



The letter to the Romans has probably brought more life transformation than any other single book in the Bible. English pastor John Stott said, “It was Paul’s devastating exposure of universal human sin and guilt in Romans 1–3 which rescued me from that kind of superficial evangelism which is preoccupied only with people’s felt needs.” Augustine describes his experience of reading Romans as this: “It was as if a light of relief from all anxiety flooded into my heart. All the shadows of doubt were dispelled.”

It was by reading Romans 1:17 that Martin Luther had a Break Through that led to the Protestant Revolution. As a German monk he was taught that God required him to live a righteous life in order to be saved. He had grown to hate God for requiring him to do what he couldn’t do. So when he read, “In the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed – a righteousness that is by faith from first to last,” he had what he called a Break Through. The Holy Spirit spoke to his heart and revealed the beautiful message of the Gospel. That experience has changed millions of peoples’ lives since then because Luther led the way for every Protestant church.

I’m praying that each of you will have a Break Through like Luther as we read and study Romans: That you will experience the freedom and release the Gospel brings. That’s what Romans is all about.

Before we read our passage for today, let me describe the setting in Rome at the time Paul wrote this letter to them. The year was sometime between 55–58 AD. Three words summarize Rome well: money, sex and power. The movie *Gladiator* depicted the violence, corruption, sexuality and arrogance well. Francine Rivers, in her historical novel *A Voice in the Wind*, described it from the vantage point of a Christian slave.

Because there’s a cultural fascination with Rome, you’ve been exposed to something that revealed how godless and ruthless Rome was. Yet, a church was shining its light in the darkness, a church that might have looked like ours. Filled with sincere followers of Jesus, young and old, gathering weekly to sing songs and hear the word of God taught, breaking bread in home Bible studies, and trying to live in a culture that was equally sophisticated as it was godless.

It was to this church that the Apostle Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, wrote them this letter to describe the power of the Gospel and how the Gospel changes everything about a person’s life.

Let’s begin our journey through this life-changing book by reading the first 7 verses in chapter 1.

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God—the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures 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. 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.

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.

Four Angles of the Gospel

- The Gospel transformed Paul
- The Gospel is not new
- The Gospel centers on Jesus
- The Gospel calls to everyone

The Gospel Transformed Paul

“Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God.”

The book begins with a traditional New Testament greeting by Paul introducing himself. No serious scholar today doubts that Paul wrote the letter to Rome. In his introduction, Paul describes himself as a man who’s been transformed by the Gospel.

Paul is a servant. A slave, a *doulos*, wasn’t a hired servant who could come and go as he pleased. A *doulos* was a person who had been purchased, and once purchase he became his master’s possession. Paul, like all Christians, has a Master, and his name is Jesus Christ. “He is the Master and I am his slave.” And this is good because He is a great God. Paul was transformed from aimless freedom to purposeful servanthood.

Paul is an Apostle. “... **called to be an apostle.**” Literally, this means “sent one.” This is not a job for Paul; it’s a calling. After Paul met Jesus on the road to Damascus, his name was changed from Saul to Paul. He went from a man persecuting Christians to

a man loving Jesus. He was utterly transformed personally and he was called by Jesus to be an Apostle. Which leads us to the third way Paul described himself: “...and set apart for the gospel of God.”

Paul was set apart. What does that mean? It means that Paul was “separated” in order to spread the Gospel. This was his overriding aim in life—spread the Gospel. The very thing that transformed him, the Gospel, he is now going to share with anyone who will stand still long enough to listen! We’re going to see this word Gospel repeated 12 times in the book of Romans twelve times, and half of them are in the first chapter.

Gospel = *euangelio* = good herald. In the ancient world, word of important news spread through heralds. People would travel to places and share the news. The declaration of this “good news” is the heart of the Gospel. It’s **not** good advice. It’s good news about what’s already been done for you. Other religions offer some good advice and instructions about how to behave. Only Christianity offers “good news” about something that’s already been accomplished for you. This good news completely transformed Paul! This is the essence of Christianity.

If you asked a person on the Peninsula, “What do you think is the essence of Christianity?”, most of them would say something like, “try to live like Jesus or love your neighbor or live according to the Golden Rule.” I’m all for these, by the way. But this isn’t “good news” about something that’s been done for you. The Gospel is the message that something amazing has been done **for you**. It’s a free gift. It’s an undeserved honor. It’s thoughtful. It’s personal. That’s why it’s the most wonderful news that could ever be shared.

Question: Whatever you believe about God, is it mainly about you and what you must **do**, or mainly about Him and what He’s **done**? This is a Break Through change.

When I was 24, I had a Break Through like this. I knew a lot about the Bible. I was a growing Christian yet I felt pressured to make God happy by what I did but mostly what I didn’t do. This created a huge problem for me. I had tied my good behavior to God’s love. The better I was, the more He loved me. The worse I was, the more He was disappointed. Can you see why this could have created a problem for me?

I had a bad habit; you might call it a chronic behavior; you might call it a sin that I could not stop committing. I tried ... failed. I asked for help from others ... failed. I created accountability structures ... failed. One day after failing yet again I was mopey and punishing myself for being so weak, I sensed God saying to me, “You cannot out-sin my love for you. Confess and move ahead.”

In an instant, the Spirit of God brought the insight to my heart that the Gospel is not about what I must **do** for God—instead it is all about Him and what He’s **done** for me. I was transformed.

This is the kind of transformation the Apostle Paul experienced. This is the kind of transformation that’s available to anyone. You might be wondering if my behavior improved after this. Yes. But not perfectly. “God’s kindness is intended to lead you to repentance” (Romans 2:4).

The Gospel is Not New

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

The Old Testament is all about the Gospel. Some will make an artificial separation between the Old and New Testament saying the Old is about the Law and the New is about grace. People must have been saying this for a long time because Paul is addressing that here when he says, “*The gospel was promised way back in the Old Testament.*”

Genesis 3 predicts that the seed of the woman (Jesus) would crush Satan’s head (Jesus’ resurrection from the dead and victory over sin). Isaiah 53 says that God laid the punishment of humanity’s sin on Jesus. Forgiveness and reconciliation to God will be possible through Jesus.

“*Promised beforehand.*” This theme stood out to me as we studied the Bible from Genesis to Revelation last year. Repeatedly the scriptures were pointing forward to this announcement: “You can’t do it, But Jesus, Emmanuel, can do it for you. Can somebody say, ‘Good News!’”

Why would this be important to the church in Rome and us today? To offer substantial, historical validation to otherwise audacious claims. If you’re going to make a gigantic claim, you better have amazing evidence to back it up. Paul is saying, “I have thousands of years of writings promising that Jesus would come to save the world.”

This isn’t just any message of “good news.” It’s the ultimate good news. And it’s **not** news about an event or a concept but about a person.

The Gospel Centers on Jesus

“... 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.”

There is a lot packed in these two verses. It’s like your refrigerator after Thanksgiving! Paul says that Jesus was a descendent of David, the “Son of God” and “Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Can we just soak in these for a moment? “*Jesus is ... a descendant of David*” was included for a couple of reasons. One is to grab the attention of the Jews in Rome who had become Christians. The church in Rome was comprised of both Jews who believed in Jesus and Gentiles who believed in Jesus. It was

important for the Jews to see that Jesus and Christianity were part of their history.

A second reason to include this relates to everyone. It gives a specific example of historical validity to Jesus. Old Testament prophecies predicted that the Messiah would come from the lineage of David. So if a person just claimed to be the Messiah, yet they were from any other lineage, they were immediately disqualified. Jesus' heritage was one example that he was legitimate.

"Jesus is ... the Son of God" is the second description of Jesus. This is a title describing the divinity of Jesus. Jesus is fully God. When you combine this with being a descendant of David, you get the most unusual mixture: Fully God and Fully Man. Theologians call this the hypostatic union, which means that Jesus was fully God and fully man at the same time.

Verse 4 ends with a clear declaration that "Jesus," his given name, was "the Christ," a title given to him meaning "Messiah," and He is our Lord, meaning he rules over us: He is the Master and we are the slaves. "Jesus is ... Jesus Christ our Lord." Tim Keller sums this up in a helpful manner: "The gospel is both a declaration of Jesus' perfect rule, and an invitation to come under that perfect rule, to make him 'our Lord.'"

These two verses are just thick with implications and mystery. Put simply, it's all about Jesus. The human mind can't fully comprehend all the aspects of Jesus Christ. So it helps us to take a step toward understanding to answer, What does any of this have to do with us?

The Gospel Calls to Everyone

"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."

When a person is called and they respond in faith, they receive grace. This is the whole point of the Gospel! Something has been done so the holy God of the universe can have a relationship with us. That's what Jesus accomplished for us.

But I want you to think for a moment about how amazing this grace is that we receive. The Gospel is about more than just forgiveness. If all we have is forgiveness, it would mean our past is wiped clean but my actions from this point forward are dependent on me. This isn't very Good News! It's like God would be saying, "I'm not going to hold your past against you. But now you better get it right." The salvation of the Gospel is past forgiveness and it's the perfect status of Jesus given to us—forever!

Two inmates being released from prison could illustrate the difference I'm talking about. Inmate #1 is released from a death row sentence; all charges have been dropped. When he's discharged from the prison he's given the personal items he had when he entered. And he is given instructions about checking in with his parole officer. He is free from his past actions but his future is all-dependent on his actions from that point forward.

Inmate #2 is released from a death row sentence; all charges have been dropped. As he's being discharged from the prison he's given a new name and a new social security number. His new identity has: a checking account with \$50,000; an undergraduate degree from Yale and a Masters from Stanford; a medal of honor; a job with a big salary; a Tesla is parked outside; a track record of being the most respected person on the city council.

Which released inmate would you want to be?

Someone else earned all of that but they gave it to inmate #2. That's the Good News of the Gospel. Because of the actions of Jesus, your past is forgiven and your present and future are Jesus' goodness. *"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God"* (2 Cor. 5:21).

We aren't immediately transported to a state of sinlessness. But it's like we are covered into all the benefits of Jesus. All that he deserves is on us.

This is the second Break Through change. It's not just forgiveness but being clothed in the righteousness of Christ. The righteousness from God is given to anyone who places their faith in Jesus.

Question: How much of your day-to-day attitude and state of mind are determined by your actions, and how much is determined by the merits of Jesus that he's given you? As we finish up, our section of scripture today ends with this declaration:

**"To all in Rome (in Central Peninsula Church) 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."**

Have you heard God's call? If you have, it's because He loves you and He wants you to experience a Break Through—salvation is mainly about Him and what he's done; your salvation accomplishes you being clothed in the righteousness of Christ. If you haven't, understand that God loves you. He wants you to hear the declaring of this Good News and surrender your life to Him in faith.

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

© 2015 Central Peninsula Church South, Redwood City, CA
Catalog No. 1418-1S

This message from Scripture was preached on Sunday, September 13, 2015 at Central Peninsula Church South
1005 Shell Blvd. | Foster City, CA 94404 | 650 349.1132 | www.cpcweb.org. Additional copies available on request.