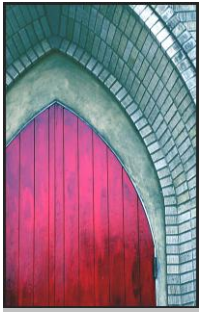


One Who Has Died

TEXT: ROMANS 6.1-11



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WHAT NOW?

“Sometimes I feel I’m living a meaningless life . . . and I get frightened . . . I know I’m one of the luckiest dudes in America right now . . . I have a great house. My parents don’t have to work. I’ve got money. I’m famous. But it could all change, man. It could go away. You never know.” These are the words of 23-year old movie star Shia Lebeouf, whose movies have now made over \$3 billion (gross) world-wide. Having grown up in a poor family in L.A., He has ‘arrived’ but he’s looking around and asking “is this all there is”? Many of us

know that feeling. Even with bills, mortgages, we have arrived, and we wonder if this is all there is. If you are a Christian—does this sentiment ever flow out of your sense of your relationship with God? “I know Jesus and I know He loves me, but now what?”

Romans is a letter written by Paul to a group of people he loved dearly. As he writes, he unfolds with sweeping beauty and intentional detail the glory of the Gospel—“the power of God for the salvation to everyone who believes.” He has spent the first 5 chapters of this letter articulating the need of all of humanity for salvation^{Rom 1.18-3.20} and the provision of God Himself for that salvation in Jesus Christ.^{Rom 3.21-31} He is careful to say over and over again that not only is Jesus the exact provision for our salvation, but also that His salvation comes to us only by faith—it is not something that we achieve.^{Rom 4} At the top of the list of implications is the fact that though humanity lives in rebellion against God, through Jesus, we have peace with Him.^{Rom 5} And in Chapter 6, He begins to answer the question “what now?”

ROMANS 6.1-11

¹What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? ²By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? ³Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

⁵For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. ⁶We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. ⁷For one who has died has been set free from sin. ⁸Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹We know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. ¹⁰For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. ¹¹So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTION

This passage begins with a fascinating question that Paul anticipates his believing readers to ask: “Are we to continue in sin so that grace may abound?”^{6.1} The question flows out of what Paul has written at the end of chapter 5, where he has said that God’s law had the effect for God’s people of ‘increasing’ their sin—because now their sinful rebellion could be articulated with great clarity. Paul goes on to say that “where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.”^{5.20-21} The anticipated question flows from the thought that asks “don’t we want grace to increase?” It’s an honest question—which is why Paul gives it thought. It arises in part from the thought that says that if salvation is the work of God, and if all of my attempts to be in relationship with God truly in spite of my sin will fall short, don’t I run the risk of rejecting his grace by doing anything? As strange as the question may sound to our ears, based on the magnitude of the grace of which Paul writes, he’s asking the right question.

In our context, when we have ‘arrived’ spiritually, one of three things happens: some struggle with the thought that God’s grace truly abounds and they continue to live as if God’s love for them is founded on their ability to behave. Others run the other direction and live with the cynical despair that sees only their darkness and has no hope for change. Yet others live with quiet apathy that neither strives for anything more, nor expects anything more. Paul addresses here all three perspectives.

Paul’s answer to his own question is an emphatic “NO!”^{6.2} Verses 2 through 4 answer the question by pointing us directly to Christ. His response is that continuing in sin so that grace may increase even more is an absurd notion to the believer, because of Jesus Himself and the life He has set out for us. Verse four ends with the immediate goal of God’s work in our lives—that “we too may walk in newness of life.” Living according to our sinfulness is in direct contradiction not only to God Himself, but also to the lives to which He calls us. The center of this call, though, is Jesus Himself. Without Jesus, mere effort, cynicism, or apathy all make sense. But because of Jesus, we see more.

I want to challenge us this morning. Let’s approach these verses not first to ask what it is that we are to do with this information. There is certainly a place for that—and we will definitely get there next week. I set this challenge before us because in these words Paul indirectly points to the flaw in the options of increased effort, cynicism, and apathy and that flaw is us. And so, let’s not look to ourselves, but to Jesus.

SIN AND DEATH

The first of two aspects of the work of Jesus on which Paul relies in these verses is the death of Jesus.^{6.3, 5} In verse 4, Paul adds to this mention of the burial of Jesus. This sounds redundant—even as it may sound to you in the Apostles’ Creed where it actually says “crucified, dead, and buried.” Burial here simply directs attention to the completeness of that act of death. There is nothing partial or ‘almost’ about Jesus’ death

on the cross as a criminal. Earlier in Romans, Paul describes the death of Christ as a sacrifice to put the righteousness of God on display—because sin needed to be punished.^{Rom 3.21-26} This was the God's Son, who lived without sin, dying as a sacrifice for those on whom God has set His love, so that the perfection of God might be upheld.

But why death? Why did Jesus have to die in order to effect salvation? The answer takes us back to the first chapters of the Bible. Death is a part of this world because it is the consequence of the sin of our first parents—Adam and Eve. As Paul summarizes in Romans 5, sin came into the world through one man (Adam), and that sin brought death into this world, which has thus spread to all humanity.^{Rom 5.12} In fact two verses later Paul speaks of death reigning.^{Rom 5.14} You and I experience death, decay, and old age because of sin. The prophet Isaiah speaks of death as a “covering that is cast over all peoples.”^{Is 25.7} Death is our fullest experience of sin in this life because in it we find the culmination of the fallen-ness of this world.

But notice verse 7: “For one who has died has been set free from sin.” In verse 10 Paul tells us, regarding Jesus, that “the death he died he died to sin, once for all.” Jesus experienced death—and therefore there is nothing more that sin could do to him. Scripture is clear that Jesus knew no sin, but that in an act of His obedience to the will of His Father He humbled Himself, lived in a world ruled by sin, and He took sin upon Himself in His death.^{2 Cor 5.21; Phil 2.6-8} Jesus died because of sin—though not His own—and as a result He has been “set free” from sin.

RESURRECTION AND LIFE

The second of the two aspects on which Paul relies in these verses is the resurrection of Jesus. Again, this is first mentioned early in this passage^{6.4} and there as the beautifully perfected work of God the Father. Jesus rose from the dead. He was truly dead. And now He is alive. Paul tell us in I Corinthians 15 that this is central to our faith—and that if Jesus was not raised from the dead, we believe in vain and we are still lost in sin.^{1 Cor 15.1-11, 17} Jesus rose from the dead.

So, why the resurrection? Why is it that without this truth, we worship in vain? Go to verse 9: “. . . Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over Him.” In dying, Jesus experienced the full weight of the impact of sin: death as a result of the out-pouring of the wrath of God. This was the declaration of God's wrath toward our rebellion, and therefore a confirmation of God's words to Adam.^{Gen 2.16} The resurrection is a declaration that Jesus is the Son of God^{Rom 1.4} and that in this event death “no longer has dominion over Him.”^{6.9} Jesus died; there is no penalty left for sin. Even more, He has risen as the conqueror of sin itself.

We cannot lose sight of the impact of the resurrection. Verse 10 gives the summary of Jesus' work. Paul's argument here is that without the resurrection, Jesus only experiences the effects of sin that is due all of us. Death and sin remain in charge over the world, and in effect, God would be subject to them. This removes God's meaning from the world.

DEATH AND LIFE

Paul tells us early in the book of Romans that the “Gospel is the power of God for the salvation to everyone who believes.”^{Rom 1.16} The completeness of this salvation must be that which takes sinners who are condemned to die and brings life. This is the

foundation of what Paul writes here in Romans 6: the glory of the Gospel of God is that He has given His son so that sinners might know Him and find true life—and live out that true life here and now. The question of verse 1 cannot stand, because what is at stake is the scope of our salvation, and even more importantly, is the perfection of Jesus' work. Part of the purpose of our salvation is that “we too might walk in newness of life.”^{6.4, 11} Sin is the contradiction to the Grace and Truth of God; to continue to live in submission to sin would be to live in direct contradiction to God and His purposes.

My concern for us is that many of us are asking “what now?” and because we live in a place of great temptation we answer with mere effort, cynical despair, or quiet apathy. The temptation that we face is that our surroundings point us toward these options. If we have ‘arrived’ based on our culture, then cynicism and apathy make perfect sense. Going farther: if we chose not to face the pain, the burdens, and even the contradictions of the world, we don't always have to. Let me be clear—we cannot run from our own brokenness and the brokenness of our world, but we can take strong measures to keep it at arm's length for a time. But if we're part of the problem, then the solution is not simply to try harder, nor is it to give up completely.

When we ask “what now” according to Romans 6, we must take into account that as much as this is not a call to simply ‘try harder’, neither is it a call to introspection. Jesus calls us to a new life, a new life in Him. This is a call to give, serve, and sacrifice, but without the truth that we pursue this activity in Christ and only based on His work in our place, we are only in our sin, and according to death. Instead, Jesus makes us and calls us to be holy alive.

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