

Romans 1:1-7 - The Announcement

ROMANS SERMON #1

September 3, 2017

Why are we teaching Romans?

Why do we teach through books of the Bible, and why do we want to spend time in a book with lots of theology and doctrine, in a book that is more about God and what He has done than it is about us anyways? Don't we run the risk of being really irrelevant by talking so much about a God we can't see?

In CS Lewis's book the Screwtape Letters, A senior demon named Screwtape is writing to his nephew, Wormwood, to coach him on separating Christians from Christ. And in chapter 12, he writes this about the power of lives devoted to what he calls "nothing."

"...Nothing is very strong: strong enough to steal away a man's best years not in sweet sins but in a dreary flickering of the mind over it knows not what and knows not why, in the gratification of curiosities so feeble that the man is only half aware of them, in drumming of fingers and kicking of heels, in whistling tunes that he does not like, or in the long, dim labyrinth of reveries ..."¹

This was written in 1942, but I can't think of a better way to describe much of our lives than as a "dreary flickering of the mind." If it weren't such a long phrase, that could be what we call facebook - "a dreary flickering of the mind over it knows not what and knows not why.com."

¹ Lewis, C.S. *The Screwtape Letters*. (New York: McMillan, 1976), 56.

So much of what we fill our minds with isn't bad or sinful in itself, it's just so much nothing. There's so much weightlessness. The empty calories of meaningless consumption.

Michael Horton describes our world as a world of buzz, where everything is all about marketing all the time:

*"So what's the Buzz about? Nothing. Or, more precisely, it's about itself. The music video is about the product: the album. The evening news need not be about noteworthy events in the world but merely about the event of "reporting" it. Advertising need not be about products but merely create a consumer experience. And when the Buzz comes to church, worship need not actually be about God and what he has done, is doing, and will do to and for us but only about itself. "Let's just praise the Lord." What Lord? And why? Never mind all that theology: Let's just enjoy the "worship experience." If the Buzz isn't about anything, what's the point? Stimulation. The consumption of experiences..."*²

And because we live in a world of weightless amusements, constant advertising, self-focus, consumption of experiences, endless buzz, and dreary flickering of the mind, we can be tempted to think that's what we as a church should provide more of it to adapt to a world of weightlessness. Just more chippiness, cliches, constant advertising when you come to church, because that's what we are used to. That's how you reach young people.

Its like we live all week long on a diet of poprocks, and desperately need some real nourishment. We need some protein, and so often what we find in

² Horton, Michael. A Better Way: Rediscovering the Drama of God-Centered Worship (pp. 192-193). Baker Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

church is just Christian poprocks. They don't taste as good or fizz as much, and they leave us just as empty. A poor imitation.

But I don't believe you're here because you want more of the same. Or that it would help you to give you more shallow dreary flickering and nothing when we gather. We need something refreshingly other, something weighty, some ballast in our boats that are getting tossed all over by the wind. We don't need another slick advertisement and finely choreographed music video.

We need God.

And Romans is a book that presents God to us.

In the ocean of mindless buzz and deviciness, we have the rock of God and his message the Gospel.

The message of how God came to rescue us and how we can know Him. It's not another meaningless cartoon but the greatest story ever told, it's not one dimensional and happy all the time, but encompasses terror and sin and blood and darkness and triumph and joy and struggle. And that story is the one we're invited to come be part of in Jesus. Not a story where we get to be the main character like we are on facebook, but where Christ is central and we get to be the extras in a plot all about Him, which is what we were made for.

So let's jump in:

Romans 1:1-7 1 "Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be 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 descended from David according to the flesh 4 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, 5
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, 6 including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ, 7
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.”**

I. The Gospel is All About God

So the apostle Paul opens up the letter with an introduction of what He is going to unpack in this book, the Gospel of God. He has one passion, one obsession, the good news of the Gospel of Jesus.

Paul is so devoted to this message that he says he is set apart for the Gospel, and the word for set apart there is the same as the root word for “pharisee.” In the past, Paul had been a Pharisee, the religious leaders who were devoted to teaching God’s law, whose lives were given to knowing the law and teaching it, they were the devoted religious leaders.

Now he says he is a Pharisee of the Gospel - he now has a relentless religious devotion to the ultimate anti-religion, the Gospel of Jesus.

And I say it’s the anti-religion because religion, in most senses of the word, is humanity’s attempt to get to God. To fight hard enough, be moral enough, climb high enough, be enlightened enough to achieve a relationship with God or to bring God’s blessing and presence down on earth. Religion says strive and achieve God.

But the Gospel is not a set of rules, a set of standards we follow. It isn't advice, it is news. It isn't a worldview, it isn't a way of life, but it is an announcement of a victory.

It was a term (euangellion) that was often used for the announcement of a military victory made by an appointed messenger. And the word "apostle" is the word for appointed messenger. These apostles were the people in the first century appointed by Jesus to be the first heralds of the good news.

Paul's not a life coach, he's not an activist, he's not a therapist (there are people with those callings in the world, but they are not his - and they are not the callings of a pastor either.) He is a messenger of the GOOD NEWS.

And the message he has been appointed to bring is not good advice, not a religion, not a new set of laws, not a way we could climb to God, not a cool hip new way to do religion so that we'll like it, but, he says in verse 1, it is the GOSPEL of God.

The good news of God. The announcement that a battle was won on our behalf by God. So Paul is an announcer of a victory.

And the Gospel, the good news, is FOR us, but it isn't about us. It's the announcement of the battle Jesus has won. It's the announcement that the holy God of the universe looked at humanity, his creation that had rebelled against Him, and came to give his life on the cross to put sin to death, to absorb the punishment that we deserve, to die in our place and rise again so that those who believe in Him wouldn't perish but have everlasting life."

It's a story about God and his love - but not sentimental love. This is not the announcement that there's an invisible sky fairy that thinks warm thoughts - and just close your eyes and believe He's up there. But its the announcement that a God of holiness, justice, mercy, grace, stepped into

this world, took on flesh, dwelt among us, and won a real battle. Psalms even calls him a God of war and He came to win a battle for us - and what's remarkable is that He did all that for us while we were His enemies.

Paul says, "I'm devoted to that with a holy obsession - because what is better?"

And the risk for all of us is that when we become distracted from this gospel, we become all about ourselves. The story of the world becomes a story about us.

Jesus becomes an example of how to be awesome, we spend our lives trying to be awesome, and sometimes even convincing other people we are awesome. The focus becomes us: our stories, our strategies for living a better life, the things we do. Which at first can be exciting and seem new and invigorating, but it always leaves us burned out and worse than we started.

In Michael Horton's book, *the Gospel Driven life*, he writes this:

"The good news is not just a series of facts to which we yield our assent, but a dramatic narrative that replots our identity. Think of it in terms of a theatrical play. Each week we come to church with our own scripts. If yours is anything like mine, it's "the show about nothing." Yet God descends to give us a new script, a rich plot in which our original character dies and is raised with the lead character. Instead of trying to find a supporting role for God in our play, God writes us into his script as part of a growing cast for his new world. This script does not offer a blueprint for a new creation, if we will only follow certain steps for realizing it. Instead, through this gospel the Spirit sweeps us into the drama, into the new creation that has already been

inaugurated. No longer "in Adam," under the reign of sin and death, we are "in Christ."³

The focus of this message is Christ. This is the rock we need, the story worth living for.

Notice what Paul says about Him here:

Romans 1:2-3 which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, 3 concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh

In the Old Testament scriptures, God had promised that Jesus would come. That His son would come, descended from David. A great ruler, the Messiah, the Savior. The ONE. Jesus is the one that all of the Old Testament was pointing to and waiting for.

Daniel was promising Jesus when he wrote:

**Daniel 7:13-14 "I saw in the night visions,
and behold, with the clouds of heaven
there came one like a son of man,
and he came to the Ancient of Days
and was presented before him.**

**14 And to him was given dominion
and glory and a kingdom,
that all peoples, nations, and languages
should serve him;
his dominion is an everlasting dominion,
which shall not pass away,**

³ Horton, Michael. The Gospel Driven Life: Being Good News People in a Bad News World. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009.

**and his kingdom one
that shall not be destroyed.**

Daniel predicted that the Son would come and when he came he would rule. A descendant of David would come and be the king of all peoples, nations, and languages.

Isaiah was promising Jesus when he wrote:

**Isaiah 53 Surely he has borne our griefs
and carried our sorrows;
yet we esteemed him stricken,
smitten by God, and afflicted.**

**5 But he was pierced for our transgressions;
he was crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,
pand with his wounds we are healed.**

**6 All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have turned—every one—to his own way;
rand the LORD has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.**

And there are hundreds of other passages in the Bible, starting in Genesis 3, right at the beginning, where God promised that he would send His Son. A son to crush the serpent's head, forgive and heal his people, give life, not because we earned it but because He is a gracious God.

Jesus was the ruling and reigning and suffering and giving Messiah that all of the Old Testament talked about. This whole book is all about Him.

But the truth is, Jesus wasn't the first Jewish guy descended from David claiming to be the Messiah and who was put to death. He wasn't the first

one claiming the scriptures were about him. Jewish messiahs were a dime a dozen in Jesus's day, and for centuries before He came.

II. The Gospel Is Legitimized by the Resurrection

But there was a difference. Romans 1:4

"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,"

The difference between Jesus and every other teacher, every other guru and leader, is that Jesus rose from the dead. And with a resurrection on your resume', you have all the evidence you need that you aren't just the latest in a long string of megalomaniacs claiming to be God's answer to humanity's problems. You have all the cred you need to back up everything you say about yourself.

Jesus rose. And his resurrection wasn't just a spiritual thing or an inspirational story (like his body stayed in the tomb and his spirit rose somehow and his disciples comforted each other by believing that.) He rose bodily, and it was a public event.

1 Corinthians 15:3-8 "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, 5 and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. 6 Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. 7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. 8 Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.

So Paul talked to these early Christians like the resurrection of Jesus wasn't just spiritual, it was physical and confirmable. He gives a list of witnesses' names, he says 500 others, and they're still alive so you can talk to them.

In the book of Romans, Paul is going to call us to faith. But faith is not believing crazy spiritual realities, the way that scientologists ask you to accept by faith their story that Xenu, the director of the galactic confederacy brought millions of people to earth 75 million years ago. Paul is saying, "This is a confirmable, historical event that declared that Jesus is who He said He is, the Son of God. Ask the people who saw it. Get two or three witnesses to confirm it. It happened."

Faith is not believing in the unprovable, but believing in Jesus because He proved his authority by rising from the dead.

So Paul is announcing Him and his reality, his death, his resurrection as the greatest war victory of all time.

And our role in that story, first and foremost, is to receive it.

We are not a community primarily of people who do the Gospel. We receive the gospel. "Don't just do something, sit there!" That's the message of the Gospel - rest, and receive. He has done it all, paid it all, given all so we could be free.

**Isaiah 55:Come, everyone who thirsts,
come to the waters;
and he who has no money,
come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk
without money and without price.**

2 Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,

and your labor for that which does not satisfy?

**Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good,
and delight yourselves in rich food.**

**3 Incline your ear, and come to me;
hear, that your soul may live;
hand I will make with you an everlasting covenant,
my steadfast, sure love for David.**

We are receivers, listeners to the message, not the cooks but the guests at the feast.

Jesus didn't come so we could get off the Old Testament treadmill of laws we can't keep to get on a more user friendly new testament treadmill of tips for living we can't keep. But to get off the treadmill and receive who Jesus is without trying to do what only He could do in saving us.

He is unique in every way, uniquely sinless, uniquely Divine, unique in his mission. And we are receivers.

When we hear the gospel we aren't listening to marching orders, but a victory announcement. It isn't something we have to buy or earn or strive for. We just receive. It's an announcement of the victory of Jesus over satan, sin, and death.

But that fact that we simply receive it and don't DO it doesn't mean it doesn't change us. It changes everything.

Michael Horton uses the example of the classic picture from the end of world war 2, when victory over Japan had been announced. And its a picture in Times Square of a soldier and a nurse, and she is dipped underneath him in a celebratory kiss, amidst a crowd of people who are all smiles and cheering. Victory in Japan was announced, and those people in the street weren't told to do anything, but in response to the good news, they acted.

Think of how much powerful that good news is than any good advice. You could stand on a corner in Times Square yelling, "you should love one another", "be nice", "be happy", and as practical as that message would be, as true as it would be, it wouldn't have any effect. The commands wouldn't work. (Yeah we know we should be happy, we're not, we're New Yorkers!) Especially under the stress and pressure that a nation being at war would create. Your commands won't make fearful people happy.

But the second there's an announcement: Victory in Japan!, with no commands, no new laws to follow, no demands, just news, the people are happy, they're clearly nice, and they're loving each other, maybe even a little too well. Good news is far more powerful than telling people what to do. They end up doing more in response to good news than they ever would in response to good advice.

And my fear for us is that we gravitate toward advice like that's what we need primarily. We need advice for our marriages, for child-rearing, for everything. We believe what we primarily need is to know what to do and if we had some steps and initiatives and principles we'd live a much better life.

But remember that when God told us what to do, when he gave us the law, we broke it. "All this we will do." So He sent His son. And the good news of the Gospel has more power to change a person and a people than any recipe for the victorious life, any steps, any guilt-tripping into obedience.

The Good News brings no demands, but when it is believed, it changes everything.

In fact, look at verse 1 again.

III. The Gospel Humbles and Gives Confidence

Paul says there "**Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle**"

Look at the two words he uses to describe himself. He is an apostle, or an appointed messenger. After Christ Himself, these are the highest ranking guys in church history. They carried the teaching of Jesus to the world, he had a unique and unparalleled authority to write scripture, they were the founding fathers if you will of all of the church in history. Ephesians 2:20 says the church is built on the foundation of the prophets and the apostles.

So he's up there - he is a higher up.

But first, he says he is a servant. A "dulos", literally a slave. There is no title with more humility than this. A dignified Pharisee like Paul would never call himself a slave.

But the Gospel has made him a whole new kind of person who can be both - the highest and the lowest simultaneously.

It's powerful news that can do that!

Think of what the news is. The news of the Gospel is that the battle has been one by the Son of God who came to be crucified for our sin.

Which has to humble us. We are sinful. Paul will knock this idea out of the park in Romans 3 - "there is no one righteous, not even one,...all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." This is a humbling message - that we needed more than some steps to get to God or some principles to follow for a better life. We aren't just spiritually sick, but dead. We don't just need some medicine, but a resurrection.

Total depravity is for optimists. We are a wreck.

Which is a message that humbles you. It explains how it could make you feel like a slave.

BUT - It doesn't just say that. It says "God so loved the world He gave his son."

Out of love, God sent Christ. Out of love, the Son died. On the cross, He said it is finished. So by faith in Him we are brought out of the pit and called his children, his heirs, his friends, his messengers. And it isn't what we do that keeps us there.

So we are humbled and exalted by the Gospel!

A person who grasps the gospel can walk with utter confidence in God being for her, totally sure of God's provision and care and love. Because His love was never contingent on us being worthy of it, so no amount of failure separates us. We can have confidence in the power of the message of the Gospel, because we know it took the lowest of sinners like us and caused us to be adopted as sons and daughters.

But at the same time, recognizing that we deserve nothing, it enables us to serve without reward or recognition, to be slighted, to get less attention than we thought we should have, to go to low places to love our neighbors, and to not feel like anything is beneath us and we are deserving so much more.

It says we are simultaneously sinful and righteous (Simul justus et peccator),

Simultaneously low and high, guilty and loved, humbled and exalted.

Religion can crush us when we don't measure up to the standards. Or make us arrogant when we think we do. It can make us high or low. But the Gospel allowed Paul to say "I'm a slave and an apostle."

The gospel creates this whole new kind of person who can be both.

It seems in our world, dialogue about controversial issues breaks down quickly because we find it impossible to be confident and servants. We think we're right about an issue, somebody disagrees, so we label them, write them off, reject them because we think they're beneath us. We move quickly toward being offended because how could someone question me?

We don't know how to be confident yet learners and listeners, yet patient, yet loving to our opponents, yet willing to be shown to be wrong. We're confident and screechy and arrogant - apostles but never slaves. We like to control, to win, to silence our opponents, but not serve. Or we will engage for a bit and always immediately back down, we can be low but not confident.

But a Christian can be confident, yet never see those who disagree as less than us - Jesus had to be torn for me I was so bad. In becoming a Christian I admitted I was completely wrong, so it wouldn't be a stretch to think I could be show wrong again. I know I'm not saved because I'm great so I can genuinely respect my neighbors.

James 1 "Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; 20 for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. 21 Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls."

I love how he describes Christian living like being quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger as receiving the word that has been implanted in us. Be a receiver of the Gospel - and that will make you slow to anger, etc. The announcement of good news changes more than just a stand-alone command ever could.

And commands apart from that good news, laws, we will see in weeks to come, can even make the problem worse. So the goal is that the Gospel could be proclaimed and that would bring about not the old kind of frustrated striving to obey laws, but a new kind of obedience of faith:

5 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, 6 including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ, 7 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.”

IV. The Gospel brings about the obedience of faith

To believe the Gospel is to be someone who is called by God to belong to Jesus and to see Jess as the Lord Jesus Christ. It is to come to a new master, a new king, a new ultimate.

And life in light of what we have been given is a life of obedience of faith, of receiving the word so that our mindset changes. There is no becoming a Christian without a change of mindset, a change of Lords, a change of postures.

But the Gospel brings about the kind of obedience that comes not from new rules, but a new love.

And now Christ is in the spotlight, not us.

When we become spotlighted it creates divisions, When christ is in the spotlight it creates unity

When we are spotlighted we create teams to make us feel right When christ is in the spotlight we're all undone, humbled, and loved.'

And there is nothing like the Gospel.

And this news is so life-changing and its news that is offered to us so freely, that we can't keep it to ourselves - always room for more around this table. To exclude people from it is to not understand what it is.

"obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations"

(5)

V. The Gospel is For All Nations

It is for all nations, all peoples. It's not just a localized faith for one culture in one place, but a universal truth for all.

Christianity doesn't have a capital city or primary culture or even a home continent. It goes everywhere, calls people from every nation to come in to Christ. This is an announcement not just with implications for one people, one nation, but for all.

And Paul is writing to the Christians at Rome here, but is laying some important groundwork, because the jewish Christians assumed the gospel was more for them than for the nations. They had the rights to it, everybody else could come but not be as important to them. There were cultural battles and racial tensions in the Roman church, and Paul works to rectify them by saying "All nations are called to this." This is for everyone.

So come one, come all to Jesus. He has made one new race, a new humanity, without the divisions and war but with welcome and grace. It changes everything. More on that in future weeks.

Reading: Psalm 67:1-3

Bulletin Notes:

Romans 1:1-7

The Announcement

- I. The Gospel is All About God (Romans 1:1-3)
- II. The Gospel is Confirmed by the Resurrection (Romans 1:4)
- III. The Gospel Humbles and Gives Confidence (Romans 1:1)
- IV. The Gospel Brings About the Obedience of Faith (Romans 1:5-7)
- V. The Gospel Is For All Nations (Romans 1:5-7)

For Small Group Discussion (*adapted in part from Romans by John Stott*) :

1. What is particularly striking about Paul's description of himself as a 'slave' and 'apostle'?
2. Why is the Old Testament important?
3. Why is it significant that Jesus is called "Lord" and "Christ"? What are the meanings of these terms? How should a Christian, then, expect to relate to Him?
4. If we are saved by grace alone through faith alone, how can Paul say the Gospel brings about the obedience of faith?
5. In what ways do you practically believe the gospel is just for me? Just for us? Just for the people already at our church? Just for my race? Just for me and a few close friends? How does the teaching that it is for all nations compel us to act?