

3. Romans 5-8. God's New Exodus in Christ

Notes on the third part of the video series:
Romans. The Greatest Letter Even Written.
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Introductory Comments

Exodus motif: God's action in Christ is the new Exodus.

Just as:

- ◆ God brought the enslaved Israelites to freedom through the waters Red Sea,
- ◆ he now brings freedom to those enslaved to sin through the waters of baptism.

Organization:

- ◆ At the end of 4, Paul could have gone straight on to Romans 9-11
- ◆ Instead, he digs a deeper foundation, and Romans: 5-8: goes to bedrock of what he wants to say.
- ◆ formally organized
 - ◆ paragraph after paragraph he rounds it off with "through Christ Jesus our Lord"
 - ◆ structured argument

Theme of the section Romans 5-8:

- ◆ those whom he justifies, he also glorifies.
- ◆ some say Chapters 5-8 is about **sanctification**, but this is just a subset of the bigger concept: **glorification**.
- ◆ It is an argument for assurance: all those justified by faith will be glorified

How does this theme work out?

God promised Abraham he would undo the sin of Adam through him and his family.

- ◆ Initial fulfillment of the promise was the Exodus from Egypt.
- ◆ Final fulfillment of the promise to undo the sin of Adam is Christ. The result is again "Exodus:" freedom, liberation from sin, the law, death
 - ◆ Chap 6: through the water (baptism), the slaves get to be free: except now it is through the water of baptism rather than the water of the Red Sea
 - ◆ the gift of the Spirit is the Mount Sinai of Old Testament Exodus
 - ◆ people of God are now on the way through the wilderness to their inheritance (this is what Romans is all about)

At each stage, freedom is accomplished by death of Christ and the gift of the Spirit. The basis is the death of Christ. The freedom in the Spirit is what operates it

The Law and the Plight of Israel

Chapter 5 falls into two parts, first an overview of where we have got to, and then where we are going.

- ◆ 5:1-11: sums up everything so far, and points ahead. We are justified by the death of Jesus. Now God will save us through the life of Jesus
- ◆ 5:12-21: the big picture: Adam and Christ, with the law intruding in the middle.

The law intruding between Adam and Christ

- ◆ 5:20: Paul says: the law came in alongside so that the trespass might multiply. That is, God gave the law in order to increase sin (very odd thing to say).
- ◆ Chap 6: Paul says something similar: law part of the problem rather than part of the solution
- ◆ Chap 7: Paul finally addresses it head on.

What is he doing?

- ◆ He is continuing to tell the story of the Exodus, with the law as the dark power trapping Israel in the “Adam life.” For Paul, the problem is the hidden Adam in Israel.
- ◆ Paul’s exposition in Romans 7 of the problem of the law is actually an exposition of the plight of the Jew under the law, who discovers the force of Adam (force of sin and death) is only increased when they want to do what is right, because evil lies close at hand.
 - ◆ (Cain in Old Testament; wants to do the right thing)
- ◆ The “I” in Romans 7, the “I” who wants to do the right thing but cannot, is:
 - ◆ not memory of how it felt when he was in that position
 - ◆ not the spiritual biography of Paul as a Christian
 - ◆ is the theological analysis of the plight of the Israel under the law, under the Torah

Paul’s Atonement Theology

The Effect of the Law:

- ◆ the effect of the law (5:20) has been to gather up sin into one place. To trick sin onto one point. The one place is the representative Israelite, the Messiah. Then God can condemn sin.
 - ◆ God condemns sin in the flesh of Christ.
 - ◆ The death of Jesus is the means of sin’s condemnation.
- ◆ This the crowning statement of Paul’s atonement theology in Romans 8:3 and following.

With sin’s condemnation, the gift of the Spirit, resurrection and life are assured for the future.

- ◆ Roman 8: 10-11: through the gift of the Spirit, Resurrection and life assured in the future
- ◆ Romans 8:12-30: we are like the children of Israel in the Wilderness, going home to our inheritance. Our

inheritance is a renewed cosmos, the renewed Creation. Salvation is not just individual thing; it is for the whole world.

- ◆ Climatic ending:
 - ◆ 31-39: cross unveils not just God’s restorative justice, but unveils God’s deep love: nothing can keep us from God’s love, one of the most glorious Christian statements.

Q (8:00): We usually think of heaven as “out there.” But Romans 8 makes it sound like it is here on earth.

Paul almost never uses the word “heaven” in Romans.

Salvation in Romans is *not* about going to heaven when you die.

- ◆ Paul vision is the vision of Isaiah, a non-dualistic salvation.
- ◆ At the end of Revelations, it is the new Jerusalem coming down to earth, *not* Saints going up to heaven

God’s good creation, subjected to futility, not because of itself, but because of God’s ultimate purpose, will be liberated. Heaven and a renewed earth will join, marry together. That will be our final home.

“Heaven” may be a temporary resting place before the world is renewed.

The world God intends to make is more physical, not less physical than the present world

Q (9:45): What are the implications of this cosmic reconciliation and renewal for ecology?

It is very unPauline to say: “we can pollute the earth, because Jesus is coming back to make it all right.”

Because of what God is going to make us, a resurrected, newly embodied human being, it matters that we live now as closely as possible to the new life in the anticipation of that life.

Because God is going to renew creation so that it is throbbing with God’s life and power and glory, it matters that we care for God’s creation now.

We must care for God’s creation now. That is our mandate in Genesis: look after the earth. Not exploit it (not treat it as an “ashtray” or a “goldmine”)

The renewal of creation is a decisive, crashing chord in the “symphony” of Romans.

Q (11:46): Do we sin boldly? Or should we be “training,” working hard to prepare for heaven?

Paul is very clear: if a Christian is aware of something sinful in their life, they must wrestle with it. Moral effort is required.

- ◆ In I Corinthians, Paul says he pummels his own body to bring it into subjection.)
- ◆ Romans 12 talks about putting to death the deeds of the body so that you may live.
- ◆ There are things the body is inclined to do, to which you must say no.

This ethic is not dualistic. Paul is not saying the body is horrid, wicked, bad thing (the road to gnosticism)

- ◆ It is because of the resurrection of the body that we can take this tough ethic without it collapsing into dualism.

Q (14:06): How is it that we who have died to sin continue to live in it? That is, if sin has been condemned by the death of Jesus, why does it seem like little has changed?

Part of explanation:

1. The “now and not yet tension” = that which is going to be true and is beginning to be true (but is not yet fully true)
 - ◆ Our job is to take what is promised in the end and try to make it real now (so called “inaugurated eschatology”)
2. Some things have changed. We should not undervalue the changes that have occurred already, things that would not be if the Spirit had not been working.
 - ◆ e.g. forgiveness.
 - ◆ In many parts of the world seen as a weakness rather than a virtue.
 - ◆ A new value has come into our world that was not there before.
 - ◆ e.g. humility
 - ◆ Was not a virtue in our world.
 - ◆ We now at least give lip service to it.
 - ◆ There has been change in the world. And things do change in us

Q (17:45): Verse in chapter 8 says “all things work for the good of those who love him.” Does a Christian have the freedom to walk away from God, or are we destined, if we try to walk away, to find ourselves walking right back into God’s arms?

The tensions implicit in this question:

- ◆ the tension between God’s sovereignty versus our responsibility
- ◆ the tension between “predestination” versus freedom

The image of God as the “ultimate chess player” is useful here:

- ◆ We can make a move in our lives, one that may even take God by surprise (disappointment in me that I would have made such a dumb move). But God, like a chess player, can immediately adjust his strategy to our move. God is not locked into an inflexible plan.
- ◆ Of course, God’s strategy is to save us and love us.

God’s sovereignty is the sovereignty of love:

- ◆ Whatever we do, however we mess it up, God will find a new strategy to work out his purposes. God will make his new creation, and we will still be welcomed and honored members of it

It does not mean that our deeds on this earth may not have lasting effects and be a lasting sorrow

- ◆ e.g. if we kill someone, our repentance will never bring back the person we killed. The good that God wished to do through the life of the person we killed will never happen.
- ◆ The scars remain, just as the scar of the crucifixion remained on the risen body of Jesus.

- ◆ Nonetheless, the risen body is glorious. It is to be celebrated even though it has the sign of human evil still marked on it. (There is a great mystery here)

God is capable by his love of bringing all things together for good for those who love him, but it is a task that is very hard won. (Romans 8:31-39)

Q (20:40): The middle of Romans Chapter 5 says because of Adam we all sin; Because of Christ we are all justified. What does this actually mean?

Paul is not tying us to a dogma on how precisely the sin works. We know there is an evil, self-centeredness, wrong-worship that runs right through the human race.

The point of the story of Adam is that God intention, God’s design for humanity has gone wrong. That “wrongness” infects all of us.

Nor has Israel escaped. Even the people of Abraham, those who have the law, are part of the family of Adam.

Adam was told to keep the garden of Eden. Christ brings the new garden, the new creation. In the gospel of John, you find a lot of new creation imagery.

We are now free from the old Adam, and must recognize this and make it our own.

Q (23:35): The story of Adam's sin is basically an imaginative story, a story that tells a truth about us. How far should we push it?

We should not really push it. Rather, we should focus on the Jesus part of the story, which is the ultimate story.

To recapitulate:

Paul tells us the story again and again:

- ◆ (5:11): “we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation (NRSV)
- ◆ (5:21): “so grace might also exercise dominion through justification [or righteousness] leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” (NRSV)
- ◆ (6:11): “So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.” (NRSV)
- ◆ (6:23): “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (NRSV)
- ◆ (7:25): “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with my mind I am a slave to the law of God, but with my flesh I am a slave to the law of sin.” (NRSV)

And then, finally, gloriously, celebrating:

- ◆ (8:38, 39) “For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

That is the true story that Paul wants us to grasp. Everything else finds its truth in its light.