

Romans 1:1-17 Gospel Greetings, 10/13/19

Every day, we hear news from a variety of sources, whether you watch the news, read the news or get your news on twitter. We hear breaking news...**But usually, the news is bad news.** In fact, I read a statistic that 90% of all news is negative. If it bleeds it leads. Test this with Phone.

We are starting a series on the Book of Romans, and the Apostle Paul headlines the front page of his story not with bad news, but **good news.** He's here to say, God has some great and wonderful news and I want the whole world to know about it. That is found in a single word, the word gospel. The word gospel means good news and in the 1st century, battlefield an emperor who won a great victory which secured his peace and established his authority, he would send "evangelists to declare the good news" to declare his victory, peace and authority. It was an announcement from the king for his kingdom. This is the gospel. The gospel is not advice to be followed, the gospel is that I need to be a better person, read my Bible, pray more and then God will bless me....NO! The Gospel is an announcement about what has been accomplished. And this is the term that Paul uses 60x in the book of Romans alone! And nowhere in the Bible is the gospel so well articulated, defended, logically explained than in the Book of Romans.

[Next Slide] The greatest Christian leaders for the last 2000 years have maintained that Romans is the most important theological book ever written. You should know that the book of Romans transformed the lives of people like St. Augustine and Reformers like John Calvin and Martin Luther, who once said it was "the most important piece of the NT" and that it was "impossible to read, study, ponder, or meditate on it too much." It sparked the Great Awakening of the 18th century with John Wesley and George Whitfield. It influenced William Tyndale, John Bunyan the writer of "Pilgrim's Progress"...and Me. At the age of 18 when I began reading through this book I came to chapter 5:8 "God demonstrates his love for us in this, while were we still sinners Christ died for us." Something clicked. And I gave my life to Christ. Now I want to pose a question that will stay with us throughout this series. This question for this series is, **"Has the Gospel become real to you?"** Or is it just Christian catch phrase? Something we just sing about? Is it just a theoretical idea? Or is it so real that, like Martin Luther, it has broken through your heart and lead you into the freedom of a transformed life? That you couldn't imagine ever going back to life before the gospel awakened your soul? A life before his grace, his power, his presence in your life?

Wherever you are with that question today, my prayer throughout this series is that the Holy Spirit will help us to say, "yes, the gospel is real, and becoming more real to me each day." Challenge- study along with us. **Romans for You** We are going to study Romans in 5 Parts, with some breaks in between, over the next year. **Our problem, God's provision, our power, our predicament and our practice.** This first part, **our problem, from Romans 1-3,** we will study over the next six weeks. In order to understand what makes the good news so good, we need to first become well acquainted with the bad news. The gospel is not "You're OK, I'm OK, we're all OK." That is the gospel of modern spirituality. We have a problem that no amount of self-improvement, self-sacrifice or self-denial can fix. And the bad news is what makes the good

news so precious. But today we get the good news headlines in the first 17 verses of chapter 1. **Gospel Greetings**. We will discover the Man and His Message.

The Man: Who is Paul?

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

We have to take in just how astonishing it is that Paul would introduce himself this way, given who he used to be. A couple decades earlier if he was writing a letter to this church it would have said- “The powerful Saul, a Pharisee of Pharisees, called to be God’s hitman. I’m coming for you Christians!”

What changed all that? Let’s just say he had a literal, “Come to Jesus” meeting. And after his encounter with Jesus, he began to realize what religion had been doing to him. His zeal for being good, lead him not to love, but hatred and self-righteousness. Believe it or not, Atheist Bill Maher and the Apostle Paul agree on one thing—religion can turn you into a really bad person. Religion (doing external good works to earn salvation) caters to the worst parts of us: pride, self-centeredness, judgmentalism, self-righteousness, and bigotry. The one exception to that: the gospel. Because the gospel teaches the opposite of religion: It teaches that God offers salvation not to those earn it as a reward, but those who are unworthy and receive it as a gift.

This is why Paul sees himself no longer as a pharisee but the opposite, a servant, a slave of Jesus Christ- doulos, lowest of the low. As a Pharisee, he saw himself as a messenger of God’s wrath, as a servant he now sees himself as a messenger of God’s grace. As a Pharisee he was “set apart” because he thought he was holier than everyone else. Now he sees himself set apart to serve. You see, the gospel of grace produces in us a fundamentally different spirit than religion does. Religion can make you proud and self-centered. The gospel produces humility and others-centeredness.

[Next Slide] Probably the second biggest story in the news over the past couple of weeks is the Amber Guyger hearing, the policewoman who shot and killed Botham Jean, her neighbor when she mistakenly went into his apartment instead of her own. In the midst of this incredibly dark moment, there was bright light. Botham’s brother, Brandt Jean when he testified in court, to the astonishment of all who were there, and proceeded to not only forgive Amber Guyger, but acknowledge that we all need forgiveness from God through Jesus Christ, told her he loves her and then in a stunning moment gave her the hug seen round the world. **PICTURE**. This is gospel power, the same power that transformed Paul from a self-righteous, condemning pharisee to a humble servant of God’s grace. **How do you see yourself?** A pretty good person? Better than most? An important person at work? A wealthy influencer? A popular athlete who deserves accolades? Or a servant of Jesus Christ. How you see yourself reveals much about your understanding of the gospel and will dictate how you treat others.

The Message: What is Paul proclaiming? 5 things.

#1 Good news about a promised savior.

Romans 1:2-3 ² *the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures* ³ *regarding his Son,*

Paul reminds them that if they know the Scriptures, they should be expecting a Savior. New Testament isn't an addition, it is a continuation of God's promised savior. Christians weren't a bunch of defectors from Judaism who followed some renegade leader named Jesus. This is why Jesus himself said, I did not come to destroy the law and the prophets. I did not come to destroy them, but to fulfill them. Post resurrection, Jesus spoke with those on the road to Emmaus and showed 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, the savior of the world! If I had the time we could look at the 300 prophecies and promises and themes. The gospel message is proof that God keeps his promises.

#2 Good news about the God-Man, Jesus.

Romans 1:3-4 ³ *who as to his earthly life was a descendant of David,* ⁴ *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.*

This message is about a person, not a concept. Who is Jesus? Probably no better passage affirms both the humanity and the deity of Jesus Christ in a sentence like this one. Fully human, descendant of David, fully divine- and his resurrection is living proof of who he always was. That means the good news is not about a good man. The good news is about the God-man. Being man, he had the ability to substitute for mankind on the cross. Being God, he had the capacity to save all of mankind. No one is like Jesus (man) Christ (savior) our Lord (God).

#3 Good news about grace.

Romans 1:5-7 ⁵ *Through him we received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith for his name's sake.* ⁶ *And you also are among those Gentiles who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.* ⁷ *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.*

Paul saw the message of grace as a distinguishing characteristic of the gospel. This is a beautiful word that means "unmerited, unearned favor" a gift! 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'm accepted. The gospel works off the opposite. I am accepted, therefore I want to obey. C.S. Lewis story: Prof of literature... Oxford professors in room writing what all religions have in common on board. They see C.S. Lewis- what is not on this board that would make Christianity different? He writes one word, "Grace." and walks out of the room. Talk about a mic drop. The gospel is about grace.

#4 Good news for all people.

I want you to listen for Paul's heart toward the Romans, a group of people he had never met in person.

Romans 1:8-15

⁸ First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world. ⁹ God, whom I serve in my spirit in preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you ¹⁰ in my prayers at all times; and I pray that now at last by God's will the way may be opened for me to come to you.

Paul was writing this letter from the Greek city of Corinth in 57AD during his third missionary journey. And he had been hearing about their faith in all of these cities he had been preaching in throughout his travels.

¹¹ I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong— ¹² that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith. ¹³ I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that I planned many times to come to you (but have been prevented from doing so until now) in order that I might have a harvest among you, just as I have had among the other Gentiles.

¹⁴ I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish. ¹⁵ That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are in Rome.

Prior to 2016, I had a longing to visit the Holy Land, Israel. I had read so much, known so many people and stories from this land...and yet never put my hand on the Western Wall, I longed to be in this special place with these special people. This is just a glimpse of how Paul felt about the Roman church. While he had not yet been there physically, it seems like he had been with them in Spirit for years. He felt like he already knew them and he loved them sight unseen- in fact he mentions 26 people by name from this city he had never visited. Paul was determined to get to Rome, and he ultimately did, although it was cuffed to a Roman Centurion. What I want us to see in this, is that Paul's heart was so compelled for these people in foreign city. What a radical shift- the religious Paul, the pharisee Paul would have never been concerned about foreigners. And definitely not gentiles! But now he sees them like family he has never met. Why? Because Paul did not see the gospel as only a Jewish thing in Jerusalem, only something for rich people or poor people. It is not one race, one place, But good news for all! The gospel does that.

There's a false assumption out there. I've heard it put to me this way, especially when we send out missionaries to different parts of the world. Why are you doing that? A modern skeptic would say, why are you sending missionaries? You have no right to impose your Western culture, a Western religion, on other cultures who think differently.

And anytime somebody says, it's a Western religion, I feel like saying, I think you need another geography course in school. Last time I checked, it originated in the Middle East town of Jerusalem. That makes us about as far away from its origin as you can get. And the center of Christianity is not Texas as some might think. Statistically, you are far more likely to find a Christian in Asia or Africa than you are to find one with a belt buckle and cowboy boots. It is a gospel for all people. The world has many religions, but only one gospel. And this leads us to our last point about the message.

#5 Good News about saving power.

Romans 1:16-17

¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. ¹⁷ For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.”

That's quite a statement isn't it? I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ. It's quite a statement because think of all that Paul had been through up to this point. He had been snuck over a wall at Damascus. He had been stoned and left for dead at Lystra. He had been beaten up, arrested, and put in jail in Philippi. He has been chased out of Thessalonica. He was laughed at in Athens. He was nearly torn to pieces in Jerusalem all because he preached the gospel. After all of that, he goes, I can't wait to come to Rome and do it again. I'm not ashamed of the gospel. And you read that and say, are you sadistic? Paul sets a really high bar for us because often are so intimidated to share the gospel because someone might give us a thumbs down on social media. What would make someone so unflinching and unashamed? Paul knew firsthand the power of God in the gospel. "I've experienced its power in my life; I know it is the only hope of salvation. So, I *want* to get it to you!" Here's my question. Has the gospel come to you like that? What I mean by that is can you honestly say, at this moment, that this is the best news you've ever heard? That you know the power of God? You have experienced the power to transform your life?

Because if not, it could be that you are simply making a profession of faith, but there's no possession of faith in Christ. Maybe it's a religious thing. It's a weekend thing. It's a cultural thing. It's your parent's thing. But it's not a personal thing. An encounter with Jesus and what he has done leaves us different. Do you know the gospel?

And if you have the greatest power on earth, how can we be ashamed? There's a great story about a famous **Austrian violinist named Fritz Kreisler**. And in his travels, in one city, he came across an exquisite violin. And he thought, I must have that violin. He couldn't afford it. So he didn't buy it. He left to raise the money to buy the violin. Once he raised the money, he went back to the town, found the man who owned the violin, offered to buy it. But the man delivered the sad news that he had already sold the violin to a collector. Fritz was undeterred, found the collector, offered to pay the money. And the collector said, I cannot part with what he called my most prized possession, the violin. Fritz Kreisler was disappointed but as he turned to leave, he asked the collector, would you mind if I played the violin before it is consigned to eternal silence in your collection? Collector said, sure, what do I care? Have at it. So Kreisler took the violin, began to play such an inspiring song. The collector was so moved by what he heard, he said, I have no right to keep this to myself. It's yours. Take it into the world. And let the people hear it.

That's our message. We have such a treasure. We need to let the people hear it. It's not a task. It's a treasure. It's more than a duty. It's sheer delight. It certainly was to Paul. This is how I want us to feel about our own community, because it starts here...How do you know you aren't ashamed of the gospel? You share it!