**Romans sermon series session 3**

**18th February** **2024** 10.30am Holy Communion St Denys’, Eaton

**Reading: Romans 3:24 (NIrV)**

1. **Salvation**

**What’s so amazing about grace?**

Our key bible verse for today is: **Romans 3:24 (NIrV)**

The free gift of God’s grace makes all of us right with him. Christ Jesus paid the price to set us free.

In the first two sessions of this series exploring the letter to the Romans, based on Andrew Ollerton’s book, we have looked at context and sin. The context of the letter is Paul writing to small Christian house churches in Rome, scattered, meeting in secret, persecuted. Churches made up of gentiles (who had worshipped idols), Jewish converts (who would have lived under the law & rituals of Judaism). Rich and poor, slaves and free, a whole completely radical mix of peoples drawn together through their revelation of Jesus Christ. And they needed to know how to understand their new faith and how to live – hence the letter.

Last week we looked at Paul’s understanding of what it is that separates us from God, which is sin. We finished the last session in the Valley of Sin, as Andrew terms it (see image), with Paul’s summary which says:

For all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God. It is a serious message in which he shows that everyone, Jew or Gentile and us ‘modern’ people – have turned away from God and followed our own desires, resulting in separation & desolation. Paul calls it idolatry, anything that we put before God which we hold as more important than God – these become the idols that we worship, instead of worshiping God. God’s plan was always that humanity live in harmony with each other and with God – but we have destroyed that calling – we sin against each other, God, and the earth – and we reap the consequences of that.

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God – and we can, of ourselves, do nothing about it!

But there is an answer! And that answer is found in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ – God’s gift to us enabling us to become right with Him.

So Paul writes:

‘The free gift of God’s grace makes all of us right with him. Christ Jesus paid the price to set us free.’

So in this session we are asking the question what, or who, can set us free from the valley of sin?

Paul starts this section of the letter with the words: **But now**…. When he uses these little words we know that something amazing is about to be revealed.

Yes we live in the valley of sin, yes we are sinful, yea we can do nothing about that by ourselves: **But now**….we are about to hear one of the central beliefs of Christianity

Romans 3:21: But now God has shown us a way to be made right with him – to be saved from our human situation.

So Paul moves on to explain what salvation is. We are made right with God, we come into relationship with God, through our belief in the work of Jesus. His death on the cross has enabled us to be put right with God, to step out of the valley of sin and into His new life.

As Paul says: The free gift of God’s grace makes all of us right with him. Christ Jesus paid the price to set us free. This is the great ‘But now…’ of Paul’s letter to the Roman churches.

But now, we can receive salvation through Jesus Christ.

And this salvation means a number of things: we are set free from the slavery to sin that is in us all.

Paul draws on the image of the slave market. In Rome 30% of the population were slaves., slaves were paraded for sale in the market place, and were bought and sold like goods. Slaves were completely in the power of their owners, only someone else could pay the price to set them free.

Paul says we are like this with sin. We are completely in its power, like slaves we have no power of our own to set ourselves free. We need someone else to come and pay the price to redeem us from slavery – and that person is Jesus Christ. He has paid, through his death, the price for our freedom. Freedom is part of our salvation.

And in his crucifixion Jesus paid the price for our sin. The shedding of his innocent blood wiped out before God the sins of all people, Jesus became the perfect sacrifice of all time. Paul harks back to the Exodus story - when God’s people were enslaved and God himself set them free by His own power. They could not free themselves, but God could and did.

Like the blood daubed on the lintels of the houses of the Israelites in Egypt, which kept away the angel of death – the blood of Christ *in our lives* sets us free to walk as new people in God. He became the perfect sacrificial lamb so that we, who deserved death for our sins, are set free from death and given life instead!

Forgiveness is part of our salvation

Salvation doesn’t just offer us forgiveness for our sins, but deals with our sinful nature.

Last week I likened sin to an infection, an illness we all carry and can’t get free of ourselves. We need a doctor to treat us and save us, we need a saviour, and that saviour is Jesus Christ. The new life of God that we receive as Christians sets us free from the power of sin, from slavery to sin. God puts his new life, eternal life, within and we are brought to a place where we are much more able to resist temptation, much more able to recognise sin and turn away and back to God. It is what Jesus himself calls being born again. We are healed from our old ways of being: healing is part of our salvation.

In the gospel reading we had a great example of what that looks like.

Thus salvation is a transforming power within us, the power of God himself within us, bringing forgiveness, freedom and healing. And all this is because of God’s grace; all of this is a free gift made possible through Jesus’ life, death and resurrection. A free gift offered and given because of God’s love for his creation, for us.

God always intended humanity to live in harmony with Him, and this is how he has achieved it – he loved us so much that he was prepared to send and see sacrificed his only begotten son Jesus, so that we might become the children of God and enjoy life in Him.

Now I say this cautiously, but you can go to church all your life and not actually experience the fulness of this life in God. The transforming power of salvation is a journey which we start by believing and receiving new life through faith, through accepting and believing that Jesus died for us, for me – it is a heart thing, not just a head thing.

Do you know you are in a relationship with God, you are a child of God – won that journey there is more for you to experience.

God’s longing for you, for me, is to fully experience life in Him. To know His truth and for that truth to set you free. To live in the power of the holy spirit and find that freedom that he died for you to have. Freedom from sin and the power of sin. Forgiveness and healing – no guilt, no shame. Transformation of the old us to a new person in God.

God offers this gift of salvation, of new life – have we recognised and responded to that offer? Have we received the free gift of God through Jesus Christ?

Paul says this:

**22**We are made right with God by putting our faith in Jesus Christ. This happens to all who believe. It is no different for the Jews than for the Gentiles. **23**Everyone has sinned. No one measures up to God’s glory. **24**The free gift of God’s grace makes us right with him. Christ Jesus paid the price to set us free.

And what does that free gift look like? How do we live in the light of this - knowing we are accepted by God, saved from the power of sin, guided by the Holy Spirit, living by faith?

Well Paul moves on in chapter 4 of Romans to offer the life and faith of Abraham as an example of what faith and freedom looks like. We don’t have time to look into this in detail this morning but I encourage you to read Romans chapters 4 to see what becoming right with God and living by faith looks like. Paul says this:

What did Abraham, the father of our people, discover about being right with God?

Did he become right with God because of something he did? If so, he could brag about it. But he couldn’t brag to God. **3**What do we find in Scripture? It says, “Abraham believed God. God accepted Abraham’s faith, and so his faith made him right with God.”

We can be like that! Trusting God whatever happens – we are always saved, and God will *never not* love us, he will never start to count our sins against us, he will always be there to help, guide, support and forgive us – why?

Because of Jesus and because of love, that’s why. Paul’s explanation that we are all sinners is a fact, and so is the work of Christ. It’s a fact, it’s there in history and for all time, offering the way to return to God. To put aside our idols and worship and enjoy the true and living God.

Salvation brings forgiveness of sins, freedom from guilt and shame, healing from our past – old hurts and old ways, and a living relationship with God. And it’s all a gift…..

‘The free gift of God’s grace makes all of us right with him. Christ Jesus paid the price to set us free.’

If you don’t know this freedom to be true in your heart and life, you can ask Jesus today to come in to your life and bring God’s forgiveness and freedom.

Jesus died for you, so that you can know God and enjoy life in him, now and forever.

Amen