

Sermon preached by Pastor Ben Kuerth on April 3rd on Romans 8:1-4 at Victory of the Lamb.

Series: Greatness

Today's Focus: Great Peace

“In Christ, You Can Have a Clear Conscience.”

It's good to be here with you today. I got to spend the week down in San Antonio with my wife celebrating 10 years of ministry, 10 years of being a pastor with my fellow classmates and friends I went to school with. One of the presenters at the retreat in a breakout session shared a story that this past year on an airplane he got to sit next to Adrian Peterson. My friend had his Bible open and was reading it. And Adrian noticed that it was covered with handwriting. He said to my friend, “It's ok to do that?” So this led to a pretty neat conversation about the Bible, and how it's ok to write in the Bible because the words and promises of God aren't just for people who lived a long time ago. They apply also to us today so there are all kinds of good reasons to write in our Bibles and to highlight particular verses. But how many of you have ever felt like that?

Now maybe you've never had a Bible before. And if not, that's ok. If not, today we'll actually give you one. But I admit I used to think this way too. When I was in 8th grade I got a really nice Bible with a leather cover, felt nice, smelled nice. But I would barely even touch it. A sacred book after all. One time in high school though I actually opened it and started reading. My conscience was bothering me, I was struggling with some things, and I knew I was supposed to find some comfort in the Bible. So I opened to the book of Romans which was recommended to me. I started reading.

And when I got to Romans 8 I thought, “This is absolutely awesome!” So I took out a yellow highlighter, reread the chapter, and as I did...I highlighted the whole thing. I broke the ice on writing in my Bible. And even though the yellow highlighter is faded now in my Bible, Romans 8 remains a go-to chapter. What's yours? Do you have a go-to place in the Bible where you can find the promises of God and pray them back to God for his blessings in your life? My goal with this series is that Romans 8 will become such a place for you. Romans 8 is a great chapter of the Bible because it's full of great promises of God, promises for you, promises that I want to teach you to pray back to God so that you can experience his blessings in your life. And today I want to help you see that **In Christ, You Can Have a Clear Conscience.**

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,² because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.

³ For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

Did you find an incredible promise of God in these verses? There's a couple, but the big one comes right off the bat there in the first verse. It's a promise that has the God inspired potential to give you great peace. *Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*

Now that sounds pretty amazing, doesn't it? But to understand this, you need to understand a deep theological truth. You ready for it? Romans chapter 8 comes after Romans chapter 7. That's pretty deep, isn't it? But you see context is important.

Verse 1 of Romans chapter 8 didn't pop up out of nowhere. It comes on the heels on Romans chapter 7. You have to understand this because *Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus* sounds pretty great by itself but it doesn't mean nearly as much unless you understand Romans chapter 7—the verses that come immediately before this. So let's listen to some of those verses and see if you can put yourself in the shoes of the speaker...

Romans 7:18-24 *18 I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. 19 For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do-- this I keep on doing. 20 Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. 21 So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. 22 For in my inner being I delight in God's law; 23 but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. 24 What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?*

Yikes, that's a pretty harsh self-assessment, isn't it? But do you ever feel this way? Do you ever have the best of intentions to do what is right and good and helpful or loving but then fall short of them or fail to follow through with them? Are there certain sins, even though you know that you struggle with, yet you fall into them again and again instead of doing what you resolved to do the next time you were faced with that trigger or that temptation? And how does this sometimes make you feel? Does it bother your conscience? Torment you? Keep you up at night?

You resolved to be a calmer, more patient person... but you snapped at your kids. Again. Does your conscience ever condemn you? Do you ever hear a little internal voice that says, "You're such a failure as a parent"? You resolved to try harder to show your spouse love in ways that they will receive as loving only to end up in yet another argument about something so silly you'd laugh about it on a TV sitcom if it weren't so seriously damaging to your marriage. Do you ever hear a little internal voice that says, "You're such a worthless piece of garbage. This just goes to show you that you're not even worthy of love"?

Or have you ever resolved to break free from a harmful pattern of behavior or an addiction...or resolved to make better choices...or maybe even to go to church more, start reading the Bible, perhaps even pray...but find yourself falling short? Have you ever resolved to just try harder the next time, telling yourself, "Come on, you can better than that!" but find instead that the harder you try the bigger your failures seem to become?

Friends, me too. There is so much good I want to do...and not just as a pastor, but in my other roles like as a husband. Or in my role as a father. In my role as a friend and a next door neighbor. I want to be more diligent having personal devotions and praying through prayer request cards and reading my Bible not because it's my professional tool like a plumber's wrench but because my Savior God wants to spend time with me. I want to be a great pastor, a great husband, a great dad, a great son, a great friend, and a great neighbor. I have the desire to do what is good and pleasing to God.

But here's the problem. Here's what our friend in the Bible says, and you'll have to decide for yourself whether this is true in your life too, ok? *For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.*¹⁹ *For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing.* You know who's saying this? A guy named Paul. The Apostle Paul. Ever hear of him? Converted by Jesus Christ himself. He preached the gospel to thousands. He also suffered so much for the sake of Jesus and the cause of His church. So, humanly speaking, Paul's the man. We're talking like 1st team All-Time Missionary. Hall of Fame Pastor. Author of sacred Scriptures. And this isn't like Paul the frat boy talking here either. This is Paul the veteran missionary. This is mature Christian Paul. Whoah, huh.

One of the things we learn is that it is a sign of spiritual maturity to recognize and own up to your mistakes and your weaknesses and your sins. It is not weakness to confess your sins and your struggles. So friends, if there's something in your life you've been stuffing down and trying to keep secret, and it's been eating at you for far too long, friends today I want you to know that it's ok to confess it today before God, to say "I'm sorry God", because there is a way to have a clear conscience without ignoring that sin or letting your conscience become calloused to it. If you're like Paul who comes to the conclusion as he compares his life to the ten

commandments of God, “What a wretched man I am!” then here’s the promise that can quiet your conscience. *Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*

Wow! Did you hear that? *No condemnation.* What is condemnation? It’s the verdict of Guilty that you and I would rightly fear God would have to pronounce upon us on the Last Day. It’s judgment and punishment and hell itself. But it’s also the criticism of colleagues and classmates or family members and friends, isn’t it? It’s the trail of regret we feel from relationships that ended badly when harsh words were exchanged. It’s the feelings of failure that we experience when our own consciences testify against us for that sin we’ve fallen into yet again.

Yet friends, when all we see is reason for great despair, then we are ready to discover instead great peace. *Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.* What does this mean?

It means if you’re “in Christ Jesus” everything good that God’s law says we must do, all its “righteous requirements”, we can legitimately say that we have done through our Lord Jesus Christ! Why? Because as a human being like us, Jesus was tempted in every way that we are, yet he was without sin. As the sinless Son of God, Jesus went to the cross, and he overcame with perfect obedience to his heavenly Father. He took on the devil’s temptation to give in or to give up, but he pressed on. He took on the jeers of the crowds and the temptations to come down from the cross, but he hung on until with his very last breath he cried out, “It is finished!”

Romans 8 teaches us this incredible truth: You lack any condemnation because Jesus was fully condemned in your place. That’s what Good Friday was all about. On the cross Jesus the sinless one took all the guilt of all the sins and of all the world, including yours, upon himself and there he took it all away. And the empty tomb on Easter Sunday was God’s declaration that your guilt is forever gone. And therefore...so is any condemnation. In Christ, you can have a clear conscience because there is no condemnation. Your sin was already condemned in Christ.

What does it mean to be “in Christ Jesus”? It means to trust in what Jesus has done, not your ability to undo the sins you’ve done. It means to trust that you don’t have to try to find your way into God’s peace nor could you ever do so on your own but through Jesus you already are at peace with God.

“In Christ Jesus”, think of it like this. It’s like living in a house where the ceiling and the walls and the floor are all grace—God’s undeserved love. Though there are rules there is great freedom in this house and so long as you live inside this house of grace you live in a state of constant forgiveness. And so this doesn’t mean you don’t stumble and fall into sin or trip and stub your toe once in a while but so long as you’re in this house of grace you’re safe and secure even

when you do. This is what it means to be “in Christ Jesus.” In Christ, living in this house of grace by faith, you can have a clear conscience.

Let me just close by saying this is why you don’t have to fear going to hell if you die committing a sin of weakness. I had that thought yesterday actually when I had just powered down my laptop on the plane back from San Antonio and we made a very turbulent descent into O’hare. “What would happen if I died thinking a curse word?” Well the truth is that’s not something you or I need to vex ourselves worrying about. God does not want us to live in a constant state of uncertainty but rather confidence and faith. So when the devil tries to lead you to great despair, instead open your Bible to Romans chapter 8 where you will instead find great peace. Pray the promise back to God because in Christ Jesus, you can have a clear conscience.

Let’s do that now...let’s pray God’s promise back to him... Amen.

Take Home and Apply

Think: Your lack of any condemnation is because Jesus was fully condemned in your place.

Share: *“For whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything”* (1 John 3:20 ESV).

Challenge: When you’re troubled and need assurance, whose evaluation of your spiritual status do you have to take? God’s! You can have a good conscience when you realize that your guilt is gone for Christ’s sake. This is also the assurance you receive when you remember your baptism when you were clothed with Christ’s righteousness.