

Talk 5 Sept 21

A few weeks ago I spoke about the background to Paul's letter to the Romans. I then followed this with a short résumé of the first 4 chapters of the letter.

I am grateful to Tuli who afterwards pointed out I had missed or glossed over the main thrust of this, and all of Paul's letters.

Paul wrote constantly of love. Some well known quotes from the bible: **John 3 : 16**, 'For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.' Also, **John 13 : 34**, 'A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another'. There are lots more examples of God's love and Jesus' love, which Paul would have been aware of, either by word of mouth or in writings available to him. You will probably be familiar with a wedding favourite, found in **1 Corinthians 13:4-8** (read it out!). In short, 'God is love', and you can read it in an expanded version in **1 John 4:7** onwards.

The overall message we get from the whole bible emphasises the love God has for each and everyone of His people. Regardless of where we come from, what we look like, how we act, God continues to love us. That is really quite amazing and perhaps the one thing we should not forget, and which I clearly did the last time I spoke, and which we should constantly remind ourselves.

Granted, sometimes we are more lovable than others! Nevertheless, through God's gift of the Holy Spirit and His forgiveness, and our faith in Jesus, we are never forgotten.

So, we should read Paul's letters, as well as the rest of the Bible, with the overriding thought that faith in Jesus Christ is paramount. Salvation comes to us not through what we do, but from whom we put our faith in. It is God's forgiveness and love that rescues us, not our own efforts. Salvation is a gift of God.

I hope I have made things clearer, and thanks to Tuli for bringing the omission to my notice.

Moving on. The first 4 chapters of the letter covered a wide range of subjects. In short:

First, we are all guilty of something! Regardless of our efforts we are still getting it wrong! Second, you do not need to be Jewish, or anything else for that matter, to be a good Christian. He advocated the only circumcision required is 'of the heart'. He said the only advantage being a Jew was they received the message of Jesus and the resurrection before the rest of the world!

Thirdly, he concludes both Jews and Gentiles are 'ruled by sin'. We are all in the same boat! Fourthly, having stated the problem, Paul went on to explain how people can 'put it right'. He says the answer is already there in the Old Testament; the free gift of Jesus Christ who was sent to die for our sins. Again, he reiterates Jews and Gentiles are brought together, not in their sin but in their faith in Jesus.

Chapter 5 starts by Paul posing the question 'how does the death of Jesus affect us?'. What difference does the death of one man make? His answer takes us back to Adam and his decision to sin and thereby infecting us all with sin. Sin became part of our human nature from that moment. Just as one man brought sin into the world, Paul states, one man brought forgiveness into the world!

Paul moves on in Chapters 6 to 8 to pose the question, 'with this new freedom we can carry on as before?'. The answer is a short 'No!'. When we put our faith in Jesus, our old selves die. This means we should follow Jesus's lead and live like Him and dedicate our lives to God.

As I said earlier, we are not free to do as we like, or that if we cannot work our way into heaven we should give up trying to do what is right. Instead, we are encouraged to be 'slaves' of God, obeying His commands as we are 'married' to Him and should be faithful to what He wants. Paul (and God) knows we are aware of what is right, and wrong, but we are also rebellious by nature.

Enter the Holy Spirit. This God-given gift enables us to do what is right if we submit to Him through His Spirit. This excites Paul so much so that he alters what he said beforehand ! Paul says that we are no longer slaves because the presence of the Holy Spirit makes us into God's children and we can call Him Father or Papa. You may recall the parable of the Prodigal son and the view of the father that he had a son returning, not a slave.

This brings us to the middle of Chapter 8 and I shall stop there. The consequences of the Holy Spirit being in our lives are not just for the present but also very much for the future. We shall look at that next time.

I want to quickly remind you of the context of this letter. Paul did not know the Roman Christians, he may have heard things about them, but he was determined to ensure they were singing from his song-sheet and not another containing miss-truths and misleading ideas !

I have purposely not made lots of bible references ; I hope that is not confusing or taking away from your understanding of what I have been saying. The book of Romans has a great many confusing verses and I looked at it as something of a 'brain dump' by Paul ! This was his parting shot and the one and only opportunity to state the gospel as he saw it. The language, in the NIV, I found difficult and so reading another version was useful. You may wish to do the same. If you want references next time, please, say so.

Let us pray.