

Record of Sermons delivered during the month of
January 2020

(added progressively after each Sunday)

(see following pages)

Christ the Judge and the Saviour

Rom 2:16

¹⁶ on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.

A famous artist was to paint a portrait of a fading dowager. At the end of the first sitting she made the imperious observation that she hoped that he would do her justice. His reply: 'Madam, it is not justice that you need, but mercy.'

Also, may I remind you of the incident between Napoleon and a mother: her son was awaiting judgement by Napoleon for a serious military offence; she pleaded with the great man for mercy. "What has he done to deserve my mercy?", Napoleon challenged; "If he deserved it, it wouldn't be mercy", she said. The boy was released!

And so it is for us all.

Today we could well let Paul instruct us by his direct words. My task may be to highlight a few points only.

As the selection of readings will remind us, Paul is making a detailed case for his main argument that begins at verse 18 of Chapter 1 and continues to 3:20. That *all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*. This detail he places between the two 'bookends', 1:17 and 3:21/22: Paul's main theme, the *righteousness given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe*.

Whether Gentile or Jew, all are guilty, and warrant God's wrath. All will be judged, at the 'last day', and all will be found wanting. This then is the reason that we all need a Saviour. Jesus Christ our Lord.

Previously (1:18-32) we read the detail of the charge laid on the Gentile. That even though there was adequate evidence, in what is visible (creation), to reveal the invisible nature and person of God, men do not give Him the glory and thanks that He as Creator is due. Even though their consciences remind them and they are intellectually capable of determining right from wrong, they chose the wrong. And deep down realise that there will come a day of reckoning. That there is a judge who will bring them to account. In addition they compound their felony by standing by and approving (and thereby encouraging) the wrong-doing of others, even if they don't actually commit the same sins themselves. (Chapter 1 verse 32) Modern day crowds of spectators at street displays, designed to celebrate deviant behaviour, can easily be recognised as such. As are we who tolerate and even support political candidates who espouse Godless notions and Godlessness in general.

Then in Chapter 2 Paul turns his blowtorch on his own race. The 'chosen people', the Jews. In some ways they are more culpable than the Gentiles. Like a child brought up in a Christian household, they have the privilege of special revelation and protection that the true people of God could reasonably expect. *Jews know of the long-suffering and kindness of God, but do not allow this to lead them towards repentance. They have the Law of God; condemn others by that Law; but fail to keep it themselves. Once more Paul is pointing to the principle that all humans have knowledge of and about God, but act against that knowledge so as to be culpable in the Great Judgement of God.*¹

God Judges According to the Truth (v 1-5)

In the opening verses of Chapter 2, Paul addresses an imaginary man with the words "O man". This 'man' is perhaps modelled on persons who had actually voiced objection to Paul's teaching. Especially ones who may have been in the Christian Community and by their attitudes were causing disharmony and strife. Already two kinds of behaviour have been shown to bring the judgement of God – worthy of death.

- The practising of any of the 21 evils, listed at 1:29-31, and
- Approving this wickedness that they know God will condemn. }²

To this Paul adds a third class of person who faces God's just condemnation. Those who judge others for behaviour that they know is wrong. Yet they do the same. In fact, even if they do not exhibit the exact same sins, since God is THE Judge, any judgement passed by a mortal man against another, reveals their sins of arrogance, pride, boastfulness and heartlessness. In passing judgement the 'man' betrays (shows) an awareness of moral standards by which he passes that judgement, only to show that he himself is condemned by the very same criteria he uses and therefore acknowledges. The principle emerges from Paul's answers to the 'man'. It is God who Judges and He does this **according to the truth**, established through His complete and infallible knowledge of everyone, their actions and their hidden thoughts.

By verse 4, we begin to learn the identity of the otherwise unidentified, 'man'. Paul points out that if such a person thinks he will escape God's judgement he is in fact showing contempt for the riches of God's kindness, tolerance and patience. He is failing to realise that these riches do not flatter the human, making him arrogant, proud and isolationist, but are always intended to draw him (and the rest of his race) to repentance, in gratitude for God's loving mercy and grace. Yes, these riches were to this point in history, poured on the one, 'chosen people': the Jew. Only the Jew had the Scriptures that explicitly revealed the riches of God's *kindness* and His patient *long-suffering* (Ps 34:8, Ex 34:6). Yet the Jew at the time Paul was writing, was at a crossroads. His situation was desperate. After 25 years of preaching to his fellow Jews, calling on them to 'repent' on account of God's Messiah, recently come among them, Paul had the experience that much of the preaching had been met with stony rejection. In verse 5 he cries out:

1 Paul Barnett p51/52

2 Initially applied to the Gentiles, but also applicable to the Jews

⁵ *But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgement will be revealed.* Though the situation was desperate (as for us all) the Gospel continues to be the answer. Let the representative 'man', open his mind and heart to that 'good news' of the gospel: God graciously 'justifies', those who believe in His Son. (1:16-17)

God Judges Impartially, According to Works (v 6 -11)

Knowing that the condemnation by God will be in accordance with the truth, which he knows infallibly about everyone, leads to the understanding that His judgement is based on how each person has lived. The things he has done or not done. His works!.

Paul then describes two cases:

- ⁷ *to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, he will give eternal life;* or alternatively
- ⁸ *but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury.*

In summary: ⁹ *There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek,* ¹⁰ *but glory and honour and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek.* ¹¹ *For God shows no partiality.*

And the principle: that God judges on the basis of truth, as revealed by the way we live (that is, our works) also applies to Christian believers. (2 Cor 5:10) ¹⁰ *For we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.* (1 Pet 1:17) ¹⁷ *And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile,*

Now, how do we reconcile, God's judgement of all (including Christian believers) according to *works*, with God's *gift* of righteousness to those who believe in Christ?

- On the last day God will cause judgement to passed, by the One He has appointed as Judge, Jesus Christ, on our works, but
- will also acquit us (justify us) on the ground that we belong to Him that same Jesus Christ, the Saviour.

Jesus: both Judge and Saviour of true believers.

As a matter of principle, Paul outlines in verse 7, how a human may be justified by his own merits. But no one (except the 'proper' man, the incarnate God Himself, Jesus) has, does, or ever will demonstrate this merit. And so verse 7 stands as a hypothetical statement, serving only to highlight verse 8, which is the condemnation and judgement on us all.

God Judges Law-breakers, Whoever They Are (v 12-16)

God's impartiality is further confirmed as Paul shocks the Jewish 'man' with the removal of any preferential status accorded to the Jew by being first chosen by God as a vehicle of His revelation to the world. This privilege and responsibility having degenerated into self pride, false confidence, arrogance and elitism. While there are further shocks in store, at this point, Paul focuses in on the gift of the Law of God from Moses. The 'man' felt that by being entrusted with knowledge of the Law he was protected from its penalties. He would apply this Law to the Gentiles, who knew it not, and judge them for failure to keep it.

Paul shows that Jew and Gentile each have 'law'. The Gentiles had a set of moral standards, like our concept of 'common law' or 'natural justice'. While the Jews had the more defined and explicit Law, God had given them. The point was, however, that *having* and *knowing* law was not the issue. It is *performance* that matters to God. Thus, ¹² *For all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law.* In practice then both Jew and Gentile do things that dislocate society (1:28) and approve those who practise such things (1:32).³

God Judges the Jews for Double Standards (v 17 - 24)

The climax of the case against the Jews, begun in verse 1, now begins. It is now explicit that Paul address the 'man' as a Jew. To this point all has been devoted to the Judgement of God on the 'last day', a Judgement that will be based on truth, that will be according to works and that will be directed against sin. Again Paul refers to the Law of God entrusted to the Jews. But draws the outcome that their 'possession' of the Law gave them false assurance when it comes to Judgement as they relied on the Law for their salvation. But *having* and *knowing* the Law merely makes the guilt of sin self-evident. Only the *doing* of the Law 'to the letter' relates to final Judgement. In verses 17 – 19 Paul clearly details the attitude and boast that Jews of that time held because of their 'possession' of the Law. The Law was indeed their resting place and they did boast of their knowledge of the one true God and of His 'will' in contrast to the vain gods of Greece and Rome.

The Jew has the Law of God; condemns the Gentiles by that Law; but himself does not practice that Law. In fact his works of sin only serve to encourage the Gentile to blaspheme the Name of God, as they recognise the hypocrisy displayed. His plight is

³ On the cover of today's Order of Service is a picture of the fountain and grassland near the Royal Exhibition Building in Melbourne. (The sign is an addition!)

Suppose that, while walking on the grass in general, causes no damage, a common direct 'short-cut' that causes many people to walk over exactly the same track does cause damage and should be avoided.

A considerate, aware person would recognise this and self-regulate their walk to cause least damage. 'Walk on the pathways only'. They may have 'a law unto themselves' as it were. Another with the same evidence might fail to come to the same conclusion. Perhaps the man in the picture walking towards the path is such. So far there has been no notice taken of the explicit sign. Perhaps it was only put there this instant. (Actually after the picture was taken!)

Now those who see and recognise the sign are given a specific Law. And if they break it their guilt is clear even to themselves. Yet whether by common sense or explicit notice, any who walk consistently on the one part of the lawn are causing a loss of amenity for the society at large.

desperate; God Judges impartially and condemns on the basis of truth, according to works.

Who is the True 'Jew'? (25-29)

Finally, for Chapter 2, Paul identifies the true 'Jew'. He takes the key symbol of the 'set apart' Jewish race, male circumcision, and applies the same principle that he has used regarding the 'possession' of the Law. Namely that the ritualised, external, symbolic act was useless unless it was matched by the true 'conversion' of the heart. He went even further in principle: should Gentiles, without the external symbol of the Covenant made with Abraham and the Patriarchs, were to exhibit, by their works, that they were keeping the law, in as much as it was revealed to them, then they would be accepted as part of the Covenant and deemed to be circumcised (of the heart). As we have seen for both Jew and Gentile however no person (except Christ) would fully obey whatever law they had. So the principle, but not an outcome, was being stated. So is there any true 'Jew'. Any who is 'right with God'. Chosen by Him and adopted into His family, to be a brother and sister with Christ?

Jeremiah and Ezekiel looked forward to a new Covenant, in which the Holy Spirit would write His Law on the heart of God's chosen. (Jer 31:31,33) Replace their 'hardened' hearts with 'a heart of flesh'. (Ez 11:19-20, 36:26)

In verses 28-29 Paul sees God's promises, made by His prophets, as now fulfilled, by the sacrifice of Christ and the presence of His Spirit in the heart of believers. The 'true Jew' and the Covenant are redefined. No longer by blood descent from Abraham; by male circumcision; and keeping 'the letter' (of the Law), given by Moses, but by the coming of Christ and His death and resurrection fulfilling those promises of God made through the prophets.

A new Covenant based on:

- the forgiveness of sins through the atoning death of Christ together with God's acknowledgement of full propitiation being received by His raising of Christ from the dead, and
- the inner working of the Holy Spirit changing the heart and inclining it voluntarily and spontaneously to keep the Law.

This Covenant is to those 'true believers' who by the 'implanting of the Spirit' are made able to believe in Christ and truly turn their lives around (repent) .

Pray God this will be so for all the saints present today. Amen [2278]

Dear God, I know that I am not worthy to be accepted by You. I don't deserve Your gift of eternal life. I'm guilty of rebelling against You and ignoring You (of making myself god, in Your place). I need forgiveness. Thank You for sending Your Son to die for me, that I may be forgiven. Thank You that He rose from the dead to give me new life. Please forgive me, that I may live with Jesus as my ruler. Amen.⁴

4 From Phillip Jensen.

No Boasting – God's Faithfulness

Rom 2:23,24

²³ You who boast in the law dishonour God by breaking the law. ²⁴ For, as it is written, “The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.”

Generally speaking, people don't mind talking about Christianity.

Common responses include:

- I'm a Christian. I just don't go to Church.
 - I was Baptised,
 - went to Sunday School,
 - sang in the Church choir,
- I'm not actually a practising Christian these days.

This is the response that hides behind the 'smoke screen' of religiosity. The trappings of visible religious experience.

- The world really is in a terrible mess. Everywhere you look there are wicked people doing wicked things to each other.
 - Some people are OK. Like me for example.
 - I'm not as bad as that person at work, or
 - that neighbour's daughter. (Out all hours of the night.)

They play the 'point the finger' card. The compare yourself with the other's card.

By and large, people don't mind talking about Christianity in these terms, BUT – what about when the question refers to a judgement day. To the Judgement of God the Creator? People don't like the idea that they must 'meet their Maker' in Judgement. They're prepared to accept judgement for really bad people, like the father who kills his children and then himself, or a Hitler. Oh yes there will be a day when these people will be judged. But not you and I! You shouldn't be talking about God's Judgement. Rather, about His Love.

The excuses people give that make them think they are OK: their denial of Judgement that will actually be applied to them. It's all brought together in Roman's Chapter 2.

Paul details God's Judgement: – the reality,
– the universality, (Jews & Gentiles) and
– the basis of Judgement. (your works)

Then he deals with the excuses, the false security, that people cling to in the expectation that on the 'last day' (Judgement day) they will be OK. 1. Self-righteousness, 2. Ignorance, and 3. Religiosity.

Self-Righteousness (v 1-11)

Compare me with someone else. I'm OK because I'm better than the other person. Paul refers to people who judge others just as the Jews looked down on the Gentiles. The Jews were happy to recognise that Chapter 1: 18-32 referred to the Gentiles, but there are no special cases – no groups immune from Judgement. In fact, just by passing judgement on someone else one shows his arrogance. He is slandering others while and at the same time boasting.

Jesus referred to the ease with which we see the 'speck' in an-other's eye while missing the 'plank' in our own. We so easily reveal the 'Pharisee' inside each of us when we boast how much better we are than the 'tax-collector', as it were.

We apply self serving comparison tests, blue compared with black is not so dark: compared with adultery, impatience is not so bad; what's a small 'white lie' compared with a purger? Not so bad.

But verse 2 shows God's Judgement to be justly based on the truth – on the facts. Do *anything* against God and you *will* be Judged.

Further, in verse 3, Paul reminds us that you a, 'mere mortal' – a created being – have no grounds on which to Judge others. Especially as you also fall short of God's righteousness. Do you, of all people, Paul says, think you will escape Judgement? Of course not!

We can't use such techniques 'to pull the wool' over God's eyes. Judgement cannot be avoided merely because one is not (quite) as bad as the next person. And the Jew, in the first century, and people enjoying life in a modern day civilisation, that has developed under 2000 years of Christianity, are on even more shaky ground because we have been shown so much more of God's kindness. Paul was speaking directly to the Jews who were the only race with knowledge of God's *kindness* and *patience* at that time (since it had been announced by the prophets in their Scriptures). Even more of God's grace and kindness has been shown to us, in the person of Jesus. The final revelation by God of Himself, as recorded in the New Testament.

(v 5) God's tolerance and patience has been offered to the Jew and now to us for a special purpose: not to give us special, exalted, boastful status, a position of superiority, looking down on others, but to lead us to repentance. A self-righteous attitude shows contempt for God's forbearance and kindness; is the product of the stubborn, unrepentant heart; and only serves to store up wrath against us, as our hearts – like Israel of old – are hardened.

(v 6) Rather, God's Judgement treats all equally. According to the truth. On Judgement Day, God will consider the truth revealed by our lives. What we have done. God will Judge according to what our deeds deserve.

How does a 'good' Luther/Calvinist feel about this form of 'works'? Isn't Salvation, apart from 'works' – by faith alone?

Let's be clear: Paul is not describing here, how people are *saved*, but how they are *judged*. Salvation IS all of grace; while Judgement is on the basis of works – what we have done. We are *justified* (made right with God) because of God and His love, mercy and grace – but we are *judged* on our deeds – our works. It is precisely because we are judged on our deeds that we need God's grace.

In verses 7-10 Paul outlines two cases, in principle:

- Do good and God will give you eternal life, or
- Do bad and God will pour out His wrath in Judgement at Judgement Day.

But look at the *absolute* requirements for you to be deemed to be doing good. Persistently – not now and then – seeking God's glory and honour for ever. Being the person who, in every instant of every day, looks beyond his life and never focuses on the material. IF such a person (other than Jesus Himself) could exist then he would earn from God the Judgement of eternal life and the benefits described in verse 10. No one can stand before God on Judgement day and say that he has consistently, persistently and always done good as measured by God's standards, and that is why of the two principles of possible behaviour that results in a certain outcome, those shown in verses 8 and 9 are the only true instance for us all.

Judgement Day is a reality. It will happen to everyone; it's personal and nothing do do with a comparison with others; it's personal and depends on what we do; it's personal for all types of people; it's personal not for any who feel they are God's favourites. It is a reality, it's serious and it's frightening. We focus, most often on the grace of God. And rightly so. But God's glorious grace through Jesus Christ is necessary, simply because we all will be judged and found wanting. Beware that we might think too highly of ourselves. In having so high a view of ourselves that we demonstrate such a low view of God and His justice and grace.

Ignorance (v 12-16)

The second excuse is when we fain ignorance.

“If I remain in the dark, then I'll be OK. God can't Judge me on a law I never had! God can't judge me on a law I've never heard!”

Paul says, “No.” to this excuse. When it comes to Judgement Day, whether you've had THE Law or not you have no defence. ¹² *For all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law [Gentiles], and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law [Jews].*

For the Jews in having the Law of God from Moses, having the Old Testament, generated a false assurance. They implied to Paul that because they had the Law they were better off than the Gentile. On Judgement Day each person will be judged on the law that they do know. Judged on what they do, not what they know and have. Everyone has law, but fails to keep it!

The Jews have the Law but have failed to keep it. The Gentile's claim ignorance from it, but (v14 & 15) ¹⁴... *when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law.*

¹⁵ *They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience*

also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them. All know right from wrong. The conscience accuses and sometimes defends. No one can stand before God on that 'last day' and say, "I didn't know!" God will say that you did know. No one can claim they were ignorant.

As we approach verse 16, perhaps we have been a little surprised that despite Paul's introduction, where he says that the Gospel is *all* about Jesus, that there is not much about Jesus throughout 1:18 – 3:20. There is this brief reminder: ¹⁶ *This will take place on the day when God judges people's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares. On Judgement Day the person who will Judge is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. A circumstance which is also confirmed in Acts 17:31. "... ³¹ because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."*

On that 'last day', Jesus will reveal the secrets of our hearts, the things that we have all done and thought that no one could see. The things that we have all said and we hoped no one else would hear. The things that we hoped we would 'get away with'. The amazing thing about the Gospel is that the very one who Judges us is also that same Jesus who has saved us. Who takes to Himself the penalty of our Judgement. The One we will stand before is that One who has already, once and for all, died for us. Today I reverted to a version of the 'Assurance of Pardon', used some time ago, to draw attention to this nexus.

Further, look briefly at Acts 10:42,43: "... ⁴² *And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. ⁴³ To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.*"

This is how Peter first introduced the Gospel to the non-Jewish household of the Roman centurion, Cornelius. Here is the order of the Gospel: **judgement first then forgiveness**, through His Name. The Gospel is 'watered down' to virtual impotence, when we merely explain it (to others) by saying, "We are all wicked – as described in Rom 1:18-32 and therefore we need a Saviour." But the Gospel actually says, that yes we are all wicked, and therefore we will face a Judge and **but for faith in Christ**, the Saviour, be condemned and eternally punished.

If we miss out the point of having to face Judgement and condemnation, there is no need of a Saviour.

There is a Judgement Day. We will face Jesus as our Judge and we can't claim ignorance. We will be Judged.

Religiosity (17-29)

The idea that on Judgement Day, God will look favourably on you and I, because we're religious, Paul says is fatally flawed.

Take the example of the Jews. They had amazing privileges as detailed in verses 17-20. But while they were well qualified to teach others, did not apply these lessons to

themselves. Their failure was seen by surrounding peoples and the hypocrisy was a ground for the blasphemy against God which resulted. The Jews should have shown by their lives what God was like. But instead as the Gentiles look at Jews, they say, "If that's your God I don't want to know!"

These days we may be surprised to learn that people are attracted to Christianity because of the lives of Christians. It has been observed that there could be 5 Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John and your life. (Most modern people don't bother to read the first 4, but they do read the 5th.)

Paul says to the Jews (as he could say to us): You who have the revelation of God, should live accordingly and be a good witness to His Gospel.

It is sadly common, then and now that there are deeply religious, deeply sincere people, who are zealous, passionate, evangelical and yet a bunch of hypocrites, because their actual conduct denies the will of God.

People with an outward appearance of religiosity desperately need the Gospel. Our City and our world has a host of religious people who think they can stand before God on that 'last day' and say in effect that:

- they went to Church,
- were baptised, and even
- had a Bible in the house.

This is what Paul believed was the Jewish excuse of his time. It was clear to Paul, that it is not external appearances that count but the internal, spiritual 'heart' realities that matter.

We all have cause to look with fear and with trembling towards Judgement. Neither self-righteous comparisons with another; pretending ignorance; nor outward show of religiosity will save us. We will be Judged, found wanting and need to be saved. Now we see the full power of the Gospel. We see that the Judge is also the Saviour. We certainly can't save ourselves, but He can save us. This is the power of the Gospel that Paul was not ashamed of.

Pray God this will be so for all the saints present today. Amen [2279]

Father God we tremble before you as we think of the day when we will stand before you to be judged for our deeds. Father please shake us out of any self-righteousness, ignorance and religiosity and help us grasp that we can only stand on that day because of Your Son, who is both Judge and Saviour. We ask for Jesus Sake. AMEN.⁵

⁵ Title, prayer general structure of this Sermon derived from Paul Dale.
http://www.sydneyanglicans.net/media/audio/no_boasting_gods_faithfulness_romans_21_29/

Romans 1:16; 3:1-8, 21-23

None Good: – God's Verdict⁶

Rom 3:4

4 ... Let God be true though every one were a liar,

Perhaps the most important letter in the New Testament, Paul's letter to the Romans, continues to be our focus this morning. Specifically the beginning of Chapter 3. Romans is not just a study of a theological argument. Its purpose is to motivate people to take an interest in the world. A charter for world mission.

It is worthy of study and discussion, but if it stops there we've missed the point. There must come a time as we read, study and discuss this letter when we find ourselves bowing before God, thanking Him and seeking to pass on what He has given through Paul.

Paul is devoted to the Gospel of God concerning God's Son, Jesus Christ. As we examine the activities of present day 'pillars of the Church', we may be inclined to recognise that they are devoted to the Church. That he or she has devoted their life to the Church. But Paul would say, that that is only a part of it.

He was devoted to the Gospel, because if he were merely devoted to the Church and not fully to the Gospel it would be like painting over rust or applying a band-aid over skin cancer.

Paul was devoted to it because the Gospel is the message which changes people's minds, heart, lives and eternity. And so in 1:16 he says, ¹⁶ *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.*

The Gospel is God's power to save people. It is a message of words. Words about Jesus' life, death and resurrection. That is what the Gospel is. A message of words. You might say, "How powerful can that be?" Remember that God used words to make Creation:

"Let there be ..."; "Let there Be ..."; "Let there be ..." ;
And there was!

God uses words about Jesus, to now make the new Creation. That is believers. That is His Church. That is His family. He uses the words of the Gospel. And we remember from the opening of John's Gospel that Christ was, is and will continue to be the word made flesh. The second person of the Godhead.

Yet some still claim the word to be weak. Explain to people as carefully and as often as you can about the life death and resurrection of Jesus. Use as many ways as you can. Yet you find that the common (but praise God, not the only) response is: "No

⁶ Title, general details and illustrations from an edited transcription of Simon Manchester's sermon in the series on Romans by Paul Dale: http://www.sydneyanglicans.net/media/audio/no_good_gods_verdict_romans_31_20/

thanks, I'm unconvinced, not persuaded, need more proof, I don't need to be a Christian." Is the Gospel word weak?

The answer depends on:

- whether you think God is in the dock, or
- whether the world is in the dock.

In that little box in a courtroom the person on trial is interrogated and treated as dubious. They have to defend themselves.

If you imagine that God is in the dock and has to answer our questions, then the Gospel can appear ineffective. If however you believe what the Bible says: that God is not in the dock, it is we that are on trial. He is asking the questions. Then the power of the Gospel become apparent. The power of the mighty, Creator, God.

There are people who say, "Well then God, I think of You as being on trial. If You are really there I'd like You to write my name on the clouds. I'd like You to do miracles in front of me. Give me absolute, watertight arguments and then I will consider if I will become a believer."

Now before we fall for that type of thinking, just remember that in Jesus' day, God had walked into the world. And there was God, the Incarnate Son, Jesus, in the world and He did miracles in front of people that were absolutely mind boggling. He also gave teaching and arguments that were absolutely irrefutable. But in the end people said, "No thanks, I'm unconvinced, not persuaded, need more proof, I don't need to be a Christian." "Not only don't we believe, but we don't like You" They opposed Him and crucified Him.

Romans then is a wonderful letter to us. It explains that the problem between God and people is not with God, but is with people. We need the letter to the Romans just as you might need glasses, to be able to see the world properly. It will tell us what God is really like and what we are really like. The Gospel is not weak. It is very powerful. The problem is that humans reject it.

Imagine ten people caught in quicksand. They are slowly sinking out of sight to their doom. Someone is able to bend down a very sturdy branch of an overhanging tree towards them. One person (only) takes hold of the branch and finds that he can easily be lifted. Nine others refuse the branch. Does it mean that the branch is not powerful? No. The branch is very powerful. The problem is with the refusal.

The Gospel comes to the world. It is a very powerful. It is the power of God. It can save you very easily. But when people refuse it, does that make the Gospel powerless? No. The Gospel remains powerful.

In Romans 1:18 to 3:20 (64 Verses) the Apostle Paul sets out the refusal of the human race in three sections:

Imagine a poster. In the middle is a dot. This dot represents 'believers' – God's adopted family. Around that is a ring representing those who are religious; then

another ring, the 'good people'; and finally the outer ring, complete outsiders – pagans. A picture like a dart board we might imagine.

For the outer circle, Paul describes the pagan world. They have information that God is the Maker of the world and they have enough mental capacity to use this information to make them seek Him, but they actually suppress that information. They are not inclined towards God, they are disinclined.

The next circle in, represents the 'superior person'. This person is really quite impressive. They may be better than other people (in the eyes of the world), but even they don't live up to their own standards, let alone God's absolute standards. They too need the Gospel. God's power to save.

The third and closest circle are the religious Jews (and we might add the present day nominal Christian). These are the people who have had all the outward advantages but no inward Godliness or conversion. Their faith, says Paul, in Chapter 2 is physical not Spiritual. Human not Godly. They have not had their heart changed. When you read the Old Testament, it says that there will come a day when God will change the heart. Paul says that if your heart's not changed, what good is ceremony? What good is ritual, however special?

So Paul divides the human race into what we might call:

- the pagan,
- the 'good person', and
- the religious person.

And our temptation is to think of these people as innocent. But the Bible says that they all refuse the message, the Gospel,

Think of any of your unbeliever acquaintances. Imagine you were at morning tea with them and had the opportunity to just thumb through one of the Gospels. Showing them a little about Jesus Christ. What percentage of them would you imagine would be then and there 'drawn' to Christ? What percentage are going to say, "This is fantastic! This is just what I wanted to hear!"

Won't most (but not all) say, "No thanks, I'm unconvinced, not persuaded, need more proof, I don't need to be a Christian." And come up with all sorts of reasons and excuses. Reinforcing what Paul says in Romans, that people prefer to evade the message of Christ, rather than to take it. Most prefer to escape from the Gospel rather than enjoy it!

By Chapter 3, in this process, Paul has come to the point of wrapping up the case against the religious person, the Jew. This he does in verses 1-8. Then through to verse 20 he wraps up the case against humanity in general. Soon (God willing) we will look at verses 9-20.

So far, in Chapter 2 Paul has been talking about the Jewish race and the fact that their religion is on the outside and not inward. And having just said that the 'true Jew'

(2:28/29) is not outward but inward, Paul then imagines questions, in Chapter 3, that might be fired at Him by a thinking Jew.

Question 1 (verse 1): What advantage is there in being a Jew? What value is there in the rite of circumcision? What advantage is it? Is all the Jewish story, all the Jewish history, all the Jewish experience – the raising up of a chosen people; taking them out of Egypt; across the Red Sea; through the wilderness; into the promised land; looking after them for century after century – all a waste of time?

Answer (verse 2): No, you've been given the very words of God. He has spoken to you like no others, until He sent Jesus.

Hearing this Sermon, some might say, "Why don't you Christians leave the Jew alone. Why aim to witness to them. Surely they should be allowed to enjoy their own faith."

Read the Scriptures of the Jews. Those Scriptures are like a thousand signposts pointing to Jesus. We expect, and God expects, that the Jew would follow these signposts to Jesus. When the Jewish Scriptures say that the Messiah will be born in Bethlehem; will ride on a donkey into Jerusalem; will be a servant who dies and calls out, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken me"; gives people a brand new Spirit in their heart; and is interested in the Nations of the world, we expect, and God expects, that the Jewish people would follow those signposts to Jesus. That's what He expects. He has given them His words.

So Paul's answer to the person who asks, "Is there any advantage in being a Jew?", is "Yes a very big advantage and a very big responsibility to take His given words seriously."

Question 2 (verse 3): What if some Jews did not have faith. Will their lack of faith nullify God's faithfulness? What if the Jew doesn't come up with this faith? Is God going to drop them? Didn't He make a covenant with them. Is God therefore unfaithful?

Answer (verse 4): Not at all. Let God be true and every man a liar, as it is written: ⁴ ... *"That you may be justified [proved right] in your words*

and prevail [be blameless] when you are judged." (Ps 51:4b) Paul is saying that, God is not made unfaithful by their lack of faith. He remains faithful. The quote from Psalm 51, which is part of David's confession, is where the Great King David recognises that the problem is his, not God's. So the Jewish problem, says Paul, is not that God breaks His Covenant offer, but that it is not taken up.⁷ God has provided His Son, Jesus, in order that we might come home to Him. Is God unfaithful, if people don't accept the gift of His Son? Not at all!

Question 3 (verse 5): If our unrighteousness brings out God's righteousness more clearly, what shall we say, "that God is unjust in bringing His wrath on us?" (Here Paul uses a human analogy or argument.)

⁷ Consider a father who rings his daughter at school on her mobile, says to her, "I can't get there today. I'm going to send a taxi to pick you up. So that when you walk out, there will be the taxi, waiting for you. Please catch the taxi and come home." Is the father's faithfulness questioned because the daughter, subsequently does not get into the taxi, or refuses the taxi, saying, "NO." to the taxi? No the father's faithfulness is not questioned at all. He has provided the means to bring the person home.

This is an odd but searching question. If God is the Saviour and you sin, aren't you showing just what a great Saviour He is by your sinning? Aren't you showing how much we need Him? How important He is? How great He is? Wouldn't it be unfair if He punished us?

Paul says (Verse 6), "Certainly not! If that were so, how could God judge the world?"

For example (humanly speaking): Here is a Judge or a Magistrate sitting in the courtroom. Someone comes in and they are utterly guilty and the Judge says, "Your guilty." The prisoner turns around and says, "Now listen here, it's people like me, who give you a job. You're very lucky, I've come in here. If everyone were good you wouldn't have a job. So here I am. I'm a rotten criminal, and I've made life easy for you by giving you work to do. You should now declare me innocent and send me home with a smile." That's the sort of argument being worked out here. But God's righteousness is not going to be criticised for punishing sin, says Paul. God's righteousness is being shown in that He does punish sin.

Questions 4 and 5 (verses 7 and 8): Paul includes these false excuses but simple answers, "No". Considering that a sufficient case has already been made. Basically the 'objector' is suggesting that he should tell more lies to further show God's truthfulness. And that in the case of the 'bad' – rejection by the Jews of the Gospel, which then allowed the 'good' – adoption of the Gospel by the Gentiles. More 'bad' – rejection by the Jew should be done so that more 'good' – Gentile converts – should occur.

Now in those excuses mentioned in verses 1-8, we can notice that there's a genuine part of those excuses or questions which is asking, "Is there any advantage in being Jewish?"

We could ask a similar question, "Is there any advantage in having Christian parents?" The answer is "yes" and "no".

Yes, with Christian parents you have been given a special opportunity. You have been given, much more freely the word of God. But no, because you are given no more security by having a Christian heritage. You've been given privilege but no extra security. Just as the Jew needs to come to Christ in faith for himself, so you of Christian parents, must come to Christ, personally.

Overall, what Paul tells us in these wonderful verses, is that God's word proceeds from the assumption that the problem between God and people is people. That God has given us important information, He's given us a conscience and He's given us the new Covenant blessing of the Gospel of God concerning His Son and the way we may, by faith and repentance, be made right with God. Be justified and saved to eternal life. You'll always stand in Christ, replacing your filthy rags of sin, to be newly clothed with Christ's righteousness. No condemnation – bold you may approach the throne of God Himself.

Pray God this will be so for all the saints present today. Amen [2437]

Father God we tremble before you as we think of the day when we will stand before you to be judged for our deeds. Father please shake us out of any self-righteousness, ignorance and religiosity and help us grasp that we can only stand on that day because of Your Son, who is both Judge and Saviour. We ask for Jesus' sake. AMEN.

Romans 3:10-28

The Best Known Verse in the Bible

⁶ *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.*

Based on S Olyott

Right back to basics:

The Best Known Verse in the Bible? ¹⁶ *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.*

It's indeed most fortunate (providential) that this verse is the most well known, because it touches on all the things that it is most important for a person to know!

- It starts with **God**: The Bible starts with God; the message of the Bible starts with God; and the thing that you most need to know, starts with God.⁸

Everybody knows that God is. Paul was only stating the commonly demonstrated facts, then and now when he wrote Romans 1:18-20

The Bible then spends no time at all telling us how we know that God is, because we do know this. It's built into the fabric of even our 'fallen' nature. Instead the Bible kindly tells us what we otherwise don't know: it tells us what this God is like.

God is a Spirit, has no body. He is in no particular place, because He is in all places in His full and complete Being all the time. That means that as you listen to this Sermon, you should be awestruck because God is here. Not just part of God; not most of God, but the whole 'fullness' of the Godhead, in the very place where you are seated now!

God tells us in His word that He is very great:⁹

We owe our existence to God; and God owes His existence to God. He is the 'fount' of our being, but mysteriously He is the 'fount' of His own Being. There is

⁸ This morning we will not go into a long consideration on how we know that God is God. All the philosophical arguments and constructions over the past Centuries, attempting to prove, by such a means, that God exists, don't even convince ordinary people using ordinary common sense.

Such attempts of proof aren't needed!

The human conscience knows it to be true (but not the majority of human consciousness). Whoever you are and no matter how loudly you might deny it: the human conscience knows that God is. Look at the sky above; the creation around. There's this feeling, this thirst for God. Everyone even has view of God – even if that view is that there is no God. Everyone lives and dies with some sense of God. And if they bother to be still: as the wise may do, they know that God is eternal; powerful. And if they think hard: they know in their conscience that God is Judge.

⁹ He knows all things, as if they are happening before Him all the time: past, present and future. He can do all things, that are consistent with His character. Everywhere at once and eternally.

an abundance of knowledge about God in the Bible.

The Bible shows that He is unique. We not only need to know that He is everlasting, all-seeing, all-knowing, in all places at once, and all-powerful. But He is unique in the sort of Person – because He is a Person – He is.¹⁰

The Bible tells you that He is ‘good’.¹¹

And He’s wise! And His supreme wisdom is reveal in today’s text.

This well known verse, which is in fact the words of Jesus Himself, starts with God!

- The verse moves on to talk about the **world**. God ...then ... the world. So the world, the one we are in this morning. We all admit there is something wrong with it! Each of us could come up with a range of reasons: there are acts and threats of war¹². Strikes; graffiti; rebellions; the inhumanity of man to man. Once there were no wars, no strikes, no graffiti, no rebels. Nothing to spoil God’s creation.

When mankind was made Adam & Eve walked with God. However they thought that life for them would be better without God. So although God had expressly revealed His will and had similarly told them that if they disobeyed, they would be punished. And although God made it perfectly plain that if they obeyed they would live forever, they disbelieved God. They turned round and walked out on Him. All the troubles have followed since!

Family strife, death and the fear of death. A sense of purposelessness and frustration. Squabbles and even a person being ‘at odds’ with himself. As well as sickness and pain, as well as death itself. All have been a result of the fact that man has not walked with his Maker.¹³

10 In His presence are the glorious creatures who have never sinned. But they can’t bear to look on God. Although they know nothing of impurity in themselves, there is such a thing as Holiness, which cuts God off from all His creatures, making Him like a brightness that could never be increased; like a flame that could never die; like a fire which could never fade. They can’t look on God.

Moses sought to ‘see’ God, but was only granted that he may see Him after He passed the cleft in the rock in which Moses hung.
[Ex. 33:19–23](#)

11 Though His creatures take his Name ‘loosely’, He is actively ‘good’ to the just and the unjust alike. All those good gifts He gives to all who by nature are His enemies. Indeed we can say that “God is Love”! ⁶... *Slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.* (Ex 34:6)

12 Might we say that war is wrong? After all throughout history we can’t find a time when there was not a war somewhere. On this evidence war is part of the natural order of things. Why say then that war is wrong? Why do we say things ought not to be like that – when after all its natural?

It’s because in your conscience there’s a sort of inherited memory. It’s as if, not you personally, but our humanity, together, can remember a time when there were no wars, no strikes, no graffiti, no rebels. Nothing that spoils. None of us can remember a day like that, but it’s as if humanity together can somehow remember a time when things weren’t like that and they ought not to be like that now. That’s precisely what the Bible says!

13 Imagine a classic arch made of specially shaped stones. No mortar, no iron or wooden lintel, no glue of any kind. There is a ‘keystone’ at the centre, all the bricks of the arch, from each side, rest on the ‘keystone’. Take out the ‘keystone’ and the arch falls to pieces. Man is God’s highest creature. God put him in the highest place in creation. As long as he kept his place, everything in the universe held together in harmony.

But man removed himself from his place. Now the whole universe is disorientated. Every aspect of life has been affected. Even the physical universe in which we live is the cause of much unhappiness and many tragedies. All because the highest creature walked out on God.

That's the world. It's a rebellious world.¹⁴ The world is a suffering world. And the world is a perishing world. Which brings us to our third point.

- Our verse talks about: God and the world, but also about **perishing**. Think it through: God is infinitely holy – men and women are rebels! God is nothing but good – they walk out on Him! God is kind and compassionate and loving – they prefer not to have Him at all!

God, perfect in justice, can't be indifferent to sin. He can't be indifferent to a rebellious humanity: made as His highest creatures and designed to walk with Him. Therefore the judgement – the wrath – of God is on all humanity! Punishment is certain and the Bible calls this 'perishing'.¹⁵

It uses a deliberately strong word to show to you the horror of being under the judgement of God, but it never suggests, even for a moment, that such people will cease to exist.¹⁶ Perishing is being under the anger of God in this life; in death; after death; after the bodily resurrection and infinitely after that. God is infinitely Holy, Just and Good. Any sin against Him requires a punishment that is equally infinite (eternal)

In our text this is what Jesus Spoke about: The simplest, best known, straightforward, verse in the Bible. He started with God; spoke about the world; and warned the world that without God the world is perishing (without hope of any kind).¹⁷

But the REAL issue is that men and women are alienated from God and therefore perishing! So there it is: the world is in rebellion. The wonder of this verse is:

- God could ignore the world. He could say, "The planet is in rebellion, I will finish with it!"
- God could forget the world. He could say, "I've given them a clear Law! Without exception they've all broken it. The first man and woman, and every man & woman since!" God could put the world aside. Destroy the world.

14 It's no use saying, "It's Adam's fault." Because we all do the same thing ourselves. He disbelieved God – so do we! He preferred to live life without bowing to God's feet – so do we! He listened to lies about God – that's our experience as well! The world is a rebellious world.

15 Some 'false' witnesses, who come knocking at your door, among other heresys will tell you that when you die you will eventually be annihilated – wiped out. But when the bible uses the word 'perishing' it never means that those who have offended God will be wiped out. It never means that!

16 (Sometime we should take a careful look at what the Bible says about 'hell' – mostly from what Christ Himself has said.)

17 The real issue for us all is not good housing – however important this may be.

Not an adequate standard of living – however vital that may be.

Not education and achievement – however wonderfully that may be appreciated. None of us are enemies of those things.

Wipe it out! From pure logic that's what you would expect the Bible say.

- But instead Jesus talks about the love of God¹⁸ which **gave**. Jesus said, that “**God so loved the world, that he gave ...**”

*God gave His only Son, to this planet for 33 years.*¹⁹

In that time every temptation which you and I have had, He had – but never yielded. Every morning that boy woke up in fellowship with God. Every day when He lay His head down to sleep the fellowship was unbroken. So it went on through boyhood, adolescence and adulthood unto the age of thirty and beyond.²⁰

His life was perfect. God gave ... into this awful world someone who lived a perfect life.

The wonder of the Gospel is simply this: The life I should live; the life I ought to live; but the life I could never live, He lived for me. God gave His Son! But there is more to follow. At 33 years they took the Lord of Glory. Only a handful recognised His true identity, despite His miracles and wonderful words – He even raised the dead by the word of His mouth. For most this did not convince them that He was whom He said He was. Even the people who lived in the same home – half brothers and sisters, did not believe.

The angry punishment of God fell on Jesus physically and spiritually.²¹ On the physical and invisible side of Him. Even on His infinite Person in those hours of darkness. So the infinite wrath of God fell on the infinite Son of God. Which is why He was able to bear the wrath of God in one, finite afternoon. An infinite punishment had to be paid, but it fell on an infinite Person.

At last the sky cleared and He who had started the day by saying, “Father ...” but then could no longer use that word, closed the day by saying, “Father, into

- 18 Now ‘love’ like all good words, has been spoilt! If you watch most of the TV you will think that love is some sort of ‘bell’ in the mind, some sort of sparkle in the eye, some sort of sloppy sentimental emotional ‘candy floss’. But not in the Bible: Love is something that **gives**.
- 19 He was born an ordinary Jewish boy; went to an ordinary school; left when He was quite young; worked in an ordinary carpenter’s shop, in an ordinary village street; He lived in an ordinary Nazareth house, with step brothers and sisters and probably animals in that house as well. His supposed father – not His real Father – probably died early, meaning He carried the awful toil of carrying the ‘head of the house’ until the others were old enough to take over some of the responsibility. Between birth and His thirtieth year, apart from one little incident, there’s almost nothing recorded about Him.
- 20 Every temptation to Him was much stronger than anything you’ve known, because just like a storm can wash away a sea wall – because the sea wall cannot resist – but a storm cannot wash away a cliff. Therefore the cliff is hit harder: Jesus did not give way to any temptation, therefore experienced intensities and depths of temptation we never experience, simply because He never gave in.
- 21 They took the Lord of Glory – the very God who made them – and they nailed Him like a common crook to a Roman cross. He bled. They jeered at Him. Spat at Him. Crowned Him with thorns. Treating Him as the lowest of the low and but for the intervention of Joseph of Arimathea, they would have just cast Him into a hole with all the thieves and robbers. Even forgetting where they put Him.

That event, they didn’t realise, fulfilled over 300 Scriptures, which God had caused the Prophets to write, during the intervening centuries.

For three hours the sky went black. The One who had lived in perfect communion with God, was cut off from God and knew what it is, to have God angry with Him. The wonder of Calvary is that God looked at His own Son – God looked at God – and God saw Him as the worst liar, the worst thief and the worst sinner. God at that moment saw him as one with perverted thoughts and actions: punishing him accordingly!

your hands I commit my spirit!" (Lk 23:46) dismissing His Spirit, once more to be in perfect fellowship with God.

Then God announced to the world, that what Jesus had done was perfect in His sight, by raising Him from the dead!

Every single person in the world can know that the grave was empty. Not everyone agrees on the reason. But the reason was that God raised Him from the dead! Forty days He walked with His disciples, to prove that He really was alive again, before He ascended to where He came from. Returning there as a man!

Here is the truth: God loved the world that He gave ... He didn't just give Jesus to live the life that I should have lived. The wonder of the Gospel is that the death which I deserve to die; the infinite punishment that I deserve to carry: He died. He carried. It had to be man to suffer, because it was mankind which had sinned. It had to be God to suffer, because and infinite punishment had to be carried.²²

God so loved the world that He gave

So the Gospel is about God, the world, perishing and the gift of the Son of God.

- And now we read in the verse about **eternal life**.
Eternal life: the very life that God has! What I need if I am to be right with God is righteousness. I don't have any because even my best moments, in His sight, are like filthy rags, because He is holy! What I need from God is forgiveness. Even if I could (I can't) live perfectly from this moment on, what about the sins of earlier; yesterday; and the years that have gone past already. I need forgiveness.

What I need from God is acceptance!

That's why God gave His Son. The righteousness that I could never live, is mysteriously made over to my account. The death that I deserve to die is mysteriously made over to His account. There is a mysterious, wonderful, saving exchange. The one who is condemned to die – lives. The one that is condemned to live and die without God – comes to know God. The one who has no hope – is filled with hope. The one who is damned – is alive.

Eternal life is measured first of all and primarily by acceptance with God.

How does it become mine? Listen to the words of Jesus: ⁶ *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever **believes in him** ...* Some people are teaching today that if you pray enough ... or pay enough ... or attend church enough ... read the Bible enough ... or live well enough: God will give

²² He was a substitute 'Mocked by insults harsh and crude in my place condemned He stood; sealed my pardon with His blood:'. (REJOICE! 206 verse 2)

you eternal life. Jesus says, "... *whoever believes in him ...*"

Belief,²³ in the Bible is demonstrated in three stages:

Hear the truth; intellectually believe the truth; and 'rest' on Christ, the source of this truth. That is we trust and make an approach to Christ.

Jesus put it this way: Two men went into the Temple. One of them was so very proud of himself. Jesus' comment was that the Pharisee prayed with **himself**. Not with God. The other man was so overcome with his sense of shame, that privately he said in his heart of hearts, "God be merciful to me a sinner." That was his approach and that was the man that God met. That was the man who entered into the benefits that Christ has done for sinners.

- But we are not quite finished, with this verse. It's about God, the world. About perishing. About the love of God who gave His Son for everlasting life and believing in Him. And its about **whoever**.

Often when the Gospel is preached, people will say, "It's alright for him, alright for them. Not for me!"

Sometimes people are overwhelmed by a sense of sin or have other problems: Consider the first Easter and the first few days after it.²⁴ Christ appeared to a nobody (Mary Magdalene); a failure (Peter); confused travellers (on the Emmaus Road); disciples who were afraid; a doubter (Thomas); a cynic (Christ's half-brother, James) and a little later an opponent (Saul – who becomes, Paul). Christ had time and salvation for them all!

23 Belief: in the Bible is a very simple thing! It has three parts:

- First of all it means I **hear** the truth. You're hearing that truth yet again today.
- Secondly, it means that I **assent** to this truth. You believe that what you're hearing is the truth! (which is no more than what the evil ones confess) The belief that brings eternal fellowship (life) with God is more than this.
- Essentially, it is **resting** on what I know to be true. If I come to believe that the punishment that I deserve fell on Him; if I come to believe that the righteousness that I need, He lived and is willing to make over to my account. I'm not yet right with God just believing those things mentally. If I really believe that He is 'God amongst us'; He's God now in heaven as a man. God who can be approached and really believe that these things were done for sinners like me! Then believing involves an approach to Jesus Christ. It means admitting that my sins cut me off from God; an admission that I haven't got a self-righteousness, that will put me right with God. It involves an approach to Christ! It involves asking Him for mercy; righteousness; salvation: acceptance and then resting on His promises that these He can and will deliver.

24 After the first Easter:

- The first person Christ appeared to when He rose from the dead was a **nobody**. Her name was Mary Magdalene: she'd once been demon-possessed. Presumably she had lived the worst kind of life as a result. She was a nobody. Christ has time for nobodies!
- Later in the day Jesus appeared to a **failure**. Peter denied Him three times in the one night even though he swore he wouldn't. Christ has time for failures!
- He appeared the same day to people who were **confused**. They were walking on the Emmaus Road. They couldn't understand what had happened in the last two days: how this person they loved so much had been crucified, yet there were reports that He was risen from the dead. They were totally perplexed and confused. Jesus walked with them because He has time for people who are confused.
- Then there were 10 disciples one day and 11 the next week behind locked doors because they were **afraid**. Jesus just came to them regardless of locked doors, because He has time for the fearful.
- Then there was one who could just **not believe** that Jesus was risen from the dead. Was Jesus' reaction to that, "I'm finished with you!" His reaction was to go to meet him. Because Jesus Christ has time for doubters.
- Then there was a **cynic**. A boy, becoming a man in the same house as Jesus: His half brother James. The eldest next to Jesus. All those years, he hadn't believed a word Jesus had said. His only comment on a situation was that Jesus was, mad! Jesus met him as well and brought him to be a believer, because Jesus has time for cynics.
- There was another man who met him a little later. He was such an **opponent** of Christianity that he was willing to kill Christians to wipe it out. Christ's reaction to this opponent, was that as Saul was on the road to Damascus, with murderous intent, Jesus met him in the middle of his sin, saying, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" So Paul, the Apostle was converted, because Jesus Christ even has time for opponents.

That's what the Bible means when it says 'whoever'! There is no class of people for whom Jesus Christ has no time.

Do you believe in God? Yes your conscience tells you that you do.

Do you believe that the world is in mess? Yes you do because you know you're in a mess.

Do you believe that you are perishing? Your conscience tells you that when you stand before the Holy God you can't merit His favour.

Do you believe God gave? You know you are hearing the truth. That He lived, died and rose again. That He is all that the Bible says he is.

Do you believe you need to be granted eternal life? You know that without it you must everlastingly perish. And your heart is afraid.

Do you know what it means to believe? Yes you do. It's not just to know it in your head, but by approaching Jesus Christ, knowing full well that this awful world will mock you for doing so. But none the less you know that true believing means you make your approach to Jesus Christ: to cry to Him to be merciful to you a sinner.

Do you know what 'whoever' means? It means that when you hear the Gospel, God's addressing it to you.

Will you

⁶ *“Seek the Lord while he may be found;
call upon him while he is near;*

⁷ *let the wicked forsake his way,
and the unrighteous man his thoughts;*

*let him return to the Lord, that he may have compassion on him,
and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. [Isaiah 55: 6-7]*

May this be so for all the saints gathered here today. Amen.

[2274]