

The Greatest News Ever Told: An Overview of Romans 1-7

Intro

First Sunday of 2019 and we return to the divinely inspired letter from the Apostle Paul to the church in Rome.

Last year we traversed 32 sermons over 7 chapters - now I'm a lightweight compared to Lloyd Jones - 122

As I looked over those sermons in preparation for this sermon, I could not help but notice my limited gifting in writing sermons and could not help but feel gratefulness for your enthusiastic response and encouragement over this series in Romans.

One would almost want to have another go - start over again and give some of these texts another shot but no - we press on - upward and onward into this most important book. Happily, for you - you hold this book in your hands and you are free at any time to pick up and read and relish and rejoice in this book.

As we begin this new year and as we dive back into Romans, I surmised that an effective way I could serve you is by recalibrating ourselves to this book by preaching an overview of chapters 1-7 in order to remind you of the ground we have covered and as an opportunity if you are new here for you to catch up.

I also wanted to do this overview of chapters 1-7 in order to prepare us for the next couple of months because - Lord willing beginning next Sunday - we will begin to scale the glorious, theological Mt. Everest of Romans chapter 8 - the great 8 - a chapter that one may safely consider one of if not the greatest chapter in Scripture if one is allowed to say that sort of thing.

So - having assigned myself the almost impossible task of surveying the first 7 chapters of Romans - with limited time and by God's grace we will enter again into the grand edifice of this letter and we will walk through the hallways of Romans casting our eyes upon treasures therein but unlike a stuffy, stodgy museum of precious artifacts secured against human touch in glass cases - these treasures are ours for the taking. Not leaving these treasures in these pages - takin' em home - God intends that we take these treasures out of the book - down into our souls - eating into and absorbing into them into our bones - the core of our existence

Way back in January we looked at Romans 1:16-17 and saw that it contains in effect a thesis for this letter. At the outset of this letter Paul hangs a banner over what is to come and succinctly encapsulates the grand theme of this book. In preparation to dive into the first 7 chapters of Romans - stand if you are able and willing - read out loud together and I will lead

STAND AND READ TEXT TOGETHER

[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." (Romans 1:16-17)

Romans is about the gospel that is the power of God for salvation - the greatest news ever told - let us jump back into Romans chapters 1-7 - 4 simple points that direct us into the greatest news ever told - 4 descriptive markers to guide us through these chapters - God, Man, Christ, Response - in fact a handy shorthand to guide your sharing of the Gospel with others.

I. God

- A. Chapter 1 - After Paul takes time to introduce himself as an apostle of Jesus Christ who's words are authoritative - and greet the church at Rome, Paul immediately turns his attention and ours to that greatest most worthy object of our attention - to God himself - and here - here he is fearful to behold for we read in 1:18 "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men"
- B. He reveals God as the Holy Creator of all things and informs us that he has left testimony of himself in his creation- he has revealed in creation testimony to realities of who he is - namely his eternal power and divine nature
 - 1. He has shown it to all - such is his grace toward humanity for he needs show us nothing but he has and in chapter 1:18 we find that he is angry at humanity - that his wrath is revealed against humanity - his wrath being his steady, unrelenting, just, righteous, holy opposition to all that is opposed to him and therefore evil in creation
- C. God directs his wrath toward created humanity because there is in us - each one of us - ungodliness and unrighteousness - a treasonous suppression of the truth of God - he has revealed himself to us and we in our sin and self-self-centeredness look away and prefer to run our lives the way we see fit - I'll be captain of my fate and master of my domain thank you very much
- D. This suppression of the truth of God expresses itself in idolatry - worshipping created things over the creator - to disordered sexual passions and impurity - to envy, murder, deceit, gossip, to debased minds, the list goes on and on and fearfully, oh fearfully not only is there wrath and judgment over us because of these things but one expression of his wrath is giving us up to these things and finally leaving us alone to our own devices
- E. So we find God in his creational might, having graciously shown us something of who he is in his creation and those created in his own image engaged in cosmic treason - so there is wrath
- F. God is righteous and commands us to be righteous and as creator and god he has the right to command - but we in our rebellious sin are not righteous and his anger, his judgment is wrath, is appropriate and it is severe and it is fearful
 - 1. 2:5 - in our sin apart from grace we are storing up wrath on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed
- G. Application
 - 1. Probably don't think about wrath too often - distasteful, uncomfortable - gotta see something of it in order to feel how awful sin is but more to understand how amazing his grace and love is for sinners like you and me
 - a) Paul - more God wants us to understand who he is and what we are facing - in fact an expression of kindness to warn us

II. Man

- A. Chapters 2-3 Paul presses into who we are, he presses into the problem we personally have before a wrathful God
 - 1. He speaks not only to the hedonistic pagan in love with sinful pleasure and vulgar outward displays of immorality and rebellion against God but also to the very religious - the Jew, the chosen people of God, he speaks to very religious - the apparently morally upright - even these - even these don't live up to God's righteous standards - or even their own moral standards - the blatant sinner and the religious hypocrite alike are indicted - no one escapes
 - 2. The apex of the indictment is in chapter 3:9-12 where he quotes Psalm 14 and 53

[9b]...For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, [10] as it is written: “None is righteous, no, not one; [11] no one understands; no one seeks for God. [12] All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.” (Romans 3:9b-12)

B. Not much wriggle room - none in fact

C. So no one can stand in the right before God. Many people engage in noble, courageous acts of sacrifice and kindness - BUT no matter how hard we try to be good, no matter how religious we endeavor to be, no matter how much we work to gain the approval of God, no matter how much we pray or read the Bible or go to church - none of it will work to commend us to a supremely holy God

Illustration: Trying to commend ourselves to God by doing good works is like trying to dig to the center of the earth with an iPhone

1. We have a righteousness deficiency and a sin problem and we stand under the wrath of God in our sin

a) It's not just the wrong we do or the right we neglect - sin is a corrupting presence permeating our desires, thoughts, passions - born into it - Ch. 5 born in Adam born in sin and born under the curse of spiritual death

(1) Back off - I can handle it - yeah I may slip up from time to time but I got this

Illustration: Thinking we have control over the darkness in our lives - it is like the deluded man who wraps his arm around a grizzly bear and declares “look, I have captured him” his future isn't bright

b) We behold our desperate plight - the plight of men and women everywhere apart from a divine intervention - we are incapable and unable to commend ourselves to the Holy God.

(1) Should humble us, leave us desperate somehow for us to be forgiven and rescued

c) God must intervene

III. Christ

A. 3:20 “by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight” - doing God's will is not an option in order to stand right before him - v. 21 “but now” - Martyn Lloyd-Jones “there are no more wonderful words in the whole of Scripture than just these two words ‘but now’ - v. 21-26 (Leon Morris) “possible the single most important paragraph ever written

[21] But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—[22] the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: [23] for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, [24] and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, [25] 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. [26] 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. (Romans 3:21-26)

1. Obedience to God's commands cannot make us righteous but God has manifested his righteousness for sinners apart from the Law

2. We all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and though under his wrath he has in his infinite grace and mercy put forward his Son, Christ Jesus, who has willingly come to redeem us - to buy us out of our desperate plight

a) What was the means the propitiation of his blood - satisfying the wrath of God with his death as he bore our shame and scoffing rude - as the sinless one became sin for us and drank the cup of the wrath of God down to its dregs

b) Do you see him hanging on the tree upon Golgotha's awful hill - oh it was our damnation and he took it lovingly.

(1) In his rising providing for the helpless and the sinner his perfect righteousness as a gift of his grace - clothing the corrupted with clean, white garments of his righteousness imputed to sinners -

- (2) God is just - justice means he must give people their due - he has made the way for Christ to bear what we are due - wrath - and for us to receive what Christ is due - God's absolute approval through Christ's righteousness accounted as ours and imputed to us though we are sinners still
- (3) Behold the glory of JUSTIFICATION - RIGHT STANDING with God through the cross of Christ - BUT JUSTIFICATION THOUGH A CROWNING JEWEL OF HIS SALVATION - IS ONLY THE BANNER OVER A WHOLE NEW EXISTENCE FOR THE CHRISTIAN
 - (a) chapter 5 - in Christ
 - i) we have peace with God
 - ii) access into the grace of God
 - iii) we rejoice in hope of the glory of God and are able to rejoice even in our sufferings as he works in and through them for our good
 - iv) we know the depths of his love for us in that while we were still sinners, he died for us
 - v) we were his enemies and now we are reconciled to him and rejoice in knowing God himself
 - vi) we are united to him and have life and are ordained to reign with him
 - vii) we have been made righteous
 - viii) we have come out of the dominion of sin and death and where sin abounds grace superabounds
 - (b) chapter 6 - in Christ
 - i) our old existence in sin has been crucified and we have been set free from the power of sin
 - ii) we are united to him in his resurrection and have newness of life
 - iii) we were dead and now we will never die
 - iv) we have been set free from slavery to sin to serve the living God
 - v) we have eternal life
 - (c) Chapter 7 - in Christ
 - i) we have been set free from trying to get God on our good side by obeying rules through receiving the Holy Spirit so that we serve God in a new way
 - ii) When remaining indwelling sin raises it's head in our lives and we feel remaining wretchedness in our battle against it - we cry with Paul "THANKS BE TO GOD THROUGH JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD" - our rescuer and our redeemer
 - (1) All of this for us - purely and totally by the grace of God - all through the person and work of Jesus Christ - HALLELUJAH WHAT A SAVIOR!

B. THIS IS THE WHAT GOD HAS PROVIDED FOR US - SING AND DANCE AND CLAP AND SHOUT - THE GREATEST NEWS EVER TOLD!

IV. Response

- A. Our response - only primary and only appropriate response - and the only effectual response - faith - simply receiving all of this grace by taking hold of Christ with empty hands and trusting him for his grace. Having received Christ and his cross-work by faith we are justified - we stand right before God with all of the benefits that are ours in Christ

The weakest believer and the strongest saint are alike and equally justified. Justification admits no degrees. A man is either wholly justified or wholly condemned in the sight of God. (William Plumer)

- B. CALL TO UNBELIEVERS - GET IN ON THIS! RECEIVE THIS GRACE
- C. REST AND ASSURANCE - FORGIVEN AND LOVED - DOESN'T CHANGE ON YOUR WORST DAY
- D. Having trusted Christ and receiving justification we live out of the realities of our new identity - forgiven, loved, child of God, set free from sin and death to serve God in the power of the Holy Spirit

1. We present ourselves to God so that we can serve this one who loves us and whom we love
 - a) We serve one another according to his will, we sacrifice for others, we love, we seek to kill sin, grow in Christ-like love and faithfulness
 - b) NOT so we can gain approval - we make it our aim to please him because of his approval and love - the Spirit supplied - enabled by his grace

As a Christian, you are to surrender your mind, your heart, your will, your arms, your legs, your eyes, your ears, your mouth, indeed every part of the complex make-up that constitutes you as a human being. Each part is to be surrendered and yielded to God, so that your mind is committed to righteousness, your heart is committed to righteousness, your ears are committed to righteousness, your legs are committed to righteousness. We cannot yield part of ourselves to righteousness and the rest to unrighteousness. We are called to yield our entire selves as instruments of righteousness to God. That's the response of a justified person; a person who commits his whole life to God. (R.C. Sproul, *The Gospel of God*, p. 115)

E. Application

1. What has been the effect of Romans on your soul this past year? Better how has the Gospel been affecting you this past year?
 - a) In talking with you more joy, more earnestness, more songs of thanksgiving, more seriousness about faithfulness
2. My prayer that the grace of the gospel will strengthen and cause our gospel culture to flourish
 - a) As we are amazed by the grace of the Gospel - we will be humble people
 - b) As we see that we have been set free to serve God - we will gladly serve each other
 - c) As we see that we have been liberated from slavery to sin - we will earnestly pursue godliness
 - d) As we experience the reconciliation and relationship we have with God - we will eagerly pursue fellowship
 - e) As we increasingly understand the riches of blessings toward us in Christ Jesus - we will be most grateful
 - f) As we know more of the generosity of God's self-giving love - we will be extravagantly generous
 - g) As we understand the depths of the love of God for us and the hope of glory that is coming - we will know joy in every season
 - (1) Gospel education must lead to personal and cultural transformation
 - (a) Let's continue to press into the gospel and anticipate his grace to be at work in us!
 - i) Last week pray for fellowship, love, holiness, PRAYING THE GOSPEL THAT IS THE POWER OF GOD DOWN INTO THE OUR LIVES AND EACH OTHERS LIVES.

Close

This letter contains the greatest news known to man but listen - we're just getting started - next week Lord willing we will begin a number of weeks in Romans 8 - read ahead of time - anticipate strength, comfort, joy, hope.

Romans is worthy not only that every Christian should know it word for word, by heart, but occupy himself with it every day, as the daily bread of the soul. It can never be read or pondered too much, and the more it is dealt with the more precious it becomes, the better it tastes. (Martin Luther, *Preface to the Epistle to the Romans*)

The more we deal with this letter the more precious it becomes, the better it tastes

Oh, how kind our God is to give us this letter - more how infinitely gracious and merciful is the good news of great joy that is contains the grace that is ours in Christ. Praise him

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