

Lent Day 3

Friday March 3, 2017

Reading: Romans 1:16-17

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.”

Reflection

When we lived in Toronto our daughters attended a public school which had extreme poverty on one side and extreme wealth on the other. One day after dropping the girls to school and heading on to work, I rounded the corner and saw a group of other parents filing into the doughnut shop on the corner. In a flash I could see that this was the best the day had to offer and I saw, in my minds eye, that their children would one day be enacting this same routine. There was a cycle of poverty where education wasn't a means to a better life, it was something to be endured until you could be free of it. Life didn't have much hope to it, money was used for short-term gains like cigarettes, alcohol, drugs, lottery tickets, and doughnut shops. Entertainment had become the goal, grab whatever 'good' you could get. With this modelled for their children and taught to them that cycle just keeps going. The message is, this is as good as it gets.

As a pastor, upon seeing that I wrestle with the question, how do cycles get broken? Now, as sad as a cycle of poverty is, it's nothing compared to the cycle in which we are all locked; Sin and Death. Just like the blindness that comes from being in a cycle of poverty, the cycle of Sin and Death creates a blindness. The illustration of the movie *The Matrix* still resonates. It is a prison for our minds, one we can't smell, or touch, or taste. It is the world which has been pulled over our eyes. And, worse than the cycle of poverty, this doesn't affect some — it effects everyone. We are all compromised and blind. How can we get out? There is no one to come to us with a red pill or blue pill which will set us free. Redemption cannot come from within because the power of Sin and Death is so complete. We are without hope. Except.

Except there is a greater power than Sin or Death. There is God. The same God who created the heavens and earth and everything in them, is the God who promised Abraham that through you and your seed the whole world will be blessed. The power of Sin and Death will be broken and overthrown. The gospel which Paul shares is the gospel of Jesus; his life, suffering, death, resurrection, ascension, and giving of the life-giving Spirit. That is the gospel which is itself the power of God to free us from the cycle of Sin and Death which we have been locked into. And, because the power of Sin and Death is over everyone alike, so God's gospel power is for everyone alike.

This rescue and resulting freedom is such great news that Paul says he isn't ashamed by it. He says this because the cross is the most shameful element of Roman society — you don't talk about it in public. But, God has made this most shameful death device the tool of rescue for all people, so for that reason rather than bringing shame it brings Paul joy to discuss it. Those who are rescued by this shameful device are now incorporated into the people of God. In short, we cannot break the cycle we're stuck in. We cannot rescue ourselves. But, God launched a rescue mission 2,000 years ago and because of that we are free. The cycle is broken.

Prayer

Thank you God of creation and covenant for your rescue. For breaking the powers of Sin and Death and setting us free. Let us not be ashamed by your rescue, but rejoice!