

THE NEWS THAT SHOOK THE WORLD—1

Some of us have been in Calcutta, Bombay, Delhi, Colombo, Manila, Cairo, the burned out sections of northern Ireland, the sad cities of the former USSR-- tragedy suffering, gloom, despair. And if we came away the same persons as went there we deserve to stay but may I point you to a world that was worse---the world of the Roman Empire in the time of Christ. Outwardly it was a glorious structure, magnificent, strong, wealthy but wicked. All the different streams of evil from east, west, north and south, the vices of barbarism, the vices of civilization, the remnants of ancient cults, the latest refinements of luxury and impurity all met and mingled on the banks of the Tiber; the city of Rome and underneath that glorious structure of the empire, terrible, terrible suffering, perhaps up to sixty million slaves who ate with the beasts of the fields, who slept in stables, who by mere whim could be crucified and in the process limbs hacked off and tongue cut out. Six thousand slaves were crucified on the Appian Way after the revolt under Spartacus, six thousand crucifixions along one road. Most of them could own nothing, could not marry. It was a violent world. But we are conditioned to violence. The average young person growing up in a home where TV is not processed or controlled sees thousands of deaths before they leave high school. Ours is a violent world. Not only was there violence at the end of life but at the beginning, infanticide. It was perfectly legal. We do it too but we call it abortion. Then there was suicide, very common, almost popular. Suicide is now endemic in the western world. The countries that have the most by way of material prosperity have the most suicides. Where people are scrambling for enough to eat they do not suicide...only where people have time to think about death and what is after death, that is where they

suicide. It was a world where marriage was little esteemed. Even emperors like Marcus Aurelius lived in concubinage. There were no standards of sexual morality, even if a man were married, and very little for the woman. It was a sad tragic world but to it came glorious strange news. Rome was used to plenty of Gods. They had them in the pantheon, wicked gods, cruel gods, lustful gods but now came news that shook the Roman world, of a God who loved those that did not love him, a God who accepted the unacceptable, a God who caused his sun to rise on the evil and the good, sent his rain on the just and the unjust and was kind to the unthankful and to the evil—what a message! It changed the empire after many martyrdoms, after Nero dipped the Christians in tar and used them as beacons for his beer garden. There was persecution after persecution but the blood of the martyrs was the seed of the church for men had found the secret of joy. They found there is something after death for those that are humble enough to receive it. There was glorious immortality, a life that would measure with the life of God and before that, something more wonderful, the forgiveness of sins and the cleansing away of guilt.

There is only one book in the Bible that systematically sets forth that good news, one book. They all have fragments of it but only one book sets it forth systematically. This book is the first of the epistles because it is the most important. In the epistles we have letters to seven churches...Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians, but Romans is first. Thessalonians is about the second advent—every chapter, first and second Thessalonians, the second coming. That is not good news unless you understand the meaning of the first coming. Any group that preaches the second advent except through the lens of the cross is perverting the Gospel. We are not ready for

that glorious epiphany until we have taken shelter under the cross—the climax of the first advent.

So, Romans is the first of the epistles and it deals with our first great problem. You know, the power of sin can never be broken in the life until the guilt of sin is removed....that bad temper, that impurity, that gluttony, that worry, that cruelty, that spirit of gossip, that maliciousness; the power of sin is never broken until the guilt of sin is taken away. It is in this book we learn that all our guilt is like a grain of sand along the mountain of God's forgiveness, that all our sin is like a spark falling into the ocean of God's mercy. It is in this book that we learn that God is one who justifies the ungodly, more willing to save you and me than a mother to save her child from a burning home. That's good news. We all have a passionate desire, a driving motivation to be accepted. Relationships are what matter most in life, not money, not apparent business success, academic glory—relationships are what matter most but life is triangular. Until I am right with God and I know he accepts me, I cannot accept myself. You know the loudest sound in the world? The silent cry of a guilty conscience is the loudest sound in the world. It is usually not for things done because you and I do not have the courage to do terribly bad things, it is about things undone—for our spouse, for our sons and daughters, for our parents, brothers and sisters, for our brothers and sisters in the faith, for our neighbors undone...Inasmuch as you did it not unto the least of one of these, you did it not unto me. What a piercing, scary statement to all of us because none of us can say, "Which of you convicteth me of sin?" None of us can say, "I do always those things that please Him."

So here is a book that deals with our biggest problem, how to be accepted by God that I might accept myself and when I can accept myself then I can accept others. I know I have faults, innumerable, so why should the similar number of difficulties with my brother or sister prevent me from accepting them? There is the triangle, accepted of God, you can accept yourself; when you accept yourself you can accept others. You can always tell someone that has never found acceptance with God. They are bitter, they are critical, they love to gossip. They feast on the errors of their brothers and sisters. That is the sign they have never been able to accept themselves because they do not know acceptance with God. So here is a book that deals with this issue of acceptance, deals with how to get rid of guilt. It answers all the great problems of our lives; why suffering, why tragedy, why sorrow, if God is good and all powerful---why? What follows death? How should we live? What should our relationship be to governments, to church, to family to neighbors? How can we avoid being deceived, particularly by bad religion and never forget it, most religion is bad. Unless the religion we cherish makes us kind, courteous, tender-hearted and pitiful, it is not the religion of Christ. A religion merely of dogma that makes us better than them other folks that don't know as much as we do-- what a deception! The greatest deception of the human mind is that a mere assent to the truth constitutes righteousness. The Gospel breaks the heart. It changes the mind. We come to it with the 'excepts' of Jesus ringing in our ears..."Except a man or a woman be born again, they cannot see the kingdom of Heaven....except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish....except you eat the flesh of the son of man and drink his blood, there is no life in you." If people only knew the value of the book of Romans, they would fight to get it. And then they would spend their life studying it as though their lives depended on it because they do.

Martin Luther said, “Romans is the chief part of the New Testament and the purest Gospel.” Godet said, “It is the masterpiece of the human mind and the cathedral of the Christian faith.” Coleridge said, “It is the most profound writing in existence.” Calvin said, “Every Christian should feed upon it as the daily bread of his soul.” Tyndale said, “Romans is a light and a way of the whole of Scripture.” Karl Bart in more recent years after writing on Romans said, “Religion is grace and ethics is gratitude.” Grace, God’s righteousness at Christ’s expense—that’s what grace is.

Turn with me, please to Romans, the 1st chapter. We will but introduce this magnificent book tonight...Romans, chapter 1. There are two revelations discussed in this first chapter. In verses 16 and 17 we read that the Gospel is the revelation of the righteousness of God but before we think about that, I want you to look at verse 18, “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 and eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen being understood from what has been made so that men are without excuse.” Two revelations—the revelation of the righteousness of God; a revelation of the wrath of God against who? Those that do not let him be God. You know, it is easy to tell whether we know God is God. The main sign, of course, is that of I Corinthians 13: “Now abideth faith, hope, love, but the greatest of these is love, love that suffers long and is kind, love that envies not, love that vaunts not itself, not puffed up, seeks not her own, bears all things, believes all, hopes

all things.” That love is manifest in an attitude that is rarely discussed in the Christian church today in the depth it deserves. The real test of whether we have love to God is whether we show in thought and word and deed that we know that we are certain that we are not our own, that we have been bought with a price, that our eyes are his. I dare not set idols before them or expose them to lustful scenes. My ears are his, not to listen to people who are carving up one person after another with their malicious knifely tongues. My ears are his. My stomach is his. I am not to make a God out of my belly. My mind is his, “Whatsoever things are true and pure, if there be any virtues, think on these things.” My tongue is his to speak his praise, not to complain, not to grumble for I am to remember that not one word should be spoken unadvisedly, that when I stab someone with a word I may pierce them for the rest of their lives and what I do to them I do to Christ. “When you sin against the brethren,” says Paul, “you sin against Christ.” And so the real sign that I have found the real God is when I acknowledge in thought, word, and deed from minute to hour, to day, to week, to month, to years that I know I am not my own, that I own nothing, that my time is his. How could it ever be true that Christians would spend more time inviting pagan hucksters into their dining rooms and lounges, than they spend with the love letter of God? How could that ever be true? How could it be true that people could profess Christ and give more time to the things that glorify lust, cruelty and materialistic covetousness than to the things of God. And so Paul says, “The wrath of God is revealed against those that do not know God as God.” And I am without excuse. He says, “Since the creation of the world the evidence about the existence of God is there.” There may be some here who are unaware of the great revolution that has taken place in science in our day. I can remember in the 1940s as a boy in high school encountering evolution. God is

left behind the door, we don't need God, we have no need for that hypothesis, chance is king. In those days the greatest scientific minds like Einstein said the universe is eternal. It didn't have a creator. Do you know that is out of date now. That is passe. That's now a fairytale. In the last decade because of satellites we have learned more about the universe than all the milleniums of history have taught us in the last decade but it began back in the 1920s. Men like Hubbel and others began to study the universe and found it was an expanding universe and in harmony with the second law of thermodynamics about anthropy, that all nature tends to run down like a bachelor's kitchen. They found that the universe, though it was expanding, was also decaying and, finally, in the 1960s came the evidence the universe had a beginning. Now the pagans call it the "big bang." Christians know it is creation. Einstein, in his time, rejected the thought. Eddington said it was a blasphemous idea to the physicist. Today the vast majority of scientists admit there was a time when the universe began....what is known as the as the anthropic principle. There are an infinite number of preconditions for life. Some of you will remember that glorious picture when the space craft touched down on the moon and the camera is pointed over the edge of the black dismal crater of that barren land to another world of blue and white, a glorious world, our world, and those who saw that, the picture from the moon of the earth, realized that this world was something wonderful. Here all the preconditions for life have been met. It is known as the anthropic principle. Those of you who want to study it, here's one book that lists many of the reference works, **THE FINGERPRINT OF GOD**, by Hugh Ross. He lists many, many non-Christian scientists and authorities admitting that this world is a contrived invented place. Fred Hoyle, former atheist said, "The possibility of our world coming about by chance is the same a s Boeing 747 emerging from a typhoon

hitting a junk yard. You know, if we were a little nearer the sun all the water in the planet would boil away, soon there would be no water. If we were a little further from the sun all the water would freeze. Our bodies will only function within a certain range of temperature—get a little closer, we burn up, a little further away, we freeze up.

At the time of creation the scientists now admit that had that first act that launched the universe been a trillionth of a trillionth of a trillion slower, there would have been no universe. If it had been a trillionth, of a trillionth, of a trillionth faster there would have been no universe. That is why from all the areas of science now comes the confession that this world is not a chance production. It had a creator as verse 20 of Romans I says.

Why do I dwell on this? Because, dear friends, there is no use talking to most people about sin. What is sin? You mean when I forget something or make a mistake at work? Unless they believe in a holy creator who owns us, who has redeemed us, unless they know they are not their own, that every cent, every talent, every moment is God's to be used to his glory; unless they know that you cannot talk to them about sin. This is a post-Christian world. We must open our eyes. It is not like Moody's day when you could meet a man in the street and say, "Are you saved?" If you say that today you would mean what—from a car accident, from getting to the airport late, from the IRS, the government? What do you mean? Dear friends, it is not a Christian world any longer. In Europe there are whole countries where less than 2% attend church.

And so, we must first of all tell people the old attitude of science vs. religion is dead to the informed. Giastro (?), the great astronomist said, "It is just as though the scientists are

wearily toiling up the mountain of knowledge and with tremendous efforts they reach the summit and there is group of theologians already there. That's what has happened. In Darwin's day they thought the cell was a little blob that could have come together in some dark pool. Now we know that every cell, and we have billions in our body, that every cell has more information than any huge automated car factory that is using robots like in Japan and computers, every tiny cell in you body had more information than any great automated factory. DNA, that molecule—in a single molecule there are more facts than in all the books of Britannica, the whole 30 up to date volumes again and again and again, not just one edition, several editions, some have even said a thousand editions. Every atom, dear friends, the neutron is slightly larger than the proton. You say, so what! Well when they are neutrons they break down to protons and that is okay but if it had been the opposite, if the proton had been a little larger than the neutron, the proton when free, is pure hydrogen. It would have meant that 74% of the universe would have unraveled because 74% of the universe is hydrogen. So every atom testifies to the magnificent genius of our Creator who made this world to be inhabited by you and by me.

Paul Davies, a non-believer, non-Christian said the possibility of this world coming about by chance is as if you took some sort of rifle that could reach across space and hit a one inch target twenty billion light years away. Another atheist said it is as though 10 to the 50th of people....now to understand that number you have to remember that all the grains of sand on the seashores of the world is only 10 to the 25th and all the atoms of the universe is only 10 to the 80th and all the moments of time from the very earliest time, the very

earliest the universe could have been created is 10 to the 18th. Now says this atheist scientist, “If we get this many people, 10 to the 50th, that is more people, far, far more people than if there are many earths and we are counting every grain of sand in all the earths and you give them each a Kubics cube. You know what it is, this strange little gadget where you are trying to find and resolve the number correctly and they are all blind these people—the possibility of chance for the creation of the world is about the same as if you had 10 to the 50th which is many, many more times than the population of the earth of blind people resolving this cube at the same moment.” Another famous scientist and philosopher, William Craig, says the possibility of the universe coming about by chance is 10 billion to the 124th. In other words, there is no possibility.

I must move on but I want to remind you, it is no use talking to people about sin. They must first know there is a holy God and that we are answerable to him-- after death, the judgment. People are not afraid that death is the end, they are afraid it is not and they are right, it is not. It is appointed unto men to die but after this, the judgment when men will give an account of every idle word, every evil deed, every thing left undone. There is the man in the hospital visited by a friend—is there something I can do for you? Is there something I can do for you and the poor man in the bed says, “Oh for someone who could undo.” Come to 16 and 7 please. Here is the other revelation, “I am not ashamed of the Gospel, it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes, first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.” In the Gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last just as it is written, “The righteous will live by faith,” or as

some translations give it more accurately, “He through faith is righteous, shall live.” The first five chapters use the those words faith and righteous over and over but not ‘live.’ Because that is talking about Christ for us; that is talking about Calvary, about justification, that is talking about forgiveness of sins. But when you move into sanctification, that is talking about living. No good talking about living until you have been forgiven. “He who is righteous by faith shall live.” The one who by faith is righteous shall live. But please note, this righteousness comes from God. It does not say thee, it says a righteousness from God. Luther said, “I hate that verse; how can God expect me to be righteous when I am a sinner, born crooked, total depravity?” This is true of all of us which does not mean as bad as bad can be, it means bad in every area of the being. The Bible says we are born blind spiritually. All the characters Christ worked miracles on represented me, you, the paralyzed, the lepers, the blind, the deaf, the dumb. That is us spiritually, depraved. Luther said, “How can God accept me a depraved creature who only lives for myself?” Then one day he saw it. He said, “I found the key to the Bible.” He said, “Heaven flew open, paradise was mine.” The righteousness spoken of in this verse is God’s gift to whoever believes the good news. That is why it says a righteousness from God given to the empty hand of faith and, dear friends, don’t misunderstand faith. It is not something you work up, it’s not for the good psychologist. Faith is God’s gift to anyone that hears the good news as long as they do not resist it. Do you see it? Only God has given the way, only heaven can be had for the asking.

So Paul says, “I am not ashamed of the good news.” Luther now says, “I see it.” There is the connection between Gospel – good news, righteousness and faith. Righteousness is God’s gift to all who hear the Gospel and do not oppose it. If we understand the message of

Romans, we will be filled with all joy and peace in believing and one of the reasons is because we have in our pocket the verdict of the last judgment. That is not bad, is it? That's what the word 'justification' means. It means you have the verdict of the last judgment now. Justification does not mean to make us righteous inside out. Once you come out of the baptismal pool you will still have to fight bad temper, lust, gluttony, anger and all the rest. Justify does not mean make us internally righteous, it means to 'declare' us righteous. Remember those famous words that the Christian is _____ justus et peccata—simultaneously righteous and a sinner. In ourselves always sinner; in Christ always righteous. That is the good news, that I with all my faults and failings, imperfect husband, imperfect father, imperfect minister, imperfect everything except I am a perfect sinner. However, despite all that, because I have found Christ and I have turned my back on the old life and despite many a stumbling, I am counted righteous and I can never be lost while looking to Jesus despite a thousand falls a day.

The Christian hates sin, flees from sin, looks to Jesus but there are still many a stumble, dear friends. Some day compare the description of the Christian in **PILGRIMS PROGRESS** with what you read in a lot of religious pap sold in the book stores. The book stores will tell you that once you become a Christian, no more problems, everything solved, don't have to fight temptation, you've won over it, no problem now, it's under your feet, it's a great life and everything is going my way (with Bing Crosby). That is not true. Simul justus et peccata (?) the Christian is simultaneously righteous and a sinner. I still have a sinful nature though God has come and given me a new nature that dominates the old

moment by moment as I look to Jesus. Remember we are called to the Christian walk and a walk is a continually interrupted stumbling. James 2:3, "In many things we all offend." In many things all of us offend but I have the verdict of the last judgment. He has declared me righteous. I see the truth at the cross. Christ was made what he was not, treated as though he were a sinner...why? So that I who am a sinner can be treated as though I am righteous. That is the message of Romans, dear friends.

Let me say two or three more things and then I must stop. You know, in the play Hamlet, when Ophelia went mad she gave flowers to everybody. Paul does not do that, he is not mad. This book is like a lawyer's brief. In chapter 1, if you look at the last verses following what I read in 18 to 20, he talks about the heathen. They claim to be wise, they became fools, exchanging the glory of the immortal God for images and God gave them up. He gave them up three times. That is pretty thorough, isn't it? And all the people in church who were listening to Romans were saying, "Give it to them Paul, give it to those Romans, give it to those pagans," and then he says, and YOU who go to church every Lord's day, YOU, do you violate the law of God? Do you love like Jesus? Do you accept the unacceptable? Do you pray every day, "Forgive me my trespasses as I forgive those who trespass against me?" And in chapter 2 Paul says of God, do you love like Jesus? Do you accept the unacceptable? Do you pray every day, "Forgive me my trespasses as I forgive those who trespass against me?" And in chapter 2 Paul says, "You religious people, unless you have found the Gospel, if you are trusting in your own goodness, you are lost too." You may be like the Pharisee who stood and prayed thus with himself, "I thank thee, God,

I am not like other men,” but he was lost.” Then in chapter 3 he quotes 14 statements from the Old Testament, “There is none that doeth good, there is none that seeketh after God; they have all turned out of the way...the way of peace they have not known...what things whatsoever the law says, it says that them who are under the law that every mouth may be stopped and everyone becomes guilty before God.” Here we are all brought up to the judgment bar, black and white, red and yellow, rich and poor, learned and ignorant, all of us in the dark and all of us condemned.

You can’t get rid of law but law will not save us. Law only condemns us. You can’t become good by keeping the commandments. That is like trying to muzzle the devouring beast. Desire always overcomes law. The imagination always defeats your traditional standards so Paul can say in that third chapter, “There is no difference, no difference, only two types of people in the world, disreputable sinners and reputable sinners.” There are only two types of people in the world...all sinners. And so he has us in the dark; he condemns us and then an advocate stands up and people look at him, oh what love, what wisdom, what compassion, what empathy in that face and suddenly he collapses and he is gone for three days. Then, suddenly, he comes and stands up again all glorious. The angels are surrounding him and then we read these words from chapter 3, and this is the acropolis of the Christian faith, verses 21 forward: “But now our righteousness from God,” you see, all those verses from chapter 1 verses 20 to now was parenthesis, saying you had better know you need this Gospel; if you don’t know I can’t help you. There is no more hopeless sin than to think you have no sin. No one is further from God than the person who thinks,

hey, God owes me something. So all these verses in between from chapter 1: 20 to 3:21 are all parenthesis. Paul is saying, hey, do you know your condition? Unless you know your condition, God himself cannot help you. Isn't it wonderful when you read the four Gospels, there is never a harsh word from our Lord Jesus, to anyone with a sense of need. Isn't that glorious? If you have a sense of need all His promises are for you. You have no sense of need? Pray, pray as you have never prayed before, you are a lost soul. You are hell bound. You are without hope until you say, Lord, I am a hopeless, helpless sinner, help me, help me. So Paul says now our righteousness from God apart from law has been made known to which the law and the prophets testify. That righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified freely by his grace." Remember religion is grace; ethics is gratitude. Grace—God's righteousness at Christ's expense, justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. Sometime read how the LIVING BIBLE puts it, verses 19 onward, something like this: "Now, do you see it? No one can ever be made right in God's sight by doing what the Law commands." The more we know about God's laws, the clearer it becomes that we are not obeying them. His laws only serve to show that we are sinners. But now God has shown us a different way to Heaven, not by being good enough and trying to keep his law. Now God has shown us a new way—not new, really. It is in the law and the prophets. Now God says he will accept us, acquit us, declare us not guilty if we will trust in Jesus and what He has done and we can all be saved in the same way. It does not matter who we are. It does not matter what we have done. Do you see it, dear friends? You don't have to be good to be saved, you do have to be saved to be good.