

I.N.I.

19th Sunday after Pentecost
October 4, 2015
Romans 1:13-21

In Christ Jesus, who was not ashamed to humble Himself even to the point of death upon the cross, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Paul had never been in Rome, but it was his fervent desire to visit there and it had been for some time. By the end of his third missionary journey he planned to return to Jerusalem and then go on to Rome. Unknown to him that is exactly what would happen, only he would travel to Rome not as a free man, but as a prisoner, a prisoner for Jesus, having been arrested for preaching the Gospel.

In anticipation of this visit Paul wrote this marvelous letter which has been called by Luther the Chief Book of the New Testament. For in this letter the fundamental truths of the Christian faith are clearly proclaimed. In the verses prior to our text Paul discusses the reason for his writing. We read vs. 8-12 of chapter 1: **FIRST, I THANK MY GOD THROUGH JESUS CHRIST FOR YOU ALL, THAT YOUR FAITH IS SPOKEN OF THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE WORLD. FOR GOD IS MY WITNESS, WHOM I SERVE WITH MY SPIRIT IN THE GOSPEL OF HIS SON, THAT WITHOUT CEASING I MAKE MENTION OF YOU ALWAYS IN MY PRAYERS, MAKING REQUEST IF, BY SOME MEANS, NOW AT LAST I MAY FIND A WAY IN THE WILL OF GOD TO COME TO YOU. FOR I LONG TO SEE YOU, THAT I MAY IMPART TO YOU SOME SPIRITUAL GIFT, SO THAT YOU MAY BE ESTABLISHED --THAT IS, THAT I MAY BE ENCOURAGED TOGETHER WITH YOU BY THE MUTUAL FAITH BOTH OF YOU AND ME.**

In the following verses that make up our text, Paul tells them how much he has wanted to get to Rome but so far has been prevented from doing so. He wanted to get to Rome to reap a harvest by preaching the power; the Power of God—the Gospel of Jesus Christ! Of that Gospel Paul says **HE WAS NOT ASHAMED!** He writes: **SO, AS MUCH AS IS IN ME, I AM READY TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO YOU WHO ARE IN ROME ALSO. FOR I AM NOT ASHAMED OF THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST, FOR IT IS THE POWER OF GOD TO SALVATION FOR EVERYONE WHO BELIEVES, FOR THE JEW FIRST AND ALSO FOR THE GREEK.**

Paul had learned of the power of the Gospel firsthand. Remember he was the persecutor Saul who stood by and was glad to see Stephen being stoned to death. He was the hater of Christ and of Christians who hunted them down and hauled them back to Jerusalem for trial. But Christ struck Paul down on his way to Damascus, confronted him with his empty, proud, pharisaical lifestyle and then revealed to Paul His great love for Paul. It was that love that led Christ to lay down His life for all people, not just the Jews!

That Good News, the Gospel, which Paul heard directly from Jesus and later from the disciple Ananias, was POWER, the POWER of God that brought Paul to saving faith. The Greek word for “power” is dynamis. We get the word “dynamite” from that. This Gospel message of what Jesus has done for us blew apart Paul’s dead, unbelieving heart and created a living, active, believing heart.

Yes, of all people, Paul knew firsthand the Power of this Gospel which changed hearts and lives and he couldn’t wait to bring that power to the people of Rome—to all the people of Rome, both Jew and Gentile. For all were in the same boat, all needed salvation, for all were living by nature under the old status. And that is our theme this morning:

THE GOSPEL: The Power of God for Salvation—Creates a New Status for Mankind.

I: The old status: Mankind under the revelation of the wrath of God.

In verse 18 of our text Paul begins a section explaining God’s wrath upon the unrighteousness of mankind. We read: **FOR THE WRATH OF GOD IS REVEALED FROM HEAVEN AGAINST ALL UNGODLINESS AND UNRIGHTEOUSNESS OF MEN, WHO SUPPRESS THE TRUTH IN UNRIGHTEOUSNESS.**

That’s the old status that Paul lived under, that these Roman Christians had and that you and I also were under before knowing Jesus as Lord and Savior.

The word “salvation” literally means—a radical deliverance, a rescue out of a desperate situation. And the situation of all of mankind is a desperate one. All of mankind, all people are under the wrath of God! God’s wrath, His fearful destructive anger toward evil and sin, strikes and hammers down on all unrighteousness and ungodliness. And that wrath has been revealed to mankind.

One man wrote: *When God reveals Himself, He is going into action. Revelation means, not “there it is, I see it!” but “here it is, I feel it!”*

When God reveals His wrath it is inescapable, as will be His revelation of His wrath on Judgment Day. And what provokes God’s wrath—they **SUPPRESS THE TRUTH IN UNRIGHTEOUSNESS.**

In their unrighteous state they hinder the truth and would rather believe the lie of Satan that promises them freedom, to do whatever they want to do. So they don’t believe in the existence of God or trust in His redeeming love or listen to His Word. They live their life as they desire. And God says they are without excuse: **BECAUSE WHAT MAY BE KNOWN OF GOD IS MANIFEST IN THEM, FOR GOD HAS SHOWN IT TO THEM. FOR SINCE THE CREATION OF THE WORLD HIS INVISIBLE ATTRIBUTES ARE CLEARLY SEEN, BEING UNDERSTOOD BY THE THINGS THAT ARE MADE, EVEN HIS ETERNAL POWER AND GODHEAD, SO THAT THEY ARE WITHOUT EXCUSE.**

God who is still at work in nature and in history; for it is **HIS STORY**; continually, over and over again, attests Himself to mankind. He is seen in His works; His invisible attributes of power, goodness, wisdom, justice are all seen in this world of ours. We call this the Natural Knowledge of God, which every human being has from looking at **Creation** and into his own **Conscience**.

But the unbeliever, the unrighteous, the ungodly refuse to see. Paul writes in vs. 21: **BECAUSE, ALTHOUGH THEY KNEW GOD, THEY DID NOT GLORIFY HIM AS GOD, NOR WERE THANKFUL, BUT BECAME FUTILE IN THEIR THOUGHTS, AND THEIR FOOLISH HEARTS WERE DARKENED.**

The unrighteous refuse to thank God and glorify Him for that would acknowledge their dependence on Him. Unbelievers have willed to be free from God, to not be bound to Him or be bound by His love. And therefore God says they are without excuse.

The rest of chapter 1 reveals the depths of depravity that mankind sinks into once he has rejected the God of creation and the redemption that He has prepared.. We read some of Paul’s words from the rest of this chapter: **PROFESSING TO BE WISE, THEY BECAME FOOLS, AND CHANGED THE GLORY OF THE INCORRUPTIBLE GOD INTO AN IMAGE MADE LIKE CORRUPTIBLE MAN -- AND BIRDS AND FOUR-FOOTED ANIMALS AND CREEPING THINGS. THEREFORE GOD ALSO GAVE THEM UP TO UNCLEANNES, IN THE LUSTS OF THEIR HEARTS, TO DISHONOR THEIR BODIES AMONG THEMSELVES, WHO EXCHANGED THE TRUTH OF GOD FOR THE LIE, AND WORSHIPED AND SERVED THE CREATURE RATHER THAN THE CREATOR,...FOR THIS REASON GOD GAVE THEM UP TO VILE PASSIONS. FOR EVEN THEIR WOMEN EXCHANGED THE NATURAL USE FOR WHAT IS AGAINST NATURE. LIKEWISE ALSO THE MEN, LEAVING THE NATURAL USE OF THE WOMAN, BURNED IN THEIR LUST FOR ONE ANOTHER, MEN WITH MEN COMMITTING WHAT IS SHAMEFUL, AND RECEIVING IN THEMSELVES THE PENALTY OF THEIR ERROR WHICH WAS DUE. AND EVEN AS THEY DID NOT LIKE TO RETAIN GOD IN THEIR KNOWLEDGE, GOD GAVE THEM OVER TO A DEBASED MIND, TO DO THOSE THINGS WHICH ARE NOT FITTING; BEING FILLED WITH ALL UNRIGHTEOUSNESS, SEXUAL IMMORALITY, WICKEDNESS, COVETOUSNESS, MALICIOUSNESS; FULL OF ENVY, MURDER, STRIFE, DECEIT, EVIL-MINDEDNESS; THEY ARE WHISPERERS, BACKBITERS, HATERS OF GOD, VIOLENT, PROUD, BOASTERS, INVENTORS OF EVIL THINGS, DISOBEDIENT TO PARENTS, UNDISCERNING, UNTRUSTWORTHY, UNLOVING, UNFORGIVING, UNMERCIFUL; WHO, KNOWING THE RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENT OF GOD, THAT THOSE WHO PRACTICE SUCH THINGS ARE DESERVING OF DEATH, NOT ONLY DO THE SAME BUT ALSO APPROVE OF THOSE WHO PRACTICE THEM.**

Is not Paul speaking clearly and pointedly to the pornographers, the gay activists, the abortionists, the evolutionists, sexually immoral and humanists of our day. These people do what they want to do but God makes of what they do to become a hell of their own imposing. He gives them up to their debased minds, as a judgment, to their unbelief and sin. Rejecting God and doing what they want to do they become their own executioner of God's wrath upon themselves.

One commentator wrote: **Man knows God and denies Him. Man knows God's will and does not do it. He still reaches out for all the forbidden fruit, even though his conscience cries out, "NO!" and tells him of the death that is at the core of that stolen fruit, and then man makes heroes of those strong individuals who dare to gather the most forbidden fruit of all!**

Thank God that for the believing child of God that is the "old status."---under the revelation of God's wrath. For in Christ we are under a new status.

II: The NEW STATUS: Believers under the revelation of the Righteousness of God.

Paul was not ashamed of proclaiming a message that ran and still runs completely contrary to human nature. Paul had seen how the Jews stumbled at the Gospel of a crucified and risen Messiah and they cursed Jesus. He also saw how the Greeks laughed off the Gospel and called it foolishness. But Paul was not ashamed of this Good News for it is not his words, nor the words of any mere mortal; these are the powerful words of the Almighty God! Words that reveal all people's salvation and that creates saving faith.

This Good News of Jesus enters the hearts and lives of people and they are changed forever, just like Paul. The Gospel is the power in the life of the believer and it determines his whole future. It brings salvation to everyone who believes in Jesus.

And just how and why is the Gospel such a saving power? Paul explains: **FOR IN IT THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD IS REVEALED FROM FAITH TO FAITH; AS IT IS WRITTEN, "THE JUST SHALL LIVE BY FAITH."**

Righteousness is that state of being righteous, or perfect, which is the only condition for salvation according to God's Law. But this condition of righteousness is not found in any human being. For since the fall into sin all have sinned and fallen short of God's glory. There is none that does good, no not one! But now the righteousness of God has been revealed, has been made known to all of mankind.

Revelation is God's entering into the lives of people and affecting them. This righteousness is not just reporting the event but making it a reality, an active agent in the life of human beings. This does not come from us, but from God and is given to man. Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians that God didn't count our sins against us but laid them all on His Son so that Christ was made to be sin for us so we might become the righteousness of God.

Remember our first point: God's wrath has been revealed upon natural man, that's our deserved status, standing before our holy God damned in and because of our sins. But now our new status is standing before the righteous, holy God in perfection, in Christ's righteousness. And that becomes ours only through faith in Jesus.

How amazing! Jesus is my righteousness. He has taken my sin and guilt and paid for them in full and now in Christ, with full possession of His perfect holiness, I stand before my Creator, my Almighty God in my Savior's righteousness.

That is the only way any human being can and will be able to stand on that last great day when Jesus comes to judge the hearts of all people.

May God grant that all we who stand today in Christ's righteousness, through faith, will also be standing on that Last Day clothed with Christ's righteousness, with His perfect holiness.

Lord, I believe we're sinners more than sands upon the ocean shore, BUT Thou hast for all a ransom paid, for all a full atonement made. Therefore Bold shall I stand in that great Day, for who ought to my charge shall lay? For Fully thro' these (Christ's blood and righteousness) absolved I am from sin and fear, from guilt and shame.

Amen.

