

“Who’s Your One?” // Romans 1:16–17 //

Open your Bibles to the book of ROMANS. I am super excited about this... almost as much as the Twittersphere was excited about us cancelling services this past weekend.

- And, btw, **could we stop for a minute** and just celebrate: 5 completely sold out services, plus a dress rehearsal, 1400 volunteer positions and more than **400 ppl** who indicated a FTP of faith?

We are going to spend **the greater part of 2019** working our way through the book of Romans and it is going to be AWESOME.

And check this out... We have produced a **Romans Journal** for you. I want you to **bring it every week** along with your Bible.

- It has the text printed and gives you a personal reading plan— with an explanation of our HEAR Bible reading strategy and our ACTS prayer plan,
- and gives you **places for you journal and take notes** during the sermons.
- It’s got memory verses, a glossary and study helps for the book
- Later, you’ll get a small group companion to go with this.
- **I have a promise for you:** If you **engage with just this** for the year, by the **end of this year you will be a different person**, for the better, and your **spiritual life will be on an entirely new level**.

So, I invite each of you **take one, bring it back with you** each weekend, and let’s do this thing!

Works Consulted:

Romans for You, “Romans 1”, Tim Keller

“The Plan and Purpose of the Gospel (Romans 1:1–7),” Joby Martin

“The Power of God for Salvation (Romans 1:16–32),” Joby Martin

- One note: **This Journal is free to you** but *it wasn’t free*. It’s a pretty serious investment on our part but we think it’s important—and I don’t want you to lose it or discard it.
- It’s your passport for the year.
- **So, right now, write your name in it**, your phone number, and that way *when* you lose it—not, if you lose it—but *when* you lose it. (I know you people). **When you leave it on the little shelf** above the urinal in the bathroom or in the kids area, we can get it back to you.
- **(I don’t see all of you writing.** If your arm is around your wife, you can’t be writing, you’re just messing around. I’m not. Get a pen and start writing.)

Now, “Why study Romans for a year?” you ask

So, why Romans?

Well, for one thing, the **greatest Christian leaders for the last 2000 years** have maintained that Romans is the most important theological book ever written.

- **Augustine** said that in Romans “all the shadows of (his) doubt were dispelled.”
- **John Calvin** spoke of Romans as his “entrance ... to all the most hidden treasures of Scripture.”
- **Martin Luther** said it was “the most important piece of the NT” and that it was “impossible to read, study, ponder, or meditate on it too much.” He called its central premise of Romans, justification by faith alone, “the doctrine on which the church rises or falls.”

And yet in the 16 years I’ve been pastor here (that’s right, I started pastoring this church when I was 14), we’ve never done a series on it. Why? I was scared. I knew that whenever I did it, I’d feel like I did a

terrible job. But 2019 is the year to put on my theological big boy pants and do it.

Here's the other reason we'll spend a year on it: **every spiritual awakening** I know of included some kind of study of the book of Romans.

- It was study of this **book that launched the Protestant Reformation**.
- **Luther described his discovery of the gospel** like a man falling down the shaft of a bell-tower—unsure of what the purpose of his life was and what would happen to him when he died—who reaches out in desperation for the rope, and as he grabs it, it not only breaks his fall but wakes up half of Christendom.
- **Luther described his study of it like a man who is trying to get apples off on apple tree...** shake every branch.

In Romans, Paul works through the most important and most pressing questions ever considered by the human race with meticulous logic—showing us that the gospel is the only answer to our questions and only real solution to our problems.

- His **logic is so meticulous** that for the first 100-or-so years of the Harvard Law School, 1st year students were required to work their way through Romans because of the careful way Paul in which builds his argument.
- He **starts with things most of us have observed** and then explains **why the gospel is the best explanation** for them, along the way **anticipating objections** and answering them sometimes before we have a chance to raise them.

Paul's central subject in this book is *the gospel*. He tells us that in the first chapter and explains in the them passage of Romans why he is going to spend a whole book talking about it.

(p. 20 in journal) ¹⁵ ...I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. (Raleigh, Durham) For I am not ashamed of the gospel,

for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes..."
(Rom 1:16)

Notice: the gospel is the power of God. Not “contains the power of God,” or “channels the power of God,” but **is itself** the power of God.

- **Consider this: the gospel is the one thing** in the New Testament, other than Jesus himself, that is referred to directly *as* the power of God.
- That's incredibly important, and **explains why Paul is so devoted** to it.
- **Interesting factoid:** When dynamite was invented in the 18th century, its name was derived from the Greek word here for *power*.
 - **Paul didn't know anything about dynamite**, of course, but I think it's still a good image to use when thinking of the gospel. The gospel is God's power to create; to redeem; to heal; to bring back from the dead.
 - The gospel is **not about a new strategy** or a new way to live. It's about **new life**.
 - **It's the power of God.** To touch it is to touch power. My dad grew up in WNC and told me one of the worst whoopins he got was when he broke into his daddy's shed and borrowed some of his dynamite to go fishing... A stick of dynamite doesn't give you instructions on new ways to fish, or tell you where the best places to cast your line, it *is* the power that brings fish to **the surface**.
 - **In a similar way, the gospel** doesn't give you instructions on how to change: it is itself the power to change.

I've heard it said before that the laws and regulations and guidelines of religion are like railroad tracks...

- **Don't some of you feel like that?** I want to be good. Nothing shows you how bad you are like trying to be good...
- **In fact, if you think you're generally a good person**, it's because you've never really *tried* that hard to be good. I mean, tried to be

that good *from your heart*. Try to live for an afternoon without jealousy or hatred or rebellion in your heart...

- **Me being so frustrated at my lack of love... THAT WAS WHEN GOD'S GRACE** really started to become real to me.
- So, let me say again: *The reason some of you think you're good is that you've never really tried in your heart to be perfect!* You've thought theoretically, "Oh yeah, I can be good...." **Kind of like me watching Yoga...** "I could do that." Downward dog? Who couldn't do that... and then you go to a class...

You say, "But I already know the gospel. So, I feel like I'm going to be bored this year."

- **Well, consider this:**
- First, vs. 7, we see this is a book written *to Christians*. "to the saints."
- The Apostle Peter in his letter said that the angels long to look into the gospel...
 - **Think about how hard it is to impress an angel.** I mean, they saw God create the world. Red Sea. Balaam's Donkey. They have to be like the ultimate teenagers.
 - **The thing they want to press into is the love of God** in the gospel.
- **The gospel you see, is like a well.** You get the best water not by widening the circumference of the well, but by doing deeper into it.
 - In Christopher Nolan's 2005 *Batman Begins* (the best of the 538 Batman adaptations our generation has had to endure), young Bruce Wayne falls down an old well that had been covered up for years. After his parents die, he discovers this vast, seemingly endless underground cave with all the secrets to become the Bat-man.

The point: **There was so much more to Wayne Manor than what could be found above ground.**

And to experience the full splendor of the Wayne family estate, one needed to go deeper.

This is how we must treat the gospel.

- **It's why Luther said**, "To progress in the Christian life is to begin again."
- **It's not new facts... but growing intimately familiar with these truths.**
- The way we grow in Christ is the same way we began in Christ
- The gospel is not just your initial burst of power, it's the power all the way through the Christian life.
- **It is why Paul says we experience the power of the gospel** **"...from faith to faith" (vs. 17)**
 - **How did you first experience the power of Christ?** You came to Jesus believing you couldn't save yourself and that God had to do it.
 - **Faith in Christ is what first connected you to God's power:** renewed faith in Christ is what keeps you connected to God's power.
 - You see, **whatever is broken** in your spiritual life, the first step of remedy is to believe the gospel—to believe that Jesus paid your sin debt in full, and you couldn't be any more acceptable to God than you are right now in Christ, and ultimately that it's his power and his power alone that can save you.
 - **When you believe that**, you experience the renewed power of the gospel
- **It's why we say:** *The gospel is not the diving board off of which we jump into the pool of Christianity (what most of us think; just the entry rite...); the gospel is the pool itself.*
 - Most of us think that we change spiritually by getting busy: Blue envelopes: They didn't intentionally teach this, but I just assumed like most people that being busy is what it meant to be spiritual. The godliest people were the busy-est. Those always striving to reach the next rung.

- The result was I was exhausted. The more I tried to force myself to obey Jesus, the less my heart seemed to cooperate.
- It's kind of like this: golf club
- So, that's **what a significant portion of this year** will be about:
 - Who God is and what his original plan was for us;
 - Where sin comes from and why it has such hold over our hearts
 - Why religion, education and technological advancement is useless to address it;
 - And then, what God has done and is doing about it—
 - And how that reshapes how we think about trials and transforms how we approach any and every relationship

Jesus said that this gospel was so powerful that not even the gates of hell would be able to resist its advance—either in your heart or in the world.

- Are you ready to experience this?
- Ladies and Gentlemen, buckle your seat belt and prepare for the ride of a lifetime!

So, let's make a few other observations about Paul's introduction

(¹⁶For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, first to the Jew, and also to the Greek.)

What is this gospel?

- **Well, the word in Greek literally means “good news.”**
 - **In the 1st century**, if an emperor won a great battle which secured peace and established his rule, he would send heralds with a “gospel” to declare victory, peace, and authority. **Announcing victory.**

- The gospel is the announcement that Jesus has overcome sin and death.
- **Not an invitation for you to come and help fight; but news about a battle that has already been won.**
- **“In it,” Paul said, “the righteousness of God is revealed...”**
 - What does Paul mean by “the righteousness of God?”
 - **Back in my backstage area I have a few things up on my wall:** Pictures of cities we have **planted churches** in; a picture of me **baptizing my daughter**, a gigantic picture of **Charles Spurgeon** with one of my favorite quotes of his over his face; an **actual signed picture of Nicolas Cage** from a scene in the Rock; and this **quote by Luther** where Luther said that he struggled for so long to understand Romans because he assumed that the “righteousness of God” was the standard by which God would judge him. See if you relate to this.

“I hated that word ‘righteousness of God,’ which I had been taught to understand is the righteousness with which God punishes the unrighteous sinner....”

Nevertheless, I beat importunately upon Paul at that verse, most ardently desiring to know what St. Paul (meant by this.) (This is what we're going to do this year!)

At last, by the mercy of God... I began to understand that the righteousness of God is righteousness with which the merciful God justifies us by faith. Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates.” – Martin Luther¹

Three terms I'd love for you to write down:

- **“Gift-righteousness”** Not righteousness you earn but righteousness given to you.

¹ Preface to the Latin Writings, 1545

- **Similar to this: “Alien-righteousness”** (Not “little green men righteousness” but righteousness outside of you.) **Imagine you’re sitting in physics class** and the teacher says your final exam, which is going to count for 80% of your final grade, is to write an essay on the 3 different kinds of isotopes and their electromagnetic properties. But you didn’t study, and you don’t have the foggiest idea what those words even mean. So you stare at your paper... after 3 hours your paper is still blank. You walk up to turn it in... But then. Something happens. A classmate that you have never met reaches out, grabs your quiz, marks out your name, puts their name, and writes your name on their quiz. You pass. They fail. You are not being awarded for what was inside of you, but for their knowledge. **What Jesus did. He took the exam of my life and wrote his name** on it and took his perfect life and wrote my name on it. **Gift-righteousness.**
- **“Simultaneously righteous and a sinner.”**

Many of us feel like Luther. The concept of God’s righteousness scares us because it feels to us a standard we’ll be judged by, or one that causes us to feel excluded or condemned.

- But when you come to see that it is a righteousness God gives by faith, everything changes.
 - **You see that God is the Father we’ve always searched for;** in him is the security and acceptance we’ve always craved.
 - **Your life becomes a grateful response,** not a fearful, duty-bound drudgery to try and stay on God’s good side.

“In it the righteousness of God is revealed...”

And btw, note that this gospel is not just about receiving forgiveness but obtaining righteousness

- John Stott it described like being a prisoner on death row who not only receives a pardon, the Judge hangs around this prisoner’s

neck the Congressional Medal of Honor and awarded him a graduate degree with honors from the most prestigious university. Everywhere this prisoner goes he is greeted and welcomed as a hero who has accomplished great things rather than a prisoner who has done shameful deeds.²)

- **People ask me why I know I’m going to heaven**—I have the righteousness of Christ. I am as sure of heaven as Jesus Christ. I resisted Satan to his face... **He wrote my name on it**
- **People ask me why I’m not discouraged over my struggles**—because in me I have in me the resurrection power of Christ. And one day I’m going to see him and in that moment, he tells me, I’m going to be like him! **He will present me faultless...**
- Lastly, it is **...to everyone who believes, first to the Jew, and also to the Greek.**
 - **Salvation was offered first to the Jews,** but then through them to the Gentiles.
 - **Jews had a hard time understanding how Gentiles** could be saved. They were so bad. Oppressors. Perverse sexual practices. No concept of family. Took up 2 spaces at the mall. Fished with dynamite.
 - **Paul says, “Them too.” To everyone.**
 - **“Everyone”** is a big word but it means that there is nobody here in any circumstances alienated from the power of God
 - **You say, “I am really messed up.”** Jesus created the world in 6 days out of nothing. He brought Jesus’ decaying body back from the dead. He can handle your mess.

No wonder Paul said he was eager! When you’ve experienced power like that, you have to be eager!

- **CO stories:** One of our college students at NYC got to know 3 guys on his campus whom he said “had no spiritual interest at all.” But they invited him to play on their FF team. He said it was kind of embarrassing because their first game the team got in a big fight

² John Stott, *The Message of Romans*, 64. Cf. Keller, 22.

and almost got suspended for the season. But they stuck it out and ended up winning the tournament. He gets them to CC and after my talk one of the guys becomes a Christian... he leads his friend to Christ by googling Romans 10:9 and then the next day they lead their 3rd friend to Christ.

- **When you experience power, you can't shut up.**
- **Spurgeon:** *(If you understand what Jesus has done for you) you will not be able to keep your good news to yourself. You will be whispering it into your child's ear; you will be telling it to your husband; you will be earnestly imparting it to your friend; without the charms of eloquence you will be more than eloquent; your heart will speak, and your eyes will flash as you talk of his sweet*
- **Hey,** maybe the reason you are not eager is you've never experienced it's power. **It's a theory, concept...** That's a good thing to admit right up front. Let's pray that's what you'll experience this year so that by the end you won't be able to keep your mouth shut.
- **BTW, for Paul "eager" came with a cost.**
 - Now **we think of going to Rome as a cool vacation.** I've only been 1x... unexpected 13 hour layover. I wanted to do 3 things: Colosseum; Catacombs; Olive Garden
 - Note: for Paul to come to Rome was costly. Read Acts. To get there he endured Beatings/Stonings/Prison/Shipwrecks/Snakebites.
 - But the gospel was worth it to him.
- **What's it worth to you?**

What this means for the church:

The gospel will always be paramount in our message and our mission

- **As your pastor, I always want to keep us focused on the gospel** because that is where the power is. DMLJ on preaching. I want to be relevant—and along the way we'll do some practical things. But learning uncle J.D.'s 10 steps to being a good husband won't

do you nearly as much good as **standing in wonder of the 10K steps** Jesus took toward you.

- **So, it will characterizes my messages... and it will always be what characterize our mission:**
 - **Nothing should get in the way:**
 - Not things like politics: If you have been around here, you know this: I don't want politics to ever get in the way. I have political convictions, but I have an agenda more important than them **and** if this church **becomes characterized by my political convictions**, we lose opportunities to preach the gospel. I often tell you, I might be wrong about global warming, or immigration, or the helpfulness or unhelpfulness of a single-payer approach to health care...
 - **Not good agendas. One of most jolting stories (John 6),** Jesus feeds the 5K. They want to make him king because he could solve world hunger. Jesus retreats because they have gotten off focus. What could be more important than solving world hunger? He came back preaching the gospel. Nothing, not even world hunger, is important than sharing the gospel.
 - **We don't want** to let our cultural preferences get in the way of the gospel. **We are not supposed to be a community** of one kind of person of only one ethnicity, from one cultural heritage, and from one socio-economic class. We were **supposed to reach all kinds of people in the Triangle**, which means **each of us has to be willing to go along with things** here that may not be our preferences.
 - **Because cultures worship differently:** S. Baptists, AA members—disappointed to see them quiet down; Pentecostals; Asian. Hispanic.
 - The **definition of a multi-cultural church** is that at some point you feel uncomfortable

- (Many people **say they want a multi-cultural church** but they really just want a multi-colored one)
- **We have to be willing to do this** for the sake of the gospel
- Let me tell you, bridging the gap between the cultures is hard work—but the gospel is worth it.
- **Rodney Stark**

- **Listening for the 3 “not” statements:** 1) Things are not going well 2) I was not prepared for that 3) I'm not from here, as cues to invite someone to church.³
- It's inviting one unbelieving person over for dinner once a month.

What it means for you – TWO things in 2019:

Paul's prayer for the Colossians was that the gospel **grow deeper in them and wider through them** in the world. That's my prayer for you.

WY1 forces us to ask the personal question, “Am I as **eager** to share the gospel and invite someone into this spiritual journey as Paul was?”

Ready for a great year? Let's pray

First, deeper in you:

ROMANS JOURNAL: Bring this with you every single week. Take notes in it. Write down questions in it to study later during your quiet time or to discuss in your small group. **Bring it to your small group** and let it guide your conversations; write down insights; jot down prayer requests. **Use the scripture memory verses** as part of your SG or team up with an accountability partner. Use this thing to **read, study, meditate, and collaborate** over the Word of God together.

Second, wider through you in the world:

I want to introduce something to you that we'll talk more about next week, but we're calling it **WHO'S YOUR ONE? (#WY1?)**

- Identify at least one person you can build a relationship with, share the gospel with...
- Along the way I'll give you ideas...
 - Simply asking them how you can pray for them.
 - Google how to share the gospel with them
 - Inviting them to church or your SG.

³ From Andy Stanley leadership podcast #52, “Keystone Habits.”

