



Romans
The Introduction
Romans 1:1-7
January 20, 2018
Courage Church, Detroit, MI

Welcome to Romans.

We are going to be going through this book for the majority of the year, taking it very slowly when necessary. On our website we will be posting a resources page that we will continue to add content

onto... some of it will be additional podcast style conversations we will have going into some of the details we may not get to here on Sunday's, as well as book recommendations, resources, and whatever else we come up with.

We want to make sure we start this series off right though, so we are going to BEGIN with a prayer... and together:

Let's ask God to *change us* through the reading of His Word.

again... what people tend to do when they read the Bible, is they focus on the parts that *already* line up with their theology... or with their worldview...

we like reading the Bible and feeling like "yeah, we are already doing that" so we can pat ourselves on the back and affirm ourselves that we are doing a good job.

But the Bible's job is NOT to affirm us, IT IS to inform us, and the Holy Spirit's job is to, through the Bible, convict us TO LIVE BETTER LIVES THAN WE ARE LIVING RIGHT NOW.

So what could be simply information has the power to bring about transformation... NOT JUST IN YOUR LIFE, BUT ALSO IN OUR WORLD, THROUGH YOU.

It's easy to read IT as sterile words on a page and come out of it no different.

It's easy to read it through the perspective that you already view life through and find things that YOU CAN USE to continue viewing things that way. That is how most of us read the Bible. We read it, constantly framing God into whatever box we are already convinced that He *lives in*.

It is very HARD to approach something that you HAVE seen before (or read before), with fresh eyes ready to learn something NEW from it... but we can say for sure, without a doubt... that since studying the book of Romans over the last few months...

This book is something new to me... than what it once was... something more to me than it ever was before. It's absolutely beautiful. I used to read it as law... bondage... judgment... as the harshest stuff you get in the entire Bible... because the harshest words are in here... but when we began to comprehend WHY... and even more importantly, when we began to grasp the BIGGER PICTURE of what Paul is doing here... it has changed our lives. It really has. And we are continuing to be transformed by it...

I believe it will change our marriage as we continue to study it... I believe it will change the way we relate to our kids, and the way that we love others. And it will DO THE SAME FOR YOU.

But you have to approach it ready to learn.
You have to approach it with room in your glass.

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We want to start with a tiny bit of background on the book of Romans, not too much today... but some. This week and next week will be focused primarily on the introduction of the book but I think that it is important to do *that*, in order to set us up for this entire series. The goal is to go through the first 15 or so verses over these next two weeks, and throughout those verses give a bit of a framework as to what was going on in that time that we hopefully are able to keep in our heads the entire series.

The theme of the entire book of Romans, is THE GOSPEL. In fact, a lot of scholars consider Romans to be “The Gospel According to Paul” and the thing that actually gives this letter a bit of added credibility is the perspective of which would have come from the time that it was written.

The book of Romans was for sure written before 60 A.D. probably around 55-58 A.D. - so it was written at least a decade before the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D.

The Temple meant everything. Just as important as the law - were the plans they were given at the same time, for building the tabernacle... the dwelling place of God. The tabernacle began as a tent that would travel with Israel as they wandered, until one day King David had a dream of building God an actual house... a dream that His Son Solomon would fulfill.

That Temple would later be destroyed when Israel was taken into exile by Babylon, but another temple would eventually be built and became the absolute HUB for worshipping God.

Paul was actually killed in A.D. 64 so he would not have even lived to see the temple be destroyed... whereas the other gospels, with the possible exception of Mark, were all written after the temple was destroyed, which would have had a significant impact on their writing and understanding of what the things that Jesus were saying had actually meant.

But Paul speaks of people *being* the temple... people being the image bearers of God, long before the temple ever came down... Paul had an understanding of Jesus' words that a lot of others didn't have. For most people in that day, the idea of worshipping WITHOUT a temple... the idea of God being present ANYWHERE that a temple was not... that was a foreign idea.

So now, some people consider Romans to be an even more genuine retelling of the Gospel because it was written BEFORE this huge event that played out and gave it all so much more significance... and yet he said all the same things.

Romans is by far the LONGEST of all of his writings. 13 of the letters believed to of been written by Paul were selected to be a part of the New Testament, and they had an average word count of around 1300 (Pillar, page 2) - Romans is around 7,100 words.

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Most people believe that he wrote the letter FROM CORINTH, and the context of writing is rather simple:

Paul wants to go to Rome, preach there, and use it as a stepping stone to ultimately get to Spain.

Paul's entire life was CONSUMED by the GOSPEL. To Him, there was nothing else that mattered, and his address to this church was fueled by his desire to go preach to the greatest city in the entire world because of course for him, he thought "if we can set a fire in people's hearts IN ROME, that thing is going to spread"

So he just POURS IT ALL OUT IN THIS LETTER TO THEM.

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The letter seems to be broken up into 4 sections... 4 movements of thought that flow into each other:

1-4 Is how the Gospel reveals God's righteousness. - which, we will take these first four chapters slower than the rest of the book, because foundation is crucial on where we are going... and really 1-4 springs us into 5-8 showing us how God's righteousness actually turns us into people here and now who can live renewed lives... who can live differently than we were before Christ... who can make the world a better place as we share Jesus with it...

so **5-8** is how the Gospel gives us new life, particularly, new life in the Spirit. And 1-8 really flows together nicely and prepares us for 9-11.

9-11 is about how Jesus fulfilled God's promise (or his covenant) with Israel... throughout the Old Testament God made several covenants with Israel and even before Israel, with creation. He made one with Adam and Eve, another with Noah, he made one to Abraham that Israel really was hanging on, another with Moses, another with David...

and Israel of course never held up their end of the covenant, but God consistently promised that He would hold up His. Paul takes a significant amount of time showing us that through Jesus the promise was fulfilled.

and:

12-16 - is about how the Gospel is what will ultimately unify the church.

which is a really really good thing.

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Lets Read together, Romans 1:1-7 -

1 Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, **concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the Son of God** in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ,

To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

notice the commas, that was all one sentence.

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Look at how Paul begins the entire letter... read this introduction a couple times.

Most people plow through this as if it is just Paul introducing himself to his audience by giving his merits which qualify him to be someone that they should listen to.

What Paul actually is doing, is introducing Jesus, to a world that doesn't even know that they are looking for Him, **by reminding us that the Gospel is powerful enough to get through to EVEN HIM.**

He says: (v1)

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

Now, Paul stops talking about Paul, after he says “Paul.”

But **we will take a moment to explore Paul**, so you can have a better idea of who is writing and just what it means that Paul is an Apostle.

The word “Apostle” means to be someone who is sent or commissioned. **Literally, an *apostolos* is someone who is “sent forth with orders”** - you have been given a specific task to go and do, and you are set apart for that task. So that is Paul, and the task that he says he is “set apart” to do, is for the GOSPEL of Jesus Christ.

The word “Gospel” means “good news” or “Joy news” - we will dig into it much more in a couple of weeks when we get into verses 16 and 17, but the idea comes from a messenger who is bringing a message that will cause the hearer GREAT JOY. Typically it had to do with a battle that was won, or some sort of decree by Caesar that went out into the land that the people would have been happy to hear.

Obviously, the message of Jesus is a proclamation of a different sort from what the world was used to at that time.

The Gospel is the message that though you and I are sinners and once deserved death, Jesus died on the cross for our sins, in our place, and now when God looks at you, He doesn't see who YOU WERE, He sees who JESUS IS.

and now (because of that) you can live THIS life, today, differently than yesterday, because the Kingdom of Heaven is here now and you and I get to be a part of it.

So Paul has been set apart for this "good news message" and He dedicates the entire book of Romans to explaining that good news.

Now, **the book of Acts** tells us about his conversion and his call to apostleship.

In earlier chapters of Acts he is spoken of as "Saul" - and the Bible says that he treated Christians HORRIBLY. Acts chapter 8 says that Saul actually **approved of the execution** of a Christian named Stephen.

The Bible said that Saul breathed threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord (Acts 9:1) -

Then, one day he was on a journey toward Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shined in his face (Acts 9:4) and he heard Jesus saying "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?"

He knew that it was Jesus, and Jesus told him what to do. He said to "enter the city, and you will be told what to do."

When Paul got to the city, **Jesus spoke to a man named Ananias** and told him to go and pray for Saul.

And just to show you how evil Saul was, Ananias didn't want to go, even when the resurrected Jesus asked him too! He said "I heard about Saul, and all the evil he has done to the saints."

But Jesus said something very important to Ananias. He said this (Acts 9:15-16)

“Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.”

Notice this, because it is VERY important for the way we read and understand Romans... Saul's mission field is Gentiles, Kings, AND THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL.

The word “Gentile” included everyone who was not Jewish.

But Paul specifically had a mandate... a mission and **one thing that set his mission apart from some of the others was the specific job of reaching Gentiles.**

Which as we will soon see, the church in Rome was very divided, between Jews and Gentiles. Paul had a call on his life to reach both, but we see it play out throughout the Bible particularly for the Gentiles, even though Paul himself is Jewish, was a Rabbi, and knew and adhered to the law.

Paul also was a rare case, because, despite never having been to Rome, he was a citizen of Rome... so there were automatic bridges built there for Him that even more clearly showed “he is the man for this job.”

But notice this:

I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.

That sure doesn't sound like good news... but the fact remains that in order to bridge the gap between all of the broken people that Saul was called to reach, he was going to have to be able to handle a pretty tough road, and we will learn a lot about that as we get deeper into this series.

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Sometimes God calls us to do hard stuff. Things that we don't necessarily want to do... in places we don't necessarily want to go and even to love and serve people we don't necessarily want to love and serve. And sometimes we go because we know its the will of God and we think that because we are in the will of God the ship is going to sail smoothly, but then we get hurt... we get attacked... we suffer.

The Gospel is SUCH GOOD NEWS, that the enemy will do EVERYTHING that he can to keep you from sharing it. If you can buy into the lie that "this is NOT worth what this costs me" then you will NEVER BE EFFECTIVE for Jesus.

Jesus had to really let Paul know from the beginning... THIS THING IS GOING TO BE HARD.
its going to be hard.

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Now, despite popular belief, **Jesus never changed Saul's name to Paul.** AT LEAST THE BIBLE DOESN'T TELL US THAT THAT HAPPENED.

It is easy to believe that that happened, because, especially throughout the Old Testament, that was something that God did often like in the case of Abram to Abraham, Sarai to Sarah, Jacob to Israel which in particular was very much a "**you are no longer who you once were**" moment.

And even though Paul had a moment *like* that, that wasn't when his name was changed... at least the Bible doesn't say that it was.

Paul was not a "new identity" for Saul. People love to teach that and honestly I think I have even taught it "Jesus changed his name that day" - but He didn't.

Jesus commissioned Saul to reach the Gentiles... Saul was Jewish, and his Hebrew name was Saul, but his Greek name was Paul.

That is why Acts 13:9, four chapters AFTER the conversion on the road to Damascus, says this: "Saul, who was also called Paul" -

He was a man with two names on a mission to win two different groups of people. Saul had a very distinct calling to minister to Gentile AND to Jew, the Jewish name Saul (which was the name of the first King of Israel) would have the potential to being a hindering block for some Gentiles.

In fact, in Acts 26(v14) Paul recollects that day when he was called by Jesus and he said that Jesus spoke to him in Hebrew saying “Saul, Saul” - Jesus called me by my HEBREW name.

The reason that all of this matters, is because, as we will soon see... Romans has a lot in there that could cause someone to feel as if they have fallen so short of God’s glory that God certainly has run out of patience for them and they are basically doomed.

But whatever it is you have done... **PAUL WAS WORSE**. And as fun as it is to think that Jesus renamed him... in some ways I think that it is even more powerful that He didn’t. Because **the same Saul who persecuted Christians and approved of their executions is the same Saul who is writing this Gospel letter to the Romans**.

Paul was already a studied Jew, who knew and followed the law, and when Jesus got ahold of Him, **He used the things that Paul was already good at**, already passionate about and already knowledgeable of as a way to show people more clearly, who Jesus is.

You will find that Paul uses the Old Testament, the scriptures that he knew so well, to show us that the entire thing is about Jesus.

In fact, Romans in particular is absolutely FILLED with Old Testament quotes and the even some retelling of the ancient stories.

Obviously for Saul it was easy for Jesus to use his passions and his background as a way to propel his ministry, because his background was in studying the Hebrew scriptures... But I think for a lot of us today, we still have this idea that when Jesus saves us, we have to re-arrange everything about our lives in order to serve Him.

I think we need to listen to the Holy Spirit and act accordingly, (sometimes there will be things that the Holy Spirit will probably tell you: “dude, you need to lay that thing down and follow me”) but a lot of times I think we will find that God was working in our lives EVEN BEFORE WE KNEW IT and acknowledged it and turned to Jesus... and in a lot of cases, the ministry that we will one day have, HE WAS PREPARING FOR US EVEN WHEN WE WEREN'T SERVING HIM.

If God breathes on something, it becomes Holy... it becomes inspired... He breathed on the dirt in Genesis and suddenly MAN was formed... creation can forth from nothing at the mere breathe of the almighty AND the Bible says that man, breathed on dirt WAS MADE IN THE IMAGE OF GOD.

dirt became limitless potential.

And WHEN HE BREATHES ON YOUR LIFE...

suddenly all of the places that you are able to go and all the people you are able to be in community with that maybe I will never meet... God can now you USE YOU, TO BRING HIM... into that arena.

This is often how God redeems people that you would think he would never get to...

Saul was a VERY UNLIKELY CANDIDATE, who lead a LOT OF OTHER VERY UNLIKELY CANDIDATES to Jesus, because he LET GOD take hold of him.

So Paul *is* Saul.

And then right away, he goes straight to the point really of the whole book.

he says: (1b-3)

set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, **concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh**

First - the Holy Scriptures... In all of the letters of Paul that made it into the New Testament, the Old Testament is quoted 89 times. Romans alone has 51 of those 89 quotes. So of all the books that we know that Paul wrote:

Romans
1 & 2 Corinthians
Galatians
Ephesians
Philippians
Colossians
1 & Thessalonians
1 & 2 Timothy
Titus
Philemon

More than half of the references to the Old Testament we have from Paul, come in Romans... he uses old stories to show us modern realities.

Which is amazing and can be done still today. That is what makes the Bible so powerful. Even though the context may be different in our world today, even the oldest writings we have in the Old Testament are so rich with words that have the power to help us shape our lives in our modern world. Paul demonstrates how powerful the Old Testament is, in his use of it throughout Romans.

He says "Jesus was descended from David by flesh... and then goes on to say: He is the Son of God." In other words, Jesus was not just a descendant of David... Jesus is THE descendent of David.

You are still waiting. But He is already here. The one that your prophets prophesied about... He is here. and the Resurrection proves it.

Israel knew that their story was going to culminate somewhere... there was a prophecy from a man named Nathan, spoken to King David that said that from his seed would come a King... a ruler whose throne would last forever. (2 Samuel 7:16)

so for the Jews, it was centuries of waiting for this thing to happen not really knowing how it would happen and what Paul is telling us here is that it all culminated at Jesus. He is the King that would last forever. And of course, we learn from Matthew's genealogy that Jesus is in fact a descendent of King David.

This is huge. **For the Jews, this would have been the only thing that mattered.** The only problem with that, is that Jesus was KILLED. No King who would reign forever could be killed. So for many Jews who had believed, at the point of the crucifixion, they would have began looking for another.

We read about a couple of them in Luke 24 (13-35) who are on the road to Emmaus disappointed that Jesus had been killed... and when he resurrected Jesus shows up and talks to them, they don't even recognize him because of course, they thought he was dead and when you die, you stay dead.

But what Jesus does in that moment is he walks them through ALL OF THE PASSAGES throughout the Old Testament that He himself had fulfilled. The scriptures that were about Him even though nobody knew it at the time... but they didn't realize that it was Jesus, until He was gone.

But when you have a guy that you thought was God but then stopped thinking He was God after He was murdered... show up and walk on a road with you and show you explicitly how every scripture in the Bible is about Him, I would say that was evidence that this person really is God.

and in Romans 1:4, Paul really emphasizes the resurrection.

(v4)

and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead,

Why does the Resurrection prove it?

well, first of all... everybody else who died stayed dead. Except Lazarus who came alive WHEN JESUS TOLD HIM TO.

But it was the Resurrection that showed us that Jesus was not just a man, but He truly is the Messiah.

500+ people saw the Resurrected Christ, and it was enough evidence for them, which they saw with their own eyes, that many of them were one day willing to lay down their own lives before they would deny His.

But beyond that, for the Jews, in particular, it would have given new, fresh meaning to a passage that they had always understood to mean something different...

In that prophecy in 2 Samuel 7, when Nathan prophesies that from David's seed would come a King whose Kingdom would reign forever, he then went on to talk about the temple and how someone *else* would be raised up and establish that temple.

And of course, the Jews understood that to mean Solomon, David's son who DID build the temple. But eventually that temple was destroyed.

And when later Christians would read the Septuagint, which is the Greek translation of the Old Testament (and the version Paul quotes from in Romans)... when they re-looked at that passage in 2 Samuel 7, in Greek it actually says "someone would be resurrected and would establish the temple."

The Holy temple... the place that EVERYONE THOUGHT YOU HAD TO GO TO CONNECT WITH GOD. and again, when Romans was written Herod's temple still stood... but a few years later it would fall and never be rebuilt again, and so suddenly people had to decide... what does life look like without a temple?

But Jesus had been telling us this from the beginning... Paul is trying to tell us... PEOPLE ARE THE TEMPLE...

Jesus, the SON OF DAVID... RESURRECTED and established that temple IN YOU.

God is breathing ON YOU... and giving your life breathe... and making YOU Holy and making YOU an image bearer to SHOW THE WHOLE WORLD WHAT HE LOOKS LIKE.

God breathes on His people and says MY SPIRIT IS GOING TO LIVE IN YOU NOW. (1 Corinthians 3:16)

So we get to be image bearers of God for the sake of the Gospel. For the sake of the world... watch the way Paul wraps up this first section:

(v5-6)

Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ

He ends his brief, Gospel filled introduction by saying “oh, by the way Israel... YOU ARE NOT THE ONLY ONES HE DID THIS FOR! And you are not the only ones who will benefit from it.

IN FACT: I did this IN YOU, so that you may turn around and be my witnesses TO THE REST OF THE WORLD!

This is for the sake of his name AMONG ALL NATIONS... This is for EVERYONE... including you.

Even you. Church in Rome.

Even you, who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.

But not only you.

That is why it is so important that we grasp this idea that our lives are a temple of the living God... that we were made in the image of God and meant to REFLECT HIS LOVE TO THE WORLD THAT HE DIED FOR.

The Gospel is not just some good news for you and your house that after you receive, you thank the messenger, close the door and go put yourself to bed.

If we fully grasped this thing... we would make our lives about it... we would take it to the highways and the byways. We would realize that this is the power of Salvation for everyone... THAT GOD PLACED US EACH IN OUR STRATEGIC PLACES TO BE AROUND STRATEGIC PEOPLE who need us to bear an image that SHOWS THEM what Jesus is all about.

And its not condemnation... and its not judgment... ITS LOVE... its a love the surpasses anything that we can ever even begin to understand. The kind of love that compel a person like Saul, who at one point didn't even believe... drop everything and spend the rest of his life traveling around JUST TO TELL PEOPLE HOW GOOD IT IS.

Jesus wants to do the same for you. He wants to meet you in your mess... in the broken places of your heart... It does not matter where you come from, or how far you have strayed, He wants to meet you right where you are today.

And today I want to encourage you... if you are far from Jesus, let Him wrap His arms around you this morning... If you have been having a hard time dreaming, or seeing where you fit in to what He is doing... if suffering has taken such a toll on you that you are ready to give up the journey and do something easier...

be encouraged today that the Gospel is worth it. it is worth everything you give. It never feels worth it in the moment, but I promise you it is.

Keep fighting the good fight. Detroit needs you. Those who are broken, they need you. Your friends need you... the church needs you. Let God breathe life into your circumstances...

He doesn't condemn you. His Kingdom is here... and that's good news!

let him light a fire in you this morning that takes you to the ends of the earth for Jesus.