



## ▶ DAILY DEVOTIONAL.

**Saturday & Sunday, 9/1-2/18**

**The Heart Set Free**

**All Need the Gospel**

**Romans 3:21-26 (New International Version)**

*But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood — to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished — he did it to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.*

**Family Activity:** Gratitude moves us closer toward feeling God’s grace and love. Try this for a family prayer at dinner time, or any time. In a circle, looking at each other, join hands. The leader says: Thank you God. (Everyone repeats.) Then the leader names one person or thing he/she is thankful for. (Everyone repeats.) The pattern continues until all are done, ending with “Thank you God. Amen!”

**Monday, 9/3/18**

**“Meet Paul”**

**Acts 9:1-18 (NIV)**

*Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?”*

*“Who are you, Lord?” Saul asked.*

*“I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,” he replied. “Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.”*

*The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.*

*In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!" "Yes, Lord," he answered.*

*The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight."*

*"Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem. And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name."*

*But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."*

*Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord-Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here — has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength.*

Paul experienced one of the most dramatic conversion experiences recorded in the Bible. It lasted for days! He moved from being a persecutor of Jesus' disciples to the primary force in starting and growing Christian churches. I think it is worth noting that Paul never met Jesus, except in his conversion experience.

Paul communicated with the churches he established through letters, personal visits and visits by his followers. Although there are many letters (epistles) in the Bible attributed to Paul, scholars are not in agreement as to which ones were truly written by him. However, the letter of Paul to the Romans is widely regarded as his "most carefully considered, rhetorically sophisticated, and theologically important writing." (Wesley Study Bible, pg. 1418) It was written near the end of his ministry to a church founded by others. It is often referred to as "the most commanding exposition of the gospel of salvation by grace through faith ever written." (The New Interpreter's Study Bible, pg. 2007)

- Paul's experience does not stand alone. It is not as though he experienced a stirring worship service or a good sermon. He experienced the very presence of Jesus in a way that transformed every part of his life. His encounter with Jesus threw him off his high horse to a life of humility, service and discipleship. Have you had a life-changing experience with Jesus?
- How did it change your direction in life?

**Prayer:** Dear God, thank you for Jesus and for the Bible that shows us how your love turns us around, puts us on a fresh path, and leads us in ways of grace and peace. In Jesus' name. Amen.

**Tuesday, 9/4/18**

**“Greeting”**

**Romans 1:1-7 (NIV)**

*Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God — the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures regarding his Son, who as to his earthly life was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord. Through him we received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith for his name’s sake. And you also are among those Gentiles who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.*

*To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be his holy people:*

*Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.*

Paul begins his letter by identifying himself, and the gift of *grace* received through Jesus Christ. He moves through the chapter teaching the reader that Jews and Gentiles (non-Jews) are called to belong to Jesus. Then he establishes how humanity has set themselves apart from this grace by worshipping the creation rather than the creator. (Consider how this might loop back to the sermon series on simplicity.) Paul states (1:26) God has abandoned those who turn away. This means we are left to our own devices, our egos and our very selves for judgment.

- How do you define *grace*?
- How does *grace* make a difference in your life?
- What are some ways you can extend *grace* to others?

**Prayer:** God of grace, pour your power upon me. Mend my fragmented places. Stitch together the tears. Fill me with your love, grace and courage that I may live and love like Jesus in whose name I pray. Amen.

**Wednesday, 9/5/18**

**“Change of Heart”**

**Romans 2:1-11 (Common English Bible)**

*So every single one of you who judge others is without any excuse. You condemn yourself when you judge another person because the one who is judging is doing the same things. We know that God’s judgment agrees with the truth, and his judgment is against those who do these kinds of things. If you judge those who do these kinds of things while you do the same things yourself, think about this: Do you believe that you will escape God’s judgment? Or do you have contempt for the riches of God’s generosity, tolerance and patience? Don’t you realize that God’s kindness is supposed to lead you to change your heart and life? You are storing up wrath for yourself because of your stubbornness and your heart that refuses to change. God’s just judgment will be revealed on the day of wrath. God will repay everyone based on their works. On the one hand, he will give eternal life to those who look for glory, honor and immortality based on their patient good work. But on the other hand, there will be wrath and anger for those who obey wickedness instead of the truth because they are acting out of selfishness and disobedience. There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. But there will be glory, honor, and peace for everyone who does what is good, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. God does not have favorites.*

Read verses 3-4 again and respond to the questions.

- As you consider your relationships with others, do you think you will escape being judged when you see others experiencing what you think you deserve? What does this mean to you: *Or do you have contempt for the riches of God's generosity, tolerance, and patience?*
- *Don't you realize that God's kindness is supposed to lead you to change your heart and life?* How does accepting and living into God's grace and kindness change your heart and life?

**Prayer:**

Change my heart oh God  
Make it ever true  
Change my heart oh God  
May I be like You

You are the potter  
I am the clay  
Mold me and make me  
This is what I pray

Change my heart oh God  
Make it ever true  
Change my heart oh God  
May I be like You  
(by Kenny Carter)

**Thursday, 9/6/18**

**“John Wesley”**

**Romans 3:21-26 (The Message – This version adds a new perspective.)**

*God Has Set Things Right*

*But in our time something new has been added. What Moses and the prophets witnessed to all those years has happened. The God-setting-things-right that we read about has become Jesus-setting-things-right for us. And not only for us, but for everyone who believes in him. For there is no difference between us and them in this. Since we've compiled this long and sorry record as sinners (both us and them) and proved that we are utterly incapable of living the glorious lives God wills for us, God did it for us. Out of sheer generosity he put us in right standing with himself. A pure gift. He got us out of the mess we're in and restored us to where he always wanted us to be. And he did it by means of Jesus Christ.*

John Wesley is the founder of Methodism. Paul's letter to the Romans had a profound effect on his life and the denomination. Here is Wesley's journal entry:

In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's Preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter to nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the hearts through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation, and an assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death. (Wesley Study Bible, pg. 1418: *Works*, "Journals," May 24, 1738)

- What does it mean for your heart to be “strangely warmed?”
- What do you need in your spiritual journey to lead you from a spiritual experience to a life of discipleship?

**Prayer:** Dear God, I have felt my heart strangely warmed by your love. I have experienced your grace. Help me to be strengthened, guided and moved by your presence to lead others to share in your love and grace. Amen.

**Friday, 9/7/18**

**“But Now”**

**Romans 3:21-26 (CEB)**

*But now God’s righteousness has been revealed apart from the Law, which is confirmed by the Law and the Prophets. God’s righteousness comes through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ for all who have faith in him. There’s no distinction. All have sinned and fall short of God’s glory, but all are treated as righteous freely by his grace because of a ransom that was paid by Christ Jesus. Through his faithfulness, God displayed Jesus as the place of sacrifice where mercy is found by means of his blood. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness in passing over sins that happened before, during the time of God’s patient tolerance. He also did this to demonstrate that he is righteous in the present time, and to treat the one who has faith in Jesus as righteous.*

Two little words, *but now*, shape this entire passage. The contrast between the previous two chapters and this one is not between law and grace. It is about the difference between our human condition apart from Christ and the human condition seen in “the light of God’s saving act in the cross of Jesus.” (The People’s New Testament Commentary, pg. 476) Paul is primarily concerned with **God’s** act in the cross and resurrection. So, the *but now* is not about a chronological change in God’s relationship to humanity. Paul emphasizes in the next chapter “that God has always been gracious and that believers have always been justified by trust in God’s faithfulness.” (pg. 476) Thanks be to God!

- What is the “but now” experience in your life? Where have you seen shifts in your faith life?
- What does it mean to you that God has always been gracious to you?

**Prayer:**

Dear God, I have experienced troubles in my life; but now I know I am not alone.

Dear God, I have felt sorrow and pain; but now I know peace.

Dear God, I have known disappointment; but now I know hope.

Dear God, I have been hurt; but now I know love.

Amen.

***This week’s devotions were written by  
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