

27 March 2011 Ray Slade

John 4 Woman at Well
Romans 5 Justification by Faith

My original intention, ie up to 24 hours ago, was to walk us through our gospel reading, Jesus with the woman at the well. However I have been hit by a rethink and I now feel that **a whistle stop tour of Paul's teaching on justification by faith**, from which our first reading came, is better for Lent 3.

In actual fact Jesus, in conversation with the Samaritan woman, is saying very similar things but in a different way. He is giving living water, water that will mean you **never thirst again**. Paul talks of **peace with God, hope into eternity**. Either way it is the authentic Christian gospel. *And it is for all. In the woman Jesus picked a most marginalised individual. A woman of mixed race, with a dodgy sexual past, who doesn't seem exactly quick on the uptake. The message of Jesus, of Paul, the gospel, the good news is for all.*

However I am going to start with **a brief physics lesson**. I haven't given one of those for 5 years now so I'm a bit rusty but here goes. The subject is **radioactivity**, and in particular the radioactive isotope **Iodine 131**. It has 4 more neutrons in its nucleus than the stable isotope I127. It is a beta emitter with a HL of a few days. (OK so far?) It does not arise naturally, like some things which are around us all the time. It only arises in real terms as a **by product of nuclear fission**, in a reactor. Normally not a problem but if the casing of the reactor should be structurally compromised (by explosion, earthquake, tsunami etc) then I131 might escape. It is particularly hazardous because Iodine is readily absorbed by the thyroid gland. Any radioactive iodine might cause cancer to develop.

I131 levels in water in Japan have been found to be beyond the accepted safe level. *(10 million times today)*

But only **tiny amounts** are needed for us to get way beyond the safe limit. **Tiny amounts**. I couldn't get a ppm figure but in another field **lead in air**, it is one ten millionth of a gram per cubic meter. **Tiny, tiny amounts of pollutants** and we are in trouble, short of the required standard.

You may be wondering what this might have to do with our readings.
I will explain in a moment.

Let's go to Romans 5 v1.

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ

One of the most striking lines in the NT. One of my favourites.

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ

Now **justified** means **'just as if I'd'**. Just as if I'd never gone wrong, sinned, done things to displease God etc, made righteous, perfect. And we get to this happy state through **faith** in the forgiveness God offers.

(ie not by supreme efforts but via faith, belief, trust, or as we had last week **rebirth**, born again.)

Do you have and do you experience **Peace with God**? Do you know his forgiveness? Incidentally this word **peace** might be confusing. We are not talking 'yeah man peace!' A life of uninterrupted calm, stress free, no worries at all. Jesus himself said 'I bring not peace but a sword!' Very confusing! Indeed Paul talks in v3 about '**our sufferings**'. No the Christian life is not one of total bliss and untrammelled tranquillity; there is work to do, battles to be fought.

No **peace** here is the long term peace of a restored relationship with our creator. As Paul puts it in v9 the avoidance of **God's wrath** indeed being saved from it.

The effect of this peace is to give **hope**. Ie assurance of a long term future.

V5 And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

Do you have that sense of **genuine, living hope**? Do you have any sense of **God's love being poured into you**? Do you experience that? If not you are missing out.

Why does this **wrath** arise?

V8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

At this point let me give you a couple of other one liners from Romans helpfully read together.

All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God 3v23

The wages of sin is **death** but the gift of God is eternal life through JC our Lord.6v23

2 of the verses I learned 50 years ago shortly after becoming a Christian!

The wrath, the death, the vital need for reconciliation, the absolute need for restored peace arises from sin. **Sin**. Not a popular topic but it is that **sin that separates** us from God.

I sometimes meet people who say 'well I'm not as sinful as all that – I'm quite a good person, certainly there are a lot worse.' And it's true. I'll often say 'He's a jolly good fellow'.

Which brings us back to pollution levels and the **tiny, tiny amount** that pollutes and makes air unbreathable, water undrinkable. (*10M x over the limit have been recorded*) We may not be in the league of some of the dreadful examples we hear on the news or through history but that's not the point. We might indeed be **a paragon of virtue** compared with...x, y, z we could name.

But we are not looking at comparing ourselves with the standard of others. No we look to the **gold standard of total perfection**. It is there we come short, it is there that we need help.

Again Paul helps in our reading

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: **While we were still sinners, Christ died for us**. Since we have now been **justified by his blood**, how much more shall we be **saved from God's wrath** through him. V9

This peace, this hope, this assurance comes from faith in the death of Jesus who took the sin, the guilt, the wrath upon himself. And that word justification is there again. **Justasif I'd never gone wrong through his blood!** In the cross and Christ's death **in our place**.

Let me end with one more Romans line. 8 v38, 39

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For **I am convinced** that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, ^[k] neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to **separate us from the love of God** that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

In his love God has given us a way through that brings peace, hope, reconciliation in a way that is, to use a modern word, sustainable. **Eternally sustainable**.

Is this your experience, your joy?

If not please talk with us, pray with us, take a booklet but don't sight of what it is all about.