

## So Much Grace!

Psalm 89:1–4, 14–18 • Romans 6:12–23

**6:12** Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. **13** Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. **14** For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

**Rom. 6:15** What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! **16** Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? **17** But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, **18** and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. **19** I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification.

**Rom. 6:20** For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. **21** But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. **22** But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. **23** For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (*English Standard Version*)

Did you ever have a boss who was a slave-driver? Let's talk about that reality for a little bit. What was one thing about your slave-driver boss that made you crazy?

[take responses from the congregation]

Yeah. I think it's really interesting how many of you are nodding your heads as we are going along here. I think this is an experience a lot of us have had. You know, the thing is I used to think of God that way—slave-driver, unrelenting, impossible expectations, etc—and that really interfered with a healthy life and healthy relationship with God. Our passage for today shows us a way out of the trap, and helps us experience true freedom in our lives.

First, this passage asks us who's really running things? Did you ever watch one of the shows where a trainer comes into a home being terrorized by a pet, and works with the family to have a better life with their pet? There are a bunch of them now, but the first one was *Dog Whisperer*, with César Millan. Now he has some other shows, but that was the first. In each of the episodes, César meets with at least one family and he watches them and their life with their pet, and works with them to have a better life together. Cesar once said, "Owners lavish love on their pets, which is why so many go from non-aggressive pups to being out of control

when they're older. People just don't realize their dog must respect them as leader of the pack." By making the dog the focus of all their attention and treats, the owners have unwittingly put the dog in charge of their household. Actually, that happens to lots of us in other ways—we focus all our love and attention on our jobs, and pretty soon instead of us running our lives, our job is running us. If we like pleasing people, we can often find ourselves completely at the mercy of what other people think of us, without any sense of our own identity. Paul writes in verse 16, "Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey..." Whoever or whatever is the ongoing focus of our lives, often ends up running our lives if we let it.

Second, this passage reminds us that God frees us for relationship, and not for enslavement but for service. Paul writes, "But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life." The classic story is told that one Sunday, a mom went into her son's bedroom. "Henry," she said. "It's time for us to get up and go to church." Henry covered his head, and from under the pillow came a voice, "I'm not going." "Why not?" she asked. "I'll give you two good reasons," he said. "1. They don't like me, and 2. I don't like them." His mother replied, "I'll give you two good reasons why you should go to church: 1. You're 49 years old, and 2. You're the pastor." Now I don't know how your day began, but I suspect that most of us here came because we wanted to. That's good! God loves us, Jesus died for us, and rose for us, and so we are motivated to show kindness, to give to our fellowship, to be a blessing—not because we have to, but because we want to. Instead of drudgery, our lives become grateful and joy-filled because we are in God's Presence and becoming our best selves.

Lots of us have had bosses that were slave-drivers. They are slave-drivers because they are results-focused and results are all that matter to them, and you have to demonstrate results, or you are fired. They want to run our lives and tie our self-worth to their agenda—to reduce us to replaceable, anxious, exhausted cogs in the machine. Lots of people think of God as a slave-driver who demands that we be nice, and if you're not nice enough or don't do enough nice things, you're fired. Consequently, often people who have had hard lives, or bad things happen to them, or are always slipping up, think they don't belong with us who follow God. That's not what we see in Jesus: he enjoyed spending time with people who had it hard, who were caught up in bad stuff, and who failed over and over again to live a perfect life. If we are aiming to be perfect or even just perfectly nice, we will always come up short. God is way less results-focused and way more relationship-focused. Our anxiety melts before God's love. Our exhaustion fades in God's peace. We are not replaceable cogs in the world, but made in the image of God, with unique purpose, so that we could experience and radiate the love God has for us. The question is not will we be perfect or nice, but will we love God in return? Isn't it ironic, that for us to experience true freedom, we have to learn how to go all in with God? Isn't it strange, that for us to know true freedom, to find who we really are, we have to learn to see ourselves through God's eyes—that we are loved and worthy? This is how we become God's prayer for the world, loved so we can love others, freed so we can free others, blessed so we can bless others. The world's ways will not get us or our society to a better place, but the free gift of God is not just a better life, but one that lasts forever.