

Text: Romans 6:19-23 (Anderson). 20<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost. **October 2, 2016.**

Grace and peace and eternal life are yours through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Brooks Hatlen was a character in the movie Shawshank Redemption. It was a movie about a prison. Brooks had been in this prison for 42 years. Something surprising happened over those 42 years. First, he got used to the walls. Then he got to depend on the walls. In the prison he was relatively educated, ran the library, was someone important. He was finally released. And then he was miserable. He was just an old ex-con. He contemplated what crime he could commit to get back into the comfortable confines of prison. You might think that's crazy! But in the movie, some of the other convicts who had been in the prison a long time at least could see things from Brooks' point of view. But who would choose prison over freedom? Who would want to be in prison given a choice? Who would want to spend life in prison and then die there? Someone for whom this way of life is comfortable. And you know what the sad thing is? For all of us, the way of life in slavery to sin is comfortable, natural. I'm going to use ordinary, everyday language here. I know we are using a different translation today. This translation was written to put God's Word into ordinary, everyday language. The translation was actually done by a pastor involved with prison ministry to bring God's Word in a style that would appeal to that particular audience. Since this part of the Bible talks about freedom and slavery and since this part of the Bible is using ordinary, everyday language, I thought the different translation would be good. And we see right from the start of this part of God's Word that the point of emphasis is not slavery vs. freedom. It's really just a question of, "Who is your master going to be?" You can either be a slave to sin or a slave to God. But someone is going to be your master. Something is going to be calling the shots in your life. Either it's going to be sin or it's going to be your Savior. It's not a question of whether or not you will have a master. It's really only a question of who is your master going to be? Your sinful mind and body is so weak. You used to let the members of your bodies be used as slaves of uncleanness and lawlessness to do lawless things. Do we need to make a list showing how weak our sinful mind and body is? I couldn't help it. The word just slipped out. I couldn't help it he kept pushing. I couldn't help it! And the members of our bodies used as slaves? Come on, that's not me. Really? Never once looked at a website and then erased the history? Never once watched a TV show you would be uncomfortable watching with your parents, with Jesus? You used to let your members be slaves of uncleanness, so now let the members of your bodies be used as slaves of right living. What happened? What made the change? It's not a what. It's a who. Jesus made the change. Jesus showed love to your lawless members by forgiving all your uncleanness. Jesus wiped away your weakness and replaced it with his strength. Yes, Jesus died on the cross to forgive all your sins. Jesus also died on the cross so you would forget your sins, leave them behind, live for him who died for you. Jesus' forgiveness is the power to leave behind the slavery to sin. Your baptism is daily strength from God to let the members of your body be used as slaves of right living to do holy things. I know that's a strange phrase used in this part of the Bible. Slaves of right living. Later on we are called God's slaves. We usually think of slavery as an unwilling thing with bad results. Here, slavery is a willing thing with good results. The word slave is used to show how completely we used to serve sin and now how completely we love to serve God. It's no longer a burden to live God's way. It's a joy. It's not slavery to come to church. It's the best hour of the week. It's not drudgery to read the Bible. It's the best time of the day. Jesus has so captured our hearts, so won us with his love, we can't help but serve him. This service has a good result. We do holy things. Holy means set apart for God's special purpose. We are dedicated to God, set apart from the sinful world to be used for God's holy purposes. God is training

us to develop and display all the things God is. Think of how cool that is. We are being developed to display God's holiness, God's love, God's compassion. That when someone looks at you and the more they get to know you, they start to sense and to see, "That's what God is like."

Whew! Wow! That's a tall order. I don't think I can live up to that. You're right. It's a tall order. We can't perfectly live up to that. But God gives us the power to do so more and more. And God gives us every encouragement to not fall back into the slavery to sin. It would be so easy to think, "It's so hard doing the right thing all the time. I'll just go back to what's easy." Our sinful minds can even try to convince us, "Sin is the real fun. Sin will really make me happy. Sin is the real freedom, because then I can do whatever I want." That thinking is like Henry Ford's kind of freedom. Henry Ford, you've heard of his cars. He said, "You can have a car any color you want, as long as you want it black." That's no freedom. In the same way, slavery to sin is no freedom. Choosing to do this sin or that sin, is still only choosing sin. And what are the results of sin? What benefit is there when sin is your master? You just end up ashamed of those sins later on. You know the guilt I'm talking about. But it gets worse than that guilt. The final result of those things is death! So think about what happens when sin is your master. Your life stinks with guilt and then you die. And it gets worse. If you've been through Bible 101 recently, you will probably remember the three senses of death the Bible is talking about. Death isn't just talking about physical death. No! It's worse. There's spiritual death. That means your spirit is separated from God even while the body is alive. If you've been blessed to live your whole life as a believer, talk to someone who hasn't. Listen to the dark place this world is without Jesus. Listen to the wretched condition a soul is in when it doesn't know the peace and love and joy from Jesus. But there's still more to death. There's eternal death. Eternal separation of the soul from God, forever, in hell. Eternal separation of the soul, from God, forever, in hell. That's the final result of sin. That's the fruit of sin, the "benefit" from sin. The devil might deceive you thinking sin will bring happiness. But in the end the result is shame and guilt and the final result is eternal death in hell. Not so good when sin is your master.

But sin is not your master. You have been set free from sin! Jesus died to take away your sin! Jesus rose to give you eternal life! There's a different result when you are God's slaves. We already talked about how "slavery" to God is different from slavery to sin. "Slavery" to God is a willing service with a good outcome. The result right now of serving God is a holy life. A holy life. Isn't that so much better than a life of sin? The true freedom is to live in a close relationship with God. The true liberty is to give your obedience freely to God as his child, not suffering through the slavery of sin. Free obedience to God doesn't result in guilt or shame. It results in a holy life. God's children can choose, freely, from so many ways to serve God. My job isn't just a job I have to do to make money. My job is a way to use my gifts to God's glory and serve other people. That's so liberating! Thursday night will I take my wife to dinner, or come to Bible class, or even do both? The choice is mine! The freedom is there! These are both good ways to serve God! Will I invite one friend to worship with me or will I reach out to one Christian brother I haven't seen in a while? Will I do both? I'm free. I can do one or two or both! Which Big, Audacious Goal will I help our congregation achieve? I'm free to choose! I'm living a holy life now. And the final result is eternal life, with God, forever, in heaven. Eternal life, with God, forever, in heaven.

You know, I always enjoy the chance to study God's Word for a sermon. And this time especially so, because I knew this final verse, memorized it before, but see it so much more deeply now. I see the background, the contrast of slavery and freedom. I see better the contrast of death and life. This final verse is a famous verse and with good reason. It's a summary of this section. In fact, it's a summary of the whole Bible. This final verse is really the message of the Bible in one sentence. The wages of sin is death, but God's free gift is eternal life united with Christ Jesus our Lord.

I think we are familiar with the concept of wages. Wages are what you earn when you do something. Well, the wages of our sin, what we earn when we sin, is death: physical, spiritual, eternal death. Do you see what this means? And this is going to sound harsh, but I'm going to love you enough to tell you God's truth. The very first time I sinned God could have struck me dead and sent me to hell. The very first time you sinned, God could have struck you dead and sent you to hell. You sinned. I earned physical, spiritual, eternal death. The fact that we are still physically alive, is just God being nice. The fact we are all not in hell, right now, means God is not treating us as our sins deserve.

God is treating us differently. God is not treating us on the basis of wages, what we have earned. God is treating us on the basis of a gift, what we haven't earned. God isn't giving us what we had coming: eternal death. God is giving us what we didn't have coming: eternal life. And notice while the first half of this verse says, "the wages of sin is death," the second half doesn't say, "the wages of good deeds is eternal life." No! God's free gift is eternal life. The greatest gift God has for us is eternal life. We can't earn heaven. That has to be God's gift. And it is God's gift. And he gives us freely. We didn't deserve it. We can never earn it. The gift is free, given by Jesus, through Jesus, united with Christ Jesus our Lord. Yes. God's free gift is eternal life united with Christ Jesus our Lord.

Who's my master going to be? Well, one master, sin, offers, guilt, shame, slavery and finally death. The other master, God, loves me and died for me and paid a great price to set me free. God offers freedom, a holy life now and finally eternal life forever. Who's my master going to be? Jesus! Amen.