

Sunday, February 2, 2014

Romans 1:16-17 "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, *The just shall live by faith.*"

The just shall live by faith – that wonderful truth is the topic of my sermon this morning – it is a concept that I hope will give you the same kind of instruction and comfort that it gave me in studying it. I originally intended to delve into the second half of Romans (specifically verses 18 through 32) – a passage that many of us are very familiar with, but one that I have lately seen in a new light. We have spent a lot of time over the last 20 years in this church focusing on that passage – from the pulpit, in our houses, on the picket line, on radio shows, etc. because it is a wonderful dissertation on reprobation, and the nature of this vile flesh. As I studied those verses closely, I wanted to make sure that I had them in the right context, and so I spent some time on the first 17 verses of the chapter. Verses 1 through 15 contain the introduction to Paul's letter to the Romans, including his customary salutations. As I have done many times, I nearly lumped 16 and 17 in with the introduction, in order to get right to the meat of 18-32, before I realized that 16 and 17 are the leaping off place – the purpose – for the verses that follow. Paul is telling them plainly that there is ONLY justification by Faith – no works righteousness – no salvation through the Law of Nature, or the Law of Moses – only through Faith. The rest of the chapter has to be viewed from that lens – it's Paul proving out the fact that there is no salvation – no hope – no righteousness to be found in the flesh. When we take on ourselves to meddle with the standards of God, rather than trusting in, and following after him like little children, then there can only be one outcome – more and worse sin followed by death, destruction, and hell. To put it another way – verses 16 and 17 are a juxtaposition to the rest of the chapter. Faith vs works. The mercy of God vs the wrath of God. God's love vs His perfect hate. God's ability to preserve the sheep, and deliver them vs his ability to pickle the reprobate in their sins, awaiting judgment. Jacob vs Esau. Cain vs Abel. There is no understanding one of these concepts without the other.

Romans 1:16 "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek."

The power of God unto salvation is seen in the Gospel: the preaching, and effectual hearing of the whole gospel of Christ as the means appointed by God to quicken dead sinners, enlighten blind eyes, unstop deaf ears, and soften hard hearts. This verse is

often quoted by the evangelical Christian crowd, of course they have redefined the Gospel in order to make it palatable to their version of works righteousness, thereby showing that they are, in fact, ashamed of Christ and His Gospel. Gill speaks of these false prophets that we are so familiar with:

Gill: "They preach the Gospel only in part, who use ambiguous words, of doubtful signification, to cover themselves; who blend the Gospel with their own inventions, seek to please men, and live upon popular applause, regard their own interest, and not Christ's, and cannot bear the reproach of his Gospel. It expresses, that the apostle was not ashamed of it; that is, to preach it, which he did fully and faithfully, plainly and consistently, openly and publicly, and boldly, in the face of all opposition."

Romans 1:17 "For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith."

This righteousness of God – the power of God as seen through the Gospel – is the righteousness that Jesus Christ imparts to His own, thereby justifying them. It is the only righteousness that we have – the only justification.

Gill: "Now this is said to be "revealed" in the Gospel, that is, it is taught in the Gospel; that is the word of righteousness, the ministration of it; it is manifested in and by the Gospel. This righteousness is not known by the light of nature, nor by the law of Moses; it was hid under the shadows of the ceremonial law, and is brought to light only by the Gospel; it is hid from every natural man, even from the most wise and prudent, and from God's elect themselves before conversion, and is only made known to believers, to whom it is revealed: from one degree of faith to another; for faith, as it grows and increases, has clearer sights of this righteousness, as held forth in the Gospel."

That imputed righteousness, and that faith is the only hope and help that we have beloved. We are only just **because** of that faith, and it was a free gift. We live **by** that faith – with full reliance upon our God – and **because** of that faith. Several expositors make the case that the phrase would be better rendered: "the just, by faith, shall live". We are only just because of the faith that we have been given, and having that faith, we live - having spiritual life with God. To further understand this concept, we have to go to the source. When Paul says "as it is written", it's because he's quoting from Habakkuk 2.

Habakkuk 2:1-4 "I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am

reproved. And the LORD answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it. For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry. Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith."

Habakkuk appears to have prophesied to the Kingdom of Judah around 610 BC, during the reign of Jehoiakim, in the days running up to the destruction and captivity that Babylon would bring upon them. The first chapter of Habakkuk shows the prophet to be in a state of great distress at the burden that the Lord had given him to deliver to the people. He certainly wasn't defending the abominable sins of his countrymen, but rather it seems he was in anguish at the idea that the enemies of God – in this instance the godless heathen Babylonians – would have such a victory over the people of God in the earth – the Lord's anointed. I believe that each of us sitting here can well understand the distress that this blessed man was in, desiring to serve the Lord, and be faithful to Him, while struggling with his foolish flesh, not knowing how or when the Lord would deliver his people, and how this captivity – this affliction - would glorify His holy name. It is in the midst of such affliction that we must be reminded, and settled at our very core, that the just shall live by faith alone, and that fleshly analysis of that affliction - how we might work around the providence of God – is death to us.

Habakkuk 2:1 "I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reprov'd."

Calvin: "The Prophet, finding himself sinking, and as it were overwhelmed in the deepest abyss, raises himself up above the judgment and reason of men, and comes nearer to God, that he might see from on high the things which take place on earth, and not judge according to the understanding of his own flesh, but by the light of the Holy Spirit. For the tower of which he speaks is patience arising from hope. If indeed we would struggle perseveringly to the last, and at length obtain the victory over all trials and conflicts, we must rise above the world.

The tower is the recess of the mind, where we withdraw ourselves from the world. When we follow our own inclination, various temptations immediately lay hold on us; nor can we even for a moment exercise hope in God: and many things are also suggested to us, which take away and deprive us of all confidence: we become also involved in variety of thoughts, for when Satan finds men wandering in their imaginations and blending many things together, he so entangles them that they cannot by any means come nigh to God. If then we would cherish faith in our hearts,

we must rise above all these difficulties and hindrances. And the Prophet by tower means this, that he extricated himself from the thoughts of the flesh; for there would have been no end nor termination to his doubts, had he tried to form a judgment according to his own understanding; In short the Prophet renounced the judgment of men, and broke through all those snares by which Satan entangles us and prevents us to rise above the earth.

We hence see that the Prophet observes the best order in what he states, when he says in the first place, 'I will see what God may say to me;' and in the second place, 'I shall then be taught to answer to my chiding;' that is, "If the wicked deride my faith, I shall be able boldly to confute them; for the Lord will suggest to me such things as may enable me to give a full answer." We now perceive the simple and real meaning of this verse. It remains for us to accommodate the doctrine to our own use.

It must be first observed, that there is no remedy, when such trials as those mentioned by the Prophet in the first chapter meet us, except we learn to raise up our minds above the world. For if we contend with Satan, according to our own view of things, he will a hundred times overwhelm us, and we can never be able to resist him. Let us therefore know, that here is shown to us the right way of fighting with him, when our minds are agitated with unbelief, when doubts respecting God's providence creep in, when things are so confused in this world as to involve us in darkness, so that no light appears: we must bid adieu to our own reason; for all our thoughts are nothing worth, when we seek, according to our own reason, to form a judgment. Until then the faithful ascend to their tower and stand in their citadel, of which the Prophet here speaks, their temptations will drive them here and there, and sink them as it were in a bottomless gulf.

The Prophet teaches us, that we ought to have such reverence for God's word as to deem it sufficient for us to hear his voice. Let this, then, be our understanding, to obey God speaking to us, and reverently to embrace his word, so that he may deliver us from all troubles, and also keep our minds in peace and tranquillity. So it behoves the faithful to be also tranquil and quiet, and wait patiently for God during times of perplexity and confusion.

But this appears still more clear from what is expressed at the close of the verse, when the Prophet adds, and what I may answer to the reproof given me; for he shows that he would be furnished with the best weapons to sustain and repel all assaults, provided he patiently attended to God speaking to him, and fully embraced his word: "Then," he says, "I shall have what I may answer to all reproofs, when the Lord shall speak to me".

By "reproofs," he means not only the blasphemies by which the wicked shake his faith, but also all those turbulent feelings by which Satan secretly labors to subvert his faith.

We may also gather from the whole verse, that we can form no judgment of God's providence, except by the light of celestial truth. It is hence no wonder that many fall away under trials, yea, almost the whole world; for few there are who ascend into the citadel of which the Prophet speaks, and who are willing to hear God speaking to them. Hence, presumption and arrogance blind the minds of men, so that they either speak evil of God who addresses them, or accuse fortune, or maintain that there is nothing certain: thus they murmur within themselves, and arrogate to themselves more than they ought, and never submit to God's word."

Habakkuk 2:2 "And the LORD answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it."

Gill: "And the Lord answered me, As he does his ministers and people sooner or later, in one way or another, when they call upon him with humility and reverence, with faith and fervency: and said, Write the vision; which the prophet now had from him, concerning the coming of the Messiah, and the destruction of the enemies of the church and people of God. and make [it] plain upon tables, That he may run that readeth it; may run through the whole without any difficulty, without making any stop, being written in such large capital letters; and those cut so well, and made so plain, that a man might run it over at once with ease, or even read it as he was running; nor need he stop his pace, or stand to read. The Targum is, "write the prophecy, and explain it in the book of the law, that he may hasten to obtain wisdom, whoever he is that reads in it."

Habakkuk 2:3 "For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry."

We do not get to dictate a timeline to God, beloved – it's not our place. Where were we when he put his calendar together? Let's have some perspective here - He has waited 2000 years now to avenge the blood of his own son, Jesus Christ – what complaint then could we have? It is pleasing to him that we should wait upon him, and glorify him with our patient, prayerful obedience, resting upon His promises. His deliverances are appointed, and will come at exactly the right time – they will not tarry.

Trapp: "For the vision is yet for an appointed time: This he is commanded to write, that God's people may learn to wait. He that believeth maketh not haste, he can both wait

*(as knowing that many of God's promises bear a long date) and also want, go without the good he desireth; being well content that God is glorified, though himself be not gratified. **But at the end it shall speak:** It shall speak confidently, boldly, and freely, to the great comfort of those that [patiently await] God's promises. If any ask when this shall be? it is answered, In the end, that is, in God's good time. Shall he lose his right because he hath not [done it] by the day set down in our calendar? Possibly the calendar of heaven hath a [later date than] ours. Sure it is, that as God seldom comes at our time; so he never fails at his own. [Those that rest upon God] shall shortly clap their hands for joy. God's help seems long, because we are short. A short walk is a long journey to feeble knees. But God tarries not beyond his appointed time; at midnight were the firstborn slain, because then exactly the four hundred and thirty years were up. And "In that night was Belshazzar slain;" because then exactly the seventy years were ended."*

Habakkuk 2:4 "Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith."

These whose souls are lifted up are the same with those Romans 1:18-32 reprobates who became vain in their own imagination and their foolish heart is therefore darkened. Rather than resting upon and submitting to God, through faith, in full recognition of the desperately wicked human heart, these lean upon their own understanding. They create a new standard - a new righteousness - by which they will be judged, and condemned.

Calvin: "This verse stands connected with the last, for the Prophet means to show that nothing is better than to rely on God's word, how much soever may various temptations assault our souls. We hence see that nothing new is said here, but that the former doctrine is confirmed—that our salvation is rendered safe and certain through God's promise alone, and that therefore we ought not to seek any other haven, where we might securely sustain all the onsets of Satan and of the world. But he sets the two clauses the one opposed to the other: every man who would fortify himself would ever be subject to various changes, and never attain a quiet mind; then comes the other clause—that man cannot otherwise obtain rest than by faith."

*Gill: "**Behold, his soul [which] is lifted up is not upright in him,** The proud and haughty Scribes and Pharisees are here plainly described, whose minds were elated with themselves; whose hearts were like bubbles, blown up, full of wind; whose souls swelled with pride and vanity, and a high conceit of themselves; of their merit and worth; of their holiness and works of righteousness; and treated those they thought below them in these things with the utmost disdain and contempt; and trusted in themselves, and*

to their own righteousness, to the great neglect of the true Messiah and his righteousness As Aben Ezra observes: "he whose soul is not right in him places himself in a fortress or tower, to set himself on high there from the enemy, and does not return to God, nor seek deliverance of him; but the righteous has no need to place himself on high in a fortress, for he shall live by his faith." the just shall live by faith: "a just," or righteous man is, not everyone who thinks himself, or is thought by others to be so; nor are any so by their obedience to the law of works; but he is one that is made righteous by the righteousness of Christ imputed to him, which is before said to be revealed in the Gospel. A spiritual life, a life of justification on Christ, of holiness from him, of communion with him, and of peace and joy; which spiritual life shall be continued, and never be lost"

There are many places in scripture that make these same points, but I will leave you with these two:

James 1:2-7 "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord."

Isaiah 50:8-11 "He is near that justifieth me; who will contend with me? let us stand together: who is mine adversary? let him come near to me. Behold, the Lord GOD will help me; who is he that shall condemn me? lo, they all shall wax old as a garment; the moth shall eat them up. Who is among you that feareth the LORD, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the LORD, and stay upon his God. Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks: walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled. This shall ye have of mine hand; ye shall lie down in sorrow."

Let us therefore look to the Lord, my friends, when we find ourselves in darkness and affliction - living by the faith that He has blessed us with - seeking His blessed remedies, and not leaning upon our own understanding, which will surely end in sorrow.

I love you all. Amen.