

Romans
The Gospel Paul Preached
Layne Lebo
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After three months and 12 sermons, we've come to the end of our series on Paul's 1st Century letter to the Church at Rome. While we covered a lot of ground, preaching through a 16-chapter book in just 12 weeks means that there was a lot we skipped over. I finished at verse 16 of chapter 15 last week, which means there are still 44 verses remaining. Those verses are made up of Paul's farewell address to his readers. In the remaining verses of chapter 15, Paul talks about his desire to visit Rome and his regret that so far, he hasn't been able to get there. He restates his calling to be a minister to the Gentiles, and he lays out his future plans to travel to Spain and then to Rome after stopping in Jerusalem. He then urges his readers to pray for his safety, so that he'll be able to come to them with joy and be refreshed by them. It's interesting to note that in spite of his longing to visit Rome, Paul never made it there until he was arrested and taken as a prisoner to Rome, after making an appeal to have his case heard before the Emperor Caesar. In Rome Paul was allowed to stay under guard in his own rented house for two years from 58-60 AD. It is believed that Paul wrote the New Testament letters Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon while he was imprisoned in Rome. We're not given more information about Paul's time in Rome from Scripture—the Book of Acts ends at that point—but tradition tells us that Paul was released from Rome and traveled to Spain and other places. Later he returned to Rome and was executed in the summer of 64 A.D.

Chapter 16 consists mostly of Paul commending co-workers of his to the Church at Rome and thanking ministry partners who worked with him in evangelizing and discipling believers. While many followers of Jesus today continue to struggle with the idea that women can serve as pastors and teachers in the church, it's interesting to note how many of the co-workers Paul identifies were women. He starts by commending Phoebe, a deacon of the church in Cenchreae and instructs them to receive her and help her in any way she needs. He highlights the ministry of the married team Priscilla and Aquila—listing Priscilla first. He mentions Mary who worked hard for them. He mentions Junia who had been imprisoned with him, and lists her, along with

Andronicus (possibly her husband) as outstanding among the apostles. He tells them to greet the women Tryphena and Tryphosa, women who worked hard in the Lord and Persis, a dear friend of his who also worked hard with him. And he mentions the mother of Rufus who had been a mother to him as well. He concludes by encouraging the Christians at Rome to greet Philogus, Julia, Nereus and his sister and Olympas and all the Lord's people who are with them. I'm not familiar enough with Roman names to say how many women are listed there for sure, but at least 10 women are mentioned by name + Rufus' mother. In spite of comments the Apostle Paul made in 2 Corinthians and 1 Timothy that have been interpreted as him forbidding women to preach, teach or speak in church settings, Paul ministered with many women as apostles, deacons, evangelists, pastors and church planters. And it's not just women partners that Paul highlights. I was talking about my sermon with Pastor John and sharing how chapter 16 is filled with greetings and words of thanks. He pointed out how this chapter highlights that even the great Apostle Paul wasn't a lone ranger. At the end of this letter Paul identifies 29 different people who partnered with or assisted him in ministry. As a pastor who is blessed with a wonderful ministry partner in my wife, along with our pastoral staff, church board, prayer partners and many, many other ministry leaders and friends at McBIC, I understand that none of us does ministry alone—at least not successfully.

There is one other section of chapter 16 I want to call our attention to. It's verses 17-19. Listen to these words where Paul reinforces his emphasis on unity in the church and standing against those who seek to bring division.

I urge you, brothers and sisters, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people. Everyone has heard about your obedience, so I rejoice because of you; but I want you to be wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil. The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. – Romans 16:17-20

He's written much about unity and guarding against division, but once again the apostle urges his readers to pursue unity, peace and love in Christ.

I thought it would be fitting as we close out our time exploring this great letter to recap a number of the powerful statements Paul writes. I've titled today's sermon, "The Gospel Paul Preached," because the gospel is such a prominent theme in this letter. The word *gospel* comes from the Greek word *euangelion* meaning "good news." Paul uses the word *gospel* 12 times in Romans and six times in the first 17 verses. The verses I'm going to share with you this morning fall into two categories: words that explain what Paul's Gospel was and words of good news that speak encouragement to each of us.

In Romans 1:16 Paul boldly declares his commitment to the gospel and these words can serve as a mission statement for us as well: "*For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile*" (Romans 1:16). Paul also points out that Jesus' good news is for everyone—Gentiles as well as Jews—a significant shift from what Jews had believed for two thousand years.

Romans 3:23 and 6:23 are probably the most well-known statements in the Book of Romans. In these verses, Paul reminds us that while our sin was leading us to eternal death, Jesus intervened to provide us with freedom and life. Romans 3:23 & 24 says, "*for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus*" (Romans 3:23 & 24) and Romans 6:23 says, "*For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord*" (Romans 6:23). The Gospel of Jesus for Jews and non-Jews is that through the gift of Jesus, eternal life, rather than death, can be our destiny.

As I go into this next section of verses I want to encourage each of us to open our hearts and minds to receive ministry from the Holy Spirit this morning. Wherever you might find yourselves and whatever you're walking through, allow Jesus to minister his life to you this morning, bringing his emotional, spiritual, physical and relational healing to you.

In Romans 5:1 and 2, Paul mentions the peace that can be ours as we place our faith in Jesus and receive his grace. "*Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith*

into this grace in which we now stand” (Romans 5:1 & 2). Do you find yourself in need of God’s peace this morning? Claim Jesus’ grace for you by faith.

My favorite chapter in Romans is chapter 8... Unfortunately, the way our series played out, I was out of town when we came to that chapter and so Pastor Evan had the opportunity to preach on Romans 8. Perhaps because I didn’t get a chance to preach on it, I have a number of verses from this great chapter. Paul begins the chapter by telling us that in Jesus we are freed from condemnation. *“Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death”* (Romans 8:1 & 2). Don’t gloss over those words too quickly. A free-flowing, all-encompassing sense of guilt, shame and embarrassment and the sense of never measuring up no matter how good we are or what we achieve is something that plagues humanity. Paul tells us that as we accept Jesus’ grace and his gift of salvation we’re free of condemnation. We’re no longer guilty. We’re righteous before God. That is incredible news for all of us!

I noted earlier that Romans 3:23 and 6:23 may be the best-known Scriptures in Romans...well, Romans 8:28 may surpass them in popularity. This verse kicks off a wonderful section of Scripture my Bible entitles, “More Than Conquerors.” This verse speak to God’s amazing love and his ability to work out his purposes amidst anything that happens in our lives. I’d like you to say Romans 8:28 aloud with me. *“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose”* (Romans 8:28). Like many truths in the Bible, we can use that verse in a trite way... along the lines of, “Don’t worry. Be happy. Because God will work this out for your good.” The truth of that verse runs much deeper than that. It’s the assurance we have that even in the darkest and toughest of times, God’s purposes will prevail.

Paul begins Romans 8:31-39 with a series of rhetorical questions that set him up to declare the victory that is ours in Jesus. He asks:

“What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against

those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?” – Romans 8:31-35

And then Paul writes these majestic words:

“No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” – Romans 8:37-39

You and I are conquerors in Christ, and as we place our faith in Him, there is nothing in life or death that can separate us from the love of Jesus!

As Paul shares the benefits of God’s grace for us who believe, he frequently breaks into prayer with statements of praise and thanksgiving to God. In Romans chapter 11 verses 33-36 he pens these words,

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!

How unsearchable his judgments,
and his paths beyond tracing out!

“Who has known the mind of the Lord?

Or who has been his counselor?”

“Who has ever given to God,
that God should repay them?”

For from him and through him and for him are all things.

To him be the glory forever! Amen. – Romans 11:33-36

Coming on the heels of these words of praise, the Apostle Paul challenges us with these words about what worship looks like for us.

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.” – Romans 12:1 & 2

What is our response to the grace and mercy and forgiveness of God? Doing good, reading our Bibles, tithing, attending worship on Sundays and singing songs to Him can all be important aspects of worship, but what God really wants is us—our lives offered to Him as a living sacrifice. Paul goes on to write that whole-hearted worship flows out of us being transformed as our minds are renewed by Him, rather than being shaped by the world and the people around us.

Alongside our worship of God, Paul places great emphasis in Romans on loving our brothers and sisters. He no doubt had the words of Jesus in mind. When Jesus was asked what the greatest commandment was He responded, “Love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and love your neighbor as yourself.” In Romans chapter 13—the part of his letter where Paul focuses on our interaction with each other—he writes:

“The commandments, “You shall not commit adultery,” “You shall not murder,” “You shall not steal,” “You shall not covet,” and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.” – Romans 13:9 & 10

Love of others and pursuing unity not only builds up our brothers and sisters and strengthens the church, it’s observing how we love others that Jesus says catches people’s attention and attracts them to God.

Last week I spent time having us focus on Romans chapter 15 verse 13. I think I read those words over us at least 3x. A couple people told me how meaningful those words were for them. I invite you to receive these words as God’s truth for you again this morning. *“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit” (Romans 15:13).* Whatever you are walking through this morning, may God’s joy, peace and hope flood your soul today.

And Paul concludes Romans with these words of promise about God and the work He is doing in us, *“Now to him who is able to establish you in accordance with my gospel, the message I proclaim about Jesus Christ—to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen”* (Romans 16:25 & 27).

My hope for each of us is that we’ve been able to absorb into our hearts these truths about Jesus and what is available to us as his disciples. I also hope that as we’ve preached this series, your appetite for the truth of God’s Word has increased, and that you grow in reading and meditating upon his Word and applying it to your lives.