

Romans 1.16-2.1 15th November 2009

Home Group

Prep for next week – get reading Jeremiah 22-25.

Welcome

When did you last get really angry / or someone get angry with you? (careful with this one, it might lead into a time of counselling and prayer!)

Worship Psalm 37.

Word

1. Read Romans 1.16-2.1
2. The reading we should have been 1.18- end of the chapter, why did I extend it by a couple of verses at both ends?
3. How is God evident to you in the world?
4. How does Paul see this wrath being worked out?
5. Where in the OT do we find people exchanging worship of God for worship of idols? (this is a toughie!)
6. Would you rather God gave you over to your own desires or that you exchanged godly ones for ungodly?
7. What do you do if you recognise an ungodly desire in you?

Works

This passage has been about people who hurt through the society that we've inherited. It's about people who hurt from choices that they have made. It's about being blind to what a sin is and blind to our prejudices. You should be able to find something here to pray about.

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Sometimes you read your bible and you're left exhausted and What was that all about (Jeremiah would be a good example!) Other times its pretty clear. Here we read how the world is a miserable place full of sinners. Its not the most uplifting passage but may be there's some good here, maybe it will drive us towards God.

Three points this morning. The first is that **You know enough to get started**. I've found in discussions with people about whether or not they feel ready to become a Christian. And the excuse that springs quickly to mind is that they feel that they don't know enough. So they come to an alpha course and sometimes that solves it and sometimes another excuse springs to mind so as to delay a real answer.

St Paul wants to convey how we all have this **God shaped whole in our hearts**, how we all have enough knowledge of God to get going, today, right now.

Paul's angle on this is not that different to what philosophers call the **Watchmaker** Argument – you come across a watch and its so amazing that you say There must be a watchmaker! So Paul says **God's invisible qualities** have been clearly seen.

There's the most amazing **BBC programme** (Life) that shows the most amazing views of animals doing what they do, and over the top of these amazing pictures comes the gentle, soothing, **almost divine** voice of David Attenborough.

Attenborough himself prefers the story of evolution to the story of creation and yet if you **listen to the words** that he chooses and to his tone of voice – it sounds to me very spiritual and religious.

So **look at nature** there's enough to stir your faith and get you going. Now there is a little trouble in that if you start down the **smarty-pants route** – ie you start saying Ah but what about **Nature red in tooth and claw** and so on. Then you're going to start to get a smarty pants theological reply which will be along the lines of **Well God didn't design** it that way, it has become like that as a result of the fall.

So you can go down that route but its not as much fun as watching a bunch of **meerkats** and just finding yourself **strangely encouraged** and warmed.

One wise man said the world doesn't have God stamped all over it but hold it up to the light and you can clearly see a **watermark!**

1. You know enough to get started – you can see the **handiwork of God** in creation – so get Praising and glorifying God.

The next step is to see how **very messed up society** is.

Last week we had to unlearn what we thought the word 'Righteousness' was all about – it isn't about being **irritatingly smug** – but about something that God out of His goodness does to us so we can be **friends** with Him. We learned that being Righteous is a **good thing** and it's about connecting with God.

This week we need to learn about the word **Wrath**. We're used to a word like wrath as conjuring up really mean **vicious out-of-control anger**. For me, I think of **Monty Python's** Foot coming down from the clouds. Zeus with his bolts of lightning. So we're going to have to **unlearn** some of that so that you can see what **God's** wrath is really all about. Wrath is not about **capricious** bolts of lightning. God's wrath is His **right response** to everything that is wrong in the world. God's wrath is God's right reaction to sin.

The **opposite** of wrath? You might think was **love** – but it would really be **laissez faire, a love and let be** kind of approach, but I'm not sure if you would want God to be **apathetic** about sin and evil and all that's wrong in the world. I rather think you'd **prefer God** to think that **Sin was wrong** and in need of being judged and dealt with. That's God's wrath. It differs somewhat from **my very human** wrath – which is when I completely lose it! But God's wrath is His **right response** to sin.

But you have to **remember the bit just before** – the bit about how God has revealed how we can be **right with Him**. That's Good news and we need it because not only is our **sin destroying each other** and ourselves but it is also destroying what's left of our **souls** and our relationship with God. St Paul says that God is telling us **how to be friends** with Him again and for many of us that starts with **understanding God's wrath**. How do we **see God's wrath** in the world? Is it in the form of a **giant foot** descending from on high – no we see it in the way that God decides to **stand back**.

God **gave them over** – it's a 3 fold repetition – God gave them over to the sinful desires of their hearts, to **shameful lusts**, to a depraved mind. God's wrath is seen in Him standing back and saying – **Okay you do it your way**. This standing back **shouldn't** completely **surprise** you – back in the summer when I was teaching you about **Elijah** and we heard how God hid Elijah in a desert ravine and then out of Israel in the town of Zarephath and we saw that that was **symbolic** of **God hiding** Himself – if you want to worship the Baals then go, have a **taste of your own medicine**.

It's a terrible and tragic thing to see, a **parent** who no longer knows how to help his **older teenager** deal with their **drugs** habit and the attached **thievery** that goes with it and all the **disrespect** that comes with that, the abuse if you like by the child on the parents. And there comes a point where the parent says Ok, you

are my child **but I can't help you** if this is really the way you want to live then best you go do it somewhere else. And they hand you over to yourself. For some teenagers no doubt this **works well as a wake up call**, for others it results in anger and So you don't love me, ha! I always knew it! and slam the door. Its an awful situation to get in. and **there's no right** answer. There's **no magic wand** you can wave that will make the child the way that you want your child to turn out – and if you could have such a wand, the child you'd get wouldn't be your child but a made up one, a **loveless robot**. So we read how God gave them over to themselves, their own **desires** and their own **thinking**.

You can if you want **blame** it all on God. Plenty of people do that when things go wrong in their lives, its all God's fault. And if you're up on your **Jeremiah** reading (ch21ff) (600 years before Romans) then this is sort of Okay – Jeremiah taught the people that the reason why they were going through **their living hell** was as a punishment from God. It **wasn't because** the invading **army** was **bigger than God**, it wasn't because their **emperor** was bigger than God, or the **little gods** that their enemies worshipped – they're not bigger than the LORD God.

So when we read in **Romans** that God gave them over – there is, if you can see it, a **kindness** here – it says God is bigger than all your problems, that **God is in control** and if you will let Him, He will help you again.

In Jeremiah's day it was hugely important for the people of God to understand that **God had not left them**, still loved them and wanted the best for them but if they really really wanted to worship false gods, well then that's their choice – and so **He handed them over** to them. So you can if you like **entirely blame God**, it might help you feel better in the midst of your strife, but its supposed to be a sign that **God is in control** and is **more powerful** even than your drug addiction, it supposed to be encouraging. It's supposed to **result in you seeking** out God and asking for His help.

OR you can **take some of the blame** yourself – we read three times how God gave them over, but then we read three times how **They exchanged**, they exchanged the glory of God for idolatry, they exchanged the truth for a **lie**, natural for **unnatural** relations. There is a clear sense of choosing this path, of making this **bed**, now you will have to lie in it!

There's a lot of **They's and Them's** in this passage. The great thing about Theys and Thems is that whoever they are they are **not Me and You**, they are They. Whoever They are they don't come off well in Paul's eyes, they are fools and wicked and so on. But before we rush these people off to get **burned** at the stake we ought to see two things. The first is that They initially **existed before** we did. 'They' are our **forefathers** – vs 20 'since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities have been seen – so that they are without excuse. This damaged and screwed up world that we live in is one that we have **inherited** from These People, the Theys and the Thems of this passage. And they are our forefathers.

Point 1 is **You know enough** to get going in your walk with God so start now and stop making excuses. Your faith may not be very strong, you may not know many answers to your questions, but you know enough to start out.

Point 2 is **God is in control**. His wrath is seen by Him stepping back and allowing us to go our own way. It would be a mistake to see God's stepping back as a form of **neutrality** or of God giving up – we're begin to see that the **opposite of wrath** is not love but apathy. God's wrath turns out to be a right response to all that is wrong. But in the **framework of love and freedom**, that means **letting us taste our own evil**. It's no thunderbolt or silly foot it is a wrath that **respects our freedom**. If you understand what I'm saying, you should feel slightly uncomfortable with this and be longing to hear more of **how to get right with God**.

You know enough, God is in control.

The **3rd point** is what has become of society as a result of our forefathers being handed over to their own desires. They have become **filled with every kind of wickedness** – although they still know what's right and what's wrong they don't do it and encourage others not to do the right thing.

There might be a part of you that says Well now hang about that's a bit of a **mean way of spinning** the way you see life and people and the world. **Its not That bad**, its bad, yes there are wars and refugees and bad employers and reasons for needing Child Protection Policies but **there are also good** people and peaceful governments and nice neighbours so what about all that!

And the answer – says Paul – is you're quite right, we're coming to that shortly in **chapter 2** – in the meantime, you have to admit that the world is pretty stuffed up. And so **what am I supposed** to do about that? We will be learning soon that the big answer to that is **Nothing** – God is the one who has done something about it.

But there is a little **more personal answer** – in so far as I recognise that some of the Theys and Thems are **my descendants** and it is as a result of them that I have inherited this world and to some extent who I have learned to become. So in the past, whilst they have been **open** to being filled with every kind of wickedness – well then I need to **learn to be filled with the opposite**. Last month we talked a lot about prayer and about **repenting** and then after **receiving** forgiveness about getting out of your system every kind of wickedness and **replacing** it with God's Holy Spirit.

So perhaps our third point should be a **humbling recognition** that we have in our past inherited some of these wicked traits from our forefathers. We've become **so used to it**, blind to it, that it sounds slightly insulting for me to suggest it to you. But if you're feeling **open and humble** this morning then maybe think about the idea that we have **inherited some prejudices, some bad** ways of dealing with life and perhaps you don't want to be filled with that anymore. So I refer you to an earlier sermon in which I said **Rebuke these attitudes** and thoughts and **Replace them with God's Holy Spirit**.

Point 1 – You have enough to **get started**. Become a Pilgrim, walk this life of faith, with your doubt, we've all got questions and more to learn but many of us have started. You do actually **know enough**.

Point 2 – **God is in control**. That's supposed to be comforting – though in this setting we see that it's God's wrath that has led God to **allow us the godless freedom** we have craved, to swap the truth for a lie. Nonetheless, God is in control.

Point 3 is be **filled with the Holy Spirit**, the opposite spirit that is so prevalent in society, in our **thought patterns** and in what shapes our lusts and desires. Be filled with an Opposite Spirit, God's Holy Spirit. The Psalm says **Delight yourself in the Lord** and He will give you the desires of your heart. (Ps 37.4) Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart **Amen**.