

Victory
Part 1: Victory over Condemnation
April 11th & 12th, 2015

Our Easter celebration last weekend was a joy to experience together with you! I want to offer a big 'thank you' to each of you who gave tirelessly, as you so often do, to care for every person who walks through our door. **Your investment in Harbor's ministry is what sets the stage for God to do great things in people's lives!**

And...one more 'thank you' to everyone who took seriously the call to invite your friends and neighbors! We pray that God stirred their hearts with the beauty of who He is and what He's done for us through Christ! ***Don't ever underestimate what God is able to do through a simple invitation...***

Now...as we move past another Easter weekend, there's an interesting dynamic that oftentimes takes place in our lives after big celebrations and if you're anything like me, it may have started last Sunday afternoon or Monday morning!

For many of us, we were moved and motivated by our celebration of Christ's death and resurrection; then we went home and ate egg salad and peeps! And somewhere between the peeps and your first conference call on Monday morning, the reality of Easter became eclipsed by the pressing realities of life!

Elise: For example, I woke up Monday morning to realize that Elise, our eight year-old, wasn't feeling well and needed to stay home from school. So, here's the contrast! On Sunday we were celebrating that Jesus is Lord and will one day put an end to sickness forever, but on Monday there was sickness!

And I'm going to guess that many of you experienced something similar!

On Sunday, we celebrated that Jesus is Lord over brokenness, and then we got into our cars and drove to our dysfunctional family party and were reminded that what Jesus reigns over we're stuck right in the middle of!

On Sunday, we celebrated Jesus willingness to die in order to rescue us from sin, but at some point during the week we said something that wounded someone we love! Or, we walked back into the same destructive habit that has been eating us alive for years...

We celebrated Jesus on Sunday, and yet it's very possible that we woke up on Monday to the same home, job, financial burdens, in-law issues, medical prognoses, bad habits, loneliness, fear or discouragement!

As a result, it can be difficult to reconcile what we celebrate in Easter with the circumstances of our lives, right!

Victory
Part 1: Victory over Condemnation
April 11th & 12th, 2015

For this reason, we want to spend the next four weeks resting in the finished work of Jesus Christ! You see, when we really understand what Jesus accomplished for us through his death and resurrection, life can be very, very good or very, very bad! We may be in the middle of joy-filled celebrations or pain-filled valleys. And yet, we can be sure that Jesus stands with us and has given us victory over the things our hearts fear most.

Today, I want to begin with what is one of the most foundational promises in all-of-the-Bible for Christians, and when we understand it and learn to trust it, this promise will bring security, joy, peace, and confidence into our lives like a rushing wave!

Look with me at Romans 8:1...

"So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus."

Romans 8:1

Now...each week we're going to try to memorize a verse of Scripture together, so can we read that out loud a few more times!

The word **Condemnation** is a strong word that means, *"to have a judgment against you."* Or, *"to be found guilty and sentenced to pay a debt."*

Excise Tax: Every year around this time, my city collects an excise tax for personal property, which goes to help keep our streets and bridges drivable. Last April, I received a statement with a 'demand for payment' issued by the Sheriff's office, which is as close as I've gotten to being arrested since high school. Tucked neatly in with my demand was a bill that included over one hundred dollars worth of late-penalties! So, I'm immediately on the phone with the city to let them know I never received the original bill and wanted to see if something could be done, to which they kindly explained that once the statements leave the post office, they are no longer the city's responsibility. To which I insisted they must be mistaken. I was eventually put in touch with the City Manager of Lowell! So, I'm calling him and getting voice mail, and he's returning my calls leaving me messages, and we just couldn't connect and I'm growing frustrated. In the meantime I was cleaning out our desk and found a stack of unopened bills dated back to January in which I discovered a copy of my original excise tax, and (even worse) a second copy of my excise tax with a first wave of fees! **I was guilty, and I had to pay...and pay...and pay...**

In the last few weeks, we've talked very honestly about the justice of God, and how each of us knows deep down that, at the end of the day, we deserve to pay (or answer) for our self-centeredness, self-righteousness, malicious attitudes, outbursts of anger, greed, gossip, lies, deception...

Back in chapter 1 of Romans, Paul writes...

"(We) know God's justice requires that those who do these things deserve to die, yet (we) do them anyway." Romans 1:32

He's saying, "Someone has to pay..."

And if you're saying, *"I don't know if someone has to pay,"* just turn the tables for a moment. We may not like the idea of being held accountable for our lives, but if someone is malicious toward you; if they tear apart your reputation; if they cut you apart with their words; if they lie or break a promise... what song do you sing?
"Someone needs to pay!"

Why is this? The Bible tells us that we were made in the image of God, who is a God of both mercy and justice. Made in his image, our hearts beat in rhythm with his heart, which explains why we value mercy and justice too!

So...while we can play that there is nothing in our lives deserving of justice, or we can try to hide parts of our lives like an envelope at the bottom of a stack of bills, but it doesn't change what is true...

In our quietest moments...regardless of whether we're Christians or not, we've all heard the haunting voice that says, *"I'm going to have to pay."* And at the same time, we think, *"I hope someone has mercy."*

And then, Paul comes around to chapter 8:1, and his first words are...read them out loud again!

"So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus."
Romans 8:1

In the Greek, the word "No" means "No. No more. Never will there be." No guilt to absolve. No judgment to serve. No debt to pay!

This is the beauty of what the Bible calls the gospel. God cares enough to tell us the truth that our hearts are distorted, wicked, and in need of repair. Yet, he loves us so completely that He has done for us in Christ what we could never do for ourselves by paying the penalty for our wrongdoing to bring us back into His arms!

As a result, we can live under the life-giving, joy-inducing, peace-providing promise that when we stand before God today and tomorrow...

There is NO CONDEMNATION!

Now...some of us are going to hear this and say, *"Jed, it's too good to be true!"* And then there are others (Christians) who have heard this promise so many times we've become inoculated to it, and don't live as if it is true! Let me give you two reasons why we have a difficult time believing this promise...one reason found in our culture and another in Scripture!

In our day and age, we understand that if we want to be accepted, we need to be attractive, educated, interesting, and successful...

The Beauty Bias: A couple of years ago, Ruth Graham, a columnist for the Boston Globe, wrote an article with the title, *"Who Will Fight the Beauty Bias?"* In it, she explained why life is good for beautiful people.

"Research over the past decades has found that attractive people earn more than their average-looking peers, are more likely to be given loans by banks, and are less likely to be convicted by a jury. Voters prefer better-looking candidates; students prefer better-looking professors, and teachers prefer better-looking students. Study after study has shown that we judge attractive people to be healthier, friendlier, more intelligent, and more competent than the rest of us, regardless of whether it is actually true!"

She goes on...

*"The galloping injustice of 'lookism' has not escaped psychologists, economists, sociologists, and legal scholars. Stanford law professor Deborah L. Rhode's book, **"The Beauty Bias,"** lamented "the injustice of appearance in life and law," while economist Daniel Hamermesh's **"Beauty Pays,"** traces the concrete benefits of attractiveness, including a \$230,000 lifetime earnings advantage over the unattractive."*

Graham concludes: "It's deep, unconscious, and surprisingly universal—beautiful people get a much better deal."

Now, if the research is true, then we are to some degree culturally conditioned to believe the same! If we want to be fully accepted, we need to look and act a certain way!

This message affects the way we see everything from our career to friendships to romance to our lifestyle. It also shapes the way we see God!

Many of us believe that God accepts those who are put together...who don't have tattered pasts or broken relationships and homes...who don't struggle with persistent sin, temptation, and inconsistency. People who are naturally kind, patient, and loving.

"There is no condemnation for the beautiful!"

But...the gospel contradicts the beauty bias because it says that in order to be a candidate for God's mercy, you must first recognize your ugliness! **Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in Spirit."** Blessed are those who recognize that they are spiritually impoverished, morally destitute, and completely undeserving of the kindness of God! They are the ones who get into the Kingdom!

I'll give you one more reason (from Scripture) why we have a hard time believing the promise that there is no condemnation if we belong to Jesus!

Down in verse 15, Paul writes...

*"So you have not received a spirit that makes you fearful slaves. Instead, you received God's Spirit when he **adopted** you as his own children. Now we call him, 'Abba, Father.'" Romans 8:15*

Adoption: In the Roman world, legal adoption was always a means to a brighter future for a child. Before adoption, a child vulnerable, impoverished, and had little hope for the future. However, the moment a child was adopted, she was given all of the privileges, provision, and protection of a natural child.

No other religion in history claims that God is so personal and accessible that He would adopt us as children and invite us into such a deep level of intimacy!

But we don't always see God as a warm, kind Heavenly Father, do we? And certainly, this might be because some of our earthly fathers have fractured our understanding of what a dad is supposed to be. But even those of us who have great relationships with our earthly fathers don't always relate to God this way, do we... **Why?**

Accuser: The Bible says that God's chief enemy, Satan, is our spiritual enemy as well, and it describes Satan as an accuser, father of lies, and as a thief who is constantly on the prowl looking for someone to devour.

One of Satan's greatest tactics is to keep you from believing what God says is true! As a result, the messages that play across the chords of our hearts are not always, *"You're my beloved, adopted child."* But instead...

God will never forgive my past!

I'll never be the husband or wife that my spouse deserves.

I'll always be an addict. Angry. Adulterer. Greedy.

I'll never do enough, obey enough, pray enough!

When we believe these lies, instead of living as **adopted children**, we live under a cloud of **accusation**. We live from a position of fear rather than one of freedom!

But the text says we have not received a spirit that makes us fearful slaves. Instead, when we came to Christ, God adopted us as his own children and gave us His Spirit. Now we call him, 'Abba, Father.'"

Lydia: Every day when I arrive home from work...Lydia is at the top of our stairs calling out, "Daddy...Daddy" and I sweep her up into my arms and together we do a dance."

This is the picture and the promise! Because of Jesus, we are invited to live in the protective embrace of our Heavenly Father!

Now, what shift must take place in our hearts, if we are going to believe this promise and live as if it's true? You've got to go back to Easter, the cross!

That's what Paul does... Look at verse 3...

"The law of Moses was unable to save us because of the weakness of our sinful nature.

Paul is simply saying that the Law (Old Testament) was never intended to be a rule you follow so that God will smile. In fact, Paul will go on to say that God gave us the law to show us how bad we really are. No matter how hard we try, we'll never follow the law perfectly! If you disagree...try obeying the law to a T this week...let me know how it goes!

*So God did what the law could not do. He sent his own Son in a body like the bodies we sinners have. And in that body God declared an end to sin's control over us by giving his Son as a sacrifice for our sins. He did this so that the **just requirement** of the law would be fully satisfied for us, who no longer follow our sinful nature but instead follow the Spirit." Romans 8:3-4*

In our last few minutes, I want to unpack a single truth from this text...If you hold on to this truth...and trust it...and ask God to take it deep into your heart, it will free you to live in victory over condemnation!

Truth (simple) – God gives us Victory over condemnation because Jesus was condemned!

Narnia – In C.S. Lewis' children's story, *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe*, Lewis places Edmund, the younger brother, at the center of the story as a rebel who makes an alliance with the White Witch and offers his brother and sisters in exchange for a royal throne. When the Witch confronts Aslan with Edmund's actions, Aslan, the King of Narnia, knows that law of the land says that a traitor must die. In the end, Aslan offers himself in Edmund's place. And as he's being stretched out on the stone table and run through with a knife, Lucy and Susan look on with horror and confusion not knowing why the mighty Lion didn't fight back! Later, Aslan explained...

"If the Witch knew the true meaning of sacrifice, she might have interpreted the deep magic differently. That when a willing victim who had committed no treachery is killed in a traitor's stead, the stone table would crack and even Death itself would turn backwards." C.S. Lewis

Aslan was condemned so that Edmund could go free!

Lewis is giving us a picture of the gospel! God has given us victory over condemnation because Jesus Christ was condemned in our place!

Martin Luther: In the 16th century, before he would go on to help lead the greatest reformation in all of history, Martin Luther spent most of his young adult years under the shadow of unbearable condemnation, terrified of the idea of a just God who punishes sin, and described God...

"As a wielder of thunderbolts who might at any moment strike down those who displeased Him...and consign to unspeakable tortures those who had failed to reach the required standard of behavior."

By God's mercy...Luther began to study the book of Romans and when he came to chapter three, his entire understanding of God was blown apart. There, Paul writes...

*"For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard. **Yet God, with undeserved kindness, declares that we are righteous.** He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sin. For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood..."* Romans 3:23-25a

When Luther read this, for the first time he came face to face with the true meaning of the cross!

Victory
Part 1: Victory over Condemnation
April 11th & 12th, 2015

Through Christ, we are made righteous (Forensic) - Made right. Declared innocent! Debt satisfied completely.

We deserve to pay for our sin.
But God gave us undeserved kindness!

We are guilty.
But through Christ, God declares we are innocent.

We were bound to our sin and deserving of death...
But Jesus was bound and nailed to a cross. He paid our debt in full so we don't have to!

Luther came to see that a Christian isn't someone who never sins! If you're a Christian, you know this is true! We are fully human, with real problems and real pain who even on our best days, fail to love God completely!

Instead, a Christian is someone who comes to the cross, acknowledging our sin, yet trusting in the finished work of Christ. There, we receive **the righteousness of God!**

There, we hear and experience what is true of all who belong to Jesus! "There is no condemnation!"

Have you ever heard those words? If not, go to God! Pray, "*Father, please accept me on the basis of Jesus' goodness not mine. I give my life to you.*"

Close

As we close, let me encourage you with a few ways to put this into action! If we're free from condemnation, on one hand we don't need to spend so much time trying to prove our importance through success, beauty, intelligence, and wealth! We're fully accepted by our Heavenly Father!

Some of us are exhausted trying to prove our significance and self-worth! If that's you, come to the cross and find true self-worth!

Then, if we're free from condemnation, we're freed to joyfully love and serve God! We're freed to offer our lives to Him. Our relationships. Our character. Our time. Our work. Our marriage. Our money. Our future.

The reason we have a difficult time trusting God and obeying Him is that we don't fully believe or understand the price Jesus paid to free us! When you see Christ

Victory
Part 1: Victory over Condemnation
April 11th & 12th, 2015

offering his life for your freedom, the only fitting response is to offer your life to Him!

Confession – Finally, when we do sin, we confess our sin joyfully and freely, not to earn God's forgiveness, but to open our arms to the forgiveness Jesus earned for us!

Confession is a holy habit whereby we're reminded that there is no condemnation...

Communion – this is what we do each time we come to the table! Celebration of Jesus' death, confession of sin, surrender of our lives...

We're reminded that there is no condemnation...

Meditate on this truth...let it saturate your heart until it leads you toward joyful obedience!