

The Sermon That Got a U.S. Navy Chaplain Fired

(Appendix H)

Below is a word-for-word transcript of a sermon preached by LT Gordon James Klingenschmitt (Chaps), delivered during an *optional* worship service openly advertised as a ‘Christian memorial service,’ held in the base chapel at Naval Station Norfolk, voluntarily attended by some crewmembers from his ship, honoring the religion of a deceased Sailor, D.R., who was personally a member of Chaps’ flock.

Chaps preached this same sermon two times. The first time he preached it, this sermon persuaded D. R. to voluntarily come forward, and invite the Lord Jesus Christ to rule his heart and save his soul. D. R. died soon after from a tragic motorcycle accident.

When ship’s Commanding Officer (CO) and the Executive Officer asked Chaps to preach at D. R.’s memorial service, Chaps was honored to be invited. He immediately knew what sermon to give, thinking, “What better way to honor D. R.’s personal religion, than to preach the same sermon D. R. personally loved and embraced before he died?”

But the second time this sermon was preached, the CO and a vocal minority (25%) who voluntarily attended the church service in the base chapel hated the sermon. Some complained in a survey that Chaps should be fired because the sermon was too controversial. Two senior chaplains reviewed the sermon and recommended Chaps be punished for preaching the gospel in the base chapel. The CO took their advice and punished Chaps for the sermon, illegally enforcing the views of the unbelieving minority, and violating Title 10, US Code, Section 6031 which states: “An officer in the Chaplain Corps may conduct public worship according to the manner and forms of the church of which he is a member.” The CO gave Chaps a written letter of ‘theological’ instruction, a poor ‘theological’ fitness evaluation, relieved him of duty (fired him) from the ship a month before normal rotation, and wrote an unfavorable recommendation that Chaps be denied continuation on active duty, acknowledging the sermon as ‘the precipitating event’ for these punishments. Chaps soon meets a ‘theological’ review board composed of senior chaplains of different faiths, which, if it follows the CO’s negative recommendation, will remove Chaps from active duty and take away his uniform after 14 years of service, without retirement.

Chaps always found it puzzling how the same sermon, a line-by-line explanation of Romans 8, was personally embraced by D. R., but so widely rejected by some who claim they loved him. *What controversial sermon could possibly save one man’s soul, yet anger so many others?* Here’s the exact word-for-word text of what Chaps preached at D. R.’s memorial service:

“In our reading today in the book of Romans, we see several key points that we maybe can specifically relate not only to our lives, but to the life of EN2 D. R. If *there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus*, and I’m reading from Romans 8, verse 1, if the Spirit of Christ Jesus, if *through him the spirit of life set us free from the law of sin and death (Romans 8:2)*, what does that mean? That means that sin has no power over our eternal destiny.

Now I’m standing before you as a man who would freely admit to you the many sins of my own life. I look at a man like EN2, this is a man that I

knew personally had many sins in his own life. I look at the people in this audience, I know, we all look at ourselves and we see the sinfulness of our own condition. And how could there be any hope that any of us could stand before a righteous God and even make it to heaven? Why don't we all, why aren't we all sent to hell, as we freely deserve because of our sins?

I stand before you and I would even personally submit to you that I believe this man EN2 D. R., although he passed away, **I believe he is in heaven today**. Now how can I say that? How could I be so bold as to say that a sinner would be able to be made right with God, and be able **to go to heaven and not to hell**? How would I be able to know such a thing? I can tell you from Romans 8, that Jesus Christ is his redemption.

If there is any hope for any of us to be made right with God, it can only be found in Jesus Christ. *For what the law was powerless to do, in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own son!* (Romans 8:3).

Our ability to obey the righteous requirements of God, to live holy lives, our ability is complete. I believe we are able to live holy and righteous lives. And yet we do not.

Because we choose sin, because we choose selfishness, because we choose lust or drunkenness or immorality, or any of the number of things that I myself am guilty of in this life, that we in this church are guilty of, that D. R. was guilty of, these things are not the end of the story!

We are consumed in this world we are lost in this world, by the way that we live our lives before the devil, that we offer our lives to sin. That in itself brings us only what is deserving of death and hell. And yet that is not the end of the story! God sent his son Jesus Christ to redeem you, to redeem me, to redeem D. R.

Jesus Christ entered humanity as a gift from God, and what did He do when he got here? *He condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us.* (Romans 8:3-4). And here's the key, we've got to live therefore, not according to the sinful nature, but according to the Spirit of Jesus Christ, if he lives in us.

If Jesus lives in us, then we live not according to the sinful nature. *If we live according to the sinful nature, then we have our mind set on the desires of sin. But if we live according to the Spirit of Christ who is in us, then we will then have our minds set on what the Spirit of love desires.* (Romans 8:5) *The mind of the sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life, and peace.* (Romans 8:6). The sinful mind is hostile to God. You know, there have been times in my own life, times in D. R.'s life, when we were just so controlled by sin that we were hostile to God. We did

not want Him to rule our hearts. We did not want to obey the righteous commands that God would place on our lives. In fact, my mind at times has been so sinful that I cannot submit to God's law.

But we, who are controlled by the devil, who are controlled by sin, cannot please God. It is impossible to do so, apart from Jesus Christ taking over your heart and living His righteousness through you.

But here's the good news, in verse 9, Paul continues the story, he says, "*Those who are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you, are now able to fulfill the righteous requirements of the law.*" (Romans 8:9) We are now able to live holy lives! We are able to put away our drunkenness, we are able to put away our sin, we are able to put away lust, or our greed, or any of the things which condemn us, we are able to conquer them and live holy lives! Not apart from Christ, but with Christ's power in us, we are now able to do this.

If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. (Romans 8:9). But if Jesus is living in you, what's going to happen? Verse 10. *Your body is dead because of sin yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. (Romans 8:10).* In other words, your heart, your character, your morals, are now full of life! Full of the ability to live, in a holy and righteous way.

If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, then he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies, through his Spirit who lives in you (Romans 8:11).

Now we know that Jesus was crucified, who saw "The Passion of the Christ?" We all saw this movie, we saw him, in the historical representation of him being scourged by the Roman whips, being crucified, being hung on the cross, and dying. His death, he volunteered for, as a substitute for your sinfulness, and yet he was in the grave for three days, and then what happened? Who saw the end of the movie? God raised Him from the dead.

It's a historical fact that Jesus was resurrected from the dead. I've been to Jerusalem, I've been to the garden tomb, I've walked into the empty tomb, and nobody's in there! Jesus was raised from the dead.

Now if Jesus was raised from the dead, what does that mean for us? It means that we can be raised from the dead also. It means that we can be raised from the death of our sinfulness, into a new righteousness, into a holiness. The resurrection has to happen inside of us!

The resurrection has to happen. This death that we're all walking around in, this sinfulness that we walk around in, this lust and greed, and adultery, and all the things that would consume us. The idolatry that we live our lives in, the lying, the stealing, the dishonesty, these things no longer

have place in our lives. But when Jesus rules our hearts, he can make us alive and He can *give life to our mortal bodies (Romans 8:11)*. He can help us to live holy lives.

Now in that hope of the resurrection, the personal resurrection that happens in each of us when we are *born again (John 3:3)*, when we are given new life, when the Spirit of Christ now moves into our heart and takes over our lives, this gives us hope, not only for this life, so we can live holy lives in this life, but it gives us hope for the after-life. It gives us hope for eternity.

It gives us hope that after the judgment, after D. R. dies and stands before God and God says to him, “D.R, should I let you into heaven or should I let you into hell? Where should I send you, what should I do with your life?” **He is able to say, and I hope you are able to say, that Jesus Christ paid the price of my personal sins, that His resurrection is in me, that Jesus ruled my life, that he took over my mortal body, and therefore the resurrection that happened in my mortal life should now merit resurrection in eternity.** Therefore it is through Jesus Christ that you are able to stand before a righteous God, despite all of your sinfulness, and you are able to be forgiven of your sins.

So Paul goes on, he talks about the *obligation* that we have, *not to live according to our sinful nature, but* we have an obligation now, because of Jesus, to live according to the Spirit of God (*Romans 8:12*).

Because *those who are led by the Spirit of God are true sons of God. (Romans 8:14)*. We’ve got to be led by holiness. We’ve got to be led by righteousness. We’ve got to live moral, pure, holy lives, because that’s what it means to be led by Christ.

He gives us this Spirit of adoption that Paul talks about. *By this spirit of adoption, by the Spirit of Christ we are able to cry “Abba, Father.” (Romans 8:15)*. In other words we are able to say “God you are our Father” and we are no longer submitted to the devil as our father. We are no longer submitted to sin as the guiding principle that rules our lives. Instead we are able to submit to righteousness. We call Jesus our brother, we call God our Father. It is by His Spirit that we do so.

So all this suffering that we’re going through, all this sickness, all this evil that we face in this world, all this death that we face, even the death of our beloved friend, it is conquered by Jesus Christ, who is the resurrection.

Jesus said *“I am the resurrection and the life, he who believes in me, though he perish, will never truly die.” (John 11:25)* We ourselves who receive the first-fruits of this Spirit, and the Spirit of God living in us, the

spirit of Jesus living in us is only a downpayment of the future hope that we have of the resurrection to eternal life. (*Romans 8:23*)

The thing that we have in us is just maybe 10% down. The 90% that is coming is in eternity. We have a little bit of evidence of the resurrection in us when we live holy lives. But the real resurrection has yet to be seen. The real salvation of you, of me, of D. R. is not, maybe even not now in this earth, it is in eternity.

He just began his life. Some of you think, oh my gosh, his life just came to an end. I'm telling you no! The life that he lived here was only a moment in time. **It was the beginning for him. The rest of eternity that he has to share with Jesus Christ in heaven, that will be where his life is lived out. Is this man dead? Not really. Are we to mourn his loss, or are we to celebrate his new beginning?**

In this hope we are all saved. For who hopes for what he already has? But we hope for what we do not yet have; we wait for it patiently. (Romans 8:24-25). Paul is talking about the hope that we have for eternal life.

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We don't know what we ought to pray for but the Spirit himself intercedes for us, with groans that words cannot express. He who searches our minds knows the mind of Christ, because Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will. (Romans 8:26)

If God is for us, who can be against us? (Romans 8:31) **If God is for D. R., who can be against him?** If there would be anyone here who could even say, 'Aw, no, nope, I don't think so, I don't think he made it, I don't think he made it to heaven, I think he may have even went to hell,' **well, what if God declared him righteous?** Would it matter if any of us declared him a sinner? **If God forgave him of his sins, if God declared him as truly saved, truly righteous in Jesus Christ,** would it matter if any of us condemned him? No! Because God's word takes authority over our accusations.

God, who did not spare his own son Jesus, but gave him up, will he not also graciously give us all things? It is God who justifies, who is it that's going to condemn? (Romans 8:32-33). Jesus Christ who died, more than that, who was raised to life, is at the right hand of God and is also praying for you (*Romans 8:34*). He's up there, Jesus is praying for you.

I am praying for you. I am praying that the resurrection of Christ will come and rule your hearts. God knows I pray for you. I pray that each one of you here will come to know Jesus Christ, that in him you will have the resurrection from your sins into holiness, that in Jesus Christ you will have

the resurrection from death into eternal life! You're not going to have it apart from him, but God will give it to you, if you let Jesus rule your hearts and lives.

Who can separate us from the love of Christ? Can trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written for your sake He faced death all day long, we were considered as sheep to be slaughtered. No. In all these things, even in death, we are not conquered. (Romans 8:35-37). Even in death, it's not the final word, it's not the end.

For Paul is convinced, and I am convinced, and I hope you will be convinced today, that *neither death nor life is able to separate you from God. Neither angels nor demons are able to separate you from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus. Neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, nor height nor depth nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate you from the love of God that is found, where? In Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:38-39).*

And I'll tell you this. If you don't have Jesus, then you've already been separated from the love of God. But if you have Jesus, then nothing is able to separate you from the love of God! The Bible says "*He who has the Son has eternal life, but he who does not have the Son remains in death.*" (John 3:36)

So the only question I have left is this: Do you have Jesus? Do you have him, or don't you? Does he rule your heart, does He rule your mind? Or does he not? There will be a great judgment day, where most of humanity, dare I say, is cast into hell. (Paraphrase of Jesus' words in Matthew 7:13-14).

What is the dividing line between those who are saved and those who are lost? Between those who enter into heaven, and those who enter into hell? It is Jesus Christ. (See John 3:36). But if you have him, then *nothing can separate you from the love of God, that is found where? In Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:39).* This is the gospel according to Romans 8.

Let us take a moment for silent contemplation. Let us take a moment of silence, even to self-examine, to look into our own hearts. To see if there is any death reigning in us, to see if there is any sin reigning in us, and let us repent of our sins. Let us invite the Spirit of life, the Spirit of holiness to come and rule our hearts, even the Spirit of Jesus Christ himself. Let us take a moment to silently consider these matters.

(Moment of silence)

If you are willing, let us pray this prayer together, and repent of our sins, and invite Christ into our hearts:

“Most merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against You in thought, word and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone. We have not loved You with our whole heart. We have not loved our neighbor as ourselves. We are truly sorry and we humbly repent. For the sake of your son Jesus Christ, have mercy on us, and forgive us, that we may delight in Your will, and walk in Your ways, to the glory of Your Name. Amen.”

Let us also recite the Lord’s prayer:
“Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done,
On earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
And forgive us our debts,
As we forgive our debtors,
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.
For thine is the kingdom, and the power,
and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.”