to us the true nature of God; and third — most important of all — to re-establish and reconcile the relationship between Himself and mankind. In Luke 4:18 we read, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised." Jesus broke the hold of a death that would otherwise have been permanent, through His Resurrection, and held out instead the promise of everlasting life in His glorious presence. Paul puts the matter exactly, in Hebrews 9:28: "So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation."

Something had trapped the whole human race; something weighed us down and cut us off from God's loving presence. That something was sin, and every sin brings about the one same result: death. Death is no reason for celebration — but our Lord's victory over death is! The English word "redemption" means to repurchase, or to buy back, and in the Old Testament

it was used, for example, of a bondswoman who might be redeemed rather than sold on to a foreign people (Exodus 21:8). In the New Testament, the word is used of both deliverance from sin and freedom from captivity. Theologically, redemption is the metaphor for what is achieved through the Atonement; there is, therefore, a true sense in which the death of Jesus pays the price of a ransom, releasing Christians from bondage to sin and death. His death was given in exchange for our life. Indeed, Scripture is quite clear that redemption is possible only “through His blood.”

I see the interim period, between now and the Second Coming of Jesus, as the time given to us to be fully rid of sin from our lives — a freedom now possible, because Jesus has already redeemed us. During Lent, therefore, we should look back prayerfully and gratefully upon the life and ministry of Jesus on this earth, and look forward in anticipation to His second coming. But sin still needs to be dealt with, with the help of the Holy Spirit, so that we may be holy and ready when He comes to take us to be with Him.

Let us now take a brief, but rounded, view of sin. In our struggle to avoid and overcome sin, it is vital that we understand exactly what sin is. The Bible speaks largely of two major concepts of sin. The first is transgression — to step across, or to go beyond, a set boundary or limit; God has given us commandments, from time to time, that set precisely such limits. The second concept is that of “missing the mark” — walking with Jesus for a while, but straying off course, and so not continuing in the right direction, with the result that we fail to reach the goal. Jesus, throughout His ministry, laid out the road map for righteous living, the ultimate goal being salvation. Sin, then, is to transgress the boundaries God has set for us, or to miss the target He has set before us. I like to bring the two together into a single statement: sin is an aberration — a going away from, and a falling short of, the standard set by Jesus. There is no such thing as an insignificant sin, or a major sin; sin is simply sin, and the truth about sin is that it is deceptive, destructive, and deadly.

When sin goes unchecked, we become slaves to it. As it is often put from the pulpit, sin will take us further than we want to go, keep us in its bondage longer than we want to stay, and cost us more than we ever bargained for. A telling example is the life of David. David was a wise man, a strong man, and for the most part a godly man; God Himself said so. But sin deceived David: his adulterous relationship led him into deception, lies, and murder, and, without his even realising it, he was progressively distancing himself from God. It took the prophet Nathan to jolt him out of that state. Nathan must, in effect, have asked him, “How is it between you and God, David?” — precisely the question each one of us needs to ask ourselves every day, because sin breaks our ties, our relationship with Jesus. In Isaiah 59:2 we read, “But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear.” Perhaps we, too, need a Nathan — a parent, a friend, a pastor, or an elder of the church.

We may be caught in any of three stages of sin. The first stage is sin that comes of our ignorance of the Scriptures, because we so often misinterpret them, and sin takes a stronghold on us through deception. In John 8:31-32 we read, “Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” And further, in John 8:34 and 36, “Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin... If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.”

Jesus says, “abide in my word” — the meaning is straightforward enough. We need to come out of our ignorance, and internalise His teaching, and live by it. Paul wrote, in 1 Corinthians 11:1, “Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.” Jesus then speaks of truth, directing people to Himself; understanding a correct picture of who Jesus is, and of who we are in Him, will resolve many of our sin-related struggles. I want to argue that each one of us needs our own personal theology — theology being nothing but our

understanding of Christ, and our knowledge of His will for us. Do we not pray every day, “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done” (Matthew 6:10)?

The second stage is our bondage to hidden sins; most of us, probably, are in this stage. Such sin has a root, and that root may be our inability to forgive, unrepented sin in our lives, things we know to be wrong but are not willing to acknowledge, wrong ties that need to be broken, or some substance that may need to be renounced. Such sin goes so deep within a person that he or she may come to believe it does not even exist. Hidden sins and affinities are not easily rid of; drugs and alcohol are among the other excesses of this kind, and there are relationships we ought not to be in. Paul wrote, in Colossians 3:8-9, “But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds.” At this stage we have to purge such sin out of our hearts, and allow the Holy Spirit to occupy that space. Let us use the Gospel as our weapon to fight sin.

We come now to the third stage. At this stage a person is possessed, or enslaved, by the evil one; the enemy has gained full control of such a person, and will have to be driven out. Here the church and the wider community have a major role to play. In fellowship, we should give ourselves to fasting and prayer, binding and casting out the evil in a person by the power of the Holy Spirit indwelling in us.

There are numerous examples in Scripture of what is expected of us during this period of waiting. The parables of Jesus — of the Ten Bridesmaids, of the Talents, of the servants and their masters, and of the thief who comes unannounced — are all, in their different ways, indications of the readiness we are to keep for His second coming.

Let us pray: Heavenly Master, Jesus Christ, we admit that we are sinners, and need Your forgiveness. We believe that You died in our place, paying the

penalty for our sins. We are willing, even now, to turn from our sin and come to You. Lord, we commit ourselves to You, and beseech You to take control of us, and help us to become the people You want us to be. In Your name. Amen.

Editing note: preached 17 March 2019, for the Second Sunday in Lent (date inferred from the containing folder name, "17th March 2019," since no companion service-details sheet was found alongside the sermon in the source folder — the inference is corroborated independently, since 17 March 2019 was indeed the Second Sunday in Lent that year). A near-identical reading copy, "Deliverance from sin-readng.docx," found in the same folder, carries a different header listing (Old Testament 2 Samuel 12:1-7; Colossians 3:5-11; Psalm 51:1-17) but otherwise identical text, and has not been catalogued separately, matching the treatment of similar duplicate reading copies elsewhere in the archive. A further file in the same folder, "Mark 2-1-12.docx," was found to be an unrelated Bible study document (a 2009 study of Mark 2 and 3:1-6, prepared for Christ Church, Noida) rather than any part of this sermon, and has not been catalogued here.

Seven direct Scripture quotations, several originally given in a modern paraphrase or a mixture of translations, were corrected to exact King James Version wording: Luke 4:18; Hebrews 9:28; Isaiah 59:2; John 8:31-32 and 8:34 and 36 (quoted together, following the original's own ellipsis); 1 Corinthians 11:1; and Colossians 3:8-9. The 1 John 1:8 quotation was already exact and required no change. A citation was added to "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done," identifying it as Matthew 6:10, previously given without a reference. The description of Old Testament redemption as "the ransom of slaves (Exodus 21:8)" has been narrowed to describe what that verse actually concerns — a bondwoman who might be redeemed rather than sold to a foreign people — rather than a general claim about the ransoming of slaves.

A widely repeated pulpit saying — "sin will take you further than you want to go, keep you longer than you want to stay, and cost you more than you want to pay," in one or another of its common forms — appears at the centre of the piece. A search found this saying in wide and long-standing circulation, attributed variously to different speakers (among them Kay Arthur and Ravi Zacharias) without a single traceable original; per Project Rules, section 4, it has accordingly been introduced in the text as a saying often heard from the pulpit, rather than attributed to one specific, unverifiable source.

Several small grammatical and typographical corrections were made throughout, none altering the sermon's meaning: "Old Testaments" corrected to "Old Testament"; "He thought us all" corrected to "He taught us all"; "which has powerful impact" corrected to "which have had a powerful impact"; "40-days" and "40 days" spelled out to "forty days" per the archive's number-spelling convention; "religious pretentions" corrected to "religious pretensions"; and "straight forward" corrected to "straightforward." Several inappropriate capitalisations of ordinary nouns were corrected to lower case, matching the archive's convention of

capitalising only pronouns referring to God: "Theology" (except within a proper name) to "theology"; "Fasting and Prayer" to "fasting and prayer." A lower-case pronoun addressing God in the closing prayer ("the people you want us to be") was corrected to "You."