

Romans 6: 1-11 'Dead and Alive' – 22 June 2014 (Lou)

Now I can watch most genres of film quite happily, but there's one that I struggle with a little and that's maybe because when I was younger my brother used to really like them and so they seemed to be on our TV often the westerns. I really can't stand them, they seem to have no real plot line, and they always seemed to be so very similar. The good guys, clean shaven handsome looking, usually sheriffs, usually with a love interest and of course they get their girl in the end. Then there were the bad guys, ugly, scruffy and dirty, they care nothing for law and order and of course run riot in the towns causing terror and mayhem, they rob trains, they rustle cattle, they have to be stopped. And of course the good guys get together they fight the bad guys in the desert or down the main street while their worried love interests look on at high noon. Now it's these sorts of films that I think of when I get to chapter 6 of Paul's letter to the Romans, and maybe before I tell you why, we ought to just set the scene a little because I think I'm right in assuming that today is the first Sunday in what will be a series of 6 sermons that starts here in Romans 6 and finishes at the end of the fantastic chapter 8.

This book of Romans is as John Stott says a kind of Christian manifesto, a manifesto of freedom through Jesus Christ. It's a letter attributed to Paul most probably written by him while he's on his way to Jerusalem with a collection for the poor there and after he's been to Jerusalem he was intending to go on to Rome en route to Spain Ch 15:25, so we're talking about AD57 time.

This letter is the fullest and plainest and grandest statement of the good news of JC in the NT. It has influenced many many people's thinking and changed the course of their living

Luther working on lectures related to Romans was struck by the light of the gospel of justification by faith, a foundational idea for the Reformation that was to follow.

Wesley when listening to a reading of Luther's preface to the Romans some 200 yrs later experienced as he put it his heart being strangely warmed a turning point in his life that contributed to the evangelical revival in 18th C Britain, and of course Karl Barth's commentary of this letter changed the direction of European theology for a century. Here's a letter through which many people's lives have been radically changed by the power of God.

So what is its message? Well it's simple really, human beings are born into sin and slavery, but JC came to set us all free. This letter really unfolds the news of how we can know freedom from the consequences of sin, freedom from alienation from God, freedom from the fear of death, freedom from all conflict within and without of the family of God, freedom to give ourselves into the loving service of God and one another.

So by the time we get to chapter 6 the chapter that makes me think of western films Paul has already reminded his readers of all the things that God has done for us in and through Jesus Christ. He speaks about what it means to be saved by grace through faith, of what it means for us to be sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see because of the unmerited favour of God that is ours in Jesus. And in the next 2 chapters that you will be looking at over the next 6 wks Paul moves on to talk about what this means for those who would be Jesus followers. of how this unmerited favour of God doesn't just save us but offers us a new way of living and being.

But you see there's a problem that Paul then encounters because in response to this idea that everything we get from God comes without us earning it, working for it achieving it ourselves, if it's free this favour, this forgiveness this new start that people start seeing it and treating it a bit like a

free pass to carry on doing what they're doing because ...well it doesn't matter really does it, God forgives us anyway so what's the problem, let's not get bogged down with having to be all holy and good. God's grace is big enough to make all our wrongs right. God's grace becomes seen as a licence to sin! It's in chapters 6-8 that Paul explains why this response is a complete misunderstanding and that the grace of God is the beginning of something new, a doorway through which we enter a new way of being and living. A life that is enabled, and empowered by the very Spirit of God himself. This is the climax of chapter 8 that we are in fact people of the Spirit, that we live the life that Jesus gives us only in the power of the Spirit.

And of course how we do this leads us back to the western films and why this chapter 6 of Romans that speaks out to explain why God's grace isn't just a licence to sin makes me think of western films.

You see it in the Western films that you get the posters, the wanted posters. The ones that have a picture drawn of the suspect and then in bold lettering the words dead or alive written at the top of them. In other words they did not care how this person was brought down as long as they got their man. If he was alive he would be tried, most likely convicted and hanged, and if he was brought in dead, well that would save them all the trouble.

You see Paul tells the Romans in chapter 6 that they too are wanted people. They are wanted not by the authorities, but by God and they are not wanted dead or alive, but dead AND alive. There is a poster in heaven with our picture on it with the words Wanted: Dead and Alive. Now this seems a bit odd because obviously death is the total and complete opposite of life. So, how can you be both dead and alive?

Paul explains that we are to be dead to sin AND alive to God in Christ. We must die to sin in order to become alive in Christ. And how do we do this? How can we die and yet become alive? Paul tells us that we accomplish this through baptism. Through baptism we are united with Christ in his death on the cross. As Christ died and was buried so we die and are buried with him through baptism. It is a spiritual link with Christ. Our personal identification with JC, our faith in all that he is is an invisible happening brought about by the work of the HS in our lives. Baptism visibly signifies and seals this. In our baptism we leave all the Sin and guilt at the foot of the cross and in the tomb. This is not the end. Paul continues saying that just as we die in Christ we also share in his resurrection. We are raised with Christ as new creatures so that we might walk with a newness of life.

Let's just talk about this being dead to sin. Paul is not talking about sin as individual events. He does not mean sin as a specific lie, theft, or adulterous moment. Instead Paul refers to Sin with a big "S". far too often if you ask people what sin is they'll tell you it's about the things they do that are wrong, but of course what makes them wrong who decides they're wrong and what about all the stuff we don't do that we should do are they any less Sin than the things we do?

I think Paul here is referring to Sin as every place, every time, every moment and every way that you and I that we together as church as communities as nations do not live in true acknowledgement of the rule and reign of God. You see you can live saying you believe God is the King the ruler of all but not live acknowledging that because if I really believe it to be true I'll do what he asks, what he calls me to do and how he asks for it to be done. Because He's the King, He rules, and His rule is eternal. Thinking of sin like that you soon realise that sin invades and pervades every aspect of our lives. Sin is the force that leads us to negativity, selfishness, cruelty, anger, vengeance, lust, and all the painful things that we do to ourselves and each other. Sin is the voice in our heads that says "It's ok. Don't worry about it, no one will know. It's not going to hurt anyone" And the only one who can break us

out of this force is Christ. Only through the love of God in Christ can we break out of the darkness of sin and into the light of life.

Later on in Chapter 6 Paul tells the Church in Rome that the “wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord”. Sin that goes unchecked leads us to death a spiritual death, a death that means separation from God. God does not wish it, but we choose it for ourselves. C.S. Lewis said that “the gates of hell are locked on the inside”. This means that those in hell choose to be separated from God. They chose the selfishness of Sin and reject the freedom of grace. God, out of his love, creates a more excellent way for us through the death and resurrection of Christ. We are buried with Christ and Sin is with us, but we also rise again with Christ and the power of Sin is broken. God does this because he loves us despite our sin. We deserve death but God give us life and that is called grace. Grace is that which is given, but is not deserved. John Wesley called this justifying grace; the moment that we are made right in the eyes of God.

But you see there are those who don't consider sin as much of a big deal. Those who see this grace as a license to sin that shows off more of Gods amazing grace, which on the surface makes sense. I mean , it's more appealing, we get to do whatever we want and the slate is wiped clean. Paul rejects this outright. We have to make a choice we can either keep going the same way down the same path of destruction, or by the grace and love of God make a change into a new life with Christ. Paul said in his letter to the Corinthians that “So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!” Once we are dead to Sin and alive in Christ there is no turning back, there is no return. Jesus called for repentance. The word repent means to turn away, it means to make a 180° turn, an about-face away from the path we were on. There is no greater way to demonstrate this, there is no other metaphor to explain what repentance is than to say we die to sin and are alive in Christ. It means we completely stop one life and begin another. God knows that Sin does not bring true happiness, just empty, passing moments of temporary pleasure. God knows that a healthy, complete life is in Christ. A life of love, joy, freedom, positivity, and righteousness is waiting in Christ. Paul calls it a more excellent way.

This is a process. It does not happen overnight, in fact it is a lifetime of commitment, setbacks, learning, and trying again. A process by which we are made holy more and more set apart for God alone. A process that John Wesley called Sanctification. We stand today between this being made right with God Justified and being made completely holy, sanctified. Between the death of the old and the full realisation of the glory of the new.

The question for all of us today is, what do we need to bury? What bad feelings, negativity, and darkness do you need to bury today? Maybe you have been gossiping behind someone's back and saying hurtful things. Maybe you have a bad attitude that brings everyone around you down. Maybe you have shame and guilt from some passed sin that is eating you up inside. Maybe you have doubts of God's goodness and mercy for you. We have all failed to love each other and love God as he wants us to love. Today is the day, if sin is clinging to you bury it with Christ. Bring it to the altar and leave it there. Let the sin die there and return alive in Christ.

God wants us dead and alive God longs for us to be dead to sin and alive in Christ. What do you need to do I response to that today?