

ROAMING THROUGH ROMANS

“How Is Your Serve?”

Romans 1:8-15

Open your Bibles to Romans Chapter One. We are going to look at verses 8-15 this time. Let's read our text and then we'll look at it verse-by-verse. Paul writes:

**⁸First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world. ⁹For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers, ¹⁰making request if, by some means, now at last I may find a way in the will of God to come to you. ¹¹For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established—
¹²that is, that I may be encouraged together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me.**

¹³Now I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that I often planned to come to you (but was hindered until now), that I might have some fruit among you also, just as among the other Gentiles. ¹⁴I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise. ¹⁵So, as much as is in me, *I am* ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also.

In the first seven verses of chapter one, Paul gave us a kind of overview of what he is going to teach us in his letter. As we move along, he will unpack some wonderful truths that we need to know. But we have learned the most important thing about him and his ministry already.

We learned that he was set apart to share the Gospel of God. And this Good News is not just some religious system. It is an invitation to know the Savior that God sent to reclaim the world from the grips of sin and death. This Savior is none other than Jesus Christ, who met Paul on the road to Damascus. And what Paul wants for all who read this letter is for them to have an intense, personal relationship with Him. But he doesn't want it to stop there. He wants to share everything that Jesus has taught him about growing in the grace of God.

You see, like Paul, we are called to share Jesus with the least, last and lost. Through Him we have been given “grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all

ROAMING THROUGH ROMANS

nations for His name.” We are the “beloved of God” who are called to be “saints,” or “*holy ones*.”

Isn't that a wonderful thing to know — that we can know Jesus and make Him known! We are the bride of Christ who is making us pure awaiting His return for us.

And that is something Paul had a burning passion for — the church of Jesus Christ. He was above all else a church planter and a church builder. In this case, as we talked about last time, Paul did not start the church at Rome. But he desperately wanted to minister there. Why?

Because it was the church or churches in *Rome*. Rome was the capital city of the Roman Empire. And it was also the capital city of idol worship, paganism and every other ungodly thing known to man. Think Las Vegas, San Francisco and New York all rolled up into one. It was literally a city right next to the gates of hell. The motto was, “When in Rome, do as the Romans do!” It was also said in that time that all roads led to Rome. If you wanted to do business or trade in goods, you at some time or another want to go there.

So what evangelist wouldn't want to go and preach there?

But there was another reason Paul wanted to go to Rome as well. The saints at Rome were there. And he had heard all about them. Look at verse 8 as we begin our study:

First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.

How would you like it if your faith was spoken of throughout the whole world?

Well, all you need to get to that point is to go through something like the Roman believers were. (By the way, it is possible you will get a chance to do this in the near future.) At this point in history the emperor in Rome was named Caesar Nero. Nero, I believe, was a forerunner of the antichrist. This quote by Andrew Jackson will give us some insight into this man:

Nero was a crazy, cruel Roman emperor who ruled for fourteen years, from 54 to 68. A great fire burned down much of Rome in 64; most historians believe that it was started by Nero, but that he blamed the fire on Rome's Christian community. As a result, Nero martyred many Christians in Rome. Paul and Peter were martyred there during the reign of Nero, around 65.

Legend has it that Nero would soak Christians in wax, tie them to trees around his garden, and then light them on fire. He would then ride around on a chariot saying, “You are the light of the world.” Because of his persecutions, Christians were said to be

ROAMING THROUGH ROMANS

cannibals, idol worshippers, and more. Some even said they were “atheists” because they didn’t believe in the Roman gods. And basically every bad thing that happened got blamed on either the Jews or the Christians (which the Romans thought were a sect of Judaism).

So, during the time Paul lived, it took faith, *a lot of faith*, to be a Christian in Rome. But faithful they were, and this led to them having a good reputation throughout the Christian world at that time. And that made Paul thankful for the brethren in Rome even though he did not know very many of them. But he doesn’t just give thanks for them. He also lifts them up to the throne of grace. Look at verse 9:

For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers,

Do you ever say you are going to pray for someone but then fail to do it?

I think Paul says that God is his witness here to help them know that he truly did lift them up. And this was important because they needed lots of prayer.

It is very important that we take time to lift up our missionaries and the persecuted church. In many ways we have it easy here in America. But not so in many places in the world. Look what Sarata Dugal and his family are experiencing in India right now. I have heard that they won’t treat the Christians who have COVID, saving their resources for the Hindus.

Who knows — it may not be long before we will be persecuted like that. A large percentage of the people who refuse to get the jab are, in fact, Christians. So we can expect that Christians will get blamed for causing the virus to keep spreading. But that is okay with me, because I know we are not fighting against people. We fight against powers and principalities and rulers of darkness.

And guess where we fight this battle?

On our knees!

So Paul constantly includes the Romans in his prayers for the church, just as if it was one of the many he started. That is a wonderful part of this verse, but it is equally significant what Paul says here about “serving.”

The word he uses here means “worshipful service.” And in these next few verses, he is going to lay out for us some ways he served the Romans. So if we listen carefully, we can learn some things about our serve as well.

Did you know that praying for others is a great way to serve them?

ROAMING THROUGH ROMANS

I mean, who doesn't need prayer?

And serving others is something a *doulos* should do.

So what Paul is saying here suggests that all we do in service of God should be lifted up and bathed in prayer. And Paul adds that his service comes from his spirit or inner man. This gets down to our motive for serving. Only God sees the heart or inner man.

Do we serve for the affirmation of men or to please God?

That is a big question. Because it all boils down to one thing — the Gospel.

We so often think of the Gospel as just the Good News of salvation. But Jesus said that His offer was not just life, *but life more abundantly*.

Is what we are doing to serve God all about Jesus?

Is it about sharing Him with the world?

Or, is it about helping our church grow in numbers?

I would rather that we are growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus than getting bigger. Because that will keep us from having unnatural growth. You see, that is what Paul wants for and from the Romans. He wants to come to them, serve them and help them to know Jesus, and then to know Him more. And then they can take Him to the streets of Rome. Look at verse 10:

making request if, by some means, now at last I may find a way in the will of God to come to you.

This is one of those “watch out what you pray for” moments. Paul is going to make it to Rome, but not how he thought. Charles Spurgeon wrote this about Paul's prayer:

Little did he dream that his prayers were to be answered by his being conveyed in chains to the great city. Very mysterious are the Lords' ways of granting our requests.

Paul prayed that he would go to Rome. And the Lord answered that prayer. But sometimes God's way is not a straight path. This is how Paul got to Rome:

First, he got arrested in Jerusalem after being falsely accused of bringing Gentiles into the Temple. Then he spent two years in custody in Caesarea, because the governor was hoping for a bribe. Although he should have been freed, Paul had to appeal to Caesar to save his life. Then, en route to Rome, he was shipwrecked and spent the winter on Malta. Finally, he got there but he was placed under house arrest. Of course, we know that was all orchestrated by God because this happened (Philippians 4:21-22):

ROAMING THROUGH ROMANS

²¹Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brethren who are with me greet you. ²²All the saints greet you, but especially those who are of Caesar's household.

Paul wrote Philippians while he was under arrest in Rome. But because of his imprisonment, people were getting saved — *even people connected to Caesar.*

How would you have liked to have been one of the guards chained to Paul?

It would be like being chained to a pit bull for Jesus!

So it was more than just a rocky road to get to Rome. And that should be a wonderful lesson for us about prayer. Especially when God has placed something on our heart. The Lord will get us there, just not always as we thought. We just need to keep asking, seeking and knocking. And here is the important part: Paul says that he prayed that, “by the will of God,” he could come to Rome.

The will of God is sometimes worked out in mysterious ways.

All of the circumstances surrounding Paul finally arriving at Rome were prepared for him in eternity past by the Lord. He allowed all of those things, even the somewhat evil ones, to happen to him. But think about how many people he reached with the Gospel in between Jerusalem and Rome.

He touched Roman soldiers, Jewish leaders, and his shipmates when they were in the storm. After the Lord saved all of the men who were shipwrecked, just as Paul said He would, he did miracles on Malta. First, he was bitten by a poisonous viper but did not die. Then he went to the political leader of the island's house and healed his father (Acts 26). All of this was set up by God so that Paul could do what he was called to do — to preach the Gospel. So this is what we do:

We continue to pray for God's will to be done. And then, if He doesn't answer exactly as we prayed or in the timing we expected, we must still submit to His will. We must acknowledge that His ways are not our ways. And then we just step out of the way and see what God can do. But we do it all with the same motivation in mind — to share Jesus with others.

When they see that we trust in Him, it could change their world. They have no one to rely on like Him. That is what Paul did. And this is why he wanted so desperately for God to get him to Rome (Verse 11):

For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established—

ROAMING THROUGH ROMANS

Now the Pentecostals automatically think this is talking about laying hands on people so they will speak in tongues. And although I do believe that there is a second blessing that can come through the laying on of hands, that is not what we see here.

Paul was simply saying he wanted to go to Rome and do the things that we do in the church. In other words, he wanted to serve them by using his spiritual gifts, which were teaching and evangelism. And he also wanted to see how they ministered in their spiritual gifts. That is how the church should function. Later in the book (chapter 12), we are going to learn all about the spiritual gifts, so we don't want to get ahead of ourselves. We just need to know that each of us has at least one supernatural gift that we were given by the Holy Spirit when we got saved. We are supposed to use these gifts to serve each other in the body of Christ — *to strengthen one another in the faith*. That is why Paul desires that the Romans be “established.”

You see, Paul had a very high regard for the fellowship of God's people with one another. He knew and taught that it is when we meet at church that we are trained to do the work of the ministry. That is why he says this in verse 12:

that is, that I may be encouraged together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me.

Do you see the pastor's heart of Paul here?

Not only was he a good teacher. He was also a shepherd — a servant of servants.

He loved these people, even though he didn't know very many of them. You shouldn't have to know believers to love them. We are all parts of the body of Christ. So, no matter where you go, you should be able to find like-minded people to fellowship with. And I can attest to this. Having done some travelling and ministering in churches in different parts of the world, I can tell you that most of them have been similar in one way:

Love for one another.

There are very few churches that I have been to that I did not come away encouraged. And that is a wonderful thing about the bride of Christ. We all know the same Lord, and so we have something very special in common. So even though we may be from a different part of the country, or even the world, we have a mutual faith. We all serve the same Lord. And one day we will all spend eternity together.

So what happened?

Why didn't Paul just pack up and head to Rome?

ROAMING THROUGH ROMANS

He was “hindered.” Look at verse 13:

Now I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that I often planned to come to you (but was hindered until now), that I might have some fruit among you also, just as among the other Gentiles.

If you follow Paul’s missionary journeys, you will see that he was hindered in at least four ways:

1. The Holy Spirit sometimes hindered him.

For example, when Paul wanted to go to Asia to preach the Gospel, the Holy Spirit said no. He was called to Macedonia (Greece) instead.

2. The devil sometimes hindered Paul.

Listen to what he says in 1 Thessalonians 1:18:

Therefore we wanted to come to you—even I, Paul, time and again—but Satan hindered us.

The enemy didn’t want Paul to be effective in his ministry. You know that the spiritual warfare had to be intense wherever he went. That is the thing about Satan and his minions. They can’t stop us from being saved once we trust in Jesus. So they do everything they can to stop us from serving Him. They will do whatever it takes to get in our way.

3. Other times, pressing needs of the churches he had founded kept Paul from going to Rome.
4. And fourth, Paul warned about false teachers to the believers in Galatia (Galatians 5:7):

You ran well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth?

I added the last one in because it applies to us as well. Some hindrances are for the betterment of our walk. But others are not.

We need to ask ourselves, “What, if anything, is hindering me right now in my walk with Jesus?” If there is something you can do about it, do it. If it is something you can’t change, don’t get frustrated or lose focus. Trust in God and His timing. Don’t ask God why. Ask Him what — *what He wants to teach you through this hindrance.*

So what is the fruit that Paul wants to have among the Romans?

ROAMING THROUGH ROMANS

He kind of gives us a hint. He says it is the same fruit he had among the other Gentiles. And this means he was anticipating that many would come to know Jesus through his teaching believers and preaching to non-believers.

Paul knew that when he went to places, the Word of God would be taught and the Gospel would be preached. And he trusted that it would have an effect — that God's Word would not come back void. So should we.

But here is the bottom line when it came to Paul's desire to go to Rome. He felt that he had to. Look at verse 14:

I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise.

Paul felt that he had a debt to these people. And one has to wonder why.

This is speculation, but could it be that he had persecuted some of these believers?

Or was this just a general burden for people?

Maybe both.

But he did feel as though he owed a debt. Listen to what Jon Courson said in his commentary about verse 14:

"I'm a debtor to everyone," said Paul—"to the Greek and to the barbarian, to the sophisticated and to the simple, to the businessman and to the biker, to the housewife and to the hippie, to the jock and to the jailbird." Why did Paul feel this way? Because he was amazed at the goodness of God that saved him so radically at the very time he was erring so greatly.

Charles Spurgeon also spoke wisely about Paul's debt. He wrote:

His office and his gifts placed him in debt to mankind to labor for their conversion and every Christian, according to his ability, is in the same condition. Are we paying the debts under which the Lord has laid upon us?

How is your serve?

So Paul's idea of a debt wasn't a lack of something. It was an overflow. He had been given so much by the Lord that he felt indebted to give it back. And he did this by sharing in the abundance he had been given. Paul was ready to share the Good News with those who were cultured and crude. He desired to preach both to the intellectual and the ignorant. It didn't matter who he came in contact with, he wanted to share Jesus with them.

ROAMING THROUGH ROMANS

The Gospel is a universal message. And it is something that anyone we meet will learn is his or her greatest need. It is for everyone, everywhere, throughout all of human history. In fact, it is His story that we share — *the Good News of Jesus Christ*.

The Gospel does not change. How we deliver it might change if we want to reach people with it. We don't want to hit people with a Bible. And we can't expect them to understand our jargon — our "Christianese." But we can hope that if we speak the truth to them in love, they will see their need for the Savior.

You see, the one thing that we have to offer them that no other religion can is a risen Lord who loves them. And He loves them enough that He was willing to die in their place.

That is why Paul could be so bold in his desire to share the Gospel. Look at verse 15:

So, as much as is in me, *I am* ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also.

Now, I don't know about you, but I find this verse fascinating. Paul just called the people he was writing to "saints." He also called them "beloved of God" and "the called of Jesus Christ."

Why do they need to hear the Gospel?

I think it is because you can NEVER get too much of the Good News. Especially in a world like ours — and in a world like first-century Rome.

Paul was "ready" to head there even though he knew what he was up against. Listen to what William Newell wrote about this in his commentary on Romans:

Rome was the center of the Gentile world: its emperors were soon to demand—and receive—worship; it was crowded with men of learning and culture from the whole world; it had mighty marchings;—great triumphal processions flowed through its streets. Rome shook the world. Yet here is Paul, utterly weak in himself, and' with his physical thorn; yet ready, eager, to go, to Rome! ... Talk of your brave men, your great men, O world! Where in all history can you find one like Paul. Alexander, Caesar, Napoleon, marched with the protection of their armies to enforce their will upon men. Paul was eager to march with Christ alone to the center of this world's greatness entrenched under Satan, with "the Word of the cross," which he himself says is "to Jews, an offence; and to Gentiles, foolishness." Yes, and when he does go to Rome, it is as a shipwrecked (though Divinely delivered) prisoner. Oh, what a story! ...And what is the

ROAMING THROUGH ROMANS

secret of this unconquerable heart? Hear Paul: “Ye seek a proof of Christ that speaketh in me.” “To me, to live is Christ”; “It was the good pleasure of God to reveal His Son in me”; “By the grace of God I am what I am”; “I labor, striving according to Christ’s working, who worketh in me mightily”; “I am ready to spend and be spent out for your souls.”

Paul’s desire was to get to Rome and preach the Word, in season and out. And he would one day get there. But it would not be the same as in other places.

Much like when Paul went to Jerusalem, he knew that bad things awaited him. He knew that most Romans would despise him, and many would do him harm if they could. Yet, he was eager to boldly go there and preach the Gospel. Here is why (verse 16):

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.

We will be looking at this verse and verse 17 in depth next time. But I want to touch on it here so we can all be praying in the meantime about something.

Our nation is as bad, if not worse, than Rome was. In fact, I would say that it is much worse; because, at times, we have been a people that trusted in the God of the Bible. We have sent, in our past, many missionaries to all parts of the world. As much as those who would like to sweep our history under the rug would like for this to not be true, it is. But the pagans seem to rule in this season of our history. We will discuss this at length when we get to verses 18-32 of chapter one. So until next time, take a good hard look around and then ask yourself this question:

Are you “ashamed of the Gospel?”

Are you afraid to share Jesus with the people in our world?

Do you have a burden for the lost (or the found)?

And if not, why not?

What is keeping you from giving all to Jesus?

How is your serve?

Let’s pray.