

Sermon Title: **“Gospel Triumphant: *Universal*”**

Series: *Learn, Live, Lead*

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Text: Acts 19:21-31

Introduction

“Stand firm, and you will win life.” -Luke 21:19

We began this year with a look at what Kingdom endurance is. ***Standing Firm*** here means *Endurance* and is a very rich word embodying an ***upward, consistent, contagious, and outward*** motion that goes against the current. *It is swimming upstream after Jesus.* We saw this is the work the Spirit of God does in our lives, just as He did in Jesus’ - He leads us upward to higher ground and a higher life in Him.

We also looked at some of the outward challenges we face when going upward with the Spirit, including the spiritual forces of darkness which our on their way downward. As they are being cast out of God ’s Kingdom, we are being brought in. This is the nature of our Spiritual Battle. Unlike the generations that came before Jesus since His Ascension the Spirit has now come upon us to take the battle to where it truly is at.

What does this look like lived out in or lives? Following Jesus as His Disciples.



“Come, follow me,’ Jesus said, ‘and I will send you out to fish for people.”

-Matthew 4:19

This series is set to be a journey answering this question- *what does it mean to follow Jesus?* How do we today answer His invitation and see this journey with Him unfold as it did for the first-generation followers of Jesus? Together we will discover anew what it means to follow Jesus- *to be a disciple making disciples culture that **learns, lives, and leads!***

I. What Happened to My Church? (Romans 1:1-7)

*“Paul, a **servant of Christ Jesus**, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning his Son, who was 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 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.” **Romans 1:1-7***

Nearing the end of Paul’s Third Missionary Journey, he writes to believers in the city of Rome. This letter stands out with a uniqueness that tends to overshadow the rest of the New Testament. In it’s scope, it is the clearest and most thorough display of Paul’s understanding of what the Gospel and Kingdom are all about. This letter stands as a Theological treatise in which a framework is presented by which we can see the flow of the Old Testament into the New, and the inclusive nature of the Kingdom which the Gospel leads us into-Jew & Gentile together.

Before we get back to our journey through Acts, I wanted to take a detour to reaffirm the tenants of the Gospel that we both believe in and are being saved by. If we lose sight on what the Gospel is or where we are at in the process of being transformed by the Spirit, we are in danger of drifting away from the Savior we love and misrepresenting the Kingdom of God. All too often the Gospel gets swept into the agenda of political movements, personal aspirations, or clouded with heretical influences.

Getting the Gospel right is the call upon every believer’s life in this world- and this series, *the Gospel Triumphant*, is meant to be an aid to you. An aid resourcing you to both understand and share the Good News that stands as a beacon of hope for all people of all the world. This letter to Roman believers seeks to accomplish just that- so let’s jump in!

Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ. This term *slave* in the Greek is *doulos*, which means *slave or bond servant*. It means one who gives himself in submission to the will of another in complete devotion. Why would Paul identify himself as a slave to Jesus in the opening to this letter to Roman believers? Context here, as always is key.

Rome itself, as the city in the heart of the Empire, boasted a population of around 1 million. More than 2/3 of that population were slaves. While known for its grand architecture, the landscape was surrounded by some of the most horrific slums to be found anywhere else in the Empire. The richest and the poorest called the city of Rome home- and very few existed in the margin between.

In AD 49 the Emperor Claudius expelled all of the Jews from Rome- this included the Christian Jews who were in Jerusalem during the time of Pentecost. Their newfound faith and baptism in the Spirit overflowed into the birth of the church in Rome as it did in Antioch- a church born outside of direct Apostolic effort. While not having a central place to gather beyond the synagogue, once the Jews were expelled their synagogue’s were closed. Because of this the Gentile believers gathered in their homes.

By the time Paul wrote to the Roman believers in AD 57, this Roman decree fell to the wayside and many Jewish believers returned to Rome to reclaim their homes and lives. Yet much had changed- including their church. No longer were they the majority; Jews now were the minority among the growth of Gentiles converts. This caused a great rift as the Gentiles were not concerned with the continuity of Old Testament customs and laws. The returned Jewish

believers wanted a revival and restoration of the way things were; the Gentiles wanted to live and move forward in the freedom found in Christ.

To say a rift or schism was forming would be an understatement. It is amidst this struggle Paul writes to bridge the two together with a focus on the big picture of what the Gospel truly is. If we, as God's Kingdom are divided, what hope is there for the world still dead in sin?

Paul writes this letter with two predominate purposes. 1) Addressing the hostility between customs and liberty, and 2) Addressing the attitude of the Jewish believers that they must always be the majority. Gentiles are welcomed- from a distance. This attitude characterized the ill will Jewish and Gentile believers were bearing toward one another.

By opening this letter as a *slave*, Paul associates himself with the *majority* of the population in Rome but the *minority* in right and privilege. And for those fluent in the Old Testament, this word translated *slave* to God was used of *Moses, Joshua, Elijah, and David*- to name a few popular names.

To all those loved in Rome loved by God and called to be saints. Loved here in the Greek means beloved, and is used of the Father toward the Son,

“And behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.” -Matthew 3:17

Called attached in the Greek brings forth the words of Isaiah the prophet,

“Behold, my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased. I will put my Spirit upon him, and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles.”

-Matthew 12:18/Isaiah 42:1-4

Paul opens by drawing their attention to Jesus, and then toward each other- seeing Jesus in their Jewish and Gentile brethren. *What great place to start building a bridge toward unity- the common ground we share in a Savior who although is Jewish in His humanity is also Divine and Universal in His Deity and subsequent role as Messiah for all Humanity created in His Image.*

II. A Universal Problem (Romans 1:18-25; 3:9-12)

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. 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. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the

*truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.” **Romans 1:18-25***

Before Grace, sin is the great equalizer in humanity. No one is in good standing with God on their own merit. We must be clear on this. Humanity in itself, although in sin, has a fragment of reason amidst a moral law. That is how those outside of Christ, without the indwelling Spirit of God, can make decisions, laws, and act in ways that honor who God is and created them in the Image of. Yet even with this, as well as natural creation, sin depraves us all to a bent direction leading away from God into death. From idol worship to the flat-out worship of ourselves, God is far from the affection of our hearts.

For the Jewish believers, they would argue this is truth- but for the Gentiles. They were the descendants of Abraham and while having their own faith in Christ still retained a sense of privilege over their Gentile brethren. Yes, we have sin and repent in Christ- yet Gentiles are horrific sinners and needed a greater measure of Grace. While they may not say that, their actions speak loud and clear.

Paul would further argue,

*“What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, as it is written: ‘None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks God.’ **Romans 3:9-11***

Before we can begin to bridge the chasm seeking to separate congregations, we must begin with the affirmation of a universal problem- that of sin. We are all sinners. We have all turned away from God. We all worshiped idols or ourselves. Outside of God reaching to us, we would never naturally be inclined to reach out to Him. This is where all of us began- whether born to Jewish or Gentile parents. *Whether we were born into a family of churchgoers or are yourself the first to become a part of the church.*

III. A Universal Solution (Romans 3:21-31)

*“But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a **propitiation** by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? **No, but by the law of faith.** For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law. Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since God is one—who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the **contrary, we uphold the law.**” **Romans 3:21-31***

Having established that none of us are born into any advantage over another, Paul shows how the answer for our need could not come from within ourselves. The Law was meant to point to

the need for God to do something for us, not resource us with a to do list to do something for God. The Law is a tutor or road signs helping us understand what God is doing and where He is leading us. Sin divided us from God; the Law showed us what life united with Him would look like. What the rules of His House were, so to speak.

The Law, the Feasts, the Holy Days- all that God gave to Israel was a shadow leading into the Messiah, Jesus. **Propitiation** is a fun word rich with Theological value for each of us. It refers to the cover of the ark of the covenant in the Holy of Holies. It was here, once a year, on the day of Atonement the High Priest would sprinkle the blood of the offering upon the Ark cover and the sins of the people -commission and omission- were appeased and expiated. Not just sin in general- every sin- was satisfied by this offering upon the covering of God's promises to His people. Nothing would separate them from God's promises as long as the blood was applied!

“He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? ...No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” -Romans 8:32, 37-39

The Law was meant to silence the voice of everyone under the guilt of sin; a universal problem in order to show a universal solution- faith. In ourselves? No, in God. His Gift of His Son who died for us, whose blood washes away all of our sin, and allows us all to become a part of His family- now and forever. While this is great news, what about the Jewish people? What about the Old Testament- the Law, the Feasts, the Holy Days? *This is our heritage- are we to just let it go?* Many of us can join in this lamentation- ways we had worshiped in times past that became a part of our DNA and faith relationship with God. For me personally- hymns, piano only music, the KJV, Dispensationalism, etc- even the particulars in how my family celebrated the seasons including Easter and Christmas- all of these were a part of making me who I am with God through Christ. It is hard to not be living what I was raised in. *I have to ask the question for myself- perhaps we all need to ask as are the Jewish people in Rome- what is our place in His story?*

IV. Our Place in His Story (Romans 9:1-5; 11:7-12)

“I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit— that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh. They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.”

-Romans 9:1-5

As Christianity gains momentum it is becoming increasingly clear that the transition happening in the city of Rome is happening all over- Jews were becoming the minority in this movement. If Jesus is truly the Messiah, and this is truly the way in which God is bringing His Kingdom into the world, why is the Jewish presence in this movement diminishing? Paul goes to great,

personal length to show that God has always kept His eye on a remnant- the minority within the majority- that would stay in His hand.

Paul is transparent with his audience- his heart breaks over the Majority response of rejecting Jesus by his Jewish brethren. *Anguish* here in the Greek means *consuming grief*. For those of us who have loved ones- those near and dear such as parents, children- who do not know, have walked away from, or are determined to reject Jesus, this is a shared experience with Paul. A willingness to give up all that we have and are in order to change their eternal destination. *Anguish*.

Adoption in the Greek means *adoption as sons; firstborn rights*. They were chosen among all other Nations to know, experience, and share in the joy of their God over them. This would be an invitation that would extend beyond them into all the world. All that they are as a people- all that God gave them through covenantal relationship- flowed into the Person and Work of Jesus Christ.

Israel was the National womb that would bring forth the Messiah and they were no more estranged from Jesus than Jesus was His earthly mother, Mary.

*“What then? Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened, as it is written, “God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that would not see and ears that would not hear down to this very day.” And David says, “Let their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a retribution for them; let their eyes be darkened so that they cannot see, and bend their backs forever.” So I ask, did they stumble in order that they might fall? By no means! Rather, through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous. Now if their trespass means riches for the world, and if their failure means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean! **-Romans 11:7-12***

Romans is a letter rich with things very difficult to get our arms around. One such example is that of God’s Sovereignty. A *spirit of stupor* means they became torpid; insensible to the offer of Grace by faith through Jesus Christ. They are not in need of a physician (See Matthew 9:12). What is interesting is that it is the fruit of a mind overcome with grief; such as a person intoxicated cannot function with sobriety. Whether it is a disappointment on the part of Israel with God or God with Israel, it is God who is the source of this *spirit of stupor* over Israel.

The Gospel reaching into the Gentile Nations is the purpose behind this move of God; not just the result. This is implying God’s universal intention to provide a Savior for mankind not limited to Israel but through Israel. This is not an *exclusive Gospel*, but an *inclusive Gospel*.

Yet even this time of stupor for Israel has a beginning and an end, for Paul looks beyond this present moment to a time when the Nation as a majority will be moved by jealousy to return to God. In many respects, what God is doing in our lives as Gentiles is meant to spurn the hearts of the Jewish community back toward God. *Often we don’t realize what we have until it is gone; then we long and wish for time with what was lost again promising that we would do things differently this time!* What Paul is inviting us to see is that God is not reactionary; His Kingdom comes by His Will. There will be times it does not make sense, times it is hard to

accept, yet the first, ongoing, and final steps will always be by and through faith in Him. **Keep your hand in His, no matter what is bringing anguish into your heart.**

V. Universal Unity- Learning and Growing Together in Christ (Romans 15:1-7)

“We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. For Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, “The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me.” For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.” -Romans 15:1-7

Strong implies the strength that comes with maturity; understanding. In other words, the more we **Learn from Jesus, Live like Jesus, and Lead others to Jesus**, the more we are equipped to bear with one another. **Bear** with the failings of the weak means to *pick up and carry a weight*. Not only are we tolerating each other, but seek out the ways we can come alongside and help carry each other's burdens. We seek to understand each other, find the common ground in Christ, and takes steps forward in Him together.

Why? Because this is what Jesus does for each and every one of us each and every day of our lives.

For the Jewish believers, you bring much wisdom and experience that can walk alongside the newer Gentile believers in Christ. What we know about Jesus in His Person and Work comes from the Old Testament Scriptures- they have and will continue to have value and authority in the life of believers. It is a part of God's Living Word!

For Gentile believers, you bring much energy and passion that can come alongside your seasoned Jewish brethren. Listen and learn, grow in intimacy through understanding more of who God is through Scripture.

“As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but do not quarrel over opinions. One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. Let not he one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him...One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be convinced in his own mind- observe it in honor to the Lord.” -Romans 14:1-3, 5-6

The danger is falling in love more with the shadow of Christ, the traditions that prepare us for Christ, than the Person of Christ. We can fall in love and be committed to the pattern of Godliness rather than Godliness; know and love the Bible more than the author of the Bible. We can love the things of yesterday to the point we have no joy in today; and become lost in the hope of any good for tomorrow. Like Israel, we can become calloused in our hearts, set in our ways, to the point we miss what God is doing because we miss His invitation to do it through each of us.

*“For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body- Jews or Greeks, slaves or free- and all were made to drink of one Spirit.” **-1 Corinthians 12:13***

And here we come full circle to the Gospel Triumphant. We have a Father who gives us the good gift of His Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit that unites us all into the Body of Jesus Christ.

While church today may not look like it did for some yesterday, it may not look tomorrow like it does for us today. Our traditions have merit when they lead without restriction to Christ; when they stop or get in the way we must cherish the value they brought us but be willing to let them go in order to help not hinder another.

Let us listen and find value in each other, welcoming all who are in Christ as our Father has welcomed each of us.

Let us hold to the Truth of God’s Word above all else- including our own feelings.

Let us recognize God has a plan even when it doesn’t make sense in the moment. Even when it hurts and brings us anguish in the moment.

Let us recognize the Gospel Triumphant is just that because it is a universal solution to a universal problem.

We all need Jesus.