

Romans 2.1-7, 8-16 29th November 2009 Advent 1.

Home Group

Keep reading Jeremiah 26-29!

Welcome:

When was the last time you had to appear in court?

Worship: Psalm 62

Word:

1. Read Romans 2.1-16. It would be okay if you read a few verses either side as it may help with context. Read it in other translations too, NLT and Msg are esp good.
2. Why the change from They to You?
3. Why don't You have any excuse?
4. What's wrong with passing judgement? Does that mean we can't be critical anymore?
5. How does Paul think people show contempt (vs4)
6. Why is God kind, tolerant ...?
7. Why is it okay for us to copy God in being kind etc but not okay to copy God in judging?
8. I'm not that stubborn, perhaps this doesn't apply to me? Vs 5.
9. Vs6 looks good for me, after all I've helped lots of old people cross roads ... discuss.
10. Why the Jew first and then the Gentile? I thought God didn't show favouritism!
11. What hope is there for the Tibetan Shepherd?
12. What am I supposed to do about my secrets, that only God knows of?
13. Feedback – Romans is a toughie, let me know if you got stuck on anything or if you'd like me to have a go at explaining something I obviously avoided!

Works:

Pray. Pray about who you might invite to Christingle, Carols, Nativity service, Christmas Day. People like to be invited to these services and find it difficult to walk in, you may need to even take them there.

//*/

This morning's reading is hard. You have no excuse, don't do any judging, you're stubborn and God will judge you. That's a lot to take on board in one go.

2 Weeks ago I preached on the bit just before and we had fun looking at the wicked people called They and Them. And whoever They and Them are they aren't You or Me and we see how they're in for it on the day of Judgement.

But we also saw that They are our descendants and that the Theys that are living today are the society that surrounds us. So probably be best not to judge them.

And now Paul tells us Absolutely not to do any judging at all. And the main reason for that is that it is God who gets to do the Judging.

So if you like your three pointed sermons then this one could be:

God is the Judge.

God is Kind, tolerant, patient.

God will give eternal life

1. God is the Judge.

That might sound scary to you but actually it is good news. God will judge rightly and fairly and He knows all the secrets of our hearts.

If you get the time to, please do have a read of the judgement that the chancellor has handed to us. It's very full and very detailed and demonstrates that this judge had a very good grasp of all the issues. No one can read it and feel unheard, unrepresented. (I'm not sure if I told you but he started the court hearing with prayer and we said the Lord's Prayer together and he ended it with silent prayer and the grace - that has to be a good way to take a court in a Church).

Point 1 God is the Judge, this is a good thing because we know that His judgement will be the right one. Its also good because we know that God is also our saviour and so there is hope as we come to judgement.

Point 2 is God is kind, tolerant and patient. And that has to be a good thing too. Of course the reason why God is slow to anger and abiding in love, the reason why God is kind here is in order to give you the space and the time to repent,

to realize that the life that you lead is more self-seeking than seeking God's glory. We're keener to spin the truth so that we can more easily excuse our sin. But God waits patiently. He holds back the full implications and consequences of our sin and gives us the space to repent.

We talked a bit about repenting last month and we saw that repenting wasn't about being Sorry that you'd be caught but about looking at yourself and realizing that this is not the You that you want to be, that God has created you to be and you want to be different.

We saw that repenting was not just about stopping doing certain things, acts and activities, but about having a changed attitude.

So Repenting meant turning to God and saying Sorry and asking for God's help to not be like this and not liking the hypocrisy of it all and not lowering our standards or excusing ourselves but instead asking for God's help to be clean of these sins, to be clean of the attitude, the spirit, that lies behind them

and that means asking for God's help: receiving His forgiveness and then rebuking in you that which is not of God, that which is not the You that God is calling you to be. It's not an easy thing to learn. It is hugely cathartic and helpful and it never seems to stop.

God is kind, tolerant, patient. The idea is that we will use this time to repent of our stubborn hearts.

There's a lovely digression here that is bound to pop up later in home groups and the digression is called What about the Tibetan Shepherd.

So God is the judge, God is kind and tolerant and patient. What about people who have never heard about Jesus? Do they get to go to heaven? The correct answer to that starts with Don't worry so much about their sin but get on and repent of yours! This is a trick to avoid having to face up to your own sin – Ah but what about – and it doesn't wash with God.

But seeing as you raised it! St Paul seems to say that we all have a moral compass within us and that God will judge us rightly.

So people who know better because they know what makes God happy – well they can get judged. And people who don't know what makes God happy – well it seems that lots of them seem to do the right thing anyway.

They are good Dads and Mums and good governments and wise rulers and that's all good. And God will judge them rightly. So don't worry about them in that regard.

And then because you're looking to postpone having to face up to your sin for a bit longer you ask the next question which is – Does this mean that I don't have to go to Tibet and tell them about Jesus.

And the answer to that is If you have found anything good in knowing Jesus for yourself, if you have found any peace, any forgiveness, any love, any hope, any power – then yes you have to tell the shepherds in Tibet and everyone else that you meet on the way. There are lots of people that you live next to and work opposite who know less about God than the Tibetan shepherd so get to work where you are.

And the good news is that they already know if you're a Christian or not. They just do. And if they don't then come the day that they find out, what will their conclusion be?

That you swear and cheat as much as the next person? That you gossip or steal office stationary even more than the others? What will your life preach about the impact that God has on your life. Will your life somehow say I worship a God who tells me not to Judge?

I don't know everything but I know that its God who does the judging and not me and that's good because there will be a justice and it will be a right and proper one and not one whipped up by the media or public opinion. Justice won't be done by a witch hunt but by God knowing everything, even the secrets of our own hearts.

And uncomfortable as that should make us all feel, that's good news because it means that we have a Judge who will do the right thing – we even have a judge who will endeavour to save us.

So I worship a God who is kind and tolerant and patient. And I'm going to try and show that in the way that I live and treat other people. God is like this towards me not so that I can carry on sinning but so that I can have some time and space and freedom to wake up and grab the opportunity to live a different life.

So I'm going to be like this towards other people and it doesn't mean that I think that what they do is okay but it does mean that it's not my job to judge them or to change them. but it is my job to show them what God is like.

We've had a short bible reading that is all about how much sinning we do and how much God is going to judge us, there's also a lot here about how good God is.

Be careful not to read too much hope into some of these verses – God will give to each person according to what he has done – so that sounds fair doesn't it, but the context is about our stubborn hearts. It's about getting our comeuppance.

We all have some level of right or wrong in our hearts and minds and we all defy our own conscience when it tells us what's right, we adjust our own standards and even these we fail from time to time. So the context of this is more foreboding than hopeful.

We're in grave danger of getting what's coming to us – and that applies to those of us who have done great sins and those who have done little sins and it applies to those of us who have neglected to do great deeds and those of us who have neglected to do little good deeds.

But the kindness, the tolerance and the patience is there to allow us to repent. And then to persist in seeking a life filled with God's glory, striving for His approval and seeking His presence.

It's a good word – “seek” – because it's all about what you can't see. It's all about what's going on inside your heart and mind, the motivation and driving force inside. Of course it works its way out in how you live, but it starts inside with that first step of faith.

Last time we looked at the judgment that is coming to people who sin and just don't care. This week we have looked at those people who think that they're better, who look down on and judge the rest – and we find that we are no better.

Next week we get to have a break with some Jeremiah but then it's back to Romans and we will see again that privilege and religion aren't going to be the safeguards that we think they should be.

This is all headed towards an understanding that says I, you me, they and them – we all need help, we all need a saviour – and maybe by Christmas you'll be ready to hear some really good news.

But today we have heard about God judging, not you. And that's good.
About God being kind and tolerant and patient. And that's good.
And about a God who will give eternal life. And that's very good. Amen.