

Episode 118

For I am not ashamed of this Good News about Christ. It is the power of God at work, saving everyone who believes - the Jew first and also the Gentile. This Good News tells us how God makes us right in his sight. This is accomplished from start to finish by faith. As the Scriptures say, "It is through faith that a righteous person has life."

- Romans 1.16-17

At the very outset of his letter to the church in Rome, Paul lays the groundwork for the gospel he has been appointed to preach, and although these two verses are probably the most familiar in the entire book, they have a lifetime of discovery wrapped up inside them.

To make sure we fully grasp the wonder of these verses, we need to start with the message that Jesus preached. Page through Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John and you will find Jesus declaring again and again "Repent for the kingdom of God is at hand." Unfortunately, the way we hear this is "repent, you dirty, rotten, wicked sinner. Repent. Change the way you are living, turn from your sin and you can go to heaven." But Jesus doesn't say that.

When Jesus called people to repent, he used the word "metanoia". Meta, means change, while noia refers to one's mind. So when Jesus called people to repent, he wasn't calling them to change their behaviour, rather, he was urging them to change their minds. In other words, Jesus went about preaching "change the way you are thinking for the kingdom of God is at hand." Thinking about what? Change the way you have been thinking about how you can have a right relationship with God.

This is what Paul builds his letter to the Romans on. Read these verses in light of Jesus' calling us to "metanoia", or change our thinking. First Paul says the good news is all about a God who makes us right in his sight. It's all up to him, we add nothing. Then he emphasizes the fact that this free gift of salvation is accomplished from start to finish by faith. In other words, it's done. All we get to do is accept or reject it. And so we need to change our thinking. Do we really believe God can forgive our sins? Do we really believe that what he has done is enough, and there is nothing I need to do but accept the unconditional covenant he wants to make with me?

Man, there are days when I have to read and re-read that statement. There are moments when I have to chew on those verses until they are mush because the world keeps telling me otherwise, my faults and failures scream that it's not true, and my insecurities believe every last lie. Maybe that's why they say repentance isn't a once-off event. Rather, I need my mind renewed day by day, I need to change my thinking over and over again until I am truly captivated by the simplicity and safety of the Good News.

ONE33