



series: Romans
title: The Thesis
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scriptures: Romans 1:16-17

Let's open our Bible's to Romans chapter 1. We are going to focus on just two verses, because it is, in fact the thesis for the entire book of Romans, as we ask God to change US through the reading of His word.

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The heart of the entire book of Romans is Romans 1:16-17. If you read what comes after, without first reading verse 16 and 17... you will be so confused... and you run the risk of thinking that the entire thing is law... legalistic... oppressive... all the things that people love to say that the book of Romans is, when in all actuality, the book of Romans is a book about the only hope that exists IN OUR OTHERWISE HOPELESS WORLD - and that hope is ONLY FOUND IN JESUS.

So last week we wrapped up the introduction, and asked the question of "Why Rome?" - we looked a little bit at the city that Paul was writing too, and explored some of the implications of what it would have meant, that the church's faithfulness was being spoken of all over the world, and for Paul to tell the church in Rome that HE IS NOT ASHAMED OF THE GOSPEL.

The Gospel that, as we will see today, changes everything EVEN in the darkest places, and for the worst people...

lets read it:

Romans 1:16-17

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it

the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.”

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How did everyone fare in the Polar Vortex this week?



The kids had snow days almost every day. By the evening of Tuesday it was just too cold to go outside at all, but Monday they had a great time. They were playing outside, and I looked out the back window and saw Fiona sledding down our stairway there “home alone” style.

Now, there is a plastic tarp on these stairs, and every time I even step on the tarp I slip... its very slick. And she was just sledding down the tarp. And this didn't seem to bother her, but at the bottom of the stairs is a fence that sometimes if she was going fast enough, she would crash into it.

anyway...

Did anyone else's pipes freeze? I woke up Thursday morning to my daughter Brooklyn telling me “daddy, the water doesn't work” - the water in the entire house was frozen. I was not surprised, because I had watched the thermostat that night just drop and drop... the heater ran all night but the house couldn't heat past around 52.

I turned the furnace down to 65 because I got the same alert that everyone else got... that we were running out of gas and needed to conserve it, but it didn't matter because ours wasn't going past 52 anyway.



Dawn is working to get her masters degree and one week a semester she is in Grand Rapids, and that was this week... and since the house was frozen (and the kids were out of school), I decided to go spend the last couple of days with her there. I dropped the kids off at my parents house and I studied in Grand Rapids while she was in class. It was a blast, I would wait for her outside her class before all of her breaks and we would hang out for like ten minutes at a time before she had to go back to class. It was amazing. I felt like we were dating again. I used to do that sometimes, Dawn was in film school in Chicago and I would surprise her outside her classroom when they would let out. So it felt like a throwback to those days and was really refreshing.

And a whole lot better than staying in a house that wasn't heating passed 52 degrees.

Our house has come a long way, but there are still a lot of things we are working on, and keeping the house warm when it is -13 (and a wind chill of -35) proved fairly difficult... so I wasn't all that surprised when the pipes froze.

Anyway, usually when pipes freeze, it's the warm water that freezes first.



And earlier this week we had just the warm water in our kitchen freeze, we were able to get it back on after a while, but doing dishes is basically impossible without warm water.

But the sink was getting backed up with dishes and the dishwasher wasn't going to run because there wasn't warm water, so what we did was we got out a HUGE pot and boiled water in that, and then I would transfer the warm water to a smaller container that I would put a little bit of dish soap in it and then wash a couple of dishes at a time. It wouldn't take long at all for that clean water it be very dirty by the dishes, and I would need to dump it out and fill it with clean water.

Because dirt makes things dirty.

But when I got to the PANS that were dirty from the bacon I had cooked earlier that day, it wouldn't fit in my container... so even though I knew better, I just put the pan under the cold water and dropped a little soap in it, and scrubbed it... but nothing came off... the grime in the pan just moved around, but nothing came off.

I poured more cold water on it, dropped some soap in it, and let it soak.

Came back, tried to scrub it...and all that I was able to do was move the grime and grease around but none of it came off.

But the moment that I scooped some of that hot water out of my giant pot and poured it INTO the pan, everything wiped right out... it was instant.

Because there is only one thing that will truly clean it up. And I could spend the entire day working on doing it in a thousand ineffective ways but the reality is, until I put that hot water in that pan that pan is not coming clean.

And in our lives, most of us can recognize the mess.

Most of us can tell, something needs to get cleaned up. Yet the reason that so many people actually struggle to fully accept the Gospel is because we think that we can clean it up with the tools that we have. With the cold water and a sponge... with the paper towel.

There is a pride of life that is engrained in people that says "if I got myself into this mess, I can get myself out of it." So we scrub and scrub and scrub and all we are doing is moving around the grease.

But what God wants to do is give us the hot water that will wash it clean *without* scrubbing. It will wash it clean without grinding away at it, and spending the entire day scrubbing circles to get nowhere.

BUT UNTIL WE COME TO TERMS WITH THE FACT THAT THE COLD WATER IS NOT GOING TO CLEAN THE PAN, we will never get the pan clean.

It is so simple when you just accept it. But it's a never ending amount of work, UNTIL YOU DO.

The theme of this passage, and really the entire book of Romans, is **the Gospel**.

And you will find, if you look closely, that it is EXTREMELY IMPORTANT THAT PAUL SAYS WHAT HE SAYS HERE... before getting into what he gets into in verse 18 and carries that thought almost through chapter 3, before he returns to THE GOSPEL.

Paul basically creates this sandwich presentation in which we first are told that the Gospel is the only thing in the world that has the power to save us, then he goes into some of the darkest things in the entire Bible, painting a picture of a humanity, that IT WOULD SEEM is totally lost... and then he lands back on the Gospel toward the end of chapter 3. **The big idea is to show us that the cross of Jesus Christ is big enough to bring light even to the darkest places.** That no matter how on the bottom you find yourself, no matter how much grime is on that pan... no matter how dark your sin may seem to be... the Gospel truly is still FOR YOU...

and *that*, essentially is his argument throughout the book of Romans.

That Jesus died for EVERYONE.

When he says "**for Jew first, and also to the Greek**" he is not saying that the Jews deserve it first or will be called to Heaven first or anything like that... he is literally just stating the truth... The Jews were given the message before the rest of the world. That is how it happened. God made a covenant first with Israel... Jesus came as a fulfillment to that covenant TO ISRAEL...

But now Paul is on a mission to make sure that everyone knows, the Gospel is not only for the Jews. Yes, God made a covenant with Israel, but that covenant has been fulfilled ON BEHALF OF THE WHOLE WORLD!

The word Gospel is the Greek word *evangelion* (*you on gelly on*) - just by looking at the word you can see the word “evangelism” comes from it... The English word Evangelism means “to share the Gospel” - but ***evangelion* literally means “good news”** or could also be translated as “joy news” -

it comes from the word “messenger” and in ancient Greek, an *euangelos* was a person who brought a message of good news that caused the hearer “great JOY.”

In the ancient world the messages often had to do with battles, so the messages were things like news to a King that his country had won a great battle or had forced the enemy to retreat, or a message to a wife of a soldier saying “the war is over, your husband is coming home. Your sons are coming home.” - sometimes the message was a decree from Caesar that everyone would benefit from.

The moment the news was heard, the hearer had a reason to rejoice.

This is the heart of Romans. That no matter who you are, no matter what you have done, no matter where it has landed you... there is a *euangelos* at your door with a message that will change everything for your life, right here and right now. And that message is that Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God loves you so much that He laid down His life for you... He took the fall for the crimes that you committed... He paid the debt that YOU OWED, and the work that He accomplished on the cross of Calvary is powerful enough to reach into even the darkest, most broken pieces of your life... and redeem them... and make them whole.

The Gospel IS THE POWER OF GOD FOR SALVATION, for everyone who believes.

And this word “everyone” - it really is just such a big word.

It is kind of like the word “all” - as in... “everyone” - this is for everyone.

For us, today - we need to remember that: **The church exists for the people who are not a part of it yet.**

And let me explain to you, briefly, why that matters as we study the words we will begin getting into in the coming weeks:

The book of Romans has been wielded like a sword by isolating certain parts and then using them as weapons to speak out against people who don't even claim to have a relationship with Jesus.

This is a very big problem.

The Gospel is GOOD NEWS. And it's not just good news for you and for me and for the people who come to the church... the news is good for EVERYONE who believes. So our job, as **Christ's ambassadors**... it's not to make everyone believe because only the Holy Spirit can do that...

but our job here is to represent Jesus for who He is... for what He has done in OUR LIVES and what HE HAS DONE FOR EVERYONE.

That is what this passage is about and that is why it is absolutely central to the entire book, and if we get this part wrong or we downplay its significance and then emphasize the lists of sins AS IF they are the main thing, then **all people will hear is the condemnation and our words will pierce like swords... and they will CUT PEOPLE but they will not lead people to a better life that is only found in Jesus Christ.**

and we will leave conversations with NOBODY BETTER OFF having had it.

THIS... this is the main thing. It is the number one thing. The Gospel is so simple...

you blew it. Jesus stepped in.

You **will** blow it again... but Jesus still loves you.

You deserve death... Jesus died for you, now you get to live.

You deserve hell. Jesus paid for that too.

But even bigger than that, as we will explore in a minute... YOU SEE A SINNER... But God sees a saint.

I am not ashamed of the Gospel, because it tells me that who I once was I no longer am... and WHO HE IS, *that* is who I am.

and He didn't just do it for me, He did it for you. And He did it for our enemies. That is why its so significant that Paul says here,

“it is the power of God for salvation to **everyone** who believes, to the Jew first and *also* to the Greek.”

So it is for everyone. But let's look for a moment at this word, Salvation.

Of course today, most of us attribute this word to going to Heaven when we die... God saves us from our sins, SO THAT ONE DAY WE CAN JOIN HIM IN HEAVEN.

The early writers no doubt believed that that would happen... there is no doubt that the Disciples, or Paul, or any of the writers believed that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved and will reign in eternity forever with Him... but that was an after thought.

We, just like the first century church, simply have to trust the character of God that He will do what He says He will do in eternity, and it is not something that we need to spend a lot of our time worrying about. Most of the time when the writers talked about Salvation (Greek, *sōtēria*), it wasn't just eternity... it was deliverance, preservation, safety, AND salvation... It means to be rescued.

It means that the person that you are today, IN THIS WORLD... **doesn't have to be the person that you are tomorrow.** It means that the Gospel is the power of God to redeem your life even right now, that you don't have to live in bondage anymore... you don't have to live tied up in that sin anymore...

you can change your life, right here and right now... and instead of worrying about if you one day will go to Heaven or to Hell, you can live your life now bringing Heaven to the places that are Hell now.

Many would have viewed it as being rescued or delivered from some of the things in the world that hold us down such as sickness and disease... it was salvation from our sin, and, as we will read about in the next section, SALVATION FROM THE WRATH OF GOD.

The wrath of God, as we will get really into as we continue to move forward, is not something to be fearful of and it is NOT something that should make you think that God is evil. When the ancient world would have heard this, this too would have been GOOD NEWS, because it's the big idea that God is going to sort out the world... and he is going to make the whole thing right. We will dive very deep into that as we continue through the book, but JUDGMENT ultimately is that.

It is a pruning process in which God gets rid of the bad in order that the world can be made right. **So here on earth now, the more we can be transformed and the more that our lives reflect God in a way that transforms other people, we are actually able to bring Heaven to earth now...** and we bring salvation HERE to people, now.

I LOVE the way N.T. Wright puts this, he says (Paul for everyone, pg.12)

‘Salvation’ is a present reality as well as a future hope. Indeed, when this salvation breaks into someone’s life it becomes an event in itself to which they can then look back in the past. They were saved; they are being saved; they will be saved.”

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But Paul says **we have to believe it.** Jesus died for us... He did the hard part... yet some people find it SO incredibly hard to believe it, that they never experience it. And they spend their entire lives just sort of scrubbing that pan and moving around the grease, frustrated that nothing is getting better.

now, there is one somewhat tricky line in this passage, and it is verse 17:

THE RIGHTEOUS SHALL LIVE BY FAITH. (SEE BARCLAY, stuff on Justice, page 26-27.)

The Old King James says “The just shall live by faith” - the word for just, or as some translations have it, “righteous” is the last word in this that just HAS TO BE EXPLORED.

It is the word “*dikaios*” (dē'-kī-os) and of course its very similar to the word *justified* which Paul uses in Romans 3 in what I consider to be the culminating moment of the early part of the book of Romans. **We will get to that a little later in the series, but it** is important to look at justification a bit NOW, so we can have a healthy framework going into all the stuff about the wrath of God...

There are a lot of big words that we will come in contact with throughout this study... justification being one of them... obviously **the word comes from the same word as “justice” which in Hebrew literally just means “the right thing to do”** - it is a term used in court, where hopefully the results of the trial will make right the thing that was done wrong.

That is JUSTICE.

Justice is doing what is right, so a just person, it would seem, is a person who does what is right. Now, of course, WE CAN'T ALWAYS GET IT RIGHT, ONLY JESUS TRULY CAN... Which Paul goes really into in 1:18-32.

But in English, to be JUSTIFIED means what?

Like if I were to say “you were justified in doing that...” what am I saying?

I am affirming you... I affirm your actions, I *vouch* for you. Typically it means something along the lines of: “it seems like the wrong thing, but because of the circumstances, it was the right thing.”

That would be justification, in a general English term.

So, **to justify yourself means to prove your own case...** to make a case, to show why you were right for doing whatever it is that you did that could be interpreted as WRONG. But you justify it because of circumstances, or what the person was doing to you or whatever it may be.

Then, the way we typically understand it, to justify someone else would be the same thing... we would come to their defense. We would plead their case.

Typically, when there is “justifying” - what that means is: they are guilty, BUT _____”

But the *circumstances* make them NOT GUILTY.

So most people view justification, the way Paul describes it here, as humans being guilty... BUT, because of Jesus, HE was guilty on our behalf.

And that IS TRUE from the human perspective and in English that's about the best we can do with the word. And AGAIN, it IS true.

But the word JUSTIFICATION in Greek is (*dikaioō*) (day-kai-ah-oh)

— a slight variance of “the just” or “the righteous”

and it actually is saying MORE than that.

And THERE ARE A LOT OF WORDS THAT DESCRIBE WHAT JESUS DID.

The variation **makes it “I justify”** but in Greek *dikaioō* (*day-kai-ah-oh*) does NOT mean “I prove” or even that “I make someone something” - rather, the word means:

“I account you as _____” or
“I consider you _____”

the literal is actually - **“declared righteous”**

What the Greek is actually saying is NOT that God is proving you are just or even vouching for you...

what this *particular* term actually means is that God, because of what Jesus did, SEES YOU AND TREATS YOU AS IF YOU ARE CLEAN. As if you are righteous. He doesn't see you as a sinner, His view of you is that of a saint. Of someone who IS clean in His eyes. HE SEES GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS.

its not “well you did this... but I am cleaning you up.” - its **“you are clean.”**

Isaiah puts it like this: **“for my own sake**, I remember your sins no more.” (Isaiah 43:25) - that is not to say that God couldn't remember... God knows everything... but he chooses to NOT remember, and He does it FOR HIS OWN SAKE. Which, we would think is backward. We would think, okay... WE ARE THE SINNERS... we are the ones who deserve to die... it is for OUR OWN SAKE that God would forget the things that we have done wrong, and yet Isaiah says “actually its for “my own sake” -

This goes against the concept of religion more than you can ever imagine. Religion says “I need to do these things so that God will forgive me - I will work my way to him by living a life that proves that He is my Lord” - but God wants to forgive you because He loves you so much that He can't even bare the thought of children who betray Him. He loves His children... we don't work our way to forgiveness... God, for His own sake forgives us... BECAUSE HE WANTS OUR SALVATION EVEN MORE THAN WE DO.

And that is what this word means. It means you are clean.

you are clean. When God looks at you, He declares you to be righteous.

He declares THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD - OVER YOU!

When God looks at you, He doesn't see the person that you see when you look in the mirror. HE SEES JESUS.

Let me help you see this... and one thing that we want to make sure you understand about the Gospel, is that these things have always been true:

God loved the world before He sent Jesus into it. When Isaiah said that he remembers our sins no more for His sake... He is saying that before Jesus.

John 3:16 says: God so loved the world THAT he gave... He LOVED THE WORLD... and because he already loved the world... and because He wanted nothing more *than* reconciliation *with* the world, HE SENT JESUS.

But the love was always there.

That is why He made the covenants that He did. People are his greatest creation and, as we will soon see, the church is HIS BIGGEST IDEA.

But when Paul says: For in it (the Gospel) the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."

He is quoting a passage in Habakkuk. Old Testament. BEFORE GOD SENT JESUS.

Its a quote of Habakkuk 2:4, which says:

"Behold, his soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him, but the righteous shall live by his faith." -

Real quick: the book of Habakkuk was written as a COMPLAINT from the prophet, against God, asking the question:

God... how can you move even in the midst of such sinners?

How is it that God can work even through sinful people?

Most specifically - "how can God use a nation like Babylon to bring about his divine justice?" (ESV, introduction)

Or another way to put it would be: How can God use people who are so evil, to bring justice against people who are LESS EVIL. Babylon was being used by God to punish sinful Israel... but how can God work through people who are so far from him?

How is it that in place that is absent of God, not even inviting God to be there... God can still show up?

its like: God, are you going to act in accordance to YOUR justice to a world gone mad?

And of course, in the next sections of Romans, Paul paints this picture of a NO LESS fallen humanity that has, in essence, gone mad. **No-one is righteous on their own accord**, and Paul uses the conclusion of Habakkuk as his answer: the righteous are the ones who live BY FAITH.

They are the ones who, even when their world is upside down - their eyes stay on Jesus. They are the one's who, even when they are the cause of their world being upside down... remember who Jesus is in their life and cling to Him when they are at the bottom.

Because they aren't going to achieve righteousness in and of themselves. Not the Jews. Not the Gentiles. Not the Greeks or the Barbarians. Not Israel as they are being destroyed by an even more evil Babylon...

The language Paul pulls from here is fascinating because it shows how God redeems people even when they don't deserve to be redeemed... AND HE WORKS THROUGH PEOPLE even when they are the least likely candidate to ever be used by God to accomplish a Kingdom purpose.

But yet the arms of grace extend to all of them, and they will be made righteous through FAITH in Jesus Christ.

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It is very easy to begin the Christian walk from faith... but to see that Christian walk through BY FAITH is another story.

But that is the way that Paul puts it... our translation says: from faith for faith

Most people come to Jesus at the bottom, and honestly, that's a great place to come to him... when you realize that all you have is cold water and the grease and grime are not coming off the pan with the tools you have.

So we let God, like that warm water... just come and wash us clean. Most of us who have accepted Jesus, we are good with that...

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the problem is that: we understand the grace of God as the power to forgive... but I am not sure that we fully understand it as the power *for salvation*.

But that's what Paul says it is here... He doesn't just say it's the power for God to forgive us... He says it's the power for SALVATION.

Because for a lot of Christians, the more they learn about the Bible, and about Jesus, the more they treat it like law... thinking that every time they screw up they have to get saved all over again.

The Gospel is bigger than that. At the core of the Gospel is the POWER of salvation... Paul basically defines Gospel in a whole new way... the good news for EVERYONE, is that the Gospel of Jesus Christ has the power to reach into the most broken places and because **JESUS IS THERE**,

God doesn't view you as broken anymore... in fact He doesn't even remember when He did.

But not only that... but *sōtēria*... salvation... "to be delivered or rescued" means that today as Jesus comes into the broken places... we have faith that He has the power to restore those things in your life today, which in turn, should lead you to live the kind of life that shows other people that same salvation. We should become people of justice... of helping make the world right.

But the gospel... the good news... is received when we **ACKNOWLEDGE THAT WE NEED IT**. Faith in the Gospel means that you have come to terms with the fact that you have never, nor will ever be able to live up to a standard that could ever save yourself, but Jesus Christ died for you anyway, and His blood is powerful enough to redeem even you.

That is why it's important to understand justification in terms of being "declared righteous."

Now, every time you are faced with an opportunity to do something unrighteous... you remember what God declared you as... You are a child of God... a righteous one... a saint.

We remember that the God of the universe sees us as his children... He believes in our potential... He sees the best in us... he stands with us when we fall but for his own sake he doesn't remember it. He just keeps seeing Jesus.

That's it. The righteous are the ones who live by faith... The righteous are the ones who live **BY THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD**. Leaning on his righteousness when they know they only have it because of HIM.

And in a life that has truly experienced salvation... that has truly been rescued... the question becomes "why would I ever go back?"

and of course we will fall sometimes... but the Gospel says that our sins are not too big for Jesus... and even when we fall, if we are in Christ, God does not see us as fallen. God looks at us, and He sees Jesus.

So that phrase "from faith, for faith" - the most basic understanding of it is that it's all about faith. It is faith in the beginning, and it is faith until the end.

Faith does not bring you to point A and then abandon you there to your own devices, where you now have to figure out what it means to be a Christian by following a bunch of rules. Faith will bring you to point A... and will carry you to point B and C and D and E...

or we could say it this way: the hot water is always running.

it doesn't freeze. Its always there, constantly doing the cleansing work on the grossest dishes of your life.

Constantly renewing you as you renew your mind daily and set your eyes on Jesus.

God's righteousness making you righteous every single day.

That is the Gospel.

"For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God."