

ROMANS 5:1-11
A DOOR STANDS OPEN

A door stands open! We catch a glimpse of what is on other side; a wonderful view of fields and hills, blue skies and sunshine; of people playing and enjoying themselves, of all kinds of good things and whatever else you would imagine as your ideal world is there through that door. Someone is standing beside the open door and is waving to us, beckoning us, calling us, inviting us to come through the door to enjoy everything on the other side, reassuring us that everything is as good as it seems. But, we're not sure! We hang back – is it something about the door? Or is there something about the person inviting us? Or is it something in us that holds us back from door? Will we? Won't we? Do we run a risk that if we go through the door, all will not be as promised? Will we somehow be cheated by a promise? Or that the person inviting us is not to be trusted? Or that we will be found out for what we really are and be disqualified from prize and be thrown out.

In Romans 5, Paul says: “*Since we...*” (5:1,2) There are so many good words there, but let's focus on one. ‘Access’ is about a door standing open and about people being given opportunity to go through that open door into the grace of God, into a new kind of relationship with God. A door stands open into every blessing that God has promised to us, peace, hope, love, forgiveness, friendship with God. Beside the door, Jesus stands and says “come and taste the good things that God has promised, come find the blessing of God on your life”. We stand and look at the door: we say ‘I've not loved God very much; why should He call me His friend?’ Or ‘I've not been a very good person, why should He make me this offer?’ Or ‘my life is messy; surely I would need to sort my life out first?’ Or, ‘I'm not sure that Jesus will do as He promised; can I really trust Him?’ We stand, looking at that open door, hearing that it leads to God and His grace and blessing and what do we do?

‘Why should God call me His friend? I've not loved Him very much!’ “*We have...*” (v1) “*For if...*” (v10) Peace and reconciliation are notions that we find across the world today. South Africa had its Truth and Reconciliation Commission in an attempt to bring together all kinds of groups that were at war with one another 20 years ago and turn them into friends. “*We have...*” (v1) this is not a wish; this is how it is for us with God. We might say ‘I don't feel very much at peace with God’ but this is not about how we feel; this is how things are for us in Christ. God has taken people who once were His enemies, people who didn't love Him very much if at all, people who went their own way in life, His enemies, and turned them into His friends – “*When we...*” (v10)

Or we say ‘I've not been a very good person; why should God make me this offer?’ There is a simple answer: that is what God is like. Here's a quote from Jas Denney, who was Professor of New Testament and New College and the turn of the 20th century: “If I were sitting on the end of the pier, on a summer day, enjoying the sunshine and the air and someone came along and jumped into the water and got drowned ‘to prove his love for me’ I should find it quite unintelligible... but if I had fallen over the pier and were drowning, and someone sprang into the water and at the cost of making my peril... his own, saved me from death, then I should say, ‘greater love has no man than this’”. (*Death of Christ* p177) “*Very rarely...*” (v7f) The Christian gospel is not about being good people, living a good life, or conforming to a set of good life values. The gospel is about people whose lives are not sorted, who have made mistakes, who have faults and failings and for people like us, Jesus died on cross ‘that we might be forgiven’. All through His ministry, Jesus met people like that and loved them, helped them, forgave them; Jesus took our sin on Himself and died on the cross for us, as sinners forgiven by God and loved by God.

Or we say 'my life is messy; surely I need to sort my life out first?' There is a place in South Lanarkshire called Braehead. The thing about Braehead is that it doesn't have a shopping centre, but it is right in middle of South Lanarkshire; every road you travel has a sign for Braehead; you think that it must be a huge place, because every road leads there. In fact, when you get there, it is a single row of houses! It is a bit of a disappointment! Hope is the place to which Paul is leading us in Romans 5: there are two roads to hope. The first road travels through these 'places': faith, peace, access, hope – that's the road of the gospel and these are the good things that God would give us. The second road goes through another set of 'places': suffering, perseverance, character, hope and this too is the reality of life and we also travel along this road. So the gospel is not about people living a life of sweetness and light; the gospel is not about a life on a pink fluffy cloud; the gospel is about the grace of God touching lives that are not sorted, but messy, touching people who are finding life hard and bringing the blessing of God into lives like that.

Or we wonder 'can I trust the person who invites me?' The person who invites us is Jesus; He stands beside that open door and invites us to come with Him into the blessing of God. Let me take you to the Garden of Gethsemane, on the Thursday before Easter. Jesus is in the garden with His friends, but they have found it hard to stay awake. He is praying. His prayers are agonising – "*Being in...*" (Lk 22:44) What was so hard about this prayer? Well, He was wrestling with His destiny here: "*Father...*" (22:42) The 'Cup' is all about suffering; Jesus knows what tomorrow will bring in the events of Good Friday and He will suffer and die; He knows the agony that tomorrow will be for Him, separated from God for a time, suffering hell on earth for Jesus, as well as the physical pain of the cross. Yet: "*Not my...*" (22:42) The man who is prepared to go to these lengths for us, to lay down His life for us, to suffer and die for us, is a man to be trusted.

At the centre of this gospel stands the cross of Christ. James Philip, once minister of Holyrood Abbey Church died last week and Romans was his book; he wrote an excellent little commentary on Romans; in it he says this: "the cross is the 'place' where the great Creator God overshadows the chaos and darkness of human sin, and speaks the mighty word of power that brings forth light and life for men. It is there that light breaks in upon the darkness of their lives, there that grace touches sightless eyes, opening them to see the loveliness of Christ, there that mercy opens the prison door and puts a royal pardon in their hands." (*Romans* p68,69) A door stands open into the blessing of God and the person who invites us in bears the marks of nails that once tied Him to a cross. The God of the universe, the eternal God – He has done this for us; He has sent His Son into world and His grace and love and power are poured out for us and into our hearts because cross. The Spirit makes that love and grace come alive in our hearts.

We sang Charles Wesley's great hymn 'And can it be' earlier. I always associate that hymn with Romans because there are so many connections with it in Wesley's words. It is the fourth verse that I want to quote because it seems autobiographical:

'Long my imprisoned spirit lay
fast bound in sin and nature's night;
thine eye diffused a quickening ray;
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
my chains feel off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth and followed thee.'" (Hy 396 v.4)

Here was a man who knew what life was really like, that he didn't have all the answers, that everything was not 'sorted' for him; he had made mistakes; his life was messy; it felt as if he was in prison to both his sin and his human nature that kept on getting things in a mess. Yet, into that dungeon of his life, came light and life, grace

that touched his sightless eyes to open them to the loveliness of Christ. Life was changed!

I really don't know what you think or how you feel when we read these words from Romans: "*we have peace with God... access into grace...hope of glory of God.*" (5:1,2) Maybe you think that these words are so far away from real life as to be from a different planet; maybe you think that these words set such a high ideal that you will never reach them; maybe you don't really understand them at all and because you don't understand, you think you can never enjoy the blessing of God of which these words speak. The door maybe open, but you'll never get through it!

This is about real life; this is the blessing of God for all of us; this is not about what we can reach or achieve, because God has brought this blessing to us in Jesus. This is for people whose lives are not perfectly ordered and set; this is for people who have made mistakes and from time to time have got things wrong; this is for people who have not loved God as well as they would like or who have not loved God at all; this is for people whose lives are a mess, so full of stress and anguish and turmoil; this is for people whose lives are full of good things and yet sense that God has more to give. If your life fits any of these descriptions, then this is for you; this gospel is for you to enjoy.

We have peace with God, we are His friends because He has brought about reconciliation. We have access into God's grace; we are people deeply loved by God even when we don't deserve that love. We have hope: in a world where hopelessness and despair are so often the watchwords, we have hope of heaven and the day-to-day sure and certain hope of God with us. We have a Saviour who loves us deeply, who loved us so much that He was willing to put His life on the line for us, to die for us. We have God's forgiveness for our faults, failings, mistakes; they are wiped away and we start with a fresh slate. We have God's love and friendship every step of our lives. All of these gifts, we have! They are ours in Christ; God has given them to us; they are ours.

The door stands open; on the other side is this wealth of treasure; is this life-changing treasure; it is ours in Christ. We see the loveliness of Christ; we see His grace; we see His endless love; we see His mercy that changes our lives. We have... we have... we have...! In Christ, we are people who are rich beyond our wildest dreams; so often we don't see it, or don't know it, or don't enjoy it. Life may be messy; we may not have loved God as well as we might; we may not be as good a person as we would wish; but this is for us, for all of us. A door stands open – the blessing of God is here; it is ours because of Jesus and for faith.