

*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 guidebook. While it will be useful if you are a tourist and have never walked down Romans Road yourself, it is my hope that reading this guidebook will convince you to stay at the ultimate destination: God's Eternal Kingdom. You however will find this book most useful if you are or if you would like to be a guide yourself.

Many of us who guide people down Romans Road have found that the only resources readily available are tiny tracts made as recently as the 1970s or 1980s. While they certainly have served their purpose well, I think you will agree that 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 some great information about each of the stops along the way. Whether you have led people on a tour of the Romans Road previously or not 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 20<sup>th</sup> Century. As an Evangelical Christian, 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 evangelistic classes and sent on our way to accompany people along this road to eternal life in God's Kingdom.

What is Romans Road exactly? Romans Road 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. There are a number of variations of the Romans Road; most of them 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 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 the 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 I hope you will find that it does so in such a way that is 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 to use while exploring this path with your friends.

Sincerely,

Michael Ramsay

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1.

## THE APPEAL OF CREATION

Romans 1, Genesis 1

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 our attention to is Romans 1:24:

*'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 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, writing sermons, we decided to take short walk in God's creation. It was amazing. As we were walking, my spirits were immediately lifted. We strolled around the trees in some of the small forests around here. It really is a very beautiful part of the country. In many ways it reminds me of where and when I grew up on Vancouver Island. We could spend days exploring trails in the woods, hiking, walking along streams... When I was a young adult there was this time in my life when we would go 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 get, finding new areas to explore. It was a lot of fun. One often experiences the power of God in these situations.

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 in this area we even have quads (ATVs), sleds (snowmobiles) and some pretty fancy farm machinery that make life easier but also changes the way we would otherwise work and play. Not only this but in our society today we have the imaginary worlds of television, games, internet, and other entertainment avenues providing a further peel of escape from the realities of God's creation.

We have social barriers that create peels obscuring 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 lets 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; Judges 21:25). We seem to believe secular humanism's claim that the majority is right the majority of the time. Culturally as we move further and further from God's creation physically, spiritually, emotionally, intellectually, and practically; we seem to be 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 is taking off the peel of society and tasting the fruit of the LORD (Psalm 34:8). Without doing this from time to time we can fall into the trap of Romans 1: ignoring and suppressing the obvious truth of God. Romans 1:18-23:

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 and a devout, religious atheist – believed that society had progressed beyond God and he seemed to hope that civilization would quickly progress even further and move beyond its 'illusion' of religion the same way one should outgrow a 'childhood neurosis' and 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" [2] Freud denied God. He was not alone. 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." [3] 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." [4]

Marx, Freud, and many others who have had a very profound influence on the world continuing even into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century have consistently ignored what is abundantly obvious and chose to reject God. Even though God has made it plain to them (and us), as Romans 1:20 states, "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 [all] men are without excuse.”

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 that we create in life, taste the fruit of Jesus Christ and see He is good. As important as the peel is and as favourable as many of the developments with which we have been blessed in our world are, I think it is important to take the time to actually taste God’s creation and know how good He is (Psalm 34:8).

We read in Genesis 1 the creation account; it reminds me of a love letter of sorts akin to the Song of Solomon in the Scriptures. 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 it is recorded, 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 1:1-3, 14-19).

Next, on Day 2, our loving creator makes the water and the sky and then three days later, on Day 5, He makes sea creatures to be placed in this sea. Next He makes birds to soar into these 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 and 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 tasks us with the job of filling the earth and taking care of it (Genesis 1:28-31). The Lord loves His creation, it is good and the Lord loves us too.

It is true; 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 his wife and his God. Adam, when confronted with his sin 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, her response was, Genesis 3:13, “the SERPANT deceived me, and I ate.” This was ‘the fall’. With humankind’s sin, we became separated from God’s creation and separated 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: We are promised 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 may live and so that we may be reconciled to God and His creation.

As we go about our lives, I encourage us to take a moment away from our busyness. I encourage us to walk outside and as we walk outside, let us take in the abundant beauty that is evidence of God’s love for us. Let us peel back all that might be blocking 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 are now removed and we can be fully reconciled to Him.

As we stroll down the road a little further, it is this reconciliation that we will notice right up ahead at Romans 3:23. Before we get there though, I’d like us to take in the sights and sounds at Romans 1:16, ‘for I am NOT ashamed of the Gospel’.

2.

## I AM NOT ASHAMED OF THE GOSPEL!

Romans 1:16

Welcome. We have now arrived at Romans 1:16. This is a very important place from which we can see not only the historical starting point of Romans Road but if you look carefully you will notice that you can even glimpse the culminating stop, the totality of Salvation from here. 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...*

I love the community celebrations we have across this country on special days. It is great when everyone can come out for a parade or a festival. I love the picnics and all the fun things we do. On Canada's 150's anniversary, we were blessed to be visiting friends in Ottawa. As Salvation Army Officers, when we move to new communities, we move at the end of June or the beginning of July so Canada Day is often the first big event we experience in a new place. It is good. It is fun. It is always a welcome break from unpacking and there is often even free cake! It is wonderful 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, every year we used to have a big picnic and fireworks. It was a perfect chance to see everyone. I remember one Canada Day in Victoria when my eldest daughter was just 2 years old. We went to the celebrations at Fort Rodd Hill. They had a lot of things to see and do. We could see 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 and telling them about

the environment. This 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 innocently speaking their minds. They are not ashamed to say what they mean. This is actually some of what Paul is speaking about in the passage we are stopping to look 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..."

This is important and the Apostle Paul's letter to the Romans is clearly an important work. 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 states Paul's idea of Salvation and as such I think this passage will be a good place to gather on our walk down Romans Road. We would certainly all like to feel comfortable enough as Gospel Tour Guides to invite others to join us on our tour. In order to do this we most certainly cannot be ashamed of the gospel.

There is one thing we must know first, however, and that is 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 bodily raised 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 start to experience 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? I know 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 know that I was caught off guard once when a reporter asked for my wife's and my ages – I gave him mine. As far as Susan's age was concerned, 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 area of the city with a number of other castle-like buildings. None of these castles seemed to want to put their addresses where they could be easily seen; so after quite a while of driving around we found one that looked like the brochure and I left the car out front and went to the main entrance in my full wedding regalia. I knocked on the door. I told them that we have reservations for the night. And the lady who answers said, "not here you don't" – it is at that time I realize she is dressed in a nun's habit...I had knocked on the door of the nunnery... an interesting place to wind up on your honeymoon. She was kind enough to direct us to the correct castle though. This mistake was more than a little bit embarrassing: one that I was certainly a little ashamed to admit at first.

This reminds me of Alcoholics Anonymous meetings. These meetings provide a very safe place for people to tell stories we may be ashamed to tell elsewhere. Sometimes the format for discussion is very much like a Testimony Sunday. We mention what we were like, what happened, and what we are like now. The reasons we wouldn't 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 as a result 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 how we were before we allowed God to deliver us from our addiction.

Again, this is gospel: Jesus died and rose again so that we can be free from sin; we can be free from death. There are some people who don't realize this yet, who aren't experiencing the power of the gospel of salvation. They live as if they are not free. It reminds me of September 2008.

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 offered 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 provided 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 were down there. 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 of the parts while we were there. The power outage meant that even for families that did not lose their stoves and refrigerators in the hurricane and the subsequent flood – and most did: there were many refrigerators destroyed and lying on the side of the road for pick up – they were unable to keep or cook any food. They didn't have food and they didn't have water.

Food and water: this is a big part of the temporal salvation the Lord provided through The Salvation Army mission there. We had around 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. It was around 90<sup>0</sup> F. And the food: many people told me that without The Salvation Army they wouldn't have eaten at all. They wouldn't 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.

We were honoured and privileged to see many people saved from their suffering from the storm but that was not the end of it. We were also able to celebrate with people as they committed their lives to the Lord so that they can experience His Salvation forever. We weren't 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. How are we at not being ashamed of the gospel? Are we bold for the gospel (Philippians 1)? As our friends or colleagues are speaking 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 is offered through Jesus Christ? If we feel that God is prompting us to 'lead someone to Christ', do we do it? I have one friend who didn't. The next day he heard that the fellow with whom he was ashamed to share the gospel had died. No more chances.

There is even more than this: Salvation, like we said, 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 the century. And over decade later we were Officers in Toronto's inner city. Salvation is this: imagine if 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 he, knowing his homeless brother is sick and dying, told you to invite his brother home and imagine you don't and your friend dies alone and sick. Imagine you don't share this information because you are afraid. Imagine you don't share this information because you are ashamed. Imagine if 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 hadn't told him sooner. Imagine if he suffers and dies and you don't remind him on every possible occasion that there is another way: he can 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?

*NOTE: 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 it will be like a thief in the night (Matthew 24:42-44). The time and the hour is unknown (Matthew 25:1-13) but we know it is 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, believe it or not. It is like 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 knew it was coming, everyone could have been saved and thousands were.

Can you imagine if the news reporters were so ashamed of the fact the hurricane was coming that they didn't share the information? Can you imagine if the meteorologists were so ashamed of the fact that they did not know the exact time and hour the hurricane was going to strike that they didn't tell anybody? Can you imagine if 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 the hurricane was coming? Can you imagine the horror as you look up to see your life being swept away – and no one 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. There are people in this world today who are sleeping in their beds, working, or watching their TVs right now who have no idea that the end is coming. There are people like the homeless man of our earlier analogy who are living their life away from the shelter of their Heavenly Father's house when He wants nothing more than to have them safely at His side. There are people out there who 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 know when our lives are going to end. We may be taken tomorrow. None of us know when the Lord is returning and bringing with Him the end to our world. But, like the weathermen and women watching the storm, we do 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 they do not need to 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. To this end then, 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 Chapter One. I invited you now to follow us to Romans 3:22-23 where we will learn even more about our own sin and how that impacts our walk along life's road.

3.  
FOR ALL HAVE SINNED  
Romans 3:23

We have now arrived at Romans 3:23. This is a very important turn in Romans Road. You will note that it has a strong curb for us to stretch our muscles against and because of this it often serves as the very spot from which people begin to run along this path. Romans 3:23:

*“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”*

There is a Disney movie entitled *The Emperor’s New Groove*. Basically what happens is that 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 a number of magic potions without labels and all the bottles have been mixed up. While the royal guards, who are trying to kill him, are in hot pursuit he is drinking these potions very quickly, trying to turn back into a person.

Some potions are more advantageous than others. One potion turns him into a turtle (not so good for eluding one’s pursuers). He turns into a small bird from another. He is frantically trying to turn back into a person as he drinks potion after potion: turtle, small bird, giant whale, and then finally he drinks this one potion and looks down as he changes and cheers, “yeah... I’m a lama again! ... Oh wait...” That isn’t what he wanted at all: all those potions and adventure and there is no difference, he still isn’t a person. There is no difference.

Romans 3:22b-23: *There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.* In this letter to the Romans, the Apostle

Paul has already been building his argument about how neither the Jew nor the Gentile is saved any differently than the other. According to Paul in Romans 1:18-32 and 2:1-16, as we mentioned in Chapter 1, anyone who denies the abundant evidence of God’s eternal power and divine nature is rightly exposed to the wrath of God which results in being given over to unnatural desires to act upon a debased mind. As a consequence of their sin, their rebellion, they are condemned and deserve to die. Neither moralizing nor the Torah can save anyone. At the conclusion of the second chapter of Romans, it is clear that both the Jew and the Gentile stand on equal footing. The Law and the works of Torah - those practices that mark Israel out from among the nations - cannot be the means of demarcating a true covenant people as some in Paul’s time had suggested. They merely point 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 probably heard before: that of ‘missing the mark’. It brings to mind the idea of an archer shooting for a target and falling short, missing the target. On the surface this seems innocuous enough but if we find out that that archer is William Tell – who is famous because he shoots apples off of people’s heads – and if we then find out that the apple is about to be placed on our head, it becomes important. You don’t want him to miss the mark. William Tell, of course, was to shoot the apples off the heads of his own sons and so if he missed, the consequences would be most devastating for both father and son (as is our own sin). When we continually sin the consequences are often fatal. Romans 3 tells us that we have all sinned, fallen short of this glory of God and Romans 1 and 2 tell us that because of this we deserve to die. I read a story by John Phillips [1]; 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.

Yes, he is taller than his friend (just like some people may seem holier than the rest of us) but it doesn't matter. It doesn't matter that he is taller, he still isn't tall enough and there is nothing he can do about that. There is nothing he can do to 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 thus fall short (Galatians 3:28).

Now this could be playing out in a couple of different ways in the text before us. 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' (this is simply neither true nor possible), every one of us has transgressed the will of God. Each of us has sinned but this passage may be simply referring 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'. 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 Biblical scholar F.F Bruce tells us,

Paul also could be simply referring to the fact that each of us on our own have sinned and therefore fail to make the grade [2].

Failing to make the grade reminds me of when I was in high school. There was this fellow, John, in my Algebra 11 class. John –in those days- was not exactly the scholarly type. His friends mercilessly nicknamed him 'Scarecrow', from the Wizard of Oz: "I wish I had a brain." The last day of Algebra 11 the teacher decided to read out everyone's mark in descending order from top to bottom. Now this actually made John very happy because even though he received a meagre 11%, he looked over at a friend's paper and saw that his friend had achieved only 4% (that friend was me!): for once he was not the lowest mark in the class. As the names were read down the list: Tony, 88%; Janet, 86%; Suzy, 84%; Billy, 72% - and all the way down past the failing marks – Andy, 49%; Mark, 32%; you could see John actually getting more and more excited because THIS TIME he was not going to have the lowest mark – someone else could earn the moniker of 'Scarecrow', Silvia 22%, John 11%... and then... the moment he was waiting for... and... the teacher stops reading out the marks... and dismisses the class. As everyone is quickly exiting the room, "what about Mike?" John yells, "what about Mike? Read out Mike's mark"... John knew I had only 4% but the teacher showed me grace. He refused to read my mark out loud so poor John - who did all on his own manage to fail Algebra 11 again - indeed wound up being last on the list again. Now there are a few things to be cleared up here, two that are relevant to our text and one that is quite irrelevant:

- 1) Totally irrelevant – I, who earned 4% in the course, passed Algebra 11 in Summer School with an 'A' and later went on to actually teach Algebra 11 for a few years.
- 2) Not irrelevant - In the grand scheme of things it really didn't matter for John in any tangible way what mark I, or anyone else earned, John still received a failure on his report card. He

missed the mark; he failed to obtain the prize. Just like us. It doesn't matter if you are a better person than Charlie Manson, Adolph 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'. (And you know that if anyone repents –preceding list included- and accepts Christ, they may actually be with the Lord.) It is not our actions that gain us eternal life. It is God's gift that saves us.

- 3) Relevant - I didn't actually fail Algebra 11. I did only get 4% on the course but because I realised that I was doing horribly in Algebra 11, I dropped the course and audited it instead. That meant that I had to do all the same homework as everyone else. I had to write all the same tests as everyone else and I fell short just like John did. However, it didn't matter because by auditing the course I was saved the failing mark.

That is not entirely dissimilar from the case we have before us in Romans 3. In the heavenly classroom, we have all scored 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). Rather like a student auditing a course, He still wants us to complete it (1 Corinthians 9:24, Galatians 5:7, 2 Timothy 4:7, Hebrews 21:1). In my case, it didn't matter how the class was passed (in regular school or summer school) what mattered was that the class was passed – the 4% mark was erased forever from my transcripts and replaced with an A-range mark. This is somewhat like the Biblical idea of justification.

NT Wright writes in *The Shape of Justification*:

'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. Like so much in this world, it is not 'what you know' but it is 'who you know'. Now to some this sounds unfair but when you take into account that no one knows enough to actually pass the test and merit salvation, then we really do appreciate this grace.

Speaking of grace, I don't know if everyone knows what the word 'grace' actually means? Grace means 'a gift from God'. It is a present. It is not a trophy we can earn like the Grey Cup, the Stanley Cup, the World Cup, or the Super Bowl. Grace is something even more precious than that. 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 a little lamb that I gave my daughter Sarah-Grace when she was just born. It is like a 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 and all we have to do is accept that gift of His love.

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 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), let us 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 and all we have to do is not decline it; so please let us each accept that love present, that gift of eternal life today.

As we accept this gift, our lives will never be the same again. They will be forever changed. This is true and this springs from the revelation that, Romans 3:22-23, we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. 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 will see that this gift of God that we are speaking about is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

4.

#### THE OBEDIENCE COMPANY

Romans 6:23

Before I was an Officer in The Salvation Army, I was trained as an elementary school teacher and I worked as a business person predominantly in the field of education. I had a number of contracts. I had jobs at the Ministry of Education and oversaw staff working in the Examinations and the Learning Resources branches. I also was in charge of a crew at Defence Research. I owned a couple of tutoring companies, ran the *Journal of International Education*, founded an association of international colleges and was a director and programmer for a number of colleges. This was my life prior to entering into full-time ministry. Let me tell you the story about how I got my first wages, my first real paycheque working with the international colleges.

In my early 20s, I volunteered to help a friend teach a class at a Japanese girls' 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 only hired teachers for the spring and summer semesters; the rest of the year they just employed the administrator. I decided I would make a point of regularly visiting the administrator in the off-season. I would visit the director of the college 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. I would visit her every week or two, ask about the college, tell her about the contracts that I had at the Ministry of Education with the goal of obtaining a paid contract with the school for the spring and summer.

It appears that I wasn't as clear as I thought about why I was visiting so frequently, because on one visit I asked about the spring

program and she told me that she had already hired the classroom teachers. She didn't need anyone else. I was in shock. Why had I been investing all this time to visit throughout the year? She then asked me if I could teach basketball. Me, 5'7", teach basketball... "No" I replied, still in shock. She then asked if I could teach badminton to which I, still in shock after turning down the basketball teacher's job, reflexively and almost involuntarily replied, "Yes"... And then –in the days before the internet- I promptly drove to the local library to learn everything I could about badminton. I picked up every book on badminton that I could find and called up a friend of mine to teach me how to play so that I could live up to the job that I had already obtained. The position of Acting Principal opened up shortly after this and I took that on before becoming the Assistant to the Director and later the Program Coordinator of that college myself. But I obtained my first wages in the college by agreeing to teach badminton in this way. (The badminton class went very well by the way.)

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 how the Greek word for 'sin' is actually an old archery term and 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 simply define as being right with God. Sin is having fallen short of this mark.

We know what wages are, right? Wages are what we are paid for what we do – often times in our culture this is represented by a paycheque. Relating to 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 underway, you are either in the uniform of the *Blue Bombers* or of the *Roughriders*. The game is underway; no other players are on the field. You can play for the one team or you can play for the other. No player on the field in neutral.

Expressed another way: unemployment is not an option. There are only two competing companies in town and we have to work for one or the other of them. We can be employees of the Sin Company of which Adam, as the first to sin, is the CEO (Romans 6:21); or we can be employees of the Obedience Company, of which Christ, as the first fruits of the Resurrection, is the CEO (Romans 6:22). We can be employees of the Sin Company and receive as our pay death (Romans 6:21); or we can be employees of the Obedience Company and receive as our pay sanctification (Romans 6:22; cf. TSA doc. 10). We can either choose sin and death or we can choose 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 that 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 asks in effect '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 this right away

before he even gets to the passage and the analogy we are looking at today. He says here, Romans 6:2, as he has said elsewhere, “By no means! We died to sin; how can you live in it anymore.” You can’t! (See 1 Peter 1:15; Leviticus 11:44-45, 19:2, 20:7; Psalm 89:35; 2 Corinthians 13; Colossians 1:28; Hebrews 11-12).

In Chapter 7 Paul will point 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 this is the one person you promise God you will be faithful to, forsaking all others, until one of you dies. It is only when one’s first spouse dies that one is free to marry a subsequent spouse – otherwise we are committing adultery (Romans 7:2; cf. 1 Corinthians 7:10-11; cf. also 1 Timothy 3:2, 12; Titus 1:6). Paul says this is representative of our covenant with God. Only when we die to sin are we released from our bondage to it (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 diseased first spouse (Romans 7:1-6; Romans 6:1-14). That doesn’t make any sense.

The truth is that, Romans 6:23, “The wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” And Romans 6:1-2: “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 (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, don’t play for the old one; you are no longer employed by the Sin Company, so stop doing its work! This is important and it is something that historically even high-profile people have either ignorantly misunderstood or defiantly misinterpreted. One such person was the notorious Russian monk, Rasputin. We know who

Rasputin was. Maybe we remember the *Boney M* 1978 Disco song ‘Ra Ra Rasputin’. That song claims that the monk was a lover of the Russian queen. There is no evidence for this but he was an advisor to the Russian royal family prior to the 1917 revolution and scholar F.F. Bruce points out that Rasputin promoted the heresy that we can continue to intentionally sin and still be saved. FF Bruce in *The Letter of Paul to the Romans* [1] 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.

Thus, Rasputin reasoned, 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.” The Apostle Paul says, Romans 6:1-2: “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.” You have been traded from the Sin team to the Obedience team; how can you keep playing for the Sin team? You are now employed by God and the Obedience Company so don’t do the work of the Sin Company. Romans 6:23: “The wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

There is another important element to this: You have no doubt heard in sermons, homilies, preaches, and talks on this verse which

references the difference between wages and a gift. Wages are something that we deserve. We go into work, we put in our hours and we receive our paycheck. When you are a slave to sin, when you are an employee of the Sin Company, you earn your wages and your wages are death. This is true. When you work in Sin you earn your death. Romans 6:23, “The wages of sin is death.”

In contrast the eternal life we receive and our obedience to the Lord is a gift. We do nothing to merit that gift but like any gift it is only any good to us if we open it. Christ died on the cross and rose from the grave so that whosoever will, may be saved and so that that none of us need to perish (John 3:16-17). He offers us all the free gift of eternal life in God if we just accept this gift of righteousness and open this gift of obedience. Each and every one of us has already been offered a job in the righteousness department of the Obedience Company of our Lord and Saviour. Jesus Christ -between the cross and the empty tomb- made this job offer to everyone (cf. TSA doc. 6). All we need to do is go to work for the Lord and we will collect our free gift at the end of the day. Romans 6:23: “...the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

We do 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. Others conversely, having rolled their hermeneutical analysis too far in the other direction, have brought this passage so far from grace that they have also fallen upon heresy. The Apostle Paul speaks quite a bit about 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). We can do nothing to offer ourselves eternal life. Eternal life is a gift of God.

Once we have accepted this free gift of eternal life the righteous will live by faith. And this faith is both, as James D.G. Dunn declares, “the initial act of receiving the gospel and the continuing process toward salvation”<sup>[2]</sup> Faith is a result of righteousness (Romans 3:22; 4:5, 9,11,13; 9:30; 10:6) and righteousness is 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 it is His righteousness which enables us to be righteous, just as it is Christ’s faithfulness that enables us to live by faith.

Romans 6:23, “The wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” As we said at the top of this chapter, this passage is addressing our position in Christ rather than our individual actions. We have come back to Paul’s analogy a few times that we can either be in the position of a slave or employee of Sin (Romans 6:21) or we can be in the position of an employee of Obedience (Romans 6:22). We can either choose sin and death or we can choose obedience and sanctification. We can choose one or the other but we cannot choose both. This does not mean that if we are working for the Sin Company and sometimes accidentally or otherwise commit actions of obedience that we are contracted out to the Obedience Company and receive the gift of eternal life. The devil does not give up on us that easily! Likewise and very importantly, as we are working for the Obedience Company, this passage does not mean that if we accidentally or otherwise sin that we will immediately be terminated and lose eternal life; it does not work that way.

This is important. Romans 6:23, “The wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” This verse is not speaking of our every action; we do not lose our salvation every time we utter a curse word. This pericope is speaking about our relationship with Christ. For those who choose to continue outside of



a relationship with Christ, for those who choose to reject His job offer of obedience and righteousness, as they make that choice they will receive the consequence of death regardless of whether they have done a number of seemingly good things in their lives or not (cf. TSA doc. 11). But here is the good news: For those of us who have committed to following Jesus, He has already declared us righteous. He has already declared us holy. He has already made us positionally perfect 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. He, like the good coach, is going to give us an opportunity on the very next play to repent, to change. 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; as we remain on His team, He has already won the victory; as we remain on His team Christ guarantees that, even though the wages of sin are death; as we remain on his team, we are guaranteed eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

This promise is a blessing beyond measure. As we continue to serve the Lord we will experience that glorious salvation both for now and forever and in so doing we should realize that this salvation is not cheap. It is provided for us at no cost to ourselves but in obtaining it for us our Lord paid a great price: Romans 5:8, while we were still sinners Christ died for us. At our next stop on our journey, I will invite you to meditate on this for a while before we continue.

5.

## WHILE WE WERE STILL SINNERS CHRIST DIED FOR US

Romans 5:8

Our next stop on our journey down 'Romans Road' is Romans 5:8, "But God demonstrates His own love for us, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." As we rest here, before going further, let's look back towards the earlier stops we've made along this road. Our first stop wasn't exactly on Romans Road but I thought we needed to rest there before we embarked on this journey. Romans 1:16: "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes..." Next stop, Romans 3:23: "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." We then went to Romans 6:23: "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

This stop is 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 always reminds me of my heritage as a Salvation Army Officer. The Salvation Army often plays a big role in Remembrance Day ceremonies across this country because of the great work that the Lord did through us during the so-called 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," remarks 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 it to help maintain morale by manning leave centres. Very close to the battle front, The Salvation Army showed films, established canteens, organized sporting events and other recreational activities, provided reading material, stationary, cigarettes and other items which the troops greatly appreciated. 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.” The Salvation Army tried to offer a glimpse of home in the midst of the horrors of war. [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 also visited the homes of deceased soldiers comforting and looking into the welfare of many grieving families. In short, The Salvation Army “provided the reassuring link between the fighting man and his world of peace and kindness and sanity” [2].

Personally, shortly after moving to Saskatchewan, I heard many individual accounts from veterans of WWII or their widows about just how much God used the ‘Sally Ann’ during ‘The War’. Canadian Salvationists were sent overseas to serve Christ by serving the soldiers in the hopes that some might be saved. Canadian soldiers were sent overseas in the world wars to fight and to die and to live for ‘God, king, and country’. Many were saved and many did lay down their lives in the name of God, our king, and our country (cf. John 15:17).

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.

Christ died for all of us when we were still sinners (cf. Romans 4:5). Romans 5:10 tells us that not only were we still sinners, we were more than that: we were His enemies (cf. 1 John 4:10). Christ died for us while we were still His enemies. What is an enemy? An enemy is one who means us harm. An enemy is one who is in opposition to 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 lordship and leadership, we were necessarily under our own and/or someone else’s. We were not part of His kingdom and indeed by our actions, our deeds, our words, and our thoughts, we were His enemies. By our actions, our deeds, our words, and our thoughts, 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). This is the condition we were in when Christ died for us.

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 God’s enemy does it?”

The Apostle Paul argues that the sinner is an enemy of God and a sinner here 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 not yet grabbed hold of the salvation that Christ offers. Paul makes a real distinction between the ‘sinner’ and the ‘saint’. The former (the sinners) are God’s opponents. The latter (the saints) are the ones on his side; this is where we want to be.

A good way to understand how we were ‘as sinners’ and indeed even ‘as enemies of Christ’ could be expressed in an analogy of military conflict. We know of the horrors of war and the crimes

that our enemies commit. We, and our allies, however, are far from innocent. In WWII, the UK and the US mercilessly created an horrific firestorm in Dresden that killed many innocent women and children and, of course, the US dropped an atomic bomb on an already defeated Japan intentionally when the Japanese mothers were walking their children to school in order to maximize casualties.

Indeed in Canada during the Second World War we treated anyone who was of German, Italian and especially Japanese ancestry as our enemies. We most certainly went overboard when we placed many Canadians of Japanese origin in internment camps. (Famous Canadian scientist and environmentalist, David Suzuki, even spent part of his early life in a Canadian internment camp.) We treated innocent people as our enemies. I say 'we' intentionally. As is shown through the official government apologies and tax money paid in reparations by future generations of Canadians who were not even born during World War II, the responsibility and the liability for this does rest with all of us.

In 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 in Guantanamo Bay (and elsewhere). These actions of the government and her allies, no matter how well-intentioned, have made 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).

You and I may never actually drop a bomb on a family sitting down for dinner but just like there are consequences for the family who receives the bomb, especially in a democracy the guilt of our country rests to some extent with each of us. The consequences of our country's actions do affect us all. When I was younger, Canada

was seen as a peacekeeping nation. At that time we saw more clearly not only the blessings of being a peacemaker (Matthew 5:9) but also the consequences of overt military aggression. In those days American students, when travelling around the world, would wear Canadian flags on their backpacks so that no one would want to harm them. Canadians as peacemakers, which we were back then, didn't make the enemies that the US did. And even though the American students never killed anyone themselves, their government – rightly or wrongly – had waged (or sponsored) many wars, killed many people, and in the process made enemies for all of its citizens -even those not yet born!

Likewise, sin makes us enemies of Christ. When we sin, we are warring against Christ. Before we served Christ, our moral self-government was perpetually warring against Christ. When we were sinners, though we may not have even been totally aware of it, we were very much Christ's enemies. We obviously could never win this war and the consequence of this war, this rebellion against Christ, is death (Romans 6:23).

Paul in his letter to the Romans explains it in terms of 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 pretty much do anything they wanted so long as they just go forth and multiply while abstaining from eating the fruit of just one of the many trees in God's garden. This is the same garden that He graciously permitted them to tend to on His behalf (Genesis 1:28, 2:17, 9:1). And then what is one of the very first things Eve and Adam do after a short conversation with some snake? They disobey God; they sin. In doing this, in essence our fore-parents declared war on God and humankind has been in rebellion ever since (Romans 3:23). Furthermore, as the author of Hebrews tells us, every time we sin we, ourselves, are taking up arms against Christ (Hebrews 10:28-30). But even so at a point in history that was

probably about as bad as it is today in terms of disobedience to God; at a certain time, Romans 5:6, "...at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly." 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 more than one occasion a true story about a preacher in an English church who one day caught the attention of two young boys who were in the pews. The illustration in a sermon he used to explain to the congregation about Christ's death for us went something like this:

There was a father and his son who often went fishing together in the waters off the coast of England. On this one particular occasion the father told his son that he could bring a friend along. Now the father was a parish priest or something like that. He was a deeply religious man anyway. He and his son were speaking about the Lord quite a bit. The boy's friend did not know the Lord and he did not know entirely what to make of all this.

While they were out on the water a terrible, sudden storm came up. The storm tossed their little ship to and fro amongst the rocks. Try as they might, the three of them were not strong enough to regain control of the boat. When the storm reached its fiercest, suddenly both boys were thrown overboard. The father ran to grab the life preserver. There was only one (and there wasn't much time so even if there had been more than one he couldn't possibly throw two of them in two different directions in order pull both boys to safety). There was only one. The sea was frantically trying to claim the life of both boys. It would get one for sure. There was no time to save them both. The father grabbed the preserver and he threw it. He threw it. He threw it to... his son's friend. The friend grabbed the preserver and was pulled onto the boat but by the time the father had gotten his

child's friend aboard, there was no sign of his own son. The father sacrificed his own son, his only son so that the other boy could live.

This is what it is like for our Heavenly Father and His son (Ephesians 1:7; John 15:1-17). God let His son -whom He loves- die so that even those of us who do not know Him, even those of us who are sinners, even those of us who are His enemies can be saved. God's son died for us at just the right time so that we all can be saved.

After this sermon, the boys queried the old preacher. They asked if this was a true story or if he was just making it up. He said it was true. They were unconvinced. One boy asked why a father would let his own son die for a kid he doesn'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, yet would he live; he would see him again at the resurrection of the just. His son's friend however did not know Jesus so if he died, he would be lost forever. The father sacrificed his son to save the other boy.

'How do you know that that story is true?' demanded one of the two boys listening to the story.

'I was the boy who was saved that day,' replied the old preacher. And so it is with all of us. Today we have the choice before us of life and death. God the Father has already sacrificed His one and only son so that we can live. All we need to do now 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 can live.

Today, I urge us all not to let Jesus' death to have been in vain in our own lives. If there is anything we are holding onto that is preventing us from grabbing hold of our salvation, let us cast it aside. If there is any aspect of our lives that we are holding onto 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 and in so doing, reach out and grab hold of that life preserver of His salvation so that we can all be gloriously saved.

Once we have grasped hold of this glorious salvation there is even more excitement awaiting us. Once we grasp this salvation, we have the opportunity to hold firm and follow along exactly where the Lord is taking us. And that is where we are going next on our trip down Romans Road as we come to Romans 10:9&13.

6.

SAY IT! KNOW IT! DO IT!

Romans 10:9&13

At our next stop along Romans Road, we are looking at 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 some of the basics of the whole Christian faith. As this is the case, I would like to share a piece of wisdom that was presented to us at an Officer Camp by Major David Ivany. He shared this story with us about a kind elderly lady who upon a public confession of faith is experiencing the pure joys of Christian love.

This lady, Emma, she goes into a local Christian bookstore and sees a ‘Honk if you love Jesus’ bumper sticker. Feeling particularly good that day because she has just come from a great choir practice and prayer meeting, she buys the bumper sticker and she puts it on her car – professing her faith publicly. She recalls, “Boy, I’m glad I did! What an uplifting experience followed!” and then she launches into this story. She remembers stopping for a red light at a busy intersection just when she first had on her new ‘Honk if you love Jesus’ bumper sticker. Lost in thought about the Lord and how good He had been to her, she didn’t notice the light had changed to green.

“It is a good thing someone else loves Jesus,” she said, “because if he hadn’t honked, I’d never have noticed that the light had changed!” She then noted that indeed, lots of people actually love Jesus because while she sat unmoving, blocking 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 remembers thinking, “What an exuberant cheerleader he is for the Lord!”

Suddenly, it seemed as though she had started an epidemic and everyone started honking. Impressed by such a response, she leaned out of her window and started waving and smiling at all these loving people – while she was still parked in front of the intersection. “I even honked my horn a few times to share in the love!” she recited. Then she realized the mix of celebrants. “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 suggested that it was probably an Hawaiian good luck sign or something...”

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

She also remembers that a few persons 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 through the intersection. 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 the car down, leaned out of the window and gave them all the Hawaiian good luck sign one last time before I sped away.”

Like with the bumper sticker, Romans 10:9, “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 10:13, “For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

These are two critical pieces of that famous ‘Romans Road to Salvation’ upon which we are walking today – there are a number of different paths one can travel along the Romans Road but these two verses, 9 and 13, are a regular stop along every one so I thought that we would rest by them now.

I do have a bit of a teaching background and this pericope does lend itself to an older style of teaching; so while we are at this stop, I will take us through a 3-point discourse complete with plenty of repetition. The three points we will address are: 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.

We must remember that God has offered the whole world a free gift of Salvation (Romans 6:23, John 3:16-17) and to fully take 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’

This is important. Whenever I hear this verse I immediately 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 Peter that He was going to use him to help build His church. This was at the time Jesus gave Simon the nickname ‘Peter’. Peter wasn’t his given name; Simon was his given name. Peter means ‘Rock’ or

even ‘Rocky’. Simon ‘Rocky-Peter’ was one of Christ’s main ‘go to’ people after His resurrection and we remember the story about how Jesus told Rocky-Peter that he would deny Jesus three times before the cock crows twice, then shortly after Peter says ‘I don’t know what your talking about’; shortly after Peter’s third denial that he even knows Jesus; the rooster crows and Peter is devastated (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 ended there this would be very sad but John 21:15ff, records Simon Peter’s restoration, as Rocky, as Peter. The Resurrected Lord asked him three times to feed his sheep and Peter agreed to it. Near the conclusion of the book of John, Jesus then blew on Peter -and the other disciples- giving him the Holy Spirit (John 20:22). Luke picked up the story of Rocky-Peter in the book of Acts as Rocky-Peter was at Pentecost taking the lead as the Holy Spirit, like a starting pistol, sent the disciples and more out to proclaim salvation to the world. 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!

Peter and the disciples said it and many were saved. And just to underscore the fact that Peter did fully recover from his earlier denial, church tradition states that Peter even earned his martyr’s crown. He was apparently crucified upside down as he left his life here for heaven to await the resurrection. Point 1: Say it! This brings us to Point 2.

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

It is very important to proclaim the gospel but that is not the end of it. Speaking is one thing and believing is quite another. If you have any

doubt about that, think about the general reputation (accurate or not) of our elected politicians – speaking is one thing, believing what you say is quite another. Paul in this section of scripture is really addressing the whole problem of Israel (Romans 9-11; cf. also Deuteronomy 30, Leviticus 18). He is addressing the problem of the Law and their relationship to the Law and their 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, did believe in the resurrection and as a group were quite evangelistic (cf. Acts 23:7-8)! But believing in your heart in Jesus’ resurrection is quite a different matter (1 Corinthians 15:17; cf. 2 Corinthians 4:13-14). The Apostle Paul - who was a Pharisee - celebrated the fact that Jesus was raised from the dead but sadly many Israelites and even many Pharisees did not. It pained Paul that people who were zealous for God’s Law were indeed missing out on the benefits of the culmination of that Law: Jesus, the one to whom the Law points (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, of course, is a central part of not only Paul’s message but of 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.

This is important. Saying it is good. Knowing it is better. Doing it is imperative. This fact is also implied in Verse 9. The scriptures speak about this quite a bit (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). I believe that Matthew actually paints this picture quite vividly. In Matthew 25:31ff is recorded the parable of the sheep and the goats. In this parable you have two groups of nations. Both groups – the sheep and the goats – 1) *say it* and 2) *know it*, that Jesus is Lord. But it is only the sheep that 3) *do* anything about it. As a result, only the sheep are saved. The goats who don't do anything are sent to where there is a weeping and gnashing of teeth. Matthew 7:21 is quite clear on this matter: it is recorded there that the Lord says "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": *Say it! Know it! Do it!*

We must actually call on the name of the Lord. We have to call on him. We have to trust him. This is important. 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: these are wonderful things but my relationship with Susan only grows when I actually call on her, when I actually 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 actually have a marriage if I bother to see her, to call on her sometimes. This is important.

Christianity isn't some academic pursuit. Christianity isn't some code. Christianity isn't some rules and regulations. Christianity isn't some club. Christianity isn't some principles by which we should live our life. Christianity is a relationship with the risen Christ. Jesus Christ rose from the grave and we are promised that, Romans 10:13 "...everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." He loves us and He wishes that none will perish. And Salvation in our text today 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 our hearts in His resurrection.
- 3) *Do it!* – That we would call upon the name of the Lord.

Psalm 34:8, "Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him." 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, Luke 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 then even we shall be saved.

This salvation is a glorious blessing and it is sad if any should choose to miss out on something as easy as one, two, three. That being said, sometimes when things appear easy, sometimes when things should be easy, sometimes we can make them difficult. The more we try to solve these difficulties on our own, the more difficult they can become. Sadly many times those difficulties can cause us to try even harder to solve our problems on our own which then creates even more problems for us. This downward spiral continues as a cycle until we finally do actually 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.



## THE LAW THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS

Romans 9:30 –10:4

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 it doesn't matter how hard 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? Or there's the other side of that as well: have you ever really attempted to avoid a responsibility or attention for something but no matter how hard you try to avoid it, there it was?

There was a high school student, Alan, in the last months before his graduation. All the boys were preparing to rent their tuxedos and the girls to get 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 have to 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 kids 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. Being the class representative is a big deal for some people - but not for Alan. Alan was really not into the whole school scene. He was graduating and he wasn't even sure if he wanted to go to the ceremonies led alone vote for a favourite song or who should represent his class on graduation day. He didn't want anything to do with it.

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, down the stairs and almost got away. But the Vice Principal spotted them and marched them

unceremoniously into the gym where they were just finishing the nomination process for Class Graduation Representative. All those who had been campaigning were sitting on the stage and, just when everyone was about to vote, someone noticed Alan and the others being dragged in called out as loud as she could. "I nominate Alan!" Soon the whole student body was cheering – except for those who were actually running for the position, of course, and except for Alan, who is nonetheless overwhelmingly elected.

When Alan tells the story, he says that not only didn't he want the position but he would have refused it if the Vice Principal didn't approach him after the vote and try to convince him to step down! So now he has this responsibility. He has won this prize but it's a prize that he didn't even want.

This is a little bit like the story Paul is relaying to us in Romans Chapters 9-11. Verse 30: "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 (and by Gentiles here, Paul simply means non-Jewish people) weren't campaigning to be anything (they weren't seeking salvation) and as far as many of the Jews were concerned, the Gentiles were outside the Promise when the election occurred but Paul is letting the Romans know that they snuck in at just the right time and they were elected whether they had previously wanted it or not and there is even more.

Paul has some not very good news for those who were actually trying to obtain their position. He says, paraphrasing Isaiah (Isaiah 8:14, 28:16), in Verse 33, "...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)" Paul says, Verse 31, that the Jews, the chosen people, Israel; though striving for righteousness did not obtain it. They did not get it. They now find themselves on the outside looking

in. Jesus even, in Matthew 21:42-44, says very 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." 'The kingdom will be taken away from you,' Jesus says.

This wasn't really good news for some who were reading or listening to this letter to the Romans in the first century and maybe it isn't good news for some today either. After all now, like then, some mistakenly think that God exclusively elected Israel for salvation. They didn't realise, as we know, that the purpose of their election was for God to bring salvation to the world (Genesis 12:3). They didn't understand God's promise of salvation was for the whole world and through this ignorance some of them actually rejected the Promise. They were crushed. The kingdom was taken away from them.

Paul loved his countrymen (Israel) and knowing this problem, Romans 10:1&2, Paul cried 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." The people of Israel, in Paul's time, Verse 33, strove for righteousness and did not obtain it.

Now this raises a serious couple of questions for us: One, why did they not obtain righteousness? [1] And two, can we strive for God's righteousness and not obtain it? Can we seek first the Kingdom of God and not find it (cf. Matthew 7:7ff)? Can we strive for righteousness and not obtain it? Can we try to get to heaven and be turned away at the gates? Can we? Maybe the answer is 'yes' but see Matthew 6-7. Romans 10:2-3 records, "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." These people then, though they were zealous for God, tried to develop their own righteousness and in the process rejected Jesus as God and therefore could not know God and, as a result, would not win the prize. They rejected Christ and they rejected salvation.

It seems like the classic story, *Alice through the Looking Glass*. In that story there are two groups of people: those who are determined to reach a goal (like Israel in our pericope) and those who are not. Those who are most determined to reach the goal walk towards the mirror where it is reflected but – of course – they never reach it because its not there – only the reflection is there. The ones, however, who turn (repent) and walk in the opposite direction are the ones who actually did find it. [2]

We can never grab something by reaching for its reflection in a mirror no matter how hard we try because it is not a real item: it is just a reflection. This is like the Law was to Israel: the Law was a reflection of God. It was not God and as long as one was reaching for His reflection, one could never grasp God. As long as one is reaching for a reflection rather than for Jesus himself - even though he is standing right beside you – you will never reach him.

Are there any ways that we can be tempted to do this? Are there ways we are tempted to ignore God and try to grasp an image, a rule maybe, or a ritual instead? Are there times when we, like many in first century Israel, might rely on our own righteousness and in the process actually turn our backs on God? I think that sometimes in our churches we make this mistake. I think sometimes some of us might be tempted to believe that if we come to church and sing songs we'll be saved. Do we sometimes think that the fact that we don't swear or drink or smoke or gamble or whatever else we don't do we'll be okay? Are we fooled into believing that if we are nice and don't hurt

anyone then we deserve to go to heaven. I have even heard that sentiment at some funerals and it's tragic. I have even heard clergy mistakenly suggest that anyone will be in heaven as long as they were just liked by someone. Well, if any of us are hoping to get to God by being liked by others, by being nice, or by our own righteousness, then we will be disappointed because good personality, good works, and our own righteousness are nothing more than grasping at a shadow, an image in the mirror.

But let us not become depressed. There is some very good news. Romans 10:4: Christ is an end to the Law. We no longer need to be deceived by that particular reflection; that mirror is finished and there is more good news even: Romans 9:33, those who do trust in Jesus will never be put to shame. We don't need to look at anything else; we don't need to be deceived by any other mirror. Jesus is standing right beside us and 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's coming back so that whosoever believes in Him will not perish but will have everlasting life (John 3:16). This is good news, this is the real deal and 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. Jesus is the whole of a grade 12 class from our opening story chanting your name for election. God wants you to be His representative, so don't turn your back on Him. Don't reject your election. Instead turn around from the mirror of our other analogy, turn around and experience the Lord's everlasting embrace.

When we do this we will no longer need to grasp at shadows. We will no longer need to search in the dark for a light. The Light of the world is right next to us and as we turn to Him we will notice that even in the midst of our very real suffering, He will be our strength and our hope. With this in mind we shall now march on towards one of the extra stops on our journey along Romans Road, Romans 5:3&4.

## HOPE AND AN ANGEL ON THE DTES

Romans 5:3&amp;4

Romans 5:3&4 is not a typical stop along Romans Road but I thought, since we are travelling this way anyway that we should stop and take a look.

When our oldest two children were very little, we sold our home and our businesses and moved into North America's poorest postal code - Vancouver's downtown eastside - as full-time urban missionaries with The Salvation Army's 614.

We have shared with many people over the years the excitement from our time there 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 indeed the Lord is still performing today and were, oh, so evident in that environment. We met people who were cured of cancer, cured of AIDS, and completely 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, as you can well imagine, wasn't always rosy though. I remember one day. One morning I was mugged. I knew better but I wasn't paying attention. It was early in the morning and I was right on Main and Hastings – the most infamous intersection in this most infamous neighbourhood - and I was on the pay phone with Susan who was out of town at the time. Someone came running up behind me, grabbed my briefcase and tore down Main Street. In the briefcase was my laptop and all the information for the summer school program I was running for the poor kids in the area; so, like anyone mugged in the depths of skid row, I'm sure, I...well, I chased the mugger.

I followed him down Main Street through Chinatown across busy streets and around the myriad of mazes that are Vancouver's back alleys. Scaring rats, jumping over people sleeping on the street, I pursued my assailant. When I was within reach of him... I fell right in front of a bus and though I escaped from in front of the bus with my life, the mugger escaped with my briefcase, my laptop, and my files for a program I was running for the kids in the neighbourhood.

It was when I was walking back completely distraught and despondent from this incident that I experienced the miracle that happened: I encountered an angel, a messenger of God, in the back alleys of Vancouver's storied downtown eastside. I can still remember vividly; he looked like a 'dumpster diver;' he prayed with me and he offered me these 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. I knew he was right. God gave me these words to encourage me.

When the Apostle Paul recorded these words circa 55 AD in his letter to the Romans, he himself had already seen much suffering - he had already spent so much time under arrest, so much time in prison and even after this he will be ultimately killed for his faith and tradition suggests that he was even beheaded by the Romans themselves.

In the first few verses of Chapter 5 of Romans, Paul was not only warning the Romans about the persecution and suffering that was coming for him but he was also warning them about the suffering that was coming for them and ultimately the suffering that may be coming for us as we do the Lord's bidding. You'll notice from our text today that not only are we to endure our suffering but Paul says, depending on your translation, we are to rejoice and even boast in our suffering (see Philippians 2:17; 1 Peter 4:6, 4:13). 1 Thessalonians

5:18 states that we are even to give thanks in all circumstances (see Philippians 4:11) and Paul, in Philippians 4:4 says, 'Rejoice in the Lord always and again I say rejoice.'

This is important: we aren't supposed to lick our wounds when we suffer for doing the Lord's work; we are to rejoice. We should think about what exactly God and Paul and the Bible are saying here for a moment because it does go against a lot of popular culture and indeed seems to oppose the so-called 'prosperity gospel' that is prevalent in our affluent North American culture.

This prosperity heresy - the idea that wealth, health and prosperity come to those whom God loves but trials, tribulations and suffering on this earth come to those whom God hates - this prosperity heresy was apparently alive and well in Paul's day as well but just like it was a lie then, it is not true now. [1]

Paul says that we should rejoice in our suffering because - if indeed our suffering is for the gospel of which Paul is not ashamed (1:16) - our suffering will produce perseverance (endurance) and you know what perseverance is good for, right? It gives us the ability to get through difficult times; and you know why God gives us the ability to get through difficult times? Because we've got more difficult times to get through. So as we persevere through these difficult times we can rejoice because we will be ready for the even more difficult times that are to come.

There is even more to it than this. 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 home growing up the phrase 'It will build character' was the 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? ...It will build character. More or less this is what Paul is

saying. (Who knew my folks were paraphrasing Paul's letter to the Romans?)

Paul really does say that we should enjoy our character building experiences. They are a means to the strength of the Lord. In Philippians 1 Paul says that whatever happens, everything will be okay because living is Christ and even to die is gain: there is the resurrection ahead. We have nothing to lose. To die is gain and to live is Christ! (Philippians 1:21)

Paul had a lot that was building his character during his time in jail, and the Roman Christians had great opportunities to develop character as they faced the lions in the Coliseum, and my mugging on the downtown eastside wasn't our first experience with loss nor was it our last but it was directly related to our work for the Lord and this period was extremely significant in our lives and its results echo to this day in our souls.

When I was mugged and my laptop containing all the information for The Salvation Army's tutoring ministry was stolen it was only the beginning. My foot was also injured, my hands later were inexplicably painfully swollen, my eye was injured (so painfully that I couldn't even get up for days) and it was later re-injured too- I required surgery; one of my daughters, who was two at the time suffered seizures in front of our eyes, our car stopped working, a person in our home was struggling with heroin addiction, the police visited our home and encouraged a roommate of ours to leave, a visitor's computer and camera were stolen on subsequent nights spent in our home and this last event unleashed a chain of attacks straight from the Enemy. We were serving the Lord, openly and abundantly and we were suffering as we did so and there was more to come (cf. Mark 3:20-35).

Knowing all this was still to come, after my mugging the Lord sent His messenger - the angel in the form of a downtown eastside resident - to encourage me to endurance, to perseverance. He told me specifically from Romans 5:3&4, to "...rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope."

So what is Paul saying about suffering here? He is saying we have to rejoice in it but is he talking about any kind of unpleasant event, any suffering? Not necessarily. The Greek word here (*thlipseis*) refers to literally a 'pressure' that is applied to Christians from the world, from God's opponents (cf. John 15:18, 16:20). John Stott writes that *thlipseis* is "almost a technical term for the suffering which God's people must expect in [these] last days".[2] This suffering is something that we can expect as we do the will of God in the last days. When we serve the Lord there is opposition both spiritual and practical and though the war is won, the battle rages fierce.

As we fight in this battle that is our life, there are people, powers and principalities that oppose us. As we fight in this battle, it develops our perseverance; it develops our character; we become like battle-hardened veterans experienced in engaging the foe. We are no longer green. Our character is being built. 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 know we can be counted on to persevere through even more of whatever opposition, whatever pressure the Enemy throws our way. We know we can have hope because God will never leave us nor forsake us.

Jesus Christ Himself suffered and He rose again on the third day. Jesus Christ Himself endured and He is the reason for our hope. And what is our hope that grows through this suffering, this

perseverance and character-building experiences? What is this hope? This hope through Jesus Christ is indeed in the power of the gospel which is the power to transform us all (Romans 1:16); our hope is in the Lord Jesus Christ who will never leave us nor forsake us and our hope is through the cross and the empty tomb: our hope is in the resurrection of the dead. Paul knows, as we know, that when our bodies fade away it is not the end. We will be in paradise with our Lord and then there is the hope of the ultimate resurrection of the dead. We will rise again. As the Lord has conquered Sin and Death, He will indeed continue to conquer our own sins that lure us to death; so we can have confidence, we can have faith, we can have hope in the resurrection.

There is even more too. I know that there are some serious struggles that face many people today. The week before I first preached this chapter as a sermon, there were some serious losses in the town where we were living: a father and his son perished and a family lost their home in an explosion and fire. There is uncertainty in our daily lives. There are questions and we don't necessarily realise what the Lord is doing but no matter how bleak things seem we can still have that hope.

Susan and I have received serious, vocal, practical and even litigious opposition from the Enemy through people very close to us not only when we were on Vancouver's Downtown Eastside but also everywhere else we have lived and worked for the Kingdom. We have had to consciously protect even 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 does and will attack those of us that serve the Lord. There is pressure but we must not give in to the temptation to surrender to the pressure. Instead we must boast in our sufferings, experience 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. Let us all, as Romans 5 says, "...rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope." And this hope will never disappoint us (v.5). Quite the contrary, this hope will certainly lead us to victory at the end of the day, at the end of the game, at the final whistle and that is what we will reflect upon at our next stop, Romans 13:11-14.

9.

## VICTORY AT THE FINAL WHISTLE

Romans 13:11-14

Welcome to our next stop on this journey along Romans Road. This is one of our extra stops. As it is near dawn let us pause and look over Romans 13:11-14 before we carry on our way.

*'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 armor 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.*

We have lived and worked many different places in our ministry. This passage reminds me of our first year living in Saskatchewan. Something happened. Something exciting happened. The Roughriders won the Grey Cup! This was exciting. Anyone who has ever lived in Saskatchewan will know the kind of excitement I am talking about. This was the first time they had won the championship in 18 years - and there are only eight or nine teams in the whole league! The game was on a Sunday. I will never forget that day. After the church service ended I rushed to the car with my daughters and turned on the radio. The other team, the Winnipeg Blue Bombers were up. When they made it ten nothing, I felt quite alone in my vehicle as the 5 and 6 year-old in my backseat erupted into a chorus of "Go Winnipeg Go!" (We had just moved from Winnipeg.) I had faith, though - mind you, it was mixed with a little doubt - I had faith that the victory we Roughrider fans have been waiting 18 years for was finally coming

and -as history as recorded- my faith, my hope was not in vain. The cup returned.

I doubt anyone still remembers the game after all this time (if you are from Saskatchewan, you might). In the last couple of minutes, right after the deciding interception, you could see the anticipation in the Riders' expressions as the cameramen zoomed in on their faces. They knew the game had been won already but it wasn't over yet. The game had been won; they wanted to celebrate but it 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 wasn't over yet. They knew that it had been won but the game wasn't over yet. The anticipation was written on the players' faces as they knew that the game had been won but it wasn't over yet.

This is exactly the situation that our text is talking about today. 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..." It says that the night is nearly over! It says that our 'salvation' is nearer than when we first believed! The Apostle Paul, in his numerous letters, uses the word 'salvation' in a number of ways. One way he uses the word is to refer to how we can be saved from the normal course of events in our lives (cf. Philippians 1:19).

Indeed we ourselves can be saved from daily events such as happened to me not long before first typing these words: when we were driving back from Winnipeg we were pulled over; the police officer kindly decided not to issue us a ticket: we were *saved* that expense. A few days later, Susan was going to walk back from dropping off our car to have winter tires put on. An employee at the store, however, offered her a ride; she was *saved* the walk. This is a

common way that we are *saved* everyday and this is one way that Paul does indeed use the word 'salvation' but this daily salvation is not exactly what Paul is talking about here.

Paul speaks at times also, in other places in his letters - such as in 2 Corinthians 6:2 – about the 'day of salvation' and that 'day of salvation' is already here. It is not still to come; it has arrived but in Verse 11 of our text today it says that our salvation is still to come: it says that our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed so how can that be?

How can our salvation be both now and still to come? How can it be both near and here already? This is an important concept to understand (theologians refer to this concept as a 'prolepsis') because our salvation, as it is, has indeed already been obtained. It was achieved when Jesus died and won the victory through rising from the dead. Paul himself acknowledges this in other places in the scriptures: 2 Corinthians 6:2, 1 Corinthians 15:2, Ephesians 2:8. The Apostle Peter talks about just this sort of thing in 1 Peter 1. Christ has already won the victory but the final reward of salvation is yet to come. The game is won but the final whistle has not been blown yet and the great cup is still to be presented.

It is very much like our Roughriders game. When the player went down on one knee to run out the clock there was no way that they could be defeated. The Rider Nation, as we are called; the Roughrider fans were already victors with the team, just like we are already victors with Christ.

When Christ died on the cross and rose from the grave, Death was dealt its deathblow, so to speak: Christ intercepted the pass and ran for the final touchdown to put the game out of reach. There is no way now that sin and death can ever come back and win the game but



the thing is that the final whistle hasn't been blown yet and this is exactly what Paul is speaking about in our text here today.

In this passage, Paul is speaking about 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 the final whistle had sounded. The analogy Paul uses to make this point is quite neat – and for those who aren't football fans, I imagine a new analogy is a bit of a welcome relief right now. Paul refers to our salvation as the daytime that is almost here. This is exciting because, just as with the game that is out of reach, there is nothing that we can do to stop the daytime from coming. There is no such thing as a night that never ends; for that to happen the earth must stop spinning and then we would have a lot more problems than just a lack of light. Day hasn't arrived yet but there is nothing we can do to stop it from coming.

That being said, Paul has some words for us. He says we should wake up (verse 11)! We don't want to miss it. Wouldn't you hate to be a Riders fan who, after 18 years of waiting, slept through the awarding of the cup. It wouldn't change the outcome of the game but it would sure affect you. Paul says, "Wake up! You don't want to miss the finish. You don't want to miss the dawn" but he says even more than that. He says that since the darkness is fading (Verse 12), we should no longer live like we are in the darkness. It is like 'regime change' such as we've heard so much about in the news the previous few years and there is a good example of this from historical England actually.

There was a time in England's history when she had neither a king nor a queen. Parliament had won the war against the monarchy and this is arguably the darkest period in all of English history. The rules of their society changed so drastically: it became so repressive without the king to look out for the interests of the common people

that they eventually begged the son of the king to come back to rule over them again – but, even then, it takes a while and people have to be convinced to act the way the new regime wants. Just ask the Americans how well their governments in Iraq and Afghanistan are going...it may be a new day there but many people are still not choosing to live under U.S. authority.

It is the same in our world of the text today. When Christ died, there came about a regime change – the King is back. The Son of the King has come and He is indeed coming back again and as this is the case, it is time to stop acting as if He is not.

Daytime is arriving so we should stop doing all those things that people like to do under the cover of night. Some of these things are listed in our text today: it says in Verse 13 that we should not engage in sexual immorality and debauchery; we should not engage in dissention and jealousy. Doing so, acting on our own selfish desires, would be like swearing allegiance to the darkness, to the old regime, the defeated regime; it would be like paddling out to join the Titanic as it's going down or buying shares in Eaton's as it goes 'belly up.' It would not be prudent. It would not be smart.

This is important. When we focus on ourselves rather than on God and others (see Verses 8-10; Matthew 7:12, 22:40), we are serving the defeated regime. And don't be mistaken: even though it is defeated, it is still fighting and even though the darkness has lost, people are still dying.

This is very much like the battle of New Orleans in the War of 1812. I don't know how much you know about that battle or that war but it is very significant. The War of 1812 began when England was occupied trying to contain Napoleon as he was bringing war to every corner of the planet. England was very busy trying to stop him so the Americans thought this would be a good time to conquer Canada.

Like they did before, they invaded – only it didn't go so well. They lost. Canada was saved. It remained free. The USA failed to conquer Canada and they were forced to send their agents overseas to sue for peace.

This is when the tragedy struck: On Christmas Eve 1815 the war officially ended but in those days there was no long distance telephone, e-mail, or other way to tell the troops in the field quickly this good news and so on January 8th a terrible thing happened. General Pakenham took the initiative to invade American-held New Orleans. The enemy had already been defeated, the war had already been won but there were over 1700 needless casualties that day. The war had already been won but many people still perished in the battle that followed.

This is what it is like for us today. Even though the victory has already been won between the cross and the empty tomb, people are perishing every day. If we follow our own selfish desires, even though the war has been won, not everyone will be delivered from the darkness. There are still people perishing every day. How many of us, like General Pakenham's troops, are perishing when we don't have to? 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? When we do, we are serving the darkness, the old regime, the defeated regime.

How many of us still give into quarrelling and jealousy? They are the same as the former sins. When we give into these we are serving the darkness, the old regime, the defeated regime. If you break one aspect of the law you transgress the whole thing (Galatians 3). In the eyes of the Lord, sin is sin and the consequence of sin is the same as it was for those poor people who marched to their graves in

the Battle of New Orleans even though the victory had been one. The wages of sin are death (Romans 6:23).

So why would we commit sexual sin or quarrel with each other? Why, when we know that that is submitting to the old regime, the defeated government? Why? Why are we content to live in the darkness? Why not rather strap on the armour of light like it says in Verse 12. Actually this is interesting: Did you know that the word translated as 'armour' here (and in Ephesians 6 too) – *hopla* - is probably better translated 'weapons'.<sup>[1]</sup> This word designates much more than just defending oneself with armour. This refers to going out and seizing the foe. We should not just hide from the darkness; we must wage war against it. It says, Verse 14, that we must put on Jesus Christ Himself and make no provisions for our own selfish desires and really that is what the answer to everything is, isn't it? As we put on Christ, we can engage the world and not succumb to it. When we have Him as our armour, nothing can slay us – He has no Achilles heel.

So it is to this end that I exhort us now. The game has been won, the foe has been defeated; therefore for us to be engaged in selfishness at this time would be as if in the last minute of play, one of the Roughriders switched to join the Blue Bombers. Why, when the victory is already won, would anyone want to forfeit his or her prize before it is awarded? Why would we want to reject our salvation now that the daylight is coming?

As we leave this stop along Romans Road, I leave us with this encouragement. Sin is already defeated. Death is dead and the darkness is fading; so let us, like Jesus said to the lady accused of adultery (John 8:10), let us 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.

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 and as such 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've been walking down 'Romans Road' together in the hopes that collectively we may become more familiar with this path that many of follow while sharing our hope and our faith. The verses we've looked at – the stops we've made along Romans Road - are as follows.

- 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."

We also made a couple of extra stops that aren't usually made on the Romans Road, such as 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. Actually, we aren’t even looking at anything even written by the Apostle Paul. Here we are looking at letters within a letter ascribed to ‘John the Revelator’ in the book of Revelation. But in so doing, as strange as it may sound, we actually are continuing our walk down a Roman Road: the seven churches mentioned in Revelation are interestingly 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.”

One thing that people who are familiar with my teaching probably already know is that every once and a while parts of scripture remind me of comics that I used to read as a kid and that now my own children read. In this chapter I will reference some comics from Bill Waterson’s *Calvin and Hobbes*. The storyline is about a six-year-old boy, Calvin, who is expecting his babysitter, Rosalyn (whom he doesn’t like) to spend the evening with him. This is quite a long story line and where we will pick it up is after Rosalyn has already arrived at the house and has been knocking at the door, ringing the doorbell for quite a while. Calvin’s mother asks his father if he has seen her missing shoes; they look everywhere for them and in the last panel you see Calvin hiding the shoes, thinking that his parents can’t go out without them. While his parents looking for his mom’s shoes, they

ask Calvin to answer the door but he doesn’t because he doesn’t want to be babysat. The parents eventually realise that Rosalyn is still outside and ask Calvin why he didn’t answer the door to which he replies that he doesn’t need to answer the door because they can’t go anywhere without his mom’s shoes...His dad then asks Calvin how he knows the shoes are missing. Calvin is found out! He then reluctantly lets in Rosalyn who has been persistently ringing the doorbell this whole time.

Revelations 3:20 (Like Rosalyn): “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.”

This comic sequence is not actually too far off what today’s passage of scripture is talking about. We’ll come back to that in a little bit. First, I think we need a little context for the book of Revelation and even more so the pericope in which this verse is located. Revelation is an account of the apocalyptic vision of ‘John the Revelator’ (Revelation 1). It is full of imagery. Some people consider that its prophecies relate either to John’s time or even to the ultimate end of times. Others see it -quite reasonably- as a critique of the superpower of John’s day (Rome) or even a condemnation of any earthly empire or superpower for that matter. It certainly contains elements of this but one thing for certain is that Revelation is meant as an encouragement to the faithful (Revelation 2:2, 19; 3:10; 13:10; 14:12). Revelation is meant to spur us on to be faithful to the end – even unto death – so that indeed we can claim the prize (see also 1 Corinthians 9:19-27, Philippians 3:14, Colossians 2:18).

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

These seven letters written to the different churches all have some basic features in common: each letter is addressed to an angel (even though John was asked specifically to address them to the churches themselves); each letter mentions the city to which it is addressed; each one follows a prophetic messenger formula; each contains a Christological ascription; followed by praise and a promise or blame and a threat; each has a call to obedience and an eschatological promise for the victors.

Some of the recipients of these seven letters fair 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 Philadelphia even receive significant praise (Revelation 2:8, 3:7)! Laodicea, however, receives the most negative of all the letters. Laodicea receives no praise at all. It is the angel and the church of Laodicea that it seems are in the most trouble and it is the angel and the church at Laodicea that we are looking at in our scripture here.

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.”

Laodicea was a city situated in the Lycos Valley in the province of Phrygia of Asia Minor. It was founded by Antiochus II (261-246 BC) of Syria, who named it for his wife Laodike, and populated it with Syrians and Jewish people from Babylonia. Though Laodicea stood on the great highway at the junction of several important routes, it was a place of little importance until the Roman province of Asia was formed in 190 BC. It then suddenly became a great and wealthy centre of industry, famous especially for the fine black wool of its sheep and for the Phrygian powder for the eyes that was manufactured there (compare Revelation 3:18). In this area was a renowned medical school. In the year 60 AD, the city was almost

totally destroyed by an earthquake but as the Roman senator and historian Tacitus records, its citizens were so wealthy that they actually rejected the monetary aid offered by Rome and quickly rebuilt at their own expense - compare Revelation 3:17. Laodicea was a city of great wealth, with extensive banking operations (compare Revelation 3:18). Rich, cultured, pluralistic - this church became so self-satisfied and worldly that it seems to have ostracised Christ completely. It was neither cold nor hot; it was nauseous to God: it was a church which considered itself rich and in need of nothing but that was instead wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked.

This was the church to whose angel John wrote the letter. 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.

There is an important point to be made here. This is significant. 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 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 (Matthew 19:23, Mark 10:23-24, Luke 18:24-25) – and when was the last time we saw that! We know that even the poorest of Canadians today are amongst the wealthiest people who have ever lived on this earth. King Solomon could never have even dreamed of the luxuries we have today: cars, microwaves, centralized heating and air-conditioning, TV, Wi-Fi, food and junk food galore!

Laodicea had become so rich in the things of this earth that they did not realize they were spiritually ‘wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked’. In Canada we were founded arguably as a direct rebuke to earlier atheistic/deistic revolutions: we were intentionally founded upon scripture (Psalm 72) but as we have grown richer in this country, complacency, crime, pornography, atheism, and self-reliance have sprung up like so many weeds attempting to choke out the Word of God. In Canada, like Laodicea, we have become so complacent and so trusting in our earthly riches that it seems we are turning further and further away from God.

Laodicea was rich in material wealth but Laodicea lacked the good water that her neighbouring cities had: Hieropolis had great hot mineral springs and there was also the clear cold waters of Colossae in contrast to the poor water of Laodicea, which was piped to the city 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 but was 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])

This is what John is talking about: Laodicea may have wealth but they lack spiritual wealth. They have both the good hot water and the good cold water being poured into them but when they mix together in their wealthy city it becomes useless lukewarm water. John doesn’t stop here; he 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. It says that He stands at the door and knocks. This is important: It isn’t a casual knock at the door and seeing that the people of Laodicea are too busy to hear Him, He goes away – this is a persistent knock. The word here in the Greek refers to a continual knocking but the people of Laodicea seem to be hiding. It is like this – Calvin and Hobbes again: Later in the comic strip sequence, Calvin hides and then he locks his babysitter out of the house and does all the things he’s not allowed to do.

The Laodiceans - like Calvin and not unlike many in North America - are even taunting the Lord and deceiving themselves into believing that we can survive on our own without Him. But we can’t; there are consequences. Calvin and Hobbes, while they are ignoring their babysitter who is locked outside, fail to notice his parents come

home and he looks up to see Rosalyn, his mom and his dad standing before him. There are serious consequences for his actions.

There are consequences for us too if we do not open the door but God doesn't give up (cf. Romans 3:3,4). He is more persistent than the babysitter. He is more persistent than an unwanted salesperson or a family member who you just don't want to see. He is like the person with a political pamphlet, vacuum, or (in the old days) an encyclopaedia set who is pounding on our door and is not going away. With Him, He has His 'Word of Truth' and He is calling out. He is crying out. "Hello. Is anybody in there? Hello, is anybody in there?" And the more He yells for us in this country to open the door, the more we seem to turn up our TV sets or our on-line programming so we can't hear him. "Hello, Hello, Hello," He still yells because He wants our attention, "Is anybody in there?" But we – in this country - seem to duck beneath the window and hide ourselves in our work or in our entertainment or even in our sin that we keep deep inside ourselves because we don't want 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, it seems. But He is still calling. 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 behind the affluence of Canada and He is calling. He is calling us each out by name, 'Susan', 'Michael', 'whoever'... He is calling us, begging us to turn down the distractions provided by our life and let Him in.

Please let us let our dear Saviour in because we know that just like the six year-old Calvin can't survive without the protection of his babysitter, mother, or father; so also, no matter how self-sufficient we think we are, in reality we cannot survive without the protection of our own Heavenly Father.

So let us today, as Jesus is still knocking persistently and relentlessly, let us look out the windows of our own souls, let us see Him and let us invite Jesus 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 our Guidebook to Romans' Road. If you have never walked down this road to salvation, I would invite you to do so right now. There is no time like the present to invite Jesus into your life. Please pray with us:

Dear Lord,

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

In Jesus, Name.

Amen.

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### 3. FOR ALL HAVE SINNED

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- [4] Wright, NT. *The Shape of Justification*. Available on-line at: [www.thepaulpage.com/Shape.html](http://www.thepaulpage.com/Shape.html), April 2001.

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- [2] Dunn, James D.G. *Romans 1-8*. WBC 38A: Word Books: Dallas, Texas, 1988.

### 5. WHILE WE WERE STILL SINNERS, CHRIST DIED FOR US

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### 6. SAY IT, KNOW IT, DO IT!

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## 10. HELLO, IS ANYBODY IN THERE?

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