

Romans 1:8-15 - The Gospel for All of Life

ROMANS SERMON #2

September 10, 2017

Passage: Romans 1:8-15 "8 First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world. 9 For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you 10 always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you. 11 For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you-- 12 that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine. 13 I want you to know, brothers, that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some harvest among you as well as among the rest of the Gentiles. 14 I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. 15 So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome."

I. Christians Need the Gospel (Romans 1:15)

Last week we saw that Paul opened his letter to the Romans by saying that he has been entrusted with the good news of God - that Jesus has come as the one the Old Testament predicted, that He was confirmed to be God's Son in power by His resurrection from the dead. And Paul was set apart for one purpose - to spread that message.

This message is so good and powerful that Paul is eager to go to Rome with it: a city he has never been to, and to get among a people that for the most part he hasn't met. He wants to go preach the gospel to these Christians.

But why? Why preach the Gospel to Christians?

These people are Christians already. In Romans 1:6-7, he says they're the called of God, they're saints (holy ones), they have the same Father as Paul

does already. They already believe the gospel. But Paul wants to go there and preach to them. Why?

Why would one of the greatest missionaries ever to live waste his time sitting down the Christians to preach a Jesus to them that they already know?

If you go to a car dealership and express your interest in a car, a good salesman will be calling you and following up and doing everything he can to get you into that car. But if he's still calling you months after you bought it to tell you about it, you'd say, "I already have the car. You can stop now. And why do you keep showing up on my porch - this is getting weird." You got your commission, move on.

Why preach the Gospel to those who have already received it? Why do we do that here?

And the answer to that question reveals some of the ways that we grow as Christians.

There are a lot of reasons for this, but a big one is summed up well by Keller when he says that the Gospel is not just the ABCs of the Christian life, but the A to Z of the Christian life.

What he means by that is that there's a common definition of the Gospel message as a three step making of a Christian, ABC - Admit you're a sinner, B - believe Christ died for your sins, C - confess your sins and your newfound faith in Him. Which is good.

But we can tend, individually and as a church, to limit the Gospel to that formula and to think that from there we move on to something bigger and better. The Gospel is the doorway to the Christian life and Christian teaching, and after going through that door we leave it behind to learn how to live with some helpful steps and strategies.

Or we move on to the "really deep stuff" which can involve all kinds of weird things from spooky interpretations of the bible to rapture obsessions to focus on minutiae. Or we move on to more and more rules and laws and ever-rising standards for holiness and sacrifice to make ourselves really holy.

We start with Jesus and his work and to move on to something more interesting or practical or exciting or deeper or harder.

And we grow simply by doing better and trying harder and efforting our way to holiness. The Gospel is the ABCs, and D to Z is something else.

But the reason Paul wants to preach the Gospel to the Christians in Rome is

A. Because the Gospel is the message that brings us to faith in Christ and then is the constant, continual source of our continued faith and obedience and growth.

The Gospel changes our eternity because only by believing it are we forgiven and granted everlasting life. But it changes us in every other way as well - our identity, our attitudes, our behavior, our relationships, how we spend our time, how we live toward our neighbors and community, are all shaped by it.

We don't just start with the Gospel and move on, we continue to go back to it again and again to be transformed and warmed and to have our whole world-view adjusted by it.

We need to hear it and respond to it again and again, not because we need to learn it again, but because we need to be nourished by it again.

The gospel message isn't just knowledge, it's food.

Yes, learning the same things over and over again can seem boring and unnecessary. And many people have stopped gathering with the church because "they already know that stuff."

But if the Gospel is food then it's different. We eat the same meals again and again. At our house, sometimes there's something new. But usually it's something we've had before. And I look forward to eating things I've eaten before because I love the taste and the full belly. I never say, "I'm only going to eat if it's brand new." That's not how nourishment works.

So I hope many weeks you learn some things here -I hope there's something that informs you every week. But more than that I want us all to

be fed - to allow the same truths we've learned before to nourish us and strengthen us and change us. Not just so we can know things, but so we can believe things and "feed on" those things.

We come in tired and burned out, with faith weak and faltering, exhausted from life, discouraged by our failures. And we need to hear again that God loves, that God forgives, that Christ died, that Christ is good and generous and with us and powerful and because of the cross we know he works all things together for our good. He stays with us, he cares for us, he knows us but still loves us. Because that message is the only strength we have. It's the a to z.

All of our continues strength for living comes from it. Paul will end Romans by saying this:

Romans 16:25-27 "Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages 26 but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith— 27 to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen."

We need the Gospel preached to us because it is the strength of the Christian life. It's the power to bring about the obedience of faith.

We also need it because in the Gospel, we'll see next week, the righteousness of God is revealed. This message shows us more clearly than anywhere what God is like. That God is holy, that God has a righteous anger toward our sin - so much so that Jesus had to die, but also that God is love and sent his son to absorb that anger so we could be free. He's that Holy and that loving.

And seeing God for who He is changes us. Because:

B. We Become Like the Gods We Worship.

In the beginning of the Bible, Genesis chapter 1, God tells us that he created us in his image.

**Genesis 1:27 "So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them."**

We were made to be imaging beings. We were made to reflect our God.

If you go into a store that sells mirrors, you'll see a huge variety of frames and shapes and sizes. But the core characteristic of every mirror is that it reflects something.

And people are the same way. God has made us unique with unique characteristics. But the bulk of who we are is a reflection of the god we worship.

Like mirrors, we can't remain neutral. We all reflect something. That's primarily what we're made for. Not to display our frame, but to display a reflection.

And the god that we worship will be reflected in our lives.

"That which dominates our imaginations and our thoughts will determine our lives, and our character. Therefore, it behooves us to be careful what we worship, for what we are worshipping we are becoming."

-Ralph Waldo Emerson

For a Christian who worships Jesus, this is how the scriptures describe this process:

18 And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another - 2 Corinthians 3:18

We gaze at glory and are transformed by it. If we gaze at Christ, we image and reflect Him more. If not, we will reflect something else. If we worship the true God, we will resemble Him. If we worship something else, we resemble it.

You can see what we worship by what we resemble.

And the place the righteousness of God is revealed so we can reflect it is in the gospel.

The mercy of God is held up in the Gospel and as we worship that God we'll reflect it and be people of mercy.

The love of God is shown in a God who gave His son so we become loving people.

The generosity of God who would give His son gets reflected in His people who believe. Its on the cross that we see most clearly the God we worship, and nothing changes us more than the God we worship.

In fact, this is a preview of where we'll be in springtime, but chapter 12, he starts verse 1 with "In view of these mercies" and then spends 5 chapters unpacking practical implications of believing this stuff. He spends 11 chapters revelling in the mercies of God in the Gospel, then the last 5 talking about how those mercies of God affect:

How we use our gifts

How we honor one another

How we forgive one another

How we submit to the government

It affects the food we eat, our finances, our approach to people who create divisions and don't reflect the love of Christ.

What Jesus has done for us on the cross shapes everything.

So Paul says I want to go to Rome and preach the gospel you already know because it is the source of strength, it shows us God and we become like the God we worship, and because:

C. Because a focus on the gospel leaks over time.

Carson says it usually happens like this over time in a church community:

1)The gospel is accepted

2) The gospel is assumed - we all believe it but we talk about other stuff.

3) The gospel is confused - we haven't talked about it in awhile so the we are pretty confused about it.

4) The gospel is lost - nobody knows it, we're either just a social club or just a rallying point for good deeds without a good creed anymore.

5) And, I would add, once the gospel is lost, much of the impetus for good works, loving people with our vocations, serving neighbors, embracing the poor, standing with victims - it all goes away if we stop believing that people were made in the image of God.

So we preach it again and again because we are prone to forget. We are prone to add something to it and make that issue or cause as important as it. We are prone to self-worship and need to be reoriented. We need it.

We need it individually and we need it to be the kind of loving community we desire to be.

II. The Church Needs the Gospel

Paul's background was that he was a Jewish Pharisee. So this means that it is likely that he was prejudiced against gentiles, and we know that he persecuted Christians and even oversaw their execution. So there's not a person in this Roman church that Paul wouldn't have previously disliked or been prejudiced against.

But the Gospel has changed all that. It has brought his heart to God but also moved his heart toward them.

Now he is writing to a church in Rome, that is now predominantly gentile, and he says:

8 First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world.

So Paul is affectionate toward them and thankful for them.

When I was a teenager at the church where I came to faith, Orchard Park Wesleyan Church, the pastor there, at every wedding he officiated, would say "A marriage is like a triangle with three points: God, the husband, and the wife. The husband and wife can move closer to one another or farther

from from another. But a way they can guarantee they get closer to one another is by getting closer to Christ."

And he was right. And that's true of all of our relationships.

Moving closer to Christ moves us closer to all of those who are closer to Christ. And keeping the Gospel front and center creates warmth, unity, transcends barriers, move us closer.

And in Paul, it has created thankfulness for these Christians that he previously would have hated.

And the gospel has created thankfulness in him for them. Because their faith is known all over the world. The fact that the Spirit has moved in such a huge way as to take the Gospel to Rome, and that there people from all walks of life have believed: Jew and Gentile, slave and free. Philippians says that even some people from Caesar's household have come to believe. The Gospel is on the move, and Paul thanks God for all of the Romans and their burgeoning faith.

So you have racism overcome, you have a 180 turn in a guy who hated the Christian faith and now he is glad that it's spreading, and who hated the church but now is overflowing with thankfulness for them.

One of the evidences that a heart has actually received the Gospel is that it becomes thankful.

In Romans 1:21, Paul will write, **"For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened."**

So the fundamental problem with a heart that isn't connected to Christ is a refusal to honor God or thank God.

But when the Gospel breaks in and we receive the grace of God in such huge measure on the cross, it makes us thankful people.

See how it's the strength of the Christian life and we never move on from it?

Once the gospel has overcome our refusal to honor God and give him thanks, it grows into all the regions of our heart and makes us thankful

people. Particularly, as we see in Paul here, for other Christians, for the church.

And the church is a messed up place, a messed up people, a people with blind spots and sins, but so am I. And if I've come to realize the truth of the gospel, that Christ was crucified for me and my sins, then that moves me toward other deficient people in thankfulness, not away from them in superiority and arrogance. Christ didn't die for the really together people, He died for me.

This is supposed to be a really weird gathering - a gathering of people very unlike us in many ways, but drawn nearer to one another as we draw nearer to Christ.

So When Paul thinks of this church in Rome, he is "first"(verse 8), thankful for them. People unlike him in many ways as gentiles, people still new and immature in the faith, people who had needs, and people he was thankful for.

His reaction to them is thankfulness for them. This is the opposite of my default mode. My default mode is to look for problems so I can start fixing them. That feels like the most productive thing to do for me, because stuff that is right about people can be left alone - that doesn't need attention because its all set. I want a problem to solve. Give me something to fix. And if it ain't broke, I'll ignore it.

But Paul didn't approach people that way. He was a go getter, he was a problem solver, but he was able to step back and genuinely enjoy the work of God in the hearts of messed up people.

And he was able to be thankful for them.

And this is not just technique - its not just, "Say three nice things to a person before you get to fixing them." People can smell when you're trying to soften them up so you can drop a bomb. They don't want a shady sales technique.

Its not just a technique, but a genuine hyper-awareness of God's grace in their lives.

It is viewing people through the rose-colored glasses of grace.

Which is a way we reflect the God we worship.

Look at this verse in 1 Corinthians chapter 4 verse 5:

1 cor 4 5 Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God.

So he says that God is coming as a judge. He is going to judge our hearts. And for me, I would think, that would be a bad day. God knows every motive. Every thought. Every intent. Every insult that I thought but didn't speak. Every good deed I did just to be noticed.

God is one day going to disclose the purposes of the heart and bring it all to light.

Can you imagine what it will feel like to be completely exposed by God when He returns? You tremble to think about it. To get caught for everything you've done, every way you were phony, everything we seemed to get away with.

And God exposes it all, and now it is time for God to settle the score and pay us for our deeds.

And we get...

A smiting? a divine scowl? a lecture? Solitary confinement?

No - a commendation. A reward. For me? God will disclose my heart and then reward me? How could that be?

Its grace. Christ has taken away my sins and my shame. He paid for them, and God is just, He doesn't demand payment again. There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. (Romans 8:1).

We are known - and LOVED! Exposed, and rewarded!

And we, gazing on his glory in that gospel, reflect Him. We become like Him.

If he is going to do that for me, then surely I can do that for others. Surely I can commend them for the evidence of God's grace in their lives, and really feel that way. Surely I can FIRST be thankful for them. Because grace makes you gracious.

If you believe the Gospel: that all of the worst things about Christians and about a church have been cleansed by Christ, then you can first be genuinely thankful for them.

This is hard when you see something in someone that needs to be corrected. It is easy for their deficiency to dominate your view of them. Paul was fully aware of their deficiencies, and gently helped with them when he could, but he was dominated by his awareness that God was at work in them.

If you believe you are only right with God because of what He has done for you in Christ, then you really can't be superior and separate from others. "Nobody is quite as devoted to Christ as me, nobody cares as much about the oppressed as me, nobody evangelizes like I do, nobody gives like me" - if you think God loves you because of your works you will feel superior to and disgusted by people who you think don't do those same works and don't get it. You will separate yourself and isolate yourself.

But when the gospel goes deep you can move toward a messed up person and a screwed up church because we're all in the screwed up boat together, and before we complain and criticize, we can be thankful.

The Gospel creates thankfulness for God's people and His church.

It also creates prayer for them:

B. To Create Prayerfulness (9)

9 For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you 10 always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you. 11 For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you--

Paul was drawn toward the church and is always thinking about and praying for them.

Notice how Paul calls God as his witness that he is always praying for the Romans and wanting to be with them. We are pretty good at saying, "I'm praying for you" and not being. But Paul, with trembling, calls God as his witness. God knows this is true. Paul actually does pray for them, continually.

Which creates a lot of thankfulness and love.

When you are praying, you are entrusting someone to God. Which means you aren't trying to control them, God can control. You aren't their savior, God is. If they're wronging you somehow, you don't need to repay, you entrust any vengeance to God. You're unloading the burdensome part of people. And reminding yourself that you don't have to change them, God does that.

This is practical for raising kids. We instruct and discipline and do work to change them. But God has made them uniquely, and some of our expectations aren't realistic and aren't right for them. And they'll always sense that we're frustrated and unpleasable, or that they exist to glorify us.

But if we're happy in Christ, have been humbled by the gospel and don't feel like we have to put on a show, if we're satisfied by grace and don't need them to do something for us, we can be first thankful and second be prayerful for them.

And that builds a sense of warmth and loyalty that makes the correction and instruction go so much farther.

And this is practical for relationships to other Christians and to the church as a whole. Thankfulness for people and prayerfulness for people and being more affected by the evidence of God's grace in people than you are by their deficiencies is the grounds for helping and restoring one another that we do.

And this thankfulness and warmness isn't dependent on anything in them changing at all.

Because if we can't be thankful for and praying for and close to deficient people and a messed up church, we will never be close to anyone, and we will miss the grace that is in it for us when we draw near to people unlike us.

This is supposed to be a room full of people that are very different. That may never see eye to eye on many issues, but all are in the same boat when we say we're wrecks in need of Jesus, that He is ours for free, that we're called to help each other obey and follow him.

But if we're more affected by their deficiencies and our pet issues and our preferences, we will separate from them and miss the grace that comes from people very unlike us.

I've found in talking to lots of people over the years from lots of churches that it doesn't take Christians long to complain about their church. Because church people are frustrating, the institution is frustrating. It's supposed to be, because those sharp edges are the iron that sharpens iron.

But if we're dominated by the deficiencies, we will miss the ways our deficiencies get exposed. We'll miss the grace.

Every group of people, every church has major problems. And to maximize the grace we receive, everybody needs to find a church where they will be thankful for, and love and serve the people even if nothing changes.

Because we can become so obsessed with the deficiencies that we miss the grace.

Believing the Gospel creates thankfulness and prayerfulness, but also a desire for togetherness:

C. To Create Togetherness

10 always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you. 11 For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you--

Paul is writing this letter, which is good - and no letter has ever imparted more to anyone than the book of Romans. But he also wanted to be with them.

When we are redeemed by Christ, we are made part of a new family of redeemed people. We are connected. And we have a bond with people that are otherwise very different than us that can make them feel like family because of common love for Christ.

We're drawn to other Christians.

This is why we provide grace groups, because the gospel received creates a new people, not just a new person, and it draws us toward people to share it with. Again, movement toward Christ creates a closeness with others that are moving toward Christ.

And - when we find that we just always want to get away from Christians, we have to ask if there's something wrong in our faith. Are we trying to avoid correction, avoid giving ourselves, avoid the drain. Because we worship a God that was drained for us. We reflect that and give ourselves for others.

The gospel creates thankfulness, prayerfulness, togetherness, and it also reveals our need for one another.

D. By Revealing Need

Also, because we've been humbled and recognized our deficiencies, we know we need others. Notice how Paul says he wants to impart a spiritual gift to them - he wants to bring this good news to bless them. But then quickly walks it back a little and says, "**11 For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you-- 12 that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine.**"

He knows that he has something from God that they need. And they have something he needs.

Paul wants to preach there. Preaching is standing and declaring. It's monologue, not dialogue. And it is an important part of our Christian lives - to silence ourselves and listen to what God has done for us. Preaching is

very important for us to sit under and hear so the faith can be imparted and strengthened.

But we also need context for dialogue - for give and take. To hear the word from friends, to say things that are immediately affirmed or sharpened, to see the reactions when we say something hurtful, to hear from people with different backgrounds. The whole Christian community strengthens one another in this way.

C.S. Lewis had a couple of friends that he hung out with regularly, JRR Tolkien, and a guy named Charles Williams. One day, Charles died suddenly. And Lewis wondered what that would mean for the dynamic of their get togethers that it would just be him and Tolkien. At first, he thought that would mean he would get more of Tolkien - now there were two friends. Tolkien wouldn't be divided between Lewis and Charles. But he wrote this:

"In each of my friends there is something that only some other friend can fully bring out. By myself I am not large enough to call the whole man into activity; I want other lights than my own to show all his facets. Now that Charles is dead, I shall never again see [Tolkien's] reaction to a specifically Charles joke. Far from having more of Ronald, having him "to myself" now that Charles is away, I have less of [Tolkien]."

And when we are with God's people, discussing His word, for example, we need to hear the angle someone very unlike us might have, we need to see the reactions when we say something that we didn't know was offensive but now we know. We need to learn from one another, strengthen one another, be annoyed by one another so we can grow. Paul knows his need for the "reciprocal blessings of Christian fellowship" (Stott 57). We always give and receive when we serve others in ministry.

Especially people unlike me. If everybody I hang out with is a middle-class, white, suburbanite in their thirties with a masters degree and a family, I will miss some of what Christ is for me, a grace that he gives through his body.

And they will miss something we've been given. He has uniquely shaped us to contribute to others. So fellowship with others and speaking into their lives isn't an option. Paul calls it a debt:

Romans 1:13-14 I do not want you to be unaware, brothers,3 that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some harvest among you as

well as among the rest of the Gentiles. 14 I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians,⁴ both to the wise and to the foolish.

Paul calls it an obligation, in verse 14. God has given him something, he must share it. And in this whole passage he is trying to travel great distances and leave what he was doing to do that. He reorganizes his life around the people of God.

The gospel creates that in us.

And, lest we be motivated by guilt to do these things, we have to remember that the one who did all of these things perfectly on our behalf was Christ. He came near to us, perfectly taking on flesh to live among us. He prays for us continually. He shares all of his blessings with us.

We aren't motivated toward others because we feel guilty about our failures, because in every way that we fail to go near others, Christ has succeeded for us, and God is *thankful* for us, will commend us for what He is doing in us, smiling on us.

But, mesmerized by a God who would draw so near to sinners like us, we draw near to Him and draw near to one another in love.

Bulletin Notes:

Romans 1:8-15

The Gospel for All of Life

- I. Christians Need the Gospel (Romans 1:15)
- II. The Church Needs the Gospel (Romans 1:8-14)

Small Group/Discussion Questions:

1. Why do Christians need the gospel preached to them if they have already received it?

2. How does Paul feel about the Roman readers of his letter? How does belief in Christ create those feelings?
3. How does prayer for others fit into the regular rhythms of your life?
4. How does belief in the Gospel increasingly make us a thankful people?
5. How do we rearrange our priorities around the Christian community?