

# Who's in Charge?

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, thank you very much, Stephanie, for that lovely reading. Great to hear the passage read like that. I know at my house group last week we were commenting on Thane's reading of the passage the week before, which was really beautiful, so we're getting a high standard set for us.

Now, I stand before you this morning, very pleased to be here, pleased to have the opportunity to take a few minutes as we look at Romans chapter 8, but also feeling pretty inadequate, if truth be told.

So, last week, let's have a show of hands. Who was here last Sunday? Okay, quite a lot. Quite a lot weren't, which is quite interesting. We had Ewan Dodds giving us, I think, a really masterful exposition of Romans 7.

He had put a huge amount of work into it. He had even consulted with Pauline theologians who had PhDs in these passages, right, in order to make sure that the exposition was really careful.

Next week we have Wayne Sutton, the senior pastor at Corubbers, who also has devoted his life to studying all of this. And sandwiched in between, you've got me.

[ 1 : 07 ] So, sorry, there's no degrees or PhDs in theology. I haven't even found somebody with a PhD who I could consult to be able to speak to you. But all I have been doing is reflecting quite carefully on what are incredibly rich verses throughout the last couple of weeks and just trying to let them sink into my own heart and soul.

And, of course, reading a bit, but also just praying that God would make something here really real to me so that I've got something to share with you this morning. And I think you could probably look at this and study it for a week or two and come up with about 50 different sermons, to be honest.

Such is the depth and complexity to it. So, here goes. Here's my attempt at making, at just sharing what this has meant to me as I've studied it.

And the title, if you want a title, is this question. Who is in charge? Who's in charge? Now, we could look at that in terms of the nation. I do, of course, have a picture there of number 10 Downing Street.

And it's a question which many are asking. Who's in charge? Has Theresa May really been in charge over these last weeks and months? Well, maybe, maybe not. And we now, of course, have a battle going on for who is going to be in charge.

[ 2 : 24 ] Who is going to be having those keys? Do they have keys? The door just seems to open, doesn't it? Who is going to have the door open as they turn up to number 10 Downing Street in a few weeks' time?

The battle is raging, isn't it, for control? Maybe some of you, are some of you backing Boris? Or we don't like to be too political this morning at Brunsfield. Maybe you've got your other favourites.

Maybe you're not too sure. Maybe you're switched off altogether with this whole battle. But I want to present to you, as we look at Romans 8, a different battle that is raging for control.

Control this time in our lives. Because time and again, and please have the passage and make sure you agree with me or feel free to disagree with me. But it seems that time and again we've got a battle between what's described variously as sin, the flesh, death.

Lots of different words used for it. All seeking to have dominance and control. And on the other hand, we've got so much that is said about God.

[ 3 : 28 ] God the Father, God the Son, Jesus Christ, and God the Holy Spirit. Indeed, 17 references in these verses to the Holy Spirit.

And it seems that God is appearing to us in this passage. Father, Son, Holy Spirit. Moving and inviting us to allow Him to be in charge in our lives.

And telling us something about what life will be like if we really allow God to be in charge. But yet isn't it the case that as we look in our own hearts and lives, we know the reality of this battle.

Particularly those of us who would describe ourselves as Christians. Those perhaps who have been coming to this church for some time or other churches or seeking to follow God. And we recognise that for all that we have come to understand something we believe about God.

Powerful forces still seem to be at work. That cause what's in these verses about sin and flesh and death to still have an influence in our lives.

[ 4 : 41 ] And we saw that particularly last week as we looked at what Paul was saying about the struggle with sin in Romans chapter 7. Well, there was a little passage I came across in Tim Keller's book, Counterfeit Gods, that I'd like to share with you before we go any further.

A great book, and it's a book about how the promises of money, love and power have so much appeal but yet let us down. And he says this, the human heart is a factory that mass produces idols.

Idols can never really be removed, they can only be replaced. If you try to simply uproot them, they grow back, but they can be supplanted.

What we need is a living encounter with God in order for them to be supplanted. Jesus must become more beautiful to your imagination, more attractive to your heart than your idols.

If you uproot the idol and fail to plant the love of God in its place, the idol will simply grow back. Now those are pretty profound words that might take us a while to get our head around.

[ 6 : 05 ] But if I can make it a bit more straightforward, I want you to think of a garden. And I want you to think of a garden, perhaps if it's anything like the patches of garden that I have, then the one thing that seems to grow very, very easily are lots and lots of weeds.

And what I think Tim Keller is saying there is, it's not enough just to be trying to uproot the weeds. Because the reality is, we'll soon find in those patches of grounds, other weeds are going to grow in the place.

What we have to be focusing on is planting. Planting things that will take the place of those weeds and that will cause the garden to flourish. And what I'm going to invite us all to do is perhaps to take some of the seeds, seeds which are in Romans chapter 8 verse 1 to 17.

Seeds of truth, of great transformational truth about God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. I'm going to invite you to take these seeds and to plant them in your life.

And we're going to focus more on the seeds of truth about God than we're going to focus on the weeds of sin, flesh, devil and all of the other idols which we may feel are taking place in our life.

[ 7 : 15 ] And I'm just going to invite you to perhaps focus on these seeds. And I hope some of them will be really precious. Maybe some you'll take and you'll want to just really cultivate in your life.

Because you know that you need these seeds to grow and flourish so that God can really take his proper place in your life. And may that be the case as we just try to explore this a little bit further.

So I've got three seeds to offer you which I think tell us something amazing, something really true, something really vital about God. First of all, God the Father.

I'm going to turn to verse 3 where it says this, 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 my first seed for you this morning is that God is an active God. God is somebody who is moving towards us in love. God is not someone in Romans 8 who is passive, who is simply waiting to see how we will respond.

[ 8 : 23 ] But God is always moving and reaching out towards us. And in verse 3 did so in the most ultimate way, by reaching out to us to send his son in the likeness of sinful flesh in order to die for us.

Are we seeing God as someone who in Christ reached towards us in love and still through the work of the Holy Spirit is reaching out towards us today?

Maybe there's a seed there. The God who is active, the God who is not disinterested, the God who is reaching out towards each of us in love today.

But another truth about us and God is there in verse 7. And I'm going to point you to that today where it says, verse 7, the mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God.

It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. And verse 8, those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God.

[ 9 : 32 ] And the reality about God that we're exposed to here is that just left to ourselves and our own devices, we will turn away from God and from all that God wants for us.

And I wonder if we just need to take that truth again and remind our hearts and our souls that naturally left to our own devices, we do not as humans get better and better and better and more advanced and life does not, in the terms of this passage, get better.

But rather left to our own devices, we are in rebellion against this God who is reaching out towards us in love. We are consciously, actively turning aside from him, turning away from him and going our own direction.

And I wonder if we pause this morning and we allow these words, verse 8, those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God.

And if we need to acknowledge and confess and perhaps repent of the fact that our attitude towards God has been one of turning away from him.

[ 10 : 48 ] Today is, of course, Happy Father's Day. Happy Father's Day to all of the dads here. I certainly got some lovely gifts this morning. I hope some of you are not looking around and suddenly realizing that you'd entirely forgotten to look after your own dads.

Well, there's still plenty of time to write that for those of you who need to wish someone a Happy Father's Day. But the other wonderful truth about God here, and you'll see it in verse 14, and in many of the other verses towards the end, is that God has children.

Verse 14, those who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. And the wonderful truth that God invites us, it's there in verse 15, to approach him and to cry to him, Abba, Father.

This simple cry out to, in need, but in trust, to one who knows us so well. The invitation of God this morning.

The God, the Father God, who is moving towards us. The Father God, who naturally we are moving away from. And yet the God who invites us to approach him. The God who invites us to be part of his family, to share in his inheritance, and to call him Father.

[ 12 : 10 ] There are just a few seeds of truth about God the Father that you might want to take and plant deeply into your own life this morning, in place of the weeds that may be so prevalent and that will crop up if we allow them to.

I've got four truths for you now. Four seeds about Jesus that I see in this passage. Jesus Christ, our Lord, which I want to offer to you and see if you can really take them and if they are helpful to you.

And first of all, in verse 11, we are reminded of the truth. It says, If the spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his spirit who lives in you.

Now reality, in that one little verse, we've got truths about what God the Father is doing, what the Holy Spirit is doing, and we've got a great truth in the middle of it about what Jesus, what has happened with Jesus Christ, and that is that he has been raised from the dead.

And the word that is repeated a lot in this passage is the word life. And just as Jesus was given newness of life, so the promise that comes to us time and time again here is that the reality, if we are to live the life that God wants, then that is what we will experience too.

[ 13 : 41 ] That new life that Jesus had is in some ways like the new life that we will be able to experience. Why on earth have I just put up a picture now of a sports car?

You may ask. Well, I'm keen to get your attention here as we think of three other truths that we are, that we're encountered, that we're invited to reflect on here about Jesus Christ.

The first truth is that it is possible to experience life in Christ. Verse 1, Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

And verse 10, If Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness.

So we can know the truth of being in Christ and having Christ in us. Just reflect a little on the closeness, on the intimacy involved in that image.

[ 14 : 50 ] And I can't really think of an image that is in any way good enough to even come close to describing it. But I was spending some time this week sitting in my car.

The kids were having an incredibly long haircut and I decided I wasn't waiting there any longer. And indeed, I was going to give a little bit of thought to what I wanted to share with you today while sitting in my car.

And it struck me that as I was in the car, I was completely enclosed by that car. The doors were shut, the windows were up, and this doesn't seem a particularly profound truth, but I was in the car.

Yeah? But also that within that car there was so much that could be done that I would not be able to do myself. By simply pressing the button, putting my foot on the accelerator, and trying my best to pay attention to the surroundings and the rules of the road, I would be able to get places at a speed that would be utterly impossible if I wasn't actually in the car and driving in the car.

You see where kind of my mind went to in eventually giving you an image of a racing car to think about. And I freely acknowledge that the image is limited. But the seed I want to give you this morning is just this thought about Jesus that he invites us to step into all that he is, all that he has, and all that he wants us to be.

[ 16 : 24 ] and not just have a kind of head knowledge of Jesus and yes, a set of beliefs about who he is and what he did, but to really step in and to think about what it means to be in Christ and to be experiencing a life where we are surrounded by him and by his love and by his power and by all that he offers to us in Christ.

But the other phrase that comes time and again here is that it's possible not just to be in Christ but to belong to Christ. Verse 9 says you whoever are not of the realm of the flesh but on the realm of the spirit if indeed the spirit of God lives in you if anyone does not have the spirit of Christ they do not belong to Christ.

Verse 10 but if Christ is in you then even though your body is subject to death because of sin the spirit gives life because of righteousness. And here's the truth here is the seed about Jesus Christ in the same way as I and my children can say with confidence that we belong to the Johnston family and you I'm sure can look at the family and hopefully have a sense of belonging to that family though I appreciate that's not a reality for everyone.

So Jesus invites us today to recognize the truth that not only has he died and risen for us not only does he invite us to step in and experience a life in Christ but that he says you belong.

You're no longer strangers. You're no longer at a distance. Come in and experience what it is to belong to this family this family of Christ.

[ 18 : 26 ] And I wonder if some of us need to experience again a sense of belonging a sense of belonging first and foremost to Jesus. We're not alone. We're not isolated.

We're not trying to work all this stuff out ourselves. We belong. Hear the truth. You belong this morning. If you just step in willing to step into that relationship with Jesus Christ you're not on your own.

And of course church is intended to be an expression of the truth that God offers us which is that in Jesus Christ we're not alone.

We belong. And so in church we're told we belong to one another. We're intended to have fellowship that just emulates in some way what it is like to be part of this family.

And finally and marvelously in terms of Jesus we're about to move on to some seeds in relation to the Holy Spirit. Verse 17 tells us this. If we are God's children then we are heirs.

[ 19 : 29 ] Heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ. Verse 17 the truth about Jesus is that as we think of Jesus and his greatness his splendor his glory as creator of this universe as the one who we see who we read about in Revelation as enthroned and exalted.

We're told in verse 17 that part of what's going on here in terms of God is that we are co-heirs with Christ. All of his inheritance all of his riches are things that we are invited to share in.

I don't pretend to understand even the beginnings of what that's really all about other than to offer it to you as a truth as a seed which perhaps can supplant some of the rubbish that might be in our lives and growing all around us.

Truths about God truths about Jesus and now we come on to in many ways the person who seems to be the central figure in this passage the Holy Spirit himself note in verses 9 and 10 that he's not somebody who may or may not be present in the lives of Christians it's very very clear in verses 9 and 10 that he comes and dwells in every single person who is a follower of Jesus Christ and again he offers us life verses 2 verses 6 verses 10 verses 11 verses 13 and there are others repeating time and again that the Holy Spirit comes and offers life but I want to just give you two or three specific seeds about the Holy Spirit that I observe in this passage which I think might be helpful for us verse 5 let's look at it those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires but those who live in accordance with the

Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires and just that wee phrase at the end has been playing in my mind mindset on what the Spirit desires and the truth about the Holy Spirit that I offer you this morning is that the Holy Spirit is not disinterested in us and in our life and in our choices and in our present and in our future but he has desires for us the Holy Spirit has desires for your life and for mine regardless of our age and stage regardless of our past regardless of our regrets regardless of our fears I stand confident because it's in God's Word and say that the Holy Spirit has desires for our life and for my life verse 13 another truth if you live according to the flesh you will die but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body you will live and the truth here is that the Holy Spirit gives us power the Holy Spirit is the only one who gives us power to change he's the one who gives us the power to uproot those weeds and rubbish that might be taking place in our lives and so if we are here this morning struggling with sin feeling regretful about the perhaps the events of the last week month year or maybe even our lives then in and of ourselves that's normal but I want to encourage us and to give you this seed this morning that the Holy Spirit is the one who says

[ 23 : 24 ] I'll give you that power day by day to change I'm not saying it'll be easy I'm not saying that suddenly because you've got the Holy Spirit in your life everything will be fine and you'll no longer experience the desires around sin but I am saying I'll give you the power to put to death the misdeeds of the body and then another truth about the Holy Spirit is in verse 14 where it says those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God I don't normally use slides and some of you might be saying Paul we wish you continued not to use slides because some of your pictures are really a bit bizarre why on earth are you now showing a picture of a dog with a dog's lead in its mouth well I was thinking here of what it means to be led by the Spirit because as well as the Holy Spirit having desires as well as the Holy Spirit having power the reality is the Holy Spirit wants to lead us now I find it's quite strange I for the last couple of years have had a little dog and have very much enjoyed being out with a dog but there's a choice you have to make every time you're going to go out with a dog and that is is it a time to have the dog on the lead or not now some of you who might be in the kind of centre of Edinburgh maybe have never experienced taking a dog out without a lead on because I appreciate you probably don't want dogs walking up and down

Leamington Terrace without leads on it's probably a bit dangerous but I do like the times where living slightly out of town it's possible to have our little dog Harris running around without his lead on but do you know what happens?

He gets so distracted he's having a great time but he can't really get anywhere because let's face it it's smells it's lamp posts it's random bits of ground it's the grass it's another dog but there are just so many distractions that if he's out without his lead then it's pretty much running round in circles time and every so often when I call him because I think we're going to go somewhere the odd thing is he gets quite excited about the lead going on and as somehow or other then having a somewhat more purposeful journey where we see more than just the same patch of grass that we're sort of running round and round and round and fascinated by slightly unpleasant smells in it now again it's an illustration which I'm offering you it's got huge limitations because I do not think God sees us as people in the same way as I see that dog right so I'm not suggesting for a minute God wants to take us in a lead and drag us through life or that that's what the Holy Spirit's up but what I am saying from this passage today is the Holy Spirit wants to lead us and I think the question is whether we are willing to be led by the Holy Spirit and I think where my illustration may have some relevance is that the reality is that without the Holy Spirit's leading we might be a bit like that dog running round and round and round in circles being totally distracted maybe at times thinking we're having a great time but getting absolutely nowhere and so I ask myself where is the Holy Spirit wanting to take me where is he wanting me to go what decisions is he wanting me to make today and in the days ahead and am I seeking his will am I saying

God through the power of the Holy Spirit please lead and direct my life so that I do not just run around in circles and waste this time on earth but that I use whatever days and moments I have to bring pleasure to you and to go in the direction that you want me to go and then finally the Holy Spirit comes and in verse 16 he assures us he gives us power to change he leads us he assures us verse 16 he testifies with our spirit that we are God's children and maybe some of us the seed I can offer you is that the Holy Spirit comes and says you're not alone you're not forgotten you're not abandoned and just as children need assurance after a fall or after a scare the Holy Spirit comes and assures you today you are indeed God's children we're pretty much out of time so I'm going to have to finish but I wanted to leave with you three of the promises which happen to begin with an F and therefore might be memorable for some of you if you like that kind of thing that we are offered if we are willing to do that work of getting rid of the weeds and planting in place the truth of God the truth of what God the Father

Son and Holy Spirit are wanting to do and it's there in verse 1 there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus and it's there in other bits of the passage the word freedom that's what we are offered today do you know in Scotland there are more people imprisoned in our prisons across Scotland than has been the case for many many years more than 8,000 people are in prison custody today in Scotland despite our crime being at a lower level and it's been for many many years to discuss feel free to have a chat about why that might be the case over lunch but I wonder how many of us while not being in prison custody in reality are not experiencing anything like the freedom that God actually intends for us and that he offers if we allow him to enter into our lives and then the other truth that we see time and again is that he offers us the reality of a life that is not marked by fear dread insecurity but rather a life where we can know what it is to be fearless and finally a life where we know what it is to be part of

[ 29 : 18 ] God's family I offer you those as we close and just invite us now to take a moment as we reflect on all that God Father Son Holy Spirit want to do in our lives in our hearts in this church in our families for our today and for our future let's come before him and invite him to supplant all the other stuff and to take his place in our lives God thank you for your desires for us thank you for the work that you have done for us to offer us rescue hope purpose and a future Holy Spirit thank you for your presence within and your desire to lead us and we say as we move on from this point would you dwell within be at home in our hearts and rule in our lives we ask in Jesus name and for his glory

Amen