

Transformed by the Resurrection

Spring Sermon Series on Romans

Romans 7:1-8:4

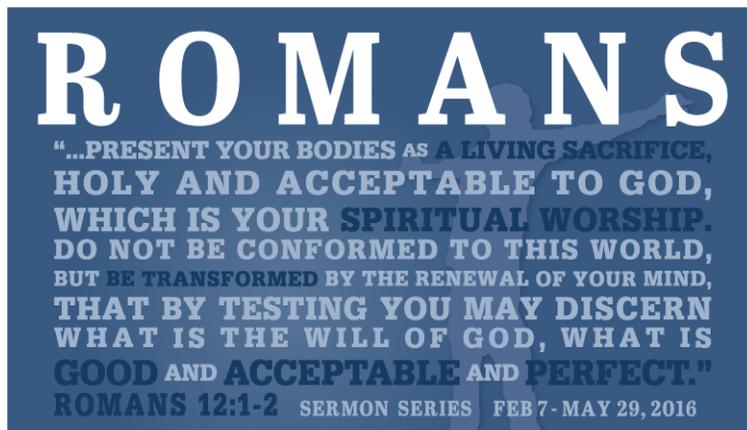
Kenwood Baptist Church

Pastor David Palmer

March 27, 2016 (Easter Sunday)

TEXT: Romans 7:1-8:4

This is my favorite weekend of the whole year, and it is a staggering privilege to share with you from God's Word the best news that has ever been received on planet earth. By no means



does Kenwood Baptist Church possess sole ownership of this news. As we gathered this morning to pray before our service, we prayed for all the gospel-centered churches of our city that the Good News of Easter would be announced throughout our city and throughout the world. The best news on the planet is that Good Friday leads to Easter Sunday. The

text before us this morning may seem at first glance like an unusual passage for Easter Sunday, and yet this passage is framed by Easter Sunday. Romans 7 is a portion of Scripture in which the apostle Paul reflects on his own need for Easter Sunday, his need for Good Friday, and so is the case for all of us. I have the sobering task to persuade you of the depth of your sinfulness this morning because, without being convinced of the depth of your sinfulness, Easter Sunday has no meaning for you or me. I want to look together at this passage, this passage which offers us hope and life through the death of Christ and the resurrection of Christ.

Romans 7 begins with an innocent looking parable, if you will, a little story. Stories are disarming, and Romans 7 begins with a little story about people being married. He says that if you're married and you are committed to one another, and you are bound to this marriage relationship until someone dies. If you sleep with someone outside of the marriage relationship, you are considered an adulterer. If, however, a death occurs, then there is the possibility of remarriage without sin. This seemingly innocent parable leads Paul to the announcement which is the key to this whole passage. He is speaking to his kinsmen. He says in Romans 7:4:

“Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, 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.”

Those of us who were here last week will recognize the thought is very parallel to Romans 6, that we die to our old life so that we might live in newness of life in and through Jesus Christ.

Paul's concern in Romans 7 is to persuade the good people, if you will, of his generation of their need for Christ. It is easy sometimes to condemn people whose lives are a wreck. In the first century, Paul looked across the street at pagans who were immoral, worshiping idols, and saw their lives were an absolute mess and they needed forgiveness. It is tempting for all of us to think that way, to look across the street at the sinfulness of our neighbor and say, “You probably need forgiveness.” It is harder for people who are good people, or see themselves as good people, or regular churchgoing people, to see the depths of their own sinfulness and their need for Christ. Yet, that's where the text actually goes. Paul begins to explore his own need in a very moving autobiographical testimony, if you will. Romans 7 is really a testimony of his conversion. He asks the question in Romans 7:7a:

“What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means!”

Yet he begins to explore the depth and reality of the sin that afflicts you and me. Paul continues in Romans 7:7b:

“Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, ‘You shall not covet.’”

For those who know the Bible well, you recognize that he is quoting the tenth of the 10 Commandments. Some of you might say: “I don’t use the word *covet* very much.” Let me assure you that you know it well. The tenth of the 10 Commandments says: “You shall not covet your neighbor's house.” Have you ever looked online at a house that you think: “Boy, I’d like to live there,” and you check the listing price, and you think: “How could they ask that?” “You shall not covet your neighbor's wife.” Many of us have looked across the street and thought: “I’m not satisfied with God's portion in my life. I want more.” Some of you have looked at your neighbor's male servant or female servant or the people working for them and thought: “There’s top talent across the street. I'd like to have those people working for me.” Some of you have looked in the depths of your own heart and you know that you have looked across the field at your neighbor's ox and thought: “That's the ox. That's the ox I need. That's that shiny black SUV I got pulled over in last week that I told you about.” Some of you just looked at the donkey and thought: “That's it. That's the donkey.” Some of you look past the shiny SUV and just think: “The Mercedes. That's what I want,” or anything else that's your neighbor's. Perhaps

it's the latest flat-screen TV that he got at such a good price. Paul says: "I discovered through God's telling me what sin is I found to my horror that sin was in me." That's the challenge. That's where we need honesty this morning. He says in Romans 7:12 that God's Word is holy:

"So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good."

Then he asks the question in Romans 7:13:

"Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means!"

It's not God's fault that I am a sinful person. It's not the Scripture's fault. But actually there is something more pernicious, something more deadly, something much more toxic, at work in the soul of every one of us, and that is the reason why we need Good Friday and Easter Sunday. Paul says what actually was happening was that sin is in me and it is producing death in me even through something good like God's own Word. Paul enters into a very profound, existential crisis, a real angst without parallel in ancient authors beginning in Romans 7:15. He says:

"For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate."

You see, sin is not just missing the mark. For Paul, sin is wanting to do what is right and good and looking within himself and finding the inability to do it. It is even more torturous for him to say: "I see what's good. I see the will of God out there. I want to do it, and I find within me that I cannot do it." Why not? He says in Romans 7:17:

"So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me."

In Romans 7:18b, he says:

"For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out."

Do you have that desire, a desire to please your Heavenly Father? That desire is in us. I remember my thick-skinned, Dutch grandmother telling us as new parents in a very stern voice: "There's nothing you can do that will ever make your children not want to please you." And I thought: "That seems strong. Is she right about that?" She said: "That's in us as children. Remember, as a parent you are not your child's friend. You are their parent. They will have friends, but only one set of parents." It is in us as God's children to want to please Him. Paul says: "I have the desire to please my Heavenly Father," and yet the tragedy at the beginning of this passage is that the ability to do it is not there. I delight in God's Word in my inmost being, and yet I see something else within be waging war inside of me and making me captive to sin.

Paul is reflecting on our inability to please God, and he is locating that in himself and in all of us as a pernicious toxic reality of our fallenness, that we are made in God's image and yet fallen

through sin. This is something we inherit, according to the Bible, from our earliest ancestors. There is no way into this world without it. It's in you; it's in me; and it's why we need Christ. It is as though Paul would say: I want to be a diligent student, a loyal friend. I want to be an honest reporter of my taxes. I want to be a dedicated parent. I want to spend more time with my children. I want to live healthily. I want to forgive the people around me. I want to have God at the center of my affections. I want to honor my parents. I want to act with love and not with rage. I want to give generously and not hoard with greed. I want to love with sacrificial love and not shameful lust. I want to be a man who speaks the truth, to build other people up and not tear them down. I want to thank God for all that He has given me and not incessantly ask for more, and yet with all these desires to do what is right and pleasing to God, when I look in the depths of my soul, when you look in the depths of yours, you will find that you can't do it. You can blame your parents. You can blame your second-grade teacher. You can blame your cable provider. But if we are honest this morning, the answer is that we are fallen, and Holy Week, Good Friday, Easter, will be meaningless to you unless you discover that I have the longing to please my Heavenly Father, but the inability to do it.

Paul reaches this conclusion: the world is in need of transformation, and that need of transformation is right within his own soul, and he bursts out in Romans 7:24:

“Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?”

Who will rescue me? This is the question that we must ask. It is the question asked by John Bunyan, who wrote *Pilgrim's Progress*, the most widely-read circulated book ever in the history of the English language. People know Bunyan for his work on *Pilgrim's Progress*, but his other



work that he wrote was called *Grace Abounding to the Chief Of Sinners*. Bunyan anguished over his own sinfulness. Martin Luther anguished over his own sinfulness. He struggled with what he called *anfechtung*, which was deep distress over the reality of his own sinfulness, of wondering how he could be redeemed, how he could be forgiven. He describes these spiritual trials as so great and so much like hell that no tongue could adequately express them, no pen could describe them. Luther says: “One who had not himself experienced them could not believe them, and so great they were that if they had been sustained or lasted for half an hour even one-tenth

of an hour,” Luther says, “I would have perished completely.” Modern people, or postmodern people like us, read this and we think: “Luther is just suffering from clinical depression. Take some medication.” The Good News of Easter is not a medical prescription. The Good News of Easter is something much deeper than an answer to clinical depression. The Good News of

Easter is the reality that God has addressed our sinfulness and provided a solution for it.

The summer of 1987, I was confronted with the reality of my own sinfulness like never before. I was a junior in high school, and I was starting to live a double life. I was a straight A student during the day, but my life was spinning out of control in the evenings, and I couldn't slow that down. I met a peer who said to me that he had a real relationship with Jesus Christ. I'd never heard that before. He spoke of the reality of knowing Christ, and I told him that when I pulled the switch trying to launch my own goodness when I needed it, I found that when I pulled that lever that nothing happened. Nothing happened. I told him that I could feel the evil in my own veins, and praise God, he didn't look at me and say, "Cheer up, friend, you just need an attitude adjustment." He said, "Let me tell you what that is. That's the reality of your own sinfulness, and Christ came to die for it." That's the gospel. That is what is good about Good Friday. "Who will rescue me?" Paul asked, and he answers this question in Romans 7:25:

"Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!"

Paul knows that in his mind he serves the law of God, but in his fallen humanity, he is enslaved to sin, and yet God has not left him there, and He has not left you there, and he has not left David Palmer there. Instead, the great news of Easter is that God has acted, and since God has acted on our behalf, there is now on Easter Sunday morning absolutely no condemnation, no verdict against you, for those who are in Christ Jesus. You must be in Christ Jesus, otherwise you will face condemnation. If you are outside of Christ Jesus, then a real condemnation does hang over you. The reality of God's wrath against sin, the punishment that we face is real, and Paul says in Romans 8:1:

"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

We will discover why as he supports this amazing assertion with two supporting statements. Why is there now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus? Reason number one is in Romans 8:2:

"For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death."

This desire to serve God, to walk in God's ways, is within us, that in Christ Jesus we are freed from a life that is characterized, as Pope John Paul II said: "As a culture of death." We are freed from it by the presence of the Holy Spirit.

In reason number two, Paul explains this even more clearly. This is the mission of the Son of God, and this is the good news of Holy Week. In Romans 8:3, Paul says:

"For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending His

own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh.”

We say three times: *Christ is risen*. He has sent His own Son. The problem is the sinfulness of humanity. He sent His own Son into the world out of His own love for the world. He sent His Son in the very likeness of sinful flesh and for sin as a sin offering, and the Son of God took the sin of the world, gathered it upon His own shoulders, and bore it, and experienced the wrath of God for you and for me. It was poured out, and He condemned it in the flesh. That's why there's no condemnation for all who are in Christ Jesus, because the condemnation that we face has been poured out and exhausted on Good Friday.

You wonder when you leave Good Friday, was Christ's sin offering sufficient? Was it accepted? Has the power of sin and death and hell actually been broken forever? I woke up this morning, and it was still dark. I left my house early, drove around the city trying to mentally imagine myself like those disciples on the first Easter morning still wondering if the offering was accepted. Has the power of my sin been broken? As I drove around, I saw the sun starting to rise, and I imagined myself this morning going to the tomb, meeting there an angelic announcement with an earthquake and the stone being rolled back and saying: "He is not here! He is risen!" and knowing in the depths of my soul that the offering for my sin was accepted. Therefore, this morning there is no condemnation, none, no future threat of judgment for all who are in Christ Jesus.

If you are in Christ this morning, then you are free. You are free from the tyranny of sin. You are free now. Notice the completion of the thought. If you already know Christ, I think in many ways this is the most exciting ending of all, the resolution of Paul's thought, the full end to this arc, this theological, glorious rainbow of Good Friday and Easter is this: if the power of sin is broken; if the punishment that we face has been satisfied; guess what happens in the end? That gap, that chasm between desiring to do God's will and being unable to do it is closed. Look at Romans 8:4.

“. . . in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”

The result of the empty tomb. The empty tomb leads to the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, and the result of Christ's death, of His resurrection, is that the righteous requirement of Law, that the walking in God's ways, might actually be fulfilled in us who walk no longer according to the flesh, no longer in our fallen humanity, but we walk and live in God's ways.

The Good News of Easter is that Christ died for your sin, that He is raised and that you are justified by His resurrection, and that He wants to come to you now and fill you with the Holy

Spirit so you can actually live and please your Heavenly Father. This is the vision of Ezekiel 36:26:

“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.”

Jesus said that the whole vision of Scripture, the life God desires for His children, can be summed up in two love commands: that we are to love God of all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and we are to love our neighbor as ourselves. The Good News of Easter is this, that Christ came to die for us so that we might live in Him.

My friend told me that what I felt coursing through my veins was my sinfulness and that Christ died for it. He told me that Christ was raised from the dead so that I might walk in newness of life. I remember that evening in the summer of 1987 sitting on the red vinyl seat of a rusty Reliant K station wagon, and I remember something happening to me, something that I could feel. What started happening to me was a new heart beating with real spiritual life, new life in Christ, a death to my old life and being joined to Christ's resurrected life.

If you don't know Christ this morning, if you are living underneath this condemnation, let me tell you the best news the planet has ever received. It is this: Christ died for your sins. He asks you to place your trust in Him so that you might receive forgiveness of sins and be filled with the presence of the Holy Spirit. A couple of months ago, we had a new guest at Kenwood, and I was talking with this man after the service, we were joined by a dear brother at Kenwood who has the gift of evangelism. As he spoke and shared with our guest about his need for Christ, he asked this man, “Would you like to receive Christ right now?” and this man said, “You know, I would.” I was in awe, and I thought: “This is great!” I was just standing there, and though the pastor is usually supposed to have the right words to say, I couldn't say anything. I was just in awe and my friend did all the talking. But as he spoke and lead this man to Christ right before my very eyes, the Lord gave me a vision and I saw inside of his chest. I didn't ask for it, but I could see this small, new, beating heart just starting to beat, and I thought this is what it looks like to be born again, and it is happening right now.

The Good News of Holy Week is that Christ has died for your sins and mine. The Good News of Easter Sunday is that the offering for sin has been accepted, and the power of sin, death, and hell is broken, and when you receive Christ, He will then fill you with the Holy Spirit so that you can really live in a way that God intended you to. This new life grows slowly, just as a child's new beginning life grows slowly. We don't become perfect overnight. We don't become fully obedient to God overnight. I've been a Christian for more than 20 years, and there are huge

sections of my life in which I am still trying to take baby steps of obedience to Christ. But the new life has started definitively, and there is no going back. Tim Keller puts it like this. He says: "The gospel is this: We are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared believe, . . ." Do you believe that? Do you believe that if you look within you are more of a wreck than you are really probably prepared to admit publicly. You may concede it on social media for people you will never meet face-to-face. We are more sinful and flawed than we ever dared believe, and yet, at the very same time, with this Easter Sunday, Keller continues: "Yet at the same time we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we'd ever dared hope." This is the Good News of Easter. This is the Good News of Romans 7, that for even the best looking among us there is sin lurking deep within, but that sin is the sin that Christ came to die for, to rescue you and to rescue me. Would you pray with me.

Precious Lord Jesus, we give You praise. We give You thanks. We extol You, glorious Son of God. We ask, Lord, that You would triumph in every heart this morning. We thank You, Jesus, for Your saving mission in the world. We thank You that we discover our need for You, that Your Word helps us to see it, and yet You do not leave us there. We worship You, Lord Jesus, saving Son of God, for bearing all of our sin and shame, for offering Your life for the sin of the world, including the sin that lurks within each of us. Lord Jesus, we praise You that You are risen from the dead and that You live forevermore, and that You desire us to walk with You, that You desire us not to be strangers, that You desire us not to be just once or twice with You but for all eternity, and that starts now. Lord, I pray for any here this morning who are still fearing the condemnation that their own sin provokes. I want to invite you right now just to open your heart and say, "Lord Jesus, I'm sinful and I need Your death. Thank You, Lord Jesus, for dying for me. I give You my life now."

If you prayed this now, come talk to me or one of the other staff of the church. If you know this to be true, then be filled anew this morning with the presence and power the Holy Spirit so that you might love your Heavenly Father with everything you are, that you might love those around you, display His glory in your life with increasing freedom and joy.

Lord Jesus, we love You. We love You because You first loved us, and we crown You with many crowns, the Lamb on the throne.

Would you stand with me now. "Hark, the heavenly anthem drowns all music but its own. Awake my soul and sing of Him who died for thee. And hail Him as thy matchless King throughout all eternity." Hallelujah! Amen.