

**Sunday 14th February 2016 - St Nicholas' and St Mary's**  
**"The Gospel Manifesto: No one is righteous" - (Romans 3 vs 9-20)**

*Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer. Psalm 19 vs 14*

Sixty years ago this coming August I was at a summer camp organised by the Crusaders in a small village in North Yorkshire. Most of the young men present were members of the Sunday Crusader class that I had been attending for several months.

There was a guest speaker one evening. His name was Tony Gill and he was a visitor from Eastbourne. He had spoken at this camp over several years, but this was my first camp so I had never previously met him.

**Slide 1 Sin on the Cross**

At the climax of his talk that night Tony showed, on a flip cart, a simple picture of the cross. He explained that, at the moment when Jesus cried out "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani" what God had seen on that cross was the sin of all mankind, (And Tony wrote on the cross the letters "SIN".) God had turned away his face away because He could not look on SIN.

This was a startlingly revelatory moment for me, and I began to shake, with what must have been the searing touch of the HS. **It was an extremely powerful moment, carrying a most important message for me.** Some people call this as a second birth, perhaps it was for me. It was at the very least a most important step, one of many, in my developing a full understanding, and acceptance, of God's redeeming love demonstrated in Jesus Christ.

This has been my enduring belief since. That Christ came into the world because of my sin. Any one of my sins would have brought Christ, in love, to the Cross. Every one of my sins adds to His pain. Jesus came to reconcile me to God. He suffered intolerable pain, humiliation, and eventually death. Worst of all, at that moment of crying out, he suffered the separation from God which may be defined as hell, for to be separated from God is to be forever shut off from light (1 John 1:5), love (1 John 4:8), joy (Matthew 25:23), and peace (Ephesians 2:14) - God is the source of all those good things.

We all invited to believe this. We all must know that God loves us. It is because of this redeeming love that we must also know that any one of our sins would have brought Jesus to the Cross; that every one of our sins in the past has added to Jesus' pain, as will every one of our sins in the future.

We are all sinners, and this is what St Paul is forcing home to his readers in Romans 3 verses 9 to 20.

First of all we must know that Paul is writing to the church at Rome, which was unlike all the other churches for which we have records of his letters. This was a church not founded by St Paul, but one he hoped to visit, one which he hoped to encourage and strengthen. No doubt he wanted to make sure that the Christians of Rome understood the Gospel of Christ correctly and would live their lives accordingly.

In this passage Paul forces us to look at the reality of our sin against God and other people. In short, we are the problem. I am the problem. You are the problem. Not one of us can escape. Paul makes it clear here — with a list of Old Testament quotations to add authority.

This is a fitting climax to the section of the Epistle which began in 1:18 where he began by speaking about God's wrath against sinful humanity, and then explained God's righteous judgement on all, and how the Jews can not be justified by keeping the "Law".

In Chapter 3 Paul says that men and women are all sinners — all of us — and held accountable to God. Here we stand, guilty and convicted. The sombre weight of this passage should never be missed. We are encouraged not to turn to the peace offered by the gospel too quickly, but to take the time to have a good and prayerful look in the mirror of scripture. We can see ourselves and every one of our sins listed there. I will come back to this idea of a mirror.

Only after fully recognising our sinfulness and unrighteousness may we look to God for mercy.

Paul, who knows that he has been commissioned to bring the Gospel to the gentiles, begins in verse 9 by explaining that Jew and Gentile are in exactly the same position as each other in relationship with God. The fact that most Gentiles were not aware of the Law of Moses did not mean that they escaped its justice. The fact that the Jews were the chosen people did not mean that they could be justified by keeping the law; that was and is not possible.

In verses 10 to 12 Paul says that there is no one who has any standing before God on their own, for there is no one who is righteous (v10), no one who understands or seeks God (v11), and no one who does good (or, as some translations say, shows kindness) (v12). Together all men and women have become worthless (v12).

In verses 13 and 14 Paul says that there is no one who has any standing before God on their own, for their sin with the tongue is evident, deceitful, deadly, and brutal (3:13-14).

He says their throats are open graves (3:13); they deceive with their tongues (3:13) (*these ideas are from Psalm 5 vs 9*); the poison of asps is on their lips (3:13) (*this from Psalm 104 verse 3*); and in verse 14 “their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness (3:14) (*which is taken from Psalm 10:7*)

In verses 15 to 17 Paul goes on to say there is no one who has any standing before God on their own, because violence marks their lives, they have not known the way of peace, (3:15-18).

He says their feet are swift to shed blood (3:15); ruin and misery are in their paths (3:16); and they have not known the way of peace (3:17). (These ideas are from **Isaiah 59: 7 & 8**)

In verse 18 we may come to the most important thing of all. Paul says that there is no one who has any standing before God on their own **because they have no fear of God** (3:18). (***This comes from Psalm 36: 1***).

The word in this text, used many times in the scriptures for “Fear” can mean “to fear reverentially, to respect, to reverence, having a wholesome dread of displeasing Him”. This kind of fear makes a person receptive to wisdom and knowledge

To follow this idea for a moment - in 2 Corinthians 7:12 Paul tells us to work toward complete holiness because we fear God. It is good to be God fearing, because that prevents us from following our own sinful nature. But here in Romans 3, Paul is telling us that our chief sin is that we “have no fear of God at all”.

God’s offer of forgiveness to those who repent gives us a reason to fear—a reason to change. It also gives us a reason to be eternally grateful and to grow in love to be more like our loving God!

Finally, in verses 19 to 20 Paul tells us that no one, not even the Jew, can be declared righteous by works of the law for the law cannot declare righteousness, but can only bring the knowledge of sin (3:19-20).

He says that the law speaks to the Jew (3:19); and that every mouth will be silenced because of the knowledge of their sin (3:19); and eventually the whole world will be held accountable to God (3:19); he repeats no one can be declared righteous by works of the law (3:20); but through the law comes the knowledge of sin (3:20).

In this passage we find that there are certain things that the law can not do and there are certain things that the law can do. What is the law unable to do? It is unable to justify sinful man. But this verse teaches that the law can give men the knowledge of sin. It can show the man willing to look and listen his utter sinfulness. I return to the idea of a mirror, for the law may act as a mirror. A mirror can show that we have our hair out of place, or that we have dirt on our face and lots more. It can tell us the problem but it can not solve the problem for us. In a similar way God's holy law can show us that we are guilty sinners incapable of keeping God's holy commandments, but it can never save us. But it can show us that we need a Saviour. Jesus.

If any one here thinks that these verses do not apply to him or her, or to their lives, then, I suggest, they have not given the passage enough thought. These sins can be ours in the thought as well as in the deed. These actions may be taken on our behalf by our governments, or some organisations to which we belong. If that happens and we do not protest, we have become complicit in the act.

So there we have it - under the Law there is no hope of being made righteous. It is just not possible for humankind. But, we will find in other parts of Paul's letter and in the Gospels, it is possible with God through Jesus.

So let us consider the summary of the law our Lord gave to the teacher in Mark 12: 29. We use this reading in our Communion Services.

*The first commandment is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is the only Lord. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.*

Not one of us has always been able to adhere to these strict rules - not with our whole heart. By the law we stand utterly condemned, with no standing of our own before God.

We need the saving grace of Jesus. We must try to sin no more, for every sin adds to Jesus' pain.

**Slide 2 John Stott.** John Stott the Anglican evangelist said this:

*Every time we look at the cross Christ seems to say to us "I am here because of you. It is your sin I am bearing, your curse I am suffering, your debt I am paying, your death I am dying." Nothing in history or in the universe cuts us down to size like the cross. **John Stott***

Jesus died for all our sins; all those sins listed in Chapter 3 of Romans by Paul, and many more.

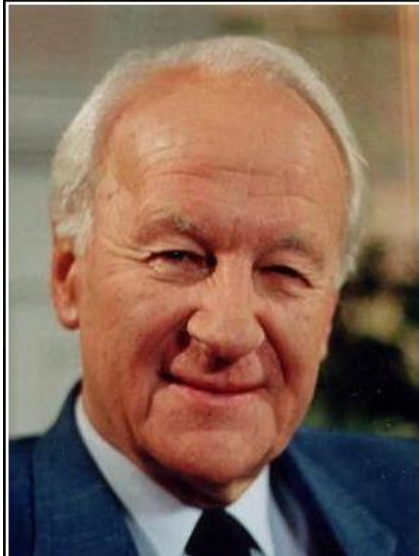
We are invited to reflect on our sin; our very great sin. We must see that our sin causes great pain to God in Jesus on the cross. We are therefore shown that we do not deserve God's mercy. We have got to conclude that we need God's love, and we are shown God's amazing love through the grace of Jesus great sacrifice.

We will be hearing more of this story over the coming weeks.

Meanwhile put your trust in Jesus; have faith in Him and His redeeming Love.

**I end with words from Psalm 25:4 & 5:**

**“Show us Your ways, O Lord, teach us Your paths; guide us in Your truth and teach us, for You are God our Saviour, and our hope is in You all day long.”**



Every time we look at the cross Christ seems to say to us, 'I am here because of you. It is your sin I am bearing, your curse I am suffering, your debt I am paying, your death I am dying.' Nothing in history or in the universe cuts us down to size like the cross.

— *John Stott* —

**AZ QUOTES**

