

Pastor Jordan Gades Sermon, 5/26/19 Romans 3:28-30, 5: 1-11

Good Evening! Today we are diving into the letter to the Romans by Paul for the second week. Throughout my readings and searches I found something that I forgot about for some reason and it goes back to Martin Luther. And since it's also Memorial Day weekend I thought it would be fitting to say a few words about him. It's not often talked about that, but while there was Luther bravely taking on the Catholic Church, it was millions of people across Europe that stood behind him, fought battles for him and their protestant beliefs, of which some 6 million died, that got us to where we are today.

It's those beliefs that those people stood behind and died for. So where did Luther find the basis for those beliefs? This is a serious question with a huge weight attached to it. Luther did not make this stand haphazardly. He took his stand for from verses all over scripture. But specifically Romans.

Now Romans is no easy read. Paul is using all types of language that we hardly come across in our daily life. Romans has been described as “The most pessimistic page of literature upon which your eyes ever rested” and at the same time, “the most optimistic poem to which your ears ever listened.” -G. Campbell Morgan

Paul is writing this letter to a group of people who are relatively new to Christianity, let alone the thousands of years of Jewish history which Christianity has its roots in. And at a casual glance you will immediately see how pessimistic this letter from Paul is. Over and over he talks about sin and judgement. He talks about the law and our complete inability to follow it. And here in our reading today from chapter he starts talking about how suffering is inevitable and it's time to start taking joy in our suffering.

This might make sense to some of us, maybe we've heard this a few times, maybe if you've taken an intensive bible study into Paul and Romans in particular. Maybe you've caught a really good devotional or

book. But to most of us, we are looking at this letter, critiquing it based off of our understanding of the world and how the world works.

We understand that it actually within our power to follow the law. We don't kill. We don't steal. We never speed do we? We never look for ways to get around rule and regulations, do we? But in theory we could follow every letter of the law if we just tried really really hard. And suffering, are you kidding me. I'm not going to be happy or joyful in my suffering? What's good about that? And now days it's basically shameful to be suffering isn't it. Isn't every day that I can look at Facebook and social media and everyone is doing great? Big smiles and exotic locations with the perfect meal set before them? We are not supposed to show our suffering, we are supposed to have it all together.

So what is Paul talking about in Romans? Let's hear from Martin Luther

“This letter is truly the most important piece in the New Testament. It is purest Gospel. It is well worth a Christian's while not only to memorize it word for word but also to occupy himself with it daily, as though it were the daily bread of the soul. It is impossible to read or to meditate on this letter too much or too well. The more one deals with it, the more precious it becomes and the better it tastes. Therefore I want to carry out my service and, with this preface, provide an introduction to the letter, insofar as God gives me the ability, so that everyone can gain the fullest possible understanding of it. Up to now it has been darkened by glosses [explanatory notes and comments which accompany a text] and by many a useless comment, but it is in itself a bright light, almost bright enough to illumine the entire Scripture.”

That's pretty good. Why not a few more.

Luther's successor Philip Melanchthon called Romans, “The compendium of Christian doctrine.”

John Calvin said of the Book of Romans, “When anyone understands this Epistle, he has a passage opened to him to the understanding of the whole Scripture.” - Founder of Presbyterian, reformed Baptist

Samuel Coleridge, English poet and literary critic said Paul’s letter to the Romans is “The most profound work in existence.”

Frederick Godet, 19th Century Swiss theologian called the Book of Romans “The cathedral of the Christian faith.”

John Wesley on hearing Luther’s writing on Romans “While he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for my salvation, and an assurance was given me that he had taken my sins away, even mine.” Methodist

So Romans is pretty powerful. And Wesley hits it all right on the head

“I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for my salvation, and an assurance was given me that he had taken my sins away, even mine.”

The message that Paul is repeatedly trying to get across to those people in Rome is about What Jesus, what God has done for us and is continually doing for us.

Paul is saying you know the law. The law tells you what to do and what not to do. God's law kind of does that same thing, but at even deeper level. If we leave meaning of existence at that, we will experience nothing but despair and failure. We can never measure up. We can never do enough. We will be good enough people. There is no such thing as a "pretty good" person in the eyes of the law. It's guilty or innocent. And the pessimistic part of Romans says we are all guilty, of sin, of trespasses, of causing pain and suffering, of disobeying God; there is no hope for us who are alone.

In the midst of this suffering was where Luther found grace in these words from Romans. "Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand"

We are not alone, we stand with God, always. No matter what our situation is at this moment. We are with God. And God is with us. Jesus cleared the way for you and me and all of to come back into the presence of our God. Now and forever. It's not us clawing our way back or working our way to God. Jesus already did that.

That is the belief that set Europe ablaze for 30 years and for which 6 million people died.

Can you imagine being told throughout your life that your life that God is doing nothing but judging everything you do and you will be held accountable for every sin you do. Being basically held hostage by that belief by the church and your entire world?

And then being told, of course you are a sinner but by your faith in a loving God you are saved and know now the presence of God in your life.

These words of Paul are so deep, so wide. It's really time for us to rediscover them for ourselves. So I'm going to ask you to try and read

through romans this week. Try a chapter a night and see how far you get. Write down questions you have. Pray about them. Dive deeper into what it means that we have peace with God or what it means to you and your faith that we stand in the presence of God because of the grace of Jesus Christ. There's a reason Luther found these words and ended up changing the face of the world. That's the power of the word of God on our lives.