

The Captain of your Soul

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[0 : 0 0] Well, good morning everyone. Good to see you this morning. Well, the movie we watched on Friday night was the movie *Invictus*. It was the true story of the relationship between Nelson Mandela and SA rugby springbok captain Francois Pinnard in the build-up to the 95 World Cup.

So that poem that was just quoted there, called *Invictus*, which is Latin for unconquered, it formed the center point of the movie. It was written in 1875 by English poet William Ernest Henley, and it helped Mandela through his incarceration.

His long 30 years in prison on Robben Island, it helped that poem as he recited it, as we could see in the movie as well. It helped him to get through that, and you can understand why. It's a rousing poem if you listen to the words, Under the bludgeoning of fate, my head is bloody but unbowed.

It encourages us to stand strong against all the difficulties of life and not give up. It's a good rugby poem, you know, for rugby players just before they face the All Blacks. You could just as well say, Under the bludgeonings of the All Blacks, my head is bloodied but unbowed.

And that moving last phrase as well, I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul. Don't we all like that idea, secretly? Don't we all want to be the master of our fate?

[1 : 1 9] Don't we all want to say, no one's the boss of me? No one can tell me what to do. I'm in charge, I call the shots. You know, I think that's a desire that we can all relate to, can't we? And so *Invictus* is a masterful piece of poetry, a very well-known, famous poem.

But the question I want us to consider this morning, for the next few minutes, is, is what that poem says actually true? You see, just because a poem is well-written and a movie is well-made and inspiring, doesn't mean it's necessarily true.

And we must always ask that question of poems we read, of art, of literature, of movies we watch, the message that it's portraying, is it actually true? We should always consider that in our minds. And think about this poem.

Are we really as independent as the poem says we are? Are you really the master of your fate? Ask yourself this morning. It's an important question. Are you the master of your fate?

Are you really the captain of your soul? Do you really decide what's going to happen to you? Well, I think this picture will answer that question for you. See, this is a picture of Nelson Mandela's coffin.

[2 : 2 6] And that's what's ultimately going to happen to you. The same thing that happened to him. You'll end up in the ground. That's, I can assure you, that's what's going to happen to you.

You might get to choose where in the ground you end up, or whether it's in a coffin, or whether it's your ashes being scattered somewhere, or your body donated to medical science. But you don't get to choose whether or not you're going to die one day.

You don't get to choose that. I came across a statistic the other day. Ten out of ten people die. All right? Everybody is going to face that. You're going to face that. And this is one of the opportunities for you to think about that.

And I bet you you're thinking about all the different things. Oh, I'm at church. I have to sit through this. But I want to think about, you know, the week to come, and think about lunch later, and all the thoughts that might be entering your mind. But you know what?

I want you to think about the day that you're going to die, because it's going to happen, and it's worth thinking about. Ten out of ten people die. And so while Henley's poem *Invictus* is rousing and inspiring, it can't possibly be true that we are really the masters of our fate, in the ultimate sense, can it?

[3 : 34] Because your fate, like mine, like Nelson Mandela's, is to die. And you can't change that. No matter how many multivitamins you take, and no matter how many inspiring poems you read about the dignity of mankind, it doesn't change the fact that one day you're going to be eaten by worms.

Okay? How does that make you feel? To picture yourself lying in the ground eaten by worms. It doesn't make you feel like the master of your fate, that's for sure. Okay, now I don't want to spend this morning depressing you.

I'm sure that's not why you came to church, but I do want you to consider just why this is the case. Why do we end up in the ground eaten by worms? Have you ever wondered that? Have you ever wondered, why do we die?

I mean, life is great. You know, well, some of it is great. Certain parts of it are great. Relationships are great. Love is great. Why do we have to end it all? Why do we have to die? Why do we have to lose loved ones? Why does it have to end?

Have you ever wondered that? Surely, you know, surely it's a silly question to ask, because it's just natural. Surely it's just the circle of life. We're all supposed to die. It's just what happens.

[4 : 39] Well, actually, no, it's not natural. Did you know that death is not meant to be? You know, God didn't make us to die. God made us to live.

God made us to enjoy life and to have it to the full, Jesus says. He didn't make us to die. He didn't make us to get sick. He didn't make us to suffer, but we do. Why? Well, the Bible says we die because of sin.

Death, it says, is the wages of sin. All right? So wages, you know what wages are? Wages are what you get at the end of the week or the month after you've done your work. So you do your work and the end result is that you get your wages.

Well, Jesus uses that to describe death. He says you live, you sin, and you're going to get paid at the end of it with death. Death, that's the wages of sin.

You see, the Bible describes sin as a kind of spiritual disease we all have, a terminal disease which eventually kills us. That's the reason why we die.

[5 : 39] And I want you to listen to what I have to say over the next few minutes. Unless you're not going to die. Okay? If you're not going to die, then you don't have to be here. And I'll give you a chance to leave now.

So if you're not going to die, please, none of this has any relevance to you. But if you're going to die one day, that means that you've sinned because the wages of sin is death.

You have a terminal disease inside you. Now, if a doctor came to you and said, listen, buddy, you've got a terminal disease in your blood. We've done tests and it's terminal. There's no cure.

It's going to kill you. You're not just going to sit and think about Sunday lunch. If the doctor comes to tell you that, you're going to listen. Well, that's exactly what the Bible says you already have. It's a terminal disease called sin.

And it is serious because it's going to kill you one day. But more than that, more than leading to our death, this disease of sin also causes us in life to do and say things that we know we shouldn't, but we can't help doing.

[6 : 41] You know what I'm talking about? Lust. And greed. And angry outbursts to people we love. Things that we know we shouldn't do, but we do anyway.

They just come out of us. We can't control them. Which shows us that we're not in control of many of our thoughts and actions as much as we'd like to think we are. In fact, listen to what Jesus says.

Very truly, I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now, that's quite a thing to say. I don't know if you've been to the slave lodge in town.

It's a museum that's devoted to exposing the horrors of slavery throughout history and especially in Africa, but also slavery beyond that. And it's quite an eye-opener if you walk through that museum.

I think entrance is free of charge or there's a nominal fee, but it's definitely worth a visit just to see what these slaves went through. And the thing about slavery, whether it's ancient Roman slavery or African-American slavery, the fact is a slave always has to obey someone else.

[7 : 46] They can never obey themselves. They don't have a choice in what to do. Someone else tells them what to do. And that's how Jesus describes you and me with regards to sin.

It's quite heavy language that he uses. He says we're slaves to sin. If you've sinned, you are a slave to sin. You had no choice. You weren't calling the shots. We don't get to choose whether or not to sin.

We don't control sin. Sin controls us. That's what Jesus means when he says you're a slave to sin. And if you doubt that, if you go, no, that preacher's talking rubbish.

The sin doesn't control me. If you doubt that, I challenge you. I challenge you to try keep God's law for one week and come back next Sunday. Tell me how you did. All right? Do you think you could do it?

Do you think you could be unselfish and not lie and not covet and not think any lustful thoughts and not slander others and love your neighbor as yourself and love God more than you love the gifts he's given you?

[8 : 47] Do you think you could do all that for one week? Do you think you could do that for one day? No. Because we're slaves to sin. You can't do it. I can't do it.

Sin rules over us. We don't rule over it. And so I'm sorry to say this morning, we don't have an unconquerable soul.

I don't have an unconquerable soul. You don't have an unconquerable soul like the poem would like us to have. Because our souls have already been conquered by an enemy sin.

And if they weren't, then we'd be able to choose not to sin. And in that case, we would be the captains of our souls. But we're not.

We're all under the control of forces that are more powerful than us. Sin and death. Things that we can't resist. Things that we can't fight against. Which leaves us with a bleak future.

[9 : 42] If God is going to judge our sin one day. Which the Bible says he is. And we can't avoid that. Any more than we can avoid death. The Bible says, listen carefully, people are destined to die once.

And after that to face the judgment. That's what the Bible says. That is our fate. That is where we're going. And sickness and aging and death in this life just prove that judgment are coming.

They're like the trailers of a movie. You know? You know when you go to the cinema, you watch the trailers before the movie. You know, well finally the movie is coming. Because the trailers are on. Well, those things in life. The suffering. The death.

The sickness. Those are all trailers. They're just pointing to the fact that judgment is coming. And so we're in a sorry state. Think about it. We're slaves to the sin that is leading us straight to judgment one day.

And there's nothing we can do about it. And if that's not a scary thought to you, I don't know what is. It's a depressing thought. It's depressing if it wasn't for Jesus Christ.

[10 : 43] Now my job as a pastor is to help you to see how important Jesus is for you. My job as a pastor is to help you to see why you can't ignore Jesus.

And if you haven't seen how important Jesus is for you, then I hope you begin to see this morning. Because when we look at Jesus, we discover someone who is completely different from any other human being who's ever walked the face of this planet.

Not even in the miracles that he performed, which was amazing enough. No, he was different because he was the first and only person who was able not to sin.

Here we find a man who walked this planet who was not at the mercy of the other forces which control us. They were at his mercy.

And that's what we see when we look at his life. To illustrate, I want us to join him in the middle of the Sea of Galilee. One of the first times that he revealed his power to his disciples. It was the story that Gene read for us earlier.

[11 : 50] There was this terrifying storm in the middle of the Sea of Galilee. And these hardened fishermen who had spent their whole lives sailing and fishing, they didn't know what to do. They thought they were going to die. And Jesus, the carpenter, the guy who hardly knows how to sail, they think.

They go to him. And they're so desperate that they ask this carpenter who's sleeping in the back, Please help us. Please help us. And you know what he does? You know what he does? Just picture the scene. He stands up. Probably rubs his eyes.

But irritated that he's been woken up. He looks at the storm. And he goes, shut up. He goes, be quiet. And it dies down. And it's completely gone.

Just picture that scene. And you know what the disciples, they were standing there. They were terrified. They weren't terrified of the storm. They were terrified of this man standing in their boat who could tell the weather what to do. I mean, wouldn't you be terrified?

People can't just tell the weather to stop. I mean, imagine we could. Imagine we felt like a shorts and t-shirt day. So we go out in the morning and we tell the weather to be sunny. We can't do that.

[12 : 53] You know, if you stood on Fischig Beach in the howling southeastern and you shouted at the wind to stop, they would probably lock you up. All right?

We can't do that. We don't influence the weather. The weather influences us. It determines what we have to wear. We're under its power. But not for Jesus.

You see, for Jesus, he called the shots. And then, straight after this, we see another example. They get to the other side of the Sea of Galilee and he meets a man that's under heavy influence of evil forces who no one could control except Jesus.

He commands this evil to come out of him just with a word and it does. You see, Jesus is a man who isn't answerable to outside forces. He wasn't under their sway. They were under his because he is the Son of God and he can do that.

He had authority over the weather. He had authority over sickness. He had authority over evil. And he had authority over sin. Sin had no sway over him.

[14 : 00] He was no slave to sin. And so, if anybody could honestly say, I'm the captain of my soul, it would be Jesus. Even death couldn't hold him. Listen to something else he told his disciples when the Jews were conspiring to kill him.

He said, now this is as they're kind of going into Jerusalem and all this conspiracy is going on and they're looking for a way to arrest Jesus and the disciples are petrified. You know what he tells them? He tells them, no one takes my life from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.

I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. I mean, who can say that? Who can say, well, I'll die when I want to and I'll come back to life when I want to? That's what Jesus said.

Now, no one in the history of the world except Jesus, the Son of God, could say that. And that's exactly what he went on to do. He didn't just say it. But he died on the cross.

And then just a few days later, you know what he did? He just got up and walked out of the tomb. Death had no hold over him. Jesus is not answerable to death.

[15 : 04] No one's the boss of him. Not even death, not sin. But what significance does this have for us today? I mean, we're sitting here 2,000 years later. What does it mean for us?

Well, you see, if Jesus, think about it. If Jesus was the one person who proved not to be under the control of sin and death, but rather to be master of sin and death, that means that we found someone more powerful than our greatest enemy.

And that is good news. Someone who's able to break us free from the slavery of sin and death. And that is exactly what Jesus came to do.

He declared, the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor and proclaim freedom for the prisoners and to set the oppressed free.

You know who he was talking about? When he spoke about the poor and the prisoners and the oppressed? He wasn't talking about the guys in Polsmoor or the guys in some other prison.

[16 : 04] He was talking about you and me. You see, we are the poor. He was talking about. We have no resources to save ourselves from judgment.

We are spiritually in poverty. We are prisoners locked up under the power of sin and death. We are the oppressed that Jesus was talking about. But Jesus came to break us free.

He came to this earth from heaven to break you and me free of sin. And he did that when he died on the cross to take the judgment that you and I deserve on our behalf so that we can stand one day before God.

Righteous with Jesus righteousness spotless, not because of anything that we've done, but because of what Jesus did on our behalf. If we trust in him and then on that day, our death will be reversed and we will be given new life in an eternal world without sin and death.

The world that you and I were made for. You see, you were made for a better world than this. And Jesus came to break you free from sin and death so you could enter that world one day in eternity.

[17 : 12] And that is why Jesus is so important for you this morning. And that is why you can't afford to ignore him because he came to give you a way out of sin and death and judgment. There's a way out.

And it's my absolute pleasure to announce that to you this morning because the Bible says that there's a way out of your sin. There's a way out of your death. There's a way out of judgment. But you know what you need to do to take that way out?

If you haven't yet, you need to let Jesus in. You need to let him be the captain of your soul. Have you done that?

Because you've only got two choices in life. You are either under the control of sin or you're under the control of Jesus Christ. Those are your two choices. Nothing else.

There's no third choice. You choose. Which are you going to be under the control of? Which one of those two are you? Under the control of Jesus or under the control of sin?

[18 : 11] And I don't, you know, I ask you that. I don't care how long you've been coming to church. Just because you've been coming to church doesn't mean your life is under the control of Jesus. Okay? This might be your first time at church.

I welcome you here. I'll ask you that question. Who is in control of your life? I don't care how religious you are or how religious you've been in the past. That doesn't matter. All I want you to ask yourself is, am I under the control of sin or am I under the control of Jesus Christ?

Because those are the only two options you've got. In the early 20th century, a follower of Christ wrote a new version of Henley's poem *Invictus*.

And it goes like this. And I hope these are the words that you'll be able to say as you leave this place. Out of the light that dazzles me, bright as the sun from pole to pole, I thank the God I know to be for Christ, the conqueror of my soul.

Since his the sway of circumstance, I would not wince nor cry aloud. Under the rule which men call chance, my head with joy is humbly bowed. Beyond this place of sin and tears, that life with him and his the aid, that spite the menace of the years, keeps and will keep me unafraid.

[19 : 25] I have no fear, though straight the gate, he cleared from punishment the scroll. Christ is the master of my fate. Christ is the captain of my soul.

Who's the master of your fate? Who's the captain of your soul? Is it Jesus? Well, if you would like it to be this morning, whether it's for the first time, or maybe you're a Christian and you just want to recommit this morning to Jesus being the captain of your soul, then you can do that now.

I want to pray a prayer, which I'm going to pray now. And I'm going to give you a chance after each line to pray the same prayer silently in your hearts to Jesus. So let us pray.

Let us bow our heads and pray together. Lord Jesus Christ, heavenly God, I know you are there.

I know you made me and you give me all that I have. I admit that I have often failed to thank you. And I admit that I have often sinned against your holy will.

[20 : 38] Forgive me this morning by the blood of Jesus who died on the cross for sin. I put my trust in him now. Wash me clean and give me strength to live from this day forward under his righteous rule.

Amen. Well, if you prayed that prayer for the first time this morning, then I would love to give you a book. It's a free booklet that I just want to give to you.

It's called *Crossing the Line*. It's all about what it means to live with Jesus as the master of your faith, Jesus as the captain of your soul. And so please come to me at the end of the service.

No questions asked. Just ask me for this booklet and I'll give it to you happily. Thank you.