

What is the gospel? Part 9: The barrier – the debt of sin.
Bible readings: Isaiah 53.16, Colossians 2.6-17

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In the beginning of our series answering the question ‘what is the gospel’ we spent a lot of time focussing on Jesus who he is and what he has done, over the last couple of weeks we have turned our attention to the problem which Jesus came to deal with – sin. we saw that, unpopular as it may be, sin is a fact of life and to live effectively and realistically in the world we have to take it into account – we also saw that none of us can get all holier than thou or critical because we have all sinned and are in the same boat. The Bible uses the imagery of an archery tournament, where we either fall short of the bullseye and fail to qualify, or we try to bend the rules and are disqualified – either way the end result is the same; it creates a **barrier between man and God**.

Last week we looked at the problem of perfection, and how through **propitiation God was able to satisfy justice and justify us**, going on to impute to our account the righteousness of Jesus, so we can never be condemned or separated from his love.

This week we turn our attention to the **problem of freedom**, in trying to live free we do things we shouldn’t do, and also don’t do things we should; when we do this we trespass into other peoples lives and deny them freedom – we also trespass God’s boundaries which are there to protect us and others (guinea pig run) therefore we produce a moral and spiritual debt which we are unable to pay; our attempts at living in freedom actually bring us **into slavery**.

Now at the time of writing the new testament the nation of Israel was occupied by roman forces, so Paul uses an example that everyone would understand: In Rome every citizen owed perfect allegiance to Caesar, if a person broke the law and was sentenced to prison, they would have an itemised list of each infraction and the corresponding penalty = the **‘certificate of debt’**

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This was nailed to his door to demonstrate the justice and the limitation of punishment (i.e. if sentenced to 20 years, he must be released after 20, not 25)

When he was released he was handed the certificate of debt with 'paid in full' written across it: he could never again be punished or imprisoned for those crimes as long as he could produce his cancelled / fulfilled certificate of debt

Colossians 2

We have a **debt of sin**

It is a problem of the heart: story of girl with stomach pain, the medicine tasted horrid so she rubbed it on her tummy instead, but the problem didn't go away, she went back to the doctor; he convinced her that only inside medicine could deal with inside problems.

Religion and philosophy (mentioned in this passage) are trying to deal with heart trouble from the outside: the greatest truth about Christianity is that God goes to work on the inside, cleans us up and makes us new.

But because of our sin we end up with a debt and in prison / slavery

Col 2.13-14

13 When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, **14** having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. **15** And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross

Our certificate consists of the decrees which were meant to make life full and free, to protect us and others, but which we have broken.

They 'stand against us' and are 'hostile' because we can't keep them; there is nothing wrong with the laws; it is our inability to keep them.

This passage tells us that Jesus takes our **certificate of debt and nails it to the cross**: he was not only willing to take our certificate of debt, but also the penalty that went with it, which was death.

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On the cross:

Isa 53:4 Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. **5** But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. **6** We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

2 Cor 5.21

Jesus was made sin for us, he took our certificate of debt and the punishment, and he was made sin for us: the exchange in Isa 53,

Punished to bring us peace,

Bruised for our iniquity

Something that we have all read over and over in the accounts of the crucifixion, but only this week as I was reflecting on this passage did I notice something that I have not found in any commentary but which is absolutely true: the cry of **eloi eloi lama sabacthani**, which means my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?, this is in **Aramaic** he was forsaken so that through his work he could promise to never leave us or forsake us. The other sayings from the cross like speaking to Mary & John are in Aramaic, but there is one that stands out;

The cry of **'tetelestai'**: this is a Greek word, not Aramaic. Greek is a very accurate language, and to switch from his own native tongue, to Greek demands our attention:

This is the exact same word which the roman judge would write across the released criminal's certificate of debt, to show that his penalty had been **paid in full** and that he was free at last 'Paid in full' in John 19.30 is translated **'it is finished'**

This was not hopeless gasp 'I am finished' but triumphant shout 'it is finished!!'

"His shout 'it is finished' was a cry of total and complete victory and marked the fulfilment of the plan of God. The echo of that cry will last for eternity, even today it rings out triumphantly and full of hope for fallen humanity." RDGP

'Paid in full' has been written across the certificate of debt of every man because the debt has been fully paid by Jesus – it is

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finished, it is done, there is nothing left to pay. No amount of feeling bad, punishing ourselves or denying ourselves freedom adds anything to it – quite the opposite, it is paid for, if we try to add to it, we are saying that the ultimate sacrifice of the sinless son of God isn't good enough, he needs a bit of help from us!!

But, if a man refused and insisted on staying imprisoned, even though his debt had been paid, then the certificate of debt, now ensuring his freedom, would be of no benefit to him at all:

Imagine how crazy that would be: [the prison door is open](#), what are you still doing inside?

If that person chooses to live in the darkness and slavery of a life without God, then there is no help for them, and they may even die in darkness without God – what a tragedy that would be.

We now have the cancelled certificate of debt which proves to us that we are free and can never be punished or imprisoned for our sins, because Jesus on the cross has paid for them in full – break [free with Jesus](#) no sin is too big or too terrible, so now we are free, we are forgiven, and the only way to thank God for this gift of life is to live it, to enjoy it and to thank him for it every day