

Aim: Peace with God. Romans 4. 31<sup>st</sup> January 2010

Worship: Psalm 32 but can you figure out why?

Welcome & Word:

1. Where have you found any peace this week (interpret as broadly as you like!)
2. What does it mean to have peace with your wife / son / neighbour / yourself. How do you get it and when do you know you've got it?
3. What does it mean to have peace with God? How would you know you've got it and how do you get it and is the answer very different from the question above?
4. Someone else Read Romans 4.1-5 – and look up Genesis 15.4-6
5. I like doing good things, it makes me feel good, I'm sure God likes it too. Its got to be a good thing to do good! Why doesn't it make me right with God?
6. Someone else Read Romans 4.6-9a. if you didn't use Ps 32 look it up now.
7. David thought circumcision was really important (see 1 Sam 17.6) so what does David think the best way to be right with God is?
8. Someone else read Romans 4. 9b-12 and look at Gn 17.10 (the first mention of circumcision in the bible).
9. Rom4.11 what did circumcision do? It's positively sacramental!
10. Do the males in the home group need to get circumcised now?!
11. Someone else read Romans 4.13-17
12. Does anyone know when the Torah was given to the Israelites? Cf Ex 20. but how many years later is this?
13. So do I live by law or by promise (this is one of those easy qns, so you can all say in unison ...)
14. Someone else read Romans 4.18-25.
15. What strengthens your faith, what weakens it?
16. Split into twos and work out how to explain to someone how to be at peace with God (each pick one of: Gordon Brown, Victor Meldrew, Bart Simpson)

Works: Share one thing that you'd like others to pray for you this week.

Pray, for those who do try to explain how to be at peace with God with different people and nations.

Pray for your own awareness of that peace.

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The aim of this sermon is for you to **know the peace** of God. Ideally you will not only know it in your head but also in your heart. St Paul starts the next chapter with Therefore ... **we have peace with God**. So that's the aim of this chapter – its all leading up to Paul's great Therefore ... we have peace with God.

We all seem to **carry with us as many worries** as we can possibly manage. We're all as busy as busy, even to the point of neglecting ourselves, our souls, even others we love. Very often we don't notice it but it's the truth.

Jesus said **Come to me and I will give you rest** for your souls. And we're going to see from St Paul a little of how that works.

**So far** in Paul's letter to the Romans we have been told **not to judge** others and that you and I along with all the others are up a **creak without a paddle in a leaking** canoe. And then we heard the marvellous **Eucatastrophe** – the wonderful news that you and I and **all** people can be **right with God**.

Some of you are wanting a deeper answer to that and last time we looked at **Justice**. This time we get to **look at Me**. I want to make myself Right with God, I want to make myself at Peace with God. **How do I** go about doing that?

Paul will address this question using the story of Abraham and of David and he'll talk about employment and the logic of history and the meaning of a promise and the punchline will be: **Its not about Me its about God**.

The way to Peace with God is to see and understand what it is that God has done.

This week there is no advice. **Its not about You its about God**. It's about understanding what God has done. We've already looked at what God has done so Paul now wants to hammer home that **everyone gets to tap into what God has done through Faith** and not through any other route.

St Paul is speaking to the **Jews** – verse 1 – What shall we say about Abraham our forefather in the flesh. So he's speaking here really to Jews. Later Paul will talk about Abraham as our spiritual father. God said to Abraham: **I will bless you and make you a father of many nations and through you all nations will be blessed**. (see Gn 15.6) Sounds good? But it didn't come easily. How does Abraham get right with God? **How do you squeeze something** out of God? Are you supposed to **sacrifice children** or people or animals? Do you offer to burn your crop to God? Do you give all your money, all your time to God? How do you get God to cough up His promise?

Abraham learned the hard way that you **just have to hang** in there. You just have to trust and believe. There's **no amount of hours worked**, no amount of **regulation keeping** that is going to make God do anything before God is ready to do it. You just have to hang in there and **know that God will come true**.

If Abraham had worked out **how to force** an answered prayer out of God then Abraham would have something to **boast** about. If Abraham had worked out how he could **make himself peaceful with God**, yes he would be able to call himself a true magician.

After various mistakes, **Ishmael** being the biggest one, Abraham comes to realise that it really is only by faith that God's promises are good and come true.

Meanwhile Paul calls **King David** as his next witness. This is a great idea. **How does David get to be right with God?**

The young David goes to the frontline of the war with the Philistines. He sees Goliath and says Why are we afraid of **this Uncircumcised fellow?** (1 Sam 17.26, Jonathan

would agree: 1 Sam 14.6) That's the key point for David, Goliath still has an extra bit of skin somewhere about his person! He may be twice or three times as tall as David but **Goliath is not circumcised** and that means he is **not part of the promise** of God and **David is** and that means that David isn't afraid of Goliath. So you would expect **David to be arguing against** Paul. You would expect David to say **Circumcision is the all** important way to be right with God.

So it's good that Paul takes a hold of a song of **David's**, (Ps32) a song that says The way to be right with God is to **acknowledge your sins** and to receive the forgiveness of God.

So **Abraham** agrees with Paul that the way to be right with God is going to be **through Faith** and not through trying really hard. And **David** agrees with Paul that the way to be right with God is **through confession** rather than circumcision.

If you're a good Israelite, you're just getting ready to complain at Paul's conclusion but then Paul says **What came first? When was Abraham** made right with God? Long before Circumcision and a hugely long time before the Law came through Moses. And this is why Abraham becomes our spiritual father because **he hung in there against all hope** and he trusted that God would come through and God was proved faithful. And this brings us right back to understanding that **it's all about God not Me**.

The good news today is that you don't need to get circumcised. If any of you chaps are still not at peace with God then we can try it but I'm telling you that St Paul says this is **not the way to find peace** with God.

And we don't find peace with God by **burning ourselves out on regulations** and **exhausting ourselves** in the pursuit of doing good.

The angels declare to the shepherds in advance and now it is here – **Peace on earth, good will to all men**. How do I get me some of that? **By faith**. By believing it and living in the light of it.

You may have spotted that there seems to be some **crazy loophole**. **God justifies the wicked (vs5)**. Go ahead and sin and all you need to do is to trust that Jesus will forgive you and make you right with God and you have your peace with God again.

Maybe I could murder? If I murdered someone could I still be at peace with God. **Surely not**, that would be crazy, you'd go to prison, you'd be wracked with guilt and the **burning fires of hell await you** – that's justice. And then we think about it and say – **well maybe** if the murderer proceeded to live an **exemplary** life, if the murderer could do **enough** good things, go to **Haiti** and find all the wounded and feed all the hungry, then maybe that would be enough good to get you **back into God's good books**.

And this of course is exactly the problem with Paul. He **murdered Stephen**. So by Law and by Justice he should be facing Hell. But by God's grace, Paul's life is turned around. But the thing is, **Grace comes first**. God's forgiveness came to Paul before Paul showed that he was worth forgiving, or worthy of being forgiven.

When Paul came to write his letters to **Corinth**, he had to deal with sexual immorality. Christians there had cottoned on to this loophole. **God forgives unconditionally.**

Over the years the **church has tried to close up** that loophole. By saying, well you really ought to do some **penance** first, you really ought to show that you are worthy of forgiveness. Here are some **rules**, follow these and we'll see how it goes.

But the loophole is still there. Some of us **desperately need** this loophole as we seek out 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> chances. But others use the loophole to excuse their lack of faith, lack of self-control, well we might need a **fresh appreciation of why this loophole is here.**

And then you'll here sermons that I call **Jesus And sermons**. You need **Jesus and** you also need to be **here at 10am** every Sunday, and join at least 3-4 **rotas**, be part of a home group and give at least **5%** of your money. Did you know that the average CofE giver now gives £9 per week! Let me know if you want to revise your gift aid form! Yes that includes the rich churches in London, it also includes the poor ones.

You see **Jesus And sermons** – you're not really at peace with God until after you have **achieved** all these things. And you can see how it would be **jolly handy** if that were the truth. Then we could use this **religion to control** people more easily and we'd have lots of money and lots of cleaners.

But the truth is its just **Jesus**.

Jesus was **delivered over to death for our sins** and was raised to life for our justification – so now we can be right with God, we can have **Peace with God** and we get that through faith.

What about the **loopholes**? What about our **rotas**!? There is an answer to that but not one that affects your **salvation**, your peace with God. In fact if you haven't got peace with God then **filling the rotas isn't going to help much** and it isn't going to build the kind of church we want to build anyway. So the loophole stays, we're open to charges of **hypocrisy** but its better than the charge of **legalism** so don't worry about it.

This week focus on the Peace and on **knowing that we have peace with God** through what Jesus has done on the cross. You don't have to understand the cross, its good to but there's no academic test here, all you need is the **simplest of faith that doggedly holds onto Jesus** and says I can't do this myself, I need you. Amen.