

The Lifeboat

There's an old Alfred Hitchcock movie called *Lifeboat*. It takes place during World War 2, when German submarines preyed on both military and civilian ships crossing the Atlantic. In the movie, a passenger ship tries to defend itself, but does no more than sink the submarine as the ship itself goes down.

The ship has a few survivors, who manage to gather in a lifeboat. They include a journalist, a rich businessman, a nurse, and some of the crew. Then, they see another man in the water. Not until they pull him out, do they realize that he was not from their ship. They had inadvertently rescued the sole survivor of the German submarine that sank their ship, one of the very men that had put them in that lifeboat.

It was easy for the ship's survivors to consider themselves more worthy of a place in the lifeboat than the German sailor. It can also be easy for us to consider ourselves more worthy than others of receiving God's blessings. This week's passage, though, shows us that God does not see it that way. God knows the truth.

Monday – All in the Same Boat

1. Please read Romans 2:1-3. What comparison does Paul make between God's judgment about people and our judgments about others? What does this say about your own position with God?
2. Now look at Matthew 8:23-27. What circumstance did each disciple find himself in? What emotions and thoughts did each one experience? Were any of the disciples in less need of Jesus' help than the others?

Making it Personal: What is your understanding of your need for God?

Tuesday – Led by Kindness

"...humility is the blunt acknowledgement that I owe my life, being, and salvation to Another. This fundamental act lies at the core of our response to grace." Brennan Manning – The Ragamuffin Gospel

1. Review Romans 1:24-2:3 where Paul lists various acts which reject God's truth, followed by a caution against hypocritical judgment. What do you think our response should be to the issues Paul has identified?
2. In Matthew 7:1-5, Jesus has some strong words about judging others, along with instructions for our proper behavior. How are we to respond when we are tempted to judge others? Are you able to put this into practice? When do you find it difficult to do so?
3. Romans 2:4 concludes with a simple observation about the source of a repentant heart. What is it? If you find God leading you into repentance and a restored relationship with him, remember that he made it all possible in the first place. Take time to thank him for it.

Wednesday – Goodness

"No good work is done anywhere without aid from the Father of Lights." CS Lewis – Reflections on the Psalms

1. Please read Romans 2:5-10. Paul's statement in verse 6 was not a new concept to his readers. Many of them were surely familiar with Psalm 62:11-12 and Proverbs 24:12. What comfort can you find in these Old Testament passages when considering God's judgment?
2. According to Romans 2:7, from where do "glory, honor and immortality" come? How does this compare with modern society's notions of what it takes to get to the top?

Digging Deeper: Read John 15:4-6 and 1 John 4:19. The life described in Romans 2:7 is impossible without help. How will that help come to us?

Thursday – Playing Favorites

1. Romans 2:11 is a simple statement, which some people find comforting and others find startling. How do you feel about it? Why?
2. Many Jews in Paul's time thought that God should favor them over non-Jewish people, but Paul knew, as did many other Jews, that God had never intended to automatically reject those who were not Jewish. See 2 Kings 5:1-17 for a wonderful story of how God brought a foreign military commander into a "right relationship" with himself.

Text Insight: Aram and Israel had been at war off and on for centuries. The King of Israel was naturally suspicious of the King of Aram's motives in sending his top military commander. Elisha saw past all this.

Making it Personal – How does this story apply to your life today?

Friday – Throwing Up the Sponge

"Christians have often disputed as to whether what leads the Christian home is good actions or Faith in Christ... It does seem to me to be like asking which blade in a pair of scissors is most necessary. A serious moral effort is the only thing that will bring you to the point where you throw up the sponge. Faith in Christ is the only thing to save you from despair at that point; and out of the Faith in Him good actions must inevitably come." CS Lewis – Mere Christianity

1. Please read Romans 2:12-16. According to verse 13, what does it take to be declared righteous? Why do you think Paul says these people will be *declared* righteous, rather than say they will *achieve* righteousness?
2. What do Psalm 143:2 and Ecclesiastes 7:20 say about our ability to act in total righteousness?
3. Now read Isaiah 53:5 and 1 Peter 2:24. How is our ability to *live for* righteousness and *be declared* righteous consistent with our inability to *be* righteous?

Making it Personal: According to Isaiah 53:5, Christ has made it possible for you to live at peace with God. Are you? If so, thank him for his wonderful gift. If not, pray for the grace to accept what Jesus has done for you.