

Romans: A Conclusion

Romans 16

Deuteronomy 30:1-10

Deuteronomy 30:11-20

Responsive Psalm 146

This morning we are going to try to wrap up this book of Romans. There is some controversy surrounding chapter 16 here, as to whether or not it was originally Paul's writing, or was added on later by someone else. Due to that, many argue that it shouldn't have been included in scripture, but honestly as we read it this morning its inclusion, or emission I don't think makes much of a difference since the entire chapter is not much more than greetings to a few of the people in Rome, sprinkled it with a little bit of exhortation that has already been stated in previous chapters. Personally I don't get caught up in the argument back and forth whether or not this chapter should be included because for the most part seems inconsequential. But I think its not a bad thing to understand some of these issues. One of the reasons that many argue that this should not be included is simply the fact that Paul had yet to visit Rome, so the question arises, how does he know these people by name who apparently hold a special place in his heart. Another piece to the controversy is that in no other writing of Paul do we see such a conclusion with any other letter to any other churches. So often the speculation is that this last chapter here was actually quite possibly part of another letter, a letter that is missing and these greetings is all that is left. Another idea, is that as I mentioned already, this was tacked on later by someone else, quite possibly one of Paul's followers, or maybe his scribe, for there is evidence that Paul often had someone write for him due to some affliction causing writing to be a difficulty for him.

So this morning we aren't going to actually spend a lot of time in this chapter, for there isn't a whole lot to dig out of other than some character studies into the individuals that are mentioned here. Which can be interesting from a historical point of view, grounded this letter to the Roman church in reality and adding to its credibility. So instead of spending a lot of time looking at the historical aspect and who these people that are written to are, I thought we would take some time this morning in conclusion to maybe give a broader overview summary of the entire chapter, to sort of bring it all together. That being said, let us go ahead and read chapter 16. (read 16)

Paul's purpose or writing this letter was to encourage the Roman church and to persuade the people of that Church of the certainty of their future in Christ. This encouragement will likely prove as a cornerstone in the future tribulation that this church will suffer by the hands of the Roman Empire for in the coming years there was serious effort by the Roman Empire to eradicate all Christians. Many were crucified along the side of the roads, and others were thrown to lions in the Colosseum for the entertainment of the people. Recalling these words from Paul, reminding believers of their place around the throne of God, as chosen beloved children of God would likely have been a great encouragement in these dark times. And though, many lost their lives during this time, there were others who were brought in to the family having been witnesses of the great faith found in these people who laid down their lives for their belief, knowing and understanding that their gain in Christ far outweighed their loss in life. So much to the Roman Empire's disappointment I am sure, there was a rise in Christianity during this time, there was a great moment of growth as the faith of God's people were tested and found true proving to many others the truth and reality of this gospel.

So instead of the intended outcome of the Church being destroyed and dying off, it ultimately played a part in the destruction and fall of Rome. So these words of Paul's letter would ring out true to a people who would be deprived of their most basic human rights and who would possibly lose everything they owned including their life as a result of their belief. AS they are reminded that their treasure is not here on this earth, but rather it is with Christ who has indeed given them all things.

As I was studying this week for this final sermon on the book of Rome one of the main commentaries that I have been using throughout this series as a summary conclusion which I thought was quite good because it touches on the highlights and main points of Paul's letter in each and every chapter as it builds up to the conclusion of our hope that we have in the fulfilled promises found in Christ. So I thought today we would sort of skim through it as both a refresher of the past how ever long its been we have been I this book, and also as a conclusion to give us maybe sort of a larger overview look of this letter. So today's message will be borrowed heavily from the final chapter of Tom Hollands book on Romans, The Divine Marriage. It was helpful for me to sort of review and hit the highlights of this letter Paul wrote, so I thought we would do the same this morning, with a quick overview of each chapter and its overarching themes.

In the opening of this letter, Paul firmly roots this gospel message in the promises that God had made, this was not some new thing, but rather this gospel is intrinsically tied to what has come before. This is an important message for both the Jew and the Gentile believers as it shows God's work in his fulfillment in Christ. Paul pointed out that Jesus is the promised seed of David, and the one who had been sent to bring the righteousness of God to his people which is desperately needed because of mankind's natural rebellion against it's creator. There is no what if's or changes with God, what he claims he will do, he will accomplish and as promised he has brought redemption for his people by the promised Messiah.

Paul then went on in chapter 2 to take this reality and argue that those who previously were thought to be on the outside were included in this salvific work. In chapter 1 he said righteousness would come upon the ungodly, the gentiles, the outsiders and that circumcision was not the guarantee that the Jews believed was the sign of their redemption, but rather what mattered was the circumcision of the heart, faith and belief not ritual and practice. And also, that those who believed through such ritual and practice were righteous, were indeed just as lost in their sins as their Gentile counterparts, putting all of mankind outside of the righteousness of God, who without faith could not come to the father to find righteousness and hope which they so desperately needed.

In chapter 3, Paul brings in a lot of references to the old testament writings all of which have links to an exodus theme. The main drive of these texts is that man is in exile from God, separated and lost, wondering aimlessly through the wilderness of life, but as he states in verses 21 through 26 we have a great hope of redemption found in Jesus which has been revealed. "But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith n Jesus Christ to all, and on all who believe for there is no difference. For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God sent forth as a propitiation by his blood through faith to demonstrate his righteousness because in his forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at this present time his righteousness, that he might be the just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus."

Paul continues the exile theme as he builds his argument of the church is represented in Christ who is the atoning Passover sacrifice, and in this new covenant established in his blood, there is no special status for Jews or Gentiles, but rather both are united together by the one who is faithful to his covenant promises, by the giving of his Son for the remission for the remission of sins.

Which then Paul moves into the focus of justification and membership in this new covenant community, proving the Abraham's justification was considered in the terms of the requirements that God made for him as Paul points out that his justification had nothing to do with his circumcision, for he was justified while uncircumcised. Verse 1 of chapter 4. "What then shall we say that Abraham how father has found according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does scripture say? Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace, but as debt. But to him who does not works but believes on him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted as righteousness. Abraham's righteousness was not found in his obedience, but in his faith and it was that faith which produced obedience, in the offering of his only son as a sacrifice. He knew that God would keep his promise to give the promised seed through Isaac, and would therefore raise his son from the dead. Paul's point here is that this is the same faith that new covenant believers exercise, for we believe that God has raised Jesus from the dead and has raised up an spiritual family as a result.

In chapter 5, Paul points out that through the fall of Adam, all of mankind is under a curse. Each and every individual is born into a natural state of sin and rebellion against God creating a bleak and hopeless situation of inevitable death and punishment. There is none who escapes this reality, except through the blood of Christ. God had brought about a new humanity through the death of his Son, raising for himself a people from the ashes of a fallen world to be born again in the likeness of his Son. And we, this new creation are on a new exodus through this foreign land, in which we dwell, but are not longer citizens of. Through Adam all have died, but through Christ all are made alive. Just how Adam's sin ultimately had far reaching consequences into humanity, Christ's actions of righteousness will have far reaching consequences for those who are apart of this new nation of people whom he represents. While Adam's sin the garden brought all under condemnation, Christs death on the cross brought many into righteousness. The Glory of God is now displayed in this new exodus with a far greater intensity than the original exodus out of Egypt. God's people are freed not from physical bondage, but from the bondage of sin itself, no longer a slave to it, but rather servants of righteousness, a status that carries with it all the connections, and meaning of the original call for Israel to be servants of the Lord.

With Paul reviewing the history of the human family under Adam, He likened humanities covenant with sin and Satan as a marriage, to which all are bound to until death. But this was not just a mere illustration, but an actual description of covenant reality. A covenant only annulled by the death of its members. The point that Paul established here in chapter 7 is that salvation depends upon Christ, and Christ alone. For through his death, the covenantal relationship binding humanity to Satan was canceled. Christ severed Satan's authority, which had been given to him by the law. For the law was obliged by the covenant nature, expressing the will of a covenant God, to respect relationships which were entered into freely and therefore had to respect the right of the husband, in this case, Satan. But now, by having our identity found in sharing in the death of Christ, we are no longer bound under this law, or covenant and have been made free to marry another. We have been pledged to Christ, our redeemer, whose death delivered us from Sin.

In chapter 8 Paul picks back up with the theme of the Christian exodus, describing the believing community as the children of God who are led by the spirit. This leading of the Spirit is reminiscent of the cloud and pillar of fire which led the children of Israel out of captivity into the promised land. We have now been given the Spirit to guide us in our exodus through life, as we journey through the wilderness of this world toward our own entrance into the glorious promised land. Paul points to the promise of God, of a new creation, which was predicted by the prophets of old, saying that the church, along side with nature groan for this fulfillment.

And this day, of entering into the promised land he says will be accomplished when the birth pains have been completed. The final display of the children of God, all who have been redeemed by the blood of Christ, will bring to completion the redemption of creation. There are no forces in heaven, nor on earth which can separate us from this reality, we are bound in a covenantal marriage relationship with the one true God who has created all things new for his glory and purpose. We have died, with him and rose into an everlasting covenant which can not ever be annulled or destroyed. For in that death, Christ has defeated death itself, and we one day will rise immortal to meet him in that promised land. There is now nothing, not even death itself that can separate us, the covenant community, from the love of God, we his adopted children are assured of our inevitable, and eventual arrival in Zion.

In chapter 9 Paul begins to point out the inevitable question in all of this, “Where are the Jewish people in this new exodus salvation? He begins by pointing to himself, and asserting that he valued the blessed heritage that he himself shared with every Jew, but pointed out to the God often bypassed lawful inheritance rights in favor of a people with no rights. Verse 1 of chapter 9 “I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit. That I have a great sorrow and continual grief in my heart for I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for the sake of my countrymen according to the flesh, who are all Israelites to whom pertain the adoption, the glory of the covenants, the giving of the law and the service of God and the promises, of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect, for they are not all Israel who are of Israel, nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham, but in Isaac your seed shall be called. That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God but the children of promise are counted as the seed.

Paul uses the hardening of Pharaoh's heart as an example of Israel, warning that those who turn from this high calling will become vessels of wrath under God's judgment. His warning, and his lesson here is that this hardening, and consequential judgment of Israel was not an exception, but rather it reflects God's dealing with all of mankind. Disobedient Israel had no divine right to avoid this consequence, and neither do gentiles who also like Pharaoh harden their hearts to the things of God. This is the state of all creation unless, and until God intervenes.

In chapter 10, building upon what he has been writing to the church in Rome, Paul seeks to point out to his fellow Jewish kinsmen that the gospel message is not a departure from the law, but rather it is what the law pointed to and was intended to serve. Christ is, for the believer the fulfillment of the law. The law written was to show God's standard, his requirement for sinless perfection in which no created man could attain. Therefore there is a need for the promised Messiah, the one who would come and lead his people out of the captivity of sin. This was the message that Israel was given, but in the hardness of their hearts worshiped the creating thing, instead of the creator, the law became their believed means of salvation when the law was given to bring condemnation and judgment.

Christ was given so that we may be reconciled and found righteous by his sacrifice, but he was rejected as an imposter and false teacher for he taught against the practice of the law for salvation. So Paul points out, that Christ was always the intended end of the law, the one and only who could bring salvation to a lost and fallen people. But that is not to say that God abandoned Israel, no, just as in the times of old, a remnant shall be saved. God used the rejection of Israel to outreach to the gentiles, which was also a part of the prophesy, that those who are not God's people, would be called God's people. The Jewish root still remained, but now the Gentiles have been grafted into this root, which was the covenant that God made with Abraham,

And Paul argued that even the natural branches which had been cut off could be grafted in. that is a natural born Jew, by having the faith of Abraham in this promised Messiah who has come, could share with the gentiles in the covenant blessings given to their father Abraham. Making from 2 distinct groups, one nation under God, a people from all corners of the world, who worship him in faith, and in truth. Therefore as Paul argued for the last few remaining chapters, since we have been united in Christ, we should likewise seek that unity in Christ like love. Christians are all called to a priestly ministry, to be holy and pleasing to God and we have all been transformed in our thinking through the holy spirit so that this perfect and holy will of God may be discerned. Because of God's work in bringing the church together from all nations, and social status' we are each a part of that body with our own God given roles to fulfill. Paul exhorts us all in his letter here to be characterized by sincere and devoted love, and humility, and a hatred for evil. We, the church are to be zealous in service, joyful in hope, patient in affliction, prayerful and generous. We are to live in harmony with one another, seeing Christ in one another.

We are to help, encourage, and exhort one another in this faith, the strong serving the weak, the rich serving the poor, in a reflection of Christ's service of his sacrifice bringing us redemption, because we are in the service of the most high king and should seek his purpose, and his glory in all that we do. Paul appeals to each to give preference to one another, and to not be torn apart by secondary issues, do not let food, or days, or ritual tear apart the people of God, the ones whom God has united together, should not allow themselves to be distracted by such things. This was a huge issue in a church made up of Jewish and Gentile believers, and Paul calls on them again, reminding them that they have now been made one body in Christ, and it is their reasonable service to live as such, giving preference for one another, loving one another, seeing Christ first in one another.

Then Paul concludes his letter, which we read this morning, with greetings to certain individuals with a hope of journeying to them, and as noted in last week, Paul did indeed make it to Rome, but not by his planned journey, but rather through captivity, and the courts, as a Roman citizen making an appeal to Caesar for his trial. And that is where this letter is left off, Paul's instruction and teaching to the Roman church of Christ's work in bringing both the Jew and Gentiles together in faith to serve a higher purpose in God's calling. And we today, are likewise a reflection of that, a local expression of the body of Christ whose calling is to the community in which we live. To stand firm upon the truth of scripture, to share the gospel, and to live as servants to one another in a Christ reflecting love.