

FOREWORD

By Major Stephen Court, Territorial Evangelism Consultant, The Salvation Army Canada and Bermuda

Only One To Salvation

“There are many ways to damnation, but only one to salvation” (William Booth).

Millions of people throughout history have proven the truth of this maxim. Generations have found more ways to hell than you can shake a stick at, more ways to doom than you can skin a cat. And, while many seem to find their customized path to destruction well enough on their own, most benefit from the guidance of negative influences. Depending on your culture and your subculture(s), those guides might run you through tricky entertainment terrain, or over distracting political mountains, or through rough relational rivers, or under foreboding sickness skies, or via deserts of selfishness, or across plains of pride, or...

As Booth concluded, there are many ways to damnation.

Only One...

But there is only one to salvation – the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus, by His death on the cross, His supernatural resurrection on the third day – conquering sin and death, and defeating the devil - and His ascension to heaven where He now reigns, made a way for us to be forgiven. There are so many ways to describe the transforming experience He makes possible that we’ve developed over the years a growing vocabulary, including words like redemption, reconciliation, regeneration, justification, salvation, conversion, adoption, and more. We celebrate when someone is ‘born again’, saved, converted – all supernaturally transformative.

At Hand!

And Jesus, in Mark 1:15, instructs us, “The Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe the good news.”

‘At hand’? That saying suggests that something is ‘nearby’, around, hereabouts, within reach, readily accessible when needed, close in time, about to happen...

But to make it clear, why not stretch your arm right now. Then look at the end of it – your hand! There’s the Kingdom of God! It’s ‘at hand’. It’s within reach. It’s here. Jesus is here and wants to reign in our lives.

Think Different

‘Repent’? It comes from a Greek word – metanoia – that means ‘change of mind’, to ‘think differently after’. Wow! When you read that - if you are older than my sons - you might jump to the conclusion that APPLE is the best evangelist of our lifetime! After all, APPLE’s legendary commercial slogan was ‘Think Different’. They basically told a generation, ‘Repent!’ That’s quite a bit different than the stereotypical image of the lonely, earnest man on the street corner with a megaphone and a large sign stenciled with ‘prepare to meet thy God’ or some such message.

‘Think differently *after*’? In this instance, we’re talking about *after* you encounter Jesus, as in, ‘after you meet Jesus, you’ll never be the same!’

About what are we to ‘think differently after’? At least three things, for our purposes:

We think differently about God. He’s not the conventional philosophical picture of a clock maker who creates the universe, winds it up, and then goes off to his own business while letting it tick away on its own. He’s not aloof.

He’s not a finger-wagging Father. He’s not always irritated by our shortcomings and failures or aggravated by our hassles and whining.

He's the loving God. He cares for us. He's profoundly interested in every aspect of our lives. He's dependable. And He is good. Always.

Second, we think differently about ourselves. On one end of the spectrum, we are not the centre of the universe, the star of the movie, the sun around which everyone and everything revolves. On the other end, we're not terrible, miserable, despised, and worthless beings who don't deserve the breath we breathe. We are masterpieces of God, who created us with amazing purposes for each of us.

Third, we think differently about sin. Most of us tend to downplay our sin. We justify and rationalize. We make excuses for it. Sometimes we try to regulate it or domesticate it. But sin is significant. It is an affront to God. And it separates us from God, both now and, if we don't deal with it at the Cross with Jesus, for eternity. Our sin is what makes Jesus' sacrifice on the Cross essential. Thank Jesus for His atonement!

Conviction, Not Opinion

That deals with 'repent'. 'And believe'. We repent *and* believe. Jesus actually equates belief with obedience in John 3:36 ("Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them." NIV). This raises the standard above conventional use. This is not about opinion; this is about conviction. This is not about the right idea; it's about the right action.

And Jesus immediately follows, 'Repent and believe' in Mark 1:15 with the invitation, 'Come, follow Me' (Mark 1:17). But it's not only an invitation. Coming, as it does, from the Creator, Preserver, and Governor of all things, it's also a command. And obedience to it operationalizes the 'belief' we've just unpacked. We follow Jesus.
Guide

Though there is only one way to salvation – Jesus – there are many ways to get to Jesus. And the role of an evangelist is described in

different ways in different places. One of the most famous images is of one blind person telling another where to find bread (we're not the biggest fans of this one because the saved person is no longer spiritually blind, but it does make its point graphically).

One we've heard recently is that the evangelist is a match-maker, introducing my friend Jesus to my friend _____ in hopes that they will strike if off and launch a relationship that will last forever (literally, 'a match made in heaven!').

And one of the trusted comparisons is between evangelist and guide. *Salvogesis' Guide To The Romans Road* is a Biblical sight-seeing tour providing background context and applicable tips to timeless and transferable truths. This book walks you through the significant salvation signposts of Paul's letter to the Romans on the Road to reconciliation with God. It's by far the most consequential trip anyone can ever take. And Michael Ramsay is a trustworthy guide. He's travelled this way many times, first, himself, finding Jesus for his own salvation, and subsequently with others in cities across Canada, guiding them to meet the Christ and submit to His Lordship and follow Jesus. As you pray your way through these pages, may God instruct your mind and inspire your heart to enable and empower you to be a worthy guide for many others to meet Jesus.

Much grace,
Stephen Court
Toronto, 2020

Salvogesis
Guide Book
to
Romans Road



Welcome to
Salvogesis GUIDE BOOK to ROMANS ROAD

Welcome to the *Salvogesis* GUIDE BOOK to ROMANS ROAD. This is not your typical guide book. Romans Road leads to God's Eternal Kingdom. While this book is a useful guide if you are a tourist and have never walked down Romans Road yourself, it is intended to help you as you become a guide yourself.

Many of us who guide people down Romans Road have found that the only resources readily available are tiny tracts published as recently as the 1970s or 1980s. While they have served their purpose well, it is time for the guide books to be updated and explored in more detail. That is what this book is: the *Salvogesis* GUIDE BOOK to ROMANS ROAD will give you great information about each of the stops along the way. Whether or not you have previously led people on a tour of the Romans Road, this is the book for you.

INTRODUCTION

Being raised as an evangelistic Christian, I have always been aware of the Romans Road. It ran right past the front door of many churches in the 20th Century. As Evangelical Christians, once we had walked down that road ourselves we were invited to lead as many of our friends there as we could. We would be armed with tracts and evangelism classes and sent to accompany people along this road to eternal life.

What is this road exactly? It is one well-trodden path to Salvation. Romans Road is a series of scriptures the Lord has used to call many people into the Church and Salvation. Most of the variations of the Romans Road include stops at the following verses:

- Something from Romans 1. We will look at Romans 1:20: “For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities — his eternal power and divine nature — have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse”; and at Romans 1:16: “I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes. . . .”
- Romans 3:23: “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”
- Romans 6:23: “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”
- Romans 5:8: “But God demonstrates His own love for us, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”
- Romans 10:13: “Whoever calls on the Name of the Lord will be saved.”

- Romans 10:9, 10: “If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Jesus from the dead, you shall be saved; for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.”

Many times people end their trip down Romans Road at Revelation 3:16: “Behold! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.” Even though this verse is not included in the book of Romans, we will end our journey here as well. We will also add a couple of extra stops along our way, such as Romans 5:3–5: “we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.” And Romans 13:11–14: “The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. . . . clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.”

This guide is more than a tract. It spends some time looking at each of these very important verses and in a way that I hope you will find -both interesting and illuminating. Whether you are new to Romans Road or have walked this path many times before, it is my hope that you will find *Salvogesis* GUIDE BOOK *to* ROMANS ROAD a wonderful resource for you while exploring this path with your friends.

Sincerely,

Michael Ramsay

1
THE APPEAL OF CREATION
Romans 1, Genesis 1

Introduction

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Cited Materials

Welcome to our first of ten stops on this journey along Romans Road. This is an exciting view as we can see both Romans 1 and Genesis 1 from this vantage point. A key verse I would like to draw to our attention is Romans 1:20:

For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.

This reminds me of a time when my wife Susan and I served as Officers and pastors in Nipawin and Tisdale, Saskatchewan.

After a day of dealing with another vandalized window at the ministry centre, packing boxes, and writing sermons, we decided to take a short walk in God's creation. It was amazing. As we walked, our spirits immediately lifted. We strolled around the trees in some of the small forests there. This very beautiful part of the country reminds me in many ways of where I grew up on Vancouver Island. We spent days exploring trails in the woods, hiking, walking along streams. . . .

When I was a young adult we went hiking almost every weekend. My friend Dan would pick me up after I finished work on Friday nights and we would drive up island as far as we could go, finding new areas to explore. It was a lot of fun. One often experiences the power of God in these times.

Stepping out into the wilderness is like peeling a banana. Much of our life, it seems, has become a peel hiding the beautiful fruit of the Lord's creation. Our cities and towns have added ever so

many layers over God's creation. We have our warm houses, our fancy cars, paved streets, telephone poles and wires obscuring the view; and on the prairies there are even quads (ATVs), sleds (snowmobiles), and some fancy farm machinery that make life easier but also changes the simpler ways we would otherwise work and play. In our society today we also have the imaginary worlds of television, games, the Internet, and other entertainment avenues adding a further peel of distance from the realities of God's creation.

Social barriers obscure God's creation as well. Our education systems sometimes let us think that we have solved most of the world's mysteries all on our own. Our political system may let us believe that we have absolute control over our own destiny and that we should actually do as we see fit in our own eyes (cf. the sin of Judges, 21:25). We seem to believe western democracy's claim that the majority is right the majority of the time. As we move further and further away from God's creation physically, spiritually, emotionally, intellectually, and practically, we are enticed more and more to believe the old serpent's lie that as humankind evolves our "eyes will be opened, and we will be like God" (Genesis 3:5). Stepping out into God's creation strips the peel off society and allows us to taste the fruit of the Lord (Psalm 34:8). If we don't do this from time to time we can fall into the trap described in Romans 1: 18–23, ignoring and suppressing the obvious truth of God:

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.

Acclaimed to be wise, Sigmund Freud – the father of modern psychology– believed that society had progressed beyond God. He hoped that civilization would quickly progress even further and move beyond its "illusion" of religion the same way one should outgrow a "childhood neurosis." Freud had faith that eventually humankind would indeed do this. He thought that "nothing can withstand reason and experience and the contradiction that religion offers to both is all too palpable"[1]. Moving beyond the 'illusion' of God and religion, for Freud, "would be an important advance along the road which leads to being reconciled to the burden of civilization" (P. 41). Freud was not alone in denying the existence of God. Our society seems to want to progress beyond God's creation -- as if that were possible.

Karl Marx says of religion, "Man . . . looked for a superman in the fantastic reality of heaven and found nothing but the reflection of himself." [2] He says religion is the "opium of the people" and "the abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is required for their real happiness" (P. 42).

Marx, Freud, and many others who have had a profound influence on the world even into the 21st century seem to have chosen to reject God. Even though, as Romans 1:20 states, "... since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made..."

God loves us so much that He made it obvious through this life and all He created that He is God; all we have to do is peel back the artificial barriers we create in life, taste the fruit of Jesus Christ and see He is good. As important as the peel is and as beneficial as many of our modern manmade developments are, it is just as important to take the time to actually taste God's creation and know how good He is (Psalm 34:8).

We read the creation account in Genesis 1, which reminds me of a love letter of sorts akin to the Song of Solomon. Look at how poetically the creation story is related to us in Genesis 1. First, on Day 1, our Heavenly Father creates light and day and night and then, on Day 4, three days later, after creating this environment, He lovingly creates the sun and the moon and the stars to be placed within that light (Genesis 1:13-19).

Next, on Day 2, our loving creator makes the water and the sky and, three days later, on Day 5, He makes sea creatures to be placed in this sea. Next He makes birds to soar into the skies God made for them (Genesis 1:4-8, 20-23).

On Day 3, our Heavenly Father gathers together the waters to create dry land. On Day 6, He creates plants and animals to be placed on this land that He made for them. God then creates man and woman in His own image (Genesis 1:9-13, 26-7), blesses them and graciously assigns them the job of filling the earth and taking care of it (Genesis 1:28-31). The Lord loves His creation: it is good, and He loves us too.

It is obvious that God loves us but – too bad – the story of creation and of Adam and Eve doesn't end here. As we know, Adam (the first man) disobeyed God and he – instead of taking responsibility for his actions–blamed the woman, Eve, and his God. When confronted with his sin Adam said to God, Genesis 3:12, “The

woman **you** put here with me – **she** gave me some fruit from the tree and I ate it.” And lest we think the woman was any better than Adam, she responded, in Genesis 3:13, that “the **serpent** deceived me, and I ate” (emphasis mine). This was The Fall. With humankind's sin, we separated ourselves from God's creation and from God.

Now God, of course, had a remedy for this. He really does desire that all the people of the earth be blessed as He blessed Adam and Eve. Genesis 12:1-3 promises that all the nations of the earth will be blessed through Abraham. And God is faithful to that promise. God sends His only begotten son to die and rise again on the third day, so that we might live and so that we might be reconciled to God and His creation.

As we go about our lives, take a moment away from our busyness. Walk outside, and as we walk let us take in the abundant beauty that demonstrates God's love for us. Let us peel back all that blocks the view of our hearts; let us notice each other, our family, our friends, our animals, our gardens, our plants, our crops, and all His creation. Let us notice the sun today and the stars tonight. Let us notice all of this around us; then let us bow our heads and lift our voices in praise of our God because He loved us so much that He sent Jesus Christ, His only begotten son, so that all barriers to salvation would be removed. Now we can be fully reconciled to Him.

As we stroll down the road a little further, we will consider this reconciliation up ahead at Romans 3:23. Before we get there, though, let's take in the sights and sounds at Romans 1:16, “for I am **not** ashamed of the Gospel.”

I AM NOT ASHAMED OF THE GOSPEL!

Romans 1:16

From this very important spot, Romans 1:16, we can see the historical starting point of Romans Road, and if you look carefully you can even glimpse the culminating stop, the totality of Salvation. Romans 1:16 states, in part:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes

The world-renowned Biblical scholar N. T. Wright claims that “Romans is neither a systematic theology nor a summary of Paul’s lifework, but it is by common consent his masterpiece.”[1] Romans 1:16 clearly lays out Paul’s idea of Salvation so this passage will be a good place to gather on our walk down Romans Road. We all want to feel comfortable enough as Gospel Tour Guides to invite others to join us on our way. In order to do this we most certainly cannot be ashamed of the gospel.

I love the community celebrations across this country on special days. Everyone can come out for a parade or a festival. I love the picnics and all the fun things we do. On Canada’s 150th anniversary, we were blessed to be visiting friends in Ottawa. As Salvation Army Officers, when Susan and the girls and I move to new communities it is usually at the end of June. So Canada Day is often the first big event we experience in a new place. It is always a welcome break from unpacking and there is often even free cake! It is wonderful to see the way different communities celebrate Canada Day. In some places, there are even church services for the whole community at historical churches. This is a real blessing.

Growing up in Victoria, we used to have a big picnic and fireworks every year. It was a perfect chance to see everyone. One Canada Day when my eldest daughter was just 2 years old we went to the celebrations at Fort Rodd Hill in Victoria. They had a lot of things to see and do. We saw people dressed in historic costumes. There were mascots dressed like animals walking around: great for kids, right? There was even one person who was dressed as a tree, giving balloons to children while telling them about the environment. The tree came up to us to say hi and as he leaned over my daughter offering a balloon, he asked her, “Do you like trees?” to which she replied as sweet as can be, “Not trees that talk and walk.”

Young children are great for speaking their minds. They are not ashamed to say what they mean. Paul is referring to this in the passage we are looking at here, Romans 1:16: “I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes...”

Let us examine the meaning of the word *gospel*. Gospel is a rendering of the Greek word *euangelion*, which means “good news” or “good message.” In its most basic form, gospel is good news. And what is this good news? This good news is that we can be saved from eternal death and damnation. We can actually be raised bodily from the dead to eternal life and even more than that: the gospel is the totality of the Christian message. By the power of God we can begin a new life this very day! This is good news and we should definitely not be ashamed of this good news! But sometimes, sadly, some of us are.

What are some of other things that people are commonly ashamed of? Many people are not forthcoming about their weight either because they have too much of it or, less prevalent in our culture, not nearly enough. I was caught off guard once when a

reporter asked for my wife's and my ages – I gave him mine. As for Susan's age, I told him he'd have to ask her himself.

Further to this, I was reminded the other day of a story relating to Susan and my honeymoon. On our wedding night, we had reservations at a bed and breakfast in a grand old building that looked just like a castle from the brochure. It was in a really nice neighbourhood with other castle-like buildings. None of these castles posted their addresses where they could be easily seen; so after driving around a while we found one that looked like the brochure and I parked the car out front and went to the main entrance in my full wedding regalia. I knocked on the door. I told the lady who answered that we had reservations for the night. And she said, "Not here you don't!" It was at that moment I realized she was dressed in a nun's habit; I had knocked on the door of the convent. . . . An interesting place to wind up on your honeymoon. The nun was kind enough to direct us to the correct castle, though. This mistake was embarrassing, and one that I was a little ashamed to admit at first.

Alcoholics Anonymous meetings can be difficult for some people to attend. These meetings provide a safe place for people to tell stories they might be ashamed to tell elsewhere. Sometimes the format for discussion is very much like a Testimony Sunday. We describe what we used to be like, what happened, and what we are like now. The reasons we would not want to share the stories in too many other places are two-fold:

- 1) We wouldn't want anyone to think that we are celebrating our sins and inadvertently tempt someone back into the life of alcoholism.
- 2) We have changed. In many cases we are ashamed of what we have done. We are ashamed of the way we were before we allowed God to deliver us from our addiction.

Again, the gospel applies here: Jesus died and rose again so that we can be free from sin; we can be free from death. Some people don't realize this yet, aren't experiencing the power of the gospel of salvation. They live as if they are not free.

It reminds me of September 2008.

After Hurricane Ike struck, I was deployed to Galveston Island in Texas as part of a team assisting survivors and emergency personnel with emotional and spiritual care. More than 1 million people were saved from the hurricane and flood that followed as they obeyed the evacuation order. But some refused to evacuate. No one needed to die but some refused the chance of salvation. Sadly, around 100 people were found dead as a direct result of the hurricane. Bodies were still being found while I was there. I spoke with people whose family members had refused the offered salvation from the storm and suffered the consequences.

Homes were destroyed. Businesses were destroyed. The sewers, the water, and the phones were still not working when we arrived. People were housed in shelters both on and away from Galveston Island. Many still had no place to go. Power was still out in some areas. So even families who did not lose their stoves and refrigerators in the hurricane and the subsequent flood – and most did – were unable to keep or cook any food. On top of this, most didn't have food and they didn't have water. Many refrigerators were destroyed and lying on the side of the road to be picked up later as junk.

Food and water are a big part of the temporal salvation the Lord provided through The Salvation Army mission there. We had about 30 food trucks from which we helped to serve approximately 75 000 hot meals every day and gave people water and ice. Ice is very

important. The temperature was around 90 degrees Fahrenheit. And the food: many people told me that without The Salvation Army they would not have eaten at all. They would not have survived. We thank the Lord for the service He provided to the community through many people. We prayed for them. We prayed with them. Our work there was very much His work through us. We were able to be a part of people's salvation from the storm and its effects and more.

And that was not the end of our efforts. We were also able to celebrate with people as they committed their lives to the Lord so that they could experience His Salvation forever. We were not ashamed of the gospel: we shared the good news and some people grabbed hold of it and chose to live forever.

In our own daily lives, do we point people to that eternal Salvation or are we ashamed of the gospel? Jesus tells us that if we deny Him before others, He will deny us before God (Matthew 10:33). That sounds fair. Are we bold for the gospel (Philippians 1)? As our friends or colleagues speak about life, do we tell them what we have heard from God and what we have read in the Bible? When someone shares their struggles with us, do we share with them the strength to persevere that Jesus Christ offers? If we feel that God is prompting us to "lead someone to Christ," do we do it?

There is even more than this: Salvation is about the future and the future begins in the present. Susan and I were missionaries in Vancouver's infamous Downtown Eastside with Stephen Court, Danielle Strickland, and others around the turn of this century. And more than a decade later we were Officers in Toronto's inner city. Salvation is this: imagine you have a friend living on the street. He is very poor and suffering from various illnesses, struggles, and the most painful of lives, thinking he is alone. Now imagine that you know his father. Imagine you know that his father wants your friend to come home and live with him because his father is very well off

and in his father's house there are many rooms (John 14:2). Imagine you also know his father's first-born son. Imagine that, knowing his homeless brother is sick and dying, he told you to invite his brother home. Imagine you don't share this information because you are afraid. Imagine you don't share this information because you are ashamed. Imagine that every time you see your friend it becomes more and more difficult to share the good news of his father who loves him because you are too embarrassed to admit you have not told him sooner. Imagine he suffers and dies and you have not reminded him at every possible opportunity that there is another way to live: he could turn to his father and live out his days in the comfort of his father's love.

If that happens, what kind of friend are you? What kind of a friend am I?

Please understand me. I am not saying that as you come to know your Heavenly Father you will never suffer loss, tragedy, sadness, or the consequences of your own or someone else's actions. I am not saying that God offers you a magic potion that makes all the challenges of life disappear. He doesn't. What He offers you is the opportunity not to be alone in the midst of life's challenges. He offers to be with you in the midst of the reality of your life as someone you can turn to for support, comfort, and love. He offers you the opportunity to be a part of His love forever and to be a part of His future kingdom where there will be no more tears, no more suffering.

This is reality: when Christ returns His Coming will be like a thief in the night (Matthew 24:42-44). The time and the hour are unknown (Matthew 25:1-13) but we know they are coming and He is coming to judge the living and the dead (Acts 10:42, 2 Timothy 4:1, 1 Peter 4:5). Some will go off to eternal happiness and some to hear weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 8:12, 13:42, 13:50, 22:13, 24:51, 25:30; Luke 13:28). To know this is good news. As when the

hurricane struck Galveston Island, even though 100 people chose to stay behind and perished; even though we met with, spoke with, and prayed with people whose family members chose to reject salvation from the hurricane: everyone had known the storm was coming, everyone could have been saved. And thousands were. That is the good news.

Can you imagine news reporters being so ashamed of the fact the hurricane was coming that they didn't share the information? Can you imagine meteorologists being so ashamed of the fact that they did not know the exact time and hour the hurricane was going to strike that they told nobody? Can you imagine your neighbour knew the hurricane was coming and she evacuated but she never told you because she was ashamed that she couldn't explain exactly why, where, how, and when it was coming? Can you imagine the horror as you look up to see your life being swept away – and no one had ever told you how to be saved because they were ashamed?

An eschatological hurricane is coming and it is a lot more dangerous than Hurricane Ike. People in this world today are sleeping in their beds, working, or watching their TVs right now and have no idea that the end is coming. People like the homeless man of our earlier analogy are living their lives away from the shelter of their Heavenly Father's house when He wants nothing more than to have them safely at His side. People out there are lost and just waiting for us to point them to salvation. So today let us do that.

Today let us be the rescue workers pointing people to safety. None of us knows when our lives are going to end. We may be taken tomorrow. None of us knows when the Lord is returning and bringing with Him the end to our world. But, like the meteorologists watching the storm, we know that the things of this world are going to pass away (Matthew 24:35, Mark 13:31, Luke 21:33, Revelation 21:1) and it is our job to share with everyone the good news of the way to

Salvation so that others need not perish. It is our responsibility to share the gospel, for the gospel is the power of God for all to be saved both now and forever. I encourage us to look for opportunities to share this good news so that we may all turn to God and experience the full power of His Salvation.

This concludes our stop at Romans 1. I invite you now to follow us to Romans 3:22–23 where we will learn even more about our own sin and how that affects our walk along life's road.

3
FOR ALL HAVE SINNED
Romans 3:22b–23

We have now arrived at Romans 3:22b–23. This is a very important turn in Romans Road. It often serves as the very spot from which people begin to run along this path:

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

There is a Disney movie entitled *The Emperor's New Groove*. Some people try to kill the emperor with a magic potion but they get it mixed up and accidentally turn him into a lama instead. As the movie progresses, the emperor attempts to regain his throne and turn back into a person. There is one clip at the climax of the movie where the emperor finds many bottles of magic potions without labels, all of them mixed up. While the royal guards, who are trying to kill him, are in hot pursuit the lama-as-king hurriedly drinks one potion after another, trying to turn back into a person.

Some potions are more beneficial than others. One turns him into a turtle (not so good for eluding pursuers). Another turns him into a small bird. Frantically he downs potion after potion: turtle, small bird, giant whale, and then finally he drinks one potion and looks down as he changes and cheers, “Yay! I’m a lama again! . . . Oh wait!” That isn’t what he wanted at all: he still is not a person. In the end all those potions and adventures make no difference.

Romans 3:22b–23: “There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” In his letter to the Romans, the Apostle Paul has been building his argument that neither the Jew nor the Gentile is saved any differently than the other. According to Paul, anyone who denies the abundant evidence of God’s eternal power and divine nature is rightly exposed to the wrath of God (Romans 1:18–32 and 2:1–16). As a consequence of their sin, their rebellion, they are condemned and deserve to die. Neither moralizing nor the Torah can save anyone. The conclusion of the second chapter of Romans makes clear that both the Jew and the Gentile stand on equal footing. The Law and the works of Torah – which distinguish Israel from other nations – cannot be the means of demarcating a true covenant people as some in Paul’s time suggested. The Law merely points out the fact of sin (Romans 3:20, 2:17–24, 5:20, 7:7–25).

For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. The Greek word for “sinned” in this passage, *hamartanō*, carries with it the classic definition of sin that we have heard before: that of “missing the mark.” An archer aims and shoots and the arrow falls short, missing the target. On the surface this seems innocuous enough but if we find out that that archer is William Tell – famous for shooting apples off people’s heads – and if we then learn that the apple is about to be placed on our own heads, all of this suddenly becomes important to us. You do not want him to miss the mark. William Tell was to shoot the apples off the heads of his own sons and the consequences of his missing the marks would have been devastating for both father and son (as is our own sin). When we continually sin, the consequences can be fatal. Romans 3 tells us that we have all sinned, fallen short of this Glory of God, and the first 2 chapters of Romans tell us that because of this we may be at considerable risk. In a story by John Phillips, he tells us:

Paul describes sin as a coming short of the divine standard.

Two men went to the recruiting office in London to join the guards regiment. The standard height for a guardsman was a minimum of six feet. One man was taller than the other, but when they were measured officially both were disqualified. The shorter of the two measured only five feet seven inches and was far too short; his companion measured five feet eleven and a half inches and, stretch to his utmost, as he did, he could not make it any more. Nor did his pleas avail. It mattered nothing that his father was a guardsman, that he promised to be a good soldier, that he had already memorized the drills and knew the army regulations by heart. He was short of the standard.[1]

Yes, the taller of the two applicants was taller than his friend (just as some people may seem nicer, better, and/or holier than the rest of us) but in the end the difference didn't matter. He still wasn't tall enough and there was nothing he could do about that. He could not make himself grow any bigger. Thus he failed to obtain his goal. Likewise, it doesn't matter if we are Jew or Gentile, male or female, employer or employee, a missionary, a relatively good person, or what-have-you . . . for we have *all* sinned and so fall short (Galatians 3:28).

We can approach this text in different ways. It could be speaking about each of us falling short and missing the mark on our own accord; that happens. Ignoring the heretical idea that "we all sin all the time without even realizing it" (which is neither true nor possible), every one of us has transgressed the will of God. This passage might refer simply to the First Sin when Adam and Eve originally disobeyed YHWH in the garden and then tried to hide from Him (Genesis 3): this was St. Augustine of Hippo's idea of "Original Sin." The Biblical scholar Tom Wright tells us that here the verb "tense is aorist, indicating a single moment . . . [thus] Paul seems to be again thinking of Adam"[3] But, as another Biblical scholar, F. F.

Bruce, suggests, Paul also could be referring to the fact that each of us on our own has sinned and therefore failed to make the grade.[2]

When I was in high school, a fellow student, John, was in my Algebra 11 class. On the last day of Algebra 11 the teacher decided to read out everyone's mark in descending order from top to bottom. Now this made John very happy because even though he received a meagre 11 percent, he looked over at a friend's paper and saw just 4 percent marked on it. For once, John's was not the lowest mark in the class. As the names were read down the list: Tony, 88 percent; Janet, 86 percent; Suzy, 84 percent; Billy, 72 percent – and all the way down past the failing marks – Andy, 49 percent; Mark, 32 percent . . . John was getting more and more excited because **this time** he was not going to have the lowest mark. Silvia 22 percent, John 11 percent . . . and then the moment he was waiting for – and . . . The teacher stopped reading out the marks and dismissed the class. As everyone rushed out of the room, "What about Mike?" John yelled. "What about Mike? Read out Mike's mark!" The teacher had shown me grace with my meagre 4 percent. He refused to read my mark out loud so poor John, who did manage to fail Algebra 11 again, wound up being at the bottom of the list again.

Now there are a few things to be cleared up here, two that are relevant to our text and one quite irrelevant:

- 1) Totally irrelevant – I, who earned 4 percent in the course, passed Algebra 11 in Summer School with an A and later went on to actually tutor Algebra 11 for a few years.
- 2) Not irrelevant – In the grand scheme of things it really didn't matter for John what mark I, or anyone else, earned; John still had a failing grade on his report card. He missed the mark; he had failed to obtain the prize. Just like us. It doesn't matter if you are a better person than Charlie Manson, Adolf Hitler, Abraham Lincoln, or your next-door neighbour – that is not

what is going to “get you into heaven” as they say for “all have sinned and fallen short.” It is not our actions that win us eternal life; it is God’s gift that saves us. Anyone who repents – preceding list included – and accepts Christ may actually be with the Lord.

- 3) Relevant – I did not actually fail Algebra 11. I did earn 4 percent on the course. Because I realized that I was doing so horribly in Algebra, I had dropped the course and audited it instead. So I had to do all the same homework as everyone else and I wrote all the same tests. So, yes, I fell short just as John did. However, by auditing the course I was spared the failing mark on my report card. We can each be spared a failing mark even though all of us have sinned and thus failed to obtain a passing mark on our own.

Consider the case before us in Romans 3. In the heavenly classroom, we all score less than a passing mark; we have all fallen short and deserve to fail. But Jesus does not read our marks aloud nor does He condemn us (John 3:17). Like a student auditing a course, He still wants us to carry on and complete it (1 Corinthians 9:24, Galatians 5:7, 2 Timothy 4:7, Hebrews 21:1). In my case, there was no difference in how the class was passed, whether in the regular school year or summer school. What mattered was that students passed the class. So my 4-percent mark was erased forever from my transcripts and replaced with a mark in the A range. Compare this to the Biblical idea of justification.

In his work *The Shape of Justification* N. T. Wright writes

“Justification” is thus the declaration of God, the just judge, that someone is (a) in the right, that their sins are forgiven, and (b) a true member of the covenant family, the people belonging to Abraham. That is how the word works in Paul’s writings. It doesn’t describe how people get in to God’s forgiven family; it

declares that they are in. That may seem a small distinction, but in understanding what Paul is saying it is vital.[4]

We know that “There is no difference, for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:22b–23), and we also know that we “are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:24). This is good news. Once you take into account that no one knows enough to actually pass the test and merit salvation, then we really do appreciate this grace.

Grace is “a gift from God.” It is a present. It is not an award or trophy we can earn like the Grey Cup, the Stanley Cup, the World Cup, or the Super Bowl. Grace is far more precious than those. It is a special present from Our Father. It is like a little unicorn named Lovely that I bought for my daughter Rebecca on her third birthday. It is like the little lamb that I gave my daughter Sarah-Grace when she was just born. It is like the little stuffed owl I bought my daughter Heather one day as we were looking in a toy store. It is each of my daughters’ first pictures they drew that I have sitting on my desk at home. Our salvation is a love present, a special gift from God that He gives us because He loves us. All we have to do is accept that gift.

Now God loves the world so much that He did send his only begotten son to die so that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life. He sent His son into the world to save the world, not to condemn the world (John 3:16–17). and since He did all that at such a great personal expense, let us please accept that gift today and let us not be ashamed of this good news (Romans 1:16–17). May we let all our friends and family know that the Lord our God loves us all. He has purchased this special gift of salvation for every one of us. All we have to do is not turn down the gift; let us each accept that love present, that gift of eternal life today.

As we accept this supreme gift, our lives will never be the same again. They will change forever. This truth springs from the revelation that we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:22–23). This revelation of our sin brings us naturally to our next stop on the road, Romans 6:23. The wages of sin is death but at the next stop we see that this gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

4
THE OBEDIENCE COMPANY
Romans 6:23

Before I became an Officer in The Salvation Army, I worked as a business person predominantly in the field of education. Let me tell you the story about how I got my first wages, my first real paycheque working in the education field.

In my early twenties, I volunteered to help a friend teach a class at an English as a second language school in Victoria. I enjoyed the experience so much that I embarked on a strategy to secure myself a paid contract with the school the following year. This college hired teachers only for the spring and summer semesters; the rest of the year they employed only an administrator. I decided I would make a point of regularly visiting the administrator in the off season. I visited the director of the college regularly in the fall and winter so as to get to know her and let her know that I would be interested in working with the college in the spring.

Apparently I was not as clear as I thought I was about why I was visiting so frequently, because I asked about the spring program at one point and the administrator told me that she had already hired the classroom teachers. She didn't need anyone else. I was shocked. Why had I been investing all this time to visit throughout the year? Then she asked me an even more astonishing question: could I teach

basketball? Me, 5 feet 7 inches, teaching basketball! “No,” I replied automatically. She then asked if I could teach badminton to which I, still in shock after all this, reflexively blurted out, “Yes!” And then – in the days before the Internet – I drove straight to the local library to read everything I could about badminton. I borrowed every book I could find on the sport and called up a friend of mine to teach me how to play so that I could live up to the job I had obtained. The position of Assistant to the Director opened up shortly after that and I took that on before becoming the Program Coordinator of that college. But I obtained my first wages in the college by agreeing to teach badminton in this way. (By the way, the badminton class went very well.)

The verse we are speaking about at this stop along the road, Romans 6:23, is looking at wages from a different source. Romans 6:23a records that “the wages of sin is death.” We mentioned in the previous chapter that the Greek word for “sin” is actually an old archery term and that sin in this passage is the already fired arrow that has missed the mark. We have all sinned as we have missed the righteousness mark (Romans 6:16; cf. 3:22–23). Righteousness, for our purposes today, we will define simply as being right with God.

We know what wages are. Wages are what we are paid for what we do – in our culture this is often represented by a paycheque. In our scripture, what we earn by having missed the righteousness mark is death. The wages of sin is death. Doctrine 5 of The Salvation Army reads, “We believe that our first parents were created in a state of innocency, but by their disobedience [their sin] they lost their purity and happiness; and that in consequence of their fall all men have become sinners, totally depraved, and as such are justly exposed to the wrath of God.” The wages of sin is death.

The Apostle Paul expresses this idea of sin in a number of different ways in this letter to the Romans (cf. Romans 6:1–14,

6:15–23, 7:1–6). He says of sin: being neutral is not an option (Romans 6:15–23). Like a CFL (Canadian Football League) game that is already under way, you are either in the uniform of the *Blue Bombers* or that of the *Roughriders*. The game is going ahead; no other players are on the field. You can play for one team or the other. No one on the field can be neutral.

Expressed another way: unemployment is not an option. There are only two competing companies in town and each of us must work for one or the other of them. The Apostle Paul speaks about the first Adam and the second Adam (who is Christ). We can be employees of the Sin Company with Adam, who was the first to sin (Romans 6:21); or we can be employees of the Obedience Company, of which Christ, as the first to rise from the grave, is the CEO (Romans 6:22). We can be employees of the Sin Company and receive death as our pay (Romans 6:21); or we can be employees of the Obedience Company and receive sanctification. (Romans 6:22; cf. The Salvation Army doctrine 10). We can choose either sin and death or obedience and sanctification.

Paul in this pericope is addressing the oft-asked question “Whose side are you on: are you on the Lord’s side?” If God’s Obedience Company employs us, then we should make sure we actually work for His company. If we are on His team, we should play our position. We do the team no good if we put on the jersey and then just sit in the stands. Paul is asking “What good is it to wear the team jersey if we never take the field?” In Romans 6:1 he asks, now that we are on God’s Obedience team, “Shall we just go on sinning so that grace may increase?” Paul answers his own question right away before he even reaches the passage and the analogy here. He says, as he has said elsewhere, “By no means! We died to sin; how can you live in it anymore?” You can’t! (Romans 6:2). (See also 1 Peter 1:15; Leviticus 11:44–45, 19:2, 20:7; Psalm 89:35; 2 Corinthians 13; Colossians 1:28; Hebrews 11–12).

Later in Chapter 7 Paul points out what was generally accepted by his audience at the time and place of this letter, that when you enter into a marriage covenant with someone, you promise God that this is the one person to whom you will be faithful, forsaking all others, until one of you dies. Only when one’s first spouse dies is one free to marry a subsequent spouse – otherwise a person is committing adultery (Romans 7:2; cf. 1 Corinthians 7:10–11; cf. also 1 Timothy 3:2, 12; Titus 1:6). This union represents our covenant with God. Only when we die to sin are we released from our bondage to it, Paul says (cf. Romans 6:5–10). When we are raised in Christ, we are a part of a new creation: we are free to be the holy bride of Christ (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:27, Galatians 6:15; Ephesians 5:22–32, Revelation 21–22). Returning to sin is like returning to be with our deceased first spouse (Romans 7:1–6; Romans 6:1–14). And that makes no sense.

The truth is that “The wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23). And Romans 6:1–2 emphasizes this truth: “Shall we just go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can you live in it anymore?” We are saved **from** sin; we are not saved **to** sin. Sin is not just something we do. It is not that simple. It is something that interferes with our ability to live life to the fullest. Sin is like a leg hold trap and being ‘saved’ is being released from that trap. (Matthew 5:17–21, 1 Peter 1:16, Galatians 3–5; cf. Leviticus 19:22; Psalm 89:35, 2 Corinthians 13, Colossians 1:28, Hebrews 11–12). You have been traded to a new team, so you can’t play for the old one; you are no longer employed by the Sin Company, so stop doing its work! Historically even high-profile people have either ignorantly misunderstood or defiantly misinterpreted this passage. One such person was the notorious Russian monk, Gregory Rasputin. We know who Rasputin was. Maybe we remember the *Boney M* 1978 disco hit song “Ra Ra, Rasputin.” That song claims that the monk was a lover

of the Russian queen (czarina). There is no evidence for this but he was certainly an advisor to the Russian royal family before the 1917 revolution. Scholar F. F. Bruce points out that Rasputin promoted the heresy that we can continue to intentionally sin and still be saved. In his *Letter of Paul to the Romans*,^[1] Bruce writes:

Russian Monk Gregory Rasputin [was] the evil genius of the Romanov family in its last years of power. Rasputin taught and exemplified the doctrine of salvation through repeated experiences of sin and repentance. He held that, as those who sin require the most forgiveness, a sinner who continues to sin with abandon enjoys, each time he repents, more of God's forgiving grace than any ordinary sinner.^[1]

According to Rasputin, if you sin more, you receive more grace. This is not true. The Salvation Army's Doctrine 9 states that "continuance in a state of salvation depends upon **continued** obedient faith in Christ." Doctrine 10 of The Salvation Army states "that it is the privilege of **all** believers to be wholly sanctified, and that their whole spirit and soul and body may be preserved **blameless** unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

There is another important element to this: in sermons, homilies, and talks you have no doubt heard distinctions made between wages and a gift in this verse. Wages are something that we deserve. We go to work, we put in our hours, and we receive our paycheques. When you are a slave to sin, when you are an employee of the Sin Company, you also earn your wages, and these wages are death (Romans 3:23).

In contrast working for the Lord is itself a gift. The eternal life we receive and our obedience to the Lord are a gift. We can do nothing to merit that gift. Christ died on the cross and rose from the grave so that whosoever will accept that gift may be saved. None of

us needs to perish (John 3:16–17). This gift is like employment in the Obedience Company. The position itself is the gift. Each and every one of us has already been offered a job. Jesus Christ – between the cross and the empty tomb – made this offer to everyone (cf. The Salvation Army doctrine 6). All we need to do is accept the gift of this job and we can enjoy our employment for now and forever: "the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23).

We need to remember which company we work for, which team we play for, and we need to act accordingly. As was pointed out earlier, Rasputin rolled his biblical interpretation of sin and salvation so far from holiness that it rolled right off the table of orthodoxy and onto the floor of heresy. Conversely, others, having rolled their hermeneutical analysis too far in the other direction, have moved this passage so far from grace that they have also fallen into heresy. The Apostle Paul explains at length how people can be trapped by legalism, rules and regulations, as if somehow by our own merit we can obtain salvation (cf. esp. Galatians 3:19–25). Yet we can do nothing to offer ourselves eternal life. Eternal life is an outright gift from God.

Once we have accepted this free, extraordinary gift, the righteous will live by faith. And as James D. G. Dunn declares, this faith is both "the initial act of receiving the gospel and the continuing process toward salvation."^[2] Faith is a result of righteousness (Romans 3:22; 4:5, 9, 11, 13; 9:30; 10:6). Righteousness comes from God (Romans 3:22, 24; 10:3, 17) for it is God Who is righteous (Romans 3:5; cf. Psalm 35:24; 48:10; 50:6; 51:14; 65:5; 71:19; Isaiah 5:16) and His righteousness is what enables us to be righteous, just as Christ's faithfulness enables us to live by faith.

Again: "The wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." This passage addresses our identity and our position in Christ rather than our individual actions.

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We can choose one or the other: we cannot choose both sin and death **and** obedience and sanctification.

However, if we are working for the Sin Company and sometimes accidentally or otherwise commit actions of obedience, we will not be contracted out to the Obedience Company and then receive the gift of eternal life. The devil does not give up on us that easily! Likewise, this passage does not mean that if we accidentally or otherwise sin while working for the Obedience Company that we will immediately be terminated and lose eternal life. It doesn't work that way!

We do not lose our salvation every time we utter a curse word. This pericope concerns our employment, our relationship with Christ. Those who choose to continue outside a relationship with Christ, those who reject His job offer of obedience and righteousness will receive the consequence of death regardless of whether they have done good things or not (cf. TSA doc. 11). But here is the good news: For those of us who have accepted employment with Jesus, He has already declared us righteous. He has already declared us holy. He has already positioned us perfectly when we accepted his job offer of obedience unto righteousness (cf. Psalm 89:35, 2 Corinthians 13, Colossians 1:28, Hebrews 11–12).

If we are playing for the Obedience club, the Salvation team, He is not going to kick us off the team when we throw an incomplete pass, when we miss the mark, when we sin. As the good coach, He gives us an opportunity to change on the very next play, to repent. As long as we are willing to play for His team, He is going to continue to send us right back out there and give us every opportunity to complete the pass. As we remain on Christ's team, no matter how many times we mess up, we will experience victory with Him. He has already won the victory.

This promise is a blessing beyond measure. As we continue to serve the Lord we will experience that glorious salvation both now and forever. It is provided to us at no cost to ourselves but in obtaining it for us our Lord paid the greatest price: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8). Let us meditate on this overwhelming truth for a while before we continue on our journey.

5

WHILE WE WERE STILL SINNERS

Romans 5:8

Let us rest here at our next stop before going further: “But God demonstrates His own love for us, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” And let us look back at our earlier stops along this road. We needed to rest on our first stop before we embarked on this journey: “I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes. . . (Romans 1:16).” Next stop: “For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). Then we went on to Romans 6:23: “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

We pause now at Romans 5:7, 8: “Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die but God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners Christ died for us.”

This verse reminds me of my heritage as a Salvation Army Officer. The Salvation Army plays a big role in Remembrance Day ceremonies across this country because of the great work the Lord did through us during the First and Second World Wars.

“It would be easier to forget one’s name than fail to remember the times without number when the Salvation Army was, in truth, our comforter and friend,” remarked General Harry Crerar, former Commander of the First Canadian Army in the Second World War. During both world wars and throughout the Cold War, the Salvation Army provided Canadian military personnel with comforts such as hot drinks and snacks and helped keep up spirits by manning leave centres. Very close to the battle front, the Salvation Army showed films, established canteens, organized sporting events and other recreational activities, supplied reading material, stationery, cigarettes, and other items for the troops. The Salvation Army also offered spiritual guidance and personal counselling to military personnel: comforting the wounded, even helping to bury the dead. In short, they did whatever they could to help maintain morale. The Salvation Army instructed its supervisors to “care for the body, mind and soul of every [service person] irrespective of creed or personality.” In the midst of the horrors of war, the Salvation Army aimed to offer a glimpse of home to the military.[1]

In Canada, The Salvation Army Home League raised funds and sent thousands of comfort packages filled with socks, underwear, Christmas presents, and other items directly to The Salvation Army chaplains for distribution. Salvationists visited the homes of deceased soldiers comforting and looking into the welfare of many grieving families. Truly the Salvation Army “provided the reassuring link between the fighting man and his world of peace and kindness and sanity”[2].

Shortly after moving to Saskatchewan in 2007, I heard many individual accounts from veterans of the Second World War or their widows about how much God used the “Sally Ann” during the War. Canadian soldiers were sent overseas to fight and to die and to live for “God, king, and country.” And many were saved and many did lay down their lives in the name of God, our king, and our country (see John 15:17).

Christ died for all of us when we were still sinners (cf. Romans 4:5). Romans 5:10 tells us that besides our being still sinners, we were more than that: we were His enemies (cf. 1 John 4:10). An enemy is one who means us harm. An enemy is one who opposes us. An enemy is against us. When we were still in our sin we were indeed Christ’s enemies. When we were not under Christ’s leadership, we were under our own and/or someone else’s leadership. We were not part of His kingdom and by our allegiance as much as our actions, deeds, words, and thoughts we were truly His enemies. In all these ways we fought against Christ even though His only desire was for all of us to be saved and come to a full knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:4).

One might say, “While I didn’t know Christ, I was not his enemy, really. I led a good life. I didn’t hurt anybody. I just happened to get to know God later on in life and then become ‘born again’ . . . that doesn’t mean that I was ever God’s enemy, does it?”

The Apostle Paul argues that the sinner is an enemy of God. In this context the sinner is simply a citizen of a side that is at war with Christ. In this context a sinner is anyone who is not experiencing the joys of “life with Christ” (cf. Romans 5:1, 12:12, 14:17, 15:13). The sinner here is anyone who has yet to grab hold of the salvation that Christ offers. Paul makes a strong distinction between the sinner and the saint. The former, the sinners, are on the side of God’s opponents. The latter, the saints, are those on his side.

A good way to understand how we were “as sinners” and even “as enemies of Christ” could be expressed in a military analogy. We know of the horrors of war and the crimes that our enemies commit. We, and our allies, however, are far from innocent. In the Second World War, the United Kingdom and the United States created a horrific firestorm of carpet bombing over Dresden, Germany, that nearly wiped out the city and killed many innocent women and children. And of course the United States intentionally dropped an atomic bomb on an already defeated Japan intentionally when Japanese mothers were walking their children to school in order to maximize casualties.

During the war years in Canada we treated anyone of German, Italian, and especially Japanese ancestry as our enemies. We confiscated all the assets of Canadians of Japanese origin and moved these citizens into internment camps. (The famous Canadian scientist and environmentalist, David Suzuki, spent part of his early life in a Canadian internment camp.) We treated innocent people as our enemies. As is shown through the official government apologies and tax money paid in reparations by later generations of Canadians not even alive during the Second World War, the responsibility and the liability for this rests with all of us.

In more recent history during the “War on Terror,” the American president declared that “Whoever isn’t with us is against us” and proceeded to sanction torture by the American military in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, as well as elsewhere in the world. These government actions, no matter how well intentioned, have created many enemies all over the world for the rest of us. Terrorism, counter-terrorism, suicide-bombing, assassinations, and mass political murders increase precisely because many countries in this world are falling short of the standard of the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6).

Consequences rest on both the families on whom the bombs fall and to some extent on each of us, especially in a democracy. The consequences of our country's actions impose guilt on us all. When I was younger, Canada was seen as a peacekeeping nation as we recognized more clearly the blessings of being a peacemaker (Matthew 5:9) and also the consequences of overt military aggression. In those days American students travelling around the world often wore Canadian flags on their backpacks so that no one would want to harm them. Canadians, seen as peacemakers, did not make the enemies that the United States did.

Similarly, sin makes us enemies of Christ. When we sin, we are warring against Him. Before we served Him, our moral self-government warred perpetually against Christ, whether or not we were aware of that fact. Engaged as we were, we could never win such a war and in consequence, this rebellion against Christ, leads to death (Romans 6:23).

As he writes to the Romans, Paul refers to Adam (Romans 5:12–21; cf. 1 Corinthians 15). Adam and Eve were the original sinners. They were the first to transgress the will of God. God told them that they could do anything they wanted so long as they went forth and multiplied while abstaining from eating the fruit of just one of the many trees in God’s Garden of Eden. He graciously permitted them to tend to the garden on His behalf (Genesis 1:28, 2:17, 9:1). And then what was one of the very first things Eve and Adam did after a short conversation with some snake? They disobeyed God – and sinned. In this way our fore-parents declared war on God. Humankind has been in rebellion ever since (Romans 3:23). As the author of Hebrews tells us, every time we sin we are taking up arms against Christ (Hebrews 10:28–30). Paul was writing at a time very like our own as our society distances itself from God and His son. He writes that, “at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly” (Romans 5:6). Verse 8: “but God

demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners Christ died for us.”

I have heard on several occasions a story about a preacher in an English church whose sermon one Sunday caught the attention of two young boys sitting in the pews. He used the account to impress on the congregation how Christ died for us:

A father and son often went fishing together in the waters off the coast of England. One day the father told his son that he could bring a friend along. Now the father was a deeply religious man, possibly a parish priest. He and his son were speaking about the Lord quite a bit. The boy’s friend did not know who the Lord was and he did not know entirely what to make of the conversation.

While the three of them were out on the water a terrible storm came up. The wind and waves tossed their little boat to and fro amid the rocks. Try as they might, the three of them were not strong enough to maintain control of the boat. When the storm reached its fiercest point, both boys were suddenly thrown overboard. The father ran to grab the only life preserver. Even if there had been more than one life preserver he could not possibly have thrown two of them in the two different directions towards both the boys, who were separated by the powerful wind and waves. The sea would claim one boy for sure. The father threw the life preserver. He threw it to . . . his son’s friend. The lad grabbed it and the man laboriously hauled him back and into the boat. By the time the father had rescued his child’s friend there was no sign of his own son. The father had sacrificed his own son, his only son, so that the other boy could live.

The story applies to our Heavenly Father and His only son. God let His son – whom He loves – die so that even those of us who do not know Him, those of us who are sinners, those of us who are

His enemies, can be saved. God’s son died for us at just the right time to enable us all to be saved (Ephesians 1:7; John 15:1–17).

After this sermon, the boys approached the old preacher. They asked if he had made up the story. He told them it was true. They were not convinced. One boy asked why a father would let his own son die for a kid he didn’t even know. The preacher told him that the father knew that his own son served Jesus. He knew that even if his own son were lost, yet he would be saved. He knew that his own son, even if he died, would yet live; he would see him again at the resurrection of the just. His son’s friend, however, did not know Jesus. So if he had died he would have been lost forever. The point, the preacher explained, was that the father had sacrificed his son to save the other boy.

“How do you know that story’s true?” demanded one of the two boys, still skeptical.

“Because I was that boy who was saved,” replied the old preacher.

And so it is with all of us. Today we each can choose between life and death. God the Father has already sacrificed His one and only son so that we can live. All we need to do is to grab hold of the life preserver of our salvation, hold tight in holiness, and not let it slip away. Christ died so that we could live.

Do not let Jesus’ death be in vain in our own lives. If there is anything we are holding onto that is preventing us from seizing salvation, let us cast it aside. If we are holding on to any aspect of our lives so tightly that we are not fully clutching that preserver of our salvation, let us cast it aside. If there is any sin in our life that we have not confessed to God, let us immediately confess it, reach out

and grab hold of His life preserver so that we can all be gloriously saved.

Once we have taken hold of this glorious salvation, even more excitement awaits us. We have the opportunity to follow along exactly where the Lord is taking us. And that is where we are going next on our trip down Romans Road.

6
SAY IT! KNOW IT! DO IT!
Romans 10:9 & 13

At our next stop along Romans Road, we focus on Romans 10:9: “That if you confess with your mouth ‘Jesus is Lord’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved,” and Romans 10:13, “For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” These are basic tenets of the Christian faith.

At Officer Camp at Beaver Creek Camp one year, Major David Ivany from Territorial Headquarters told us a story about a kind elderly lady who experienced the pure joys of Christian love upon making a public confession of faith.

This lady, Emma, had gone into a local Christian bookstore and seen a “Honk If You Love Jesus” bumper sticker. Feeling particularly good that day because she had just attended a great choir practice and a prayer meeting, she bought the sticker and applied it to the back bumper of her car – professing her faith publicly. She recalled, “Boy, I’m glad I did! What an uplifting experience followed!” She remembered stopping for a red light at a busy intersection on the way home from the bookstore. Lost in thought about the Lord and how good He had been to her, she did not notice when the light changed.

“It is a good thing someone else loves Jesus,” she said, “because if he hadn’t honked, I’d never have noticed the green light!” She was gratified to note that lots more people loved Jesus because while she sat unmoving in the lane of traffic, the guy behind her also honked like crazy before leaning out of his window and screaming, “For the love of God! Go! Go! Jesus Christ, Go!” She remembered thinking, “What an exuberant cheerleader he is for the Lord!”

In unison everyone around her started honking. Impressed by such an epidemic of a response, she leaned out her window and waved and smiled at all these loving people – still parked at the intersection. “I even honked my own horn a few times to share in the love!” she recounted. “There must have been a man from Florida back there because I heard him yelling something about a ‘sunny beach’ . . . I saw another guy waving in a funny way with only his middle finger in the air. I asked my teenage grandson in

the back seat what that meant, and he said it was probably a Hawaiian good-luck sign or something. . . .”

Emma admitted that she had never met anyone from Hawaii before and so was unaware of their customs. “I leaned out the window and gave him the good-luck sign right back,” she said proudly.

A few people were so caught up in the joy of the moment that they got out of their cars and started walking towards her. “I’ll bet they wanted to pray or ask what church I attended, but that was when I noticed that the light had changed. So I waved to all my loving sisters and brothers in Christ, grinned joyously, and drove on. I noticed that I was the only car that made it through the intersection before the light changed again and I felt kind of sad that I had to leave them after all the love we had shared, so I slowed down, leaned out of the window, and gave them all the Hawaiian good-luck sign one last time before I sped away.”

While we would not choose to be so oblivious to the daily reality of our lives as Emma, we can endorse heartily her bumper sticker, “if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Romans 10:9). Romans 10:13 reinforces the point: “For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

One can take a number of different routes along the Romans Road to Salvation upon which we are walking today, but these two verses, 9 and 13, are a regular stop along every path. Let us rest by them now. These are two critical milestones on that famous road.

This pericope lends itself to an older style of teaching; so while we are here, I will take us through a 3-point discourse complete with plenty of repetition to emphasize the point. We will address

Romans 10:9: One, “Confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord’”; two, believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead”; and, three, Romans 10:13: “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” In other words,

- 1) Confess Jesus as Lord with your mouth: Say it.
- 2) Believe in your heart in His resurrection: Know it.
- 3) Call on the name of the Lord: Do it.

God has offered the whole world a free gift of Salvation (Romans 6:23, John 3:16–17) and to take full advantage of it we should say it! Know it! And do it!

1) Say it! Romans 10:9: Confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord.”

Whenever I hear this verse I think of the Apostle Peter, the rock upon which Christ built His church (Matthew 16:13–16; cf. Mark 8:27–29, Luke 9:18–20). Jesus told Simon that He was going to use him to build His church and He gave him the nickname “Peter.” Peter means “Rock” or even “Rocky.” Simon Rocky-Peter was one of Christ’s main go-to people after His resurrection despite Jesus’ having told Rocky-Peter that he would deny Jesus three times before the cock crowed. Shortly after that Peter says, “I don’t know what you’re talking about.” Yet after Peter’s third denial that he even knows Jesus, the rooster crows and Peter remembers and is devastated at what he has done (Matthew 26:69–75; cf. Mark 14:66–72, Luke 22:55–62, John 18:15–27).

Point #1 about Salvation today: Say it! (Cf. also Luke 21:12–15; 1 Corinthians 12:3; Philippians 2:11; 1 Peter 3:13–16, 21.) Simon Peter had his chance to confess Jesus as Lord but he declined it. If the story had ended there, this would be very sad but John 21:15 ff. records Simon Peter’s restoration, as Rocky, as Peter. The Resurrected Lord asked him three times to feed his sheep and three

times Peter agreed to do so. Near the conclusion of the book of John, Jesus then breathed on Peter – and the other disciples – filling them with the Holy Spirit (John 20:22). Luke picks up the story of Rocky-Peter in the book of Acts as Rocky-Peter was at Pentecost. Peter took the lead as the Holy Spirit, like a starting pistol, fired the disciples and others out to proclaim salvation to the world. In Acts 2, after they share the gospel in many different languages as the Spirit enabled them, the Lord added to their number daily those being saved. Point 1, Romans 10:9: Say it!

And despite his earlier denial, church tradition states that even Peter earned his martyr's crown. He was crucified upside down as he left his life here for heaven to await the resurrection. Yet Peter and the disciples said it and many others were saved. Point 1: Say it!

2) Know it! Believe in your heart in His resurrection.

Speaking something is one thing and believing is quite another. Think about the general reputations, accurate or not, of our elected politicians. In this section of scripture Paul is really addressing the whole problem of Israel (Romans 9–11; cf. also Deuteronomy 30, Leviticus 18), specifically the problem of the Law and Israel's relationship to it, and Israel's relationship to God. He is very concerned about people who are quite happy to say what needs to be said – the Pharisees, as a group, were evangelistic and believed in the resurrection as a future event (cf. Acts 2:7–8)! But believing in your heart in Jesus' resurrection is a very different matter (1 Corinthians 15:17; cf. 2 Corinthians 4:13–14). The Apostle Paul, himself a Pharisee, celebrated the fact that Jesus was raised from the dead. Yet many Israelites and even many Pharisees did not understand. It pained Paul that people who were zealous for God's Law were missing out on the benefits of the fulfilment of that Law: Jesus, the one to whom the Law and the scriptures point (cf. Romans 9:1–5; 10:1–4; Matthew 5:17,18; Luke 16:16; Acts 4:12; Galatians 3:19-24).

Salvation is about, Point 1, *Saying it*, confessing that Jesus is Lord, and it is also about, Point 2, *Knowing it*, really believing in your heart in the resurrection and in Jesus' resurrection. This central part of Paul's message holds for all of Christianity (Romans 6:9, Romans 9:16; 1 Corinthians 15:17, 20; 2 Corinthians 4:13–14; Ephesians 1:20–23; Philippians 2:9–11; Colossians 3:1–4; Hebrews 2:9; Revelation 1:17–18; cf. Deuteronomy 30:14, Acts 4:12, Isaiah 28:16). N. T. Wright tells us, "Almost all early Christians known to us believed that their ultimate hope was the resurrection of the body. There is no spectrum such as in Judaism. Some in Corinth denied the future resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:12), but Paul put them straight; they were most likely reverting to pagan views, not opting for an over-realized Jewish eschatology." [1] Belief in the resurrection and the resurrection of Christ is central to Christianity.

To review what we know so far about Romans 10's three points of Salvation:

- 1) Say it! – Confess Jesus as Lord with your mouth.
- 2) Know it! – Believe in your heart in His resurrection.
- 3) Do it! – Call on the name of the Lord.

3) Do it! Call on the name of the Lord.

Saying the good news is good. Knowing it is better. Doing it is imperative. This fact is also implied in Verse 9. The scriptures address this point (cf. Leviticus 18:5 and Deuteronomy 30:11–16, cited in vv. 5–8; Luke in Acts 2:16–21 and Paul here are both quoting from Joel 2:32). Matthew too paints this picture vividly, through the parable of the sheep and the goats (Matthew 25:31 ff.). Both groups, or nations – the sheep and the goats – 1) *say it* and 2) *know it*, that Jesus is Lord. But only the sheep 3) *do* anything about it. So only the

sheep are saved. The goats that do nothing are sent to where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. Here the Lord says bluntly, “Not everyone who calls me ‘Lord, Lord’ will enter the kingdom of heaven but only he who does the will of my Father in heaven” (Matthew 7:21): *Say it! Know it! Do it!*

We must actually call on the name of the Lord. We have to trust Him. For example, it is one thing for me to confess that I know my wife; it is another thing to believe in my heart the many wonderful things that have been done by and through her. As wonderful as these things have been and are, my relationship with Susan grows only when I actually call on her, when I spend time with her. I can say she is my wife all I want; I can believe she is my wife all I want; but we only have a sound marriage if I make the effort to be with her, to call on her sometimes.

Christianity is not some academic pursuit or code. Christianity is not a framework of rules and regulations. It is not a club. Christianity is not a mere set of principles by which we should live our lives. Christianity is a relationship with the risen Christ. Jesus Christ rose from the grave and Romans 10:13 promises that “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” He loves us and He wants none of us to perish. That Salvation is as easy as 1, 2, and 3. It is my prayer today that every one of us will

- 1) *Say it!* – Confess Jesus as Lord with our mouths.
- 2) *Know it!* – Believe in His resurrection in our hearts.
- 3) *Do it!* – Call upon the name of the Lord.

Consider Psalm 34:8, “Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him.” Remember Matthew 11:30: “For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” And blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord (Psalm 118:26, Matthew 21:9, Matthew 23:39, Mark 11:9, Luke 13:35, 19:38, John 12:13). Romans 10:9a, *Say it:* Confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord. Romans

10:9b, *Know it:* Believe in your heart in Jesus’ resurrection. And above all else, Romans 10:13, *Do it:* Call upon the name of the Lord and even we shall be saved.

Let us seize on this salvation as the glorious blessing it is rather than choose to miss out on something as easy as one, two, three. Sometimes when things appear easy, sometimes when things should be easy, we can make them difficult. The more we try to solve these difficulties on our own, the more difficult they can become. Many times those difficulties can make us try even harder to solve our problems on our own, which then creates even more problems for us. This downward spiral becomes a cycle that traps us until we finally do hand everything over to our Lord.

And that thought brings us to our next stop along the Romans Road, Romans 9:30–10:4, where we will look at the Law through the looking glass.

This brings us to our next stop along the Romans Road, Romans 9:30–10:4. Have you ever noticed that there are times when no matter how much you want something or how much you think you deserve something; it just is not to be? Have you ever worked really hard for a trophy or a job only to see it go to someone else? On the other hand

as well, have you ever tried really hard to avoid a responsibility or attention for something; yet no matter how hard you try to avoid it, it ends up in your lap?

Alan was a high school student in the last months before his graduation. All the boys were preparing to rent their tuxedos and the girls to have their dresses made or bought and the million and one other things that they have to do. The atmosphere around schools at this time of year is always charged with excitement. The students vote on everything from what to do on grad night to what song they will play as they march into the auditorium.

Most of the students are excited to find out who is going to do this and who is going to do that at graduation, and some of the students are even campaigning to represent their class on Grad Night. For some people being the class representative is a big deal – but not for Alan. He was graduating yet he wasn't even sure if he wanted to go to the ceremonies, let alone vote for a favourite song or who should represent his class on graduation day. He wanted nothing to do with the whole business.

So when the day came to vote for the class representative, Alan, along with some of his closest friends, decided not to participate. They crept out the back door and down the stairs and they almost got away. But the Vice Principal spotted them and marched them unceremoniously into the room where their class was just finishing the nomination process. All the students who had been campaigning were sitting at the front, and just when everyone was about to vote Alan and the others were dragged in. One girl called out as loud as she could, "I nominate Alan!" Soon the whole student body was cheering – except for those actually running for the position, of course, and except for Alan, who was overwhelmingly elected.

When Alan tells the story years later, he says that he would have refused the responsibility if the Vice Principal had not approached him and tried to convince him to step down! So he found himself saddled with this responsibility. He has won this prize that he didn't even want.

Paul tells a similar story in three chapters of Romans. In Chapter 9, Verse 30, he writes: "What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; but Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it." The Gentiles – anyone not Jewish – were not campaigning for anything. They were not seeking salvation. As far as many of the Jews were concerned, the Gentiles were outside the Promise when the election occurred. Yet Paul is letting the Romans know that the Gentiles had slipped in to the Promise at just the right time, whether they wanted it or not.

Paul has some not very good news for those who actually wanted their position. In Romans 9:33, paraphrasing Isaiah 8:14, 28:16, he writes, "See, I am laying in Zion a stone that will make people stumble, a rock that will make them fall . . ." (see also Psalm 118:22–23). Two verses before this, Paul says that the Jews, the chosen people, Israel; though striving for righteousness did not obtain it. In a complete reversal they now find themselves on the outside looking in. Even Jesus says bluntly, "the kingdom of God will be taken away from you [Israel] and given to a people who will produce its fruit. He who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed" (Matthew 21:42–44).

Then, as today, some mistakenly believed that God elected Israel exclusively for salvation. The readers of Paul's letter to the Romans in the first century did not realize, as we do, that God intended to bring salvation to the world through Israel's election (Genesis 12:3). They did not understand that God's promise of

salvation was intended for the whole world. Through this ignorance some of them actually rejected the Promise. Accordingly they were crushed. The Kingdom was taken away from them.

Paul, himself a Pharisee, loved his countrymen (Israel) and cries out, “Brothers, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness” (Romans 10:1 & 2).

This point raises serious questions for us: One, why did the Israelites not attain righteousness?[1] And two, can we too strive for God’s righteousness and yet not reach it? Can we seek first the Kingdom of God and not find it (cf. Matthew 7:7 ff)? Can we try to get to heaven and be turned away at the gates? Maybe the answer is yes but see Matthew 6–7. Though these people were zealous for God, they tried to develop their own righteousness. In the process they rejected Jesus as God and so they could not know God and they could not win the prize. They rejected Christ: they rejected salvation.

As in the classic story *Alice through the Looking Glass* by Lewis Carroll, there are two groups of people: those determined to reach a goal (Israel in our pericope) and those who are not. Those who are most determined in their quest walk towards the mirror but of course they never reach their goal because what they see is only the reflection. However, those who turn (repent) and walk in the opposite direction are the ones who actually find salvation.[2]

We can never grab something by reaching for its reflection in a mirror because we reach for something that is not there: it is just an image. For Israel, that Law was a reflection of God. It was not God Himself and His fulfilment of His Promise. As long as one reaches

only for His reflection, one can never grasp God. As long as we reach for a reflection rather than for Jesus Christ himself – even though he is standing right beside us – we will never reach him.

Are there times when we can rely on our own righteousness and in the process turn our backs on God, just as many in first-century Israel did? In our churches today we can make this mistake. Some of us might be tempted to believe that if we attend church and sing songs, we will be saved. Sometimes we think that the fact that we are careful not to swear or drink, smoke or gamble or whatever else we avoid doing makes us okay. We are fooled into believing that if we are nice and do not hurt anyone, then we deserve to go to heaven. I have even heard clergy suggest that a person will be accepted in heaven as long as someone in their lives simply liked him or her. Good personality, good works, and our own righteousness are nothing more than grasping at a shadow, an image in the mirror.

Now let us focus on some very good news. Romans 10:4 states that Christ is an end to the Law. We no longer need to be deceived by that particular reflection. Romans 9:33 says that those who put their trust in Jesus will never be put to shame. No longer must we look at anything else, at any other mirror. Jesus stands right beside us. He will never leave us nor forsake us.

So this is it – the gospel – this is the real thing: Jesus died, rose from the grave, and he is coming back so that whosoever believes in Him will not perish but will have everlasting life (John 3:16). This is what we will see when we stop looking in mirrors of self-righteousness, rules, regulations, and traditions. This is what we see when we turn to the Lord. Even before we knew God, He knew us. Even before we sought Him, He called us. He is standing beside us right now. He wants us to turn and accept His eternal embrace.

God offers salvation to all of us. God wants you to be His representative, so don't turn your back on Him. Accept your election. Turn away from the mirror, turn around and experience the Lord's everlasting embrace.

We no longer need to search in the dark for a light. The Light of the world is right next to us. As we turn to Him we will discover that even in the midst of our very real human suffering, He will be our strength and our hope.

With this Promise in mind we now march on towards one of the extra stops on our journey along Romans Road, Romans 5:3–4.

Romans 5:3 & 4 is not a stop many of us make along Romans Road but we should pause here and take a look.

When our oldest two children were very young, we sold our home and our businesses and moved into North America's poorest postal code, Vancouver's Downtown Eastside (DTES), as full-time urban missionaries with The Salvation Army's 614.

Over the years we have shared with many people the excitement of that time as we saw people who were turned from their addictive, destructive ways of life; transformed into new creations by the power of the Holy Spirit. It was exciting to open up our home and our lives to the miracles that the Lord performed and is still performing today and were oh so evident in that environment. We met people who were cured of cancer, cured of AIDS, and cured of diabetes. We have seen and experienced the power of God first-hand (cf. Romans 1:4, 1:16, 11:23, 15:13, 15:19–20).

Our time there was not always so uplifting. Early one morning I was right on Main and Hastings – the most infamous intersection in this most infamous neighbourhood – talking on the pay phone with Susan who was out of town at the time. I should have been more careful but I was not paying attention to my surroundings. Someone came running up behind me, grabbed my briefcase, and tore off down Main Street. I had been mugged.

In that case were my laptop and all the information for the summer-school program I was running for the children in the area. So, like anyone mugged in the depths of skid row, I'm sure, I reacted instinctively – I chased the mugger.

I raced after him down Main Street, through Chinatown, across busy streets, and around the myriad of mazes that are Vancouver's back alleys. Along the way I scared rats, leapt over

people sleeping on the street, determined to catch my assailant. Then just as I was within reach of him, I tripped and fell in front of a city bus. I escaped with my life, but the mugger escaped with my loaded briefcase.

Distraught and despondent, I began walking slowly back. And that was when I experienced a miracle. I encountered an angel, a messenger of God, in the Downtown Eastside's back alleys. He looked just like a dumpster diver. He listened to me and prayed with me and he offered me words of encouragement from Romans 5:3–4: “but let us also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.” Inside I sighed. Yet I knew he was right. God was giving me these words to encourage me.

When the Apostle Paul wrote these words around 55 AD, he himself had already seen much suffering – he had spent years under arrest and years in prison, and after all that time he was ultimately killed for his faith. Tradition suggests that the Romans beheaded him.

In the first few verses of Chapter 5 of Romans, Paul warns the Romans about more than the persecution and suffering that was coming for *him*; he was warning them about the suffering that was coming for *them* and therefore the suffering that might be coming for *us* even as we do the Lord's bidding. Depending on the translation you read of this text, not only are we to endure our suffering but we are to rejoice and even boast in it (see Philippians 2:17; 1 Peter 4:6, 4:13). 1 Thessalonians 5:18 goes further, stating that we are to give thanks in all circumstances (see Philippians 4:11). And in Philippians 4:4, Paul writes, “Rejoice in the Lord always and again I say rejoice.”

So we are not supposed to lick our wounds when we suffer for doing the Lord's work; we are to rejoice. This attitude goes against a

lot of popular culture and opposes the so-called prosperity gospel that prevails in our affluent North American society.

This prosperity heresy is the idea that wealth, health, and prosperity afflict those whom God loves while trials, tribulations, and suffering on this earth come to those whom God hates. This same prosperity heresy was apparently as alive and well in Paul's day as it is today. And just as it was a lie then, so it is a lie now.[1]

If indeed our suffering is for the gospel of which Paul is not ashamed (1:16), then Paul is saying that we should rejoice in our suffering because that suffering will produce perseverance (endurance). And perseverance gives us the ability to endure difficult times. So as we persevere through these difficult times we can rejoice because we will be all the more ready for the even more difficult times that are to come.

Paul says that through perseverance we will also develop character. And what is character? Character is what you get when you survive suffering joyfully. In my childhood home the phrase “It will build character” was the standard answer to the question “Why should I do that? It's not fair!? Why do I have to rake the leaves, mow the lawn/clean my room/take grade-six band?” This is what Paul is saying as well.

We should enjoy our character-building experiences. They are a means by which we draw on the strength of the Lord. In Philippians 1 Paul says that whatever happens, everything will be okay because to live is Christ and to die in His service is gain: we look forward to the resurrection. We have nothing to lose. To die is gain and to live is Christ! (Philippians 1:21)

Paul endured a lot that built his character during his years in jail, and many Roman Christians had great opportunities to develop character as they faced the lions in the Coliseum. Even my mugging

on the Downtown Eastside was not my first or sole experience with loss directly related to my work for the Lord. The experiences and lessons of that whole period echo in my family's souls to this day.

My mugging was only the beginning. My foot was also injured, my hands later were inexplicably and painfully swollen, my eye was injured – so painfully that I could not even get out of bed for days. Later it was re-injured. Eventually I required surgery. One of my daughters, who was two at the time, suffered seizures right in front of us; our car stopped working; a person we had taken into our home struggled with heroin addiction; the police visited our house and encouraged a roommate of ours to leave; and a visitor's computer and camera were stolen during his stay in our home. This series of events was preparing us for a chain of attacks straight from the Enemy. We were serving the Lord, openly and abundantly, and we were suffering for it. And more was to come (cf. Mark 3:20–35).

Yet I treasure the memory of the Lord messenger's after my mugging – the angel in the form of a Downtown Eastside local – to encourage me, to remind me of the benefits of endurance, to build perseverance.

So is Paul referring here in Romans to any kind of unpleasant event, any suffering? Not necessarily. The Greek word here (*thlipseis*) refers literally to a “pressure” that is applied to Christians in this world, pressure from God's opponents (cf. John 15:18, 16:20). John Stott explains that *thlipseis* is “almost a technical term for the suffering which God's people must expect in [these] last days.”[2] When we serve the Lord, we will face opposition both spiritual and practical, and though the war is won the battle rages fierce.

As we fight these battles in our lives, individual people, powers and principalities oppose us. Through the fight, through developing our perseverance, our character; we become battle-

hardened veterans experienced in engaging the Foe. We know that we can endure. We know that we can live up to what has already been obtained (Philippians 3). We can be bold for the gospel (Philippians 1). We are confident that we can be counted on to persevere through even more of whatever opposition, whatever pressure the Enemy throws our way. We are sure of our hope because God will never leave us nor forsake us.

Jesus Christ Himself suffered and He rose again on the third day. Because Jesus Christ Himself endured, He is the reason for our hope. And our hope, which grows through this suffering, this perseverance and these character-building experiences, rests in the power of the gospel. And the gospel in turn has the power to transform us all (Romans 1:16). Our hope rests in the Lord Jesus Christ, on the cross and the empty tomb: in the resurrection of the dead. Paul knows, as we know, that when our bodies fade away we ourselves do not end. We will be in paradise with our Lord and then have the hope of the ultimate resurrection of the dead. We will rise again. As the Lord has conquered Sin and Death, so He will continue to conquer our own sins that lure us to death. So we can have confidence, we can have faith, and we can have hope in the resurrection.

Many people today face struggles and hardships. The week before I first preached this chapter as a sermon, a father and his son perished and a family lost their home in an explosion and fire in the town where we were living. We all face uncertainty and loss, pain and suffering in our daily lives. In this life we always have questions and we don't necessarily recognize what the Lord is doing. Yet no matter how bleak things can seem, we still have that hope.

Susan and I have received serious, vocal, practical, and even litigious opposition from the Enemy, often through people very close to us on Vancouver's Downtown Eastside and everywhere else we

have lived and worked for the Kingdom. We have had to consciously protect our children from harm as the Foe is relentless. The Enemy continues to attack the Lord's soldiers through whatever *thlipseis* (pressure) he can muster.

The Enemy attacks those who serve the Lord. Despite that pressure, we must not give in to the temptation to surrender to it. Instead we must boast in our sufferings, embrace our new-found endurance and character so that we too will continue to experience the faith, the joy, and the hope that is in Christ Jesus. As Paul declares in Romans 5, let us all "rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope." This hope will never disappoint us (verse 5). On the contrary, this hope will lead us to victory at the end of the day, at the end of the game, at the final whistle, at the last trumpet. And that is what we will reflect upon at our next stop, Romans 13:11–14.

VICTORY AT THE FINAL WHISTLE
Romans 13:11–14

This is another of our important bonus stops along Romans Road. As it is near dawn let us pause and look over Romans 13:11–14 before continuing.

And do this, understanding the present time: The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armour of light. Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.

As I have noted, Susan and I have lived and worked in many different places in the course of our ministry. This passage reminds me of our first year of living in Saskatchewan. Something happened. Something exciting happened. The Roughriders won the Grey Cup! Anyone who has ever lived in Saskatchewan will know the kind of excitement I am talking about. This was the first time that team had won the CFL championship in 18 years – and there were only eight or nine teams in the whole league then! The game was played on a Sunday. After our afternoon church service ended in Tisdale, I rushed to the car with my daughters and turned on the radio so we could listen to the game as we drove back to Nipawin. The other team, the Winnipeg Blue Bombers, were ahead. When the Blue Bombers pushed their lead to ten to nothing, I felt quite alone in my vehicle as the 5- and 6 year-

olds in the back seat erupted into a chorus of “Go, Winnipeg, Go!” (We had just moved from Winnipeg.) I had faith, though that the victory we Roughrider fans had been waiting 18 years for was finally coming and – as history has recorded – my faith and my hope were not in vain. That momentous day the Grey Cup returned to Saskatchewan.

I was able to catch the end of the game on the big screen with many others in our community at one of the local churches in Nipawin. In the last couple of minutes, right after the deciding interception, you could see the anticipation in the Riders’ faces as the cameras zoomed in on their expressions. The players knew the game had been won already but it wasn’t over yet. They wanted to celebrate but the game wasn’t over yet. The game had been won already and it took everything for the coach to keep the players on the sideline and the staff off the field because the game was still on.

This is exactly the situation that Paul lays out in our text. Consider Romans 13:11–12: “And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. . . .”

In his many letters, the Apostle Paul uses the word “salvation” in several ways. In one he refers to the ways in which we can be saved from the normal course of events in our lives (cf. Philippians 1:19).

Not long before I first typed these words, while my family was driving back to Saskatchewan from Winnipeg a police car pulled us over. The officer kindly let us off with a warning and chose not to issue us a ticket; we were *saved* that expense. A few days later, Susan was going to walk home after dropping off our car to have winter

tires put on. An employee at the store offered her a ride home; she was *saved* the walk. These are familiar, and very welcome, ways that we are *saved* every day. This is one way Paul refers to “salvation” in this letter.

In other places in his letters, Paul refers to “the day of salvation” and that “day of salvation” is already here (see 2 Corinthians 6:2); it has arrived. Yet Verse 11 says that our salvation is yet to come, then adds that our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. How can this be?

This is an important concept of our faith, which theologians term a “*prolepsis*,” because our salvation has indeed already been obtained. Jesus achieved it when He died and won the victory over death by rising from the dead. Paul cites this fact in other places in the scriptures: 2 Corinthians 6:2, 1 Corinthians 15:2, Ephesians 2:8. The Apostle Peter addresses this same point in 1 Peter 1. Christ has already won the victory but the final reward of that salvation lies in the future. The game is won but the final whistle has not been blown yet and the Great Cup is still to be presented.

Back to the Roughriders game. When the player went down on one knee to run out the clock, his team could not be defeated. The Rider Nation, as we are called, the Roughrider fans, had already triumphed with the team, just as we are already victors with Christ.

When Christ died on the cross and rose from the grave three days later, Death was dealt its final blow: Christ intercepted the Enemy’s pass and ran for the final touchdown to put the game out of reach. Sin and death can never come back and win the game – but the final whistle has yet to be blown.

Paul refers to salvation as if it were that final whistle. Yes, the Riders had won the game with 20 seconds left to go but they did not get to hold the Grey Cup until after that final whistle sounded. The analogy Paul uses to make this point is quite neat – and for those who are not football fans, I imagine a new analogy would be welcome right now. Paul refers to our salvation as the daytime that is almost here. This is exciting because, just as with the game whose victory is just out of reach, there is nothing that we can do to stop the daytime from arriving. There is no such thing as a night that never ends; the earth would have to stop turning and then we would have a lot more problems than mere lack of light. While day has not arrived yet, nothing can stop it coming.

Paul has some advice for us: we should wake up (verse 11)! We don't want to miss that moment. Imagine being a Riders fan who slept through the awarding of the Grey Cup after 18 years of waiting for that very moment! Missing that moment, though it would not change the outcome of the game, would affect you very much! Paul says, "Wake up! You don't want to miss the finish. You don't want to miss the dawn." And he continues: since the darkness is fading (verse 12), we should no longer live as if we exist in the darkness. Think of the term "regime change" we've heard so much about in the news a few years ago.

Regime change can be a very difficult thing: for a time in her history England had neither a king nor a queen. Parliament had won the war against the monarchy, resulting in arguably the darkest period in all of English history. Society underwent drastic change. The new government without the king became so repressive that eventually the people begged the son of the king who they had beheaded to become king himself and to rule over them! In a little more recent history, look at how the people of Afghanistan and Iraq responded to regime change imposed upon them. Years later they are still resisting.

Christ's death triggered a regime change that continues to this day – the King has claimed his throne. The Son of the King has come and He will return. So it is time for us to act like He is coming back!

Therefore we should stop doing all those things we like to do under cover of night. The text lists some of these things: Verse 13 says that we should not indulge in sexual immorality and debauchery; nor should we engage in dissension and jealousy. To act on our own selfish desires would be akin to swearing allegiance to the darkness, to the old regime, the defeated regime. This would be akin to paddling out to board the *Titanic* as it was going down or buying shares in Eaton's department store as it went "belly up."

What is vital here is that when we focus on ourselves rather than on God and others we are serving the defeated regime (see Verses 8–10; Matthew 7:12, 22:40). We must not fool ourselves; even defeated, that old regime fights on. Even though the darkness has lost the war, people continue to perish in the ongoing battles.

The battle of New Orleans during the War of 1812 provides a good analogy. By 1812 the majority of the population of Canada was born in North America. Many were refugees who sought protection from Britain as they fled persecution by the new American republic. The War of 1812 began when England was occupied elsewhere trying to stop Napoleon and his wars of aggression. The USA seized this opportunity to attempt to conquer Canada. Those who fled to Canada for their very lives were terrified. The Americans invaded – only this time it didn't go so well for them. Canada was saved. The United States was forced to send representatives overseas to sue for peace. The peace treaty was signed on December 24, 1814.

Then tragedy: There was no long-distance telephone, no email, or other way to get the news to the troops in the field quickly. On January 8 General Sir Edward Pakenham seized the initiative and

invaded American-held New Orleans. More than 1,700 people were wounded or killed that day. Many people perished in a battle that followed the formal end of hostilities.

Similarly, even though the victory has already been won in the war between the cross and the empty tomb, people continue to perish every day. If we follow our own selfish desires, even with the war won, not everyone will be delivered from the darkness. How many of us, like General Pakenham's troops, will perish needlessly? How many of us are acting on our own instead of submitting to God? How many in this world – how many of us, our friends, or our family – still give in to drunkenness or debauchery or sexual sin? How many of us still give in to quarrelling and jealousy? How many of us continue to serve the darkness, the old regime, the defeated regime, even when Christ has given us the victory?

Our sins today are the same as our former sins. When we give in to their temptations, we are serving the darkness, the old, defeated regime. If you break one aspect of the law you transgress the whole of the law (Galatians 3). In the eyes of the Lord, sin is sin. And the consequence of sin is the same as it was for those who marched to their graves in the Battle of New Orleans even though the victory had already been won. The wages of sin are death (Romans 6:23).

So why are we content to live in the darkness? Why not rather strap on the armour of light as urged in Verse 12 of Romans 13? Did you know that the word translated as "armour" here (and in Ephesians 6 too) – *hopla* – is probably better translated as "weapons."?[1] This word denotes much more than just protecting oneself with armour. *Hopla* refers to going out and actually seizing the foe. So we should do much more than just hide from the darkness; we must wage war against it. Verse 14 says that we must put on Jesus Christ Himself and make no provisions for our own selfish desires. Indeed, that is the answer to everything! As we put on Christ Himself, we can engage

with the world and not succumb to it. When we have Him as our armour, nothing can slay us!

So it is to this end that I exhort us now. The game has been won, the foe has been defeated. For us to indulge in selfishness at this time would be as if, in the last minute of play, one of the Roughriders switched teams to join the other team. When the victory is already won, why would anyone want to forfeit this personal prize before it is awarded? Why would any of us want to reject our salvation now that the daylight is coming?

As we leave this stop along Romans Road, let us cling to this encouragement. Sin is already defeated. Death is destroyed and the darkness is fading; so let us, as Jesus told the woman accused of adultery, go and sin no more so that we may be there to hoist that Great Cup high with Christ who has already won us the victory (John 8:10).

This brings us quite nicely to our last stop on our journey together, Revelation 3:20. As we reach the end of the road we come to the door upon which Christ is knocking. Each and every one of us has a choice to make: Do we open it and let Him in? Or do we not?

10
HELLO, IS ANYBODY IN THERE?
Revelation 3:20

We are coming to the end of our travels. We've been walking down Romans Road together in the hopes that we can each become guides to help others navigate this path that leads to eternal life. The verses we have examined at our stops along our way are:

- Romans 1:16: "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes..."
- Romans 3:23: "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."
- Romans 6:23: "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."
- Romans 5:8: "But God demonstrates His own love for us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."
- Romans 10:13: "Whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."
- Romans 10:9 & 10: "If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Jesus from the dead, you shall be saved; for with the heart man believes,

resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation."

We also made a couple of extra stops off the main path, including Romans 5:3–5: "Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us." And Romans 13: 11–14: "The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed . . . clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature."

At this last stop we are not looking at Paul's letter to the Romans at all. Here we are actually looking at letters within a letter ascribed to "John the Revelator" in the book of Revelation. Yet, in a sense, we actually are continuing our walk down a Roman Road: the seven churches addressed at the beginning of Revelation are situated along the same Roman road in the Roman province of Asia. Our last stop on Romans Road, then, is Revelations 3:20: "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me."

People who are familiar with my teaching know that every once in a while parts of scripture remind me of the comic strips I used to read as a boy and that my own children enjoy now. In this chapter I will refer to Bill Watterson's *Calvin and Hobbes*. The storyline centres on a six-year-old boy, Calvin, who is expecting his babysitter, Rosalyn, to arrive to spend the evening with him. He doesn't like her. One frame shows her on the front doorstep, knocking at the door and ringing the doorbell. Calvin's mother asks his father if he has seen her shoes as she is dressing to go out; puzzled, they look everywhere for them. The last frame shows Calvin hiding his mother's shoes,

believing that his parents cannot go out if she cannot find them. His parents press on with their search and ask Calvin to answer the door. He ignores the request. Eventually the parents realize that Rosalyn is still outside and has been for some time. They demand of Calvin why he hasn't answered the door. He replies that he doesn't need to because he knows his mom and dad can't go without his mom's shoes. . . . His dad asks Calvin how he knows the shoes are missing. Calvin is found out! Rosalyn has been ringing the doorbell persistently the whole time. Calvin reluctantly lets her in at last.

Revelations 3:20 quotes Christ Himself: "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me."

First, our consideration of the book of Revelation and even more so the pericope in which this verse is located requires some context. The whole book is an account of the apocalyptic vision of "John the Revelator". It is full of imagery. Some people believe its prophecies relate either to John's time or to the end of all time. Others see it, quite reasonably, as a critique of the superpower of John's day, Rome, or a general condemnation of any earthly empire or superpower. What is certain is that Revelation is meant as encouragement to the faithful (Revelation 2:2, 19; 3:10; 13:10; 14:12). Revelation is meant to spur us on to trust our Lord to the end – even unto death – so that we can claim the prize (see also 1 Corinthians 9:19–27, Philippians 3:14, Colossians 2:18).

The apocalypse begins after a brief introduction. John receives a message from our Lord Jesus Christ in the form of letters he writes to seven churches in the Roman province of Asia, modern-day Anatolia, Turkey (Revelation 1:4–20).

These seven letters written to the different churches share some common features: each is addressed to an angel (even though

John was asked specifically to address them to the churches themselves); each letter cites the city to which it is addressed; each one follows the formula of a prophetic messenger; each contains a Christological ascription; each is followed by praise and a promise or blame and a threat; and each contains a call to obedience and an eschatological promise for the victors.

Some of the recipients of these seven letters fare better than others: Good things are said about six of the seven churches (Revelation 2:2, 10, 13, 19; 3:4, 10): Laodicea is the seventh. Smyrna and even Philadelphia receive significant praise (Revelation 2:8, 3:7)! Laodicea, however, receives the greatest reprimand of all the letters. Laodicea receives no praise at all, so the angel and the church there appear to be in the most trouble.

Revelations 3:20: "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me."

The city of Laodicea lay in the Lycos Valley in the province of Phrygia in Asia Minor. Antiochus II of Syria (261–246 BC) founded it and named it for his wife Laodike. Laodicea was populated with Syrians and Jewish people from Babylonia. Though it stood on the great highway at the junction of several important routes, it was a place of little importance until the Roman Empire created the province of Asia in 190 BC. Suddenly it became a great and wealthy centre of industry and trade, especially famous for the fine black wool of its sheep and for the Phrygian powder manufactured there for eye makeup (cf. Revelation 3:18). The region also boasted a renowned medical school. In 60 AD, an earthquake nearly destroyed the entire city. The Roman senator and historian Tacitus records that Laodicea's citizens were so wealthy that they rejected the monetary aid Rome offered. With its extensive banking operations the city quickly rebuilt at its own expense (cf. Revelation 3:17, 18). As rich, cultured, and

pluralistic as the city itself, the church there became so self-satisfied and worldly that it had ostracized Christ completely. It had made itself repulsive to God. Yet it was a church that considered itself in need of nothing.

To this church's angel John wrote the letter in Revelation 3:14–18:

These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation. I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth. You say, “I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.” But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.

So what is the sin of the angel and the people of Laodicea? They are rich but they are poor (Verse 17; see also 1 Timothy 6:3–10). This is not unlike our own nation today. We know that one cannot serve both God and money (Matthew 6:24, Luke 16:13; cf. Hebrews 13:5, 1 Peter 5:2). We know that our country has an economic system (capitalism) that by definition serves those with money. We know that it is more difficult for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of God than it is for a camel to go through the eye of a needle (Although with God all things are possible. Matthew 19:23, Mark 10:23–24, Luke 18:24–25). Even the poorest of Canadians today are among the wealthiest people in the history of this world. King Solomon could never have even dreamed of the luxuries with which so many of us

live: cars, microwaves, central heating and air-conditioning, TV, Wi-Fi, gourmet foods and junk food galore!

Laodicea had become so rich in the things of this earth that its inhabitants and its Christian church did not recognize that they were spiritually “wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.” In Canada we were founded intentionally upon scripture (Psalm 72) but as we have grown richer in this country, complacency, crime, and self-reliance have sprung up like so many weeds to choke out the Word of God. In Canada, like Laodicea, we have become so complacent and so trusting in our earthly riches that we are turning further and further away from God.

Despite her material wealth, Laodicea lacked the good water that her neighbouring cities had: Hieropolis had great hot mineral springs and Colossae enjoyed clear cold waters in contrast to the poor-quality water piped into the city of Laodicea through crusty aqueducts. Laodicea was rich in money but poor in the water it needed to survive.[2] Likewise, Laodicea was rich in temporal wealth while poor in the Living Water we all need to survive. If only Laodicea was spiritually as hot as the waters of Hieropolis or as cool and refreshing as the waters of Colossae! (Important: This passage is **not** referring to “spiritual hotness” as good and “spiritual coldness” as bad, like some might think of those terms today. That idea would have been a most foreign analogy in the Mediterranean world of the first century!)[3]

Laodicea might have had both good hot water and good cold water being poured into their supply but when the two mixed together, it became useless lukewarm water. John continues (vv. 19–22):

Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat

with him, and he with me. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Even in this state of wallowing in their riches while people in their world starve to death; even in our state of wallowing in our riches while people in our world starve to death; even in this state of not having spiritual strength equivalent to relaxing hot springs of Hieropolis or the religious zeal equivalent to the clear, cold waters of Colossae, God does not give up on them. God does not give up on us. He stands at the door and knocks. This is important: This is no casual knock at the door with the people of Laodicea so busy that they cannot hear Him and He goes away – this is a persistent knock. The Greek word here refers to continual knocking – as the people of Laodicea seem to be hiding.

The Laodiceans – like Calvin who later locks out his babysitter completely and like many in North America – are taunting the Lord and deceiving themselves into believing that we can survive on our own without Him. But we can't; we face consequences. While Calvin is ignoring his babysitter locked outside, he fails to notice his parents have returned home. He looks up to see Rosalyn, his mom and his dad standing before him, waiting to be noticed. There are serious consequences for his actions.

There are consequences for us too if we do not open the door. But God will never give up on us (cf. Romans 3:3,4). He is more persistent than Rosalyn the babysitter and He is calling out. He is crying out, "Hello! Is anybody in there? Hello, is anybody in there?" And the more He calls to us to open the door, the more we seem to turn up our TV sets or our online programming so we cannot hear him. "Hello! Hello! Hello!" But we duck beneath the window and hide ourselves in our work or even in our sin that we keep deep inside

ourselves because we choose not to see Him. We turn up our radios, we put on our washing machines; we do anything we can do to ignore our Lord and Saviour.

He is still calling at the door because He loves us. He knows we are in here. He knows the Angel is hiding behind the door of Laodicea. He knows that you and I are tucked away within the affluence of Canada. He is calling us each out by name. He is calling us, begging us to turn down the distractions in our lives and invite Him in.

Please may we let our dear Saviour in. Like the six-year-old Calvin, we know that we cannot survive without the protection of a babysitter, mother, or father. No matter how self-sufficient we think we are, in reality we too cannot survive without the protection of our own Heavenly Father.

Jesus is still knocking persistently and relentlessly at our door. So let us look out the windows of our souls, let us see Him and let us invite Him into our lives to eat with us so that indeed we can be with Him in His Kingdom to come forever and ever. Amen.

ONE MORE THING . . .

Thank you for taking the time to stop and read this Guide Book to Romans Road. If you have never walked down this road to salvation, I invite you to do so right now. There is no time like the present to invite Jesus into your life. Let us all pray:

Dear Lord,

Please forgive me my sins, rebellion, and mistakes. Please come into my life and help me to love you and follow you forevermore.

In Jesus' name.

Amen.

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7 THE LAW THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS

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8 HOPE AND AN ANGEL ON THE DTES

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9 VICTORY AT THE FINAL WHISTLE

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