

Access Granted Romans 5: 1-11

We live in an age and time where controlled access is a routine part of our lives. In this high- tech age of electronics and high- risk cyber threats, keys are quickly becoming a thing of the past. Many newer cars use a fob rather than a key to unlock the doors and start the engine, and doors can be remotely locked or unlocked, and the engine can be started through a smartphone app. During the week here at Millcreek you have to push an intercom button and speak with someone in authority before you can have access to our building or else know the code to the electronic keypad on the door to the kitchen. I can remotely grant access to someone and unlock that door using an app on my phone. Passwords and other forms of identity verification are required before we can access our phones, bank accounts, social media sites and ATM cards. At the airport, it is necessary to pass through one or more security checkpoints before access is granted to the terminal and boarding gates. We are at the mercy of electronics and technology to obtain access to some of the things we need to live our lives. Without the right credentials, access is denied. The good news is that we will never need things like keys, fobs, or electronics to gain access to the most important thing we need in life, peace with God. The apostle Paul reminds us that it is one of many blessings that come from our faith in Christ. Access to God comes from faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Romans 5:1-2. The old cliché remains true. Know God, know peace. No God, no peace.

One of the reasons Paul wrote this 5th chapter of Romans was to address a specific problem among God's people. This problem was really nothing new, as its roots can be traced back thousands of years in time to the Garden of Eden. Yes, it affected Adam and Eve, but it goes back even further to a previous resident of paradise- an angel named Lucifer. Isaiah alludes to it in 14:12 "Oh how you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning. How you are cut down to the ground". Ezekiel describes it in 28:11-19 and Jesus mentions it again in Luke 10:18- "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven".

The problem Paul is addressing in these verses in Romans began with the fall of Satan and can be seen throughout the history of humanity. It is described for us in Genesis when Adam and Eve were banished from the garden. Access denied. And again when Cain killed Abel. It happened again in Exodus, where we learn that it took God's people 40 years to make an eleven-day journey to the Promised Land. God said access denied. The whole time the people complained saying "what shall we drink and what shall we eat?"

We see it in Judges, where the prophet concludes that book with these telling words- in those days there was no king in Israel: everyone did what was right in their own eyes. As we continue through the writings of the OT we see it over and over. It affected men and women alike –Adam, Abraham, Moses, Saul, David, Solomon and Eve, Sarah, Miriam, and Jezebel. Perhaps by now you have concluded that the problem Paul is talking about is sin, and if you have reached that conclusion, you would not be wrong. Sin keeps us from having access to God.

There can be no doubt that sin was wreaking havoc and causing chaos among God's people, but that is too generic of a statement. To be more specific, there is a particular and specific sin that was really at the root of all those situations the Scripture describes for us. It affected those who lived before Jesus came to earth as well as those who lived during and after. The problem is easily stated, but for many it is not easily resolved. Simply put, the problem is that people may believe that God exists, but they do not believe He loves them.

Certainly, Satan knew God existed- he had personal and first-hand access. Though pride is often blamed for Satan's fall it really came down to the fact that he really didn't think God loved him enough- he wanted more. It was the same with Adam and Eve. They had access to God. The Scriptures reveal that God was with them in the garden. The lie that Satan used to tempt Eve was meant to have her question God's love. If God truly loves you, He would not have said that you can't eat from that tree over there. The rest is history. Cain killed Abel because he thought God loved him more.

Moses had questions. There is no doubt he knew God was for real as he experienced His presence firsthand several times. But when he was trying to lead the people out of Egypt, it seems that he was thinking to himself here I am Lord, trying to be obedient and all I get is grief. Why can't we just get to where we need to go? Every time I think the Promised Land is just past the next oasis all I see is more sand and all I hear is more complaining.

Likewise with David- there can be little doubt that David knew God. The Scripture says he was a man after God's own heart. But even though he knew in his heart that God was real his actions seemed to reveal that he didn't believe that God loved him. Adultery and murder were the end result.

And then consider Judas, the apostle that betrayed Jesus. He certainly knew that God was real. He heard the convicting teaching with his own ears and saw the many miracles with his own eyes that could only lead to one conclusion. Jesus was God. But he didn't believe that Jesus loved him. In his eyes a God that loved His people would set them free from Roman oppression and allow God's kingdom to rule.

If you have ever had doubts about God, take comfort in knowing you are not the first. Sin is a universal problem that affects all of us. Perhaps you are even experiencing a bit of guilt and shame for having had similar thoughts and emotions at times. If you haven't, just be patient, as odds are quite likely that you will. The question we must answer is what do we do when we believe that God exists, but have doubts about the depth of His love?

For some, the answer is to deny the obvious and say God doesn't exist. We know that is foolish, for all of creation and the miracle of life allow us to know with certainty that there must be a divine power behind it. For others, the answer is to conclude that there is a God who created the world and set it into motion but yet powerless to intervene in the things that result. Again, we know that is foolish for throughout the Scriptures we learn and hear from a God who both intervenes and intercedes for His people. Both of those explanations do little to bring us comfort when we are hurting.

How do we know God loves us? The real answer, the truth- is found in Romans 5:8. But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. The proof is in and on the cross. Jesus is proof positive that God loves us. Even when we are thinking that God must not love us God is saying I love them even though they are thinking those things.

We know that is true by following Paul's logic in verse 7. Allow me to restate what he is saying in another context. Who do you know that would willingly die for someone that hates them? What Jew would say go ahead, take my life, cut out my heart out and give it to that Muslim who needs a heart transplant in order to live? What Muslim would say go ahead and give both of my kidneys to that Christian over there that will soon die without them? What person would say to their captor go ahead and kill me but just let my kids who have disowned me go free? We know someone who would, and His name is Jesus.

One of the most powerful things about the Gospel is that it is so believable because it so unbelievable. If mere humans wrote it the story would have been much different. It would have been like a John Wayne or a Clint Eastwood movie- the bad guys die and the good guys win. But the gospel tells a different story- the good guy dies so the bad guys can live. Who would or could conceive such a thing other than God? *But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.*

The next time you are tempted to doubt God's love, look at the cross and discover proof that you are mistaken. The cross is proof positive- just like the plus sign- that God loves us and has a plan to reconcile us to Him. It is our faith in Christ that reconciles us to God. God says access granted, and that brings us peace. Praise God! Amen