

## The Gospel Moves Us to a New Place

January 3, 2010 - Romans 7:1-6

We move into a New Year this Sunday. We have no choice. The calendar flipped. 2010 arrived on Friday. I wonder what you're thinking as we move into a New Year. Our perspective might be shaped by the events of 2009. Some of us look back and can't think of a much better year. Maybe you got married or a new baby arrived or something good happened at work or school or in a relationship. Some of us look back and couldn't wait to turn the calendar. 2009 brought sorrow or layoffs or laying others off. Maybe it brought financial difficulty or a break up or tension or that diagnosis that your family deals with now. Some of you physically moved in 2009 and look forward to 2010 in a new setting.

Moving to a new place or new year can be tremendous. But it can also be hard and challenging to accept. I've moved physically at least 12 times in my life. Some were in-city. moves. Some were across the country. Some I loved and some I dreaded. I remember when it was time for me to make a big move. God hunted me for several years. He called me to the ministry, but I didn't go for 2 full

years. I was running. I didn't want to be a pastor. I didn't want my weekends ruined. I didn't want to be responsible for a flock. I didn't want to go to places that required me to step out of my comfort zone.

But God has a way of directing our lives to where we need to go to fulfill His purposes for our lives. We can either run, resist or embrace His leading. In my life He closed door after door funneling me towards seminary; a school that trains pastors. But to go to the seminary required moving from Calgary to Edmonton. It's not a far move geographically. But I didn't know much about Alberta's capital region and I didn't know anyone. I only knew that people from Edmonton dressed in green and gold would come to our football stadium on Labor Day and yell at anyone in red.

So I moved physically and it was hard. So I guess I resisted that move emotionally even though it happened. In my first ministry position in south Edmonton, I regularly built up my hometown and bashed my new town. For 2 years, the patient people at that church bore with me. What was going on? I may have moved in my body to Edmonton but in my mind and heart I still lived in Calgary. Slowly I discovered some really cool things about Edmonton; the beautiful river

valley; Whyte Ave; the U of A campus; an insane number of golf courses; new friends and great people. But until I began to embrace that I actually lived here and engage in life here, I would always look back to my old life wishing I still lived there.

The same thing can happen in our relationship with God. God's Gospel moves us to a completely new place in life. But there might be times we don't want to live there. We may hang on to our old way of life or our old way of thinking. Or we circle around and around some sin. It might be a sin we commit habitually. Or it might be a sin because we omit addressing it—like reconciling with that person—or neglecting to reach out in love or show mercy. As we look into 2010, we've convinced ourselves "this part of my old life will be with me until I die."

But the Gospel moves us to a completely new place. So how do we live here, embrace life here and bear fruit here? That's what we're going to look at today in our return to the letter to the Romans. Remember Romans? It started in chapter 1, verses 16 and 17 where Paul declares "I am not ashamed of the Gospel because it is the power of God unto salvation for all who believe." But why do we need the

Gospel? Romans 1 and 2 explained that all of us were born under God's just and holy wrath because we violated His holy law. Romans 3:9 summarized those chapters with this statement "For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks are under sin" or lawbreakers. That's bad news because God's holiness requires a penalty for sin against Him. Romans 3: 19-20 – Every mouth will be stopped and the whole world accountable to God because we're guilty. Then came the good news of the Gospel starting in Romans 3: 21 – But now – the righteousness God does has been revealed; the way God makes us right with Him is clear. Though all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, all who believe are given the gift of justification—right standing before God that He provides for those who believe in Christ. That's the Gospel.

It's all by grace. We didn't earn it. Then we asked the question "But how could a Holy God justly forgive?" He put his own Son Jesus forward as a sacrifice that would bear His holy wrath to the end. That's what happened on the cross. God poured out His wrath, that we deserved onto Jesus. Anyone who puts their personal trust in Jesus receives the gift of justification by grace.

Now all this was pretty radical and earth shaking. All people like to justify themselves; our world justifies or recognizes those who earn.

So this grace thing is pretty difficult for us to grasp. So Paul talks about Abraham. People thought if anyone deserved to be justified by works and keeping God's law, it was him. But in fact Abraham was justified by faith because God's law had not been given yet. A closer look at Abraham's life reveals he wouldn't have been justified by keeping the law because he too failed.

In Romans 5 Paul shows us all we have to celebrate in Justification. We have peace with God – In fact, we can even rejoice in our sufferings because they are building in us hope that God will come through in the end to ultimately save us. (Remember in Romans salvation means glorification most of the time which means we will be protected by Christ's sacrifice on Judgment Day. Then we will enter into our glorified state with our resurrection bodies and free from sin's presence.

But this great gift led to another question or problem. If we're saved by grace right through into eternity, why worry about sinning today? Romans 6 tackled that issue. It showed us that if we're thinking that

way, we have to question if we've appreciated the immeasurable gift of the Gospel.

Paul took us back to the beginning of our Christian lives to remind us that we died to sin's reign when we came to Christ. Our baptism shows what happened at the beginning of the Christian life – we died to sin with Christ; our old life of sin was buried; We were raised to new life in Christ. So we now have a choice; whose reign will we follow; the reign of sin or the reign of Christ. Who is our master – sin or God? We ended at 6:23 – For the wages or earnings of sin is death but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Now in chapter 7, Paul starts fleshing out what the Gospel looks like in a life saved by it. Here we discover again the major move that has taken place in our life. So today, as we move into a New Year, I want you Christians to see again where you've moved from and where God moved you to. We'll see what had to happen for you and me to make this move. The text raises a new description of life in the old place. Life under the law. It says "we've been released from the law." So how are we supposed to view the law from this new place? Finally, we'll ponder what we might need to do to embrace this move and start

living in it. Then we'll ask the Holy Spirit for His wisdom and guidance in a closing time of prayer. My hope and prayer is that by the time we leave today you'll be closer to more fully embracing where God has moved you; you'll see maybe a little more clearly where He's calling you to bear fruit this year; you'll be much more comforted by His presence, guidance and strength for the year ahead.

Our text today is Romans 7: 1-6 if you'd like to follow along on the outline.

### **Where did we move from?**

*We moved from the realm ruled by Sin and Death.* We moved from a country where sin and his buddy death held power over us. We left behind that kingdom that kept us captive in sin. Verses 5 and 6 speak about where Christians used to live – “For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive.” So there you have descriptions of life in that realm or kingdom: life in the flesh or sinful nature; ruled by sinful passions which worked in our bodies result in death fruit – deeds and behaviors leading to death or separation from

God. When we lived in this realm, we probably viewed God with fear, apathy or rebellion. Maybe you were raised to view God with terror. Maybe you were told “If you obey God, you might appease Him – but you never know.” Maybe we viewed God with apathy or boredom so we just ignored Him and His law. But the whole time this bored attitude of God results in death fruit.

Maybe you once lived in rebellion against God. In fact, when you heard His law, you wanted to do the opposite. You said yes to what God says no to and no to what God says yes to.

Notice when we live in sin's realm, we have a distorted view of God. He's an angry and easily offended dictator, an irrelevant old man or ticket officer looking for violations. All of us once lived there even if we can't remember that time – or we act like we're still living there. But as we learned in Romans 6:21 – the fruit or end of a life lived in that realm is shame and death. Ultimately, those who remain in that realm will face God's holy wrath at judgment and will not be saved. That's where we Christians used to live. That's where we've moved from.

### **Where did we move to?**

*We moved to the realm of Christ.* We transferred to a kingdom where Christ is King. We moved to the country ruled by the King of Kings. Romans 7: 4 – “Likewise my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ so that you may belong to another to him who has been raised from the dead.” Do you see that phrase “belong to another to him who has been raised from the dead?” There’s the realm transfer – the move. We now belong to Christ our King. It’s like we’ve been moved from the slums to a sea side inheritance. Though we have not yet attained our eternal inheritance and still have to live among the slums, we get glimpses of that inheritance.

I hope if you look back to 2009, you can remember glimpses or moments or seasons when you tasted heaven. Maybe it was an answered prayer. Maybe it was when your Christian loved one died and yet gained life in the physical presence of Christ. Right now on this first Sunday in 2010, they’re with Christ. Maybe it was when you got baptized or saw your loved one baptized or married or dedicated. Maybe you were part of something where the unity of the Spirit brought you together with others and you saw God work. This is life in

the new place, the kingdom of Christ which we experience already today.

### **How did we get there?**

How does anyone get from the old realm ruled by sin and death to the new realm ruled by Christ? Through death. Someone has to die. Actually, there needs to be 2 deaths. That’s the point of the first 3 verses of Romans 7. I talks about a universal principle. Death severs legal relationships. Verse 1 – “Do you not know that the law is binding on a person only as long as he lives?” Then he applies it to the marriage relationship. When a man and woman enter into marriage, they join into a relationship on multiple levels – Emotional, Romantic, Physical and Legal. You have to sign the documents to be legally married. While you’re both alive, you are legally obligated to fulfill that marriage covenant. “Forsaking all others.” That means we are bound to each other.

And what did most married people here include in our wedding vows – “Til death do us part.” When one marriage partner dies, the surviving partner is free from the law of marriage binding them

together. They still have legal obligations regarding the estate. But the actual marriage part is legally over because of death.

In the same way, through death we are released from life in our old place. 2 deaths needed to happen for us to experience this move. First, Christ had to die. Our transfer into our new home could only take place because of his death. That's what verse 4 describes that "Likewise my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ." Here, the body of Christ does not refer to the church but to the physical body of Christ. Through Christ's death, our move was possible.

But it also requires our death to our old life; to life under the reign of sin, death and the law only as a condemning agent. Remember Romans 6:2? How can we who *died* to sin still live in it? Romans 6: 4 – We were baptized into his death. Romans 6:11 – So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to Christ Jesus. Here again in Romans 7:6 – But now we are released from the law, having *died* to that which held us captive.

Through Christ's death on the cross and our death with Him when we first received Him, God's Gospel has moved us to a new place.

But then comes the question about law.

### **So does "released from the law" mean we are free from the Old Testament?**

I hope you felt a little tension during the Scripture Reading. The Old Testament reading talked about loving God's law. Here in Romans we read "we're released from the law." Paul is describing the realm of the old life in new terms in Romans 7. So not only was it the realm under sin and death, but also the realm under law.

At first glance, it looks like most Christians are doing just that. How many people here check Leviticus 11 before you go grocery shopping to ensure you don't get forbidden food? How many of you have a goat, bulls and lambs in your back yards to bring as sacrifices to next week's worship service? Did any of you observe the feasts of Passover, Pentecost or Tabernacles in 2009? It seems like we live completely released from the law.

But what about the Old Testament passage Justin read earlier? That Psalmist loved God's law. If we ditch the entire Old Testament, does that mean we throw out the 10 commandments? I suspect few of us would think that would be a good idea.

In what sense are we released from the law? *We are released from the burden of trying to keep God's law perfectly to earn right standing before God.* We are released from the law as a condemning agent in our lives. Apart from Christ, it only exposes our guilt.

### **So how do we view the law in this new place?**

We see God's law as holy and good. We celebrate that God has provided a way for us to be released from the just penalty of the law. We recognize that many of the ceremonial, dietary and sacrificial parts of the law have been fulfilled in Christ. *We see God's law as a law of love written on our hearts.* We especially value the moral law. We realize that by the power of the Holy Spirit, we can joyfully keep God's good law.

It's kind of like the difference between doing your chores because someone forces you to compared to doing them because you want to. In sin's realm, we may have done as little as possible thinking we'd be okay with God. In the new realm, we see the glory and value and purity of God's moral law. We desire to keep not only in actions but in thought and motive.

That's what Jesus was talking about in the Sermon on the Mount. You have heard it said "you shall not murder, but I tell you everyone who is angry with his brother is like one who murders him in heart. So be reconciled to your brother. You have heard it said "you shall not commit adultery." But I say that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart." We're not keeping God's law if we do something that looks right on the outside while we're wrong on the inside. Jesus commands us to keep God's law on the outside and inside. We realize we can't keep it without Him. So we call out to the Holy Spirit for His power and strength to guide and provide.

So, yes, we are released from an external law as a means to salvation. We are released from the law as a condemning agent. Instead we are moved to a new place where we are already saved. Now we live by the Spirit who empowers us to embrace God's holy law and bear fruit wherever He calls us. There will be more on God's law and our relationship to it in the rest of Romans 7 if you want to read ahead. That's next week's message.

So, we've seen where we moved from – a realm ruled by sin. We've seen where we moved to – a realm ruled by Christ. We've seen what needed to happen for us to move – Death – First Christ's death to pave the way and then our death to life in the old realm. We've seen a new view of God's law.

**Now those of us who are Christians must embrace our new surrounding and bear fruit for God.**

For some, we need to stop doing the Christian thing physically while being somewhere else mentally or emotionally. Ask the Holy Spirit to renew our passion for Christ.

For others, it means we've got to stop circling around that same sin we're committing over and over – or stop sinning by omitting or ignoring His call. We've got to fight! On New Year's Day, I spent some time outside working on clearing up my driveway from snow and ice. In the Christmas rush, I would quickly shove snow off the center part of the driveway to the edges. Well, quite a pile collected right at the entrance way to our driveway. Instead of turning smoothly in at a 45° angle, you had to go beyond this pile and make a 90° turn into our driveway. That pile could have sat there all winter until the

snow melts. We would have lost the use of that part for several months. So thankfully, we cleared it and reclaimed that portion of the driveway for our use.

We might have done the same thing with some sin that we're cherishing or some area of our lives that we won't hand over to God. So yah, we're getting by spiritually, but we're not close to Him. That pile of junk hinders our relationship.

Today, we need to offer that sin we've harbored or that reconciliation we've avoided – that pile of death, fruit to Him and ask for His strength and the power of the Holy Spirit to chip it away. God moved us to a new place! We need to embrace fully this new life and leave behind that old decaying life.

For some here who are not Christians, I hope your eyes have been opened today. Your picture of God might have included a wrathful deity who is just waiting to zap you. I hope you've seen maybe for the first time the Loving Father who gave His own Son to die so that you might move to this new life. You can experience that move by trusting in the one who died – Jesus Christ – as your Lord and Savior. Only in

and through Him will you move from a life ending in death and shame to a life moving to glory.

For many of us, it means stepping out of our comfort zones to what God has next for us. God did not move us so we could live comfortable middle class lives. He has entrusted us with all kinds of resources to share this gift with others. He calls us to bear fruit not be nice looking trees with leaves.

Embracing this new realm doesn't mean we settle down where we're comfortable. It means we get in line with where the Lord leads us. It means we reach forward to where He's calling us to go and grow.

That's what our Jericho Road focus is all about. We need to look out and around otherwise we might just settle down and slide back. If we move forward by looking around for those in need, we'll keep reaching forward to what God has for us next. But if we settle down thinking that we'll just stay where we're comfortable, we'll slide back and even begin thinking and living like our old life. We might even think as long as we just keep up externals like come to church occasionally or do our Christian duty, we'll be fine. No way. It's

moving forwards or backwards. It's bearing fruit or being cut off and thrown into the fire. Those are Jesus' words.

Yes, moving can be hard. But our move to a new place under Christ's reign is the best move that could ever happen to us. So as we enter 2010, will you embrace God's move in your life? Will we embrace God's move in our life as a church? We have been raised from spiritual death to life in order to bear fruit for God. Let us enter 2010 embracing the new life of the Spirit!