

Sunday, Nov. 2

We looked at Romans 8:1-4 and what “God Has Done.” Pastor Steve said the first thing to notice is that God has not placed any conditions on His promise of forgiveness for those Christ. While God’s wrath is coming, Christians are not going to be subject to this judgment.

“It will be awful,” Steve said of Judgment Day. “It will be unbelievable and tough to describe. But not for you. This is good news. In Christ, there is no judgment. The way you know you are in Christ is the spirit of liberty and life. You are free and because you know you are forgiven, you can make war with sin.”

Being a Christian does not mean sin automatically goes away, he said. We are still here and because of Adam’s sin we still carry that inclination. But Paul wants us to know the fight has already been won. The law of liberty has set us free from sin and death; God has empowered us to live free. It doesn’t happen because we put our foot down and vow to do better, because we read more Scripture, or pray more. Victory is the upside of us saying, “I want more of Christ.”

Steve then read verses 3-4, saying there are four primary points Paul relates:

1. It’s all about what God has done. He quoted Jonathan Edwards saying that the only thing we contributed to our salvation was the sin that made it necessary.

2. God is the one who set us free.

3. The law is not going to save anybody. Paul points out in Romans 7:12-13 that while the law is good, it cannot produce life.

4. The weakness is me. We are the problem with sin; it is our fleshly desires that produce sin. But the promise that the prophets Ezekiel and Jeremiah made is that one day God will give His children a new heart that will innately desire to serve God out of law, not a grudging obedience to obey the law.

“You can’t discipline yourself enough,” Steve said. “You’re going to do what you want to do. The law without the Spirit of God will do only one thing: shine the light on your inability to keep it and make you want to do wrong.”

Because we are weak and could not follow the law, God sent His Son to rescue us, he added. By doing that He initiated contact with sinners. “In likeness of flesh” (Romans 8:3) means Jesus identified with us. He sympathizes with our weakness. Hebrews 4:15 says He is a high priest who understands temptation because He endured it.

Sunday, Nov. 9

Based on Romans 8:1-4, today’s sermon was titled “Atonement.” Pastor Steve said since we couldn’t fulfill the law, God did it through His Son. Yet, many Christians live in a legalistic trap. He called it a “weird irony” that we are conditioned to the wrong things that prevent us from doing the right things.

“I used to use a conditioning stick to motivate me to do the right thing,” Steve said. “You have an idea of what you should be doing and yet won’t do them. (Using the stick) lasts for about two weeks. Condemnation is still around our attempts to live in holiness. It didn’t work.”

This has been true ever since Adam and Eve hid from God in the garden. The answer to holiness is that God sent His Son to do what we couldn’t. That’s how God

solved the problem for us and our weakened flesh. What the church settled on historically is that Jesus was fully God and fully man, Steve said. He experienced the same weakness, tiredness, and temptation we all do, yet without sinning. What the Father did is amazing, unique and powerful—that the baby lying in the manger was the powerful Creator of the universe.

“Your salvation is the result of God, not the result of man,” Steve said. “He died for sin, as an offering for our sin. The detail of the Old Testament (about this) is so detailed that you get tired of reading it.” After reviewing Leviticus 16:1-22, he added, “This describes the Day of Atonement.”

Before Aaron could present an offering to God, he had to be cleansed by taking a bath. The details surrounding his duties show that if someone treated the things of God lightly, they would die. After Aaron sacrificed for his sin, he sacrificed for the people of Israel. Steve said the tent needed cleansed because Israel’s sins had defiled it. The Spirit would remind them of God’s holiness. Yet they had to make these sacrifices again and again.

The two goats used in the sacrifice had different purposes. The first was to cleanse the temple and the second was the scapegoat. After Aaron confesses Israel’s sin and puts them on the head of the goat, the priest sends the goat away; the animal takes the blame for people’s murders, gossip, lying and other sins. Referring to Isaiah 53, Steve said the prophet wrote of how God laid our iniquity on Christ.

“Jesus is our scapegoat for our sins,” Steve said. “He’s both goats, purifying us and became our scapegoat by bearing our sin... The love of God is for us, something that is beyond comprehension.”

Sunday, Nov. 16

“Righteousness is the Way of the Walk” was the title of today’s sermon from Romans 8:3-9. Pastor Steve said Paul is clear: those without the Holy Spirit do not belong to God. Therefore, they can’t please God. Even believers can’t do enough good things in the flesh to prove we deserve to go to heaven.

Steve talked about seeing a group of guys on Saturday night wearing clothing popular in the 1990s, including one man with an “I Hate God” T-shirt. Outside of God, people are an enemy of the Lord. The problem is our sin nature. Without Jesus, we cannot submit to God. That’s why He told Nicodemus that he had to be born again to enter the kingdom of heaven.

“Something has to change and you can’t make the change,” Steve said. “Verse 3 (says) God did what we couldn’t do. ... It’s like being told you have to bench-press 10,000 pounds; the law highlights you can’t do it. Jesus lived a perfect, sinless life to glorify God, so you could identify with Christ’s righteousness.”

He said a New Testament summary of what the law looks like appears in Romans 13:8-10, which says love fulfills the law; and Galatians 5:13-14, which urges loving our neighbor as ourselves. God did what the law, weakened by our flesh, could not accomplish. Jesus didn’t sacrifice His life so we could work hard at being better. He fulfilled the law by doing everything it required.

After reviewing Romans 5:18-19, Romans 6:3-4 and Romans 7:4-6, Steve said, “We have been saved so we might walk in the newness of life. What God did was change

us. We can be obedient to God's commands, though not perfectly. A Christian is going to live out a life of holiness, just not perfectly."

Romans 8:4 says we are justified by faith. Our salvation causes something to happen: we can live out a changed life. God has done something profound that enables us to walk a different way. Christians live like Christians. We can get off track in either direction, thinking we have to keep the law, or rationalizing that grace means we can do anything we please. But people who are in the Spirit walk according to the Spirit; as Philippians 2:12 says, we are to work out our salvation with fear and trembling.

"The only reason you can walk in the Spirit and not the flesh is Jesus has come and did what you could not," Steve said. "Saved people act...differently than they did before. Those who belong to God are His. They will live for Him. Even if they wander away from Him, He will bring them back."

Sunday, Nov. 23

Pastor Steve said that while he had notes on Romans 8 for today, he felt the Holy Spirit leading him to preach from Philippians 3:1-16 and Paul's message that everything he had achieved was worthless, compared to knowing Jesus as Lord. Steve reviewed Paul's background, including his birth in Tarsus, a city second only to Athens in philosophy and education. Born a Roman citizen, he enjoyed the privileges of citizenship and religious status as a Pharisee.

"Paul had everything," Steve said. "(He said), 'It wasn't just position. I was so zealous from what I believed to be God's will that I was hunting down and killing Christians.'"

Steve used Paul's background to discuss his testimony of being raised in church, but not appreciating what he had. While he was scared of God, he wasn't excited about Him. But what happened in Philippians 3 was not legalism, he said. It was the joy of doing the right thing. Paul was zealous to know Christ. Paul listed all the blessings he had as a Pharisee and then said he gladly gave it all up and counted those things as loss next to knowing the Lord.

"These things that were gain to me I count as all loss," Steve characterized Paul's view. "He used the word 'rubbish' (verse 8). 'That's translated politely because it means 'excrement.' He counted everything he had as dog poop. That's really what he means. I wonder how much of our desires are for worthless things—for stuff that passes away."

Steve said he was raised to obey the rules. By the time he reached high school he considered the youth group "cheesy" and much of what they did goofy and boring. By the time he turned 19, his parents couldn't make him go to church as they once did, but his mother kept encouraging him to attend church. When a new youth pastor came she suggested he give the group another try.

Steve did and was surprised by his first meeting, when the youth pastor felt the most important thing for the teens was their need to know Christ. That night there were two women singing a song based on Revelation: to give blessing and honor to the Lamb who sits on the throne. In that moment, he realized all the Bible stories he learned growing up were real.

"It landed on 'Jesus loves me,'" Steve said. "That landed on me like a thousand pounds. I could see that He's real; He's there. From that point forward, you couldn't keep

me away from church. Everything I had considered so important was utterly worthless. It was excrement compared to knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.”

Sunday, Nov. 30

Steve detoured from Romans today to launch an Advent series on the coming of Christ. He opened with Psalm 127, which begins: “Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain.” He pointed out that, according to Scripture, an architectural design without God as the builder will be worthless. The same is true of God watching over a city; without Him the watchman stays awake in vain. It is also vain to rise up early and stay up late while eating the bread of anxious toil.

“Has anyone ever went to bed late, worried, and that’s why you didn’t sleep?” Steve asked. “Whatever the problem is...it’s directly related to sleep. Which is why one of my favorite stories in the New Testament is Jesus sleeping on a boat that’s in the middle of a storm. He was utterly unconcerned, because He is the Lord of the waves.”

The specific reason it is in vain to stay up late and worry is because God gives His beloved sleep, he added. And, because He gives his beloved sleep, it makes sense that the next verse talks about children being a heritage from the Lord. Steve acknowledged that children correlate with a lack of sleep, which is why some mothers in the congregation were laughing. Children can keep you up late at night, whether because parents are concerned about their welfare, sickness, or the messes they make.

“But God is saying through Solomon that houses are being built by God,” Steve said. “Cities are being watched by God; those are the cities that are protected. The children of God (and) people of God don’t worry about things. God’s got those things under control...Don’t go to bed late, trying to figure it out on your own. Go to sleep.”

He said he had to remark on the first Sunday in Advent that this season is about celebrating the coming of the greatest birth that has ever happened. The worldview a Christian should have is that children are a blessing, a view that is more profound in 2025 than at any time in the last 200 years. Children have generally been considered a blessing, but not everyone sees them as such today.

“The fruit of the womb is a reward,” Steve said. “Could you just let that settle in your heart? Kids are not mistakes. They are not accidents. Kids are not to be regretted. They are to be cherished as a heritage from the Lord. They are to be trained and raised in (His) fear and instruction. They are to be loved. They are to be cared for because they’re coming from the Lord.”