

## Rom. 1\_1 Pt. 1.mp3.mp3

[00:00:05] Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus. Called to be an apostle, set apart from the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning His Son, who is descended from David according to the flesh, and was declared to be the son of God in power according to the spirit of holiness, by his resurrection from the dead Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of the faith for the sake of His name among all the nations, including you, who are called to belong to Jesus Christ, to all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus reads the words of the Lord you may be seated.

[00:00:56] So as we approach Romans, we see these first seven verses are what we call introductory. Remember, this is a letter written to a people. It's historical, it has a real author and it has a real audience. Paul is writing to a church he's never, ever met. Paul has not been to Rome at this point. Paul longs to be with these Christians and there are some important questions that we need to ask, is why? Why does Paul care so much about a church he's never been to, in a city that has never seen? A people that he didn't plant. Why? There's a lot of questions about Paul that we have to ask why to. But what we're going to do is we're going to situate ourselves in the Book of Romans, we're going to start slow in the book of Romans, and then we're going to pick up speed as we go, but we're going to take four sermon's to look at these first seven verses. And the reason why is because when you grasp the situation and you grasp Paul and what he's trying to accomplish, this book takes on new life, you'll start to see it in it's historical context. So often we read the Bible as though it was written directly to us, but the fact is, it is written to a people two thousand plus years ago. It has implications for us today and applications for sure. But it was written to a people that desperately needed this book.

[00:02:33] Before we move on, though, I want to look at the impact that this book has had on history. I'm going to read a story to you by a man named Augustine. Augustine in 386 A.D. ran into the book of Romans and was changed forever more. Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin. John Bunyan, all these men and women that approached the book of Romans were changed by it dramatically. And my prayer for this church is that we do not leave this series unchanged. We desperately need this book. But listen to this story of Augustina, maybe some of us in here, actually can relate to Augustine. Some say Augustine, Augustine, if you're like, who's Augustine, Augustine that's what he means I never know what to say when it comes to Augustine. I just call him Augustine and stick with it because I think it sounds fancier than Augustine. But listen to the story in September 386, a native of North Africa who had been a professor for several years in Milan Italy sat weeping in the garden of his friend Alypius contemplating the wickedness of his life. While sitting there, he heard a child singing tolle lege, tolle lege, which in Latin means "take up and read." So you have to picture this, Augustine is sitting there contemplating his own wickedness, sick of his sin, he was a womanizer, a partier, he loved his sin and he was sick of it. And he sat in his friend's garden weeping, praying to the Lord, probably just saying, "God, give me something" and he hears a child saying tolle lege, tolle lege, what does that mean? Take up and read. And an open a scroll of the book of Romans laid beside him and he picked it up the first passage that caught his eye, listen to this, "not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy, but put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts" Romans 13:13-14. Take up and read, take up and read Augustine and there is a scroll of Romans sitting beside and he takes it up, he turns to Romans 13 versus

13 through 14, and God puts his finger on the pulse of Augustine's life. And the command put on the Lord Jesus Christ.

[00:05:26] The man later wrote on that occasion, no further what I read, nor did I need for instantly as the sentence ended by a light, as it were, or security infused into my heart, all the gloom of doubt vanished away. The gospel penetrated Augustine's heart. You might say, while this sounds miraculous and the answer is it is, salvation is miraculous. How can a man be reborn, nicodemus asked Jesus? He must be born from above, that's miraculous, you can't will your own salvation. Because as Augustine would later write, we are totally depraved, there must be a work outside of us that changes our hearts. Takes a cold stone dead heart, cuts it out, puts in a heart of flesh that then is able to respond to the gospel of Jesus Christ. You might be saying this sounds... I've not heard this before. Well, it's all through your Bible. Jesus says you must be born again from above, and then you can see the kingdom of heaven. There must be a work from inside that God wroughts in human hearts and all of a sudden in this moment, Augustine is regenerated by God's power, he hears the gospel, and it saved. We're going to see when we look at the life of Paul today that it was something exactly similar to that, wasn't it? A man who was breathing threats and murder against the church and in a moment he was saved. Not by his own power, not even by his own will. Now, his will gets in line, we'll talk about that specifically, but when God acts, it's instantaneous. It's the power of God in salvation, it's a miracle. And then it goes on to say this, the man was Arelius Augustine who, upon reading that short passage from Romans, received Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and went on to become one of the church's outstanding theologians and leaders. That's just one story.

[00:07:34] I could read to you about Martin Luther, who hated the righteousness of God. Can you imagine? He hated God's righteousness. That's what he says, why? Because it offended him. Every time he looked at God, he saw a God that was holy and righteous and set apart and Martin Luther only recognized his own sin and he hated that God. Until he read Romans, and then he realized that Romans has the gospel, and that the gospel is not about our good works, it's about Jesus's good work that He accomplished on the cross. I could read you about John Wesley, who was saved upon hearing the book of Romans proclaimed and then went on to be an amazing evangelist, but before that time, he was a minister, an unsaved minister. Can you believe that? There are a lot of unsaved ministers in this world, just so you know. If God has not done the work in our hearts, if He has not brought the gospel into our lives, that we have not bowed the knee to King Jesus then we have not been saved. John Calvin, William Tyndale, John Bunyan, others, when they approach this book were changed dramatically. And the reason I go through that is because what I want you to recognize is that when you approach Romans, you have an opportunity before you that could change your life from this point on, forever. Don't waste the study, join with me in studying Romans, read it every day, pray over it, wrestle with it, chew it, digest it, let God work it out. Starts in your mind, goes to your heart, works its way out into your hands. That's what Romans should do to this church. As we leave the book of Romans in 2035, just kidding. As we leave the book of Romans, my prayer is none of us are the same, that all of us have grown more to love Jesus Christ, that we all look a lot more like Jesus Christ. And as the world gets darker, which it will, until his return, that we look to Jesus Christ and we represent him to a lost and dying people.

[00:09:58] So now we look at Romans chapter one, verse one. If you look down in your text, look at the first word, Paul. That's as far as we're going to get today. Paul, who is this man? Paul. I've titled this sermon, the most unlikely convert, says conve. Clearly cut off the word when it went from my computer to the computer in the back, the most unlikely conve.

**Unidentified** [00:10:39] Think about it, isn't Paul the most unlikely convert? I think so. We're going to get into that, but in the section, what we're going to do today is we're going to introduce Romans whenever you come to a new book, we were talking about this downstairs, read the notes, if you have a study Bible. Read the notes before the book begins and situate yourself in the book. Recognize the historical background. Who is the author? When was it written? What was the circumstance? And what we see when we go to Romans is you need to understand the circumstance before you can understand the book fully. Of course you can understand the book without the introduction, but an introduction helps. But once we do that, we're going to look at Paul, Paul before conversion and Paul at conversion. And then next week we're going to look at Paul after conversion. What we see is a man who is most unlikely to write this book. Perhaps there's no other person in human history that would be as unlikely to write the book of Romans as Paul was. Why? Because God wanted to show his glory through Paul. A man that was the early church's chief opponent. And then he saved Paul and Paul became it's chief proponent. It's magnificent.

[00:11:56] So now let's look at this introduction. So look at your text again and look at the title, Romans, Romans, what can be learned from this title? It was written to the Romans. People, a historical people, that desperately needed this letter. How do we know that they needed this letter? Because God ordained it. God put it on Paul's heart to write a letter to a church he had never known, a church he had never seen because this church desperately needed truth. Why? Well, it's likely that Paul wrote this letter at the end of his third missionary journey, and that he wrote this letter around 56 to 59, A.D. why is that significant? Has anyone ever heard of Nero, Emperor Nero? Emperor Nero would begin a holocaust against Christians in 64 A.D., so just five, six years before the Roman Church received this letter and you can imagine it took some years for this letter to circulate, to be copied down and passed from church to church member, house churches, small churches. So probably by the time that this letter was in the hands of the majority of the Christians in Rome, Nero begins his persecution against the Christians. That's significant because when you see this persecution come, we know the great fire turned Rome's anger and ire against this brand new group called the Christians. Let me read to you Tacitus and his history, he writes this, stick with me, this is so important for Romans. He's writing in about Nero and the Great Fire, he says, therefore, to stop the rumor that he had set Rome on fire, he the Emperor Nero, falsely charged with guilt and punished with the most fearful tortures the persons commonly called Christians. So there was a great fire in Rome. Three fourths of Rome was burnt. Many believe that actually Nero himself in his madness started the fire. There was a rumor spreading around Rome that Nero had lost his mind because, in fact, he was a crazy person. So Nero, like any good politician, blamed someone else. He blames the Christians for lighting the fire, Christians who are generally hated for their enormities. Christus, the founder of that name, was put to death as a criminal by Pontius Pilot. Remember, this is a secular historian writing this. Procurator of Judea in the reign of Tiberius, but the pernicious superstition repressed for a time broke out yet again not only through Judea where this mischief originated, but through the city of Rome. Also, whether all things horrible or disgraceful flow from all quarters as to a common receptacle and where they are encouraged accordingly, first those who were arrested and confessed they were Christians. Next on their information, a vast multitude were convicted. Not so much on the charge of burning the city that as of hating the human race.

[00:15:22] Doesn't that sound like today? I have heard so many people say Christians just hate people. That so many of the world's problems today, people are still pointing at Christians, saying it's because they hate humanity. That's actually terrifying because I haven't noticed that until just now as I was preaching it, that that sounds exactly what I just

read yesterday in the news about Christians. That if we could just get rid of the Christians, then wouldn't we have a better world, a better society, if you think that we are far removed from Rome? We're not. And let me ask you what country today looks the most like Rome? America. There's a battle going on in our country, and I guarantee you, Satan always loves to point the finger at Christians. Tacitus goes on to write and they're very deaths, they were made the subjects of the sport, for they were covered with hides of wild beasts and were put to death by dogs or nailed to crosses or set on fire, too, and when the day waned, burned to serve for evening lights. Do you catch that? Christians were covered in animal skins, they were thrown to dogs in the Coliseum, they were killed for sport, covered in blood, thrown in front of lions, and Nero would hang impaled Christians upon poles, cover them and to light them on fire, it says, to light his own garden. They were spectacles exhibited and sensory and games indiscriminately mingled with common people dressed for charioteers while standing in the chariots for this cause, a feeling of compassion arose towards sufferers, though guilty and deserving exemplary capital punishment because they seem not to be cut off for the public good, but were victims of ferocity of the one man. These Christians that Paul is writing to just five years later would become sport for Nero. Don't we have it so good in America? That we can gather like this and worship our God without threat of a president coming in. And putting us on poles and lighting us on fire to light his garden. But that's who the audiences of Romans.

[00:17:55] And Paul is writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, because God knew that Rome needed the best book ever penned. If you go through church history and if you go through history in general, many have said that Romans is perhaps the best piece of literature ever penned by a human. Out of every piece of literature that we have, it's had more impact on Western civilization than perhaps any other book. It's impacted men and women who have made huge decisions that have directed the course of history, like I mentioned, Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, many others. Romans has dramatic impact upon people when they read it. But let's look at Saul now, Paul, verse one, a servant of Christ Jesus called to be an apostle, set aside for the gospel. Who is Paul, Paul is of the Tribe of Benjamin, he is a Jew, he is a Roman citizen. We know that that comes into play later in his life. It was born in Tarsus, amazingly important city in the Roman Empire in modern day Turkey. He's a Jew, he's a Roman citizen, he's born into an incredibly important city and he's a student of Gamaliel. Who's Gamaliel, the grandson of Hillel, one of the most famous rabbis of all time, Gamaliel, himself a very famous rabbi. So Paul is uniquely qualified and we're going to see this, this is what's so important about Paul. Is he is a Roman citizen, he is trained in Tarsus with probably some of the best Greek philosophers that Rome had to offer. He's also a student of Gamaliel, one of the best rabbis that the Jews had to offer, and he's the son of a Pharisee, he himself becomes a Pharisee.

[00:19:58] So you have a man that is steeped in both Greek and Jewish culture, that's trained by the best that that Rome has to offer and the best that Palestine Judea has to offer. He is steeped in the Old Testament, steeped in the scholars, Plato, Aristotle. He is the man to bridge the gap between Jews and Gentiles. We also see the date here, he's writing from Corinth. Turn if you will to Romans 16. In Romans 16 we see some important notes that are made. He's writing from Corinth, which is that means he's on his missionary journey, he's near the end of his missionary journey. And Rome just won't leave his mind. And so he he writes this entire book or this entire letter to the Romans, and he sends his sister, Phoebe, a servant, to deliver this book to Rome, you'll see that in chapter 16, verse one.

[00:21:00] So he's he's sending one of his important friends, Phoebe, she takes this letter to Rome. Likely it takes a year or two for the letter, like I said, to disperse around. And we see this is just years before Nero's persecution begins. And at the time, Rome has a million people and most of them are slaves. You have many of the games going on, you have the Coliseum, you have all of this going on, and as I quoted, you have their probably their most crazy emperor in all of Roman history, Nero. And so Paul writes this letter to them, and now we have the setting. Who is Paul? Now, turn if you will to Acts 7. This is where we're going to spend the rest of our time this morning. Is an Acts 7, eight and nine. If you turn to Acts, we need to remember something about the book of Acts. Acts was written by Luke and Luke was Paul's physician. Luke is an incredibly intelligent man. We know that just from his Greek, if you read his Greek, it's pristine. Only the people with the highest educations wrote at the level of Greek that Luke writes in the book of Luke in the book of Acts, which is considered to be one book that was split. And what we have in Acts chapter 7, look down if you will, to verse 54. And this is our first mention of Paul, what we see here is Saul, but it comes in the context of Steven's speech. What we see here is that when we are introduced to Saul were introduced into a story of martyrdom. It's not Paul who's the one that's being martyred. Paul, Saul of Tarsus, who is the one doing the martyring. Let's read this and then let's just briefly overview, Stephen Sermon's verse 54, "now when they had heard these things," this is Stephen's sermon, they were enraged and they ground their teeth at him, but he," Stephen, "full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. And he said, behold" this is Stephen,"I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God, but they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears." They plug their ears so they can't hear what Stephen's saying, "and rush together at Stephen at him. Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. And as they were stoning Steven," killing Steven, he called out this is Stephen, "Lord Jesus receive my spirit. And falling to his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, Lord, do not hold this sin against them. And when he had said this, he fell asleep." He died.

[00:24:09] Well, what was it that angered these people to the point that they would stone Steven to death? If you read through Acts 7 it's perhaps one of the best sermons ever penned when it comes to looking at the Old Testament. He goes through the entire Old Testament showing a detailed defense of Christianity, why it is that Jesus is the Christ the Messiah, and how the Jews always reject God's prophets by killing them. And so Stephen goes through the Old Testament showing how all these prophecies are pointing to the coming of Jesus Christ the Messiah, and how the Jews in their obstinance reject Him and kill their Messiah. And as he himself is being stoned, notice he is full of the Holy Spirit, he's preaching with unction, this is a barn burning sermon. The Spirit is preaching so loudly that people are grinding their teeth because of how much they hate the preacher. Some of you might be grinding your teeth at me right now. They hate what Stephen is saying. So much so that they want to kill him. Do you know, they treated Jesus this way? I love the passage where the disciples go up to Jesus and they said, did you realize you offended them? And Jesus was like, yeah of course, I offended them that was my intent. Every good sermon should offend you, just to be honest, our flesh should be offended, someone asked, and not meaning to quote John MacArthur so much today, but I was talking to I had a class with him and someone asked him, do you ever get afraid of offending people? And John said, I live to offend people. And we asked why and he said, because our flesh needs offended. If you're comfortable under the preaching of God's word, then you're not hearing God's word. Our flesh needs to be absolutely offended so that it's killed and changed. Steven's preaching an amazing sermon by the unction by the power of the Holy Spirit. People are furious at what they're hearing. He's preaching the best gospel sermon that

anyone has preached in history up to this point. He's drug outside the city, he's stoned to death, and as people are going to stone Stephen they're taking off their garments, they're taking off their outerwear. And they're laying them at the feet of a young man named Saul of Tarsus. What's Saul's role in all of this? Is he passive? Is he standing there in abject horror? How could they kill such a man? No. In fact, the very stance, the fact that he's standing there and people are laying their clothes at his feet might suggest that he is a leader in this. That he's overseeing the execution of Stephen. We also don't have to guess because it says this, Acts 8:1, "And Saul approved of his execution." So, Saul, we know as Paul, approved of Stephen's execution. In fact, he probably smiled at it. Why? Because Saul was a zealous Jew. Trained under Gamaliel of the Tribe of Benjamin. Likely a member of the Sanhedrin will see this in his life because he votes against the Christians. Or he's just a judge. But he's a very young leader, meaning that he's beyond his years incredibly intelligent, incredibly zealous, going from city to city, seeking whom he may devour. Thinking that him murdering Christians, imprisoning them, separating parents from children, dragging babies out into the street, dragging children into the street, you have to realize how ruthless, how bloodthirsty Paul was when it came to Christians. Why, Paul, Saul? Because he was zealous for God, he wanted to stamp out this Christian heresy. He didn't buy it. He was likely in Tarsus during Jesus's ministry. And while he was over there, he probably heard story after story of this false Messiah. And so finally, he's heard enough and he starts to slay, kill, murder Christians, Stephen being one of them. But notice Stephen's prayer. Look back, if you will at verse 60, "falling to his knees, he cries out with a loud voice," this would be his last words., "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." Who is he praying for? Saul, and the others. Stephen's final breath is a prayer for Saul and his salvation. Now, how did Saul respond? Look at verses one through three of Chapter eight. Saul approves of his execution and there arose on that day a great persecution, on that day arose a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles, devout men buried Steven and made a great lamentation over him. But listen about Saul, but Saul was ravaging the church and entering house after house he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison. Turn now to Acts Chapter 22, this is Saul giving an account of his life before Jesus, Acts chapter 22 verse four, he says this "I persecuted the way, this way to the death, binding and delivering to prison both men and women. As the high priest and the whole Council of Elders can bear me witness from them, I received letters to the brothers and I journey toward Damascus to take those also who were there and to bring them in bonds to Jerusalem to be punished." Look at verse 19 of Chapter 22 "and I said, Lord, they themselves know that one synagogue after another, I imprisoned and beat those who believed in You." Turn now to Acts 26, in Acts 26 versus 10 and 11 we read more, "and I did so in Jerusalem, I not only locked up many of the saints in prison after receiving authority from the chief priest, but when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them," that's how we know he was a leader, "and I punish them often in the synagogues. And I tried to make them blaspheme and enraging fury against them I persecuted them even to foreign cities." This is Paul. Why do I go to this depth to show you Paul's depravity? Paul's wickedness. Because Paul was not a good man, Paul, Saul of Tarsus. Saul being his Hebrew name, Paul being his Greek name. We know him as Paul because Paul was a minister to the Gentile's. So he introduces himself as Paul to Greeks because he's using his Greek name. That's why we know him as Paul, Saul is just his Hebrew name.

[00:32:22] So what we see here, that Paul was a terrible person, beyond saving, wouldn't you think? Have you ever felt that way about someone? Well, I prayed for them, but there's no way God will ever save Jim. Jim loves his... Is there a Jim in here, can you raise your hand, Jim? No I'm just kidding. I don't think there's a Jim, in here, that's why I'm using the

word Jim. Have you ever thought about maybe a parent or friend or coworker? That you just think there's no way they could ever be saved. No way. What was your first response to the gospel? Some of us may have been raised in the church and it took years for us to finally accept the gospel. Some of us may have heard the gospel and thought it was the stupidest thing we'd ever heard when we first heard it. When I do ministry at Idrahaje with high schoolers every year, what I love about it is just to see the dramatic impact that the gospel has on these people, whether or not they hate it or they love it. That's how, you know, you've preached a good gospel sermon, is if you have some people crying and saying what must I do to believe and others people saying where do you live I'm going to destroy your windows. That's a good gospel sermon because Jesus is the rock of offence. And so what we see here is that, Paul, the first time that we know of that he was exposed to the gospel, what was his response? To kill the messenger and to begin a persecution against the church. This man is beyond saving, probably, right has to be? You know the story no, Acts 9 versus one through 19, now we look at Paul's conversion, starting in verse one, he's ravaging the church still, "but Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest," he's still breathing amid the very air he breathes is blood, he hates Christians. And he goes to the high priests and "asks him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus so that if he found any belonging to the Way," let me ask you, what is the Way? John, 14:6, "I am the way, the truth and the life no one comes to the Father except through me." Jesus says the only way you can be saved is by coming to Me. I am the way, the truth and the life. And His followers were known as followers of the Way that was the very earliest phrase when referring to a Christian, you're talking about followers of the Way. We're not talking about Mandalore, for anyone who's watching the Mandalorian right now, we're talking about Christians, followers of the Way.

[00:35:33] "Now, as he went on his way, he approached Damascus and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him," he's on the way to kill Christians, to imprison them, to destroy churches. He hasn't prepared his heart for the receiving of the gospel. His heart is on fire to kill Christians. And on the way, on the way, a light appears from heaven and he gets knocked off his horse, "and falling to the ground, he hears a voice from heaven saying, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" Jesus Christ and he says, "who are you, Lord?" Confessing that this is a powerful being, "and He said, I am Jesus whom you are persecuting," whom you are persecuting, presentence. I am Jesus, the one that you are going to kill right now. Isn't Jesus already dead and resurrected in heaven? Yes, but where is His body? On earth, the body of Christ, yes, He is His resurrected body, but we are referred to, are we not, as the body of Christ? And so when people persecute the body of Christ and they murder the body of Christ, you are persecuting Jesus Himself. And He says, why are you persecuting Me? And He says this, "but rise and enter the city," Damascus "and you will be told what to do. The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice, but seeing no one." And we know from Acts from later on in Acts 22 or 26, these men didn't understand what was happening, they couldn't they couldn't make out what the voice was saying. They just heard this amazing voice from heaven. Paul falls on the ground, Saul falls on the ground, he's blinded and the men didn't know it was happening. "Saul rose from the ground," verse 8, "and although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. So they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus and for three days, he was without sight and neither ate nor drank." What do you think he was thinking about those three days he was blind? The image of Jesus that he had just seen. For three days, all he could picture was the glorious resurrected Jesus Christ, and for three days he saw nothing else. Knocked off his horse on the way to kill a church and immediately changed, Paul recounts this as his conversion. In an instant, in a moment from heaven, his heart is changed forever more, this is the gospel. God taking out a cold dead heart, regenerating it, putting the paddles on it and bringing it back to life,

resurrecting this old dead heart. And for three days all he could imagine is the glorious Jesus Christ. And then I love what happens next, we can learn a lot from Ananias here. Look at verse 10, "Now, there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias, the Lord said to him in a vision, Ananias. And he said, here I am, Lord. And the Lord said to him, rise and go to the street called Straight," I just love that I don't know why, "and at the house of Judas, look for a man of Tarsus named Saul for behold, he's praying, he has seen a vision a man named Ananias has come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight. And Ananias is saying, that's terrific! No. But Ananias answers and says, Lord I've heard a lot of things about this man, "how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem, and here he has the authority from the chief priest to bind all who call on Your name." So Ananias' objection is understandable, is it not? Saul. Yes, Saul of Tarsus. Yes, Saul of Tarsus, who has orders to kill Christians from the high priests here in Damascus. Yes, okay. Verse 15, "but the Lord says to him," Ananias, "go for he is a chosen, underline that, "instrument of Mine to carry My Name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel."

[00:40:43] God says Ananias, I chose Saul, I saved Saul, he is my chosen instrument to go to the Gentiles and to deliver the gospel of Jesus Christ. And he says this, verse 16, "for I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of My Name." Saul knows immediately, that he has been saved, set apart and marked for persecution. Saul, the chief antagonist, becomes the chief proponent of Christianity. He knows all of his friends, all of his family, everyone will turn against him, they will hate him. Nothing is worse than a traitor, right? He becomes a traitor to the Jewish people, all of his friends turn against him, and the church that he has now been saved to doesn't trust him for good reason. He's going to suffer greatly, and we know in 2 Timothy that he dies alone, everyone has abandoned them except Timothy. Paul lived a hard life for the gospel, Paul even had to stand toe to toe against Peter to fight for the gospel, we see that in Galatians. Paul was a man marked for suffering, shipwrecked, beaten, whipped nearly to death, perhaps died, was resurrected to suffer some more, we don't know, stoned. There are so many things that happened to Paul, but he knew it the second he was chosen by God, he knew that all of that was considered, all of his previous resume. Everything he accomplished beforehand was considered rubbish in comparison to the glory of Jesus Christ, he had seen God. We know he also went into the third heavens, he wasn't allowed to share on that. We know we were going to read this in just a second, well we won't have time to read it. But in Galatians one, you read the he was discipled personally by Jesus Christ in Arabia for three years. Do you know long the other Apostles had with Jesus? About three years. Paul had three years and he didn't have to share Jesus with 11 others. Paul had Jesus one on one for three years in Arabia, read this in Galatians one, the resurrected Jesus Christ. He saw Jesus resurrected on the road to Damascus, he was knocked off his horse. He was a brilliant man, trained by Gamaliel, trained in the finest schools of Greece and Rome. Set apart for the gospel of Jesus Christ. He became a follower of the Way. Let me ask you, when you're praying for people's salvation, when you're sharing the gospel with someone, how big is your God? Sinclair Ferguson once said this, "we best defend the Lord's glory by speaking first to Him about unbelieving men rather than speaking first about him to unbelieving men." When you share the gospel with someone, you need to start by praying for them, because the gospel brings miracles. It takes a work of God to save a human soul. And as Sinclair Ferguson says, before you talk about Him to the unbelieving, talk to Him about the unbelieving. Let me recall your mind back to Stephen, Stephen preached a barn burning gospel sermon that the likes of Billy Graham and Martin Lloyd Jones and others could not even imagine. Stephen preaches a barn burning sermon and look how many people lined up to receive the Lord Jesus Christ, zero. Rather, they picked up stones and they killed him. And he prays in his last breath, unknowingly maybe



for Paul Saul of Tarsus, Saul doesn't respond immediately to the gospel, in fact, he responds negatively. He begins a persecution one like Jerusalem has never seen. He kills Christian after Christian, but you know what, Steven's prayer still stands. And on the way to Damascus, he's knocked off his horse and he's saved. The reason I'm going at this depth to talk about Saul, Paul's salvation, is because this is the man who wrote Romans. One of the chief sinner's. And why that's significant is because the gospel message that you will hear in Romans is handcrafted and tailored for sinner's. You cannot earn your own salvation, no one can. It is by grace, through faith, it's not of yourselves it is a gift of God. Saul understood that better than anyone else, and he wrote a book unlike no other book. Because he understood the gospel at a level that few have ever understood. He knew he deserved hell. He probably remembered and saw the agonizing faces of husbands and wives and children being imprisoned and murdered at his own hands. But I'll never forget the face of Jesus Christ that he saw on the road to Damascus that saved him. And that's why nothing could deter him from gospel proclamation.

[00:47:02] So as we come to Roman, what I am asking is that you allow God to change your heart. Maybe you're already saved, but you need to grow in your salvation. Maybe you're not saved. I asked that you would give Romans a chance, and I pray for your soul. That God would break every hard heart in this room and that God would regenerate us and that God would sanctify us and that at the end of Romans, we looked more like Jesus, our King and our Lord. Frederic Godet said this of the book, "Romans is the Cathedral of the Christian Faith." Enjoy it, love it, chew on it, read it, memorize it, talk about it, share it. So if you're an unbeliever, there's one charge that I give to you, be converted. Accept the Lord Jesus as your Lord and Savior. And if you're a believer, continue to look to Jesus and work hard for the gospel mission, stay on mission, going to all the nations, making disciples of Jesus Christ, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Let's pray. So, Father, as we approach Romans. I pray that we would be changed, all of us, every one of us. God I pray that this 2021 would be a year that we work hard for the gospel, would be a year that Chapel in the Hills is used mightily in the Canyon and in the front range and in the world. Lord that You would draw a broken sinners to our church and that You would save them, that You would draw Christians who desperately need the Word of God. And Lord, that You would strengthen them, and Lord that we would be a pleasant aroma to our neighbors, and Lord, that we would pray for our president, that we would pray for our government as Romans 13 commands Lord. That we would seek righteousness in this wicked world Lord that we would speak truth into darkness, I pray all this in Jesus' name, Amen.