

## Romans: A Solid Foundation for Christian Living

### Message 15: What now shall we do?

Text: Romans 3:21-26

In last week's message I talked about going to the doctor and receiving his diagnosis. No one likes to hear bad news, but like I said then, you cannot begin the treatment until you know what you have. And so the physician runs a series of tests and he performs an exam, looking for evidence of what ails you. Then he draws a conclusion – your diagnosis. And then comes the question that's been on your mind for some time: what can I do about it? What now shall I do?

This week we're going to examine this question. Once we know what the problem is, we wonder what to do about it. And this is especially true in terms of our relationship with God. In Luke 3:10, John the Baptist is preaching. He presents his diagnosis to his listeners, and they ask, "What now shall we do?" And in Acts 2:37, Peter preaches to the crowd assembled for the feast of Pentecost. The Spirit is moving as Peter explains how this Jesus who was crucified was both Lord and Christ. And the people ask, "What shall we do?" In Acts 16:30, Paul and Silas were in prison. God causes an earthquake to shake the walls, open the door, and break the prisoners' chains. The jailer comes in, attempts to kill himself, but is stopped by Paul who explains how not one prisoner has escaped. The jailer escorts Paul and Silas out of the jail and asks, "What must I do."

And in Romans 3:21-26, after explaining the great problem facing humanity, the utter hopelessness of sin, Paul explains the same here. Oh, the words aren't used here. But the sense of the text is the same. Paul answers for us, given the diagnosis of the problem, what we must now do about it. Listen to what the Bible says (read).

Now this is a turning point on Paul's Roman letter. Remember, his aim is to build up believers and lead others to faith in Christ. He writes in 1:16-17, "*I am not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes... for in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last...*" And everything in Romans from that point to this builds on this truth. From 1:18-3:20, Paul explains the problem. His final diagnosis, which we discussed last week: "*Both Jews and Gentiles – in other words, everyone who lives, are under the power of sin.*" Apart from Jesus Christ, sin is our master. Sin enslaves us so that – despite our best efforts – we cannot know God. We don't seek Him. We don't honor Him. Sin reigns in our bodies, leaving us forever separated from God, His love, and His power in our lives.

But, as I said last week, the diagnosis brings both bad news and good. If the bad news says we're sick, the good news us that God has a cure. And here it

is: Whereas our righteousness is not – no good, non-existent; a righteousness from God has been revealed. As vs. 21 says, it is not a righteousness gained through obedience to the law (which Paul already established that no one can perfectly do); but it is a righteousness foretold in the Law and Prophets. The Old Testament reveals it. But here's the real distinction: it is a righteousness that comes through faith in Jesus Christ.

"Faith in Jesus Christ." That's the key phrase this morning. You may remember from a previous study that the words faith and believe are the same in the New Testament language. And so, if you looked at these verses, you would see that this same word appears 4 times in the text. Four times in six verses Paul makes it clear that righteousness – or the kind of goodness of life that qualifies you to know God – does not come by way of your own effort. Sin is too great. Rather it comes to you only through faith in Jesus Christ. It is the righteousness that "*comes through faith.*" It comes "*to all who believe,*" (v. 22). It is "*through faith in His blood,*" (v. 25). And God justifies only "*those who have faith in Jesus.*" The great cry of the reformers who in the 16<sup>th</sup> century led Christianity out of the trap of legalism and religious ritual was "By faith alone in Christ alone." And so, the answer to our question, what shall we do, is believe. As Paul explained to the jailer in Acts 16:31, "*Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.*"

But this raises two questions: (1) What does it mean to believe in Christ?; and (2) What happens when you believe? Let's look at these.

#### 1. What does it mean to believe in Christ?

It is more than mere ascent to a set of facts (Slave girl in Acts 16:16 knew and believed the facts, but was possessed by a demon). And it is more than making a verbal declaration (many people who have walked a aisle and told the church they were trusting Christ, and yet remained lost)).

Whatever else might be involved in saving faith, two things are clear from our text:

- **First, believing in Christ means forsaking all others** (all other means of salvation; all other ways of discerning right and wrong; all other principles for life). Vs. 21-22: Paul wanted the people to stop trusting in themselves – their own ability to please God through the law and their Jewishness. The Bible calls this repentance (Acts 3:19, "*Repent, then, and turn to God, that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord.*")
- **Second, believing in Christ means trusting Jesus** (to trust – to be fully persuaded in your head, heart, and will; ex: drowning, hanging onto a piece of wreckage that is sinking a little at a time. Rescuer

chopper flies by and drops a rescue basket. You can't straddle between the two).

This is what it means to be saved. I'm not into the words you use, or even if you say anything at all. In fact, the Bible doesn't say that salvation comes through a prayer. It comes by faith. So what matters is that, in your mind, heart, and will, you come to the point of turning away from sin and self and trust Christ only as Lord and Savior.

## 2. What happens when you believe?

Paul uses three illustrations to describe the transaction of salvation:

- **When you believe, you are justified** (a legal illustration, vs. 23-24). To be justified is to be reckoned as innocent. It is not the same as acquittal. Acquittal means that the jury thought you were innocent, or at least they were not fully convinced of your guilt. But justification means that you were very much guilty, and the jury and judge —God — knew it. But, because of His great love and mercy, he treats you as you were innocent. This doesn't happen because God lets you off the hook (that would make Him unrighteous). It happens because Jesus took the punishment for you.
- **When you believe, you are redeemed** (an illustration from the institution of slavery, vs. 24). The word "redeem" means to liberate, to free by means of paying a ransom (people in debt became bond slaves; freed only when the debt was paid; Jesus through death on the cross paid your debt).
- **When you believe, you are reconciled** (a sacrificial illustration, vs. 25). The phrase in some translations "sacrifice of atonement" translates the biblical word "propitiation". Literally it speaks of the mercy seat in the holy of holies. The Old Testament sacrifice never really saved anyone (Ps. 51:16); it merely pointed to the one sacrifice that would, Jesus. His blood spilled on the cross was the atoning sacrifice that once for all makes salvation happen.

So, when you place your faith in Jesus Christ, you are justified – considered righteous, freed from sin, and reconciled to the God who loves you. But why?

- **It's a gift of God's grace** (vs. 24).
- **It's a sign of His righteousness** (v. 26).

This is what happens when you believe.

### Conclusion:

So, what now shall we do? In our natural condition, we are all lost in sin, prisoners to a nature of sin that we cannot break. Left to our own we do not move closer to God, we drift farther away from Him. So, what do you do?

You believe in Jesus, placing your trust in Him as Lord and Savior.

It could be that you've already done so. As you assess your own life, you know that you came to the point where you turned away from sin and self, and trusted your life to Jesus Christ. In that case, you need to be growing in that relationship. We'll look in following messages how to grow in our relationship with the Lord and honor Him with our lives; who we can overcome the sin that hangs on in our lives and experience His power in our life and service. But maybe now, you simply need to praise God for your salvation, express your love to Him, and commit to a life of spiritual growth...

On the other hand, perhaps this morning you realize that you have not truly believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. You've heard the diagnosis, but you have yet to take the next step. Why wait? In 2 Cor. 6:2 Paul says, "*Now is the day of God's favor, now is the day of salvation.*" Is there any reason why here and now you cannot trust your life to Jesus Christ?