

Romans 1:1-17 – What is Romans all about?

Sermon

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III – We’re about to have our 3rd baby. One of the things I look forward to, apart from sleepless nights, nappy changes and 50 loads of washing each week, is the first few moments after the baby’s born. Finally, the baby’s arrived, and you can let everyone know. I now have a routine – first I make a few calls to family, then I text message with my mobile, then I e-mail 40 or 50 pictures of the baby that all look the same to everyone except me, and everyone across the world knows everything within about an hour! I love that part. Announcing to everyone what’s happened. Telling them the news.

The gospel

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

Romans is a book about an announcement. A message. Paul calls it “the gospel” – a word that simply means “an **announcement**” or “a **message**”. And Paul’s life has been set apart to tell people this message, this gospel. Which gospel? The gospel of God. The message of God.

What gospel of God’s? Which message of God’s is Paul talking about? Verse 2:

* *“the gospel (the message) he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures”*

In other words, it’s a message that was **promised**, an announcement that was **expected**. This is not a new idea of God’s. It’s a promise. It’s planned. It’s intentional. This is not some random good news. Paul is saying: “This is the announcement we’ve been waiting for! It is finally here. The one God promised earlier.”

It’s the Gospel... of God... promised beforehand...about what?

* verses 3-4: *“3regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David, 4and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.”*

The message **is** the gospel of God, promised beforehand, about the Son of God, resurrected from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord.

People often get stuck in long-winded arguments about the book of Romans because it is so DEEP in it’s theology. But the simplicity of Romans is here in chapter 1, verse 1. Romans is about the gospel of God – Romans is about Jesus Christ our Lord. It doesn’t matter what chapter of Romans you read or how complicated you think it is... you’ve got to come back to this simple message – it’s about Jesus Christ our Lord.

III – I was listening to (Kyle and Jacqui O on) the radio this week as I drove the kids to pre-school. A witch rang up to share a love potion with the listeners. He said for this love potion, you have to take an apple and cut a heart shape in it. Then focus all your desires and wishes, and positive energy, into that heart shape in the apple. And then you take the apple and bury it under a healthy tree and as the tree grows the universe will give us what we desire.

And the radio announcer (Jacqui O) hears this and says something like: *“I like that. It’s nice”*.

Some people think it’s nice to put your trust in an apple and a tree and “the universe” rather than the one who created the apple and the tree and the universe! *“It’s nice? I like it?”* Is that how people make a decision about what they put their faith in? People believe ridiculous lies like this because it makes them **feel good**. But it won’t **do** them any good when it comes to eternity. Paul tells us here in

this simple introduction that *the* message from God, the *promised* message, is that *Jesus Christ* is our Lord. **This** is the message of **truth** that all people need to hear.

Paul doesn't say "believe whatever makes you happy or feel good." Paul simply says: "This is God's message!" Here is what GOD says. Here is *God's* truth, not *our idea* of truth. Here is God's gospel, God's message, God's truth.

** The gospel... of God... promised beforehand...regarding his Son...born as a human...from King David's line...the son of God... resurrected...Jesus Christ our Lord.*

And now as we read on, Paul tells us what he plans to *do* with this message. So let's focus now on just 4 verses: vv14-17. First, verse 14-15:

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

Paul is not just *eager* to preach God's gospel. He is obligated. He is sent by God for this work.

III – There are a lot of jobs I suspect we don't like doing. I don't like washing the floors or vacuuming. I don't like cleaning toilets, or changing nappies. I don't like washing or ironing. There's a lot of things I don't like. But I'm obligated. As a husband, as a Father, as a person. I have an obligation to do these things. Especially for my family.

But Paul doesn't see gospel work as an obligation that he has to do even though he doesn't like it! He speaks in verses 8 – 13 about the joy and love he has in this work. And THEN he brings up his obligation. It's an obligation he takes on with joy. Why? Because it's a message for everyone. "I am obligated to both Greeks and non-Greeks." In fact, let me give you a better translation of that verse: the words actually used are:

** "I am obligated both to Greeks and Barbarians. "*

The word is actually Barbarians. You see, the Greeks were generally well educated and intelligent people. And they spoke Greek, the language of all the so called "smart" people. The Greeks called anyone who didn't speak Greek "Barbarians". Because to the Greeks, when these Barbarians spoke, their language *sounded* like "Bar, Bar, Bar". So what Paul is saying is that this is a message he needs to bring to ALL people. He says "I am obligated both to Greeks and Barbarians, both to the wise (the Greeks) and the foolish (the Barbarians)." In other words, "Everyone has to hear this message, whether you think you're smart or stupid, wise or foolish, rich or poor, unemployed or a King." Whether you're James Packer or Tom Cruise or a politician, a president, a Prime Minister, a university lecturer, or a homeless drug addict. This is a message EVERYONE needs to hear. That's why Paul is so *eager* to share this message.

But no matter which way you look at it, it's a hard job to share this message with anyone – It's often just as hard whether people are poor or rich, wise or foolish, Greek or Barbarian, employed or unemployed. It's hard. Sometimes it's even harder when people are wealthy or intelligent and think they have everything they need and know everything they need to know. It seems like an impossible job sometimes, doesn't it? How on earth do we reach *all* people with this message from God? Why is Paul so eager to do it? And more importantly, *how* does Paul do it? The answer's in verse 16:

** 16I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. "*

Paul is not ashamed. Paul is not ashamed to speak. How many times a week are we ashamed to talk about the gospel? To talk about Jesus as Lord? How often are we embarrassed to make that the topic of conversation? Be honest. How often do we *avoid* talking about Jesus?

Paul is not ashamed. Why? Because the *gospel* is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.

III – Imagine this. You’re on a boat. You see a person drowning in the water below. No-one else is around. Right next to you is a life preserver. You can throw it in to save them. But you’re ashamed. “What if they don’t want it? What if someone else wants to save them? What if they *want* to drown? No. I couldn’t possibly risk embarrassing myself. I’ll just stand here and watch them drown.” Surely we wouldn’t let embarrassment stand in the way of seeing a person saved from drowning? What about seeing them saved from hell?

So if we are not embarrassed, what is it that actually has the power to save?
Not you. Not me. Not our vast knowledge of the Bible. Not our personality. Not our great caring skills. Paul the apostle doesn’t have the power to save. No preacher has the power to save souls. What has the power to save? It is the *message*, the *gospel* of God that has the power to save souls.

* And Paul continues: (verse 16b) “*first for the Jew, then for the Greek*” (Note the original word is actually “Greek”, not Gentile’.) In other words, even the *smart Greeks* and the *religious Jews* can be saved!

We all know prostitutes can be saved. Jesus did a lot of that! The poor the lonely, the outcasts. We know they can be saved. But here’s a revelation for the society that Paul is speaking to: Even smart people and religious people can be saved!

God’s message has the power to save our world leaders, our bosses, our councillors, our wealthy business people. The very same message of God’s gospel saves both prostitutes AND millionaires.

And *how* does it save? Verse 17:

* “*17For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.”*”

God offers his *righteousness* to those who put their *faith* in him. God offers all people the opportunity to be made righteous, blameless, without sin. To be in a *right* relationship with him. And it’s not based on how religious you are, or how intelligent you are. God saves those who put their *faith* in him. By faith, from first to last.

Not by faith, *then* by doing good works. Not by faith, *then* by studying the Bible hard. Not by faith *then* by how much you put in the collection plate. Not by faith *then* by how many people you convert. By faith, from first to last. There is nothing in between. Only faith. That is how God’s gospel saves.

That’s it. That’s Romans 1:1-17. That’s Romans in a nutshell – the gospel.

Let’s not make Romans a complicated book. It’s a book about...

* *The gospel... of God... promised beforehand...regarding his Son...born as a human...from King David’s line...the son of God... resurrected...Jesus Christ our Lord.*

It is this message, and this message alone, that has the power to save *all* people. And it is a gospel which is accepted by *faith alone*, and by nothing else.

Amen.