

Reading: Romans 4:16-25

1. The focus of Richard's talk was "family". If you feel comfortable to, share with each other your experiences of family – the good and the hard.
 - a. What is it about earthly family life that sometimes makes it so challenging?
2. Paul, in chapter 4 of Romans, introduces us to Abraham and Sarah. Even though they were childless, God promised they would have descendants more numerous than the stars.
 - a. How easy do you think it was for Abraham and Sarah to believe this? (For hints, read Romans 4:21 and compare with Genesis 17:17)
 - b. God may not have promised you a child but in your life how easy is it to trust in God's promises and God's word?
 - c. What gets in the way of our trust? Remember it is not sinful or bad or wrong to have doubts; doubts show us that our faith is active and enquiring.
3. Paul described God as, "the God who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist". This phrase reminds us of two things that only God can do, two things that no one else has ever or will ever be able to do:
 - a. The God who gives life to the dead (resurrection)
 - b. The God who calls into existence the things that do not exist (creation)
 - i. What do you think of this phrase and how do they help us to believe God's promises?
4. Richard talked about the "family of faith" which as believers in Jesus we are all part of. A baptism service reminds us of what this family of faith is all about with a promise and a welcome
 - a. We welcome people into the family of faith, and we promise to uphold them in their new life in Christ; to uphold each other.
 - i. What does this promise and the words of welcome mean to you?
 - ii. What do these look like in practice?
5. Richard shared a word from an email he had received this week inspired by Romans 4 and the picture of Abraham and Sarah, "Can God really bless us in this situation?" and the affirmation that "God is not finished with us yet, there is more, it is appearing".
 - a. Is there a situation in which you are asking this question?
 - b. Pray for each other that God's affirmation will speak into this situation.
6. Praise God together that, "if God can handle, transform, and redeem, two of the most frightening and incomprehensible things to us humans, both nothingness and the total nothingness of death, there is nothing that God cannot handle; nothing that God cannot deal with; nothing that God cannot transform and redeem.

Reading: Romans 3:21-26

1. What are some of the most powerful or glorious words you have heard or read?
 - a. What is it about them that has such impact?
2. The second half of Romans 3 opens with, “But now...”
 - a. What is it about these two words that is so important?
3. What have you previously thought about justification?
 - a. Richard said, “Justification is not merely to cancel [remit] that punishment, but to declare that punishment cannot be justly inflicted. To declare that no ground or basis for the infliction of punishment exists.”
 - i. What do you think is the significance of these two parts of justification?
 - ii. How might it affect the way we live?
4. Richard said, “Justification is an instant change – we instantly become what God has declared we are, ‘legally righteous – right before God’. Sanctification is a gradual process, indeed a lifelong process for every Christian of becoming more Jesus-shaped.”
 - a. What is the significance of the differences between justification and sanctification?
5. Why do you think it is important that the source of justification is solely and securely with God?
6. Would you want a God that doesn’t take sin seriously or lets it go unpunished and not dealt with?
 - a. What type of God would that be?

Richard shared the following for context:

- b. *The Big Question: “How is it possible for the righteous God to declare the unrighteous to be righteous without either compromising his own righteousness or condoning (overlooking / ignoring) their unrighteousness?”*
 - i. *Phrased more simply: How is it that God can declare the guilty to be innocent and not be a God that ignores sin?*
 - c. *The Big Answer: The Cross of Jesus Christ*
 - i. *God dealt with sin, the punishment we rightly deserved was taken by Jesus.*
7. The word redeemed is taken from the Old Testament marketplace and describes the purchase of a slave in order to set them free.
 - a. What impact does it have in your life that you have been ‘redeemed’ by God through Jesus?
 8. What do you think of when you think of God’s wrath?
 - a. God’s anger is never uncontrolled, unpredictable, or unprincipled – it rests solely on evil.
 - i. Does this alter your perception of God’s wrath?
 - b. Because of God’s love, God himself provides the way for his wrath to be placated (propitiated)
 - i. Does this alter your perception of God’s wrath?
 9. Justification is received through faith like open hands.
 - a. Spend some time with open hands asking God to remind you have what he has accomplished through Jesus Christ. “But now... a righteousness from God has been established.”

This is not a simple or easy topic. Continue to discuss with each other your questions. Listen again to the talk. Explore more for yourself. This is not an academic exercise, by understanding more about our justification we are more able to give God the glory and praise his name for what he has done.

Reading: Romans 3:10-18

OT sources. Romans 3:12 Psalms 14:1-3; 53:1-3; Eccles. 7:20. Romans 3:13 Psalm 5:9 Romans 3:13 Psalm 140:3. Romans 3:14 Psalm 10:7. Romans 3:17 Isaiah 59:7,8. Romans 3:18 Psalm 36:1

1. Read through Romans 3:10-18. What are your thoughts?
2. What is your (emotional, gut, logical, spiritual, psychological) response, to Denur's revelation that 'Eichmann is in all of us'?
3. Can you see in your life, in your family, in those you know how our human propensity to muck things up (sin) had led to broken lives, promises and relationships?
 - a. Are there things we need forgiveness for?
 - b. Are there things we need to forgive others for?
 - c. How do we see the sins of others without condemnation, superiority, and negative judgement?
4. God does not only see the areas in our lives that we suck at. He sees everything about us. What things about who you are now and what you do now, that God rejoices in, and would want to encourage?
5. How is accepting that we are all sinners counter-cultural?
6. Thinking about the context of the church that Paul was writing to, why do you think he ended his discussion (starting in Chapter 1 and moving on in Chapter 3:21) about our sinfulness with verses taken from the Old Testament?
7. In public life, where there is often much division, how could an acceptance our universal 'suckedness' help?
8. The working title of Keith's talk was 'Reality'. How would you share the 'reality' of what Keith talked about with someone who does not have a faith, but who is curious?
9. In a culture where self-help and self-improvement books prevail, how do we share the need for help to deal with our sin that comes from outside of ourselves? How do we say in a way that is helpful, 'you can't do this in your own strength'?

Reading: Romans 1:1-6, 16-17

1. What have you previously known, or thought, about Paul's letter to the Romans?
2. Paul was so passionate about sharing the gospel, the good news, that he interrupts his own introduction to write about it.
 - a. How passionate are you about the good news?
 - b. What excites you about it?
 - c. Or possibly, why are we not as passionate about it as Paul was?
3. Paul reminds us that the gospel is not ours; the origin, the ownership, the revelation of it all belongs to God. God's own good news for a lost, hurting, and confused world and at its heart is not a religion but a person – Jesus Christ, God's Son.
 - a. What, for you, is the most exciting bit of this description of the gospel?
 - b. What difference does it make that the heart of the gospel is a person and not a religion?
4. The death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus is the turning point in the history of humanity and in the existence of the Son of God. Before this singular event, Jesus was the Son of God in weakness and lowliness. Through the resurrection Jesus becomes the Son of God in power.
 - a. What do you think of this contrast / dichotomy of Jesus' earthly state and subsequent heavenly state?
 - b. What do you think is the significance of Jesus experiencing both earthly and heavenly states?
5. Which of John Stott's understandings of the righteousness of God resonate with you, and why?
 - a. A Divine Attribute – our God is righteous
 - i. God's character is one in which he always does right
 - b. A Divine Activity – God comes to our rescue – Salvation
 - i. God's intervention in the history of humanity
 - c. A Divine achievement – God bestows on us a righteous status.
 - i. A state in which we are able to be in God's presence
6. Righteousness is not a new moral ability (doing the right thing) but rather a new relationship (with the One who gives us the status of righteous).
 - a. Do you think this difference matters, and why?
7. "Life before God demands the wholehearted commitment of the individual to Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, through faith" – this is what Paul describes as, "obedience of faith" (v5)
 - a. What helps you / us to maintain this commitment?
 - b. What hinders you / us to maintain this commitment?
8. The great equaliser of the Christian faith is that everyone who is saved, is saved in exactly the same way, by faith in Jesus Christ.
 - a. Why do you think this is described as the great equaliser and why is this important and different to other ways of life?
9. I include below my finishing paraphrase of Paul's introduction:
 - a. For I am not ashamed of the good news - the ***gospel*** of God about His son Jesus Christ, for it is the power of God to rescue everyone who believes in Jesus Christ our Lord. For in the ***gospel*** the ***righteousness of God*** is revealed in that everyone who is saved is saved in exactly the same way, by ***faith!***
 - i. Of the three words / ideas that will help us as we work through the rest of Paul's letter to the Romans, which excites you the most, and why?