

- Does being a Christian make a difference?
- That's the title of today's sermon.
- Does being a Christian make a difference?
- Is it worth giving up my Sunday mornings to come to church?
- If it doesn't make a difference then surely there are better things we could be doing right now.
- Well don't worry that I am about to tell you, that you have wasted your time coming this morning.
- The gospel makes an incredible difference as we are going to see in Romans this morning.
 - Let me just remind me you where we got to last week with Romans 8.1-4.
 - Back in Romans chapter 7 Paul asks who will deliver me, who will rescue me?
 - Romans 8.1-4 gives the most wonderful answer: it's Jesus.
 - Jesus deals with my condemnation for me,
 - in place of me, on the cross, (Romans 8.3)
 - and Jesus makes a change in me by his spirit (Romans 8.4).
 - So what we're about to read in the next few verses
 - is all about the difference this makes in the lives of every believer.
 - Two main points to share this morning: first we see in these verses that there is:

1. An Unbreakable Connection (Romans 8.5-8)

- That's between the Spirit and life on the one hand,
- but also between sinful nature and death on the other hand.
- Look at v5-8 again:

"Those who live according to the sinful nature set their minds on what that nature desires, but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires."

"The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by sinful nature cannot please God."

- Paul is describing the difference between those who are Christians and those who aren't.
 - He is not describing a Christian who is sometimes more drawn to sinful things and sometimes more drawn to the spiritual things.
 - He's not saying that our sinful nature is physical and the spiritual non-physical.
 - He is comparing two ways of life, two attitudes that don't mix.
 - You are either a Christian or you are not.
 - And Paul uses that phrase "living according to the sinful nature" to describe all people who are separate from God
 - Which is all of us, until we place our trust in Jesus as our rescuer.
- So Paul has in mind a person who is not a Christian
- Their thinking, what's important to them, their goals, ambitions, desires,
 - The life of a Christian and non-Christian can look similar in many areas.
 - they love their family well, they donate to the food bank, serve in their community,
 - Paul is saying there is something different at the centre of it all.
 - The values, and goals, come from a different place.
 - Earlier in Romans Paul tells us that our sinful nature wants to pretend there isn't a god.
 - It pushes down the truth that there is a creator.
 - It wants to be the one guiding our life.
 - And when we trust in Jesus
 - Then the spirit comes and helps us centre our life around God.
 - The one who made us, designed us and knows best how his world works.
- Either our sinful nature has the steering wheel, or the spirit does.
- And if our sinful nature is in control

- Pushing the truth of God down:
 - Then look where it leads: death (Romans 8.6),
 - hostility to God (Romans 8.7),
 - and an impossibility to please him (Romans 8.8).
 - To be a Christian is to move from our sinful nature being in charge
 - to the Spirit being in charge –
 - a place full of life and peace (Romans 8.6).
- Did you notice that Paul doesn't give us any instructions here.
- You might expect him to say "so, walk in the spirit"
- or "Do not follow the ways of the world, it'll end badly".
- But he doesn't
- And that's exactly the point!
- We're supposed to listen to these descriptions and be confident.
- Our confidence doesn't come from what we can do, but from what God has done and declared in his word.
 - If it depended on what we could do – we'd be scuppered wouldn't we?
 - No, we listen to God's word, we believe in faith what he tells us he has done and that's our confidence!
 - His word tells us here that those in the Spirit,
 - those who have become Christians,
 - those for whom Jesus' death on the cross means no condemnation,
 - those who have had their mindsets changed by the Spirit
 - have a unbreakable connection with God himself!
 - Romans 8.6 calls it life and peace
 - where peace doesn't mean a state of mind –
 - but a fixed relationship with God (a restored friendship with God).
 - It's the opposite to the hostility we see in Romans 8.7.
 - And that peace means we can have life.
- 8 May 1945 – VE (Victory in Europe) Day –
- It meant an end to nearly six years of a war
- Millions of people rejoiced in the news that Germany had surrendered,
- they were relieved that the strain and stress of total war was finally over.
- In towns and cities across the world, people marked the victory with street parties, dancing and singing.
- But it was not the end of the conflict. The war against Japan did not end until August 1945.
 - Many people in Britain didn't wait for the official day of celebration and began the festivities as soon as they heard the news on 7 May.
 - Colourful bunting and flags soon lined the streets of villages, towns and cities across Britain.
 - After years of wartime restrictions and dangers –
 - from food and clothes rationing to blackouts and bombing raids –
 - it was understandable how eager they were to finally be able to let loose and enjoy themselves.
 - They were happy that they would be able to LIVE again.
 - No more rations
 - Living in fear of bombing raids
 - Peace with Germany meant life.
 - This is the difference that being a Christian makes.
 - Being a Christian means peace with God.
 - Peace with God means freedom to live
- The challenge here, is for those who may be thinking: "This hasn't happened to me.
- The Holy Spirit hasn't changed my mindset.
- In fact, I'm not at all bothered about pleasing God in how I live.
- I do live a good life, I don't swear, I give to charity and put the needs of my friends and family before my own".
- Which in one sense, is great – if this life is all there is.
 - But if it's not, and that is you, then there is a warning here,
 - That such a way of living leads to death

- to eternal separation from the very one who wanted you to come into existence.
 - To ignore God, to deny his authority, to have your mind set in an opposite direction
 - is a perilous situation to be in.
 - Maybe today would be a good day to ask the Lord to change your mindset
 - to one that leads to life.
 - Because once God has, you'll be going in:

2. An Unchangeable direction (Romans 8.9-11)

- That leads to life now and into eternity.
- Romans 8.9:

You, however, are not controlled by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you...

- So, if there was any doubt among Paul's original Roman readers as to which camp they were in,
- Paul spells it out for them, and by implication for all Christians, they/we are on the side of the Spirit.
- Likewise, the status of those not in the Spirit is also made clear:

...Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.

- saying we're on an unchangeable direction to eternal life
- may raise questions for you, such as "If this is true, why on earth do I keep on sinning?"
 - Consider the believer battling with specific temptations and seemingly winning, not just for weeks, but months and years even. Surely this is evidence of their faith and growth in maturity. Then, in a moment of weakness, out of nowhere, they find themselves in a place they thought they had long left behind, giving in to an old temptation.
 - Or what about 'little sins' in our lives that we often seem ok with
 - a stretch of the truth here, a bit of gossip there, an uncontrolled outburst justified there or another couple of drinks here?
 - They weren't that bad,
 - and then all of a sudden what you thought was small has blown up
 - and caused massive damage and pain to those you love?
 - I have shocked myself with how much my heart is willing to consider twisting the truth to make myself look better.
 - How can we be in the spirit and keep on thinking this, doing that, saying that.
- Back in chapter 7 – "why do I do the things I don't want to do and not do the things I do want to do?"
- Well in one way that comment perfectly shows this unbreakable connection and unchangeable direction.
- Because our very frustration at our actions, our anger, our sadness, our regret, our desire to fix the situation and get it right when we've got it wrong –
- all these things are evidence that we are going in the unchangeable direction towards eternal life.
- Romans 8.10:

But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your Spirit is alive because of righteousness.

- In other words, if you're a believer,
- yes it's true that your body is still going to experience sickness and death,
- you're prone to sin, tempted to let the flesh take control,
 - but it's also true that the Spirit is in you now giving life.
 - And, as we said at the start,
 - that's only possible because of what God has done for us through Jesus on the cross.
 - It's incredible to think that without the cross, if the Holy Spirit took up residence in us
 - he would just condemn us because of our sin.
 - But because of Jesus righteousness counted as our own –
 - the Spirit is life!
 - And the Spirit will do his work,
 - through illness, through that pain and suffering,

- through that sin on an unchangeable direction to eternal life itself.
- Romans 8.11:

If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who lives in you.

- Which means, Christian, that the same person God used to resurrect Jesus is living inside you right now.
 - Imagine that you were given a piece of land.
 - Somewhere to build a house of your own.
 - Imagine that you were told that I was going to design and build it.
 - You would be forgiven for being unsure as to what you're gonna get.
 - My DIY skills leave much to be desired.
 - IKEA furniture and putting up shelves pretty much is my level.
 - Designing and building a house, I've never done that.
 - You might get something that looks like a house
 - It won't look pretty
 - I have no idea how long it will stay standing
 - Being promised a piece of land with a house is amazing
 - But loses it's appeal when you're told I have to build it.
 - On the other hand imagine the Spanish architect Antoni Gaudi
 - Was tasked with designing and heading up the team to build the house.
 - You should have a lot of confidence
 - He is one of the best architects in history
 - Here is some of his work [SLIDES]
 - Not only would you get a working house.
 - A house that will not fall down after a month.
 - You would get something beautiful, a piece of art.
 - Being promised a piece of land with a house designed by Gaudi is incredible.
 - Because you know that the same skills and abilities that designed and built these buildings are at work on your land building your house.
 - Christians are not given some lesser power to be at work in them.
 - They are given the same power that was at work in Jesus as he died and rose again.
 - Defeating sin and death.
- The Holy Spirit of God living in you is exactly the same Holy Spirit of God who raised Christ from the dead.
- And who will one day do exactly the same with you!
 - We're all coming out of a trial right now –
 - to a greater or lesser extent, this Covid situation has resulted in pressure, disruption, isolation and much pain for many of us.
 - On top of that maybe you're still coming to terms with the loss of a loved one.
 - Perhaps you're looking down the barrel of a diagnosis for you or a friend that means life will never be the same again.
 - Maybe you've been praying for change in your life or someone close to you –
 - and you've been praying for years and years and it seems more unlikely than ever that God will answer your prayer in the way you long for.
 - Or maybe you've just hit rock bottom following another failed attempt to live how you really want to.
 - Look at these verses.
 - Hear the Lord God Almighty speak his assurance into your life.
 - You are in an unbreakable connection with him now
 - and you are going in an unchangeable direction to life with him forever.
 - So take heart the Spirit of God is in you bringing life now
 - and one day, what God has begun he will bring to complete perfection in the next.
 - Let's pray: