

Sunday 6th September 2020

Romans 15:1-7

Introduction:

There is a story about a security guard at a factory. One day when he was on duty he stopped a worker who was walking out of the factory gate, pushing a wheel-barrow with a suspicious looking package in it. The guard opened up the package to find that it contained nothing some old bits of rubbish, sawdust and sweepings from the floor.

The next day he stopped the same worker who once again was pushing a wheel-barrow containing a suspicious looking package. Once again it contained nothing of value.

The same thing happened for several days in succession, and the guard finally said to the worker; “OK, I give up – I know you must be up to something but I can’t work out what it is. I promise I won’t report you, but please put me out of my misery. Tell me what it is you are stealing”.

The worker looked at the guard and smiled as he replied, “It’s the wheel-barrow my friend, I’m stealing the wheel-barrow”.

This is our last look at Paul’s letter to the Romans for the time being. As such it will be both a review of where we have been and a spring board to the next few weeks teaching.

1. Romans – A Review:

St Paul wrote his letter to *all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints* (1:7). He begins by reminding them, and us, that we are all in the same boat – we are all sinners and we all need God’s mercy and love: *Righteousness comes through faith in Jesus Christ, to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Jesus Christ.* (3:22-24)

This, says Paul, was the demonstration of God’s love that *while we were still sinners Christ died for us* (5:8). He then goes on to summarise this in the following way: *The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord* (6:23).

Despite this demonstration of God’s love and mercy Paul recognizes that we continue to struggle with sin. As he says of himself in chapter 7 – I do not do what I want to do, but what I do not want to do that I do!

But he then seeks to reassure the Roman Christians, and us, with his great declaration at the beginning of chapter 8; *There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ* because the spirit of Jesus Christ lives in us. For *we are more than conquerors through him who loved us* and there is nothing in all creation that can separate *us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord*. (8:37-39)

We do, however, have a part to play in all this - we need to respond - with faith: *If you confess with your mouth "Jesus is Lord", and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved* (10:9). And we need to commit ourselves to God: *Therefore, in view of God's mercy, offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God* (12:1)

The last few chapters of Romans go on to explore how we achieve this. We achieve it by living in love. We are called to reflect God's love, shown to us in Jesus, to those around us whether they are Christian or not.

So, reflect for a moment. What do you see when you look at a person?

- What do you see when you look at Boris Johnson, or Donald Trump?
- What do you see when you look at a police officer or a street cleaner?
- What do you see when you look at someone of a different racial background?
- What do you see when you look at the Queen, or a young person in a high school uniform?

Often what we see is not just the person, but the group or organisation they belong to, or work for and our own preconceptions. It colours our perception of who they are, and conversely their behavior influences how we view their group.

So what do other people see when they look at you?

2. Christlikeness:

God's love has been shown to us in Jesus Christ, through his life, death and resurrection. Paul's desire is that we should reflect that love to others – in other words we should be like Jesus. *Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you* (15:7). So when someone looks at us, what do they see? Do they see Jesus because we belong to him? If so, what sort of Jesus do they see?

Some Christians give the impression they have been baptized in vinegar! (Anon)

Jesus encouraged his disciples, his followers and us, to follow him by imitating him; *If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. (Matthew 16:24), and A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you so you must love one another (John 13:34)*

Following Jesus means carrying a cross like he did – walking in his footsteps, and living the way he did - in love and humility.

Over the coming weeks we will explore what that means for us in reality. How can we be ‘like Jesus’ in our everyday, 21st century lives? What does it mean for us to live so that others see Jesus in us? For if we can live so that others see Jesus in us, then we will bring honour and glory to God.

Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God (Romans 15:7)

For Reflection:

- If you have been following our series through Romans, what is your favourite passage and why?
- What do you think Paul means by the verse ‘accept one another, then just as Christ accepted you? (Romans 15:7)
- How would someone who didn’t know anything about you describe you when they met you for the first time?
- If you were actually with that person for a whole week (perhaps on a holiday, or conference) how would they describe you at the end of the week?
- What does it mean for you to be Christ like in the way you live?

Prayer:

Father God we thank you for your love shown to us through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Help us to reflect that love in our lives as we seek to live like him, to love like him, and to carry our cross like him. Amen.