

"The Verdict Is In!"

Lent 4

1)

Romans 8:1-10

2)

March 22, 2020

May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance. (2 Thess. 3:5)

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

A verdict is a decision made after a lot of considering, usually made by the jury in a courtroom. For those of us that remember the trial of OJ Simpson, we may even remember where we were. Some of us may have anxiously anticipated the end of the trial. After the jury hear all of the evidence presented to them, they went into deliberations. It didn't take them very long, around four hours. But I remember a few people at school excitedly saying to everyone within shouting distance – "The verdict is in."

In the court of law a verdict is a pronouncement of judgment. In many ways you could call a verdict quite simply, a declaration. And over the past week, we've been given several declarations. In a short amount of time, our state and national leaders and elected officials have declared –

- Gatherings of all kinds are limited to 250 or less
- International travel to Europe is banned
- Gatherings of all kinds are limited to 50 or less
- All non-essential employees are encouraged to work from home
- Social distancing
- Finally, they declared that...
 - Gatherings are limited to 10 or less
 - All bars and restaurants would be closed; or at least only available for take out or delivery
 - Shelter in place = only go out if absolutely necessary

In regards to COVID-19, also known as Coronavirus, the verdict is in – it is a dangerous and deadly virus. Our government

officials and health experts are urging us to be extremely cautious for the health and safety of our residents.

In Romans 8, the apostle Paul tells us – **“The Verdict Is In.”** This isn’t a murder trial. And it has nothing to do with a deadly virus affecting people all across the globe. The verdict, or declaration, that Paul makes he tells us in v 1 – **Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus...**

This morning I want to study this verdict with you. And most importantly, to help us understand the impact it has on our life – how faith in Christ leads to real change.

(Read Romans 8:1-10)

If you look at the previous chapter, the apostle Paul talks about the battle each and every one of us faces. He tells us, **“For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing.”** Romans 7 focuses on the fact that in every one of us there is a dark mask of self-absorption and self-centeredness. V 1 – Simultaneously, Paul is saying there is “no condemnation.” **“Condemnation”** literally means “judgment against.” Paul is saying that there is no longer any judgment against us. This is the gospel.

There is a story about a family involved in an automobile accident. The car went into a lake. The husband and wife survived, but all three children drowned. The husband and wife greatly witnessed their faith that helped them survive this tragedy and as they had more children and rebuilt their family. Years later, however, the man came to the pastor and confessed his sins. With this sin plaguing him, he received good professional counseling. But the thing he struggled with the most wasn’t the loss of his family. No, it was over his own sin. Here’s a man who could handle great tragedy and the worst suffering, but in the end couldn’t handle calling the possibility of being a sinner.

The gospel gives you the freedom to handle things that you are going to do. Because it’s emotionally unhealthy not to call yourself a sinner. To be able to say that I am capable of terrible things, but I am unconditionally loved by Jesus.

Point 1 – The gospel is the freedom to admit who you are

V 3 – **³For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering.**

Typically, we like to tell ourselves – all I have to do is apply will-power – “I’m going to live the moral law.” In other words, I just need what I’m supposed to do. But, this does not help us w/ God. We strive and strive to live “good” lives. But what Paul talks about here is that we are sworn enemies of God.

⁷ the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so. ⁸ Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. Instead of God being Savior and Lord, you feel you can do it. That’s what it means is to live according to the flesh. We are literally sworn enemies of God.

⁵ Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. ⁶ The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace;

Think of it this way – What preoccupies you? What is your heart set on? Paul describes it as your “mind being set on” either what your nature desires; or on what the Spirit desires. And the sinful nature desires – you to be at the center of all of your thoughts.

Example – Chariots of Fire made in 1981, a real story of two men who won gold medals in 1924 Paris Olympics. Eric Little’s sister recalled that whenever he ran (and he’d look kind of goofy), he ran with his face up and mouth wide open. But the two men recalled what they were thinking as they ran – both wanted to win but for different reasons. But, when asked why are you running? Harold Abrams – to justify his existence...to prove that I matter. Eric Little – God made me fast. And when I run, I feel his (God’s) pleasure. Harold Abrams whole existence, his self-worth was based on how he performed. The real problem is that he had someone or something else functioning as his savior to justify my attitude and actions.

The gospel helps you identify where you need to change

Finally, where do we get the power to make those changes in our lives? We should be able to say – I don't care what you think, I don't care what I think. I only care what God thinks. I know with my head, but do I really believe it with my heart.

What does it mean to – v 5 – ⁵...**but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.**

“Minding the things of the Spirit” = Your whole heart, mind and being are enthralled or captivated by something. The Holy Spirit makes this gospel truth real to you when you read and study it over and over in God's Word. What the Holy Spirit says about you is more real than what anyone or any performance can ever say about you.

What happens when life starts pulling you down? It means that you don't have to worry if you'll have a job in a few weeks or getting sick with the coronavirus. When the Holy Spirit is working in your heart, he is making what Jesus has done for you not only a matter of the mind, but also deep in your heart. It replaces all those “false” things that are trying to leave you empty.

How much more when the Holy Spirit shows you what Jesus Christ has done for you will you be able to put to death the things that are putting you to death?

The Verdict is In! There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Prayer – Thank you Father for giving us a method, power and freedom to really change. And now we pray that you would help us get some more radioactive material for the things in our hearts that are harming us and the people around us. We ask that you would become more real to us through the power of the Holy Spirit – to change us into your image. Amen.

The peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. (Phil.4:7)