

Freed from the Curse  
March 30, 2018  
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There is an order to the world that cannot be violated. This order is nothing less than the very law of God. This law is built into every molecule, every atom, every string of energy in the entire universe. But this law is more than just the natural laws that govern the processes of our universe; this law includes the moral dimension of life, too, that can't be tested in laboratories or measured with microscopes. What's right and wrong; what's wise and foolish. It's all connect to the way God built this world.

God's law can be bent, it can be twisted and ignored; it can even be broken. But not without consequences. Not without repercussions. It doesn't matter if you believe in these laws or not; they endure and they stand. They are not dependent on us; they do not yield to us, we must yield to them or we will have to shoulder the consequences.

The Bible has many ways of describing the consequences of breaking God's law, but the one I want us to think about together this afternoon is with the word *curse*. Today, in our culture, we don't talk about curses like the Bible talks about them. We have curse words. Or curses are a part of some voodoo magic that we don't believe in. Curses are a fixture of our popular culture found in horror movies and Scooby-Doo cartoons. The Bible doesn't talk about curses that way; there are no witch doctors or black magic. Instead, the Bible uses the word curse to describe what happens when we violate God's law.

That's why we read at the start of our sermon the command of God in Genesis 2. If our first parents would eat from all the trees of the garden and stay away from the one tree, the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, as God commanded, they would live and find blessing. But if they disobey God's command and eat from the forbidden tree, their consequence would be death; they would be cursed. And as we know (not just because we know the story, but because we live it out every day) they disobeyed God's command and as a result all of humanity, all of creation even, has fallen under the curse of God.

Pastor George read for us Deut. 28. God, in his mercy, provided a path towards blessing even after humanity took the wrong path; he refused to give up on his people and he offered them a way towards life. Do you remember the path from Deut 28? Vs. 2 said, "And all these blessing shall come upon you and overtake you, if you obey the voice of the Lord your God." Ah, obey God. Obey God and live; obey God and be blessed. But what's the opposite? Disobey God and die. And this death is described in Deut 28 as a curse. (vs. 15), "But if you will not obey the voice of the Lord your God or be careful to do all his commandments and his statues that I command you today, then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you."

The curses of God are still at work in the world today. Why? Because we still disobey his word. It's like clockwork. It is like chemistry or mathematics. It always happens this way. I got a

kick a week or two ago when one of my boys came home from school talking about the chemistry experiment of throwing sodium into water. I smiled on the inside because I remember when my HS teacher did that, too. And when my teacher threw sodium into the water, nothing happened... at first. A bit perplexed and confounded, he threw in some more and after a dramatic pause, he leaned in closer and then came the BOOM! It was almost like my science teacher forgot science. The chemical reaction is going to happen; just wait a moment. And God's moral law is the same; curses always come when we break God's law.

I'm reminded of Prov. 3:33, "The Lord's curse is on the house of the wicked, but he blesses the dwelling of the righteous." The wicked, of course, are those who disregard God's law, who don't care about it, who ignore it. Here we have the wisdom writer telling us plainly: a curse remains on the house of those who break the law of God. It is inescapable.

So, how are we to understand this curse? The first thing the Bible says is that the world is cursed; it's under the curse of God. By our sin, by the sin of creation, the world was subjected to frustration and pain. Things don't work like they're supposed to. Disagreement and fights are more common than peace. Sickness strikes the young and the old. Doing the right thing doesn't always mean you'll be rewarded in this life (in fact, doing the right thing will sometimes get you into trouble... go figure.) That's why the psalmist says in Psalm 73:13-14, "All in vain have I kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence. For all the day long I have been stricken and rebuked every morning." Do you hear what he's saying: I'm doing the right thing; I'm keeping myself clean? So, why in the world am I still struggling? Why do I wake up every morning with trouble? Things aren't working like they're supposed to. It's because a curse rests upon this world.

The second thing the Bible teaches us about God's curse is we are prisoners to it. Here's how: we are not wise enough or strong enough to obey God's law. We're called to obey, but we can't. And so do you know what that means? It means we can't escape the curse. The world is cursed and we are cursed. Is there any hope?

Today, friends, as we remember the death of Jesus on the cross, listen to what Paul says in Galatians 3:13 (READ). That verse touches on a lot of what we just talked about, doesn't it?

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law. One of the regular ways the Bible talks about our battle with sin and death is by calling us a slave to sin. It's not a fuzzy word, is it? It conjures up all kinds of ugly, dark thoughts and imaginations. But I'm hoping your spirit inside of you is saying, "But that's what life has been like. Sometimes, I don't even care to do the right thing. Sometimes, I just give myself to things and ways and temptations I know are wrong, I know are hurtful to others and are leading me down a dark path. And then other times, I do care and I try to do the right thing. I have some success, but really, I have more failure." That's the picture of slavery, friends. You want to do what's right, but you lack the ability to do it. And then other times, your heart and your desires don't even want the right thing.

That's what Jesus has come to fix; he's redeems all those who trust in him from the curse of the law. The word redeem means to buy back, to purchase back. Imagine (because it's true): you're a slave. You're locked with chains unable to set yourself free. You belong to sin. And it indeed is a curse. And Jesus marches in to set you free; he's the Savior! He's the liberator. He's the one willing and able to pay the price of your ransom.

And what's that price? It's the curse of God. He became the curse of God so you could receive His blessing. He became the curse of God by taking on himself our sins; he became a curse by dying on a tree for us. Will you receive that gift? Will you receive the blessing? That's really important because you won't experience it without receiving it? So, how do we receive it? By the exercise of trust and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. We receive God's gift of blessing from the curse when we turn away from our self-centered path in life, readjust our thoughts, our direction towards God believing he accepts us and forgives us because of Jesus. Have you received Christ? And if you haven't, will you?

This Good Friday service has been this fusion of reminders of God's blessings and cursings. We've read and heard passages of scripture that highlight the darkness of the curse of God because of our sins. Yet, the songs that we've sung were ones that highlighted God's mercy in Christ, God's gracious ransom payment to free us from that curse so we can live fully within his blessing. I wanted to do that because it's always important to hold onto both. We only understand the darkness when it's put next to the light. But the light of Christ won't seem all that bright or glorious until it's compared with the darkness.

Today, to finish our time of remembrance, I'm going to invite you to come up and receive the communion elements. What are we doing when we do this? Jesus told his disciples that an important way of remembering the things we've talked about today - remembering him - is by sharing this meal together. The bread represents his body, broken and torn apart for you and me. The cup represents that new covenant that God provides for us through the blood of Jesus. Jesus' blood represents his life and that's what he gave so we could be at peace with God. Participating in this meal is a sober reminder of our sin and God's great sacrifice; it's also a celebration of God's love. Let's cap off this time of remembrance by taking this meal together.

Let me give you some instructions.

- Spend some time reflecting on what we've heard today; spend time reminding yourself of the curse of God that you deserve and also the mercy of God saving you from that curse.
- When you'd like, come up to receive the elements... first the bread and secondly the cup. And receive them with joy. Who may receive them? Everyone who puts their trust in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- When you've done that, you are free to leave. Let's leave quietly with sober gratitude for what God has done for us.