

Seven simple words. That's all it took to change everything for Michael Delaney. The country was at war with itself. So many people were dying daily from cannon blasts and muskets that everyone involved had to be scared they might be next. Going into battle during the Civil War was a place many didn't come back from. But Private Michael Delaney had sworn an oath.

That's what made it so hard when he was ordered to march out with his battalion from Colorado to New Mexico. He begged his commanding officer to let him stay. His young wife needed care. But there was no reason good enough. The commanding officer couldn't do anything. An oath was an oath. As the battalion marched south towards New Mexico, Private Delaney fell out of line and just walked away. He deserted. After they found him a few months later the trial was short. A jury of his peers quickly reached a decision. That's when the seven words changed his life. "The Court finds Private Michael Delaney, guilty." The penalty for desertion was simple. He was ordered to be shot.

Five months he waited. It was agonizing knowing that he was to be executed but not knowing if the day he woke up would be his last. Death was coming, he just didn't know when. Every day was another to sit and wonder if he would be hauled before the firing squad that day. Another day to kick himself for his bad decisions. Worst off, every day he had to deal with the guilt of his past, guilt he couldn't escape.

There were others who could relate to Private Delaney. When the disciples shook the sleep from their eyes on that Sunday morning they realized it hadn't been a dream. It was real. Jesus was dead and they deserted him. Their talk and boasting had been big, but their actions were quick. They ran at the first sign of trouble. Then they locked themselves up for three days after Jesus died. The soldiers could come for them next. Execution for them was a very real possibility. They were so scared they couldn't even attend the crucifixion. They only heard the stories second hand from the ladies who did go. The ladies spoke of darkness, much like what was in their hearts. Talked about an earthquake, like their knees shaking when the soldiers arrested Jesus. The ladies said they heard Jesus cry out as he died, "**It is finished**", and that's just what the disciples figured they were. Finished. They couldn't deal with their guilt.

Do you relate too? Having trouble dealing with some guilt from your past? Maybe there's a friend who you let down when you didn't have their back when you said you would and now you can't shake the guilt of that. Maybe you received a bad grade in school and you felt you let your parents down and that guilt still sticks with you. Maybe you did something horrible that you figure you can't be forgiven for. Maybe it eats at you. Maybe you feel you failed God, and the guilt weighs on you. It's easier not to think about it, but you can't forget. How do you deal with the guilt?

You already know that guilt that hasn't been dealt with doesn't go away. Slowly over time it gets worse. Guilt needs to be dealt with but dealing with it seems too hard. You probably tried like I have to make bargains with yourself. "If I can just get through this, I'll never do that again." It might be that we try to make up for it with the people we've hurt. We buy flowers. We take out the trash without being asked. We double our efforts to be nice. Or we could go with the always popular 'pretend it never happened'. How successful have any of those been for you? My guess is not very successful. Unresolved guilt is a huge wound that you can't fix from your past.

July 18, 1863 Private Michael Delaney woke up like all the others for the past five months. Each day he was afraid he would die. But this day would be different. Again, seven words would change his life. This time they came not from a jury of his peers, but from the President of the United States. "Let him fight instead of being shot." President Abraham Lincoln stepped in with seven simple words that pardoned Delaney. In one moment with powerful words the guilt of his past was pardoned. He was free.

So much is amazing about that pardon. But most amazing is that Delaney wasn't anyone important. Why would the President pardon him? He was a private with no special service record of bravery. In fact Delaney was anything but a model soldier before he deserted. He actually was an awful soldier. He was the drunk-partying kind who deserted and was condemned. It made the freedom he received so remarkable. Freedom from his guilty past came not with bargains or resolutions to be better or because he acted like it didn't happen. Freedom from his past required a pardon to set him free.

With the disciples still cowering in fear, the ladies walked out to the tomb of their friend Jesus. That Easter morning their hearts were sad. Jesus had suffered and died. It was real. Their expectation was to go out, anoint the body, and leave ready to continue their lives. But things at the tomb were not as they expected. "**There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it.**" As the women approached the angel gave them the good news. "**Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified.**" They came looking for one who was dead, but the dead they did not find.

Seven amazing words changed their life. "**He is not here; he has risen.**" They came disappointed and sad; they left with a pardon and a promise. They came looking for a dead man and instead ran right into Jesus himself, very much alive. Jesus had risen to free them. With his resurrection they could be sure that every single promise he made was true. The proof was in what Jesus told them. "**Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.**" Jesus wasn't mad or hurt by his disciples. He wasn't holding on to the guilt of their desertion. They were his brothers. They didn't deserve it, yet Jesus pardoned their past. Christ had risen to free them. His death was necessary, his resurrection even more so.

You can't be freed from your sins or your guilty past any other way than a pardon. You need to be freed. Jesus has **Risen to Free Us**. His resurrection is the victory that frees you from your guilty past, gives you the pardon you need. The Savior Jesus took your sins and mine and paid for each and every one of them. His final words as he died declared the promise. **"It is finished."** Then seven words freed you from your past. **"He is not here; he has risen."**

Brothers and sisters, that is just what Jesus calls you. Weak and sinful people, people who don't deserve anything good from God because of our desertion of him into sin, yet he calls us brothers and sisters. The resurrection of Jesus means God has taken all the sins of your past, the guilt of your failures, and buried them with Christ. And when Jesus came out of the grave the sins, the guilt, the failures of your past stayed there. Christ was **Risen to Free Us**.

Michael Delaney walked out of his prison cell ready to fight. He felt an enormous sense of gratitude. Every day until the war was over Delaney followed orders and fought for the President who freed him. You walk away from your sin and guilt free for a purpose. You've been freed to live, freed to love, freed to fight for the God man who saved you. What does that look like? For those who maybe are lightly connected to a church or haven't been in some time, I can assure you it isn't rules. The Church doesn't exist to give you more rules. The Church instead intends to set you free with the good news of Jesus. Freedom in Christ to exercise your new life making decisions that please God. It's living and loving in that freedom that only Christ gives. And it's fighting every single day with Christ's power, the one who has **Risen to Free Us**.

Remember your freedom is tied up in those seven words, **"He is not here; he has risen."** Now there's nothing robbing you of a future with God. In Jesus nothing can take the peace of God from you. The loving arms of the heavenly Father wrap themselves around you every day. You're free from a fear of death and from being a slave to sin. There's nothing in this life that can separate you from the love of your Savior. Christ has **Risen to Free Us**.