

Wages of Sin: WellSpring 07/04/21

Good morning, WellSpring, both live and online, and Happy Independence Day to you all!

We have been going through this series on Romans, which is a challenging enough project in the best of times, but especially when you begin to find so many of our Culture's "hot buttons" therein. Andy is out of town this weekend, which seems perfectly explicable when you consider that in his last message to WellSpring he invited anyone with questions about circumcision to come find me. He later told me, "During first service I happened to see you out of the corner of my eye, and it was just a reflexive comment. But it got such a good reaction that I said it again during 2nd service, and they really liked it." But in retrospect he felt a little bad about it, and so as an act of contrition, and with reference to his insights on

the rabbinical phrase “any & every reason” as it pertained to teachings on Divorce in the book of Matthew... I will be scheduling hour-long sessions with Andy for as many as would enjoy them, and they can be for “any & every reason”: political opinions, epidemiology, Coke vs Pepsi, North vs South, Vols vs Bama, the importance of HOAs ...

I know that probably seems overly generous of him, to which I’m sure he would reply, “Hey, it’s why I’m here!”

We’re still hanging around in the **6th chapter of Romans**, which I believe can be found on **page 771** in the Bibles available in the seats, if you’d care to follow along.

Last week we focused on the importance and impact of Baptism, and what happens to and in us through the process; this week we look at

the rest of Chapter 6, and find that it's almost all about Death, Sin & Slavery!

Romans 6:8-11

⁸ Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹ For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, He cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over Him. ¹⁰ The death He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life He lives, He lives to God.

¹¹ In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Scripture consistently connects Sin with Death. If we go back to the beginning, and by that I mean *The Beginning*, we find ourselves in the Garden of Eden with two Innocents, one NOT innocent, and one simple rule: *Do not eat of the tree in the center of the garden, the Tree of the*

Knowledge of Good & Evil, for when you eat of it, you will surely die.

And in issuing that mandate, God has now identified what SIN is: to know what God has said to do, and then to do otherwise. And that is exactly what happened.

I believe we sometimes feel a little cheated. “HEY! Nobody in this story kicked the bucket!” But looking at the situation from Adam & Eve’s perspective, I don’t feel like they got off easily. Here are two people who don’t even know what physical death is. Like, no clue at all! No frame of reference to fall back on. Nothing in the history of the world, outside of perhaps a carrot or squash, has ever stopped being alive.

More importantly, when you take into account God’s next move, you might not think the penalty was so lenient after all. The fruit is

eaten, the sin committed, and God arrives and deals with the guilty parties, but no one actually dies at that moment. Well, at least not Adam & Eve...

Genesis 3:21—

²¹ The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them.

Skin. Can you imagine what THAT looked like? I don't believe God went all David Copperfield or I Dream Of Jeannie and popped leather outfits into existence. More likely God beckons a couple of nearby animals, all peaceful and innocent, and kills them in front of the couple! And peels the skins off of them. It wouldn't surprise me to learn that He then cooked a meal out of it; they had to learn it from somebody. You've never had a family meal THAT awkwardly quiet! They know they're in

trouble... they know something bad, some “Death”, is going to happen, but this?! This is beyond horrifying! And then God covers them with the skins.

Early in my youth ministry I made this really great plan. The kind of plan that turns out to be really great, right up til the time it goes into action! I was serving in a church about a half hour from my home church, and so I contacted a friend of mine there who was an ER nurse, had been for years, to come talk to our elementary kids about why smoking and alcohol are bad for our health. (This is where I should have noticed one of the red flags... turns out long-term ER nurses may have slightly different emotional responses than the mainstream public. Or their children.) She arrived with a bottle of alcohol, a pack of cigarettes, and a bucket full of live minnows. (Red flag #2). What followed was utter

mayhem. I can only imagine what the impact on Adam & Eve was, having never even seen a coyote get smashed out in the desert by a 2-ton ACME anvil or get hit by a train speeding out of a freshly-painted tunnel entrance!

Now ultimately the process of Death entered Creation through the introduction of sin, but I believe it was this moment where Adam & Eve learn the price of choosing to ignore God. They learned the cost of Death. And the cost of Sin is established, lasting for all of the Old Covenant, the Law of Moses, which was still 2500 years away. And that Law, that Covenant would continue to associate Death with the cost of ignoring God's commands, not with the immediate death of the transgressing person or people (though there were certainly exceptions), but in the system of blood sacrifice, of bulls, goats, lambs, and doves.

By the time we get to the book of Romans, the young New Testament Church, Paul is explaining how the sacrifice of the Messiah changes things, fulfills all of the Law once and for all, instituting a New Covenant, a better covenant based on Grace rather than on Sacrifice. Paul is anticipating two objections: 1) If Grace is so great, let's sin more so we get more Grace! 2) If the Old Covenant is no longer applicable, then we can do whatever we want! And Paul answers both questions in Romans 6 with

NO!!

Paul connects his NO!! first with the simple fact that Sin leads to Death, not to a Championship level of Grace! The same poor logic would be in play if we said, "Wow! SpongeBob Band-Aids? I'm going to go step in front of a bus and get the whole box!!" The point is, not to pile up Grace, but to avoid Sin-- **Sin leads to Death.**

Romans 6:11-13—

¹¹ In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. ¹² Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. ¹³ Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to Him as an instrument of righteousness.

What caught my eye in this passage is something that slips right by without notice most of the time, but it's a Game Changer!

Verse 12: "Do not let sin reign..." I love that! It's like... a **Declaration of Independence!** If you are going to let the ruling powers know that you will no longer allow them to sit in authority

over you, well them's fighting words! It says, "YOU'RE NOT MY DAD!" "You're not my boss!" "You can't tell me what to do!"

Now I'll be honest, I was a little afraid that I might be overstepping the original language here, so I checked in with my son, Caleb, who, thanks to 4 years of Christian University studies, majoring in Bible, and another 4 in Seminary for his Masters, knows a WHOLE LOT more about Greek and Hebrew than I do. So Caleb sent me this, and this is REALLY COOL: Craig Keener, in the IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament notes that in verse 13, the Greek word translated into "instruments" is "hopla".

Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as a *HOPLA* of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been

brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to Him as a *HOPLA* of righteousness.

But the word “hopla” can also be translated as “**Weapons**”! Ohhhhyeeeaahhhhh! “Offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to Him as a **WEAPON OF RIGHTEOUSNESS.**”

Do you understand what that’s a picture of? You see it, too, right??

ZOMBIE APOCALYPSE FOR GOD!!

You were brought from death to life, and now you’ve been weaponized!

Maybe it’s just a Guy Thing, but I love that more active translation option. Fire up the muskets, boys, we’re fixin’ to liberate some folks up in here!

The 2nd objection, *now I’m free to do whatever I want*, is met with this in verses 16-18:

¹⁶ Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? ¹⁷ But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance. ¹⁸ You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.

Sure, my union with Christ through baptism has freed me from the Law, but not so I can run rogue! Actually I have a new Master, that being Righteousness, doing what is right in God's eyes, and that's a GREAT Master to have!

Insofar as Doing Whatever You Want, one of my most leaned-on bits of scripture is another Paulian phrase. It's what I think of as the Don't

Be Stupid clause for my life: All things are permissible, but not all things are profitable. –

I Corinthians 10:23.

Just because I'm free to do certain things, doesn't mean I should be stupid enough to do them!

I have to point out, now that we're in the middle of all this, that we most likely have a skewed perspective on slavery in Biblical times. Being a slave was not always a permanent thing. Some cultures, particularly within the history of the Hebrew people, saw it as a temporary situation for someone who was unable to support themselves. As a matter of fact, I wear an earring as a bit of a memento to the practice of releasing a slave from service because they have gained their freedom. It is outlined in both Exodus and Deuteronomy that anyone buying a Hebrew slave would set that

slave free in the 7th year. After leaving Egypt, never again would slavery be a long-term condition of God's people.

But if that slave decided, "Hey, I love my master, this family. I have no desire to leave", then the master would take them to the doorway of the house and pierce their ear, and from that day on their earring was a sign that they were a willing slave. It stated that they were **Not For Sale**. In the New Testament Paul refers to himself as a *bondservant of the Lord Jesus Christ*, a "**Doulos**", the same imagery used in the Hebrew law. That is what my earring symbolizes to me... that I am a willing slave to Christ, and I am no longer for sale.

As I interviewed for one of my youth ministry positions, a dad had asked me about my pierced ear, and after explaining it, he demanded, "So what am I supposed to say when my teenage son comes home and tells

me he wants his ear pierced because his youth minister wears an earring?” To which I replied, “Tell him when he’s 35 and his wife gives him permission, go for it!”

By the way, you know where Paul uses this “doulos” term, claiming himself to be a willing slave to Christ?

The first verse of the book of Romans. (Can someone drop a mike for me, please??)

In the Roman slave economy there was such a thing as the *peculium*, which was when a Master would allow slaves to earn and own as an incentive, even making it possible for them to eventually purchase their own freedom. And again, according to commentator Craig Keener, this is what is pictured in this chapter.

So our picture of slavery, or something having Mastery over us, is like this: When Sin is our

master, we work and work and pay and pay, but all that ever shows on our account is Death. On our own, we are totally unable to get ahead, satisfy our debt. But when Jesus comes along, He uses His status as the Son of God, and as the Perfect Sacrifice, and He is able to pay our account off in FULL. And how do we participate in this Deal of a Lifetime? How do we qualify? It's right there at the top of the chapter: ³ *Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?* ⁴ *We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.* And THAT is why we need words and phrases like Redeemed... Bought Back... Dead to Sin... New Life... Set Free

So what does all of this add up to?

Sin separates us from God. We may not even think... No, we PROBABLY don't think that our sin is that big a deal. OUR sins are much milder, much more justifiable. OUR sin probably isn't even really showing up on God's radar that much. We know lots of other people who are much more selfish, much less thoughtful, break many more laws, are entirely more self-obsessed, have worse habits and addictions, use much nastier language, on and on and on. OUR sin won't lead to Death! But the bottom line is that ALL sin separates us from God. Even our barely-worth-mentioning ones.

Or perhaps we're on the other end of the spectrum. An old Bible College professor of mine knew an even older man who had a very dear friend that wouldn't have anything whatsoever to do with the Church or Jesus or God, despite continued invitations to come to a service or a special event or, really, anything at

all! One night the two men were out in a boat fishing. It was getting late, and they were sitting quietly, and it just seemed like one of those moments where it was OK to be serious about serious things, and the man asked his friend, “Why won’t you have anything to do with our church?” It was quiet for a few moments, and then the friend began relating a story. He had been a soldier in WWII. It was towards the end of the war, though they didn’t know it then, and he was with a patrol in the Black Forest. It was bitterly cold, and in the pitch of night the Black Forest was blacker than ever.

In the distance the patrol spotted a flickering light, and they carefully moved toward it. As they drew closer they began to see that it was actually a quite lively campfire, surprising in wartime, and incredibly bright in contrast to the thickly wooded darkness. Surrounding the fire were Nazi soldiers, so the patrol silently

moved in, and when they were in position, they opened fire, killing the enemy to a man.

“Except there were no men there”, said the friend. For in Germany’s desperate plea for victory they had recruited everyone they could find, including young boys. And in each uniform lying motionless and bloody on the icy ground was a boy, the oldest perhaps 14, but most a good bit younger. Children, really, freezing in the cold, afraid of the dark. Anxious for the warmth and light of a fire.

“Tell me,” he said, “how God could forgive me, a killer of children?”

The man answered, “God forgave Saul as he was on a campaign to kill every follower of Christ, and he became Paul, the greatest writer of the New Testament. Imagine what He could make of you, if only you’d accept His forgiveness!”

Generally speaking we tend to think too lightly of our own sinfulness, or we fail to think too lightly of God's Grace. Both opinions can kill our shot at Eternal Life.

We have been brought to the very culmination of Romans Chapter 6:

²⁰ When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. ²¹ What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! ²² But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. ²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The slave has made his last futile payment to Sin, for Jesus Christ has come, and has offered

the gift that we can never afford to buy, that we can never earn... the gift of Eternal Life!

We shared in the baptisms of 3 people last Sunday. We had another baptism Wednesday afternoon! but I'm telling you that the water is still there. The purpose is still there. The need is still there. The bondage is still there. The way out is still there. The GRACE of God is still there.

“Do we think along the line that Salvation is only possible through the Cross? We do NOT think, and we do not LIKE to think, along Jesus Christ's line. We are told it is Old-Fashioned and Ugly.

And so it is. It is Awful... so Awful that it broke God's heart on Calvary.”

--- Oswald Chambers

Awful as it was, it was Christ's choice to die on our behalf, so this is righteousness could be credited to those who would accept the Gift. If there's any better day, any better time to dive completely into obedience to Jesus Christ, to be released from the Mastery of sin and declare yourself NOT FOR SALE, it can only be to do so on Independence Day!