



Strangely Warmed

February 3, 2019

Romans 1:1

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1 Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God,

(Pastor prays)

Today we start a journey together in the book of Romans. It's something I've wanted to do my whole life but I've always been a little intimidated. Romans is the best-known book in the Bible and the most famous letter in history, more than 7000 words long. It was written by the most influential person in Christendom. Paul wrote it to a people he didn't really know and a church he didn't plant but it's about the Gospel that he adored.

This little book of 16 chapters is powerful. God is the most important word in this book and Gospel is the second one. Leon Morris says this is basically a book about God and more specifically the Gospel of God: God's own good news for a lost world.

This little book has been used throughout Christian history essentially making Christianity what it is today. Saint Augustine tells in his confessions that he was converted by reading Romans. He famously said he heard a voice say Tolle lege, which means "take up and read." And when he read Romans 13, his stony heart was shattered and he embraced Christ by faith.

A thousand years later an obscure German monk Martin Luther read Romans 1:17 and believed that salvation is by faith alone, giving rise to the Protestant Reformation.

Two hundred fifty years later, John Wesley was at a meeting in London and someone read the preface to Luther's commentary on Romans and Wesley said, "I felt my heart strangely warmed; I felt I did trust in Christ alone for Salvation." John Bunyan got so enthralled with Romans in a Bedford jail he wrote the best-known book besides the Bible called The Pilgrim's Progress.

William Tyndale, the great Bible translator who gave us most of the King James version, said that no one can read Romans too often or study it too well. The more it is studied, the easier it is. He said the more it is chewed, the pleasanter it is. And we need something pleasant in a world that is barbaric enough to coolly discuss infanticide and yet so sensitive that it feels like any opinion triggers outrage. That is where the church must double down on what God has given us in Christ. And that's what this book is about: the unifying, sanctifying power of the Gospel and how we might find lasting joy in Jesus.

Joy in Life is Found in the Gospel of God

The Gospel of God Tells Me Who I Am

Let's take the first phrase of verse one, and really the first word: Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus. Before we get to the servant part, let's look at the Paul part. He's a changed man. We actually talked about him in the last two sermons. Back then his name was Saul. He was a highly motivated, well-educated hater of Christians. He was ruthless, slaughtering and heartless. He gave the nod for Stephen's execution and led the charge for the church's persecution. But God met him and changed him and forgave him because of what Christ did on the cross.

And although Christ changed him on the Damascus road, God didn't change his name. By Acts 13, he's not Saul anymore, but Paul. Because he was changed. The Gospel of Christ does that; it changes people. It made Paul humble. It's interesting that the name Paul, Paulos in Greek, means "small and short." He was thought to be a diminutive man.

The Gospel of grace takes away our pride. There is something else that stuck out about this introduction. Alone. This letter isn't like some of his other letters where it's Paul and Silas or Paul and Timothy. It's just Paul's name standing alone. That's how it can feel sometimes as a Christians witness at school or at work. You can feel like Athanasios would say, *contra mundum*, against the world. But the Gospel of Jesus puts steel in your backbone and starch in your shirt so that by God's grace you can have a clear picture of who you are. You see, all your life, all your past, all your "stuff" is used by God in the recipe of the Gospel to make you who you are. The Gospel of God tells me who I am.

The Gospel of God Tells Me What I Am

Let's go back to the text, verse one. Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus. I want you to pay close attention to the word servant. English often softens it up a little bit. But the Greek word is *doulos* which means "slave." I think there is a lot packed in that word that will help us get a clear-eyed view on what it means to actually be a Christian. Now would be a good time to think about your view of Christianity and does it measure up to Paul's idea of being a slave to Christ Jesus. What does it mean to be a slave? Here is the first thing.

You were bought. That's what Paul wrote in first Corinthians 6: 20. ²⁰ for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

In Acts 20, Paul says God purchased the church with His blood. Blood was the currency. If that's the case, you and all of what makes you you belong absolutely to God. He bought you at the cross with the blood of Jesus. There is something else that word "slave" brings to mind:

Singular devotion. At the very front of this letter Paul wanted the people in Rome to know how he viewed himself and how they should view him. I am a slave of Christ Jesus. Whatever they might have known about Paul, he wanted them to know right up front, that my life is centered on Christ. He's in the forefront. Christ is the primary.

Martin Lloyd Jones said, "He can't get away from it. He must keep mentioning that name." Jesus Christ doesn't become an addition to your personality, He becomes the definer of your identity. Let me give you another word the word "slave" calls to mind:

Surrender. Spurgeon said, He is our first allegiance. He is not a human leader or political party, but Jesus is Lord. We wait on Him humbly and reverently, feeling like it's an honor to do anything for Him. Absolute submission. Unconditional obedience. As master and Lord, He has complete ownership and the right to all of my life. He has the right to determine when I die. He has rights over all my goods and family and can issue commands and not even tell me why. Paul's first words when he lay down in the dirt on the Damascus road, blinded by the glory of Christ's presence was "Who are you Lord?" Do you have that kind of surrender? That word "slave" carries another idea. And that is

Love and Loyalty. In the Old Testament, Exodus 21, if a Hebrew slave loved his master and didn't want to leave, he would have a peg driven into his ear as a sign that he was a slave. Later in life Paul would say, "I bear on my body the marks of Jesus." It's a life that's a life given

completely to Christ. The Gospel of God tells me who I am. The Gospel of God tells me what I am.

The Gospel of God Tells Me What's Next

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an Apostle. Martin Lloyd Jones said both of these words are terribly important. Called and Apostle: 3 times in the first 7 verses the word called appears. It's the initiative and action of God. It's God's idea and God's movement. God is the source. It's a reminder that Paul saw himself as a recipient of grace. Called, but also with a mission. Called to be an Apostle.

God had given him a clear position and a mission and authority. In fact in verse 5, he will say, I have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among the Gentiles. And although none of us here are called to be apostles, we have been saved by grace to share the truth that God loves and saves sinners. He does that at the cross of Jesus. The Gospel of God tells me who I am. The Gospel of God tells me what I am. The Gospel of God tells me what's next.

The Gospel of God Tells Me How Life Works

Let's finish out the verse and introduction. Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, I love that phrase "set apart." It's actually the same word as "pharisee," to be separated. It's often viewed as a negative term, to be isolated or cloistered or even cult-like. To get away from the world. But Paul uses it in a positive way here saying he is separated for something. All of his life led up to his ultimate usefulness for the Gospel. It would be worth you studying the way the triune God called Paul. I'll give you some verses to get you started.

Galatians 1:15, ¹⁵ But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace,

Acts 9:15, ¹⁵ But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel.

Acts 13:2, ² While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."

A man or a woman who would be effective for the Gospel must burn all their bridges and be set apart for the Gospel of God. It's God's own good news that sinners can be saved in Jesus. "God" is the most important word in Romans and "Gospel" is the second. In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul gives four historical facts about the Gospel.

Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures.

Christ was buried.

Christ rose again from the dead.

Christ was seen by many witnesses.

In this chapter alone there are several things about God. The Gospel of God is in verse 1. The promise in the Old Testament in verse 2. Concerns of Jesus in verse 3, the Gospel must be preached (verse 15), the power of God for Salvation in verse 16, the Jews first and then the Gentiles and then it reveals the righteousness of God.

Remember this is the Gospel of God. It's God's message to man. God is the source of the Gospel. God is the purpose of the Gospel. God's word promises the Gospel. God will provide the Gospel. God's Son completed the Gospel. God's spirit applies the Gospel. God's people are saved by the Gospel. The Gospel we are talking about is that Our Holy God is the creator of the whole universe and everything in it. He created man in His own perfect image, but when man sinned, it created a chasm between God and man and condemned man to death because the penalty for sin is death. Jesus Christ, the son of God, was born of a virgin and lived a perfect life. He willingly gave His life on the cross to cover our sins and provide redemption for man. The Bible says in Romans 10:9, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

That's why we can read Romans and see that joy in life is found in the Gospel of God. Come to Christ and join the list of people in history who have come to faith through the book of Romans.

(Pastor prays)
