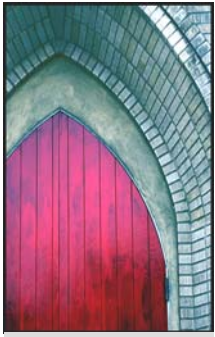


# SET FREE FOR A PURPOSE

Oak Hills Birthday Message...

SCRIPTURE TEXT:

ROMANS 8:1-4 (ESV)



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January 8, 2006

Oak Hills  
Presbyterian Church,  
Overland Park,  
Kansas

## Historic Preparation:

Seven years ago a small group of people officially formed Oak Hills Presbyterian Church. Every January we celebrate this occasion by looking back at what the Lord has for us as a local church Body. And we look forward too. But before we do, let's look at 2005. I am one who looks for historical moments. And it seems that every time I turn around some step is being made that will undoubtedly shape who we become as we continue to mature as a local church. I want to celebrate these moments because they are the handiwork of God.

Here are just a few historical moments that have occurred, mostly behind the scenes, at Oak Hills in 2005. First, we saw the formation of our first finance committee. For the first time in our history, we have a team consisting of accountants, actuaries and strategic planners, who love Jesus and have a passion for the Gospel, pouring over the finances of the church—using their gifts and wisdom to think and plan with long term vision and discernment. I believe that the work of this group of elders and deacons will open doors for the gospel ministry of this church to reach farther than we can imagine.

Second, our deacons have been developing a diaconal ministry which I believe will become one of the strongest avenues for the proclamation of the Gospel Oak Hills knows. They have been developing strategies for responding to the needs within our own congregation while working to lead this Body in reaching out beyond ourselves in ministries of mercy and outreach to the poor. The ongoing organization they've begun in the past year will shape this church in the years to come.

Third, the Lord has begun laying the groundwork for missions at Oak Hills, bringing together a unique team of people to lead us. Our first mission trip will be this summer to the Yakima Indian Reservation in Washington. You'll hear more about that opportunity in the next six weeks, as we will be working through a sermon series on missions and outreach. For now, let me say that the Lord has laid the foundation, and it thrills me to think that, even now, He is building on that foundation by stirring hearts in this room, preparing some of you to form this flagship team of Oak Hills' missionaries. This is historic!

When I look at these developments—the finance committee, the diaconal ministry and missions, I see a common theme—**preparation**. The Lord is preparing us to go out into the world and make known His astonishing grace. But you cannot make the grace of God known unless you have been astonished by it yourself. So my hope this morning is that we might again be astonished by the grace of the God, and sobered by the thought that our God would want to use our lives as the means by which He will astonish others with His grace. And beloved, this is where He is taking us. So let the astonishing truth of the Gospel of God's redeeming grace wash over your soul.

## Romans 8:1-4

<sup>1</sup>There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. <sup>2</sup>For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. <sup>3</sup>For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, <sup>4</sup>in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

## There Is No Condemnation - vs 1:

The assurance of knowing that nothing can snatch the believer from God's hand is the truth upon which the hope of our faith rests. So Romans 8 begins with one of the sweetest Gospel truths ever—"There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ." None! Up to this point in Romans, Paul has been discussing how the Law of God reveals every person to be transgressor of God's Holy standard—and that if we are to look to the Law to save us, we are hopelessly lost because we are all law-breakers. Condemnation is separation from God.

Let's remember what it means to be condemned—it is to be cut off from the One we've sinned against. And we've all sinned against God. He will not look upon sin. We don't have it in us to perfectly obey His Law, and so if we are to be reconciled to Him, it will not come through law-keeping, but by Grace. If we are to stand before God, it can only be because He pardons our sin and declares us to be righteous. There is no other way.

Paul not only tells us **that** God has done this, but **how**—by sending Christ to take our punishment upon Himself and to place upon us His righteousness, so that when we stand before God, it is not our unrighteousness that God sees, but the righteousness of Christ—our sinless Savior Who lived and died in our place! If your faith is in Jesus Christ as your Savior, there is no condemnation. The payment for your sin has been made, and a righteous God cannot demand two payments for your sin. Legally, you have no debt before Him. What a glorious truth!

## Why There's No Condemnation - vs 2-4:

If verse 1 is a declaration of God's justification of sinners, then verses 2-4 are the description of how that transforms our lives. In vs. 2, Paul paints the contrast between the law of the Spirit of life—the Gospel of salvation by grace through faith in Christ—and the Law of sin and death, which I take to refer to the Law of God as delivered in the Old Testament. And I want to be careful here in describing God's Law in this way. Am I saying that the Old Testament Law is flawed? Not at all! God's law is absolutely perfect. It is everything anyone needs to know and follow in order to be righteous in the sight of God. So how is it a law of sin and death? In that **WE** are condemned by it. The perfect Law of God exposes us, to a man, as law-breakers.

But look at what Paul says in vs. 3: “*God has done what the law, **weakened** by the flesh, could not do.*” That word weakened can be translated as “**made impotent.**” In other words, the Law was made impotent—unable to save—because sinful man was unable to keep it. If you’re falling off a cliff, the basic laws of aerodynamics can save you provided you have wings. But when all you have to flap is your arms... well... The defect is not in God’s law, but in us! The Law is unable to save us, because it can only save us if we keep it perfectly—and this we cannot do!

So Paul says, in vs 3, that **GOD** has done what the Law could not—save us from the condemnation our sin merits. How? Paul goes on, “*By sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh.*” In other words, God sent Jesus to bear in His flesh the full condemnation of our sin.

Vs. 4 tells us that Jesus came in order that the righteous **requirement** of the Law might be **fulfilled** in us. What is the requirement of the Law? Perfect obedience. How is that fulfilled? Not through our law-keeping, but through a legal transaction—the penalty for our sin is paid by the death of Christ—and by laying down His life **for us**, the righteous requirement of the Law is fulfilled **in us**. The wages of sin is death. Jesus died for our sin. Thus we have no debt left to pay.

This was no magic trick. Jesus didn’t **pretend** to come in the form of a man so that we might be inspired. He wasn’t some angelic being masquerading as a man. He became a man of flesh and blood—blood that could and would be spilled. He died a real death. He felt real pain. His heart stopped beating and his body went limp on a real cross outside the city of Jerusalem. And all this for us so that we might know the pardon of God and stand with the certainty that there is no condemnation that can **ever** be leveled against us by Him—only grace, only acceptance, only eternity with Him! And that is astonishing!

## *Your Life Is Not For Nothing:*

Paul concludes this chapter with another equally astonishing claim: “*I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*” Can’t you see it... the summary of the impact of the Gospel? For the Christian, there is no condemnation, and because there isn’t, neither can there be separation from the love of God in Christ! The Christian is justified **now**—declared righteous in God’s sight, and bound for eternal glory with the Lover of our souls!

But what does God desire to do with your life in this land between justification and glorification? The word theologians use is sanctification—the process by which the Holy Spirit works making us more and more like our Lord Jesus Christ.

What does this mean for your life? Hear the good news of the Gospel in this way. God has not given you life and breath for nothing. He has made you for His pleasure, for His glory. And your life is worth more to Him than all the gold in the world. You are more beautiful to Him than an untouched hidden mountain lake. Here in this land between our justification and glorification, God has called us to a life that is anything but dull. So what about you? Your life is happening now. This is it. These days, months and years are the ones allotted for your time here on earth. Are you who you want to be? You have not been set free for nothing—but to bear witness to Christ, and our best witness comes by resembling Him.

So God is about the business of making us like Christ. This means that at every point where we are not like Christ, He means to change us there. At every point where we love the poor less than Christ does, He means to change us there. Every point where we fail to fear the holiness of God, He means to change us there. Every point where we become too bored with the Gospel to testify of the mercy we have found, He means to change us there. At every point where we cling to our law-keeping to save us, He means to change us there. And at every point where we tremble in fear of what the world thinks of us, and where we look to the world to tell us what we are worth, He means to change us there. It is grace that He justifies us in Christ. It is grace that will bring us home to glory. And beloved, it is grace that in between our being justified and our being glorified, God, by the Holy Spirit, sanctifies us.

## *Set Free For A Purpose:*

We live in a very individualistic culture. And it hurts the church. You will search the scriptures in vain for a theology of individualism. His Bride is the **CHURCH**. Prizing individualism over belonging to the Body cuts us off at the knees. When we have more faith in our ability to control life than in God’s; or when a nice salary, or a clean house brings us a greater sense of security than the assurance of our salvation in Christ; or when we are constantly comparing our lives, our homes, our kids, our TV’s, even our devotional habits against others in our church, we miss the point of why God has set us free.

We are not called to be so put together that we appear to need nothing at all. We are called to testify of our greatest need ever—reconciliation with God—and to confess that only Christ can accomplish that. If God is equipping us to make His astonishing grace known then we should expect Him to remind us of our own desperation for the Gospel in the process.

So what does all this mean for Oak Hills here at the start of our eighth year? It means this is an unsafe place to be. C.S. Lewis reminds us that God is good, but not safe. And perhaps the most unsafe place in the world to be is in a church where God is taking a collection of individuals and combining them together to be One Body for the sake of bearing witness to His astonishing grace. It cuts at the heart of our individualism, and for many of us that feels unsafe. But beloved, it is so good!

This is an historic time in the life of Oak Hills! And it is historic that you are here right now. Oak Hills is just one local church among hundreds in this city. We’re not the best, the biggest, the richest, or the trendiest. And we’re not called to be. What we are is better than all that combined. We are God’s. Better than making us rich or famous, He is making us like Christ!

Imagine what that means! If God means to use this church for great things, then He means to use us here in this room right now for great things. Imagine what God has for this church. Imagine you are an integral part of that plan. Why wouldn’t you be? There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ. And because there isn’t, nothing can separate you from the love of God. So if that is true, why wouldn’t God use your life for His glory, since your life is a testimony **to** His glory and grace?

I love this church! I love you people! I love the knowledge that God is at work in our midst, and I can only guess that where He is leading us will be astonishing. But it is an honor to walk this road with you. May God, by His grace, lead us where He will this year, and along the way, make us ever more like Christ.