

¹ There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. ² For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. ³ 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, ⁴ 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. ⁵ For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. ⁶ For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷ For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. ⁸ Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

⁹ You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. ¹⁰ But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. ¹¹ If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

²⁸ And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰ And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

³¹ What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? ³³ Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? ³⁶ As it is written,

“For your sake we are being killed all the day long;
we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.”

³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ 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. (ESV)

It was the poet Robert Burns who came up with the phrase "the best laid plans of mice and men often go astray." Burns was not just a poet, but a farmer, too. And late one November he was out turning over the soil to prepare it for planting the next spring when he ploughed right through a mouse's nest out under the corn stalks in the hard dirt field. He was upset enough about this that he shut his work down for the day to think and to write. And you know what he means: *he* had plans, and the mouse had *his* plans, but no matter what you do, man or mouse, plans go astray.

Ferdinand Porsche, the designer of the original Volkswagen automobile, hit a glitch in his plans when he was ordered by Hitler in 1944 to design an invincible, monster tank. It was to be 50 feet long with a larger caliber gun than any rival, but at the same time have armor plating so thick that it could withstand a direct hit by another tank. It also had to be watertight, so it could be driven across rivers while totally submerged, and it had to be fast, powered by a 1500 horsepower engine.

Porsche loved this challenge and thought that his creation would prove forever his engineering expertise. The only trouble was, when they built the prototype, it weighed 180 tons and ruined every road they drove it on, and when it tried to go cross-country it inevitably finished buried up to its gun barrel in mud.

Now I'm part German, so I can say this, but Germans aren't well known for their humor. But even in late 1944, with allied bombs on the way, the Germans had enough humor to code-name this vehicle "the Mouse." The plan was for a "monster," but in spite of all the hard work, it was nothing but a "mouse." Not a good name for a tank. Herr Porsche should have remembered that the best-laid plans of mice *and* men often go astray!¹

Chapter 8 of Romans outlines a plan that will *not* go astray. In spite of man – or even mice – this plan will not, and cannot, be altered! And the reason is precisely because it is a plan that is *not* laid down by men or by mice, but by God himself. It is His Master Plan.

We want to re-cap this plan this morning as we move into the next great section of this letter, by looking at

- God's Master Plan as laid out in the past (the part of God's plan already accomplished)
- His Master Plan in the Present (the way we experience the working out of His plan in the present), and
- His Master Plan in the Future (what His plan holds out by way of hope in the days to come).

It is an awfully good thing that this plan is not designed or executed by humanity. Because there is a tension in the human heart – a pressure in the human heart – whose power is never released. A seeking after greatness and glory, and yet the knowledge of its impossibility.

This week there has been a lot of discussion about Steve Jobs, who died of pancreatic cancer on Wednesday – his contribution to culture. And while he is recognized by many as a Henry Ford or Walt Disney of his day – one tweet I saw said he was the Einstein of his day – he was a very secretive man. He was working on a biography with Walter Isaacson this last year, but until that comes out, the most we have on his approach to life or his personal philosophy is from a commencement speech he gave at Berkeley in 2005.

In this address to the students, Jobs said this:

¹ Illustration from R. Clements.

"Your time is limited, so don't waste it living someone else's life. Don't be trapped by dogma which is living with the results of *other* people's thinking. Don't let the noise of *others'* opinions drown out your *own* inner voice. And most important, have the courage to follow your heart and intuition. They somehow already know what you truly want to become."

But in this very same speech, he revealed one of his primary motivations, a foundational voice:

"When I was 17, I read a quote that went something like: "If you live each day as if it was your last, someday you'll most certainly be right." It made an impression on me, and since then, for the past 33 years, I have looked in the mirror every morning and asked myself: "If today were the last day of my life, would I *want* to do what I am *about* to do today?" And whenever the answer has been "No" for too many days in a row, I know I need to change something.

"About a year ago I was diagnosed with cancer. I had a scan at 7:30 in the morning, and it clearly showed a tumor on my pancreas. I didn't even know what a pancreas was. The doctors told me this was almost certainly a type of cancer that is incurable, and that I should expect to live no longer than three to six months. My doctor advised me to go home and get my affairs in order, which is doctor's code for prepare to die. It means to try to tell your kids everything you thought you'd have the next 10 years to tell them in just a few months. It means to make sure everything is buttoned up so that it will be as easy as possible for your family. It means to say your goodbyes.

"Remembering that I'll be dead soon is the most important tool I've ever encountered to help me make the big choices in life. Because almost everything, all external expectations, all pride, all fear of embarrassment or failure - these things just fall away in the face of death, leaving only what is truly important. Remembering that you are going to die is the best way I know to avoid the trap of thinking you have something to lose. You are already naked. There is no reason not to follow your heart."

Now, I find that fascinating, because Jobs speaks of a kind of fear. He looked for something to overcome the dread of fear, embarrassment of failure, and that feeling that he had something to lose. He wanted something to help him overcome the self-condemnation – a restless, self-condemning heart – that he hadn't achieved, hadn't accomplished what he should have. Obviously, I didn't quote the entire speech, but if I did, you'd sense the guilt and self-accusation for not achieving, not accomplishing everything he wanted.

It's interesting, too, that in a culture where morality is devalued, and there is a ready acceptance that there is no one set of morals or values, we replace these, like Jobs, with our own set of rules. Rules of accomplishment, laws of appearance, standards of behavior. "This is what I must do. This is who I must be. Now, let's set aside that Jobs – and really, a LOT of us – judges himself on performance and achievement instead of morality. There is *STILL* a law – there is still something, some standard that hangs over us – that condemns us when we look in that mirror every morning.

Now most of us get out from under this pressure – these voices of self-condemnation – by *devaluing* norms, *low-balling* standards of morality, *tolerating* ever-widening patterns of behavior.

Another way that people quiet that voice of self condemnation is to assume that, no matter what they do, it's very easy for God to forgive. Everyone knows that the Bible says a forgiving spirit is a virtue. So surely we can depend on God's demonstration of such leniency and tolerance himself. Catherine the Great once said, "Of course God will forgive me. That's his business."

But it's not that simple. And the reason for that is tied up in the phrase you find in Romans 8:4, "the righteous requirement of the law." It is upon *God's* righteousness that all moral values in the universe depend.

Just take love as an example. Everybody agrees that love is better than hate. But why? Our personal opinion on the matter can't make anyone else see as we do – the only verdict which can turn love from being a human preference into a moral imperative *is the verdict of God*. It is because **He** is love that love is an absolute by definition, irrespective of whether we agree or not.

In fact, it's His will and character which define all moral values. If God did not have a moral character, there would be no morality in the universe except that which we invent for ourselves for our own convenience.

Friends, God cannot treat sin lightly. If he were to overlook sin, no matter how minor it might be, it would imply that right and wrong did not matter to Him after all. We can overlook it because the righteousness of the universe doesn't hinge on our moral consistency. But He can't. It is absolutely necessary for the preservation of moral order in His universe that His righteousness be undeniably demonstrated. And that means He must distance himself personally from every form of evil. He must take a dear stand against it. If He did not, the very meaning of the word "righteousness" would be undermined.

So, to have a world where we can even choose what is good, and great, and beautiful and true, we need a standard, the law, and we need the one who gives it.

But that leaves us condemned.

Some of us use that condemnation as goad, a driving force, a power or even an anger. Jobs, you heard him say, used death this way: "**that I'll be dead soon is the most important tool I've ever encountered to help me make the big choices in life.**" He went on to say to the Stanford graduates:

"... death is the destination we all share. No one has ever escaped it. And that is as it should be, because Death is very likely the single best invention of Life. It is Life's change agent. It clears out the old to make way for the new. Right now the new is you, but someday not too long from now, you will gradually become the old and be cleared away. Sorry to be so dramatic, but it is quite true."

What I find interesting is that Jobs used death to drive him forward. But when death actually comes, it is to no advantage at all. The very thing you used to inspire you is the thing that condemns you – it's like the Queen in *Sleeping Beauty* who uses the mirror on the wall to inspire and motivate her rule, but it is the very thing that threatens, condemns and ultimately kills her.

Friends the very things that worried or motivated Steve Jobs – the self-condemning law that asked, "Am I happy? Am I doing what I want? Am I successful?" and the death that motivated him to go on every day but which kills – is the very thing that Jesus Christ came to solve.

There is therefore ***now no condemnation*** for those who are ***in Christ Jesus***. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free ***in Christ Jesus*** from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do...

Condemnation... is *done* for the Christian. Look that word, "therefore" seems to connect back to chapter 5, v. 16, where Paul says, "the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin (that one man, being Adam). For the judgment following ***one*** trespass ***brought condemnation***, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification."

There it is. There are only two types of people in the world. The condemned, and the justified. All divisions between race, status, nationality, tribe, social status, success – those things are meaningless. At one time this Master Plan was hidden, but now it's been revealed. Look at v. 18: "Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men." So that in Romans 8, Paul says, this is it! **IN JESUS**, you are free from those two great killers – even if you can use them to motivate yourself for a little while – those killers of sin and death. And in the end, without Jesus, they win and you lose.

Given the fact, the bible says, that all have sinned and all fall short of the glory of God, and that God himself is holy and righteous... how is it that God can be true to Himself, and yet find the sinner in a right relationship with Him? How is it possible for God who is just to justify the sinner?

That is the Master's Plan! And it was executed perfectly when the one who is perfect was executed *for us*. God found a way to maintain His integrity and be true to himself and yet justify the sinner at the same time, so that this morning, in this sanctuary, sinners like you and me can say and sing – there is no condemnation. Our sins that once condemned have been removed as far as East is from West. They are buried in the sea of God's forgetfulness. "No condemnation now I dread..." The darkest, blackest, sins, are covered, such that we are in this glorious place of righteousness. It's done, past tense. Even if the good that I would do I do not, and the evil that I would not... that I find that I do. Because Jesus has delivered you from that verdict.

- **But now, what about today? What about the present? What is it about this Master Plan that helps me today?**

Some of us, in our daily lives, have a hard time grasping in the midst of struggles and difficulties, precisely *how* Christ's death on a cross 2,000 years ago is connected with our lives today.

Some of us think of the cross and we feel conscience-stricken about our sin. And we get off the mat and determine to put our lives back in order again. We think, "I'll try and do better today, Lord." So that the death of Jesus becomes a kind of model of love that moves us to be better people. Now, of course, there is an element of truth in that. The cross is a powerful emotional symbol. Many people have been intensely moved and changed by its dramatic power.

But if that is all the cross is about then all it really is, is the worst kind of moral blackmail. It puts the cross in the same category as a hunger strike: an action which achieves nothing except to embarrass those who have to watch it. But more than that, this interpretation of the cross is fundamentally irrational.

Think for a moment. Imagine a boy and a girl having an argument. The girl says the boy *doesn't* love her. The boy insists he *does* love her. "All right," he says, "to prove that I love you, I will go and throw myself off a cliff."

Does that make any sense? For a death to prove love, the loved one must benefit in some way from the death. If the girl were drowning, say, and the guy races into the water at the risk of his life to save her, and dies in the attempt, I can see that that *might* show how much he loved her. But there's no love in giving your life up for nothing.

The trouble with these theories where the cross is merely an influence or an example is that Christ's death has no direct benefit. Jesus' death is a meaningless gesture.

If that's the case, you could argue that he would have had much more influence and been a much better example if he had stayed alive!

And by the way, if you did still try to work each day to be a good person so that you could please God, and to avoid fear of punishment or to get reward, then you're **STILL** under what Paul calls here, the law of sin and death. Your good works are simply *extorted* by the law. You're like Cain!

You know, when I was a kid, we would look at verses like v. 5:

"For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit..." and we would be taught, "Now make sure you focus on the things of the Spirit **SO THAT YOU** will be Spirit filled." It was about me and what I needed to accomplish. I needed to imitate Jesus. But no, look at v. 9:

"You, however, *are not in the flesh but in the Spirit*, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you." It's not if I'm achieving victory, or mastery, or following certain principles... No the Spirit of God DOES control me because His death REALLY did something. Living by the Spirit is *knowing* that Christ's death really accomplished something. You really are a fundamentally different person now that you are IN Christ. You see this prepositional phrase over and over in Paul and you see it right here in verses 1 and 2, and throughout the passage – "in Christ," "through Christ," or "if Christ is in you."

What's Paul's point? The cross was really meant for you.

You and me – *we* are the ones guilty of high crimes. We are the ones who want to go our own way, want to be like God or as God or pretend there is no God when we're doing that which we know we shouldn't do, but do it anyway. But today, right now, in this moment, there is now *no condemnation*. Christ stood on the cross for you, and imputes – he exchanges and credits his righteousness to you and took your sin to the cross. That was His Plan. This is the Master's Plan.

The cross, then, is not blackmail; nor is it irrational. The cross is the place where God makes forgiveness possible. The cross enables him to be "just and yet the justifier" of people who believe in Jesus. Because of the cross, and only because of the cross, you and I can go free. "There is now no condemnation." By means of the cross a new principle has been unleashed in the universe; not the principle of moral weakness which all of us have, and which renders righteousness impossible, and therefore condemns all of us. And not the law of sin and death. No, this new principle Paul calls 'the law of the Spirit of life', because it has the power to emancipate us from our former wretchedness. We are acquitted; we are "justified." It is just as if we had never sinned.

- **Now finally, and briefly, the Masters Plan for the future: Of what hope is the cross, looking forward?**

When I was halfway through preparing this message, Jeremy Chen sent me a link to Andy Crouch's analysis of Steve Job's speech. And Crouch, a Christian and a cultural critic, said this about Job's view, that you must not waste your time "living someone else's life. Don't be trapped by dogma, which is living with the results of other people's thinking. Don't let the noise of others' opinions drown out your own inner voice, heart and intuition. They somehow already know what you truly want to become."

Here's what he says:

"This is the gospel of a secular age. It has the great virtue of being based only on what we can all perceive—it requires neither revelation nor dogma. And it promises nothing it cannot deliver—since all that is promised is the opportunity to live your own unique life, a hope that is manifestly realizable since it is offered by one who has so spectacularly succeeded by following his own "inner voice, heart and intuition."

"Jobs was by no means the first person to articulate this vision of a meaningful life—Socrates, the Buddha, and Emerson come to mind. To be sure, fully embracing this secular gospel requires an austerity of spirit that few have been able to muster, even if it sounds quite fine on the lawn of Stanford University. Upon close inspection (though), this gospel offers no hope that you cannot generate yourself, and only the comfort of having been true to yourself. In the face of tragedy and evil it is strangely inert."

What is his point? This last week, we heard that the death of Steve Jobs WAS a tragedy. His death IS wrong. And those assessments are true. But the very answer that Jobs gives us for overcoming troubles in our lives – "being yourself" – cannot overcome tragedy and evil. Sin and death. Sin and death IS the spirit of this age.

Friends, from v. 28 until the end, in verse 31, Paul says this great plan cannot fail because it can suffer no unforeseen accidents: "*All things* work together for good, for those who are called *according to his purpose*." One of the reasons our plans are so prone to failure is that we cannot read the future. And even if we could read the future, we would still have little ability to change it. But God has no such limitations. When he makes a plan, there are no loose ends. No risks, no surprises, no trusting to luck. No, every detail of the process has been ordered by a sovereign providence to the single goal of achieving his purpose. Nothing can frustrate it.

There are no weak links in its strategy: The five verbs in the great Master plan of verse 29 tell us that God was determined to adopt a company of fallen men and women as his own children, to transform them into his own divine image, and to share glory with them.

And who is the subject of each of those verbs: God every time. Not one of these five links is contingent upon human actions that might go wrong. Every one of them represents a divine action that *must* go right. And the tense of each of those verbs ... every one of them is in the past tense, even the last one: "those he justified, he also glorified."

And even if you're tempted to say, "We aren't glorified yet. We're still immersed in this sin-sick, suffering world of ours. Even you admit it, Paul, Don't you mean to say is, "those he justified, he *will* also glorify?"

But no, there is no mistake in his grammar or God's plan. When a sovereign as powerful as God is determined to do something, then the moment the decision is made it is as good as done. Our glorification, is never in doubt. There is no Plan B – and no need of a Plan B.

It may be a hope, but it is a *sure* hope, just as strong and reliable a link in the chain of God's purpose as all the others, even though it has not yet happened. There is no power in the entire universe that can obstruct this plan.

Let's pray.