

For I am not Ashamed
Roman's 1

Hebrew 10
1 Corinthians 4:1-20
Psalm 124

This morning we are going to start our Journey through the book of Romans. But before we read out passage this morning I just want to take a moment to sorta recap last week. Paul wrote Roman's sometime around the year AD 57, or 58, while he was on his 3rd missionary journey prior to arriving back at Jerusalem with the collection he had gathered for the poor and needy in the Jerusalem churches. There is no evidences or mention as to how the Roman church started, there is only speculation. Some believe it was Peter, some Paul, and others believe that it may have been Jews who were visiting Jerusalem at the time of Pentecost took the gospel back home to Rome with them. Paul expressed in his writing of his intention to visit Rome on his way up to Spain, likely writing this letter as a sort of introduction of the issues that he wants to address upon his arrival. At this time one of the major issues facing the believing churches was that of Judiazing teachers, who were going among the churches, both Jew and Gentile in an attempt to draw people back to the law and old traditions. This was a growing issue that we see addressed in many of Paul's letters, including this one.

In writing about this issue to the Roman churches, Paul demonstrates how the gospel of Christ fulfills what is lacking in both the paganism of the Gentiles, and the ritualism of the Jews, thereby effectively replacing them both as religious systems and pointing only to the one and true God. The goal and intention of this letter written to the churches of Rome was to arm them with the knowledge and defense needed to thwart the teachings of these Judiazers who were spreading among the fellowships like a cancer. To help protect the brethren from those who would bring a false gospel, or teach that the gospel itself was not sufficient. So as we will see as we go through this book, Paul is writing to a broad audience of believers, warning, and instructing them to not fall into the snares of the pagan and Jewish religions. Arguing that faith in Christ Jesus is not only necessary, but it is also all that is needed, for Christ's sacrifice in our stead is sufficient and faith and believing on him is all that is necessary.

Let us go ahead this morning and read the first chapter of Romans. (read Roman's 1) These first opening lines of this letter already are steeped in controversy, Paul begins by making some bold statements about the Jewish beliefs, and the law and the prophets, claiming that God before hand had promised through the prophets in the old testament scriptures that Jesus Christ is the messiah sent of which all of the scriptures had foretold. The one that they rejected, crucified, and now persecute the followers is the one who is the promised messiah who was sent to bring peace between God and man. In the first few Verses Paul is laying out the evidences of this, claiming Jesus as the Son of God, who was foretold, born of the seed and lineage of David, and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness through the resurrection. Christ's resurrection stands as a proof of his power over death, of God's approval of the sacrifice given, and as a sign and symbol of all of those who are in him. In verse 3 and 4, we have written out and explained the dual nature of Christ, in just these 2 sentences Paul lays out the theological foundation claiming that Christ is both, fully man, (being born of the seed of David according to the flesh,) and fully God, (having the power over death itself proven by the resurrection) Pointing again to the very fact that this Jesus is the one who was foretold, and it is only by him, through his work on the cross that one may be made righteous before God.

In verse 5 here, Paul is referring to himself and the ministry that God had given him to bear witness of his son. In my bible there is a cross reference to Acts chapter 9, speaking of Paul's conversion, let us go there quickly and read that, starting in verse 17, "And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit. Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once, and he arose and was baptized. So when he had received food and was strengthened. Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus. Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God. Then all who heard were amazed and said, is this not he who destroyed those who called on this name in Jerusalem, and has come here for that purpose, so that he might bring them bound to the chief priests? But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that Jesus is the Christ."

And he says, that they likewise, those who believe upon Jesus have as well have obtained faith through him to be known as those called of Jesus Christ, establishing this connection and brotherhood that Paul has with them through the faith. Acknowledging that those to whom he writes this letter are of the same faith, and are of one mind bound in love to one another through Jesus Christ. We see this in verse 6, after he explains his own calling as an apostle, of Jesus Christ, he says, in verse 6, "among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ." In sense harkening back to his own experience and calling, acknowledging that those of faith have faced their own sort of Damascus road experience, or awakening to the realities and truth of the gospel. The Christian profession is born of faith, not merely some mental assent, or decision, nor is it found through disputes and pursuit of knowledge, though there is a sense in which the Christian faith includes study, pursuit of knowing Christ more, and having a knowledge of the word of God but what truly defines the Christian faith, is an obedience to God to which we have been enabled to by his grace. As Paul wrote here in verse 5, "Through Him we have received grace and apostleship for disputes and pursuits of knowledge...no, it says, for obedience to the faith among the nations..for his name.

This is the Christian walk in a nutshell, by his grace we have been given faith, so that we may walk in obedience to him as an example, and a witness to his holy name to the world around us. All of those who are of this faith, and only those of this faith brought forth to be obedient to God are all those who have been effectively called of Jesus Christ, to be partakers in the love that God has given us through his Son, and to become adopted members of his holy family in which we also find love and peace. We as Christians are to conduct ourselves as ones who are holy, but not to gain merit or favor of God, rather as a living sacrifice toward God having our lives to be a witness to his holy name, to the work that he has done completed in us so that we may stand firm in a world of darkness and shine the light of the hope of Jesus Christ into this lost and hopeless dark world. As we see in verse 7, Paul writes this letter to those who are beloved of God, and called to be saints. That is each and every one of us who have this faith, we have been called by God to be saints. Sainthood is not some title awarded by the church organization, because of some way you have served or suffered in your life. If you are in Christ, then you are a saint, called by him to live in obedience of faith in his grace, beloved of God. Favored by God, chosen by God, set apart by God, made holy, by God. Not of yourself, but of God, and God alone.

It is to these, whom Paul writes, and greets wishing a grace to sanctify their souls, and peace to comfort their hearts that can only come from the free mercy of God, the Father of all reconciled believers through the blood of Jesus Christ. Already, just within the greeting there has been some very profound theological truths and lessons. Making bold claims of the personhood and godhead of Jesus Christ, of whom we are partakers of the grace and mercy of God to be called saints to live in love and service toward one another in his holy name so that our lives maybe a witness to the goodness and mercy that was given. And it is to to these that Paul says he first thanks God for each and every one of them as their faith is known throughout the world. As Matthew Henry on this passage, “ We must show love for our friends, not only be praying for them, but by praising God for them. As in our purposes, so in our desires, we must remember to say, if the Lord wills. Our journeys are made prosperous, or otherwise according to the will of God. We should readily impart to others what God has trusted to us, rejoicing to make others joyful, especially taking pleasure in communing with those who believe the same things with us. If redeemed by the blood, and converted by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, we are all together his, and for his sake we are debtors to all men, to do all the good we can, and such is our duty as believers.

We as ministers of this Gospel are to be known by our love for one another, for the love that we share through Christ toward one another is the love of God himself flowing outwardly. We can get a strong sense of this love within the body of Christ in Paul's letter here to the Romans. It would seem that he had yet to meet them, only having heard about them but in that report he rejoices in their faith. In verse 9, he lays forth his desire in prayer that he may be able to make it to Rome, “For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers, making request if, by some means, now at last I may find a way in the will of God to come to you. For I long to see you, that I ma impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established- that is, that I may be encouraged together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me.”

Having heard of their faith, Paul rejoiced and was seeking to come in person to rejoice in the Lord together with them. Paul had journeyed and ministered to many different people across the known world at the time, and here he is saying he wants to make a point to get to Rome to likewise minister to them as well, to which he then proclaims in verse 16 “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek” Regardless of the circumstances, or surrounding pressures, Paul is dedicated to the gospel ministry. As we know having gone through the book of Acts, we have seen Paul have to face trial after trial, having to endure some form of persecution it would seem in each and every city that he entered. Yet, that did not deter him, to be faithful in preaching the gospel of Christ, of which he laid out in the first few verses here, establishing that Jesus, the one who was crucified is indeed the promised messiah, from the lineage of David. Just this statement along would put him in the cross hairs of the Jewish religious leaders, for they had rejected Jesus, and infact had him put to death as a blasphemer, the very one whom God had promised he would send, the very one who the law and the prophets foretold. In their blindness and hatred toward him they plotted and schemed for his death....and in doing so, fulfilling God's purpose and plan for redemption, not of the Jews only, but of the whole world.

It is this Gospel that Paul is not ashamed of, the one in which would get him kicked out of cities, the one in which there were threats on his life for talking about yet he all the more boldly proclaimed it, knowing and believing that it is the power of God unto salvation to all those who believe it, believing the gospel was of more value than his own life and comfort. That is quite the reality to be faced with is it not? How much does Paul put us to shame today, being one who has reconciled his life as forfeit for the sake of the gospel. There are many across the world who believe as such, facing persecution and death daily for their belief, we here in this country are afforded a level of safety and freedom from that for now, but that isn't to say a day may come where that may no longer be true. As our society is more and more embracing sinful desires and perversion there will become more and more hatred and justification for the suppression and persecution of those who believe this gospel. I think of the case of this missing Titanic sub, for those who may not be aware, earlier this week a rich CEO, and his 19 year old son, along with 3 others went in a small experimental craft down to see the wreckage of the Titanic. They went missing, and there has been a search for them for the past few days having only 96 hours of oxygen available to them. As of yesterday a debris field was found, believing to be this sub, which appeared likely not able to handle the pressures at that depth and imploded.

The reactions to this news has been met by some, with sadness at the loss of life, but by others with rejoicing in the death of this rich man and his kid. Having demonized those with money, as seeing them as being everything that is wrong with this world there is a sizable portion of people rejoicing in his death, and there are many more who are apathetic and don't care. I bring this up as an example for it is as much the same with Christianity and the gospel, Just as the rich has been demonized to a point where many rejoice in the death of one, we would be ignorant to think that such demonization toward Christians would never come and in many ways the ground work toward such has already begun. This societal hatred toward the rich did not happen over night, and neither will the persecution of Christians, it is a slow move further and further into sinfulness, justifying sin to the point that it becomes morally right in society and all those who speak out against it become oppressors, and the problem.

It is a scary and sobering thought, our society has changed drastically in the past 5 to 10 years, and with that change has come a falling away and a shift ever more into pagan ideologies and belief, justifying sin, celebrating perversion, and seeking to silence all who speak out against it in framing them as being ones who promoting violence through their rhetoric, just merely by offering a differing opinion or belief. It is becoming all the more important to be grounded in your faith, to be connected with a fellowship of believers, and to determine like Paul, to not be ashamed of the gospel of Christ. There is a tendency within the community of believers in this country to rely and trust that we can find victory and peace within the political system, becoming focused upon the politics of the day. And while such a thing is most definitely important, and honorable it is not the answer. The true answer lies within Jesus Christ, and the gospel ministry. It is only the gospel which has power to change hearts and minds, as Paul says, "For in the gospel, the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith." Only Christ through the gospel has any real power. Therefore it is upon the gospel that we should stand, despite the oppression or persecution which may come of it.

We have an excellent example of how God uses seemingly bad situations for the good of the gospel and we went through the book of Acts. We saw over and over again how God used such things to bring the gospel to ever more people, and with Paul throughout his time in prison we know that those around him, the guards and I am sure others also came to believe through the ministry of the gospel through suffering. It is in these times when the rubber hits the road sort to speak, the faithful will endure, the true Israel will stand, and hardships and trials, persecution and oppression will cause those who are not rooted in gospel of Jesus Christ, to ultimately turn away.

Proving in the end that their belief was not genuine, was no more than a surface understanding and belief. We can take heart in knowing, that God's people will persevere, God's people will stand, and in the end God's people will prevail. For though the powers of Satan may be strong, and his influence in this world great, as believers we must always remember, he has already been defeated, and what we are seeing in this sinful world is Satan's death cry, a desperate lashing out in a final attempt to drive all away from God that he can. Just like a rabid animal, cornered with no chance of survival, so to is Satan as he practices his influence over this world. We must put our trust in the one who has conquered, who alone holds life and death in his hands. And stand firm upon this foundation, upon the word of God, so that the righteousness of God maybe revealed to a lost and dying world, that through faith and repentance people may come to know the joy and peace of the gospel of Jesus Christ. For as it is written, the just shall live by faith. And it is only through faith that we may endure the trials of this life, knowing them to be temporary, but our home in the presence of our God is eternal, and it is in him that we endure, it is for him that we strive, and it is in him that we rest, knowing that the all mighty God, has chosen us to be heirs with his son, to inherit the kingdom which as been prepared for us.