

2013-09-01 am2 trevor- hudson discovering. acceptance

Good morning, friends. Yes, it's good to be with you. And you've got the bulletin in front of you, and I'm going to invite you to take that leaflet out. You may want to make a few notes today as we go through our message. Friends, all I want to do today is something very, very simple. I want to offer you one word, just one word. It's a word that comes off the pages of the New Testament. It's a word that takes us very deeply into the heart of God. It's a word that can heal us of our shame and of our sin. It's a word that can make our relationships just a little bit better. It's a word that can turn a congregation into a community, just one word, just one word, and it's the word acceptance.

It's a word that comes from Paul's letter to the Romans. You may know that in Rome there was a very small Christian community, and it was made up of people from different backgrounds, a very diverse community. There were some Gentiles who had come out of a pagan background and their hearts had been touched by the message of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And then there were some Jewish believers who came out of the rich history of the Jewish people. And these folk had come together in this little community in Rome, with different backgrounds, different languages, different ways of seeing the world, different cultures.

And Paul writes to them, and he writes these words, and I want you to look very carefully at them. They're printed on the bulletin and they should come up on the screen. And I wonder if we could perhaps say these words together today. Accept one another then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. Can we say that again, a little bit stronger? Are you scared of these words? Let's say them together. Accept one another then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.

Now I want you to notice something. That verse really has two parts to it. On the one hand it points us to God's radical acceptance of us in Jesus Christ. That's the one part of the verse. And then the other part of the verse, Paul challenges us to take the acceptance that we've received from Christ and then to give that acceptance to each other. It's got two parts. And I just want to take a few moments today to unpack those two parts, and as I do that I'm praying that the spirit of God, the spirit of Jesus Christ, the spirit of that acceptance will touch our hearts and lives and relationships and community today.

Will you notice, on the one hand, how those words point towards God's radical acceptance of us in Jesus Christ? Paul is clear about that. He says accept each other as Christ has accepted you. I've said many times from up front here, and I think

maybe some of you are tired of me saying this, that if we want to know what God is like, where do we look? Where do we look if we want to know what God is like? We look in the direction of Jesus Christ. God reveals God self to us uniquely, fully, unrepeatably, in the person of Jesus Christ. If you want to know what God is like, look at Jesus.

And as we follow Jesus through the gospels, as we follow Him, what do we notice? We notice Him giving God's acceptance to people again and again and again and again. And He gives God's acceptance to people who are unacceptable. He does it again and again. If you're making notes you may want to make a note of that story in Luke chapter 19. Zacchaeus the tax-gatherer, do you remember? In that day tax gatherers were not liked. Children would spit into the ground as they walked by. It was a sign of disdain. They were grouped together with sinners.

Jesus comes into the city. He looks into a tree. He sees Zacchaeus and He says to Zacchaeus these words: I want to come to your house today. Can you imagine how Zacchaeus felt? I will tell you in one word. He felt accepted. No wonder he goes on to begin to make all those changes - repaying people that he has defrauded, sharing his possessions with those who don't have, making amends. He has been touched by God's acceptance, and it has changed him.

You think of that woman, go to John chapter eight, make a note of it, that woman who has been caught in the act of committing adultery, do you remember, and she's dragged into a public place, and she is surrounded by a group of older men, religious older men, and they are going to stone her, because that is what the law says, that if you're caught in the act of committing adultery you are to be stoned. That's the law.

Jesus looks... looks... writes in the sand, looks around, and then He says to the guys, that one of you who has not sinned, you throw the first stone. One by one they walk away. And then He writes in the sand, and He looks at that woman. I wonder how He looked at her. And then He says these words: I don't condemn you. I don't condemn you. Go now, and do not sin again. How do you think she felt? Let me tell you in one word. She felt accepted, and now she's ready to move into a new life.

I take you to Mark chapter one, and there's a leper, and he's walking around, you know, as a leper would do in that day, with that bell saying unclean, unclean, unclean. He is not allowed in any place of public worship. And he comes to Jesus and he says, Jesus, if You want, if You want, I don't deserve anything, but if You want, You can make me clean. And what does Jesus say? I want to. I want to. And we read these words that "with compassion Jesus stretches out and touches the leper." Can you imagine what that touch meant to that leper? Can I tell you in one word? He felt accepted.

Can you catch a glimpse today of this acceptance that Jesus brings? In His life, in His words, in His actions, through His death on our behalf and through His glorious resurrection from the grave, Jesus makes God's acceptance available and accessible to every human being, no matter who you are, where we're from? That's the gift that Christ makes available. Acceptance comes to each one of us today.

And He says to you and He says to me, I have a personal word for you. This is what Christ says to us. "I know your whole story. I know how you have failed. I know every act of disobedience. I know those things that fill you with guilt and despair about your own life. I know all your failures in loving. I know about your broken resolutions. I know about your feeble prayer life. I know about your bad Bible knowledge, but I have one word for you: you are accepted, accepted."

And then comes the challenge of the gospel: Can we accept our acceptance? Can we turn to the One who has died for us and who has been raised again, and who is present with us right now? Can we turn to Him and accept from Him this gift of acceptance that He wants to give us? And the best place to receive that acceptance is to go to Calvary, to go to the cross, and to receive from His crucified hands that gift of acceptance. And when I receive that gift of acceptance into my life the miracle happens. I can accept myself, warts and all. I don't have to be defensive anymore. I don't have to pretend. I don't have to worry all the time what others think about me. I am accepted by God in Jesus Christ, and I've accepted that acceptance into my life.

Some people get worried when I talk like this and they say, Trevor, but, okay, if God accepts me then I can do what I like. If you are thinking that, if you are saying that, you've never experienced it. For when we experience God's acceptance in Christ we live with a sense of astonished gratitude for everything that God has done for us in Jesus Christ, and I want to say to God, "God, here is my life, and I want to live my life only and solely for You. And I want to make whatever change You want me to make in my life, I want to make."

But I'm making those changes, not to earn Your acceptance, because that's a gift. I wonder if there's anyone here today who needs to receive this gift, the gift of God's acceptance. Maybe for years you've lived with little messages in your head. "I'm not good enough. I'm too bad." Maybe this word today can come to you deeply. You are accepted. Will you now by faith receive that acceptance into every part of your life and history today?

That's one side of that text, but there's another side. Paul invites us now to give what we have received to others. Go back to that text. Accept one another. Accept one another as Christ has accepted you. Give what you have received from God to each other. Why do we struggle with this? Why are we better known as judgemental people than as accepting people? Why? Why are we better known in the church as people of condemnation than people of acceptance? Why are we better known in the church as people who exclude others rather than include? Why?

I think sometimes we almost think that if we criticise and condemn and judge it's going to change people. It's not going to. It's in that moment when we offer the gift of acceptance that that creates the climate for God to begin to work and to change and to touch people's lives and to heal and to save and to restore. That's the miracle of acceptance. Can I invite you, and I invite myself? Can we begin to give to others what God has given us in Christ?

Perhaps we can just start in our homes, in our own homes. Sometimes in our own homes we don't feel accepted, in our own homes. I know children who don't feel

accepted by their parents. Maybe you just long for him to play lock for the Blue Bulls and he just wants to be an artist, hey. I think of my marriage with Debbie. We've been married 34 years, lots of joy, lots of struggle. I'm not going to give you the percentages. And I remember how in the early years we would want to just change each other, you know. We just battled to accept each other for who we were, and it really took time. And I think slowly it dawned on Debbie that I could never be George Clooney, never.

It's just a wonderful gift, though, you know, just to be accepted. But sometimes in our homes we get told, "you're too thin, you're too fat, you're too this, you're not... you're not successful enough," and it's all conditional, conditional, conditional. And it's terribly painful, terribly painful. Can't we give to each other what we've received from Christ? And even within the church. Why are we so well known for judgement in the church, for condemnation, for exclusion? You will know that I'm part of the Methodist family. It's a family that I love very deeply. It's been my Mother of the Faith. It helped me to grow as a follower of Jesus, but we've got lots of stains in our history, you know.

And I think one of the stains is, do you know the name Mahatma Ghandi, that great Indian leader a few decades ago, the father of non-violence? You know, he, when he was in Durban, 1920, a 20 year old. He was a young lawyer. And he went to a Methodist church here in Johannesburg, and he was refused admittance at the door. Can you imagine what that does to a person? And you will know that he was attracted very deeply to Jesus, fascinated by the person of Jesus Christ, but he could never, never identify himself with the Christian church because of that one experience of exclusion.

Now we exclude people for other reasons, and we will never know the pain and the hurt and the heartache and the heartbreak that we cause each other. And some of you may be saying to me, Trevor, does this mean anything goes? No, not at all! I can accept you without necessarily agreeing with you. I can accept you. It doesn't mean one condones everything. I can accept a person and maybe not cooperate with what they're doing. As Christ-followers we seek never to co-operate with evil.

You can accept someone and give tough feedback to that person. They're two different things. If I go to a dentist the dentist says, "hey Trevor, you've got a bad tooth." I don't say to him, "why don't you accept me as I am?" I'm just so grateful that he's told me about my bad tooth. I can do something about it now. Can we give this gift of acceptance more deeply to each other?

Today I have one word for you. It's a word that takes us deep into the heart of God. It's a word that can heal us and set us free from shame and sin. It's a word that can make our relationships much better, much better. It's a word that can turn a congregation into a community, one word, one word. It's the word acceptance, and I'm praying that someone here today, maybe for the first time ever, will just accept the acceptance that Christ brings us today, and as we accept it into our lives, to begin to live with a sense of astonished gratitude, and to begin to share that gift with those around about us.

Let's pray together. Dear God, we speak about deep things, things that go very deep into our lives and who we are. Thank you, Lord, for the way that You have come to us, and thank you for Your life in the gospels, for your death on our behalf, and for the way, Lord Jesus, that you make so freely available God's acceptance. Today, Lord, we want to receive that gift into our lives at another level, maybe for the first time. And as we receive it, Lord, we ask that You will give us the wisdom, the courage to share that gift with those around about us, with each other, that we may be known as a community of acceptance. This is our prayer, and we offer it to You, Father, with all the love and with all the longing of our hearts, in the name of Christ our Lord. And we say together, as God's people, amen.

May the joy of Christ be with you. Take care. God bless, friends, God bless.