**Romans 8:1-11**

**No condemnation**

We all get things wrong in life, don’t we?

We have all made mistakes, errors of judgement - and the history of our lives is littered with events and choices and decisions that, if we had the opportunity to go back in time, we would do things differently.

But the wonderful truth of the Christian gospel is that there is nothing in our lives that we have ever done that is too big, or too bad, for God to forgive. He is always more willing to wipe away the guilt of the past than we are willing to ask of him. God’s grace and love for us is beyond comprehension.

And that is what Paul was talking about in the passage we just heard read from his letter to the Romans.

And he begins in verse 1 with this most wonderful claim that sums up the Christian gospel: “There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” That is the whole of the Gospel summed up in one sentence. “There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”

And Paul goes on to remind us why that is the case in verse 2: “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.” Let’s just unpack this a little bit.

Our liberation from the wrongs of our past comes through the death and resurrection of Jesus. If we are ‘in Christ’, the mistakes of our past no longer has any power over us because we have been set free by his saving work.

And Paul expands his understanding of that further in verse 3: “For what was impossible of the law in that it was weak through the flesh, God sent his own Son in the very likeness of sinful flesh and, as a sin offering, he condemned sin in the flesh.” Now, there’s a lot here – so let’s take this verse apart…

“For what was impossible of the law…” Paul is reminding us here that the Jewish Law was never meant to bring salvation. In fact, it is impossible that the Law could ever bring salvation! God did not give the Law to save, but to reveal our need for grace…

“…in that it was weak through the flesh…” So it’s not a problem inherent in the Law, it was not the fault of the Law that it couldn’t save but because we are weak in our flesh, in our emotions and desires. It is the interaction of the Law with our broken humanity that makes it impossible for salvation because the flesh is so weak: the flesh is weak and cannot obey the Law, so the Law cannot possibly bring salvation.

But the good news for us is contained in what Paul says next: “God sent his own Son in the very likeness of sinful flesh and, as a sin offering, he condemned sin in the flesh”. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth. God revealed himself through his Son Jesus, who lived among us as a full human being. And God has redeemed our humanity through the humanity of Christ, who lived among us, and died, and was raised from the dead. As Paul says here, Jesus was the sin offering. He has paid the price for all that you and I have ever done wrong. Jesus died on the cross and took the penalty for our wrongdoing so that we could be free from the errors of our past. As Paul has written here, “There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus”.

And in verse 4, he outlines the end result of that: “In order that the requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who walk not in accordance with the flesh but in accordance with the Spirit.” That was the purpose of God sending his Son: so that our future may look different from our past, so that we may walk in the power of the Holy Spirit and make better choices for God and for other people and for ourselves. If we walk in the power of the Holy Spirit, we are not condemned to an endless cycle of making the same mistakes but we can move into a more positive future with God. Paul isn’t saying here that we will never sin again; he’s not saying that we won’t ever make mistakes and bad choices again: of course we will – because we are still frail human beings. Instead, Paul is referring to our motivation for living; the direction in which we are walking. As Christians, we walk in accordance with the Spirit - our intention is to serve God and live holy lives - but that isn’t the same thing as being sinless. We still get it wrong time and time again but our general motivation and desire is to walk in accordance with the Spirit not in accordance with the flesh.

And he makes this point absolutely clear in verse 5: “For those who exist according to the flesh are settled of the flesh but those according to the Spirit, that of the Spirit.” It’s a question of what motivates us: if we want to pursue the flesh, we are motivated by the flesh and choose for it but if we want to pursue the Spirit, we are motivated by the Spirit and choose for God. We don’t always succeed – but it remains our primary motivation.

And Paul draws the comparison again in verse 6: “For the way of thinking of the flesh is death but the way of thinking of the Spirit is life and peace.” That’s not to say that every time we choose for God we will experience life and peace. We know that, often, choosing for God is a real struggle and causes pain. But in the broader picture, when all is said and done, those choices for God will paint a canvas of life and peace, which is our life on earth and the life to come.

And Paul then goes on in the next two verses to extend the parallel: “Because the way of thinking of the flesh is hostility towards God for it does not submit to the law of God. For neither can it, and those who are in flesh are not able to please God.” Of course we want to please God – we want to live lives that are pleasing to God. But whenever we choose to follow the way of the flesh, that is not pleasing to him because it is always an act of hostility towards him. God has given us his Spirit and when we choose to live in the flesh, that is the opposite of what he desires for us.

But Paul is aware that he is writing to a mixed audience where some of them would be committed believers and others would be exploring the faith, so he adds a disclaimer in verse 9: “But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if the Spirit of God dwells in you.” For Paul, the definition of being a Christian is someone who has the Holy Spirit dwelling within them. If we are of the flesh, primarily motivated by our own desires, we do not have the Spirit and we are not living the Christian life. But if we are of Christ, primarily motivated by a desire to walk with God, we do have the Spirit and we are living the Christian life.

And so Paul works towards a conclusion of this part of his argument, verse 10: “On condition that Christ is in you, on the one hand the body is dead because of sin but on the other hand the spirit is life because of righteousness.” Here is the tension with which we constantly live: the tension between the body, which is dead and the spirit, which is life, and we are constantly living with that tension on a daily basis.

And so he concludes in verse 11: “But on the condition that the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, [he] will give life to your mortal bodies as well through his Spirit which dwells in you.” Here is an eternal promise that just as God raised Jesus from the dead, so we too will experience resurrection through the power of the Holy Spirit. In the resurrection body, all the tensions we experience in this life will be gone and we will no longer be torn between spirit and flesh as we are now.

We are not doomed to a life of servitude but a life of freedom in the Spirit and that is our eternal destiny through the love of God towards each one of us if we choose for God and live in the power and experience of the Holy Spirit.