

Will You Know the Truth?

Last Sunday we talked about the state of our spiritual lives. I asked each of you to picture your spiritual life as a lake with 3 main streams feeding into it. I talked about the truth stream, the spiritual/devotional stream, and the wisdom stream. I stated that we need all three streams to be healthy if our spiritual lakes are to be full and overflowing, reaching others for the kingdom. I invited us to take a walk up each of the streams and to weed out any blockages or sources of pollution that may be impoverishing or poisoning our spiritual lives.

I'm not brave enough to ask for a show of hands as to how many of you took time to act on that invitation after the service or to ask you to share what you may have found. I am realistic enough to believe many of you might need help to carry out that assignment. So, this is what we're going to do. In the next few sermons I'm going to keep the image of the Spiritual lake before us and I want to invite you to walk with me up the various streams to see what we can discover together.

Today I want you to come with me up to the head waters of the stream called truth. I want to talk about three non-negotiable points of truth, three things we need to believe and hold in common to be really alive and healthy as Christians. These three non-negotiable truths are discovered in our Scripture lesson from Romans

But before we identify these three truths I want to take you through the passage and place it in its original context. Paul is writing to the church at Rome. We believe the Roman church was made up of both former Jews and Gentile or non-Jewish believers, but we think a large majority was of non-Jewish background.

In the verses leading up to our passage this morning, Paul identifies himself as a servant of Christ Jesus and as an apostle set apart to proclaim the good news that he has received from God. He tells the readers that this good news was promised by the prophets of old and is all about God's Son. He tells us that God's Son had a human nature

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and was a descendent of king David, but that He was also proven to be God's Son by His holiness

and by His Resurrection from the dead, through which He earns the right to be and to be called "Jesus Christ our Lord." Paul tells the Romans that it was through Christ that he and the other apostles have received grace and the commission to call persons everywhere to obedience to Christ, an obedience which comes through believing in Him.

In other words, the introduction to Paul's letter to the Romans is already weighted heavily on the side of the truth stream. Paul is anxious to talk to the believers at Rome about Jesus as the Son of God, raised from the dead, the Savior and Lord of all whom the Father brings to Him. Paul is also committed to calling others to believe in Jesus as the Christ and to become His disciples.

After this meaty introduction, Paul shares some personal words with the believers at Rome, commending them for their reputation of faith, and telling them of his prayers and affection for them. He tells them how he longs to visit with them in person and that he had planned many times to come to them in the past, but that those plans had been interrupted. He tells them that he is eager to preach the gospel to all in Rome.

Then we come to the verses I want us to focus on this morning. Paul says in verse 16: "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile."

This is an extraordinary notion and quite preposterous on the surface. I was thinking about this in the middle of the Communion service two weeks ago. I was standing at the Lord's table waiting for the ushers to come back from serving you, and the thought popped into my mind: this whole enterprise is foolish. The idea that I should realistically hope to change people's lives and change the world through preaching seems ridiculous. How can this exercise make any difference at all? Someone looking in

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from the outside very well see the whole thing as very lame indeed.

But Paul is adamant: "I'm not ashamed of the gospel (why), because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes." Paul could say this because he had already seen it happen again and again, and so have I. Over 36 years of ministry I have seen new life and new hope and new lifestyles come to many people through the preaching of the gospel. There are people in church today who can testify to being delivered from alcohol. There are those who can talk about how God saved their marriages. And, there are those who can say with a great deal of conviction that they would be dead today if they had not received the message of God's love for them in Christ. **The message of Christ is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes it.**

A second significant thing Paul says in our Scripture for this morning is found in verse 17, "For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last." This good news bulletin is for Jews and non-Jewish believers alike. The Jew will not be saved by keeping all the commandments and ritual observances found in Jewish law. Even if one could do that flawlessly, it wouldn't be enough to satisfy the requirements of a Holy God. Neither will the non-Jew be saved by her or his good intentions or by keeping whatever set of laws he or she ascribes to. True righteousness comes only one way and that is by faith; as Paul says, "from first to last." "The righteous (or the just) will live by faith." We are saved and made righteous by our faith in the righteousness of the Son of God. It is by believing in Him and by walking in a living relationship with Him that we are enabled to please God. **The just, without exception, will live by faith.**

The third point Paul makes in our Scripture lesson for today is that mankind in general, and many people in particular are living in rebellion against God; and, deep down inside, they know it. Romans 1:20 says, "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities--his eternal power and divine nature--have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are

without excuse." Verses 21-23 say further, "For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking

became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles." In other words, they became worshipers of idols.

There are two other observations that Paul makes regarding people in rebellion against God. Number one: People choose to reject God in favor of their wicked lifestyles. Because they want to sin, they suppress the truth. In other words, if we would acknowledge God and celebrate His holiness, we couldn't do some of the things we want to do. We reject God for one main reason and that main reason is so we can do our own thing.

And, then, the second observation Paul makes is that people's rejection of God and their worship of things that are not God, invite and invoke (call down) the wrath of God. Do you want to know why the world's so messed up and why your life is so messed up? If you are living in rebellion against God and worshiping things that are not God, you've got your answer. Our actions and the actions of people all around us are invoking--calling down--God's wrath. In other words we are "asking for it," and the fact that any of us are still alive is tribute to God's mercy.

Did you ever stop to consider why we cannot solve the world's problems? I mean with all our educated people and with all our technology, and with all our wealth, and with all our medical advances, and with all our learned psychologists and sociologists, you would think we could make at least a dent in the unceasing violence and injustice and collective insanity of our world today, but it just isn't happening. And, it's never going to happen unless and until at least a majority of us acknowledge God as creator and receive Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord of all. As the old saying goes, "There is no rest for the wicked," and whether we want to hear it or not, we are the wicked;

unless and until we have received the righteousness of God which comes through faith in Jesus Christ, we are the wicked.

Now, let me remind you where we are traveling on our journey this morning. We've left the lakeshore of our spiritual lives and we have been walking up the stream called truth. And, the question is are we all on board with the truth? I remember a scene from the television show "Jag" in which a marine officer was being cross-examined and baited by the military attorney. At the climax of the show, his discipline breaks down and he shouts, "You want the truth? You can't handle the truth!" Can we handle the truth this morning?

As we review our Scripture lesson for today we encounter three main truths. Truth number one is this: There is one God and Creator of all. And all that there is, is for one purpose. We were created and we exist for the praise of His glory. Truth number two is that mankind on the whole is knowingly in rebellion against the Creator and is therefore subject to His wrath; we are the chief authors of our own misery. Truth number three is Jesus Christ. He is the Son of God come to earth as a man to die as a sacrifice for all mankind. Our rebellion ends and our salvation begins the moment we put our faith in Him and begin to live in Him and through Him.

Do you know there is a God? Do you know that you have offended Him? Do you know He has given you a Savior in Jesus Christ our Lord? These are three non-negotiable truths we need to embrace. Are you ready to embrace these truths and receive Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord this morning? If so, say, "**Yes.**" **Just say "Yes!"**

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Romans 1:16-25

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