

SALVATION IS A BEAUTIFUL THING

So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the Gospel to you that are at Rome also. Rom 1:15

Paul's Letter to the church at Rome, in many places resembles a small manual of systematic theology. His writing runs the gamut from basic issues of sin and of our need of deliverance from its power, to Israel's role in the final plan of God. As it pertains to the Gospel, the great apostle tells us plainly that salvation is to the Jew first (Rom 1:16); even going so far as to explain unto us in Romans 3:2 that unto the Jews were the oracles of God committed. Historically the Jewish people were given special place as the Lord had sovereignly chosen them for a purpose planned before the foundation of the world. According to the first epistle of Peter "we are redeemed.. with the precious blood of Christ.. who verily was foreordained from the foundation of the world.." (1 Pet 1:18-20). The entrance of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ into this world inaugurated the greatest mass movement and exodus from bondage that this world has ever known. Multitudes still are able to bow their knees to Israel's Messiah with the expectation that a full pardon from sin will be granted. This is a grace oh so marvelous!

The verse before us today deals with Paul's readiness & willingness to minister Jesus among the throngs of people dwelling in Rome. No greater statement of courage could possibly be found among ancient writers. Rome, at the time, was the heir apparent of Magna Graecia- or, Greek civilization. Greco genius and thought permeated the ways of the Romans to such extent that a few authors of the day despaired of the Greek influences current during the formative years of the church. Like today's licentious and free living society, Rome had it all. The old proverb says "when in Rome, do as the Romans." From the comedies and theatre to the gladiatorial games, they were an entertainment driven society. No less thrilling were their private and personal affairs. Sexual conduct, in some quarters, was viewed as a private matter not to be judged by the common herd of people, but to be left to one's own discretion. The tragedy of it all can be seen in the often reckless lifestyles of the Caesars, those sick minded Caesars whose lives often magnified the persistent immoralities in the lives of those whom they governed.

Rome, during the Augustan age and the subsequent years experienced a slight revival in religion. No need to be surprised by this. The gods of Rome, historically, had been sought whenever the circumstances deemed it necessary. Daily sacrifices at the hands of the priestly cult supposedly brought a brief respite from what could have become a gods wrathful disdain. A glimpse of the seriousness in which these beliefs were kept can be seen in the book of the Acts of the Apostles. Notice in chapter 14 beginning with verse 7. Paul and Barnabas are at Lystra and Paul preaches the gospel and a crippled man is made whole. Immediately after this event the mass of people shout that the 'gods have come down to us in flesh' and they called Barnabas, 'Jupiter' and labeled Paul 'Mercury' seeing that he did most of the speaking. This illustrates several points:

1. During this clash of ideologies and ideas, the gospel showed itself more than able to meet the needs of men; a man heard the gospel message, believed in Jesus as his savior and was then healed.
2. People earnestly desire the real when it comes to true deliverance. The efforts at reaching god through endless ritual have never satisfied the empty voids within a man's heart. I recently sat with an alcoholic who told me that there has been a gaping hole inside of him for decades and I watched as Jesus filled it inside of a few moments.
3. Also, one can see by the ascriptions given to Paul and Barnabas that the Greco-Roman deities were well known and that when a supernatural occurrence transpired, their own gods were to be credited with the miracle.

What we have in the first chapter of Romans are words that reveal to us the brave spirit one must have needed in order to deliver the message of Christ throughout the Roman Empire. For it was no easy task to venture into small towns and villages and preach about a man who died a cruel death at the hands of Roman soldiers (military personnel who were possibly related to families where Paul traveled) only later to be resurrected and acknowledged as God's own Son. With the many fables existent during this period one would have needed divine aid and compulsion to muster the strength needed to go on each day. And go on and on Paul's team did do. From one clime unto the next they preached a full salvation, and in many places the folks clamored after them to hear more of this so great salvation (Heb 2:3). Dramatic deliverances are now on

record as we read page after page of exciting stories of men and women who desperately needed redemption from their sins.

As a pastor and traveling minister I have always found astonishing how one simple message about a man dying on a cross could be so powerful and anointed. Zeus (Jupiter) among the peoples of Paul's day had often been called "the savior," but we have no records of any individual or even national deliverance credited to him that prove worthwhile. Yet, the adventures of Paul & Barnabas, along with those of Peter & John, give us narrative upon narrative of towns-peoples, wealthy classes and others becoming Christian as God the Holy Spirit convicted their hearts of sin. What is your life like today? Are you passing along in this life offering your own daily sacrifices to an unknown god? Supposing that you could reach up and touch this figment of your imagination what would you say to him? A far better way, my friend, is to look upward to the King of Kings. He alone is able to relieve you of the guilt of sin. The heavy load weighing you down is too much for you to bear. But there is one who sits on high and looks downward toward the lowly at heart and hears and answers their heart's cry.

Paul has demonstrated to each of us that the only solution lies beyond ourselves and is found only in the Lord. To proclaim the simple message of salvation through the blood of Jesus offers the hopeless person a way of escape from the sorrows of this life. Thank God this life is temporal and only lasts for a season, but eternal life is unending. Once while preaching in a local church I was telling the story of Jesus that I have told so many thousands of times around the world. I was explaining the nature of sin and its effects upon humans. I walked the congregation through the ages to see the deviations and aberrations within man's heart when it beats apart from the throbbing life of Christ. At the conclusion of the sermon, an invitation was given to each and every person in the congregation to come and give their hearts to Jesus. I'll never forget the tear stained faces that came forward. A 70 year old man who had been shackled up with his girlfriend for years quickly made his way forward (along with his girlfriend) and they were both gloriously and marvelously saved. These two, of the many, stand out because here was a man who previously had told me that he had no need for God or the church, and that he was as 'good' as anyone in a church, now declaring his faith in Jesus. One 45 minute gospel message had cleared away the debris of 70 years of iniquity, and

two wonderful people found new life in Christ. I tell you, salvation, truly, is a beautiful thing.

Another time, I was preaching in the underground church of Saudi Arabia and was digging away at the verses where Peter announced that if everyone else turned away from Jesus he would be found standing near. I can't forget the man who sat in the middle of the living room listening intently as I ministered (in the underground movements you must meet in homes in order to avoid imprisonment, deportation, persecution or death). Without even allowing me to complete my sermon, he arose to his feet saying quite loudly that he couldn't wait any longer that he wanted to receive Jesus as his Savior. Truthfully I can say that this was one of the times when I had no problem with being interrupted. So with hot tears flowing down his face we all led him in the sinner's prayer; which essentially is a confession of one's lost condition and of one's need for a redeemer, thereby inviting the Lord Jesus into the repentant one's heart (Rom 10:9,10).

Well, whatever your belief is as it relates to Jesus, I can tell you this: As much as in me is, I am {also} ready to preach the gospel to you... In the end Paul gave his life as he lived it. He spent his time telling folks about a Jewish man, born of a virgin in Israel. He told them that this man offered himself as an atoning sacrifice for our sins (1 Jn 2:2), was buried in borrowed tomb and resurrected three days later. It is this Jesus that I preach to you now hoping that you too will place your trust in His sacrificial death on the Cross for you. There is no need to search for another solution. In an explanation of a healing that occurred with respect to a lame man-in Acts 3, the Apostle Peter declared these words in a brief sermonette to a crowd of Jewish people gathered at the temple in Jerusalem:

"Be it known unto you all and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." (Acts 4:10-12)

Friend, I hear music playing in the background. And Jesus is now making another appeal. Softly and tenderly Jesus is calling, calling for you and for me.. Why wait when you may receive Him today.

Pastor Darrell Sutton