“What is Romans All About?”

A Review

Sermon Manuscript

Well before I begin reading our Scripture passage, I wanted to give a little bit of a review of where we are at in the book of Romans because we have some people here today who have not been with us from the beginning of this series. So I think it is helpful to once in while review the book of Romans from that 30,000 foot perspective so that when we do drop down to the 5000 ft level for the next section, it would make a lot more sense. So please open your Bible back to the beginning of Romans, in Romans chapter 1… I want you to follow along with me in your Bibles because as I mention big sections of Romans, I am hoping as you see those big chunks of Scripture that we went over before in our series, it will jog your memory and help to put together the big picture of the book of Romans.

Well here we go… I have entitled our series in the book of Romans “The Just Shall Live By Faith” pulling it straight from Romans 1:17, which comes from a quote from Habakkuk 2:4. The quote is referring to the fact that the only way you can live eternally, the only way your soul can be saved is to put your faith in, put your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, not by relying on yourself, your own willpower, your own good works, your own merit, but purely based on receiving the grace of God through faith. But what does that grace through faith consist of? Well the apostle Paul reveals that that it putting your faith in the righteousness of God and not our own righteousness to save us. And the power of God to save us from our sin is in this God crediting Jesus’ righteousness to the account of anyone who would trust in Jesus Christ alone for their salvation. So it would be perfectly also be correct to entitle a preaching series through the book of Romans as: “*The Righteousness of God.*” Now if you want to summarize what the book of Romans is all about, that summary is found in Romans 1:16-17 which says, *“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. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “ But the righteous (or the just) will live by faith.”*

But the reason why Paul is focusing on the gospel, salvation, and the righteousness of God is because he knows that it is the answer and solution to uniting a divided and quarrelling church. During the time when Paul wrote the book of Romans, the Roman emperor Claudius was reigning. And the Roman empire did not like people in their empire fighting and dividing over certain things. They wanted for everyone under their empire to keep the peace of Rome and did not tolerate factions and divisions within their own empire for the fear of an uprising against the government taking place. Well, there were Jews who did not believe in Christ and Jews who did believe in Christ arguing over Jesus Christ. It was causing I guess a bit of a disturbance in Rome, so the emperor Claudius did not want to deal with that in his own land and decided it was best to banish all the Jews from Rome so they could argue about this so called Christ somewhere else. So he an issued an edict in the year 49 AD banishing all the Jews from Rome. So now the churches in Rome which once had a mixture of Jewish and Gentile believers are now predominately Gentile. Suddenly, there are Gentile pastors and teachers in the church, and the culture of the church becomes gentile in nature.

However, the Jews are allowed back in Rome a number of years later and the Jewish believers understandably return back to the churches they once were a part of and familiar with…only to find in shock that everything about the church they knew is now Gentile, Gentile food, Gentiles customs, Gentile everything. There’s an absence of all the feasts that the Jews celebrate yearly and hold dearly in their hearts. Now, there is division and friction. The Jewish believers are offended demanding their Gentile brothers to throw the roasted pig outside the church and set it on fire while the Gentiles respond in defiance by continuing to eat their delicious pork chops and all things unkosher. Paul needed them to be united together as one church with one mind not only for the Gospel’s sake in that the gospel has broken down the historical barrier of division between Jews and Gentiles, but also because Paul plans to ultimately go to Spain to preach the gospel and he needs the churches of Rome to be his launching pad and support to be able to do that. Paul in the beginning of Romans and the end of Romans says that his mission, his commissioning from the Lord is to be the “apostle to the Gentiles” to specifically in 1:5 to bring about the “*obedience of faith among the all the Gentiles for the sake of His name*…” But if the Roman churches are unstable and dealing with internal issues and division, they won’t be able to successfully send off Paul to Spain, to the furthest reaches of the known earth at that time. So the only answer to division in the churches of Rome is what Romans 1:16 declares the “*power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, to the Jew first and then to the Greek* (or Gentile).”

Romans 1:16-17 reveals how we are made right with God in that we see that on the basis of Christ’s righteousness, God can declare guilty and unrighteous sinners like us righteous in His sight through faith. But from chapter 1, verse 18 through verse 32 the problem is humanity as a whole rejects this righteousness from God. They don’t want to be made righteous in God’s sight. They want to live according to their own righteousness (which is really sin and perversion). They insist on going their own way. And so because humanity so screams at God to let them live however they want, God lets go and lets them live however they want. And the consequence of God loosening his purifying hand of grace on humanity is that humanity by default goes deeper and deeper into the wickedness and perverseness of sin. I like Dave Paine’s illustration where God’s hand of preserving grace is like the constant rotating of the concrete mixer of a concrete truck. As long as the mixer keeps rolling around and around, the concrete will not settle and harden…but as soon as you stop it, it will harden eventually. So it is with the sinful heart. So long as God keeps His hand of grace to restrain the heart that is bent on evil, we do not devolve into all the perversions and sins our hearts desire to do. But as soon as God lets go of us, we naturally go further and further into depravity. And so what we see currently in today’s world with all its violence, murder, and immorality, and sexual perversions like homosexuality and transgenderism is a result and display of God’s wrath against a sinful rebellious humanity. You can say that God giving us over to our sin is God’s consequential wrath against sin and against rejecting His righteousness.

Romans 1:18-32 characterizes what I have called before the “immoral majority” of this world and so a “good moral” person reading verses 18-32 would be saying “yeah get ‘em Paul! Those wicked people deserve God’s wrath for how they live!” However, starting in chapter 2 Paul directs the cannons to who I have called the “moral minority” and says in 2:1 “*Therefore you are without excuse, O man, everyone who passes judgment, for in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things*.” And then he goes on to explain to those of us who think we are morally better than those described in 18-32 that we are no better because we still sin in our hearts. We may not be openly rebellious and openly do wicked things, but we still have lust in our hearts. We may not murder people, but Jesus said if you hate your brother, that is the same thing as murder. Everyone has a standard of morality that they try to live up to, but if we’re honest, we fail even to live up to our own standards, let alone God’s. And so as Paul is firing away his cannons at the “moral minority” the “religious few,” namely the Jews are looking down at both groups and saying “yeah Paul get em’! These people are not good because they are not religious like us who believe in God and they are not chosen like us!” But just when Paul’s Jewish audience thinks they are let off the hook, Paul turns the cannon of humility at his fellow Jews and says in chapter 2 verse 21: “*you, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that one shall not steal, do you steal*?” The point Paul is making is that just because you bear the name Jew and are the chosen people of God and have all the privileges of being of the nation of Israel, if you break yourself the very Ten Commandments that you are teaching others not to break, then it doesn’t matter how religious or how Jewish you are. At that point verse 25 “*your circumcision has become uncircumcision*.”

So in response to Paul firing the cannons at the pride of their Jewishness, the Jews say in chapter 3 verse 1: “*Then what advantage has the Jew*?” Paul says, “*Great in every respect*.” And he lists some advantages, but he tables it to discuss it more fully later in chapters 9-11. But he gives a little sneak peak of it because the point that he is making is that both Jews and Gentiles are all under sin. 3:10 “*There is none righteous, not even one*,” verse 23 “*for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*.” However, even though all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, the good news is that God has provided a way for us to be saved by Jesus dying on the cross for our sins, being the propitiation for our sins – meaning he became the one who satisfied the wrath of God that we deserved for our sins. Because of our sin, everyone is on an equal playing field in terms of being undeserving of grace. But the good news is that everyone who is a sinner can receive this grace simply by believing, trusting and committing to this grace for your salvation.

And so another objection comes from Paul’s Jewish audience saying “then what about Abraham? What about the Old Testament saints? Were they not saved by the Law? And Paul goes on to demonstrate that salvation has always been by grace through faith and not through the Law. He demonstrates that in Abraham’s life and David’s life, two of Israel’s greatest heroes. Then after having established how to receive salvation from God through Jesus, chapter 5 talks about the results of our salvation. The results of being justified by faith or declared righteous in God’s sight. We have assurance of our salvation, hope, peace and love that floods our hearts because of the Holy Spirit whom God has caused to indwell in us. And in 5:12-21 we can be assured that our salvation is secure because Jesus’ grace and obedience was greater than Adam’s sin because while Adam’s sin and all the countless sins that have occurred since then, Jesus’ one act of obedience reversed and cancelled all of sin’s debts and more than that, has given us a right standing of righteousness before God.

Then starting in chapter 6, having established how to get right with God and how we can be assured that we are in right standing before God, Paul gets into how to live out our salvation before God. He gets into how we are to look more and more like Jesus Christ. It is called the process of sanctification, how a believer is set apart to look more and more like Christ. Chapter 6 focuses on our identity that when Christ died on that cross, we died with him along with our sin and our indebtedness to the Law. The old Teru has died, the new Teru has come in Christ. That’s why we get baptized publicly to show publicly to the church to the church that I am no longer the old person I once was, enslaved to sin and death. Now I have a new master Jesus Christ and I am a slave not to my sin, but to His righteousness. Therefore, my life should be marked by righteous living in Him.

But that’s where chapter 7 comes in because God knows that we still struggle with our sinful flesh that resides within us. Even the old man is dead and has been crucified with Christ, yet, I mentioned the illustration before, the dead body of the old man, still contaminated with sin and pollution still is strapped to our back. The residue of sin still infects us and weakens us to prevent us often from obeying Christ as we should. However, Paul concludes chapter 7 in verse 24: “*Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from the body of this death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord*!” And that leads into the glorious eight chapter of Romans where although we might feel at times discouraged and even feel we are still condemned because of our struggle with indwelling sin, 8:1 says in other words, what’s going to enable us to walk in victory over our sin and flesh is the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. It’s not you who’s going to do it, it’s the Spirit of God that will accomplish all that pleases Jesus Christ and the Father.

And not only are we going to triumph ultimately in the end with Jesus over sin and death, this whole creation will one day triumph and be delivered from sin unto a new creation and he talks about this eager expectation when all things will be made new in verses 18-30. Paul began this chapter with “no condemnation,” and he ends the chapter with “no separation” from Christ. If God is for you, there can be absolutely nothing that can threaten separation from the love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord. Even though we face many hardships, trials, and sufferings in this life, God has poured out every resource heaven can provide for us to triumph in this life over our sin and over death. And we are recipients of that blessing. But although we as Gentiles are being blessed with this salvation, what about the Jews? Why weren’t the Jews as a whole in Jesus’ day coming to Christ like the Gentiles were? Why aren’t the Jews as a whole today in our generation coming to Christ like the Gentiles are? So that’s where chapters 9-11 comes in to address the question of the nation of Israel, because it sure seems like God has abandoned His people Israel and has moved on to the Gentiles.

So Paul starts off with his honest heart’s desire to see the nation of Israel come to know and submit to Jesus Christ. He says in chapter 9 verse 2 that he has “*great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart*.” In fact, he says in verse 3 that if it were possible, he would trade his salvation for His kinsmen, Israel. He was willing to be accursed forever into hell if that meant His people being saved. That’s how much zeal and passion Paul had to see his people come to know the risen Christ! But then he spends the rest of the chapter defending why God’s Word has not failed, why God’s promises to Israel have not failed. He gives the reason why Israel does not believe from a divine sovereignty perspective where Israel does not believe because God chooses whom He saves and passes over the rest. It’s a hard truth to swallow for most people, but as Romans 9:16 says “*It does not depend on the one who wills or the one who runs, but on God who has mercy*.” Yes of course there are Jews who have come to know Christ in Jesus’ day, but they are few and far between compared to the whole nation. The reason why Israel as a whole does not believe is because God has not yet opened up their eyes to believe.

But then in chapter 10, Paul turns the coin of salvation and gives us the human responsibility side to the coin of salvation. The same coin, one side is the divine sovereignty perspective and the other is the human responsibility side. He focuses on the fact that Israel chapter 10 verse 3 “*not knowing about the righteousness of God and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God*.” From a human standpoint and perspective, Israel refused God’s righteousness and wanted to achieve salvation through their own righteousness. Instead of seeing the Law of Moses as a reflection of God’s character to live out in joy and love and happiness, they used and saw the Law and keeping the Law as the way to earn salvation. So from a human standpoint it looks like they are choosing to reject the gospel of Jesus Christ and the choice is with them, but from a divine sovereignty perspective Paul says they reject Christ because God has not enabled them to believe in Christ. How does that work? How can God be the one who chooses and is ultimately the one who decides who gets saved and who doesn’t while still not being the author and originator of sin and unbelief and those who reject Christ will be fully held accountable for their rejection of Christ? I don’t know “HOW” that works. That is a true mystery that only God in His infinite wisdom and knowledge knows how that works perfectly in harmony in Himself. If we understood “HOW” that worked, we would cease to be created creature and be God the Creator Himself.

So after all of that is said and done about Israel’s spiritual state, the question becomes “is there any hope for Israel? Yes, there is hope…one day all Israel will be saved. Israel’s unbelief is only temporary until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled, until God has saved the exact number of Gentiles He desires to save, and then God will once again focus on Israel’s salvation and they will come to know Him and the promises that God made to Abraham from long ago will be completed. But there is a reason God designed redemptive history to pan out this way with Israel and the Gentiles. It is to humble all under His mercy. Israel did not believe and so salvation went to the Gentiles. So Israel can’t boast about how special they are in receiving salvation because they sinned and missed their window of opportunity to believe (at least from a human standpoint). But the Gentiles now being recipients of salvation can’t boast about them being worthy of salvation either because salvation comes from the Jews. Salvation comes from a Jewish Messiah who has come from the line of Israel’s Jewish lineage. It was through the nation of Israel that God revealed all that was revealed through the Messiah. If the Jews can’t boast about themselves and the Gentiles can’t boast themselves, then what can they boast about? Who can they rely on? God….God…. 11:32 “For God has shut up all in disobedience so that He may show mercy to all.” Nobody could have thought of that plan of salvation to prevent prideful boasting and to make everyone rely purely on the mercy of Jesus Christ except God alone! So that’s why Paul bursts out in doxology and praise to the wisdom of God! Verses 33-36 “*Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!**For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor? Or who has first given to Him that it might be repaid to him? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.*”

And so in light of all of what God has done for us in salvation, in light of all the mercy God has shown to us in Jesus Christ, Paul goes into how we are to respond and live in worship. 12:1-2 “*Therefore I exhort you, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a sacrifice—living, holy, and pleasing to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may approve what the will of God is, that which is good and pleasing and perfect.*” He talks about how we are to be living sacrifices in the church in using the gifts God has given us to serve and love one another. And he emphasizes in chapter 12 towards the end of never taking revenge for wrongs done to us. That we are to leave room for the wrath of God. And that leads us into chapter 13 where Paul says that we talks about how we are to live as living sacrifices for God when it comes to living under earthly governments. We are to leave room for the eternal wrath of God when He punishes all sin when comes again, but God has temporarily authorized governments on earth to act as his servants to bring about order and peace in society, and if necessary, the physical wrath of the sword for those who do evil and break laws in society. And we ended in 13:7 “*render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due, custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor*.”

We as Christians should not be ones who are known by society as those who borrow and go in debt and do not pay back our debts…except the only thing we need to be indebt to is love, to love one another, which we will look at more next week. But let me read verses 8-14 (read). Jesus Christ, who is the very definition of love, fulfilled the demands of the Law when you couldn’t fulfill it yourself. His love conquered your greatest enemy…the twin hydras of sin and death. When Jesus died and rose again for sinners, He ushered in the kingdom of light. And that light is shining on you today, commanding you to awaken from the sleep of your sin, to lay aside the deeds of darkness, and put on the armor of light. And the way to on the armor of light is by trusting in Jesus’ righteousness alone for your salvation. As John 8:12 says, “If you trust that Jesus is the Light of the world and follow Him, He promises that you will never walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life.” So let the power of Jesus’ righteousness purge away your sins so that you can become a child of light. Let’s pray