

Midweek Message

“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

(Romans 12:1,2 ESV)

This past Sunday I talked about what it means to live in the victory that’s ours in Jesus Christ and as I like to do, I want to expand a bit on that theme, using the first two verses of Romans chapter 12. As God’s redeemed people we should all grasp the change that’s been accomplished within us through the power unleashed by the cross of Jesus. As we observed from 1 Peter chapter 4 on Sunday that means, not only do we have new life in Jesus, but also, we’re called to live that new life through Jesus. This is exactly what the Apostle Paul presents to us in the beginning of Romans chapter 12.

You see, **first** of all, we need to remember God’s mercy toward us through the cross of Jesus Christ. As we’ve all probably heard that when you come to the word “therefore” we need to find out what it’s there for. All of the previous chapters of Romans speak to the issue of God choosing to redeem a people for Himself. We were under God’s just wrath, having become disobedient and rebellious, rejecting God as well as His righteous way of life. In his letter to the Ephesians the Apostle Paul, in chapter 2 and beginning in verse one writes:

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved.

(Ephesians 2:1-5 ESV)

You see, instead of casting us all aside, God determined He would save some and sent Jesus to offer His own life to satisfy God’s justice while at the same time, accomplishing our total redemption. In other words, God was under no obligation to save any of us but chose to set His affection on us and accomplished what we could never obtain, our eternal salvation. That’s why the Apostle Paul begins this section by reminding us of God’s mercies toward us, in that, we have absolutely no right to salvation except and unless God chooses to give it to us. And because of God’s great mercies toward us, there’s now a proper response that should result from this wondrous gift of salvation that God has lavished upon us.

Secondly, we need to respond with complete devotion to God for this gracious gift of eternal life. That’s simply the natural and logical outcome of having experienced redemption. Since we have absolutely no right to this salvation, and since we are certainly unworthy of this salvation, and since we have done nothing whatsoever in regard to our salvation, then upon realizing what we now have received should move us to deep gratitude and complete devotion to the Lord who, by Himself, accomplished it all for us. That certainly is a reasonable expectation, isn’t it? Think of it in this way. If you were in grave danger of drowning and a complete stranger came along and rescued you, how would you respond to that person? God has done far more than rescue us from drowning. He’s saved us from an eternity in hell where, as Jesus says, *“there will be wailing and gnashing of teeth”* (Luke 13:28). Now, the question for us is: what does this total devotion to the Lord actually look like? The Apostle Paul actually tells us when he says we were to be *“living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God.”*

Someone once said that the problem with a living sacrifice is that it keeps getting up off of the altar. It's so easy to fall prey to the world's calling and enticing of our lives and the temptation to clamor after the pleasures and pursuits of the world that sometimes believers lose sight of who they are and whose they are in Jesus. However, as the Apostle Peter tells in his first letter: *"He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed"* (1 Peter 2:24 ESV). As we saw this past Sunday it really is a mind-game in that we're to consider ourselves dead to this world and its sinful cravings and alive to Jesus who alone has healed us. That's what the Apostle Paul was also talking about in his letter to the Galatians, chapter 2 and verse 20 when he wrote: *"I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me"* (Galatians 2:20 ESV).

And that takes us to our **final** point in that we need to renew our minds in Jesus. As I said Sunday, the only way I know of being able to die to sin and live for righteousness is if we so fill ourselves with Jesus there's simply no more room for anything else. Everything begins in the mind, in that, what we actually think usually finds its way out into our practice. We simply don't act in contrast to what we think, what's in our mindset, what world view (the way we believe life should be in this world) we happen to hold. The truth is, we're going to act in accordance with what's in our minds. Now, I know that we sometimes go against what we want to do which is exactly what the Apostle Paul talks about in Romans 7 when he says,

"For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin."

(Romans 7:22-25 ESV)

Our old sinful nature often wars against our new nature and sometimes we give into it. However, did you notice how the Apostle Paul strives to overcome and win that battle? He says that Christ empowers him and that with his mind set on Jesus, he then strives to live the new through Jesus. Again, it's really all about the mind, isn't it? That's why he emphasizes the need for us to renew our minds which then leads us to a continual working of God's grace within us that, not only began our transformation at salvation, but will continue that work of grace as it molds and shapes us, a little at a time, more and more to be like Jesus. You see, it's the Scriptures that the Holy Spirit uses in our lives to bring this transformation about. Being filled to the full with Jesus is simply being filled with the Word of Jesus, reading it, grasping its meaning, memorizing it, and applying it. As the psalmist said, *"I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you"* (Psalm 119:11 ESV)

We're certainly living in uncertain times as we travel this road in which we face many troubling obstacles. We're still in the midst of a pandemic that seems to have no end in sight. Our country, and even the world, is in the grips of social and political unrest. Violence seems to be increasing in many of our cities and it certainly should cause us some concern. However, as God's people, we can still carry on with our mission to glorify and honor God in every aspect of our lives. As I've said before, the mission of the church never changes, only the circumstances in which we serve change. So, drink deeply from the Word of God as it will give you hope, peace, and joy as well as growing and maturing you in Jesus.

Pastor Mark