

...the forgiveness of sins

Introduction

- Images are powerful - they capture our attention and our imagination, we latch onto them and remember them.
- The advertising industry knows that only too well:
 - witness the money it pours into creating images that will, they hope, help us part with our cash!
- I'm sure I could describe many, many adverts to you, and the vast majority of people in church this morning would instantly have a mental picture of the advert running through their heads:
 - (these are from a few years ago...)
 - the Vauxhall Astra advert, with all the babies; (Apparently, in making that, they stuck all the baby-grows to the floor, then put the babies in them so they couldn't crawl away - and then shot loads and loads of footage and later edited out the shots they wanted!!)
 - the Tennants Lager advert, where the woman calls down the corridor "Teas made" - the man, in his eagerness, runs in slow motion up the corridor towards the woman holding the glass of lager held ready for him - until he runs smack into a glass wall! "The Feminist"
- We remember then...
 - ...and in the remembering, each of them communicates a message:
 - this car is baby friendly - though you never see a baby in the car;
 - this lager is fun - a good laugh can be had when this lager is around, even though the poor guy doesn't seem to be having much fun and doesn't even get a drink to drown his sorrows!
- Images are indeed powerful things!!

What has God done? (vs.21-25a)

- Paul, in the passage we are looking at this morning, uses three powerful and vivid images to try and communicate to the believers in Rome something of the grandeur of what God has done through Jesus Christ.
- Now he wasn't an advertising executive trying to generate sales:
 - rather he was seeking to make known the glories of the gospel
- But he did make use of some powerful and striking images of God's work.
- What he works through here is at the heart of what we believe:
 - as the creed puts it, "I believe in... the forgiveness of sins..."
 - or, from Paul writing to Timothy, (1 Timothy 1:15) Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners - of whom I am the worst.

Backdrop

- Paul writing to church in Rome, prior to planned visit and onward missionary visit to Spain - hoping they will be staging post
- The book as a whole explores in some depth the gospel, partly to say:
 - "this is where I'm coming from"...
 - but also to build up this relatively young church, and equip them for the task of serving Christ in the capital of the Empire.
- Even though it seems likely Paul never did visit Rome in the way he'd planned, nor go on to Spain as a missionary (his only recorded visit to Rome being as a prisoner), he did succeed in strengthening that church:
 - became leading church in following centuries, and
 - his letter to them is preserved, obviously by a thriving church, for our strengthening and equipping.
- Up to this point Paul has done two main things:
 - first, (1:1-17) outlined his argument in the first part of the first chapter,

culminating in Rom 1:16,17 "[the gospel] is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes";

- second, (1:18-3:20) he's begun the process of unpacking that, exploring the detail a bit more fully - in particular, he has sought to establish that **sin is a BIG problem**, and that it affects everybody.

- That established, he **summarises** it in v.23 of the passage we read as a bridge into God's answer to the problem, which is what he really wants to talk about:
 - he says "**all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God**" (Rom 3:23)

- Picture it this way:

- Imagine a **Ferrari**, fresh from the factory, gleaming red, sleek, elegant, a thoroughly gorgeous car - built to be driven - **a drivers dream!**
- Imagine that Ferrari **neglected**, scratched, left exposed to the salt air of a seaside town through the worst of a stormy winter - with **rust and decay** permeate all its parts - an eye-sore rather than the apple of its owner's eye.

- We were made in the image of God, made to share something of his glory:

- **made to be the Ferrari's of all that he made!**

- But we have **sinned**, fallen short of that glory, allowed the **rot and rust and decay of sin** to so thoroughly permeate us that we're mere eye-sores.

- that's the **desperate situation** Paul has made clear faces **every** one of us

- **we are rusty Ferraris bound for the scrap-yard because of our sin**

- The good news is that **God has done something about it:**

- and its to explore just what God has done that Paul employs those three powerful images I mentioned earlier:

Justified

- **First, imagery from the law court.**

- Paul talks of Jesus' death and resurrection, his work on the Cross, as "**justifying**" us (v.24).

- The word is forensic, used in or connected with a **court of law:**

- means **acquit** or declare righteous.

- **Picture** - Court case - guilty verdict - we are in the dock - we are those scrap-yard Ferraris.

- **but he has pardoned us** - the method of pardon being that he takes our punishment - so he looks at the sentence sheet and has to say "**Guilty**" - but declares that we have no time to serve, its already been taken care of!

Redeemed

- **Second, imagery from the slave market.**

- Slave trade - big part of life in Roman world - **we have hardly any conception of how pervasive** - familiar part of life for all his readers - **perhaps many of whom were slaves.**

- perhaps debt had forced you into **selling yourself**

- for most, though, **born into slavery**

- **real freedom was never part of their experience.**

- Paul talks of Jesus' death and resurrection "**redeeming**" us (v.24).

- The word he uses is tied up with the "**ransom**" a slave could pay (or have paid by another), to buy their freedom

- paid to their master to win their freedom

- Not given - a **ransom needed paid, or the slave was not really free** - otherwise they'd still under obligation to their old master.

- **Dobbie's sock in the second Harry Potter book!**

- Paul is clear that the ransom price paid for us by Jesus Christ is his own life, his very self (v.24).

- we are **slaves of sin**, unable to break free from its power ourselves

- unless someone else pays our ransom!

- **That's exactly what Jesus has done for us!**

Ferrari

Law

Slave

Turned Aside Wrath (Propitiate)

- Thirdly, imagery from the altar, the averting of wrath (sacrificial system of OT)
- One element of the problem of sin which Paul has already explored, but we've only hinted at, is God's wrath:
 - his steady burning anger directed against all sin and sinfulness
- God's holiness precludes sin entering his presence
 - it is an affront to all his goodness and purity, indeed a scorning of his love and care
- His anger burns against it.
- In the OT, God's anger was, symbolically at least, turned aside through the sacrificial system:
 - an animal was killed to bear the wrath of God
- Now no animal could ever take a human's punishment:
 - but a human, one who did not deserve God's punishment, could do - Jesus!
- Paul's point is that the sacrificial system pointed forward to one who would be able to stand in our place, and fully take God's wrath, bear his anger, become sin for us.
- And that one is Jesus Christ, and him alone.
- Three powerful images:
 - law court, justified, pardoned, made right with God;
 - slave market, bought back to freedom;
 - altar, wrath turned aside, able to live!
- Each one pointing to some aspect of God's amazing salvation!
 - righteousness, freedom, life!

Why has God done it? (vs.25b-26)

- Why did God go to all the bother?
- Why did Jesus have to suffer so terribly?
- Why did God choose to do it this way?
- Couldn't he have "just" forgiven us?
- Surely he isn't limited...?
- For many people, that is their next thought - surely the barbarism of the Cross can have little to do with a God of love, who created such a beautiful world?
- Paul is ready with the answer:
 - to demonstrate his justice.
- For you see, there is a tension.
- On the one hand, the whole problem is sin:
 - and the reason it is a problem is because God is holy, pure
 - he can't stand sin; his hatred for sin is such that a sinner in God's presence would simply be consumed; indeed, as we've seen, his wrath, his steady anger, is directed at all things sinful.
- But on the other hand, God loves us, those he created to be in his image, those designed to share his glory.
- If he simply destroyed us, he would be just - but not demonstrating his love.
- If he simply forgave us, he would show his love - but at the expense of his justice.
- Either way, he'd be going against his own self:
 - there would be an irreconcilable tension in God's heart.
- So, God chose to satisfy his own wrath by taking the punishment necessary to satisfy his justice on himself.
- Stunning genius - resolves the tension - but at tremendous cost.

Where has God left us? (vs.27-31)

- Where does all this leave us?
- That's what Paul turns his attention to, at least in part, in the closing verses of the section.
- **Key point: we are unable to boast!**
- **God has done it all** - it wasn't us.
- This is the principle that is established.
- **Our salvation** - that freedom, that righteousness, that life itself - **is all from God.**
 - **it wasn't won through our obedience to the Law** - the OT law that includes the 10 Commandments, or any other law - we can't live up to that level of perfection!
 - **it wasn't because of who we were** - Jew, Gentile, rich, poor, middle class, working class, male, female, whatever.
- And that principle extends right throughout our Christian lives, pervading every aspect of all that we seek to do.
 - as we come to worship, we are unable to boast and look down on those not here, for we are here by God's grace;
 - as we plan for the future, we do not do so in our own strength - the daunting challenges ahead, of seeking to bear witness to Jesus Christ in this parish and area - in Jesus Christ we do not need to worry - he has already done the hard part - his power is with us - we are unable to boast, and we do not need to!

What has God done?

- **Granted us his salvation**, righteousness, freedom, life...

Why has God done it?

- **Because he loves us**, and done it this way because he demonstrates his **justice** and consistent character.

Where has God left us?

- **With the keys of a brand new Ferrari, in perfect condition!**
 - not for our glory, not because we have done anything, but **for his glory** and to **share in his glory!**
- **Lets rejoice together in all that he has done:**
 - **and seek to serve him in his strength and with his direction, not our own!**
- *Couple from acetate; allow music group to introduce!*