**June 28, 2020 Romans 6:12-23**

***Who Pulls Your Chain***

**Scripture:** Romans 6:12-23 NRSV

*(12)Therefore, do not let sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. (13)No longer present your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and present your members to God as instruments of righteousness. (14)For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace. (15)What then? Should we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! (16)Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? (17)But thanks be to God that you, having once been slaves of sin, have become obedient from the heart to the form of teaching to which you were entrusted, (18)and that you, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. (19)I am speaking in human terms because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to greater and greater iniquity, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness for sanctification. (20)When you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. (21)So what advantage did you then get from the things of which you now are ashamed? The end of those things is death. (22)But now that you have been freed from sin and enslaved to God, the advantage you get is sanctification. The end is eternal life. (23)For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

**Notes:**

1. Paul believes that ***everybody*** has a master.
   1. Our culture would like us to believe we are ***free***.
   2. Somebody has ***shackled*** us in chains.
   3. There is no greater slavery than serving only ***yourself***.
   4. The power of ***sin*** can twist our best impulses into something undesirable.
2. We are enslaved to whatever we choose to be ***obedient*** to.
   1. Enter into a ***relationship*** with our Lord Jesus Christ,
   2. Choose to be a ***slave***, a ***servant*** of Jesus Christ,
3. We must keep the commandments, to withstand the ***temptation*** of sin, to be faithful to God.
   1. We are expected to make new ***disciples***.
   2. If we do not make ***disciples***, many people will be condemned to an eternity in Hell.
   3. The Holy Spirit walks by our side; to ***help*** us.
   4. “*No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone*. *God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength*, *but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it*.” *1 Corinthians 10:13 NRSV*
   5. Nothing that this world will ***bring*** to you can take away what God has ***given*** you.
   6. We are indeed ***free***, in our ***enslavement*** to Christ.

**Transcript:**

If I asked you what the biggest news story has been this month what would you say? We would be hard pressed to find somebody who hasn’t heard the news of Greg Floyd’s death at the hands of police in Minneapolis. The news of the riots following Floyd’s death. News stories regarding the black lives matter movement and white privilege.

Perhaps the one subject that bothers me most are those regarding the destruction and removal of monuments and symbols from the American civil war. To me these items are reminders of the struggle in our country; the struggle to end slavery; the struggle to emancipate those who were enslaved; the struggle of each of the United States to govern themselves without federal governments interference. The struggle of the citizens to decide what is right and wrong, and then to take a stand, even if it meant bearing arms against your own flesh and blood; brother against brother, father against son.

When I see angry crowds tearing down these monuments and statues, I shake my head because the people in these mobs have little or no respect nor understanding for what these monuments truly stand for. I also shake my head because I know those who fail to remember the past are doomed to repeat it, and the pay the cost in blood, for something that has already been paid for. But I am trying to keep my eyes open to the possibility that this may be happening in my community.

Many try to tell us that this is still about slavery in the world, but I tend to disagree, I believe that these protests, I believe that this anger and hostility is due to a different type of slavery; slavery that is different than what we think of in regards to the civil war, a slavery to sin, to selfishness, to one’s self.

We all have been enslaved to something, and very rarely are we enslaved by our own free will. We are enslaved as a result of a decision made by either our self or somebody else. A decision that has bound us to something much greater. We may have been enslaved by the decision that we made in a moment of passion. But had we known the struggles and torment that we would endure we may have done whatever we could to resist this enslavement. Wouldn’t we?

Many of us envision slavery as men or women bound to a stationary object or another slave, so they are not able to escape. We see slavery as forced labor in undesirable conditions; doing undesirable work; for undesirable people, with little if any benefit to one’s self. To be a slave is to be the lowest rung on the ladder of humanity. In fact, animals are treated better than slaves.

But in our passage today Paul speaks of another type of slavery, our sermon passage is found in Romans 6:12-23. in March we found ourselves in verses leading to this passage.

(12)Therefore, do not let sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. (13)No longer present your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and present your members to God as instruments of righteousness. (14)For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace. (15)What then? Should we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! (16)Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? (17)But thanks be to God that you, having once been slaves of sin, have become obedient from the heart to the form of teaching to which you were entrusted, (18)and that you, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. (19)I am speaking in human terms because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to greater and greater iniquity, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness for sanctification. (20)When you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. (21)So what advantage did you then get from the things of which you now are ashamed? The end of those things is death. (22)But now that you have been freed from sin and enslaved to God, the advantage you get is sanctification. The end is eternal life. (23)For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 6:12-23 NRSV

Slavery was an established institution in Paul’s day and the Roman Empire. There is no evidence that Paul tried to reform slavery. But in one of his letters, he writes to a man named Philemon who is a Christian. Philemon is the owner of a slave named Onesimus who had escaped. And Paul ends up in prison with Onesimus. While imprisoned Onesimus gives his life to the Lord and becomes a Christian. When his jail sentence is up, He returns to Philemon. Paul sends a letter with him, pleading with Philemon to be forgiving of Onesimus. Paul writes, "Now you get him back, as more than a slave - he's a brother." It was a nice thing to say, but the young man was still a slave. Paul likes to give advice in his letters; advice to husbands in how to treat their wives, advice to wives as to how to submit to their husbands, advice to parents in how to treat their children, and advice to slaves in regard to their duty to their masters.

Even though Paul was a preacher, there is no way he could have reformed the practice of slavery. Slavery was the economic backbone of the Roman Empire. It may sound odd and hideous to us, but it was very much a part of the culture and life. Paul saw slavery as an example of some of the fundamental relationships in life. Paul signs his letter to the Romans as “Paul, a slave to Jesus Christ.” The irony in this letter is that the word used meaning slave, Doulos. Is also able to be interpreted as a Servant. These words, “Slave” and “Servant”, can be used interchangeably.

A Pastor was speaking in a seminar from this passage. He noticed several African – Americans in the auditorium, and so to be considerate he used the term servant instead of slave. After the seminar one of the gentlemen came to him and said, “I was following along in my Bible. I noticed you changed that word. Why did you change it?” He explained that the word in the Greek is able to be used either way. Then the gentleman said, “You know, Paul calls himself a slave. And if you're going to belong to anybody, you ought to belong to Jesus. He is a tough master, but he is more than fair. And if you belong to Jesus, nobody else can have a piece of you.”

Paul believes that he has a master. In fact, if you listen to this whole passage from Romans 6, it sounds like Paul believes that everybody has a master. Somebody owns us. That sounds strange to people like us. We live in a land where freedom is always defined as independence. If you are free, it means you are independent. For over 244 years, we have been independent from British rule. That has become the governing metaphor for American life. I am free. I am my own person. I don't need anybody else. I am an island unto myself. That's what a lot of people want: to become independent.

Our culture would like us to believe that stuff: you are free to do whatever you want, you are free to go wherever you wish, you are free to buy whatever you desire. Meanwhile, there are a lot of people telling us what to do, where to go, what to buy. We think we're free; what we're doing is merely accepting somebody else's story.

When I was growing up, probably in my late teens, every weekend there was a group of people who would meet Friday and Saturday nights. You could count on the gas stations in P-ville having a crowd gathered on the weekends. The time varied and the people varied but it happened. These were teenagers who didn’t want to go home and be alone, They wanted to exercise their freedom to hangout until the wee hours of the morning. Some would bring the suped up cars to race against somebody else. Others would come to watch. Sometimes the Police would come and try to break it up, to no avail. Other times they would set traps to scare the young people away. But as long as you were not doing anything illegal, they couldn’t make you leave.

But while these young people thought they were exercising their freedom, they were demonstrating their enslavement to the pop culture of the day. While racing was illegal they felt it was something they needed to do. While Hot Rodding the car was a little dangerous and illegal as well; it was something we all loved to do; it gave us a reputation, we were proud of the power the vehicle’s had. But never the less we were slaves to the pop culture of the day.

We see the same things today, young people gathering together to exercise their freedom; freedom to where what they want, freedom to drive the car of their choosing, freedom to act as they want, yet they look and dress like every other teen in the group. They drive the same type of car if they can manage it, and they all use the same type of slang terms and talk the same way as the others. They think they are free, but they are slaves to the culture they choose to be a part of. Paul is right. Even in a land of freedom and liberty, somebody has shackled us in chains, whether we know it or not. The question is: *Who is yanking your chain?*

We are all a slave to something; some of us are a slave to our health, and the conditions we have been diagnosed with. Some of us are slaves to habits, like shopping, eating, and entertainment. Some of us are slaves to work, our jobs and money; but we do not get paid enough to quit. Businesses are slaves to the bottom line, and if they are not at or exceeding the bottom-line heads will roll, jobs are cut and people suffer. The question is who or what is yanking our chain?

Years ago, singer Bob Dylan went through a brief spiritual phase. Dylan was a lifelong Jew, at one point he got serious about God, he even thought about becoming a Christian. He wrote some new songs, hired a backup group of gospel singers, and went on tour. One of the songs said, "You gotta serve somebody. You gotta serve somebody. It may be the devil, or it may be the Lord, but you gotta serve somebody." One night on tour he sang that song and the crowd began to boo. The more he sang, the more they booed. He stopped playing and left the stage. Afterward, one concert--goer said, "I didn't come to hear that kind of bologna. I'm free. I don't serve anybody but myself." Obviously neither did Dylan

There is no greater slavery than serving only yourself. Paul says he is a slave of Jesus. He struggles with his own urges, just like anybody else. But he knows in his gut that no good can come from listening only to his own desires. He is bound to a greater purpose than following his nose or listening to his stomach. Paul belongs to Jesus Christ. That is his identity. That gives him a purpose. He says this because he knows if the only thing he does is what he wants to do, if the only opinion he listens to is his opinion or his friends' opinions, if the only purpose for his life is to cover his tail or save his skin, then he is in a whole lot of trouble.

The power of sin is so pervasive that it can twist our best impulses into something undesirable. There are so many kinds of sin that work on us. So many kinds of sin that bind us. It's hard to be free from all of it. But it's possible.

There are a lot of things in church that may seem like slavery. So many rules that we are told we must obey. You have to go to church every Sunday and every Wednesday. Growing up I remember Every Sunday morning, we would get in the car, we would stop at my grandma Davis’s house to pick her up; and we would head to church. Every Wednesday night we would follow the same routine. Cancellations didn’t exist, if the weather was so bad that you could not get on the road you stayed home, but I believe the pastor was here waiting for just one to come.

And you have to follow all of those commandments and laws. Love God that’s not too hard, but loving your neighbor could be another story. You have to give a tithe, 10% of everything you earn, is that pretax or post tax? Thou shalt not covet, does that mean it is wrong for me to desire things that nice? And there are so many things that we are not permitted to do, no music of different genre’s, no roller skating, no dancing, no bowling, no movie theaters. So many things that we were not allowed to do. Growing up I felt enslaved by the church, because I did not understand why we could not do these things. I didn’t understand that the commandments in scripture are God’s way of protecting us from sin, and obeying these commandments is our way of showing the Lord our love for him, just like we show our love for our parents by obeying them.

What are you enslaved to? Are you enslaved to an addiction of some sort, Are you enslaved to your job and work? Are you enslaved in poverty, are you so far in debt you cannot see your way out? Are you enslaved in a relationship that is unhealthy? We are all enslaved to something; and whatever we choose to be obedient to is the slave master of our life and pulls the chain that binds us to it. You don’t have to live that way. Today you have the opportunity to enter into a relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ. In this relationship you choose to be a slave for Christ, perhaps the better phrase would be you choose to a servant of Jesus Christ. If we must be enslaved to anything, then it is best that we are enslaved to the will of God. It may sound like a bad thing but it is not.

When we enter into that type of relationship, yes there are rules that we follow, we must keep the commandments, but this is to withstand the temptation of sin, to help us be as right as possible, to help us be faithful to God. And yes we are expected to do things, we are expected to make new disciples, sharing with them our testimonies of God’s goodness, sharing what we have seen God do, living our lives as an example to others, and sharing our love for him, just as Jesus did when he walked this world. Without us making disciples how will the church grow. But then again, if we do not make disciples many people will be condemned to eternity in the absence of God, an eternity in Hell.

There are rewards as well. Rewards that we will realize when our time on this world are over, rewards in knowing that the Holy Spirit walks by our side; while we must still endure the hardships of this world, consequences of our choices, we can trust in the Holy Spirit to comfort us and help us through these struggles caused by sin. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10:13, “*No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone*. *God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength*, *but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it*.” Nothing that this world will bring to you can take away what God has given you. We have been freed from the bondage of this world, by the blood of Jesus Christ, and our faith in his restoring power, and as long as we are obedient, we will be able to meet Jesus in heaven when we die.

We are indeed free, in our enslavement to Christ. If we choose to be a servant of Christ, if we choose to give our lives to Him, to do what He wants, to live for him. I like the words of the song Glorious Freedom.

***Verse 1***

*Once I was bound by sin's galling fetters,*

*Chained like a slave I struggled in vain*

*But I received a glorious freedom,*

*When Jesus broke my fetters in twain*

***Chorus***

*Glorious freedom wonderful freedom,*

*No more in chains of sin I repine*

*Jesus the glorious Emancipator,*

*Now and forever He shall be mine*

***Verse 2***

*Freedom from all the carnal affections,*

*Freedom from envy hatred and strife*

*Freedom from vain and worldly ambitions,*

*Freedom from all that saddened my life*

***Verse 3***

*Freedom from pride and all sinful follies,*

*Freedom from love and glitter of gold*

*Freedom from evil temper and anger,*

*Glorious freedom rapture untold*

***Verse 4***

*Freedom from fear with all of its torments,*

*Freedom from care with all of its pain*

*Freedom in Christ my blessed Redeemer,*

*He who has rent my fetters in twain*

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