



# Pentecost Series

14<sup>th</sup> June 2020 | 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Pentecost

## *Our Loving King Opened the Gates of Salvation*

Genesis 18:1-15 | Psalm 116:1-2,11-18 | Romans 5:1-11 | Matthew 9:35-10:8

**"So now we can rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God because our Lord Jesus Christ has made us friends of God."**

Romans 5:11 New Living Translation

### **Intro |**

I don't know how many of you are familiar with the allegorical story written by John Bunyan in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, called *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

The story is one of my favourite.

When I read today's passage, there were several images from this story which stand out, paralleling the truths emphasised by the Apostle Paul.

The story opens with introducing us to Christian, who lives in The City of Destruction, representative of the world oppressed by a powerful wicked ruler.

As the days pass, Christian finds himself drawn to read an old book. But the more he reads, the more he becomes aware of the heavy burden which exists on his back.

I feel in many ways, that when Bunyan wrote this famous allegorical masterpiece, his mind was filled with the wondrous truths of the Gospel, the amazing gift of salvation - the very truths which the Apostle Paul goes to great lengths to explain.

Today we begin our series on Paul's letter to the believers who lived in Rome. But, instead of beginning at the beginning, we start at Chapters 5.

Even though it is important we know what Paul was talking about before chapter 5, thankfully the words within the passage today take us on a journey to discover the same Good News that Christian heard while he lived in the world.

### **Point 1 | Every person is utterly helpless before our holy, righteous God.**

I'd like to draw your attention to verse 6. *"When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners."*

This is the way Bunyan describes the main character in his story. Christian was dressed in rags and had a heavy burden on his back. The more Christian read the truth of God's Word, the heavier his burden seem to become.

In verses six, eight and ten we are confronted with our spiritual condition apart from Jesus Christ. We learn of our status before God as each one of us comes into this world.

"we were powerless", "ungodly"(v6), "sinners" (v8), and were "God's enemies" (v10).

Powerless ... ungodly ... sinners ... enemies. Not a very pretty list, is it? But those four words describe what you and I were by nature from the moment we were born. They also describe the spiritual state of every person in the world apart from Jesus Christ.

By using the words "powerless" or "helpless" Paul is saying that as we stand before God, we are completely powerless to change our basic nature.

We, in the west, however, have been taught to say, "God helps those who help themselves." Perhaps no greater heresy has been foisted upon the western world.

The Bible nowhere teaches any such thing. The biblical view is radically different: "God helps those who can't help themselves." Or if you prefer, "God helps those who are willing to admit they cannot help themselves."

This truth is encapsulated in the famous words by Dallas Willard "God's address is at the end of your rope."

## **Point 2 | Our own efforts to keep the law of morality are futile**

Yet the drive to try to make ourselves good enough, to satisfy our own sense of morality, is very strong.

John Bunyan must have been very familiar with the book of Romans, for on Christian's journey to the Gate of Salvation, he meets a person named "Mr Worldly Wiseman", who personifies human logic and reasoning, who tells him, "the way to get rid of your burden is through morality, striving to live a good life, and gaining a sense of achievement in obeying all the rules." But the more Christian tries to climb the Mountain of Morality, the more rules are created, and he fails time and time again.



Is this not what Paul was referring to in chapters 2 and 3? He sees that the Jews were trusting in their obedience to God's laws to make them righteous before God.

*"You who call yourselves Jews are relying on God's law, and you boast about your special relationship with him." (2:17). However, Paul continues, "... no one can ever be made right with God by doing what the law commands. The law simply shows us how sinful we are." (3:20)*

What Paul is saying in Romans 5:6 is 'because we live under sin's dominion, we are powerless to change ourselves.'

From Chapters 1 to 2, Paul lays out – very blatantly - God's judgment on the entire human race. No one is excluded. Search the four corners of the globe and you find no exceptions to the truth. Not only is every person a sinner, but every person by nature is powerless, ungodly and an enemy of God.

This truth leaves us with no hope in ourselves.

We find this truth very hard to swallow. We love hearing about God's love, but we like to think that God loves us because there is something in us which is deserving of His love.

If we're good, God will love us.

If we're nice to others, God will love us more.

But, God's love is not dependent upon what we do or did not do.

God doesn't love us because we deserve to be loved.

We really are in a pitiful, helpless, state – unable to change ourselves, or assist in any way towards saving ourselves.

If there was to be any change, any removal of our burden of sin, the power must be provided by some outside source.

For we, like Christian, are in need of a Saviour.

### **Point 3 | The King's Incredible Love: He Opens the Gates of Salvation**

At last we read of God's incredible solution to humanity's impossible problem.

Verses 7-8 reveal the outrageous nature of God's love. His solution to our problem is so unusual that it goes far beyond human reason. We would never think this up on our own. Only God could conceive of this solution. Two statements summarize this truth:

Our Heavenly Father went far beyond what we would do.

*"Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die." (v7)*

*"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (v8)*

The amazing thing is that Christ died for us while we were still sinners, still ungodly, still powerless and still enemies of God! He didn't die for his friends. He died for his enemies. He died for those who crucified him. He died for those who hated him. He died for those who rejected him.

As we return to John Bunyan's allegory – we see that Christian is unable to gain freedom from the heavy burden which weighs on him. He's only hope is to follow Evangelist's instructions – "Run to the light of the Wicket Gate. Knock on the door, and from there you will be told what to do."



The way of salvation is through the gate, which is Jesus Christ (John 10:6-9).

When we read verse 2 from The Message translation, we begin to see why John Bunyan' described Christian's journey as starting - after having pass through a gate.

*By entering through faith into what God has always wanted to do for us—set us right with him, make us fit for him—we have it all together with God because of our Master Jesus. And that's not all: We throw open our doors to God and discover at the same moment that he has already thrown open his door to us. We find ourselves standing where we always hoped we might stand—out in the wide open spaces of God's grace and glory, standing tall and shouting our praise.*

The passage refers to two types of doors which need to be opened:

Our Heavenly Father has already opened His doors to us. The gates into this new glory-filled relationship with Him have already been opened.

But, there remains another set of doors which need to be opened – the doors of our heart.

**Application | We must open the doors of our heart, to God's transforming Spirit**

Christian needed to decide to run to the Wicket Gate.

We too need to choose to invite God into our lives.

After Christian passed through the Wicket Gate, he thought that his journey was now over. He thought his burden would immediately be removed.

But he was told, 'no your journey has just begun. You must follow the narrow way. And, the first place you must visit, is the Interpreter, [who represents the Holy Spirit] who will teach you things you must know for your journey.'



Many of you know that later in Christian's journey he comes to the cross. We'll talk about this next week. But, first Christian must visit the Interpreter.

In verse 5, Paul reminds us that we have been given the Holy Spirit whom God has freely granted to us to "fill our hearts with his love."

We have a responsibility. We need to open our hearts, every area of our lives, allowing God to transform us.

This means allowing God to delve into the areas of our lives where we are most vulnerable, most hurt, most broken.

The essence of all healing, all transformation, all growth is knowing how much we are loved by our heavenly father.

It is only as we understand the depth of the Father's love for us that we are strengthened to "rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God." (v11)

As we embark on this journey through the letter to the Romans, may we trust that we are guided by the same Holy Spirit, and may we open our hearts to Him to be transformed in every area of our lives. **Amen.**

## Study and Discussion Questions on Romans 1-5

Summary of Chapters 1-4:

Chapter 1 | All humanity is trapped in sin and needs to be rescued

Chapter 2 | Right-standing with God won't happen by trying to obey the laws of the Law of Moses)

Chapter 3 | God's righteousness has rescued the world through the sacrificed of His Son Jesus

Chapter 4 | Justification creates the faith-based multi-ethnic family of Abraham

### Questions for reflection Romans 5:1-11

1. Read Romans Chapters 1 to 4. In your own words, try to summarise what Paul's main points are in his letter so far.
2. How would you explain the role of the Mosaic Law?
3. Upon what basis does Paul argue that Abraham was justified by faith, rather than through the keeping of the law?

### Life reflection questions

1. Do you believe that you have been made 'right' in the eyes of God?
2. What do you believe God the Father thinks of you?
3. Paul writes that God has given us the Holy Spirit "to fill our hearts with God's love". Spend time meditating on this verse. Do you have reassurance that your heart is filled with God's love for you personally?
4. The last verse talks about "rejoicing in our wonderful new relationship with God" – What steps do you need to take to be reassured of your relationship with God?
5. I said in my message "God doesn't love you because you deserve to be loved." Did this startle you? What do you do in an effort to get God to love you more?

---

---

---