

INI - SDG

Last Sunday of the Church Year

27th Sunday a. Trinity

November 23, 2008

Hecla

Intro: Jude 24-25 *Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, And to present you faultless Before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, To God our Savior, Who alone is wise, Be glory and majesty, Dominion and power, Both now and forever. Amen.*

Text: Romans 16:25-27 *Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which was kept secret since the world began but now has been made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures has been made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith – to God, alone wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen.*

Theme: *Paul's Letter to the Romans: "To God, Alone Wise, Be Glory!"*

Dear fellow sinners made saints by the blood of Jesus Christ, God's own Son,

It is seen most clearly in professional sports. A basketball player dunks the ball over an opponent or scores the game winning shot at the buzzer. A defensive end sacks the quarterback. A wide-receiver or running back takes the football 80 yards to score a touchdown or maybe just gets a first down. When such plays take place in professional sports, how do the athletes usually react to what they have just done? While it may not be the case with all athletes, in the age of ESPN and SportsCenter, we've grown accustomed to seeing athletes drawing attention to themselves and what they've just done by celebrating. They seek to glorify themselves for what they have just done.

Let me tell you about a very gifted man who had the right to glorify himself for his accomplishments, but didn't. Johann Sebastian Bach was a Lutheran organist in Germany who lived in the late 1600's and early 1700's. Bach would often compose a new organ piece for each Sunday. Many of his organ pieces are still used today by our organists and by professional organists throughout the world. Bach was a very gifted man who used his gifts to aid the congregation in worship. Certainly something that benefitted more people than dunking a basketball or catching a touchdown pass. So how did Bach celebrate his accomplishments? At the end of his manuscripts Bach would include the three letters "S.D.G." These three letters were the initials for the Latin phrase - "Soli Deo Gloria" = "To God Alone the Glory." Rather than giving the glory to himself for all his amazing accomplishments, with these three letters "SDG" wished to give God all the glory for what God had accomplished by him.

Today we conclude our sermon series on Paul's letter to the Christians in Rome which we began way back on May 25. It has been said that this epistle to the Romans is a grand summary of all Christian doctrine. In these 16 chapters Paul addresses the soul saving message of the gospel and matters in the Christian's life. As Paul concludes his epistle, like Bach, he concludes it with SDG - To God Alone the Glory! So let us review this sacred book of Romans and see how God, alone wise, gets all the glory. Through out the sermon I will be looking at various

verses and chapters which we covered in Romans. So if you think you can listen and follow along, you may wish to open your Bibles to Romans.

Throughout Scripture there are some things that God reveals to us that are just hard for us to understand. While Scripture is clear that is not always the case with our minds. Things are no different when it comes to Paul's epistles. The Apostle Peter would even write of Paul's epistles, ***"In which are some things hard to understand."*** (2Pt 3:16) Even Peter found some of Paul's material hard to understand.

However, this is not the case with the message of salvation. The message of salvation, the Gospel, is clear and simple. So simple even our youngest Sunday School children know it. The message that Jesus is the Son of God. Jesus died on the cross to take away my sins. And now because of Jesus we get to go to heaven! That is the simple Gospel message. And it is that simple Gospel message of which Paul wrote in chapter 1, ***"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes."*** (1:16) Through the message of the Gospel of Christ, God saves people. Already in chapter one we hear that it is God's work to save people - thus the glory belongs to Him!

As we continued in Romans we came to two verses which many of us memorized in Confirmation class. Chapter 3, verses 23 and 24 - ***"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."*** With these verses Paul addresses the problem for all people. ALL have sinned and thus ALL fall short of God's glory. No one measures up to God's requirement of being holy as He is holy. But to God belongs the glory for He provided the solution to our problem. He justified us freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. It is almost as though Paul wanted to drive the point home with us that we did not think to earn or deserve this justification. There is no reason in us that God should have to declare us not guilty in His sight. Instead it was freely, by grace - His undeserved love - through the redemptive work of Jesus, God declared us not guilty. CLEARLY Paul is saying to God, alone wise, be glory for He did this for us who had sinned and fell short of His perfection!

In verse 27 of chapter 3, Paul makes clear that any boasting on our part is excluded. There is no reason that someone in heaven would behave like that professional athlete who tries to draw attention to himself. There is no work which we did to earn heaven. It was freely, by grace through faith that we stand justified in God's sight. Verse 28 of chapter 3, ***"Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law."*** God declares the sinner to be not guilty before Him through faith in Christ Jesus. It is only through faith in the promises which He has made to us that we stand justified. To God alone the glory!

But if we think of someone in the Bible that may have had something to boast about or glory in, it was Abraham. After all, of all the people that lived on the earth, it was Abraham that God chose to be the father of a great nation and from whose seed the promised Savior would come. Certainly such a highly favored man would have something to boast about. Yet Paul writes in the opening verses of chapter 4 that not even Abraham has something to boast of before God. ***For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something of which to boast, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.'*** (4:2-3) Abraham was justified in the same way you and I are - freely, by grace through faith in the promises of God.

Furthermore, God did for Abraham that which Abraham could not do for himself. When

he and his wife Sarah were well beyond child bearing years God promised them a son. Scripture says of the womb of Sarah that it was dead and yet in their old age Sarah gave birth to Isaac. How could Abraham boast of this? While he was the father of this child, this wasn't his doing - this was God's doing. Abraham merely trusted the promise of God that He could and would do it. And so in chapter 4 verse 20 and 21 Paul writes, "*(Abraham) did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was able to perform.*" Abraham knew this was the work of God and he gave God the glory. And God accounted that faith of Abraham to him for righteousness.

Paul writes that the account of Abraham, Sarah, and Isaac was written for our sake. In the closing verses of chapter 4 Paul writes, "*It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised again because of our justification.*" (4:24-25) Here again we find the simplicity of the Gospel message. Jesus was delivered up because of our offenses - He died on the cross to pay for our sins. Jesus was raised again because of our justification - His resurrection from the dead means God has declared us not guilty. And God imputes His righteousness to us through faith in what He has done. Do we get the glory for any of this? S.D.G. - Soli Deo Gloria - to God alone the glory!

If you are still not sure as to whether or not Christ died for you personally, consider what Paul has to say in chapter 5. In verse 6 he writes, "*For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.*" And again in verse 8, "*But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*" Christ died for the ungodly, the sinner. As an ungodly sinner, there is no reason for God to do anything good for us. As an ungodly sinner all God is required to do is punish us. Yet God loves us. And He doesn't just talk about loving us, He demonstrates His love for us - He shows us how much He loves us, by having His Son die for us. To God, alone wise, be glory!

Paul further emphasizes this glorious Gospel message in chapter 6 with another familiar memory passage. In verse 23 we read, "*For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*" What have we earned for ourselves that we could boast of? Death! What we earned by our sinful life is death. Death is the paycheck for sin. But all glory be to God who gives us eternal life as a gift through His Son Jesus Christ, our Lord.

In chapter 7 Paul considers his own life and conduct. Paul says that he hates what he does. He wants to do the will of God and obey His commandments, but he keeps finding that the good that he wants to do he does not do. Instead the evil that he does not do, that is what he finds himself doing. This same conflict goes on within the heart and lives of every Christian. To this Paul concludes in verse 24, "*O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?*" Who can possibly save the man who knows what the will of God is, wants to do it, and yet fails to do so again and again. Who will deliver us? To God, alone wise, be glory! He is the one who delivers us. Verse 24 and 25 again, "*Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God - through Jesus Christ our Lord!*" It is God who through Jesus Christ delivers the wretched, sinful man from his body of death. Glory be to God for delivering us!

The glorious result of God's work for us in Christ Jesus is triumphantly proclaimed in the first verse of chapter 8 - "*There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.*" For the Christian there is no condemnation! We heard that Christ was already delivered up because of our offenses

and was raised again because of our justification. If Christ already paid for all of our sins by dying on the cross and by raising Jesus from the dead God declared us not guilty, what then is there to condemn us? Only unbelief - those who walk according to the flesh - will be condemned. But whoever walks according to the Spirit, whoever believes on Him will not perish but have everlasting life! To God alone the glory!

What an amazing God we have! No wonder the saints and angels spend their time in heaven singing, ***“You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created.”*** (Rev 4:11) God did all this for us solely out of His grace. Through this amazing Gospel message, Paul says, God is able to establish us, keep us firm in the faith from now and into eternity.

While there may be some things that Paul writes in Romans that are hard to understand, as we have seen today the Gospel message could not be clearer. We are not saved by our works or our effort, but freely by grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. This was God’s plan of salvation from eternity. It was a mystery that was revealed when Jesus came to suffer and die on the cross. This was God’s wise plan to save us and give us the gift of eternal life. His Son would earn it for us and He give it to us through faith in Him. So dare we glorify ourselves? No! S.D.G. - Soli Deo Gloria! To God, alone wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen.