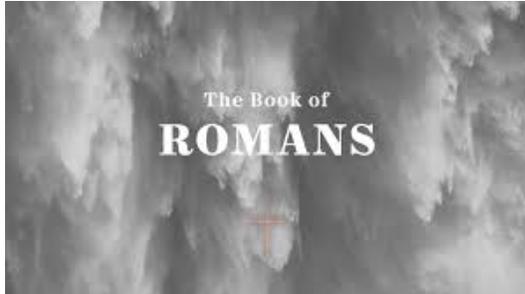


The Man, the Message, and the Mission

Romans 1:1-17

Romans #2

Weekend of February 8-9, 2020



Introduction

Today, we're going to dive into the book of Romans. We'll just start in vs. 1 and begin working our way through all 433 verses of this book--hopefully the first 17 verses. NOW, why Romans, you ask? Many of the greatest Christian leaders have considered it the most important theological book ever written—

We looked last week at this statement made by Martin Luther... **“Romans is the most important**

part of the NT and that its central premise, justification by faith alone, was the doctrine on which the church rises and falls.”

Furthermore, study of this book has been behind almost every major awakening in Christian history. It was study of this book that launched the Protestant Reformation.

Let's review what we went over last week: Romans a book about the gospel. It is the clearest, most in-depth look at the gospel in all of Scripture. But, and here's where people miss the boat--the book is written about the gospel for Christians.

Look at vs. 7: **“To all who are in Rome, loved by God, called as saints.”**

Christians miss the boat on this because they think the gospel is only for unbelievers. But Paul is going to show us that in the gospel are all the resources we need to thrive in the Christian life.

Specifically Paul has a very practical problem he is trying to address in this book: the division of Jews and Gentiles in the church at Rome. You see, the original church consisted of Jews and Gentiles... which was already its own issues, because Jews and Gentiles had all these cultural differences--Jews had this special diet and code of laws, they had different political viewpoints. But then, Emperor Claudius had ordered all the Jews (Jewish Christians included) to get out of Rome (in Acts 18:1-2).

After 5 years years they were allowed to come back and so rejoined the church. They used to be in charge of the church, but now the Gentiles have been running it by themselves for a while at this point. You can imagine the drama that is creating.

Paul is showing them how the gospel creates a new humanity that gives them the ability to overcome their differences--political, cultural, stylistic, etc. TODAY, WE'RE GOING TO try to LOOK AT THE FIRST 17 VERSES. In them, Paul introduces 3 things to us: **the man, the message and the mission.**

Bible Study

The MAN: Who was Paul? Let's look at verse 1... “Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God...” Romans 1:1

Paul was a former Pharisee. Pharisees were a sect in Judaism hyper-devoted to the law. And in Philippians Paul tells us he was not just any Pharisee, but a “Pharisee of the Pharisees.” He had trained under Gamaliel, one of the most sought after teachers of his day. Something like being a Rhodes Scholar of religion today. You didn’t choose a teacher like Gamaliel, he chose you.

For sure, Paul would have had most, if not all, of the Hebrew Scriptures memorized and been proficient in multiple languages. And he was zealous not just for knowing the laws, but for keeping them. **Paul says in Philippians, if anybody thinks they are good at keeping the law, humbly, I was better. “I was good at being good.”**

He was so zealous, in fact, that he devoted himself to destroying Christians. We may see that as a bad thing, but Paul (at least initially) saw it as a good thing. He thought Christians were the enemies of God, and he said, “I was so zealous that I was willing even to kill for his glory.” I would literally do “whatever it takes.” **Part of his dilemma was he started to realize that his zeal for being good had led him to a really bad place.**

Religion can turn you into a really bad person. Religion caters to the worst parts of us: pride, self-centeredness, judgmentalism self-righteousness, and bigotry. Religion done to distinguish you from others or set you apart is inherently selfish and leads you to insecurity, selfishness and cruelty—which is the worst sin!

The one exception to that: the gospel. **The gospel teaches the opposite of religion: It teaches that God offers salvation not to those who earn it as a reward, but those who are unworthy and receive it as a gift.** Look at how he begins...

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God... Romans 1:1

He describes himself as a “Doulos,” “slave.” Lowest of the low. As a Pharisee, his zeal in religion was aimed to elevate him above people. Now he sees his relationship- to Jesus as the reason to lower himself and serve them.

As a Pharisee, when he encountered people who were sinful and had problems, he would say, “Well, you’re just getting what you deserve. If you were awesome like me, you wouldn’t have those problems. Now, he would say, “Yeah, I had lots of problems, too. Thank God it didn’t stop Jesus from coming after me.”

As a Pharisee, when people would wrong him or treat him badly, he would respond with vengeance. I’m righteous, and if you treat me badly, I’ll pay you back. NOW, Paul would say, “I treated Jesus pretty badly, too. Thank God he kept loving me.”

As a Pharisee, when Paul saw someone in need, he’d say, “What I have is mine--I earned it, and I don’t owe it to anybody.” Maybe throw them a carrot. NOW, he would say, “Thank God Jesus didn’t keep what was his for himself. If so, I’d be lost.”

You see, the gospel of grace produces in us a fundamentally different spirit than zealousness in religion does. Religion makes you proud and self-centered. The gospel makes you humble and generous.

Before he met Jesus, the name Paul went by was “Saul,” who was the proud, victorious Israelite king who stood head and shoulders above everyone. But now he went by Paul, which in Latin meant “little,” which is fitting because that's how he now saw himself: small, but loved by a great God and recipient of extravagant grace. The gospel transformed Saul the mighty into Paul the small.

Has that transformation happened to you? We have lots of people who are good at being good and all the things that go with that--fearfulness, competitiveness, and insecurity.

Look how he describes what happens next in verse 1... **”set apart for the gospel of God.”** Formerly, Paul had tried to distinguish himself through his talents and his goodness. Now he wants to be known only for the gospel. **What do you want people to know about you? Are you trying to be Saul the amazing or Paul the small? OK! We're done with vs. 1! Only 432 verses to go in Romans.**

The MESSAGE: What made Paul so confident?

Why is Paul willing to go around the world to places he's not welcome and to people he's never met, enduring unspeakable hardships to get this message across? And why are we always urging you to talk to people about it--sometimes even total strangers? Isn't that needlessly awkward? Isn't religion more of a private matter better left alone? Look at verse 2...

“...which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures...”

Romans 1:2

Paul's most compelling evidence that religion was not a private thing was how Jesus fulfilled OT prophecy. In Luke 24, after the crucifixion, a couple of Jesus' disciples were walking along the road to Emmaus really discouraged at all that had transpired. Jesus, who had just resurrected from the dead, sidles up beside them, all incognito. And he starts trying to assure them that he really was who had told them he was. Now, you would think that the easiest way to do that would be to simply reveal himself to them as the resurrected one.

But evidently, he believed showing them how every single page of a book written by more than 30 different authors over the space of 1500 years had consistently told one story, about him, was even more convincing than the resurrection.

- **In Genesis he was the word of God creating the heavens and the earth and the fulfillment of the promise God gave to Adam and Eve to give them a son who would crush the head of the serpent**
- **Or that from Exodus that he was the Passover Lamb**
- **In Leviticus, the holy place where we meet with God**
- **From Numbers: He was our ever-present guide, our pillar of cloud**
- **From Deuteronomy: he was the prophet coming who would be greater than Moses**

That is just the first five books. 300 other specific prophecies that tell us the time, place, character and ministry of the Messiah. Look at verses 4-5...

“...and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations...” Romans 1:4-5

We saw him raised from the dead. I don't have time to go deeply into it here, but if you are unsure about all this, this is the very place to start examining. The evidence for the resurrection is solid. Paul saw the message of grace as a distinguishing characteristic of the gospel. Those that say that all religions teach the same thing simply demonstrate they have never really looked at it that deeply.

Every religion in the world works off of this premise: I obey, therefore I am accepted. The gospel works off of the opposite...I am accepted, therefore I obey.

In verse 5 Paul calls himself an apostle. There are two types of apostles. Capital "A" Authoritative: one of the original 12, plus Paul. This is what Paul is referring to here. These Apostles were specially commissioned by Jesus in places like Matthew 16 and John 14 to write the Bible, and they had to have been eyewitnesses of the risen Jesus. Jesus gave them the authority to validate the message--which is why all of the were either written by an Apostle or under the oversight of an Apostle. That's a "cap A" Apostle. The small "a" apostle has been given a commission to carry a message.

Paul was an Apostle in both senses. Having seen the resurrected Christ, he was authorized to articulate the message. He was also compelled like all of us to take the gospel around the world. That's the man, the message... finally, let's look at what Paul says about...

The MISSION: How committed is Paul to this task?

Paul discusses that in vv. 14–17, and he says 3 things about the mission: **"I am not ashamed. In fact, I am eager. And, I feel under obligation."**

...for I am not ashamed..." Romans 1:16

In saying "I am not ashamed," Paul indicates that some people are going to be tempted to be ashamed. What is it about the gospel that tempts people to feel ashamed? Tim Keller says there are 4 reasons modern Christians feel ashamed of the gospel:

FIRST, it tells us we're such spiritual failures that the only way to be saved is through a free gift. "This offends moral and religious people who think their decency gives them an advantage over the less moral."

SECOND, it tells us that we are so wicked that only the death of Jesus could save us. "This offends the popular belief in the innate goodness of humanity" (or that we just need to get in touch with our inner beauty.)

THIRD, it teaches us that all so-called good, sincere people will not automatically make it to heaven. "This offends the modern notion that any nice person anywhere can find God 'in his own way.'" It says that God is the only one who can provide salvation, and if you are going to receive it, you have to do it his way.

LASTLY, this gospel tells us that our salvation was accomplished by Jesus' serving and suffering, and we should expect the same in following him: "This offends people who want salvation to be an easy life—nice and comfortable."

So, I'm not ashamed of it, but even more than that...

“I am eager...” Romans 1:15

I won't spend a lot of time here, because we spent time with this last weekend, but Paul says: "I've felt its power in my life; I know it is the only hope of salvation. So, I want to get it to you!"

I feel like **Spurgeon**: "If my hearers are not converted, I have wasted my time; I have lost the exercise of brain and heart. I feel as if I lost my hope and lost my life, unless I find for my Lord some of his blood-bought ones. I would sooner bring one sinner to Jesus Christ than unpack all the divine mysteries of the Word."

The opposite of "ashamed of the gospel" is not "proud to be a Christian," but eagerness to share. Here is the last idea...

“I am obligated...” Romans 1:14

The word he uses here means debtor. But he'd never even met them? How can he feel under obligation to people he's never met? There are two ways to be in debt... owe someone money; be given money for someone else. If at Grace Place Properties we were given a check for one million dollars and we just stashed it away, that's wrong. It's not our money. It wasn't given for that purpose. We have been given this money to further the mission.

That's what God tells us about the gospel message. You were no more worthy of it than anyone around the world. But God blessed you with it, and with the privilege of hearing the gospel comes the responsibility of spreading the gospel. And to not do that is stealing.

Application

When you realize how much you owe to others, how unworthy you were to hear the gospel and how much you owe to Jesus for giving it to you... it changes how you look at your life.

Adoniram Judson was a missionary to Burma. He fell in love with Ann Hasseltine and he wanted to ask her father's permission to marry her. So, he wrote him this letter, and thankfully it was preserved for history:

I have now to ask whether you can consent to part with your daughter early next spring, to see her no more in this world... Whether you can consent to her departure to (foreign, dangerous) lands, and her subjection to the hardships and sufferings of a missionary life? Whether you can consent to her exposure to... every kind of want and distress; to degradation, insult, persecution, and maybe even a violent death? Can you consent to all this, for the sake of him who left his heavenly home and died for her and for you; for the sake of perishing, immortal souls; for the sake of... the glory of God? Can you consent to all this, in hope of soon meeting your daughter in the world of glory, with a crown of righteousness brightened by the acclamations of praise which shall redound to her Savior from (lost nations) saved through her witness?

Is this how you feel about the gospel? Are you ashamed of the gospel, or are you eager to share, and willing to do whatever it takes to get the gospel to others?