

Keynotes from Pastor Tims' am Sermon on 24/5/2020

How to respond to the kindness of God.

(Please read these notes whilst listening to the sermon audio file.)

Romans 2 verses 1 - 11

Romans 2 verses 4 "Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?"

When we move into a house, we rarely leave it in the condition it was in when we bought it. We make changes to the décor and layout that reflect something of our character and personality. The same is true for us as Christians.

Although Jesus accepts us as he found us, he never leaves us as he found us. By his Spirit, he moves into our hearts and then gets to work changing and improving us, putting his mark on us so that we begin to think and act like him.

Salvation from sin is meant to lead to a life of reverent obedience to God.

Ps 130 v3-4 If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? ⁴ But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared.

- The result of forgiveness of sin, brought about by the work of Jesus Christ, is **not** a life of more sin but a reverent fear of God, leading to a life of reverent obedience to him.

The recent series, Jesus - friend of sinners, showed us that those who met Jesus and put their trust in him were never the same again:

- Peter, a self-confessed sinner, became an apostle of Jesus
- Bartimaeus, from being spiritually and physically blind, became a follower of Jesus

- Zacchaeus, from being a greedy thief, became a generous disciple of Jesus
- The sinful woman, from leading an immoral life, became a worshipper of Jesus

The grace of God, having searched for us and found us, accepts us as we are but never leaves us as it found us. Titus 2v11

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, ¹² training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age.

Jesus is the friend of sinners and we benefit from the grace he provides:

- Through his death he removes our sin from us, so God is able to forgive us
- Through his righteous life we have a righteousness that allows us to stand in God's holy presence
- Through all he has done for us, God welcomes us as we are

There is a danger, though, that we can conclude that it doesn't matter if we go on sinning, because Jesus has fixed everything for us. To think and live like that is hypocrisy, to which God will respond with justice, but also with amazing kindness that is meant to lead us to repentance and to transformation.

Romans 2 v 4 and the surrounding verses show us this human danger and two divine responses.

1. The human danger of religious hypocrisy

In the first chapter of Romans, Paul has exposed the sin of irreligious people. They deny the existence of God, or rage against him, saying he isn't good and making him into a god of their own imagination. **Romans 1:29-31** lists their sins and shows an ugly picture of life without God:

²⁹They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, ³⁰ slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, ³¹ foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.

Paul now sought to expose the hypocrisy of those religious people in the church who thought they were right with God, perhaps because they:

- had had a religious ceremony performed on them as babies
- attended the local religious gathering

- held positions of authority among their religious group

Listening to this letter being read out in the church, those people would have been feeling very smug, until:

Romans 2 vv1-3 Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgement on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practise the very same things. ² We know that the judgement of God rightly falls on those who practise such things. ³ Do you suppose, O man—you who judge those who practise such things and yet do them yourself—that you will escape the judgement of God?

These moralists were passing judgement on those outside the church, but they were committing the same sins. Their hearts were as far away from God as the pagans they criticised. We see this today in people who have only a nominal relationship with Jesus, when, for example, they:

- say they love him but speak evil against his people
- claim to follow him but are greedy and self-centred.

This is religious hypocrisy, not authentic Christianity. We can see two divine responses to this human danger.

1) The response of divine justice

Romans 2 vv2-3 We know that the judgement of God rightly falls on those who practise such things. ³ Do you suppose, O man—you who judge those who practise such things and yet do them yourself—that you will escape the judgement of God?

God is just and rightly judges religious hypocrites, as well as pagans. We all have a desire for justice, as we find out when anyone wrongs us. As Christians, we believe that sense of justice comes from being created in the image of God. How much more, then, can we expect that a righteous and holy God will deliver judgement and justice against sinners whose hearts are far from him.

- **Paul tells us that God will judge what is in our hearts and not just our actions.**

Religious hypocrisy is met with divine justice.

However, God has a second response.

2) The response of divine kindness

V4 tells us that the God of the Bible is kind, and indeed so kind that Paul speaks of the riches of his kindness. He shows his kindness through his forbearance and patience. Because of his kindness to you, you are not standing before the bar of God's justice today but instead:

- You are being confronted with your sin and your need to repent
- You are being given time to turn from irreligious sin and religious hypocrisy
- You are being given time to turn to Jesus for forgiveness and righteousness

There are two ways to respond to the kindness of God.

a) You might presume on the riches of his kindness by assuming that God won't judge you:

- because you are religious **or**
- because you have got away with your sin thus far **or**
- because he **is** kind, (and therefore you think he won't ever judge you)

This is presumption and foolishness.

b) Repentance

Paul tells us that God's kindness is meant to lead us to repentance. Every human being owes a huge debt of sin, whether they acknowledge God or not. We can never repay it and stand condemned under the justice of God. In his kindness, God offers:

- To write the debt off for us
- To provide a righteousness that will give us a good standing with him
- To show us how we can live in a way that honours him, by giving us the gift of his Spirit to dwell in us so that we can live that life

This offer is not just for the rest of our earthly life but for eternity.

- God cannot keep the offer open forever because one day he is going to bring this world to an end for us. Either we will die and go to stand before him, or he will bring this world to an end, as he has said he will do, and then judgement will come.

- There is still time to repent, until that moment arrives. You may be in denial about your debt of sin, or you may think you can pay it off yourself by doing good deeds but these responses won't allow you to avoid the judgement of a holy God.

The right response to the kindness of God is to repent, admitting your sin and seeking Jesus. Then your debt of sin will be written off. Yet the justice of God demands that **someone** must pay.

- God came himself, in the person of his Son, and satisfied his own justice on our behalf. Jesus paid the debt for us by dying in our place on the cross.

God makes this incredible offer now to cancel the record of all our wrong, and to credit to us the righteousness of Christ.

When we turn to Jesus in repentance and faith, we find that, as our saviour from sin, he:

- Saves us from the **penalty of sin**, being judged in our place
- Saves us from the **power of sin**, changing us from the inside out so we begin to look more like him, showing the riches of his kindness to one another and even to our enemies.

This change takes time, and we need to be patient with one another, but we can be assured that **although Jesus accepts us as he found us, he never leaves us as he found us.**