

In View of God's Mercy - Week 1

Vision: As our church continues to grow, it has been our joy to welcome people new to faith in Jesus, and to welcome so many from different Christian backgrounds. In an effort to grow together in Christ, and promote theological unity among this congregation, we are looking at the book of Romans together, on Sundays in worship and in each of our community groups so that as we look to Jesus, we are doing so with a shared perspective.

Each week, we are asking the question, in view of God's mercy – what does our whole-life response to Jesus look like?

Context:

Around 57 AD, the Apostle Paul was in Corinth on his way to deliver financial aid to the poor Jewish Christians in Jerusalem. He had spent the past 25 years making disciples and planting churches in the regions of Asia Minor, Greece, and Macedonia. Now Paul set his sights on Spain, which was at the far western frontier of the empire. He intended to travel to Jerusalem first, then spend time in Rome before heading west to Spain to preach the gospel to those who had never heard.

So before setting sail for Jerusalem, Paul penned a letter to the Christians in Rome and sent it to them by the hand of Phoebe, an influential Christian woman from the nearby port city of Cenchreae. The Christian community in Rome was struggling. Jewish and Gentile Christians were at odds with one another. There were theological misunderstandings to be sure, but the real problem was pride - ethnic and cultural pride. Pride was fracturing their fellowship, extinguishing any zeal for gospel advance, and dishonoring God. Paul wrote his letter to unify them around the gospel,

Who was Paul?

We can best understand Paul as a rabbinic Jew converted and called by Jesus Christ to be a missionary church-planting pastor to the ends of the earth. Through his preaching, teaching, and letters, he showed the Gentiles how Jesus of Nazareth brought the story of Israel to its fulfillment, unleashing his redemptive blessings upon the world. He called churches to carry that story forward in their context through their love and witness for the sake of the whole world.

Drawing on statements in Romans and Acts, we know that the gospel had reached Rome well before the time Paul wrote his letter. While we cannot be sure, it is most likely that the genesis of the church in Rome occurred in AD 33, just ten days after Jesus' ascension. Jews from Rome had traveled to Jerusalem to celebrate Pentecost only to encounter the Holy Spirit as the apostles preached Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah. They were convicted by the Spirit through Peter's preaching and turned to faith in Christ (Acts 2:10). After some time, they returned to their families and synagogues in Rome and began spreading the news of Jesus.

With a population of around one million, Rome was home to people from all over the empire, including 40,000 to 50,000 Jews. Being Jewish in this context was difficult. Of all the cities in the empire, Rome had reached the pinnacle of religious pluralism and moral decay. Idolatry and immorality were everywhere. Faithful Jews, however, saw themselves as the covenant people of the one true God, set apart by him as his treasured possession and his instrument for saving the world. Being far from the temple in Jerusalem, their corporate life centered on local synagogues to nurture their faith and obedience to the Mosaic Law.

Sabbath observance, kosher food laws, and circumcision were precious signs of community membership marking them off from Gentile idolaters.

Some Gentiles, however, were attracted to the Jewish community, their singular God, and their way of life. These "God-fearers" attended synagogue meetings and adopted some Jewish customs without becoming full converts to Judaism. When the gospel came to Rome, Jews and some God-fearing Gentiles responded to the message, and small messianic communities began to form in people's homes. They would have understood Jesus as the promised Messiah of Israel, and their corporate life would have taken on a decidedly Jewish flavor.

This state of affairs continued until AD 49 when the Roman Emperor Claudius expelled all Jews from Rome (Acts 18:2). The Roman historian Suetonius, in his *Life of Claudius*, records that Claudius "expelled the Jews from Rome because they were constantly rioting at the instigation of Chrestus" (25.2). "Chrestus" is most likely a misspelling of the Greek *Christos*. The rioting most likely refers to rifts in the Jewish community over the claim that Jesus is the *Christos*, the Messiah. Tired of the controversy, Claudius expelled all Jews from Rome. During the next five years, however, the gospel continued to spread among Gentiles. When Claudius died in AD 54 and Jews were allowed to return home, they found a Christian community that had become very non-Jewish in its composition and culture.

Paul is writing into this context with the hope of bringing theological unity to the church in Rome.

For us, we are asking the question: in view of God's mercy, how does my life reflect my growing faith in Jesus? "*in view of God's mercy*" (Romans 12:1). It comes at the hinge between the two major sections of the letter, moving from gospel exposition to gospel exhortation. *In view of God's mercy* revealed in Jesus Christ (chs. 1-11), Paul urges them to honor one another and join in his mission to all nations.

This phrase calls for unequivocal response. The gospel must not live only in our heads, but it must take over our hearts and motivate concrete action in our lives. We will use this phrase throughout our Romans series to foster the obedience of faith in view of God's mercy in Jesus.

So, let's begin – Romans 1:1-17

Greeting

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,

⁷To 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.

Longing to Go to Rome

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 do not want you to be unaware, 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.

The Righteous Shall Live by Faith

¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹⁷ For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.”

(Ro 1:1–17)

Let’s look more closely at these three sections:

Paul says who he is, what he longs for, and how followers of Jesus are to live.

Greeting

1 Paul, a servant (gk - slave, lowest of low) 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 (Luke 24:27 Jesus on the road of Emmaus shows two disciples this, how 1500 years of history tells one story) 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 (the kingdom Jesus is building is for all the nations), ⁶ including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ,

John Stott succinctly says it this way “The good news is the gospel of God, about Christ, according to Scripture, for the nations, unto the obedience of faith, and for the sake of His Name”

⁷ To all those in Rome (these Christ followers were living in a city of 1M+ people, where idolatry and immorality was prevalent) who are loved by God and called to be saints:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (the church in Rome - like the church today, was to be as Jesus described, a city on a hill, a people of salt and light amidst darkness)

Longing to Go to Rome

⁸ First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world. (Christians experience mutual encouragement when we see/hear/observe the faithfulness of God’s people) 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.

Paul’s heart: his desire was to see this Christian community – experience life with them - and to strengthen them, the hope was that mutual encouragement by faith in Jesus would be their experience. I long to see nothing less, that we as God’s people, would seek to be others-oriented, that we would think about who we are and what we have and who we know and ask the question: what can I do to bless and strengthen others? This is the heart for our church, for every one of our community groups, for how we care for and minister to one another: mutual faith in Jesus that serves to strengthen and bless.

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The Righteous Shall Live by Faith

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Paul and his burden to share the news of Jesus – I am under obligation, I am eager to preach, I am unashamed of the gospel – it is the power of God for salvation!

Paul's transformation from being the Jew of Jews who violently opposed early Christians – to now being unashamed, eager and courageously bold in Jesus' name – is nothing short of a miracle. Simply put, God changed this man. When Paul encountered Jesus – everything changed. From hate to love, from entitlement to humility, from elitism to servanthood – Jesus changed this man.

Paul could say it is THE POWER OF GOD for salvation because he experienced this POWER first hand. This word power – it's the same word Jesus used when he said this, ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." (Ac 1:8)

The power of God – it bears witness of God – and this witness will go to the ends of the earth.

¹⁷ For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."

In the gospel – the righteousness of God is revealed.

John Stott "The origin of the gospel is God, the attestation of the gospel is Scripture, the substance of the gospel is Jesus Christ, the scope of the gospel is all the nations, the purpose of the gospel is the obedience of faith, and the goal of the gospel is the honour of Christ's name."

John Stott makes the observation that God's righteousness can be seen as "divine attributes, divine activity, and divine achievement" He points out:

- Righteousness is an attribute of God's character – He does what is right because that is WHO is he.
- We see God's righteousness in the cross of Christ when presents Jesus as the atoning sacrifice
- We see God's righteousness in that He is both just and the justifier
- Righteousness is also can also be seen as his "saving intervention on behalf of his people"
 - Isa 46 "I am bringing my righteousness near"
 - Isa 45:21 "Righteous God and Saviour"
- John Ziesler "Salvation is the form God's righteousness takes"
- NT Wright "The righteousness of God is essentially the covenant faithfulness, the covenant justice, of the God who made promises to Abraham, promises of a worldwide family characterized by faith, in and through whom the evil of the world would be undone."

- Stott says, “The righteousness of God.. it is a righteous status which God requires if we are ever to stand before him, which HE ACHIEVES through the atoning sacrifice of the cross, which HE REVEALS in the gospel, and which HE BESTOWS freely on all who trust in Jesus.”

From faith – for faith

Stott “*God’s faithfulness always comes first, ours is never more than a response.*”

The righteous live by faith. This is faith... Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. (Hebrews 11:1) What do you hope for? What is your confidence in?

In view of God’s mercy, can I ask you today –

Do you believe that the gospel begins with God?

This was HIS idea.

Do you believe that the Bible testifies the gospel is true?

Jesus explains this on the Emmaus Road.

Do you believe that the substance of the gospel is Jesus?

Jesus is truly unrivaled.

Do you believe that the scope of the gospel is all the nations?

His name will be praised among all peoples.

Do you believe that the purpose of the gospel is the obedience of faith?

Knowing Jesus leads to obeying Jesus

Do you believe that the goal of the gospel is the highest honor of Jesus’ name?

He is worthy.

Is your trust – your life - resting on the news that Jesus Christ has come to bring life to the dead?

Are you alive – truly living the life God has intended for you?

Do you believe that God extends saving redeeming grace to sinful broken people?

If you are broken, repentant and weary of your sin and guilt – you truly can bring it God and find redeeming grace.

By grace through faith – have you confessed with your mouth and do you believe in your heart – that Jesus is God?

Jesus – we believe You.