

Romans 1:1-15

“Always Ready”

There's something about the book of Romans. God has used it (down through the ages) to spark revival in hearts & homes & churches & I for one am anxious to see how He wants to use it in *our* hearts, in *our* homes & in *our* church! I don't want to spend too much time talking *about* it, I want to just get *into* it! ... But I will say that the book of Romans is a little bit different than the standard run of N.T. letters because Paul didn't write it address any issue or fix any problem.

When you read the letters to the Corinthians, you quickly come to realize there were *problems* in that church & Paul was putting out some fires. Setting things that were *out of order* back into their proper place, their proper perspective & context. There were things he had to address in the church of Thessalonica & Galatia... The book of Hebrews brings about corrections to misinformation & wrong application... Romans isn't that way.

When Paul wrote this letter, he'd never been to Rome. He didn't *plant* the church in Rome. In fact, we have no idea who *did* plant the church in Rome. My guess is that it was something that God brought about after Pentecost through believers who were converted upon hearing Peter share the message of the death & resurrection of J.C. & they carried Christianity w/them back to their home city (Acts 2 tells there were people in the crowd from Rome) & they began to meet w/others who'd come to know Christ in the same way.

Now, we know from Ch 16 of Romans that Paul *knew* some of the believers in the church. Perhaps he'd come to know them in Jerusalem at one of the feasts they mutually attended or he met them here & there throughout his missionary journeys, but he'd never been to Rome personally. So, I get the feeling (though I could be wrong) that Romans is a “summary” kind of letter that touches on many of the things that Paul would teach when he came to town, planted a church & sought to establish the believers there.

To me, that's incredibly exciting! Because there are several incredible themes threaded throughout this letter & I'm convinced that if you'll stick w/us throughout the teaching of this book (if you miss a week, download & listen to it later) God will change your life! You'll come into a deeper understanding of who He is, His love *for* you, His grace *toward* you & it's my prayer that you'll be more in love *with* God, more on fire *for* God than you've ever been before! Because though we'll work our way through themes of righteousness, & grace, faith & works, justification, the sin dilemma & God's plan to deal w/it that He might reconcile man to Himself... More than anything the book of Romans is all about *God*. The word “God” is mentioned 153 times throughout this book (more than any other book in the N.T. an average of once every 46 words).

As much as any other book in the N.T. may be about God, Romans is *more so*. There's tremendous concentration on God in what Paul writes here & that's why I'm convinced that you'll know more *about* Him & be more in love w/Him when we finish this book, than when we began it. Speaking of beginning it...

Vs 1-4

I suppose the 1st thing we should point out is the fact that in ancient world, they'd write letters a little different than we do today. Today, we state who the letter is *to*, write the letter, & then sign off at the end so that they know who it's *from*. In the ancient world, they didn't do that. The 1st thing they did was state who the letter was *from*, then who it was *to*. (Which to me, makes more sense).

But we love the way that Paul introduces & identifies himself to the Romans. He says, "A bondservant (or bondslave) of J.C." "First & foremost (Paul says) that's *who* I am". Next he'll identify *what* he is, but 1st of all *who* he is... Now, by the time Paul wrote this letter he'd been a preacher & a church planter for no less that 20 yrs. Think of all the things that God had accomplished through his life up to this point. He & Barnabas had established the church in Antioch, they'd planted churches in Galatia, Iconium, Lystra & Derbe. **He'd planted churches in Troas, Phillip, Thessalonica, Berea & Corinth. He'd had a powerful time of spiritual awakening in the city of Ephesus for some 3 yrs whereby God was using him so powerfully that people were taking his sweat rags & being healed by them. So many people were turning to Christ out of the occult that they had a book burning party & the occultic books that were burned were valued at 50,000 pieces of silver! God's word was on the go & on the grow through this man's life!**

If I were the one penning this letter as he dictated, I might've been more like, "It might have a bit more pizzazz if you say, 'Paul, the incredibly awesome, radically powerful, authoritative, miracle working, church planting machine & apostle of J.C.!' " ☺ To which he would've responded, "Hand the pen to someone else... ☺" But here's the thing, for all that God did through him, he could never get beyond who he was, the chief of sinners, the bondslave of J.C. He was just a servant of the Lord.

*** When you study the gospels, you find that the disciples were always clamoring for greatness. Arguing over who would be the greatest in the kingdom of God. & Check this out, Jesus never redirected their *desire*, instead He corrected their understanding on how to *achieve* it. He drew their attention to the scribes & the Pharisees. He said, "Look at these guys, they love to be seen by men, to have the best seats in the synagogues & to be called 'Rabbi!'"**

He said, "That's not the way it is for you." The idea was that the one who is great in this world is the one who is *being* served. The way to achieve greatness in the kingdom of God is to be the one who *serves*. He said, "But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."¹ & Again in speaking to His disciples He said, "If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all."² If you want to be great in the kingdom of God, learn to serve, show humility. It's not about how much we're *served*, it's about how much we *serve*... Write it down & read it later (you'll be glad you did), Jn 13:1-17. *

Now the idea behind the "bondslave" comes out of Exodus 21. A man could only serve as a slave in Israel for 6 yrs. The 7th yr he was to be set free. But if his master had treated him so well that he didn't want to go, (he loved the life he had). They could go to the elders of the city, he would declare his desire to stay (of his own freewill) & his love for his master, they would place his ear against a door & drive an awl through it. What that signified is that now he's a slave to his master (of his own volition) for life, no going back.

Paul says, "This is who I am, Christ's slave. Of my own freewill, I've chosen to enslave myself to Jesus for life. He's so good *to* me, has been so gracious *toward* me, I never want to leave, I'm His forever." & Ladies & gentlemen, that's the way it is w/Jesus. He will never *force* you to serve Him. **You've got to come to Him of your own volition, your own decision & enslave yourself. But I share w/you a mystery 😊. To enslave yourself to Christ is to gain true freedom. To be tightfisted concerning *your own way, your rights, what you want to do* is to enslave yourself to sin...** Jesus said that like this, "For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?"³

So... a bondservant. That's *who* Paul is. An *apostle*, that's *what* Paul is. That's what Jesus *called* him to be, an ambassador commissioned by J.C. to speak *in* His authority *on* His behalf. Btw, there are plenty of men in the ministry today whom God has not *called* to be there, it may be their *career*, it's not their *calling*. God *called* Paul as an apostle... Read Acts Ch 9. Paul didn't enlist, he was drafted! 😊

"Separated to the gospel of God..." This speaks to the plan, the purpose that God had for his life. He was headed one direction, God rerouted him. Before, he killed Christians. He was a Pharisee, set apart to the law of Moses & Jewish tradition. Now, in Christ, He's set apart to the gospel (the good news) of God.

¹ The New King James Version (Mt 23:11-12), (1982). Thomas Nelson.

² The New King James Version (Mk 9:35) (1982). Thomas Nelson.

³ The New King James Version (Mt 16:25-26), (1982). Thomas Nelson.

& What is the good news? Is it that if you work really hard, jump through all the right hoops, dot every “I” & cross every “t”, do more good than bad & help a lot of people out then maybe you can save yourself? That’s not good news! That’s *terrible* news! **The good news is the message that Christ died for our sins, was buried & rose again 3 days later from the dead. He paid the penalty of death that sin demands & now He is able to save to the uttermost all who come to Him, all who believe on Him! & Notice, it’s God’s gospel. It’s not the clever invention of man, it wasn’t something drummed up in a secret room of Jesus’ followers after He was crucified. This is God’s message, it originates w/Him!**

& Before I get too far along, let me say this, *you’ve* been separated to the gospel as well! * When we’re called out *from* the world, we’re separated *to* the gospel. It’s common for believers to live lives that seem separate *from* (they don’t do this, don’t do that) & that’s all fine & well. The confusion comes in trying to see what they’re separated *unto*! Ladies & gentlemen, you’re not only separated *from* the world, you’re separated *unto* the gospel! God wants to use your life! Sow the seeds, share the message, broadcast the good news! *

Vs 2

You see, the gospel isn’t something drummed up by man a couple thousand years ago. It’s the good news of the Savior who came, God having promised it by the mouths of His prophets beforehand. & Time would fail us to exhaust every passage that points to J.C. and purpose of His coming throughout your O.T. It begins clear back in Genesis Ch 3. As soon as man sinned, God promised a Savior. We see it pictured in Abraham’s willingness to lay down the life of his only Isaac (God never acknowledged the son of his flesh, Ishmael, only the son of promise, Isaac). Of course, coming out of Isaiah we see it plainly in Isa 53. Ps 22 touching on the elements of the cross & the things surrounding it. – The gospel (the good news of God sending a Savior to lay down His life for the sins of the world that we might be saved) was promised by God before through the prophets.

Vs 3, “Concerning His Son (J.C. our Lord)”. That word “concerning” means “that which encircles”, which is to say, * the gospel centers on J.C. It all revolves around, points to & centers *in* Him. There’s no good news regarding our sin apart from Him. At the heart of Christianity you won’t find a teaching, a moral system, a list of do’s & don’ts, a philosophy or a principle, you’ll find a *Person* & that Person is J.C. *

“Who was born the seed of David (according to the flesh)” this is His Humanity. Jesus was as human as you are & I am. God promised David that He would place one of his descendants upon the throne & that Descendant would rule forever... Jesus fulfills that promise.

Yet, simultaneously we see the Deity of Christ in the next phrase, “Declared to be the Son of God w/power (according to the Spirit of holiness [or Holy Spirit]) by the resurrection from the dead.” How can we know that Jesus is fully human? He has a lineage leading back from Mary (& Joseph legally) all the way to king David (just as God promised). How can we know He’s fully God? What is it that ratifies & verifies His status to the world as sinless & Divine, qualified to be our Savior? His resurrection from the dead.

Vs 5-6

The grace of God comes to you through J.C., (through *Him* we have received grace) & the calling that God has on your life comes through J.C. – (You are the “called of J.C.”) Now, what are you called to? What’s the net effect of His grace, His calling in our lives? Underline it, “Obedience to the faith.” Let me put it this way, *the gospel message appropriately received will change your life... Biblical faith isn’t a cordial assent to a collection of moral ethics, it’s an active, intentional commitment of your life. – It goes back to the “bondslave”. You love your Master (J.C.) so much you commit your entire live to serving Him! Your affection will lead your direction. Jesus said that like this, “*If you love Me, keep My commandments.*”⁴ He’s saying, “Your love *for* Me is demonstrated in your obedience *to* Me.” & Again, “*He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me.*”⁵ Your affection will lead your direction. Someone said, “Faith & obedience go inextricably together. Only in obedience is there faith, for faith is not emotional feeling or intellectual acceptance but active response to a person.” Genuine faith doesn’t exist outside of a changed life... If it doesn’t change your life, it hasn’t saved your soul. *

Vs 7

Straight out of the gate Paul wants these believers to know 2 things & they’re things that you need to know as well. #1 In Christ you are beloved of God. You are His child & He loves you dearly. – It’s pretty easy to convince people that they’re sinners. We can strip the veneer back pretty easy & show how sinful our heart really is. *But man, it can be difficult to convince people that God truly loves them. It’s not a spiritual sounding platitude that preachers just throw out there, it’s really true. God loves you dearly, truly & deeply. & He demonstrated that love in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. In other words, He didn’t just say He loves us, He showed His love for us... Behold what manner of love the Father has given unto us, that we should be called the children of God!*

⁴ *The New King James Version* (Jn 14:15). (1982). Thomas Nelson.

⁵ *The New King James Version* (Jn 14:21). (1982). Thomas Nelson.

The 2nd thing Paul wants you to know... In Christ, your sins are *forgiven*, that makes you a saint. The words “to be” aren’t in the original manuscript. That’s why they’re italicized in your Bible. It just reads, “Called saints”. – The Catholic church has done a bang up job confusing people on this issue. Making people think that you have to be a really special kind of Christian to achieve sainthood (even answering people’s prayers after you die)! The Bible knows nothing of that nonsense. If you’re in Christ, you’re a saint! You’re either a saint or you ain’t & there’s no 2 ways about it!

“Grace to you & peace from God our Father & the Lord J.C.” Btw, in saying that, He puts the Lord J.C. on par w/God the Father. It’s not one under the other, it’s one beside the other. These are gifts, given to you from God, from the Lord J.C. It’s not just a kind expression like someone might say, “Have a nice day”. They’re gifts given to you by God! Grace & peace. & Of course they’re always in that order because we can’t know the peace of God until we’ve 1st experienced the grace of God.

Vs 8-15

A number of things in here we could talk about, we’ll limit ourselves to highlighting just a few... Paul was grateful for a thriving church in Rome (& understandably so). It’s location made it a prime place for the gospel to go out from into all the known world. You’ve heard the phrase, “All roads lead to Rome”. It’s because the roads were built going *out from* Rome. So there was a lot of visibility & a lot of opportunity to send the gospel throughout the Empire from Rome.

& We note that Paul was praying regularly, consistently for that church specifically! He wasn’t going to be one of those, “I’ll pray for ya” kind of people that really didn’t pray for you at all (out of sight out of mind). He says, “God is my witness, I pray for you all the time!” They were prospering & Paul was praying... do you think there was any connection to the 2?

I’m going to say something here (& I don’t mean any disrespect though I do mean to stir some thought). I wonder if CCJ would prosper more if *you* would pray for us more? If you would make it a regular habit to mention us in your prayers? That God might bless, provide, pour out His Spirit upon me, upon the leadership, upon those who serve & consider this church their home. **That we might have the wisdom to serve Him well, that as a body we reflect Him accurately in the community, serve Him passionately & know Him intimately that He might be glorified powerfully in this place that He has called us to shine as a light in the darkness...**

What would God do in this place if we each took personal responsibility to bear the necessity of praying for it, making mention of it before Him? Not just once or twice because we feel kind of bad after being exhorted by the preacher 😊. But consistently, regularly as a habitual part of our prayer lives, it's just what we do...

Paul says, "I want to come to you & I want to do so in the will of God, so I'm praying." & Family this is always our desire. To do what we do, in the *will of God*. Make your requests be known, but nevertheless, not my will, *Thy will be done*.

He was hoping for a prosperous journey, what he would get would be a *perilous* journey. It was certainly God's will for Paul to go to Rome. Jesus would tell him as much. After Paul was arrested in Jerusalem, the Lord stood by him & told him, "*Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome.*"⁶

*But I've discovered (generally speaking) that there are times God will tell you *what* He wants to do. But He doesn't commonly tell us *when* He wants to do it or the *way* He'll bring it to pass. Paul was always a *preacher*, but he'd arrive in Rome as a *prisoner*, after 2-3 yrs in prison, an appeal to Caesar & a shipwreck at sea! – Somewhere in my mind that wasn't the way Paul envisioned coming to Rome after hearing from the Lord that it was His will to get him there 😊. (That should also tell us that being in God's will isn't always determined by smooth sailing). *

But Paul was looking forward to some mutual ministering one to another. He said, "I can't wait to be a blessing *to* you, but I'm also looking forward to being blessed *by* you." & Family, I think that should be true of any healthy body of believer. *Each part does it's share causing the edification of the whole. It's not just about coming and being ministered to by the preacher. Yes, we're to equip the saint for the work of the ministry. But embedded in the statement is an expectation. Saints are supposed to be doing the work of ministry! Serving, sharing, blessing & building up one another!* – & I'm just going to say it, if you come only to receive & not to give, you've erred. We're not here to consume, but to contribute! There should be spiritual cross-pollination that takes place every time we gather. We should be encouraged together by our mutual faith. (Write it down, read it later; Eph 4:11-16).

& Paul realized that the world was dying of the disease of sin (just like he had been) & he had the cure, therefore he owed it to them to get it to them by any means possible.

Vs 15 Close

I love this about Paul the apostle... He was always ready. Always ready. Ready to preach the gospel. In Acts 21 he said that he was ready to suffer & die for the name of the Lord Jesus. In 2nd Corinthians 10 he was ready to punish all disobedience. At the end of his life he was ready (2nd Timothy 4) to see the Lord & receive his reward.

How about you? Are you ready for whatever the Lord may have *for* you, may desire *of* you or to share the hope that lies *w/in* you? Are you ready to see the Lord having turned from your sin, believing on the Lord J.C. If not, don't delay, do it today...

Prayer Points:

God we thank You for Your word. For Your grace given to us through J.C. Your Son. Father, change our lives, strengthen us to walk in obedience *to* You out of love *for* You. We look forward to all that You have for us in this letter.

Listen, if you've not surrendered your life to J.C. you should know that God commands all men everywhere to repent. Turn from your sin, trust in J.C. who has loved you & given Himself for you & new life, everlasting life, will be yours.