

Sermon on Romans 10:8b-13

March 6th 2022

When you start coming to Church you sometimes hear some big words bandied about. Theology, for example and Doctrine. Well theology just means the study of God and how we interpret the Bible. So, as we Christians we believe that we can find out about God by studying the Bible. Doctrine is very similar – it means our particular beliefs and what we teach. Creeds are our statements of faith – “We believe in, one God the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth and His only Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ” etc.

Now theology and doctrine can get pretty complicated. This book is just about Romans chapters 9-16, we have the other one by the same author which is about Romans 1 to 8. People have been studying Paul’s letter to the Christians in Rome ever since he wrote it around 56 years after Jesus died, and thousands of books like this have been written about it. I did a whole course on the book of Romans at Theological College. Paul himself could get pretty complicated in his theology and doctrine as any of you who have read any of his letters in the New Testament will know. And it is important that we think about God, that we study the Bible, that we understand what we believe about God and why because we have an incredible God and there really is no end to what we can learn about Him and His amazing love for us and we are going to spend eternity with Him, worshipping Him. We don’t all need to read books like this or to study the Bible in an academic way. It all about relationship. Once we understand that God loves us and that Jesus came to die for us and be raised to life so that we can be forgiven for every ungodly thought, word and action that has separated us from God, and that we can have eternal life in Him, then our response is to begin to fall in love with Him too. And when you love someone, you want to know all about them and if they write you a letter, you

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pore over it and treasure it. The Bible has been described as God's love letter to us, because in it He tells us so much about His love for us. But faith does not need to be complicated or difficult, in fact it shouldn't be. Wanting to know more about God is wonderful but we are all different, not everyone wants or needs to study theology. Paul can be difficult to understand, and even in this short passage there is a lot of theology. In these few lines Paul quotes Moses in Deuteronomy 30:14, the word is very near you, it is in your mouth and in your heart, Isaiah 28:16 Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame and Joel 2:32 Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. Don't forget the first Christians didn't have the New Testament, their Bible was the Old Testament alone. Paul was a biblical scholar, but in this short passage he gives us a very simple and early creed – statement of faith.

“if you declare with your mouth “Jesus is Lord” and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved... Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” It is as simple as that. There is no favouritism, or inequality – no difference between Jews and Gentiles, “anyone who believes in Him will never be put to shame”.

We do love to complicate things, don't we? We love to make rules and tell people how they should belief, how they should worship, we like to think that we know the right way to behave, to respond to God, to worship. We like to decide who is in and who is out. The pharisees were like that and Jesus warned us not to fall into the trap of judging others.

Many people believe that being a Christian is all about living a good life, being a good person. Someone I visited last week, who isn't a Christian, said to me, oh I wish I was a good person. And I think that he was inferring that he thought I am a good person. Well, I can assure you that I am not. But with the help of the Holy Spirit, I am getting better.

I came across this in the week:

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“How does the thief on the cross fit into your theology? No baptism, no communion, no confirmation, no speaking in tongues, no mission trip, no volunteerism, and no church clothes. He couldn't even bend his knees to pray. He didn't say the sinner's prayer and among other things, he was a thief. Jesus didn't take away his pain, heal his body, or smite the scoffers. Yet it was a thief who walked into heaven the same hour as Jesus simply by believing. He had nothing more to offer other than his belief that Jesus was who he said he was. No spin from brilliant theologians. No ego or arrogance. No Shiny lights, skinny jeans, or crafty words. No haze machine, donuts, or coffee in the entrance. Just a naked dying man on a cross unable to even fold his hands to pray.”

Not a good man, I think you will agree. With no opportunity to go on and live a good life on earth.

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But of course, faith has consequences. Love has consequences. If we love someone, we want to tell everyone we know about them and we want to do everything we can to please them. This passage goes on to talk about the importance of bringing the Good News to others. We are saved because we call on the name of the Lord, who we believe God raised from the dead. But how can others call on His name, believe and be saved if they don't hear about Him and how will they hear about Him if we don't tell them? Paul goes on to quote Isaiah 52:7 How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news! It is said of languages, and I have certainly found this to be true, that if you don't use it you lose it. And I think this is also true of faith. If we don't exercise our faith, if we don't live it out, then there is a danger that we will lose it. That is why we need to come to church to worship together, to learn more about God, to encourage and help each other in our journey of faith. But it is also why coming to church is not enough. If you only think about God and practice your faith on a Sunday, then it will not be strong. We need to be living it out every day. Walking with Jesus every day, wanting to be more like Him every day, talking to Him every day. The strongest love will grow cold if you rarely see each other, think about each other, or talk to each other. Love needs communication. The word, that is Jesus, needs to be in our mouths – we need to talk to Him and about Him, and in our hearts, we need to be acting on our belief in Him, living out our faith every day. And the promise that when we call on Him, not just once, not just on Sundays, but when we call on Him, He will richly bless us. And the richest blessing of all, is not if we are healed, it is not if our pain is taken away, it is as the thief on the cross discovered – simply to be in His presence.