

April 23, 2017

Lesson 8: Romans 5: 1-11; 8: 31-39

God's Reconciling Love

**Context:**

Today we look at the Book of Romans with some writings that are the most prolific for the Christian faith. We hear of the power of Jesus who came to die for us so that we may live and that nothing we do can separate us from his love. It is ongoing and the proof is what happened on Calvary several thousand years ago.

The authorship of the letter is attributed to Paul who was writing to Roman Christians as he tells them about his desire to visit them (1:11-13) and the fact that he is on a mission to Spain (15:24).<sup>1</sup> This letter to them comes after he has completed several missionary journeys and has extensively toured the Mediterranean world.<sup>2</sup> Scholars date the letter as sometime between A.D. 55-64.<sup>3</sup> As the case with other pastoral epistles, we do not know if this was to a specific congregation or multiple houses church in the area around Rome. Its purpose would be similar to a District Superintendent sending a letter out to an entire district as they discern theological matters.

An important note about the book of Romans is that there are a lot of themes. But the overarching and most important thread to the book is the redeeming love of Jesus Christ for all people. Within the early church, Paul and other apostolic leaders sought to bring different groups of people together. With such diversity in language, religious background, and socioeconomic classes, there was a concern about the future of the church and how people would come together. We hear in this letter that the Lordship of Jesus is what should unite and guide everyone.

In the first section of our lesson on chapter five, Paul makes the point that Jesus' death on the cross deals with the early Christians even if it had been a few decades ago that it occurred. In the preceding chapter four, the point is made that Christ died for sinners and thus righteousness was shown in that moment. The death and resurrection of Jesus made humans right with God and peace was brought through Jesus' love. It means that God's grace was an unmerited action and breaks through the power of sin to bring us back to God.

In the second section of our reading, we hear of the comfort and assurance that comes for Jesus' love for us. From Paul's perspective, the passage is to explain that even though God is in control, the personal misfortunes of a person are not a reflection of God judging or dismissing that person. If anything, God is in that pain as is evident in the fact that Jesus also experienced human pain and suffering. And because of Jesus' experience with pain and suffering, those who go through personal tragedies have a Lord who is with them in that place and nothing can separate them from God.

Both chapters point to important theological understandings of God and have been writings used to teach people about who Jesus is and what his purpose was here on earth. This letter is unlike other epistles in that it is given so that the church can

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<sup>1</sup>Paul J. Achtemeir, "Romans," *Interpretation: A Biblical Guide for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1985), 19.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 19.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 19.

understand what they are to truly believe and to understand more about Jesus.

**Application:**

One of the things I love about these passages is that it reminds us that there are so many things that are not left to us. At times I hear even well meaning people talk about how they have done this many things to secure their salvation, or that they are the chosen ones because of x,y, or z. There are also Christians who believe we can merit or earn “God’s wrath” and quote all of these Old Testament passages. The “End Times” have become an obsession where apparently God is going to come down and strike down certain sinners for certain things and we should prepare as such.

But if we pay attention to these chapters in Romans, we read that God has forgiven us. When Jesus died and rose from the dead, he proved that death nor sin have the final say in what happens to us. We have been forgiven and God loves us. Even when bad things happen to us, it is not punishment for some obscure sin we committed in second grade that has led to this downward spiral of events where we are God’s object of anger and rage.

In fact, nothing will separate us from the love of Christ and we would do well to remember that fact. Even in an imperfect world with imperfect people, we are assured that nothing can ever separate us from Jesus and that is something we are to cling to even when tragedy or suffering happens. We can question, we can doubt, but to say that God enjoys or inflicts our suffering is to somehow say that God is in charge of those things is to say that Jesus’ death was for show or just a part of the story. Instead, we are to remember a God who will never leave us, no matter what may happen.

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