

Pastor Don Schultz
Sunday, October 27, 2024
Romans 1:16-17

The Righteous Will Live by Faith

Romans 1:16-17 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.”

When you walk into a store this time of the year, is it the Halloween season or the Christmas season? Seems like Christmas is already taking over the stores right now with all of the decorations even though it is still the month of October. What I want to talk about this morning is another season - the Reformation season, but I bet you wouldn't be able to find any decorations related to that in most stores.

Reformation - the end of October, early in November - this is the time of the year when we remember what happened a little over 500 years ago, and how God used those to bless his church, then and today. We call what happened the Lutheran Reformation, because a Catholic monk named Martin Luther began to ask questions and write articles that eventually led to many reforms taking place in the Christian church.

The Word of God we are focusing on for this morning's sermon is taken from Romans chapter 1. There's a verse that's very important, not only to the Lutheran reformation, but also to your personal life of faith and your relationship with God. It's that last phrase from Romans chapter 1:16-17, where it says, **“in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.”**

Have you ever studied something, but you just didn't get it? Maybe you're a student, and you're taking a class, and no matter how hard you listen and how hard you read and study, you just don't understand the material: I studied all night, and I failed the test! Or maybe you bought something that requires

assembly, and you look at the directions one way, and you look at the directions another way - and it just doesn't make any sense - you just don't get what the directions were trying to say.

500 or so years ago, there was a man named Martin Luther, and he just didn't get it. He was a Catholic monk in the 16th century, and his goal in life was to make sure that everything was OK between him and God. He wanted God to be happy with him because he knew that someday God would decide if he should go to heaven or hell.

And so, what did Luther do? Well, he became the best student of the Bible you could possibly be. He read. He prayed. But he wasn't getting it. Even though the Bible talked a lot about Jesus and salvation and faith, he didn't see that, just like many people do today. He ignored all of that, and instead - he focused on himself - his actions - his good works - be a good person - be the best version of yourself - and if you try hard enough - God might decide that you are worthy enough to go to heaven.

And so, Martin Luther tried this - but deep down, he knew that something was wrong, he knew that he wasn't getting it - listen to what he wrote here: "I hoped I might find peace of conscience with fasts, prayers, and with vigils, but the more I sweated it out like this, the less peace and tranquility I knew."

Have you ever felt that way? The natural human tendency we all have inside of ourselves because of sin is to ignore what the Bible says about Jesus, and instead, focus on ourselves. Have you ever tried to earn the love of God by being the best version of yourself? "I try to be a good parent. I try to be a good son or daughter. I try to be a good employee at my place of work. I try to be a good friend. A good neighbor. A good citizen. I try to be a good member of this church. I am trying!" Why are you trying so hard? Is it because you're trying to earn the love of God? Are you trying to make God love you more because you try so hard?

Many of us struggle with an inner restlessness - because our conscience knows - if I'm going to earn God's love with my life, then I'm going to have to be perfect. The

Bible would agree - "Be holy," the Bible says, "Be perfect, as your Heavenly Father is perfect" another passage says. Are you trying to be the best person you can be because you're trying to earn God's love?

The more we try, the more frustrated we become. Martin Luther felt this 500 years ago, and he once wrote that he even hated God because it was so impossible to please God by doing good works.

But then as he studied the Bible - he finally got it. The lightbulb turned on in his mind. He was studying that passage that is part of our Scripture lesson for today: "**The righteous will live by faith.**" In other words, if you want to live as a righteous person in the eyes of God, there's only one way to do it - BY FAITH." It's not by works. It's not by striving to be the best version of yourself. If you want God to look at you and call you righteous - it's by faith. And what is faith? Faith is trusting. But trusting in what? Trusting not in my own good works. But trusting in the works of Jesus Christ. Trusting in his perfect life for me. Trusting in his sacrifice on the cross for me. Trusting that I am forgiven of all of my sins because of Jesus. That's faith - trusting in Him, and not myself.

That's how you live, the Bible says - **the righteous will live by faith.** That's how you will someday stand in the presence of God and he will look at you and he will decide what to do with your and my eternal soul. How will you live when you stand in God's presence? How could anyone live in the presence of a perfect who lives in a perfect heaven? **The righteous will live by faith.**

When Martin Luther realized this, he said he finally felt peace. Imagine being that student who finally understands what the professor is saying. Imagine being that person who finally understands what the directions are saying as you put that object together. I get it, Luther said: "I felt as if I were entirely born again... that verse - **the righteous will live by faith** - was for me truly the gate of paradise."

Now I understand - To live with God - it's all about trusting in the works of Jesus, and not earning God's love by trusting in the works of myself. Martin Luther began to speak up about this peace to others. On October 31, 1517, he posted 95 theses - 95 ideas that he wanted to talk about, because it looked to him like too

many people were focusing on themselves and their own good works, and ignoring Jesus and what he did for our salvation. Soon Luther got the attention of the church, and then the whole country of Germany. He didn't mean to cause a big stir and he didn't want all of that attention. He didn't want his name - Luther - to become the name of a denomination - the Lutherans. But that's what happened.

God used this historical event to bring people back to the main teaching of the Bible, and that main teaching is this - if you want to be right with God - if you want to someday stand before God at the moment of your death and have God allow you into heaven. If you want to have peace in your life right now - then - Stop focusing all of your energy on trying so hard to be a good person, trying so hard to earn God's love.

Instead, put your faith in Jesus Christ. Luther once said: "Whoever has faith, will have everything, and whoever doesn't have faith will have nothing." Luther said that, after he finally found peace.

Have you found peace with God? The Apostle Paul once wrote, "Since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." (Romans 5:1) This is the gift of the Reformation, the gift that Martin Luther left behind, the gift that we as Lutherans today enjoy. Did you know that you will live forever? Did you know that someday you will live eternally with God in heaven? Did you know that even right now, you can live with peace in your heart, peace with God - how is all of that possible? Because of what God tells us in Romans chapter 3 - what God tells us in the Gospel: For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith." May God bless you with a strong and enduring faith in your Savior. Amen.