**‘HIS STORY’ – MESSAGE 3: ROMANS (1:16-17)**

Why is this book in the Bible? What is its essential message? And how does it contribute to the bigger story in God’s Word? Behind the books of the Bible are stories of people trying to live out following Jesus immediately following his departure. Two weeks ago, we considered the Book of Acts and four words summed up its 28 chapters. Communication, Community, Confrontation and Confirmation. God’s extraordinary power seems connected to when these believers got into hot water or difficulty. It was opposition and persecution that resulted in the explosive growth of these believers. The Holy Spirit is not given for us to be armchair observers but bold participants in showing the world who Jesus is. To bring this up to today – you don’t sit back whinging about why people don’t come to faith and the lack of God doing powerful things here and now unless you put yourself on the edge for him! That is where He is working in power! It is easy to take cheap shots at the Church from a safe distance…. what we might call armchair theology with drinks snacks and nibbles. The main reason why we don’t see God’s power at work today in these same ways is that we don’t need God. We have the government, social welfare, hospitals, medical professionals, and we have so insulated ourselves with our wealth and our toys – even Church and faith has become a consumer-based enterprise – the latest and the best entertainment! So, come on people let's ask some harder questions, like – what does a faith community look like in the year 2021 in Auckland city? What is the message and how does it connect with today’s world? Romans’ answers questions like these.

I hope you have taken time this week to read through the book of Romans. I did, it took me about 40 mins. It’s like no other book in the Bible. Gone are the stories and clips of history and we enter a kind theological gymnasium of truth.

Romans answers many questions we have like:

What about people who have never heard the gospel? Why did Jesus have to die such a death on a cross? What is the future destination of people who refuse Christ’s gospel?

How good do you need to be to be acceptable by God? What is the basis upon which God can receive you into his heaven? Is there any hope for people who keep failing?

What purposes does God have for the nation of Israel? If we cannot earn our way to heaven what does God require of us now? Does having faith mean we don’t have to follow rules and laws? What are God’s plans for the end of the world and creation?

So how should we approach this book? Romans is not familiar territory for many Christians, they are put off by the heaviness of the book. Its content seems daunting because it reads a bit like a textbook and makes its case rationally. Yes, Romans is a book we need to think our way through, it’s a rational explanation of the deeper truths of God….but if we approach it like a classroom feeling smug because we master its content, we will miss the essence of its message. The essence of the message is meant to lift us to soar with our imaginations and worship.

Romans is a **kind of corridor of theology** where on the walls as you walk by it you see the most amazing truths – but it leads to a better place into God’s presence. Walking the corridor of truth is necessary but it is meant to lift your heart in praise and worship – not become the reason for your arrogant dispute and debate. Have you seen the corridor the tennis players walk down on their way to the centre court at the Aussie Open? On the walls are great graphics and pictures of past winners. And the players must walk past these before they enter the court to play. I think Romans is a bit like walking down a corridor of faith – which explains answers to key questions. And as you do so you are inspired to go out there and give it your best!

Secondly, I think Romans is like the **foundation of a building**, its strength is what lies underground – beneath what you can see of the building above ground. Without a strong foundation, the beauty of what is above will crumble when tested. But you don’t stay underground for long and you build on what you have put in place. Too many people admire and argue the foundations and don’t get on with the real building which is the mission of the Church.

But more than anything Romans is a **book of the Bible to be experienced**. Illustration – Drinking Water - Let me give you an illustration of what I meaning. Here is a glass of water, you can analyse its components, dissect, and enter into deep thinking about it…but that will do nothing for you other than gain knowledge and possibly impress other people. Water is for drinking! You can only describe its impact upon you once you have tasted it. Romans needs to be understood, but its magic is in experiencing its truths not just comprehending them. CS Lewis writes about this book, that “we cannot reduce its contents to reason and feel that once having secured it we have understood the depths of Gods truth.” There is no refreshment when you describe water – only when you drink it. You may never understand how water refreshes you – but it just does! In the same way, the things of God described in this book are not secured by reason and knowledge they are secured by experiencing them in your life.

You only comprehend the depths of **God’s love** for you when you experience feeling loved by God…understand its height, length and depth. **Grace** only makes sense when you feel your past is forgiven. **Sonship** only dawns on you when you understand the Fatherhood of God and that you come into the benefits of being an heir of God’s best. **Redemption** by the sacrificial offering of Jesus only impacts you when you realise what it means for someone to take the hit for you. Far too many people who call themselves Christians have tried to think their way into faith and not just drink and enter and feel it and experience it.

Let me now just summarise the book for you - what then is the essential message of Romans?

The three key questions Romans answers are this – How can we be put right with God?

How can we overcome our fallenness? How can we live in Community?

**Chapters 1-5** **Answers the first question – How can we be put right with God?**

We are separated from God by sin and rebellion. Obeying the Law cannot save us even if we could keep it, which we cannot. We are made right with God by the death of Jesus which God accepts for each of us when we trust his gift in faith. You cannot earn this gift and have done nothing to merit it. God chose you and asks you to choose him.

So, we come across these great words in Romans.

**Atonement** – The basis upon which sin is forgiven.

**Justification** – Made right with a holy God’s because of Gods remedy.

**Redemption** – Once estranged and now bought back into relationship.

**Sanctification** – Changed and made more in God’s likeness and image.

**Glorification** – All Creation is moving towards a day when it will reflect Christ.

**Chapters 6-8** **Answers the second question - How can we overcome our fallen-ness?**

Tells us how to do the impossible! The Christian life is unliveable – and impossible to live! Being as good as some of you are – you still fail, and one failure is terminal. You want to do good but cannot. Romans tells us how to connect to God’s power to make the impossible possible. How we can become the person we long to be. It tells how we can learn to move with the rhythm of God in our lives and enter a deep relational community. So, we can stop living the old way and start living the new way of the Spirit. The old way was pride, manipulation and self-dependence, the new way is unearned favour with God your Father and a daily choice to submit to his authority in your life led by the Holy Spirit.

**Chapters 9-11** **Answer another question – What then about Gods Jewish nation?** Has God rejected them forever? No they are the root – you are grafted into them like a branch. God’s purposes are not finished with the Jewish nation. Make them jealous by your inclusion.

**Chapter 12-16 Answer the question - How then should we live in Community?**

Present yourselves a living sacrifice…. 12.1 Choose Life. Submit to God. Yield your life to the control of God’s Holy Spirit. Love each other from the heart, be forgiving, tolerant of differences, respect authority, use your skills and gifting’s and serve each other. This is the new way of the Spirit.

Here are my two sentences on Romans. *Romans tells us our spiritual condition is terminal, but through faith in Christ, we exchange our enmity and exclusion from God for peace and adoption. This spiritual rebirth is worked out by us choosing a new life in the Spirit, living in a redeemed community, and drinking deeply from God’s grace. Romans puts us right with God and with each other.*

It’s like we are all going on this bus. And on this bus some people pull the shades down and don’t look out the windows, they just want to get to the destination called Heaven.

God says to us - engage the journey, understand the scenery have imaginations stretched with what we see on the way. But here is the challenge, how do we keep the beauty of God’s truth alive in us while living with our own frailties and others?

Romans reminds us to keep choosing this new life in the Spirit. Lift your heart in praise and adoration. It’s not a reason to be arrogant or judgemental, but let that truth take you out on a mission to others.

**Favourite verses**

**Romans 10.14** How can people come to know God if they have never heard? How will they hear if no one goes to tell them?

**Romans 8:38-39** Nothing can separate us from his love…

**Romans 8:28** And in all things God works together for the good of those who have been called according to his purpose.

**Romans 12:1** I urge you to present yourselves as a living sacrifice to God….

During this last week, I have been reading James Smith’s latest book entitled – ‘You are what you Love’ and in it, he reminds us that Jesus did not ask his followers ‘what do you know or what do you believe….he asked them what do you want?...do you love me?’ ***Our wants and longings are at the core of who we are***.

**Hungering and thirsting is more than knowing and believing**. So, it's not just our intellect that needs sharing and forming but our loves and longings. Romans lays out what we believe but it reminds us that it’s not enough just to know and believe the right things. It enables us to believe that we can rise above the pettiness of life and embrace a higher purpose. We are not just thinking beings we are longing beings – who long to find our way home to God. We are more than brains on a stick – we are made in the very image of God. That image can be recovered and then used to fulfil God’s purposes in the world.

So, take a walk down the corridor of thinking your way to faith and then drink!

Understand that foundations are not there for staring at – they exist to support what’s built above so it can function the way it should. And the function of this new community of faith is not to argue about theology or to analyse and dissect the foundation. It is built strongly on top - a mission to the world – telling the stories of Jesus.