

## Romans 2: Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> October 2023

If you asked me to recall any sermons I've listened too I could name only a couple and even then just the highlights! I'm not too worried about this because all those sermons still did me good -I can't remember many meals I've eaten but they still fed me.

One took place in Carnmoney Presbyterian at a youth event when I was around 16. The speaker punctuated it over a dozen times by repeating this verse from Romans 1:16 '16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes.'

For a 16 year old that was sometimes ashamed to say what they believed and who they were this was a powerful reaffirmation. I had salvation through the love of God, the forgiveness of Jesus Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit. I was saved **by grace, through faith**. I was saved by the love and sacrifice of Christ on the Cross -His choosing of me and my faith decision to choose him back. I wasn't saved because I was a good person, I wasn't saved because I went to church, I wasn't even saved because I believed in what was said in church -I was saved by acting on that belief, in other words... Faith. Flawed faith, doubtful faith but enough faith to accept God's grace, put my trust in him and be saved. *(If you haven't had that moment of salvation yet... maybe today is the day. Perhaps you believe in God, come to church but God always seems a bit distant. Maybe it is the case that you've never had that moment of surrender to Christ where you have asked him to come into your heart and grant you his salvation. That moment described in Romans 10: 'If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.'* -we will pray a prayer about this later -maybe this is the day.

Here's the big question though that is so obvious we don't tend to think about it enough: **What are we being saved from?** If I told you that Adrian saved my life you're first question (after the disbelief) would be 'How?' -what did he save you from? Describe the certain death that would have taken place without his intervention.

A big reason why so many people do not make the decision to receive the salvation of Jesus Christ is that they don't grasp what it is they are being saved from. A big reason why so many Christians fail to walk fully in that grace of God is that they do not grasp what King David asked for in Psalm 51:12 '...the joy of thy salvation.'

So what are we being saved from? Sin. Those thoughts, actions and inactions that are unrighteous -the opposite of God and His truth and beauty. The NT Greek word for sin is an archery term 'to miss the mark' Sin does not just harm, corrupt and destroy -it ultimately condemns -an eternity separated from God.

This is why it is essential for salvation that we understand that our sin separates us from God. This why, as Jonny pointed out last week in chapter 1, we need to understand what sin looks like in order to appreciate what righteousness looks like. If we don't recognise sin, how can we recognise a saviour?

So in chapter 1 we are given an idea of where society ends up when God is removed from it:

- Idol worship -the placing of idols before God and yes even the so-called silly stuff like crystals
- Sexual impurity -coerced, shameful, before marriage, adulterous, same-sex.
- Apathetic, envious, slanderous, gossipers, greedy, arrogant, disrespectful, malicious, insolent, murderous, depraved, even v.30 *'they invent ways of doing evil.'* And our 'oh so civilised' western world knows how to invents ways to do evil -we can sexualise and corrupt children in ways the Baal worshippers could only dream of.

**So sin**, against our neighbour and God, in thought, word and deed, through negligence, through weakness, through our own deliberate fault... **we can agree -exists. And we need saved from sin.**

Here's our next problem though: People have an amazing ability to blame others for the sin in their own life. Sometimes they're right, but too often they're wrong:

*-I sin because of temptation, because I didn't have the same chances as you, because I don't have a comfortable lifestyle, because of family history, because of pressure on me, because I might lose a job or relationship, I sin because I was influenced badly, because I wasn't thinking, because it wasn't as bad as what the others are up to. I sinned because Eve gave me the fruit and I ate it.*

Romans chapter 2 v.1-3 says you have no excuse for passing judgement on others because you will be judged yourself for doing the same thing. And that judgement from God (v.2) will be based on the truth -not what you or I think we did right or wrong. No excuse.

And then Romans 2:4 highlights something that many of us in church misjudge. We tend to hear often (and I hope believe) about the Eph 2:7 'incomparable riches of his grace.' 'For God so loved the world...'  
Here is a saviour that comes to live with his people, die for his people and redeem them. God is a shepherd that goes out for the lost sheep. God loves us no matter what. And so on. This is all true but it is not the full truth is it?

Grace is free but it was bought at a price. If we do not live this truth we are in big trouble. Jesus paid the price -the life of God no less -so that we would **repent -turn from sin and turn to Christ.**

2 Peter 3:9 *Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to **repentance.*** 2 Peter 3:9  
Luke 15:7 *I tell you that in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who **repents...***

Mark 1:4 *The first message of the Gospel: 'And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of **repentance** for the forgiveness of sins.'*

How does a person who doesn't grasp repentance make a decision to ask for forgiveness? How does a Christian grow in faith without regular repentance? They become like spoilt children -receiving grace eschewing sins consequences and slowing believing they deserve the blessings they receive -'I thank you God that I am not like the sinners!' (Luke 18)

Romans 2:4 *'Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?'*

***So we need saved from sin, through repentance (turning from sin and turning to Christ) -We are not all saved anyway because God loves us so much -that is a universalism heresy.***

Verses 5-11 emphasises this -the stubborn and unrepentant will be judged and experience God's wrath -his separation. And 'repayment' for what they have done (v.6). 'Trouble and distress' (v.9) for the evil -wrath, repayment, distress -what we call **hell**. Now hell is not preached on much but it is real and to understand it we need to do some quick origins story stuff:

God creates the universe and everything in it. He's pleased, He loves it but He's not finished. If God **is love** then the ultimate expression of that is to create beings in His image -with the potential to love as He does. Humans with the capacity to reproduce and love children just as he loves us. But He's not finished. For ultimate love is to give those people the freedom to choose **not** to love God back. So sin enters the world through the temptation of Satan, people fall and the world falls. It is not paradise anymore (have you noticed!?) and God, while all powerful, has removed his total control from this world **-but not His presence!**

So each of possesses both the divine spark of God and the taint of sin. That taint of sin separates all of us from the perfection of God. There is a chasm. What bridges this chasm is not the presence of God's son on earth, not even God's love from afar -but God's love in Christ, on a cross and resurrected to the conquering of death.

*1 Peter 3:18 <sup>18</sup> For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit.'*

That's why the cross bridges the gap.

But (v.7) 'To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honour and immortality, he will give eternal life.' Those who repent, who seek God, seek good are saved because of the cross.

And (v6) while 'God "will repay each person according to what they have done." The ledger of sin may well be presented with the due punishment deserved -but the risen saviour takes the ledger away for destruction and you to be raised to eternal life -in fact it's already done!

There is other good news here too -verses 12-16 tell us that those people who, despite not knowing of the saving grace of Christ, have a life of good deeds and a sense of atoning for sins may well have God 'law written on their hearts' (v.15) -their conscience and life may defend them (v.15) on the day of judgement. So is it possible to live a life not knowing the gospel message as revealed to us and still be saved -absolutely. Heaven will be filled to the rafters with the innocent and it may well surprise us who else we meet there.

***So to recap: God loves us enough to give us freedom. Sin enters the world and separates us from God. God loves us enough to die on the cross for the forgiveness of sins -as long as we repent of those sins and choose him back. And the joy of salvation and fulfilment is felt by those Christians who continually turn from sin and towards Christ.***

Remember the old farmer? What did he say? Nothing really changes -the trees might get bigger, the telegraph and electric might come but the human heart -our capacity for good and evil is still the same. Each of us possesses both the divine spark of God and the taint of sin. Each of us capable of significant moments of beauty, truth and righteousness. Tender moments of love, fearful moments of courage, determined moments of hard graft. But each of us is also capable of significant hurt -cutting words, violent actions and apathetic disdain.

Each day is a move towards God or towards our selves. Orientated beyond us to the divine or within us to the flesh. Repentant hearts or stubborn hearts.

What will yours be today?

Prayer of salvation.

Lord Jesus I acknowledge you as Lord,  
I believe that you died on the cross and were raised from the dead.  
I confess to you that I am a sinner, and I ask for your forgiveness.  
I choose to follow you. Come this day into my heart by your Holy Spirit. Amen