

Light On Our Path



*Messages by Pastor Paul Aasman
on the book of Romans
at the Streetlight Mission Church
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December 2, 2007
Pastor Paul Aasman

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Romans 7:24 “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?”

The Cost of Following Jesus

Reading: Romans 7:14-25
Text: Romans 7:24

There are some pretty wicked people in the world. Perhaps you know some public figures whose sins are set forth for the whole world to know. Perhaps a terrible criminal (Robert Pickton?), or political figure (morally corrupt, or perhaps a demagogue and cruel).

Who would you say is the most sinful person you know? Any suggestions? Paul the Apostle said, “I am the worst of all sinners” (1 Tim 1:16). He often agonized about his former life, because before he met the Lord he had been a blasphemer, persecutor of Christians and a violent man. And after his conversion, he still struggled daily with sin, and daily lost the battles.

Do you think that Paul is the most wicked man ever born?

Would you say, then, that he was wrong when he called himself the worst of all sinners? Do you dare to call the inspired writer wrong?

No, Paul did not err. To him, he was more sinful than anyone else. For listen to how he describes himself: “I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin.” “The sin I hate, I do; but the good I love, I don’t do.” Evil is always right there inside him, fighting against his good impulses. That power of evil was so powerful for Paul that he said every time, it won the battle, and made him a prisoner - because every day, he realized that he had given in to temptations to evil.

The pattern played itself out again and again, each day of his life. With sickening regularity, he felt deeply the shame of having done sinful things against God and his neighbour. He struggled hard, but made little progress and seemed to win no battles. Wretched man that I am!

Now, Paul could not really know if this is true for others. He only knew this intimately and infallibly for himself. He knew his own struggle with sin, and sin of his own heart. Nobody knows the heart of another man but God alone. So to Paul, he was the worst of all sinners.

But I find that hard to believe. Because you see, I know how sinful I am. Nobody else but God knows it. But sometimes I think, can anyone be more sinful than I? One day, we will know something about the extent of each person’s sin. But for now, you can only know how sinful you are.

Is it not so that you are the most sinful person you know?

Whatever shame Paul feels, whatever wretchedness and horror he experiences in our passage, must be the shame, wretchedness and horror that you feel. If you are not brought down in despair because of the power of sin in your life, then you are simply not being honest with yourself. The most sinful person I know is me. And it should be the same with you: that is, the most sinful person you know is you.

It has been said before that a Christian is not a perfect person. A Christian knows that he is sinful. It presses his heart with pain and grief. He cries out like Paul, “Wretched man that I am.” He is all torn up on the inside because he has evil thoughts and secret sins. How I hate myself because of my sinful ways. I wish sometimes that I could die and put an end to the misery. It would be better to die, than to have to suffer a broken heart each day again because of the sins I commit.

But Jesus Christ does not leave us. Precisely in our wretchedness, he comes and saves us. He came into the world to pay for our sins. He came to suffer in our place. He invites you to believe in him, and to share in the riches of his forgiving grace through faith. This morning many among us enjoyed going to the Lord’s Table - nourished with the grace of Jesus, his body and blood for the forgiveness of all our sins.

God’s love is so big that he not only can forgive you, and you, and you, but he can also save me. Yes even me, because I am

the biggest sinner I've ever known.

What then is the price for belonging to Jesus Christ? Give up your pride. You have nothing, nothing to boast about. Apart from Jesus Christ, you are nothing. Apart from Jesus Christ, I am nothing. Throw away your pride. Put all your hope in Christ and give thanks with all your being to God for giving us his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

For his sake, we are forgiven. A Christian is not perfect, only forgiven. In myself, I am wretched, poor, and naked. But in Jesus Christ, I am a child of the King.

December 9, 2007
Pastor Paul Aasman

Romans 8:16 “The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.”

Adopted by God

Reading: Romans 8:1-17
Text: Romans 8:16

How can a person know anything? Some things we know because we have seen them for ourselves. Many other things we know because it is logical to believe it. I've never seen electricity, yet I believe it exists, don't you? But most of the things we claim to know, we know not because we have seen it for ourselves, or experienced it in some way, but because we have been told. A

child in Grade 3 will often be heard to say, “No, that isn't true. My teacher said that water gets lighter when it freezes. My teacher said that a tonne of feathers weighs exactly the same as a tonne of bricks. My teacher said that you may never start a sentence with the word ‘because.’”

In many ways, we are still like grade 3 students, because most of the things we think are true are simply things we've been told. We never bothered to ask if it was true or logical. We just accepted and believed because we were told.

Now there are some facts that you can get wrong and still get by. I know that, because I went to school, and I got tests back with many errors on them. I got a lot of facts wrong. Maybe you had the same experience. We got by.

But there are some things you had better not get wrong: Does God exist? Did he create the world? Is the Bible true? Is Jesus is the Christ, and the Saviour of the world? Ah, these are important questions!

I know that I am in Jesus Christ, I know the Creator of the entire cosmos is my Father, I know that the Bible is true. How do I know? Because the Holy Spirit has told me. The Holy Spirit testifies with my spirit that I am a child of God, that I belong to him for Jesus sake. The Holy Spirit has been given to me because God, having adopted me to be his child, wants me to love him, to feel happy with him. A Christian is someone who does not

hesitate to cry out to his Father when he is afraid; who will talk to him when he is lonely; who will turn to him for advice. That is what God wanted to be for me, so he gave me his Holy Spirit, the Spirit of adoption, so that I would never doubt that for Jesus sake, God loves me forever.

You have questions that must be answered, don't you? Perhaps you came this evening to get some answers. Good for you. God's posture toward you is this: He is holding out his hands for you to receive. Even if you've never prayed to God, he says to you now, "I'm right here." He is showing himself to you through the sermon being preached and the passage of the Bible that was read - Isaiah 65:1-2 *"I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me; I was found by those who did not seek me. To a nation that did not call on my name, I said, 'Here am I, here am I.' All day long I have held out my hands to an obstinate people, who walk in ways not good, pursuing their own imaginations..."* You see, God wants to be your Father. He holds out to you his love and grace.

So how can you know that God loves you? That Jesus will save you? That you will not go to hell, but to heaven? Do this: humbly accept the word of God that is being sown upon your heart this evening, and you will receive the Holy Spirit - you will receive him more richly than if I was to baptize you with water right now. Accept the word of God, the good news of Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit will fill your heart with a deep conviction that you are

a sinner in need of grace, powerful knowledge that Jesus Christ has paid the price for you and that you now belong to him; and he will fill you with a peace that is beyond all understanding as you rest in God's love and bath in his grace.

And perhaps most wonderfully of all, the Holy Spirit will walk with you from this place, making you strong where formerly you were so weak - helping you to fight against temptation, and to leave your way of sin. May God bless us all with a rich outpouring of his Spirit, the Spirit of adoption.

December 23, 2007
Pastor Paul Aasman

Romans 8:17 "Now if we are children, then we are heirs - heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory."

We are Heirs of God

Reading: Romans 8:12-15
Text: Romans 8:17

Our passage really helps us to grasp what is the real importance of Christmas, and connects us to the teachings of the ancient church. In the earliest times, Christmas was the greatest celebration because it opened up new possibilities. God became a human being so that humans like us might be taken up into God's divine family. Let us see this wonder from our text.

Twice Paul uses the expression “If – then”: If we are children of God, then we are heirs of God; If we share in Christ’s sufferings, then we can share in his glory. The two say much the same thing, but the second “If-then” statement carries the idea of the first a bit farther. We will look at them in order.

“If we are children (of God), then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ.” In the context of this letter, this is stunning good news. Remember that Paul had said earlier in this letter that the whole human race is silenced before God because we all have sinned against him. We are by nature enemies of God. But God loved us so much that he sent his only Son to save us. And even though we have been saved by Jesus, we keep on sinning. Whenever we wanted to do good, evil was right there; again and again, we do the evil we hate instead of the good we want.

Nevertheless, “*there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*”(8:1) If you believe in him, it does not matter what horrible things you have done in the past, nor how often you struggle against and loose against sin still, there is now for you no condemnation.

But God never does things half-way. He not only allows us to live, but he fills our life with joy and hope. After saving us, he made us his children. God adopted us, for Jesus sake, into his

divine family. By faith in Jesus, you become a part of God’s family.

And God has no favourites in his family. Imagine a family in which there are adopted children and natural children. That does in fact often happen. A man and woman have longed for children. None came. So they adopted a baby. A year after, they have a baby of their own. What should they do with the adopted one? Should they get rid of it? Would it be right if they loved the adopted one less? Should they make the adopted child do all the chores? Would it be right for the adopted child to get one present (socks) at Christmas and the natural child everything he ever asked for?

God is not like that. If you are adopted by God, you get all the privileges. He loves you as much as he loved his own Son Jesus Christ. He cares for you as much as he ever did for Jesus. And whatever inheritance Jesus gets, you will get just as much, though to each comes his own share, as one can manage it. One receives one talent; another receives 10. God knows what is right.

Now Paul adds a second “if - then”: If indeed we share in his sufferings than we may also share in his glory. Don’t be too quick to celebrate the privileges of being ‘in Christ.’ If you are a child of God, then he will treat you as a father should. He will discipline you and you will suffer. Parents discipline their children. If they don’t, their children won’t learn anything. We

have a whole book in the Bible that tells us that over and over again: Proverbs. This book is for attaining discipline (vs. 1) but a fool despises wisdom and discipline (vs. 6). A father who does not discipline his child, hates his child.

If you are a child of God, God will discipline you. God even disciplined his own natural son, Jesus. Hebrews 5:8 says that *“Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered.”* Earlier on, Paul said that this is especially precious, because when he disciplines us, he brings us closer to him. Romans 5:3-5 says *“Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.”* This is how you can bond with your Father in heaven.

So, do you suffer? Jesus was born to suffer because he was born a child of God. If you are born again, you are a child of God, just like Jesus, and because God does not play favourites, he will discipline you. You must learn obedience through what you suffer. God will form you through sufferings to be his child.

And as a result, you will share in Christ’s glory. In fact, because Jesus is already in glory, you begin to share in those riches now already through the Holy Spirit.

What a great celebration Christmas is: God the Son became a man so that we might become sons and daughters of God.

December 30, 2007
Pastor Paul Aasman

Romans 8:26 *“In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.”*

The Spirit helps us to Pray

Reading: Romans 8:18-27
Text: Romans 8:26

The apostle Paul speaks in our passage about groaning. When does a person groan? When he is in pain. And there is a lot of pain on the earth, but also in heaven. What are the three things that groan, in our passage? The earth, ourselves, and the Holy Spirit. We gain great insight into the manner of Christ’s redemptive work when we understand these groanings.

Paul speaks first about the groaning of creation. Verses 18-21 describe the pain creation feels because of decay and slavery, and in verse 22 he says that creation is groaning. The victory of Jesus Christ on Easter has made little difference for creation. It began to groan when Adam and Eve fell into sin. Then creation stopped working properly. With sin came death, decay and things began to fall apart. It used to be that the lion would lay down with

the lamb, and a child would play with serpents. But no longer. Nature is red in tooth and claw, and the soil of the earth has been stained with so much blood. Diseases rise up from the heart of Africa (AIDS) and are bred on the farms in China (poultry viruses) that have killed or have the potential to kill more than any war or pestilence before. The earth groans with the horrors happening upon its surface, things that should never have occurred, and it is as a sword jabbed the earth itself, with the pollution of air, soil and water.

The earth groans in agony as it waits in hope for the day Christ Jesus returns to set it free. Christ's victory has made little difference. Death and suffering and pollution have only accelerated. But the earth groans in hope, for Christ Jesus rose up from the dust of the earth, rising from the dead to immortal life. He is the first born of all creation. It is a sure sign that all creation will be raised to glory.

Paul speaks further about the groaning of believer in verse 23. We ourselves groan. Now, for us, Christ's victory has made a big difference. Because of it, he could send the Holy Spirit into the world. We have the first fruit of the Spirit. We have seen what that is: Because the Holy Spirit is at work in our hearts, we know that we are God's children. The Spirit testifies in our spirits that we are children of God. That is what it means to be born again - to have the Spirit of God work in our heart.

But when the Holy Spirit enables us to love God, we want to do things that show our love. But so often, we don't and instead show selfishness toward God. We fail to do what he says, and what he tells us not to do, that is what we do. Every day, then, because we have the Spirit, because we love God from the heart, we groan all the more because we cannot live as we want. We are false to our deepest passions.

So we pray. But what is it we pray for? We pray God to help us fight against sin, that God will help us love him as we should. We pray God so that we might live life with him, to love, praise and honour him. To stop sinning, when the passions of the flesh at work in our bodies, Paul calls that "the redemption of our bodies, our adoption as sons." Anyone who loves God, groans in this sinful body for the day of our complete redemption.

Finally, Paul speaks about the groaning of the Spirit. This is the most awesome of all. The earth is in pain because of sin. We ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan in pain. But the very Spirit of God himself is in pain - for he intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. He groans because he loves God's children. When those you love suffer, then you suffer with them. The Holy Spirit feels our pain so intensely that he intercedes with the Father on our behalf with groans as though the pain we feel was only his. And because he intercedes for us, he saves us from what otherwise would destroy us.

So if you feel pain, if you groan in spiritual agony because of your sins, then speak from the heart, and if words cannot express the sorrow you feel, then say so. The Holy Spirit knows your pain. Though we don't know what to say, he will communicate it to the Father. So let us be a praying people. One day all groaning will cease. The salvation of Jesus Christ will then be complete. Until then, let us be unceasing in prayer, and the Holy Spirit will carry our needs to the Father most perfectly in Jesus' name.

December 31, 2007
Pastor Paul Aasman

Romans 8:31 "What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us?"

If God is for us, who can be against us?

Reading: Romans 8:28-39
Text: Romans 8:31

A child should never feel like he does not belong, and definitely should not feel unloved. If a child grows up with these feelings, as I know some of you have, than that person is hurt for life. He will have a hard time trusting people; will be less confident, and have less deep and inner joy.

A Christian also should feel like he belongs and is loved - if not by fellow Christians, than certainly by his God and Father. If

he is in trouble, he should be able to depend on the help of his Father in heaven. He will thus grow up in the faith with confidence, deep joy and able to bond with the communion of saints in the church.

This is very important today as we mark the end of the year 2007 and begin 2008. We wish each other a happy new year because we want 2008 to be happy. We know that the opposite may happen: sickness, disaster, a mugging, or death. At least we know there will be changes at Streetlight.

It is important for us to know what our text says: God is for us. This is the basic promise God gives to people in the church. A person becomes a member of the church through baptism. We heard God make that promise in August to Victoria, in November to Charlie, Murray and Ken, and in December to Gordon. When we enter into God's covenant and church, then God promises, as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, to be our God. Believe that promise and hold on to it.

God is 'for us' because he paid so much for us already. If a person pays \$1 million for a house, he won't mind to spend another \$10 per month to take care of it. God has paid a lot to make us his own. We have been purchased by the blood of Jesus Christ - God gave his own Son so that we might belong to him. Since God has paid so much for us, he will surely give us whatever we might need still today.

What do you need for 2008? God will give it to you, graciously and generously. It is his pleasure to give it to you. Psalm 50:15 says *“and call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me.”*

This is a relationship that nothing in the entire world can possibly break. This is something that Paul wants us to be very certain of, and he points out in vs. 33 that nobody can accuse us before God. Paul is clearly referring here to the devil because his name “Satan” means “accuser or slanderer.” The story of Job is an excellent example of Satan trying to slander one of God’s children. He failed because Job believed that he had a saviour in heaven, someone who would stand in the gap for him. Satan might bring all kinds of charges to God against us, but Jesus Christ will take the charges and write over them, “Paid in full.” He paid the price for us in full. Because God justifies us (forgives our sins) through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, nobody can condemn us before God.

Then in verse 35, Paul goes on to point out that no amount of suffering can ever separate us from our Saviour Jesus Christ; *“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?”* Paul speaks of trouble, hardship, persecution, famine - these have always been part of life for believers (Psalm 44:22). But not only did God give us strength so that we triumph over them, we gain more and we are more than conquerors. We become

stronger through these things, and our faith can bear more weight for God’s glory. Our testimony becomes most brilliant when God’s love shines through our suffering.

Finally, because Paul wants us to be absolutely sure that the new year brings no terrors, he points to purely spiritual things. Nothing can separate us from God’s love: not life (and all the trials it brings) nor death (for when we die, we go to the Lord!); not angels (for they are all servants of God and will never fail him again) nor demons (even in the days of his humiliation, they were helpless to resist Jesus); not the present nor the future (all time is in the Father’s hand); not height nor depth (we are never so exalted, nor so depressed, sad or broken that God cannot reach us).

We are in God’s care, now and forever - God promises that to you. So believe his promise; hold onto that promise. You are a child of God and in Jesus Christ; you have a right to it. You are loved and you belong to the Almighty God, who will protect you in his mighty love.

For us as a community, 2007 was a good year. God is with us still. He goes with us, indeed, he goes ahead of us. 2008 will be a great year! Let us be confident of his love; he will never leave us. With him, we will do great things.