

THE GOOD NEWS OF GOD

Romans 1:1-15

Good morning! We just started a series last week we're calling "Power to Change". In this series, we're going to look at the Book of Romans, we're going to study it, we're going to look at the major themes in this book, we're going to see how Paul's letter not only had implications on the lives of the early Christians but on us at present as well, and then, hopefully, we can be changed in a way that God wants us to change. Because the Christian life, in the end, is all about becoming like Jesus. Please say to your neighbor, "You're becoming like Jesus".

This is the second part in, perhaps, a series that will take us to the end of the year. Last week was the introduction. So, I hope you're all ready to dig in. Get your pen, paper, phones, and Bibles ready as we try to unpack this exceptional letter.

Next to Jesus Christ there was no man that made a greater impact on the world besides the apostle Paul. He wrote most of the New Testament, he established the first churches in the Roman Empire. He was a great man of God. This morning, we're going to get an insight into this man's life, what it takes to make an impact on people and on the world.

The first thirteen verses in the book of Romans are really an autobiography. Paul talks about himself. He speaks in the first person, he shares his heart, he exposes his life. This morning, we're going to look at Paul: the man, his message, and his ministry.

I've chosen a title for this morning's message, "The Good News of God." Paul wrote a message like no other to the Roman Christians and to the world, by extension, and this is it.

We're going to take our time through this great letter. It's a very important letter. So, let's start at the very beginning, a very good place to start.

Chapter 1:1 *"Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God."* Let's look at

I. PAUL - THE MAN. Paul says three things about himself.

1. Servant. He says that he is *"a servant of Christ Jesus"*. He was born a free man. But the fact is everybody is a servant. Who are you a servant to? Everybody has a master. It may be something or someone. But Paul changed masters. As we get into the letter, we see he had been a slave to sin and legalism. In **John 8:34** Jesus says, *"Everyone who sins is a slave to sin."* In this letter, Paul talks about being a servant to sin. And then, he also talks about being a servant of Jesus Christ afterwards.

2. Called to be an apostle. God's army does not consist of volunteers. You are commissioned. You have been called just as Paul was. His position in the army was apostle. Apostle means messenger, one sent forth with orders. We know there were 12 apostles, right? Paul was the 13th, so to speak. There are 3 qualifications of an apostle. **First, he should have been personally called by Jesus, taught by him for several years, and seen him alive after his resurrection.** Paul met this qualifications and the apostles themselves confirmed Paul's apostolic ministry. Today, there are some preachers and pastors who call themselves apostles. I wonder about that because, do they meet the 3 qualifications? But if you have grandchildren and you take care of them, then you can rightfully claim that you have an apostolic ministry. Like Kuya Rey. We can call him Apostle Rey. Sooner or later, we will have Apostle Andrew. In this church, we could have more than 12 apostles. I just wonder who will be the betrayer. BTW, what is an epistle in the

Bible? Like the Epistle of Paul to the Romans. An epistle is the wife of an apostle. All right, I'm getting corny again.

Ok, so, you don't volunteer to serve. You are called to serve in God's army. Now, because you are called to serve, you can then volunteer to serve the Lord in the church in order to use your ministry or use your gift. I hope I didn't confuse you.

3. *"Set apart for the gospel of God"*. Paul's calling is unique. He was set apart for a special purpose. In Acts 13 the church in Syrian Antioch is told by God to *"Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."* (Acts 13:2) Paul himself, in many of his writings, asserts his right to his special calling. He writes the following defending his unique calling to the churches in the Roman province of Galatia. *"I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel I preached is not of human origin. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ."* (Gal. 1:11-12)

Now, God has called Paul for a special purpose but that doesn't mean that he is more special to God than any of us who are followers of Jesus. We are all special in God's eyes. He doesn't have favorites. God has also called you for a special purpose. Paul himself recognizes this. In *Ephesians 4:1* he says, *"As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received."* And as you read the verses following this, he is talking about not only about our being called to salvation but also about our use of the gifts that God has called us to use, *"So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up."* (Eph. 4:11-12)

The fact is if you're not serving the Lord, you're AWOL because we're called into service, called to be part of the gospel. You may not be called to be an apostle, but you're called to do something else based on your gifts and your talents.

Now, let's look at his message.

II. PAUL'S MESSAGE

Paul's message is the gospel. Verse 2, *"...the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures regarding his Son, who as to his earthly life was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power."* Paul's message is the gospel.

Gospel means "good news". Gospel is an Old English word. Actually, back then it was actually spelled "godspel" "god" meaning "good" and "spel" meaning tale or story. So, the gospel is a good story. It is the story of God's love to the world. So, "Gospel" means good news. When you graduated from college or high school and you said, "I graduated!", that was the gospel, the good news. Someone who comes home from the doctor one day and announces, "I'm pregnant!", that is good news. It can also be good news for someone who says after testing, "I'm not pregnant!" So, Gospel simply means it's good news. But God's good news is vastly different from other good news.

We see the difference when we look at how Paul describes the gospel.

1. First he says it's promised in the Bible. vs. 2 *"he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures."* He's talking about the Old Testament. In Hebrew 1:1-2 the author there says, *"In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son."* Then, in Luke 24:27 Jesus is talking to a couple of men. It's after He had resurrected from the dead, *"And beginning with Moses and*

all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.”

The Gospel didn't start in the New Testament. Moses preached the Gospel. David preached the Gospel. Abraham preached the Gospel. All through the Old Testament we see this good news. We see it through signs, sacrifice, symbols, promises of God, prophecies. The Old Testament says one thing, "He's coming...he's coming... he's coming..."

First, back in Genesis, it's kind of veiled and vague but then you start seeing symbols and types and illustrations. As it gets closer and closer to the time of the Messiah, it gets more and more specific. Paul says that the first thing we can say about the gospel is it's promised in the Bible.

2. The second thing we can see about the Gospel is in v. 3 *“...regarding his Son, who as to his earthly life was a descendant of David.”* The second thing about the gospel is that **it is a person**. In other words, it is a gospel that is centered in God's Son. You see, if you take Buddha out of Buddhism you still have a great philosophy. If you take Mohammed out of Islam, you still have a bunch of rules and regulations and a system by which people can live by. But if you take Jesus Christ out of Christianity, it falls apart. It's all based on His Son. Christianity is not a religion, it is a relationship. A relationship to God through Jesus Christ.

What can we say about Jesus Christ? Two things: He's an actual human being. Some say that Jesus Christ was a myth, that He never existed, He wasn't a real person. But it says here, He was a descendent of David. Who was David? David was a king of Israel. There was a time when skeptics also claimed that David was just a fictional character. Then, in 1993, a ninth century stone slab was discovered and on it were inscribed the words “King of Israel” and the “King of the House of David”. Experts now say that it is authentic. If David existed, then

Jesus Christ existed and we see here in Scripture that Jesus would come through the genealogy of David.

Now, in Matthew 1 and Luke 3 we find two genealogies. If you compare those two, you'll find they don't match. Why? One of them is the genealogy of Joseph. The other is the genealogy of Mary. Joseph was supposed to be the father; we know he was the stepfather to Jesus because Mary was a virgin. But through either Joseph or Mary you see that Jesus was the Son of David. He was a real human being, not part man and part God. He was 100% God and He was 100% man. Some people think Jesus was kind of a schizophrenic -- half human and half God. But He was 100% man. When you pricked Him, He bled, He hurt.

Why is that important? If Jesus Christ were not a human being we wouldn't have this verse in **Hebrews 4:15, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin."** If Jesus Christ had not been a full human being He couldn't be an example for us. He couldn't experience the suffering we experience. He couldn't comfort us because he wouldn't know what it was like. He couldn't die for us because he wasn't mortal. But because He was 100% human, He went through what we went through and we can come to Him and say, "God, I'm struggling today" and He understands. He was 100% human. He had real hurts and he actually died.

Jesus was not only human, but He was also 100% God. **v. 4 "and who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord."** Jesus Christ was not only 100% man, He was also 100% God. What is it that proves that Jesus Christ was God? The resurrection proves that Jesus Christ was God. He came back to life on His own. In John 10:18, he says about his body, **"No one takes it from me, but I**

lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again.”

Now, notice in v. 4 He is **Jesus Christ our Lord**. Let’s break this down.

Jesus is His personal name. That’s the name the angel told Mary to give her baby. Jesus is the Greek word for Joshua. Jesus' real name in Hebrew was Joshua. Joshua, in Greek, is Jesus. Joshua means "Jehovah is salvation" or God is salvation.

Christ is His official title. It's the Greek word for Messiah. In Greek, it is Christos. It means "anointed". When I was young, I thought Jesus was his first name and Christ was his last name.

Lord is another title of Jesus. It means master or owner.

So, what do we say about this gospel? It's promised in Scripture. It's centered in a person -- Jesus Christ. And Jesus Christ was 100% God and 100% man.

3. The third thing we see about this gospel is in v. 5. *“Through him we received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith for his name’s sake.”* It is a **gospel of grace**.

What is grace? Grace is when you give somebody what they need, not what they deserve. The Bible says that God doesn't give you what you deserve. If you got what you deserved, would anybody be alive today? No. God doesn't give us what we deserve, but what we need. Lastly,

4. **It's a gospel for the whole world.** v. 5-6, *“Through him we received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith for his name’s sake. And you also are among those Gentiles who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.”* In the Jewish mind there are only two types of people—Jews and non-Jews. They didn't recognize any other race. The non-Jews were grouped into one group and they were called Gentiles. Paul said the gospel is for all Gentiles—

it's a global gospel—for Jews and non-Jews. That's why we support world missions; that's why we go to the Philippines to reach out—to Ilocanos, to Cebuanos, and to Aklanons, for example.

Let's review: Paul, the man, is a servant, called and set apart to preach the gospel. What is the gospel? It's the good news of God for the Jews and Gentiles. The good news is centered on Jesus Christ who is 100% God and 100% man. It is also the good news of God's grace, that he gives us what we need and not what we deserve. That's the message. Now, we come to Paul's ministry.

III. PAUL'S MINISTRY

In the next few verses, verses 7 and following, we see how Paul conducted his ministry among the Romans. So, we can learn a lot from Paul about how we are to do ministry and do it effectively. If you want to know how to do ministry, key in to these next few verses.

v. 7 "To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be his holy people: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ."

First, he says the people in Rome are holy people. Other versions of the Bible use saints instead of holy people. Like the NASB, "To all who are beloved of God in Rome, called as saints." The Greek word is *hagios* which gives the idea of being pure and morally blameless. Obviously, Paul was writing to living Christians. So, a saint is not just someone who has been dead for a long time. A saint is a follower of Jesus who are still alive. Although if you look at some Christians, you'd think they're not alive. They look defeated, their faith is dead.

And Paul says "*grace and peace to you.*" That's a common phrase and you see it in every one of Paul's letters. This is the way Paul says "hello". "Grace and peace" comes from two different cultures. Grace literally means rejoice. Peace is

the Hebrew greeting, Shalom. When Paul says "grace and peace" he's kind of taking the best of both worlds to say "Hello" to everybody. The two go together.

Then in v. 8 *"First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world."* He begins with a compliment and says, I thank God for you. Do you want to influence people? Do you want to help people grow in the Lord? Develop a ministry of encouragement. Be an affirmer. There's plenty of critics in the world. It doesn't take anything to criticize. But Paul was a master at affirmation. He knew that the way you build people up is not by putting them down.

You build people up by lifting people up with a word of gratitude, a compliment. That's the secret of bringing out the best in other people.

Now, notice the reputation of this church, *"...because your faith is being reported all over the world."* The Christians in Rome had a world-famous faith. They were famous because of their faith. He said everywhere I go, all over the world, people talk about your faith. What a reputation! In Rome it wasn't exactly an easy place to be a Christian. Rome was sin city. The Las Vegas of the Mediterranean. Nero was emperor at this time and there were all kinds of immoral things going on. It was a totally corrupt city. Yet it's kind of like the statement, "The darker the night, the brighter the stars" and the more corrupt a society is the more Christians stand out. The stronger the wind, the stronger the oak tree becomes. Just the very fact that Rome was so decadent and so opposite of what God wanted, the Christians there stood out like stars on a dark night.

What do you think a church ought to be famous for? Some churches are famous for their size. Some churches are famous for their building—their architecture is well known. Some churches are famous for the teachings of their pastor. Some churches are famous for their music. But that's not really what God

wants churches to be famous for. The church in Rome was known for their faith. Look at 2 Thessalonians 1:3. Paul commends another church because they exhibit the same kind of characteristic as the Romans, “We ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love all of you have for one another is increasing.”

Brothers and sisters, this is what I think God wants our church to be known for. Faith and Love. Like the Roman and Thessalonian churches.

What do you think the reputation of Fil-Am Community Church is? What do you think unbelievers think about our church? The answer is that our church is known for whatever you are. You are the church.

What do people think about you? The Romans’ faith is growing. They just radiate love. The church is not a pastor, a building, a program, music. The church is people. Whatever we are is whatever our reputation in this region will be.

Paul says I thank God for you because your faith is famous. Why did this church in Rome have such a great reputation? v. 9 “*God, whom I serve in my spirit in preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you in my prayers at all times.*” Do you think that our church would be a better church if the Apostle Paul prayed for it every day? You bet! One of the reasons I think they were so strong is Paul continually prayed for it. He says, God is my witness. He couldn't prove it. Nobody was there when he prayed. He was often alone when he prayed.

Truth is, praying members make a strong church. Paul said he prayed for them constantly. How often this past week did you remember your church? We might expect Paul to pray for people he led to the Lord. But Paul's praying for people he's never even seen. He's never been to Rome. Yet he says, I pray for you every

single day. If we would commit ourselves to pray daily for our church what kind of difference would that make? What kind of change could we see?

He continues in v. 10. Paul says *"...and I pray that now at last by God's will the way may be opened for me to come to you."* Paul longed to see his fellow Christians in Rome. But he wouldn't go unless God wants him to. Sometimes we struggle with this. We want to do something so much or we want something so much and we pray about it and if the answer is no, we get disappointed with God and we feel like God doesn't care for us. Or he is not interested in us. Nothing can be further from the truth. Sometimes God withhold those things we want because we're not ready for it. Or we would get hurt. Or the timing is not just right. Like Paul, we should be willing to accept what God's will is. God is Sovereign. He knows what's best for you. Always!

v. 11-12 *"I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong—that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith."* Here we see the reason why Paul wants to come to Rome. It was not to see the beauty and grandeur of Rome. But it is to minister to other Christians. Paul talks about the mutual ministry of Christians.

Notice he says, *"I long to see you so that I can impart to you some spiritual gift."* What does he mean by, I want to impart a gift. The key is the word "impart". It simply means share. The way it can read best is "I want to come and share a spiritual gift." He wanted to share his gift of teaching. Paul had the gift of teaching. Paul planned to come to Rome eventually and, to introduce himself to the church, he sent this letter. This letter is an outline of what he's going to teach when he gets there. If this was an outline, imagine what he taught when he got there! When he didn't have to limit it to paper!

When spiritual gifts are shared two things happen. *"..make you strong..."* -- that's the first thing that will happen when we share our gifts with each other. The second thing that happens is *"you and I may be mutually encouraged."* Even though Paul was an apostle he needed encouragement. We need each other. Paul was a spiritual giant but he's humble enough to say, I need to receive as well as give. Christian sharing is a two-way street.

If you want to have an effective ministry, then you need to do **the four things that Paul did in these verses.**

1. Encourage people. Develop an attitude of affirmation. Compliment people. Thank God for people, praise people, praise what Jesus is doing in people. It's hard to have a ministry when you're critical.

2. Pray for fellow believers. Pray that their faith will grow and love will abound.

3. Do whatever you can to spend time with Christians. Get with them as often as possible. It is not enough to get together with Christians one day a week. We need each other. Paul says, I long to see you. In the Greek, he's literally saying, I'm homesick. I can't wait to be with other Christians. Is that your attitude? Paul says that's the kind of attitude you've got to have. I really can't wait to get with other believers.

4. Use your spiritual gift. Every one of you has a talent, a gift, a special ability that God gave you when you became a Christian. You may be unaware of it. You may not even know what it is. But as you begin to live the Christian life and begin to serve Him in any way it will float to the top and you will discover it. As you use your gift or gifts, people are strengthened and people are encouraged.

Finally, in the last 3 verses, he says, *"I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that I planned many times to come to you (but have been*

prevented from doing so until now) in order that I might have a harvest among you, just as I have had among the other Gentiles. I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish. That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are in Rome.” This is the second thing that is motivating Paul to come to Rome. He wanted to preach the good news of God to the Gentiles in Rome. Apparently, there were some Christians there who knew Paul or who have heard about Paul and they were aware of how he was so diligent and effective in sharing the good news. Perhaps, they have even invited him to come so he could speak in their gatherings where they would invite their friends who are Gentile. Much like we do today when we invite a well-known preacher to speak in our service and we invite non-Christian friends and loved ones so that they may hear the gospel.

So, in these last verses we're looking at today it seems he was offering an excuse why he wasn't able to visit in the past though he tried many times. At the same time, he assures them of his desire to be with them in order to do ministry, to the Jews and to the Gentiles.

Folks, we've seen Paul, the man and Paul's message, which was the gospel, and we've seen his ministry. I hope that his life and ministry would be an example for all of us. Are we willing to go to great lengths then to follow his example?