



Kirknewton and East Calder Parish Church of Scotland

Minister: Rev Dr André J Groenewald

8 Manse Court, East Calder, Livingston, EH53 0HF

Tel: 01506 884585, Mob: 075 888 458 14, email: groenstes@yahoo.com

www.knec4jesus.org.uk



Date: 5th December 2010

Sermon: Rev Dr André J Groenewald

Reading: Romans 15.1-13

Background to the reading

Paul is writing this letter to the congregation in Rome. Rome was the capital of the mighty Roman Empire and the place where the Emperor and all the people who ruled the world lived and worked. There were also a lot of temples worshipping idol Roman gods and very impressive buildings.

The apostle Paul had never been in the city prior to his imprisonment in Rome. The church was also not founded by him. He most probably heard about the congregation through Aquila and Priscilla while staying with them in Corinth. Researchers assume that he wrote the letter to the Romans while he was staying in Corinth because in the last chapter he also mentions a lot of important people from Corinth like Gaius and Erastus. It seems clear from the letter itself that he did not know **all** the members of the congregation but only a few which he includes in the last chapter. It is also a fact that Paul desperately wanted to visit the congregation during his ministry but never could find the right moment. In chapter 15 he expressed the hope to come to Rome after his visit to Spain. Rome had a large amount of Jews who came to the city. But Emperor Claudius expelled all the Jews from the city including Aquila and Priscilla just before the middle of the 1st century after Christ. It seems clear that the congregation existed of Jewish and Gentile converts to Christendom.

Paul wrote to the congregation in Rome to stress the fact that Jesus Christ died a sacrificial death for all sinners, Jews and Gentiles. God saved each and every one through faith in Christ alone through His mercy and grace. It is a gift from God to everyone that has faith, irrespective of race, or culture. The situation now was that "all have sinned [both Jew and Gentile] and fall short of the glory of God". Researchers are of the opinion that the Apostle wanted to emphasize the contents of the Good News in order to reach other parts of the Empire.

In our reading Paul starts with a very strong argument. They must follow the example of Christ. Therefore they must look after the weak among them. He is the example of the righteous sufferer and then Paul quotes Psalm 69 verse 9 to make his point very clear. It seems as if he is addressing the Jewish Christians in their relationship with the Gentile believers because they would know the Old Testament by heart. If they

truly believe in Him they will know that He suffered the ultimate sacrifice to redeem the sins of humanity. He did not only think of Himself! Then Paul says that the Scriptures, meaning the Law of Moses and the book of the Prophets, were always their norm of instruction. It gave them hope in the past and it will again give them hope for the future but only when they listen!

They must be sensitive to the “weak” among them. In the context of the Letter to the Romans Paul wrote in chapter 14 about the practice of eating meat that was sacrificed for idol worship. If it offends anyone, they must not have it. They must not only think of themselves but of others too whose faith is not so strong and can lead them to stumble and fall into a life without Christ. Paul insisted that the strong be supportive and helpful to those who naturally speaking would be nonproductive in the assembly. People that have strong faith will live in harmony and peace with their neighbours.

They have a responsibility to live the unity with the Gentile believers which they share in Christ. If they manage to live, proclaim the unity they share in Christ, God will be glorified. Christ became a servant of the Jews to demonstrate the truthfulness of God. He fulfilled all the promises of the past. He was the perfect example of obeying the Old Covenant and in the event of his sacrificial death started a new covenant whereby Gentiles are included. The Gentiles can now glorify God for the mercy he has shown to them by including them in His plan of salvation. This being the case, the Jewish Christians must recognize that the incorporation of Gentiles into the people of God is part of God’s plan and try to get along with their fellow Gentile Christians.

In support of the universal scope of God’s redemptive work through Christ his Son, Paul cited four Old Testament passages namely:

- 2 Sam 22:50 and Ps 18:49 where David vowed to praise God among the nations, to sing in honour of his name. Israel was to be the instrument through which God’s redemptive work would extend to the Gentiles.
- The second is from Moses’ great hymn Deut 32:43 celebrating God’s victory over Pharaoh and his army: “Rejoice, O nations, in company with his people” .
- The third is from Ps 117:1, where the writer called upon the nations to lift their voices in praise to the Lord.
- Finally, Paul cited the well-known messianic promise from Isaiah 11. The Messiah will come as a shoot springing up from the stump of David’s family line. He will rule the nations, and on him the nations will “rest their hopes”.

Paul interprets the Greek translation of the Old Testament word for “nations” as meaning “Gentiles” to emphasize the point he tries to make, namely that from the beginning the Gentiles were part of God’s plan of salvation. The original Greek text of our reading also speak of “nations” rather than “Gentiles”.

In verse 13 he is stressing the fact that God is the source of all hope, and because they trust in Him, He will give them joy and peace which will be evident in their lives of faith. He will be with them through the presence of His Holy Spirit.

At this point Paul’s great argument comes to a close. From here to the end of the letter he deals with several matters of a more personal nature. He had told them in detail of the gospel he preached. It supersedes the Jewish law but maintains the

moral demands for which the law stood. The new morality it creates is God's righteousness at work in human lives. These are the themes that have dominated the earlier chapters. Now it was up to the Romans to evaluate all that the apostle had written.

Amen

Sermon

The text verses are 1-3

"We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. ²Each of us should please his neighbour for his good, to build him up. ³For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: "The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me."

There are different ways of going through life. You can either be a passenger or a driver. A passenger usually looks out onto the passing scenery in a passive way while the driver is involved in everything that goes on around and on the road. Passengers usually moan a lot about almost everything, in the way the driver goes around corners or forgets to put the indicator lights on. Instead of being part of the solution they become the problem. I guess that is how life works. It is how we look at life's challenges or more accurately our attitude towards life. One is to see in everything a challenge to overcome. Another is to see in everything a problem which cannot be overcome.

Sometimes we as followers of Jesus can be like the church in Rome. It seems as if the Jewish Christians thought of themselves as people with stronger faith and ignoring the challenges that faced them like the situation of the Gentile Christians. Instead of building bridges they saw the Gentiles as a problem that was very difficult to handle. Instead of being drivers facing the challenges, they were moaning passengers forgetting to whom the car belong to. They forgot that they belong to Christ.

Life is all about one's attitude to everything especially with regard to our faith in Jesus Christ. If we say we have faith we ought to look at life through different eyes, the eyes of Christ Jesus our Lord. He did not focus His ministry of grace and salvation on problems that could not be overcome. Indeed He overcame each and every challenging situation with grace and peace. He excluded no one. He was never rude. He was never insensitive to the needs of others. He was a "bridge builder" like none other. He was the truly ultimate example of faithfulness to all of God's demands.

I think this reading challenges us too to lead by example in the weeks leading up to Christmas. Just imagine if we can make a difference this year in the way we treat, speak, judge people who are not necessarily followers of God. Imagine if we can show them how to be truly joyful without drugs or excessive amounts of alcohol or immoral acts. Imagine if we can manage to be at peace with everyone round us. Imagine if we all can try not to gossip one word up to Christmas day. Imagine if every one of us starts reminding one another of our responsibility as followers of Jesus Christ! I mean:

- If anyone uses the Lord's name as a stop word, adjective or swearword in our company let us say LOUD and clear Halleluia! Praise the Lord's Holy name! Can you think of the reaction in a place like Asda?
- If anyone starts speaking of someone else in your company please say to that person: "May the peace of Christ be with you"!
- If anyone ignores someone in your presence, make sure they are included.
- If anyone in your company is making comments about hope and happiness, please say to them LOUD and clear: "Only God can give us happiness and He already did through Jesus Christ our Lord."
- If anyone says in your company Christmas is all about giving please tell them about Jesus Christ who came to the world as a sacrificial lamb to humanity.

I guess our reading focuses our attention again on what it really means to be a follower of Jesus. He is our example. May we glorify His name by our faithfulness to Him in everything we think, do and say in these weeks leading up to Christmas! May we indeed find our current position as outnumbered followers of Jesus not as a problem but as a challenge to overcome with love, faith, goodwill, hope, and peace!

Amen