

The
New
Testament
in a Year

Week 33

Romans 3-7

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he is feeling somewhat depressed
these days. Go Raptors!*

Paul the faithful Jew has come to believe that Jesus is Israel's Messiah (Christ). What does this mean for Israel? And what does it mean for the rest of humanity, the Gentiles? Paul's deep wrestling with this produced some of the richest and most challenging insights into God and God's ways. These insights are urgent in a growing and increasingly multi-ethnic church.

Monday

Romans 3

Paul has celebrated the Gospel of hope (1:16-17). He has fleshed out the sinfulness of Gentiles and Jews alike (1:18-2:29). Even Israel, entrusted with "God's oracles" has been unfaithful. Like all humanity, it has been held in sin's power. As Paul cites passages from Israel's scriptures, I get a strong sense of hopelessness here. Sin is inclusive!

Does Paul's description of humanity's sinfulness ring true to you? In what other ways would you describe our problem?

Israel, representing us all, has not kept covenant with God. But God is faithful! That's what the "righteousness of God" means. God won't scrap the Covenant with Israel. Instead, God has kept it by acting in Jesus. He has been faithful, most especially by offering himself as a sacrifice for our sin.

"Justification" is a covenant-relationship term. We are right with God, not by our ethnicity, nor by what we have done, but only because of what Jesus has done. The Great News is, he has done enough for all of us. Salvation is inclusive too!

Spend some time thinking about the goodness of God, revealed in Jesus. Turn these thoughts into prayers of praise.

Tuesday

Romans 4

Paul is re-exploring the story of Israel, through the new lens of Jesus. He is telling a story that includes us all.

Abraham stands at the head of God's family. The key passage here is Genesis 15.6: "Abraham believed God, and God reckoned it to him as righteousness." God pronounced approval upon Abraham.

Aha! God did this before Abraham was circumcised (Genesis 17). Circumcision was a very personal sign of division between Jew and Gentile (men, at least). It showed who belongs in God's covenant family. Yet Abraham was "in" before he was circumcised. Aha again! This was before the Law (Torah) was given. So neither circumcision nor obeying the Law can be the decisive marks of family membership.

It is grace. Abraham was "in" because he believed God would bring life out of his nearly-dead body (i.e., descendants). We are "in" because we believe God brought life out of Jesus' really-dead body (i.e., resurrection). We belong because we trust in God. That's enough!

Where are you being stretched to trust God's promises? How might Abraham be an inspiration to you?

Wednesday

Romans 5

Think about this chapter as talking about the same thing, in three different ways.

5.1-5: Our faith in Jesus' faithfulness gives us peace with God. So we can share in God's glory. We can also endure through sufferings. God uses them to produce fruit in our lives.

5.6-11: I try to be strong (on top of things, competent, smart), but am always encountering my weaknesses. I try to be good, but trip over my sin. Yet it is as a weak man, a sinful person, that Christ saved me. My hope rests in him.

Are you "achievement oriented?" Consider this: In Christ we can simply receive that which we struggle so hard to achieve – peace with God.

5.12-21: Paul contrasts Jesus with Adam. Paul likely considered Adam to be a historical person, but even if we don't, we can understand him as representing all of humanity. He represents us in our sin, our rebellion against God. How much more then does Jesus represent us! He obeyed God and undid Adam's disobedience. So all can be right with God.

Think of a broken part of your life. Can you find hope for that in this chapter?

Thursday

Romans 6

What do you know about your baptism?

I've heard that in some parts of Latin America, babies are baptised in tiny water-filled coffins. The priest immerses the child under the water, saying "I kill you in the name of Jesus." He lifts them out, proclaiming "I raise you in the name of Jesus." Shocking! Paul would love it.

Baptism symbolizes the hinge between the old person and the new person. We share in Jesus's death for sin, and we share in his resurrection to life. Our old self dies and our new self is born. So, Paul insists, don't act like you belong to sin. Think of sin as a power that claims dominion over us. God's grace in Jesus has freed you from its power.

Some hear Paul's message of the free gift of grace and forgiveness, and take it as a license to keep on sinning. (Why not! God will forgive me.) Paul will have none of that. Jesus sets you free from sin's power, to be "slaves of righteousness." In other words, part of the servant people of God. God is changing you (sanctification), preparing you for eternal life. And life begins now!

Does this change how you think of your baptism? If you are not baptised, why not talk with your pastor about it.

Friday

Romans 7

In this chapter, we who are not Jews are eavesdropping on a conversation between one Jewish Christian (Paul) and others, those who "know the Law." The Law is the Torah, given by God through Moses. It is good, and if Israel followed it, it would have shown all of humanity how to live as God's people.

But because of sin, Israel did not follow the Torah. Rather than showing how to live as God's people, the Torah showed Israel's disobedience. Paul experienced this personally. I know what is good, but my sin keeps me from doing good. I'm in the "flesh" ("flesh" is not our physical body, but our humanity in rebellion against God.)

Paul is not being anti-Jewish. His basic critique was widely shared in Israel, and follows the traditions of the prophets. However, after centuries of Christian anti-Semitism, Paul's words are best used carefully. They cover us all.

The good news? Because of Jesus, our "fleshy" selves have died, and we are no longer bound to the Law. Using the analogy at the beginning of the chapter, we are no longer married to it. Jesus has done what the Law could not do. He has dealt with sin by his obedient death on the cross.