

Starting the Romans Road, part 1

(Romans 1:1-7)

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Introduction

In October of 1955, Pastor Martyn Lloyd Jones stood behind the pulpit of Westminster Chapel in the heart of London and began preaching the book of Romans.

Lloyd Jones was committed to expository, verse by verse preaching.

As such he began in Romans 1:1 on that day in October 1955 and he finally arrived at Romans 16:27 in March of 1968.

Though he took breaks each summer to make sure his congregation a balanced diet of the Word of God, Lloyd Jones ended up 366 sermons from the book of Romans.

Which equally 7 years worth of Sunday spent in this great letter to the church.

Lloyd Jones would go on to say that this book transformed his life and ministry and the flock at Westminster Chapel.

In fact, when Lloyd was asked by which sermons he would like published, he quickly pointed out his sermon series in Romans.

Jones said that the value of the book of Romans to the Christian is unmatched.

“Romans not only lays out the doctrines of the faith clearly, it fills the heart with joy unspeakable.”

Now I don’t plan to spend the next 7 years in it here, but I do plan to take our time working through it.

Our goal is not to get done.

Our goal is have our lives transformed by it one verse at a time.

Some have said that if we only had the book of Romans in the NT, we would know most of what is essential to Christianity.

Others have noted that nearly every revival or great awakening in the church era has some tie to the book of Romans.

Martin Luther was converted when he read Romans 1:17, and the result was the Protestant Reformation.

Listen to Luther’s view of Romans,..

"It is the true masterpiece of the New Testament, and the very purest gospel, which is well worthy and deserving that a Christian man should not only learn it by heart, word for word, but also that he should daily deal with it as the daily bread of men's souls. For it can never be too much or too well read or studied; and the more it is handled the more precious it becomes, and the better it tastes."

But Luther is not the only one captivated by the truth of this book.

Countless other theologians and scholars and pastors and professors have marveled at the book of Romans.

Even the unbelieving world notes the incredible logic and reason found in the book of Romans.

Some have called the book of Romans the most profound writing that exists.

So we are in for a treat for the next 16 chapters.

And I tell you that we will plumb the depths of some of the greatest truths that God reveals to man in this book, and we will all be the better for it.

Let me whet your appetite with some questions that will be answered within the 16 chapters of Romans.

What will happen to people who have never heard the gospel?

What is man's biggest sin?

Why is our our own nation experiencing a rise in sin?

Is it better to be born a Jew or a Gentile?

How did we inherit the sinful nature of Adam?

Why does the believer struggle with sin?

What is relationship between a believer and government?

How should we view the nation of Israel today?

What does predestination mean?

Who are the elect?

Can salvation be lost?

And what does the Bible say about a believer's view of OT law?

Those are just a few of the questions that this book will answer.

So where do we begin?

Well, we begin where we always begin.

WE begin at chapter 1 verse 1 and we take it verse by verse, trying to milk every drop of nourishment from this incredible book.

Let me read the first 7 verses to us, and then we will go back and simply see how far we get today..

1 Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, [a]called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, 2 which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures, 3 concerning His Son, who was born of a [b]descendant of David according to the flesh, 4 who was declared the Son of God with power [c]by the resurrection from the dead, according to the [d]Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord, 5 through whom we have received grace and apostleship [e]to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for His name's sake, 6 among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ; 7 to all who are beloved of God in Rome, called as [f]saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

What we see here is simply an introduction to this letter that really sets the stage for what will follow.

We are going to meet the man who God uses to write this letter.

We are going to be reminded of the message that he was given.

We are going to see the mission that he was on, and we are going to meet the people to whom he was writing.

So, let's go back to verse 1 to meet the author of the letter.

I. The Author (1)

Let's just read the first word of this book and take a minute to think about Paul.

Now if you have been with us on Wednesday nights, we have met Paul in the book of Acts.

He first shows up in Acts 7 as the ring leader of a group of Jews who are stoning a man named Stephen.

Stephen was a Jew who had come to faith in Christ.

In fact, Stephen was one of the first Christian evangelists in the history of the church.

He was saved, and he immediately went to his fellows Jews and told them about Christ.

Yet, that news wasn't received too well.

Instead of listening to Stephen, they attacked Stephen and drug him before the Jewish authorities.

And those Jewish leaders sentenced Stephen to death and put a man named Saul in charge of his execution.

And Saul makes sure that Stephen dies as the first Christian martyr.

However, the plan to silence Stephen by stoning him backfires because the threat of death sends other Christians running in all directions.

And eventually Saul finds believers like Stephen spreading in all directions.

Though he can't chase them all down and have them stoned, Saul chases down a lot of Christians and has them thrown in jail or even murdered.

And this rampage against the church goes on for some time until he encounters the resurrected Jesus on the way to Damascus one day.

In his encounter, his physical eyes are blinded but his spiritual eyes are opened and he puts his faith in Christ and never looks back.

In a matter of a few days, Saul goes from persecuting Jesus to proclaiming Him as the Son of God.

And from that moment, the world and the church will never be the same.

Saul will be called Paul, and God will begin to use him mightily in the ministry.

Paul will start churches all over the Mediterranean world.

Paul will preach sermons to all sorts of kings and authorities.

Paul will write letters to churches like the book of Romans that become the 13 of the 27 books of the NT.

All in all, the name Paul means much in terms of the spread of the gospel, the life and health of the church, the sanctification of the believer, and the doctrines of the Christian faith.

Paul is no random man that God chose to use to write this letter.

Paul is a key figure in church history and crucial to the unity and purity of the early church.

And so Paul is the one chosen by God to pen this letter to the church in Rome.

Now, this was nothing new for Paul.

He wrote to the Corinthian church on two occasions.

He wrote the Galatian church.

He wrote to the Ephesian church.

He wrote to the Philippian church.

He wrote to the Colossian church.

He wrote to the Thessaloian church.

But in all those cases, Paul had a personal connection with those churches.

He founded many of them and had personal connections to them all.

But that was not the case with the Roman church.

Paul hadn't founded it.

He had never even visited it, but Paul was still used by God to write a letter to them.

Now why was that?

Well, no one knew the gospel better than Paul so he would be more than equipped to explain it to the Romans.

And second Rome was a strategic city for the gospel.

The church there needed a sure foundation, and since they had not been founded by an apostle or even visited by one, they needed to make sure their doctrine was sound and accurate.

So Paul was the logical choice to lay the foundation of gospel truth in Rome, and that is exactly what this letter is.

Many of Paul's letters to church corrected error, but Romans was written to prevent error from creeping into that church.

Now where is Paul as he sits to write this letter to Rome, and what is going on in his life?

Well, Paul was converted on that road to Damascus in the early 30s AD.

Most put his conversion around 32 AD.

But that miraculous conversion put Paul in immediate danger.

He was almost killed by the Jews in Damascus after his conversion, so he escaped and went south, even south of Israel.

And it seems that during this time out of the limelight, he was visited and taught by the resurrected Christ.

Once training was over, he headed out in the world to preach and evangelize and establish churches and lay the foundation of biblical truth that becomes the NT.

Now Paul's first letter was to the churches in Galatia, which he wrote in 48 AD.

His second and third letters were to the church in Thessalonica in 51 -53 AD.

His third and fourth letters were to the church in Corinth in 54 AD, and his 5th letter is the book of Romans written in 56 or 57 AD.

At this point, Paul has been saved for over 20 years, but it has been 20 years of trouble for him.

He has been beaten, he been whipped, he has been under threat of death.

But Paul has pressed on, and he is pressing on as he writes this letter.

In fact, he was in Corinth when he wrote this letter.

He is there as part of his third missionary journey to take the gospel and plant churches and shepherd already planted churches.

But the Roman church is on his mind, simply because he is close to them geographically but he can't get to them physically.

So the Lord breathes out the words of this letter to Paul and he puts them on paper and sends a lady named Phoebe to deliver it to the church in Rome.

Now at this point, Paul bears the scars of a rough life.

Though we aren't sure what Paul looked like, and ultimately it doesn't matter, I want to read you a description of Paul from a 2nd century historian.

“Paul was small of stature—and there's an unconfirmed report that he was four feet six inches tall—bald, with crooked legs, a hooked nose, scars all over his face from his stonings and beatings.”

Here is an artist rendering of what Paul may have looked like.

Again, we aren't sure about this picture, but ultimately the ministry of Paul was not about his appearance but his character.

So how did Paul view himself?

Well, if you look back at verse 1, Paul describes himself in 3 ways..

First of all, Paul sees himself as a bond servant of Jesus Christ.

However, the best translation of this verse is not bond servant but slave.

The word that Paul used here is doulos.

It is found quite frequently in the NT, and it simply means a slave.

One Greek dictionary defines doulos in this way, - someone who belongs to another, a bond slave without any ownership rights of their own.

Servants had some rights but slaves had no rights.

And the picture of the believer's relationship to Christ is one of a master to his slave.

Paul was a slave of Christ, and so are all of us.

Christ is our Savior, but He is also our Master.

He owns believers because he has bought them with a price, - the price of his own body and blood.

And if anyone saw the absolute authority of Christ in their life, it was Paul.

Paul had encountered His Master on the road to Damascus, and he served Him the rest of his life.

He lived as a loving slave of Jesus for the rest of his days.

Now, the Romans to whom Paul was writing would know all about slavery.

In fact, the Roman Empire ran on the backs of slaves.

Some historians estimate a slave population of over 1 million in the Roman Empire.

There were slaves all over Rome, and they were looked down upon by all.

But this is the picture that Paul wanted his readers to see.

He was writing them a letter but he was a nobody.

He was not in ministry to get rich.

He was not in ministry to satisfy his longings.

He was in ministry because Christ was His master, and Paul was his slave.

And though the Lord was using him to write them a letter, he was a fellow slave of Christ simply doing his job for His master.

You see, Christianity is not a religion of personal benefit, it is a religion of personal service and devotion to Christ as Lord and Master.

Over the years, people have tried to clean up this concept of slave in the NT.

This is why many of your translations say servant or bond servant.

But slave is proper view of our relationship to Christ.

He bought us.

He owns us.

And we serve him with all our might for the rest of our lives.

Paul was a slave of Christ.

But Paul also says that he was called as an apostle.

Now what is an apostle?

It simply means one who is sent, and in a general sense, all believers are apostles.

We are sent in the world with the gospel for the express purpose of making disciples of Christ.

But in the NT, there are also we can call capital A apostles.

And these men were the men that God chose to use to build the church.

The 12 disciples of Jesus become the 12 Apostles of the church.

And the NT is clear, - a capital A apostle is one who was called by Jesus personally and had been an eyewitness of the resurrection.

Now Paul was not with Jesus during his ministry on earth.

He did not see Jesus go to the cross and rise on the 3rd day.

He was not there for the 40 days after the resurrection where Jesus taught the disciples.

But he had seen the resurrected Jesus, and he had been personally sent by Jesus.

Now why is that important?

It is important because Paul is about lay out the essentials of the Christian faith to the church in Rome, and he wants them to know that he was called by God to do this.

He is not some random man writing them a letter about what it means to be a Christian.

He is a man who has been called by God and sent to deliver the truth of the gospel to the world.

Paul is not delivering his opinion to the Romans.

He has been sent to by God to deliver them the foundational truths of Christianity.

The point was simple.

They needed to listen carefully to what he wrote because it is exactly what God wanted them to know.

A final description of Paul is that he was set apart for the gospel of God.

The irony of this statement is that Paul spent much of his life as a Jewish Pharisee.

Pharisees were those who followed every letter of the law.

They literally set themselves apart from the majority of the Jewish people.

Paul even said that he was trained to be a Hebrew of the Hebrews.

Paul had worked his whole life to be set apart from his fellow Jews.

He had worked hard to keep his life cleaner than any of his fellow Jews, but Jesus had destroyed that effort in a blinding light outside of Damascus.

And He has now set Paul apart for gospel ministry.

He has been set apart to declare the worthlessness of good works and the glory of the gospel of Christ which saves by faith alone.

All the time that Paul had spent separating himself from fellow Jews and Gentiles would now be spent bring those two groups together in the gospel.

The one who was once the untouchable Saul is now the kind and compassionate Paul.

God often has way of taking our former priorities and turning them on their head to serve him.

The man who was set apart stood head and shoulders above all because of extreme obedience to the law is now going to call people away from that same law and into faith in Christ.

So that is the author of this letter to the Romans.

Now what is his message?

Vere 2..

II. The Message (2-4)

Paul ends verse 1 with 3 words, - the gospel of God, and now in verse 2 we are reminded of what that is.

First of all, the gospel is the fulfillment of a promise..

2 which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures,

The gospel is not a new idea.

It is not a new concept.

It was found in the OT.

It was found in Genesis 3 where God promised a descendant of Adam and Eve who would destroy the serpent.

It was found in the book of Exodus in the picture of a Passover lamb's blood that saved Israel from the angel of death.

It was found in the countless sacrifices in the book of Leviticus.

It was found as Paul says here in the mouths of the prophets, who offered over 300 prophecies about the coming Christ.

Now why is this important?

Well, first of all Paul's audience would certainly contain many Jews who had come to faith in Christ.

And Paul wanted to remind them that the OT pointed to this day.

It pointed to a time when the Messiah would come and die for his people.

Paul hasn't made this gospel up.

It is God's gospel that he laid out before the foundation for the world.

Paul is not peddling some new fad.

Paul is simply declaring an old truth that has to life in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Second thing we about the gospel is found in verse 3..

***3 concerning His Son, who was born of a
[b]descendant of David according to the flesh***

The gospel is found in the word of God from long ago, but it is focused on the Son of God who was a descendant of David.

Again, Paul is pointing this out to show that Jesus is not the enemy of the Jewish faith.

Rather, He is the ultimate fulfillment of it.

And we know that Jesus was the Son of God because of His miraculous resurrection.

Verse 4..

4 who was declared the Son of God with power [c]by the resurrection from the dead, according to the [d]Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord

The point that Paul is trying to make is that Jesus was a man, which is seen in the family tree of David.

But Jesus is not just a man in the flesh, he is also the Son of God evidenced by his resurrection from the dead.

Jesus is the unique God Man.

100% God and 100% Man with no mixture of either one.

And that makes him the object of the gospel of God, which Paul has been set apart to preach.

We will stop there for this morning, but let's consider a couple things before we go..

Conclusion

#1 - The man is always tied to message.

As Paul sets out to deliver the foundations of the Christian faith to a distant church, he begins the letter with his identity.

He is a slave which shows humility.

He is a called apostle which shows authority.

He is set apart which shows responsibility.

And this is so important because the message can be ruined by an unqualified messenger.

Let me remind you church.

You are called to deliver a message to the world as well.

You are called to declare the gospel of God to the world.

But you can ruin it in an instant if your life doesn't line up with your message.

Look, the world can attack the church and try to silence the gospel.

They always have and they always will, but more damage is done to the church and to the gospel when people proclaiming it are living contrary to it.

Paul could write a very serious letter because he lived a very serious life.

Paul could get the attention of his readers because his life got their attention first.

The person is always tied to what they preach.

Make sure you are practicing the truth that you are preaching.

#2 - The gospel is always the focus.

Paul is going to write a letter about the gospel that is 16 chapters long but he gets to the heart of the gospel in the very second verse.

Paul is a man who is obsessed with the gospel, which is the simply God's rescue plan for sinners that was formed in His mind before Genesis 1, predicted in the OT, fulfilled in the gospels, and spread through the rest of the NT.

Paul's life and ministry will be centered on the truth of Jesus' sacrifice for guilty sinners.

Let me tell you something church.

It is easy to get distracted in Christianity.

Programs, activities, ministries...

It is so easy to lose focus and take our eyes off the ball.

Ultimately, we should be gospel centered people.

When we describe ourselves, it should lead to gospel.

Look, Paul was just introducing himself to the Romans but he got the gospel almost immediately.

May that be true of all of us.

May all our words quickly find their way to Christ and his death in our place to rescue us from our sin.

The gospel is going to start there and it is going to fill the rest of the book of Romans is ways we probably never considered.

I am looking forward to it.

I pray that God would give you the same excitement.

Let us pray.

III. The Mission (5)

IV. The Readers (6-7)