

Romans 1-4 Revisited, 8/2/20

Before masks, before social distancing, before virtual church there was a time when we were walking through the book of **Romans**. It seems like such a long time ago...and maybe you struggle to remember life before the pandemic like me, so we are going to revisit the first 4 chapters to get our minds back on track with the ground we've already covered. Of course, if you missed that series you can go on our website and watch those messages, download the sermon notes and get caught up.

On 8 May 1945, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill made an announcement on the radio at 3pm that the **war in Europe** had come to an end, following Germany's final surrender the day before. This is the day celebrated each year known as VE Day. Maybe some of you watching remember the celebrations and joy as this good news of victory spread across the world.

In the same way, what Paul shares throughout Romans is the good news about victory! In fact, that's what the word Gospel means, which Paul uses 60x in this book alone. Nowhere in the Bible is the gospel so well-articulated, defended, logically explained than in the Book of Romans. We use this term, gospel, quite a lot but do we really know what it is? The Christian gospel is not good advice to be followed to live a better, stress free life- **NOT Therapeutic gospel**. It's not have enough faith and God will make you healthy and wealthy- **NOT Prosperity gospel**. The gospel is not that I need to try hard to be a good person and do good works to get to heaven. **NOT Morality Gospel**. The Gospel is not, as long as you are sincere about whatever faith you have they all lead to the same place- **NOT Universalist Gospel**. **The Gospel is the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ our Lord**. The Apostle Paul, who wrote this letter, declares this good news right in the beginning of his letter.

Romans 1:2-4

*² the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures ³ regarding his Son, who as to his earthly life was a descendant of David, ⁴ and who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead: **Jesus Christ our Lord.***

The question for this series: **"Has this Gospel become real to you?"** Or are you trusting in a false gospel? Or is it just Christian catch phrase? Is it just a theoretical idea? Is it head-deep, or truly heart-deep?

Setting: Paul was writing this letter from the Greek city of Corinth in 57AD during his third missionary journey to the church in Rome. A church he has actually never visited, but he loved them and felt a strong kinship with them. **CONTEXT: Jew and Gentile Relations.** One of the major presenting challenges that Paul is addressing in this book is that the church was made up of two different groups who had a widely different cultural and religious backgrounds. The Jewish believers came from a background of monotheism- worshipping the one God, Yahweh and a focus on rigorous adherence to the moral law of God outlined in the Old Testament. The

Gentile believers came from a background of polytheism and pagan idolatry, and in comparison a much lower bar for morality, with no background in the law of God. Historically, the relationship between Jews and Gentiles was defined by racism, segregation and hostility. It would have been seemingly impossible to get these two groups to be united in love let alone be in the same building together. But that's exactly what the Gospel did! This is why Paul says, **Romans 1:16 *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.*** That's the amazing thing about the gospel. It doesn't discriminate, it kills hostility, racism, segregation and any hint of superiority. So, Paul is showing them how the gospel creates a new humanity that gives them the ability to overcome their differences. Sounds like something our world needs today.

We are breaking our study of Romans into 5 Parts: **The problem 1-3, God's provision 3-5, our power 6-8, our predicament 9-11 and our practice 12-16.** Part 1, Ch 1-3 We focused on **The Problem**. In order to understand what makes the good news of the gospel so good, we need to first become well acquainted with the bad news. Why do we need salvation anyway? Not just individual salvation, but the whole world. Aerosmith said it in the 90s- There's something wrong with the world today, we don't know what it is. When you look just within our nation today- do you ask, "How did we get here?" Animosity, division, racial tension, such disparity between the wealthy and poor, corruption, moral degradation, the breakdown of the family, such high rates of crime, suicide, abuse, addiction? Some may point to a lack of education, economic inequality, abuse of power... and these may be valid answers, but in Romans 1:18-32, Paul answers the question, "How did we get here?"

Reason #1 We exchanged the truth about God for a lie.

Romans 1:18-21 Although God has revealed himself from the very beginning through the glory of his creation, humanity rejected their maker and refused to seek Him.

Reason #2 We Exchanged worship of God for worship of idols.

Romans 1:22-23, 25-26 The heart of man is an idol factory. Everyone worships, the only choice we get is whether it is a god or the God.

Reason #3 We exchanged obedience to God for obedience to our desires.

Romans 1:24, 26-32

The Bible tells us the problems we sin in society, relationships, economics are all symptoms of a greater sin- rebellion against our Maker. No amount of self-improvement. No amount of political or social reform can fix, as well intended as they may be.

Now the religious Jews would have been Amening and high-fiving this part of Paul's message. They would be saying- the problem with the world are those godless, gentile sinners. But chapter 2-3, Paul turns to religious people.

Romans 2:1 You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things.

Paul says that religious pride and hypocrisy is just as bad, if not worse, because the one committing it always feels justified in their self-righteousness. The Jewish people through the ages, because they were chosen by God to represent Him as a nation and God revealed Himself through them, let it go to their heads. They thought they were better than others, especially the Gentiles. The Jews believed all Gentiles were born in sin and under God's condemnation, but that they were not sinners like the Gentiles. They forgot that the same principle on which God will judge the Gentile, which is sinning against the light of God's truth that they have received, is the same principle by which they too will be judged. Paul concludes that sin makes us all equals.

Romans 3:9-10

⁹ What shall we conclude then? Do we have any advantage? Not at all! For we have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under the power of sin. ¹⁰ As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one.

The most despicable murderer and sweet grandma. Both the rebel and the religious. Not even one. My mom tells the story of several years ago when she and my dad were at the beach in late September when you swim at your own risk because there are no lifeguards. And she was out in the water on a particularly rough current day, and she noticed these two men appeared to be getting sucked out deeper and deeper, so her instincts kick in and she grabs a boogie board and swims out to help pull them to shore. She was able to rescue one, and sadly the other drowned. Friends- the bad news of the gospel is that we are all drowning in the same ocean of sin and no amount of hard work is going to change that. But thank God the story doesn't end there- Paul tells us of the incredible rescue plan of God in Jesus Christ our savior.

Romans 3:21

But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known.

This verse marks the transition from Our Problem to God's Provision. Paul shares that our rescue has come in three **Three Big Words: Justification, Redemption, Propitiation**

Justification: "The WHAT of God's Provision"

Romans 3:22-23

²² This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and all are justified freely by his grace.

Justification: Paul tells us that in the legal courtroom of heaven sinners are declared "not guilty" instead they are declared righteous in God's sight through faith in Jesus Christ. In justification, Christ's righteousness is credited to our spiritual account.

Redemption: “The HOW of God’s Provision”

Romans 3:24 *and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.*

Redemption: the paying of the price of one’s slavery to give them freedom. Jesus pays the price of our debt that enslaved us, paying the price of our sin that we were incapable of paying to set us free. It costs us nothing, it is free...but it cost Jesus his life.

Propitiation: The “WHY of God’s Provision”

Romans 3:25 *God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement (propitiation), through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith.*

Why did Jesus have to die? Because the just penalty of rebellion against a holy and perfect God is to face God’s wrath through eternal death and separation from God and his blessing. Instead of God pouring out his wrath on us- he pours it out on Jesus Christ once for all. God’s just wrath is satisfied by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Salvation then, is all about what God has done through Jesus Christ, not what we have done.

[Slide] In chapter 4 Paul then gives us a real-life example of one who trusted God’s rescue plan- Abraham. And we will pick up that story next week.

What about you and me? Almost without fail if you ask the person on the street what they must do to get to heaven, you are going to get the same mental framework. If I’m going to come to God, I’m going to have to do this and that for God, and He will do this and that for me...what are the “this” and “that”? Most religions say, there is a good life to live and a bad life... what do I have to start doing and stop doing...

And there are typically two responses to that. On one hand, there are those who look at the requirements of religion and say, “I can’t or don’t want to live up to that standard.” And in their rebellion run in the opposite direction.

On the other hand, are those who say- “I meet the standards, I try hard, I am good enough and so therefore God must accept me.” They feel secure and justified because they behave better than most.

All religions come down to this: “I obey, therefore I’m accepted.” But Romans 1-3 show us that model is fatally flawed because none of us can obey perfectly, the gospel says “Jesus obeyed, therefore I’m accepted.”

Do you feel morally inferior? Do you feel like a constant screw up, that you can’t get your stuff together, or have people told you that you aren’t good enough? It’s OK not to be OK. Sinners welcome! God brings everything, we bring nothing, not our good works, not our obedience, not adherence to the law...It is only by trusting in the lifeboat that God has sent in Jesus Christ.

Here's the amazing thing, it's God power in the gospel that begins to change us from the inside out.

Do You feel morally superior? The Jews thought they were the guides for the blind. They looked down their noses at everyone else. The religious Jews thought they were the good people and everyone else were the bad people, blind to the reality that the line between good and bad runs down the center of every human heart. Do you feel superior to others that aren't as good as you? Successful? Families aren't as behaved as yours? Don't go to church or know as much about the Bible as you? The gospel tells you that the only difference between you and the worst of sinners is that you grabbed the raft of Jesus Christ for your rescue.

John Gerstner- "Because of the Gospel, the way of God is wide open. Nothing stands between you and God but your good works. All you need is need. All you need is nothing, but most people don't have it." It's good news- have you taken hold of it?