



Today we are starting a new series on the book of Romans. The letter to the Romans has probably brought more life transformation than any other single book in the Bible. Listen to what Martin Luther said, “This epistle is really the chief part of the New Testament, and is truly the purest gospel. It is worthy not only that every Christian should know it word for word, by heart, but also that he should occupy himself with it every day, as the daily bread of the soul.” Our prayer for you is this same thing!

The book begins by identifying Paul as the author. No serious scholar today doubts that Paul wrote the letter to Rome. From what we know about Paul, we think he has yet to visit Rome and this letter was written as a way of preparation for his upcoming visit. We think the letter to Rome was written from Corinth between A.D. 55 and 58. I actually had the opportunity of a lifetime to visit Corinth. While I was there I wondered where Paul was exactly as he wrote this letter.

Many good people have many different ideas on the main purpose of the book of Romans. As I've been studying, I think there are three main purposes. The first was to unite the Jewish and Gentile believers. In AD 49 the emperor Claudius evicted the Jews from Rome over the name of Christ. As they were repopulating the city after his death, there was division between the Jewish and Gentile believers. Second, the book was a way for Paul to share the Gospel in Rome, which leads to the third purpose, which was that Paul wanted Roman churches to rally behind him to help spread the Gospel to Spain.

We're excited to begin preaching the book of Romans this morning. It's going to be a journey with great impact. At CPC we value expository preaching, and our purpose in preaching the book is similar to Paul's purpose: for us to know the Gospel. When you think about the Gospel, what is your response? Think about how the Gospel has impacted your life. Let us find ourselves introduced to the Gospel today in Romans 1.

Paul's Calling

The book starts out with a traditional New Testament greeting which is different from our American letter writing style.

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God— (v. 1).

Did you notice the difference? In Biblical times the writer began by introducing himself, while we begin with addressing the recipient. At the time of this letter, Rome boasted a million

residents. Rome was an exciting place to live for the wealthy; it was a center of art and culture. But for the poor, it was quite the contrary. It was especially difficult to be a Christian in Rome. Emperor Nero would soon go mad and Christianity would become illegal and deadly. Nero was raised on brutality, deceit and fought to be Caesar. Nero would become known for blaming his shortcomings on Christians, which resulted in their death in the Coliseum or hanging them on crosses.

Paul actually introduces himself in three different ways here. The first introduction is that of a servant. The word here from the Greek would actually be better translated “slave.” A servant is someone who places themselves under the authority of a person who is more important than they are. A servant recognizes it is their job to assist their master in accomplishing his purpose and not their desires. It is a mindset that says, “I am here for you.” Paul is describing his servant nature to the King of Kings. Paul recognizes his place under Christ.

The next title Paul gives himself is that of an apostle. Paul is called to be an apostle. Note, this is not a job for Paul; this is a calling. The nature of being an apostle is a high calling. This designation was only given to a handful of men and they all spent significant time with Jesus while He was on earth. Paul is the only apostle Jesus called after His ascension to heaven. Paul is the final apostle. God initiated the process for Paul; he did not choose it for himself.

Paul didn't always go by the name Paul. In fact, in the books of Acts we first learn about him with the name Saul. Saul was so troubled by the name of Jesus and so zealous for the religious practices of his Jewish ancestors that he persecuted Christians. He went as far as to ask for letters to travel to Damascus and kill Christians there. As Saul and his companions neared Damascus, a bright light flashed from heaven, knocking Saul off his horse. The light shone so brightly no one could see what was going on around him. Out of the commotion a voice spoke, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” As he lay on the desert floor, with chaos swirling around him, the words spilled out of his mouth, “Who are you, Lord?”

The initial question cut his heart. The answer to his question cut his soul, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.” It would be impossible for the words to be any clearer, “Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do next.” As quickly as it happened, it was over. The very person Saul had

come to persecute intercepted his plan. The Savior reoriented the destructor. Saul was taken to Damascus but instead of killing Christians there, he was baptized as a Christ follower and became known as Paul.

Knowing his calling as an apostle helps us as we study this text. We see there is a stark contrast here between the first two titles Paul uses to describe himself. There is a big difference between a servant and an apostle, especially one who is set apart for the Gospel. This is the third title Paul uses in his introduction—a man who is set apart for the Gospel. We're going to see this word *Gospel* repeat itself in the book of Romans 12 times, and half of them are in the first chapter. What is the Gospel? The Gospel really means "Good News." Please note that I didn't say, "Good Advice." When we talk about the Gospel of God or the Gospel of Jesus Christ we are really talking about the good news of Jesus Christ; mainly His death and resurrection which atoned for our sins.

When was the last time you turned on the news and it was good? It seems like the news is filled with Syrians fleeing the terror of ISIS, a deadly protest in a foreign country, a fire that is out of control and burning homes, another suspected case of police brutality, a reporter being shot on live television, Amber Alerts, suicide bombers, inappropriate celebrities, and professional sports players acting like thugs. With so much bad news around us, it's comforting to know we are going to be studying a book that is all about the good news of Jesus Christ.

The Gospel is Nothing New

This Gospel we are talking about is nothing new; it was actually promised beforehand in the Old Testament.

the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures (v. 2).

Paul was teaching the Gospel from the Old Testament, did you know that? Did you know the Gospel is all over the Old Testament? Some like to say, "The New Testament is concealed in the Old Testament, while the Old Testament is revealed in the New Testament." What was once concealed in the Old Testament is now clear in the New Testament. The Gospel was promised to us in the Old Testament. The prophets spoke of one who would come in the line of David. The Old Testament continually points beyond itself to a time of fulfillment, the age to come.

The Gospel is Centered in Christ

The Gospel that was promised before, from the prophets in the Old Testament, is all about the Son of God.

regarding his Son, who as to his earthly life was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord (verses 3–4).

Make no mistake, there is huge intentionality in Paul's talking about David just after talking about the prophets. Paul is making a connection from the Old Testament in hopes of grabbing the attention of the Jews in Rome. He does this almost immediately so as not to lose their interest. We're going to see this again at the end of our text, but the church in Rome was comprised of both Jews and Gentiles. It was a multicultural church, and it was important for Paul to address the Jewish population here since they comprised a portion of the church in Rome. Paul himself was a Jew!

After Paul embraced the Gospel he began reading the Scripture with a Messianic focus. The Old Testament is full of passages that point us to Christ. Listen to what the prophet Isaiah says. *"Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed"* (Isa. 53:4–5). This is one of the most articulate passages. It's an easy place to start and a great example of reading the Old Testament with New Testament eyes. To those of us who are Christ followers, it is almost impossible to read this and not know who Isaiah is talking about. The prophet is foreshadowing what will happen to Christ. He is telling how Christ will suffer for us and how His wounds will bring us healing. The next time you are reading Isaiah 53, think about Jesus. The next time you're reading the Old Testament ask yourself, "How is this text trying to point me to Jesus?"

Go back to Romans again. Paul is describing Jesus by using two contrasting titles. Paul points out the dual nature of Christ in this passage. Look again—in verse 3 he mentions how Jesus came from the line of David; making him fully human. Meaning Jesus Christ was a direct descendant from King David, who was the king of Israel a millennium before. Then in verse 4, we see Jesus given the title, "Son of God." This second title describes the divinity of Jesus; thus making Jesus fully man and fully God. This description is so neatly and carefully constructed, many have suggested that Paul is making use of a fragment from a creed the early church would have held to.

Verse 4 ends with a clear declaration that Jesus Christ is none other than our Lord. We have to be careful not to conclude that Paul is stating Jesus was only declared the Son of God after His resurrection. The resurrection of Jesus did not "make" Him the Son of God; it did declare and reveal in a powerful way that He had always been God's only Son. As a descendant of David Jesus was a human being. This is what the apostle John attests to. *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning... The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth"* (John 1:1–2, 14). But when

Jesus rose from the dead, it declared to all that He was indeed the Son of God. In his writings on the letter to Rome, Timothy Keller says, "The gospel centers on Jesus. It is about a person, not a concept; it about him, not us."

The Gospel is centered in Jesus Christ. Too many people have fallen into the trap that if they just pray a prayer or raise their hand after a sermon that is all they need to do. Praying a prayer is a starting point and raising your hand is a great first step. Once you've done that, now it's time to grow. Raising our hand can feel like it took so much work to get there, but it's only the beginning of a great relationship! It's like many apps today. You can download an app and get access to a percentage of the game. For most people they only need 50 puzzles or 15 levels and they are good. This is how many people think of Christianity. They think they don't need to upgrade to the full version because the first download has enough to occupy them. We live in a time when many people have only experienced what seems to be a "trial version" of Christianity. But in the New Testament, whenever a person encounters Jesus Christ, they're converted. It's always a life-changing experience centered in the work of Christ. It's a complete change!

The Gospel Calls All People

Jesus came for all of us! Our Lord did not come only for the Jewish people but as Paul continues, he points out that Jesus came for all.

Through him we received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith for his name's sake. And you also are among those Gentiles who are called to belong to Jesus Christ (verses 5–6).

The response must come by faith. Obedience is based in faith. The obedience Paul is talking about here comes from faith. Paul is capturing the attention of both Jew and Gentile. First, for the Jew, he is reminding them of faith. This no doubt would have reminded them of the faith of Abraham who left everything to follow the call of God. What area in your life is calling you to obedience by faith? Have you become complacent in obedient faith? Let this text be a gentle reminder of our need to live by obedience that comes from our faith.

Then Paul grabs the attention of the Gentiles reminding them the Gospel is not "good news for a few." No, the Gospel is good news for all! Jesus came to fulfill the Law and the Prophets, tearing down the curtain and allowing all to enter the presence of God. Paul started this letter as "one called" and now he turns his attention to calling all Gentiles to faith in Christ. He wants to share the same grace he received with others. He wants the church in Rome to experience the calling he received to follow Christ.

Do you know that you are called to belong to Christ? There are those of you who have accepted that call and surrendered your

life to Christ. There are also those of you who have yet to accept that call and have not yet trusted in Christ as your personal Savior. Did you know that I wasn't always a Christ follower? I accepted Christ at an early age, but I walked away from Him during junior high school. It doesn't mean people didn't share the love of Christ with me; I just chose to reject it.

There is one time I vividly remember rejecting the Gospel. It was Halloween, my senior year of high school. Growing up in a small town, everyone went to the village for Halloween. This place was packed with people! As a high schooler I wouldn't dress up, but I did go to the village to see my friends. This particular night I was taking drugs and went to the village to find some friends when a guy from the local church engaged me in conversation about Jesus. He was telling me how Christ came to earth to save me from my sins and that He died on the cross so I could have eternal life with Him. I listened for a minute or so and remember laughing in his face, telling him I wanted nothing to do with Christ.

But even though I wanted nothing to do with Christ, Christ didn't stop pursuing me. A few years later I surrendered my life to Christ. And a year after that, I actually went on a mission trip with that same guy who had shared Christ with me! The great news is this: God is unwilling to give up on us. We are called to belong to Christ. The evangelistic scope of the Gospel is phenomenal—to think that God would go after a young man who laughed at what He did for him! Listen to what the Scriptures say: *"You are not your own; you were bought at a price"* (1 Corinthians 6:19–20). That price was not silver or gold; it was the precious blood of Christ (1 Peter 1:19).

Write this down: The Gospel is the life-changing message about Jesus Christ. Each and every one of us is called to Him. We are loved more than we know, we are worth more than we think, and we are desired by the King of Kings! He went to great length to call us to Himself.

Grace and Peace

We've been though a ton as we're introducing the Gospel and you might be thinking, "This is a long, detailed, introduction to the book." You are right! This is a great introduction to Romans and the Gospel. Paul is so articulate here because he didn't start the church in Rome.

To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be his holy people: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ (v. 7).

Many of Paul's New Testament letters are to churches he helped found on his missionary journeys. Paul traveled to Ephesus and helped start the church there, but he didn't start the church in Rome. He longed to visit it, but he didn't start it. So if Paul didn't start it, then how did it get started? Some have suggested that Christianity was carried to Rome by Jews who visited Jerusalem

on Pentecost and heard the message of Christ. It would have most likely been from the disciples speaking in their own language. Maybe they even listened to Peter as he shared about the love of Christ and they trusted Christ as their personal Savior. What they thought was a religious journey became a radical encounter with the truth of Christ. After Pentecost, they traveled back to Rome where they helped to start the local church.

Thinking about all Christ has done for us let me reiterate a few main points. The next time you read the Old Testament, read it thinking about Jesus as the focus. The Old Testament points us to Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior but you won't know this if you aren't reading it. If you don't have a Bible, get one before you leave, and make a commitment to begin reading it.

We also talked about how the benefits of the Gospel are breathtaking for us! The Gospel is good news and many people are longing for good news. We have the full Gospel, we don't have to live with a trial version. We have the good news, not good advice! It's breathtaking to think about how this Gospel is specifically for us, and that Jesus Christ rose from the dead so we can have life, real life, in Him.

Finally, the evangelistic scope of the Gospel is wide open. In CPC's vision statement, we have a goal of having 5000 people worshipping Jesus in multiple locations. Our mission statement is to make and mature more followers of Christ. The good news we studied is not for us to keep to ourselves. We can't just nod our heads in agreement with what we talked about and then plan for the Niners game tomorrow night.

We too need to share this good news with others, just like Paul. There are people who are depressed, discouraged and maybe even suicidal because they are so inundated with bad news. Will you please share this good news with someone? It will mean a step of faith for you. Think how thankful you are that someone shared this good news with you. Now that we have been introduced to the Gospel, let's share it with others. Bring a friend to church with you next week as we continue this series to hear about the life changing Gospel of Jesus Christ.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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