

Romans 1:1-17 The Power of the Gospel

¹ Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, ² which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, ³ concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh ⁴ and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, ⁵ through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, ⁶ including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ, ⁷ To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Longing to Go to Rome

⁸ First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world. ⁹ For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you ¹⁰ always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you. ¹¹ For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you— ¹² that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine. ¹³ I do not want you to be unaware, brothers,^[a] that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some harvest among you as well as among the rest of the Gentiles. ¹⁴ I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians,^[a] both to the wise and to the foolish. ¹⁵ So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

The Righteous Shall Live by Faith

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,^[a] as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."^[b]

Introduction

Starting today, we're going to take letters written to the Romans and look at them in order each week. Even among the books of the New Testament, Romans is said to reveal the essence of the Gospel. Last week, as we celebrated the Pentecost and Grace City Church's 10th anniversary, we learned the Bible's "Most Important Message," that is Love God and your neighbor!

Brothers and sisters, what is the driving force behind loving God and our neighbors? It is the power of God that brings us salvation, the Gospel. So for some time to come, we will examine through the book of Romans, how the Gospel of Jesus Christ reveals and brings forth the power of God.

Romans 1:1-17

Let's look at how wonderful the power of the Gospel is through three points from today's Scriptures. First, the gospel is the power of grace that transforms our personal lives. Paul experienced a dramatic transformation and became an apostle, and the Romans became a people beloved by God. Secondly, at the time, the Gospel was spread rapidly, starting with the Romans and spreading throughout the entire Mediterranean region. As such, the Gospel reveals the marvelous transformative power of God that changes the world.

And third, the Gospel has the power of salvation which works through faith. Faith is like the engine that enables the power of God, which dwells in the Gospel, to do His works. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the power of God that **1) reshapes individual lives, 2) renews the world by being shared from person to person, and 3) works through faith.**

A brief epistle from the Book of Romans A

Now, this book, called Romans is a collection of letters written by the apostle Paul to the Christian community (church) in Rome, the capital of the Roman Empire. Paul is one of the most important Christian leaders who was active in the first century A.D.

He delivered the Good News of Jesus Christ to various cities in the Mediterranean area. You could say that he was a church planter who built churches in various regions. He also left many works or writings which became a part of the New Testament. All of them are letters addressed to churches and individuals.

The contents of the letters are wide-ranging. Some are theological in nature, explaining what the Gospel is. Others are on the practices of Christian life, as well as the problems that have arisen in the church community. He therefore depicts the grand scheme of salvation at work, which God has accomplished through Christ.

Ordinarily, you write the recipient's name immediately after writing the sender's name. But that's not the case here. He writes the sender's name Paul, and declares, as if driven by something, that the Gospel is good news about Jesus Christ, the very Son of God. He urges them to see that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was born as the son of David, and just as promised, was resurrected from the dead!

This particular section in Romans was written probably during Paul's third mission. It was definitely written in Corinth, the great Greek city, when Paul was staying in Greece for about three months. Biblicalians assume Romans was written give or take 1-2 years from 55 A.D., roughly twenty years after Jesus was crucified and resurrected.

1. The power of grace that transforms individuals

Since it is a letter, the name of the sender: Paul (verse 1) was written first, and then the recipient: Rome (verse 7). He refers to himself as, "Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God." This was Paul's self-introduction. Yet regarding the recipients, he describes them in a loving way, addressing them in verse 7: "To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be his holy people," making clear their identity in God.

That's not all. Again, Paul writes to explain who he is and who the Christians of Rome are in verses 5-6.

⁵ Through him we received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from [c] faith for his name's sake. ⁶ And you also are among those Gentiles who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.

Paul emphasizes therefore that through Jesus Christ, both he and the Romans all had their lives personally transformed. He calls himself a servant--in other words a slave. He was especially chosen to deliver the Good News of God and appointed an apostle on special duty. Yet he writes that he is

a "servant" to convey how entirely he belongs to Jesus, how entirely he is obedient to Christ, and how committed he is to serving for the Good News of God.

The word, "servant" (slave) may sound a bit anticlimactic. Nevertheless, a servant of Christ Jesus is one who used to be a slave of sin, but whose life was bought in exchange for the life of Christ Himself, so that he has been set free.

At the time, a slave was his master's possession. If you wanted to be free, you had to pay a reasonable ransom. Otherwise, you could never be free. Only if someone wealthy pays the ransom could the slave be set free. Such people were called liberated slaves, and they were even able to obtain Roman citizenship thereafter.

Liberated slaves who were freed from slavery were extremely happy and took on the surname of the patron who paid their ransom. In addition, as a gesture of gratitude, they worked hard to uphold the patron's honor and so that the patron's work became widely known in society. They worked for the praise of the patron who had given them freedom.

In exactly the same way, Paul was set free from the bondage of sin by Christ Jesus, who had paid Paul's ransom by sacrificing His own life. Paul therefore thanks Christ in all things, and willingly does his duty for the honor and the service of Jesus, just as a liberated slave would for his patron. He used all of himself to live with a new mission for Christ. The Romans were also transformed to take on a new identity as those who are loved by God. The Gospel therefore is the very transformative power of grace that changes individual lives.

Brothers and sisters, the Gospel of Jesus Christ will transform our lives too so that we too live for Jesus. So then what is our new mission, our new vision, as liberated slaves of Christ? It is that we make clear the works of Jesus, so that His honor and glory be revealed.

2. How the Gospel transforms the world

Despite that only 20 years had passed since the death and resurrection of Jesus, the Gospel had already been spread throughout Rome, the capital of the Roman Empire. The Roman church had already been planted. Yet Paul had not yet been to Rome to share the Gospel. There is no evidence that other apostles engaged in missionary work in earnest either.

That is to say, the Gospel wasn't spread in Rome by means of the effort of apostles, missionaries or the like. Then who was the first to spread the Gospel to the Romans? They were probably not professionally trained people. They were probably ordinary Christians who weren't even well-known.

On the day of the Pentecost, it is written that the Romans also stayed in Jerusalem (Acts 2:10). Among them, there were those who had heard Peter's sermon, witnessed the works of the Holy Spirit, and believed Jesus Christ was their Savior. When they returned to Rome, they likely shared with their families, friends, and coworkers what they had seen and heard about regarding the Gospel of Jesus.

Even those who visited Jerusalem for business or academic purposes would have heard the Gospel. People who held government-related jobs and military officers, who became Christians upon hearing the Gospel in places other than Rome would have returned to Rome too and shared with

each other about Jesus Christ. Christians from Palestine and Asia Minor also went to Rome for business, and while working, talked about Jesus to their new business affiliates. They shared their testimonies on how they became Christians.

Thus, not only Jews but also Gentiles (Romans, Greeks, Asians, Africans...), who constituted the melting pot of races, came to believe in Jesus. Isn't it an exciting story? In Rome, the center of the world, the Good News of Jesus was beginning to be heard. Gospel movements were beginning to occur. Paul knew of this and wrote in verse 8.

1: 8 First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world.

"All over the world" may sound exaggerated, but Paul wrote this considering the importance of Rome. In fact, the Good News was being spread from Jerusalem in all directions: North, South, East, and West. This is why Paul so wanted to go to Rome to spread the Good News. He wanted to encourage the Roman Christians, as well as being encouraged by them, and he was planning to go as far as to eastern Espania, or Spain.

15: 23 But now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions, and since I have been longing for many years to visit you, 24 I plan to do so when I go to Spain. I hope to see you while passing through and to have you assist me on my journey there, after I have enjoyed your company for a while.

Brothers and sisters, the Good News is spread to all peoples of all the countries of the world, whereby our world will be transformed into one that is Godly. Do you believe in what God is trying to achieve through the Gospel of Jesus Christ? What God is planning (including believing in Jesus and going to heaven) is far bigger and greater than our imaginations.

Through the Gospel of Jesus' sacrificial death and resurrection, God seeks to re-create the darkness of our sins and evil into a beautiful world full of love and righteousness; This is the very reason why Grace City started in Tokyo 10 years ago! We may be but a small flock, but the works of God start with the transformation on the individual level.

It affects relationships and the way people work together, and the gospel is further shared and spread. The works of the living God are made manifest through your life and community. In this way, the world is being transformed into one that is Godly through the power of the Gospel.

3. God's power that works through faith.

This is what the Bible says about the power of God that works through faith. Verses 16-17:

1: 16 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. 17 For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."

These verses reveal the unified theme that runs through the entire book of Romans, that is the power of God that works through the Gospel. This very power of God "brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.

When you hear of the power of God, what comes to mind? Perhaps business people think of the power of money. Or in the world of democratic politics, the power of numbers may be envisioned because it is ruled by the principle of majority. Perhaps people think that "military power" is necessary in order to suppress war and conflicts and achieve a peaceful balance. Meanwhile, some may think the power of education is most important for children and young people. And as long as these things are used correctly, they will have their respective positive effects. They will mobilize people, bring policies into effect, bring peace and nurture good personalities.

It is said that when the Jews heard of the power of God, they conjured up miracles and mysterious signs. Throughout the Gospels, many Jews asked Jesus for a sign. The Greeks, on the other hand, thought that wisdom and special knowledge were the only things that could save them. Each of them had their own definition of "power" and requests based on those definitions .

Brothers and sisters, the Gospel is the power of God. Wherever the Good News is spread and believed, it is none other than the living God at work. God's power is the amazing creative power that created us in Genesis Chapter 1, and He in fact, did so with words alone.

The Gospel is news that tells the story of God's wonderful salvation through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ on the cross. When we believe in the Gospel, our hearts are renewed. Our lives, attitudes and behaviors also change.

We all believed after hearing the news of the spread of the coronavirus. Then everyone became worried and concerned. And in order to prevent infection, we wore masks, refrained from going out, kept social distance, and changed our ways of working. Church services were conducted online as we offered prayers online and switched over to having community groups via Zoom. Social life has changed, and people are now calling it the "new normal."

The Gospel (the good news) is called the *Eugengerion* in Greek, which originally means good news that the king used to report victory in war, or good news to inform the whole country of a new king's accession. Victory in war makes the country prosperous, just as when a new king is a good, wise and powerful king, his people can look forward to better lives and social circumstances.

Likewise, believing in the Good News of Jesus Christ, we will be able to live with gratitude and joy, courage and humility, as those loved by God. Being forgiven of our sins and reconciling with God, we know that we could ask anything, pray and trust in God as we walk with Him. We gain a healthy confidence as we develop new human relationships based on love and truth. This is why Jesus commanded us to love our enemies, and pray for those who persecute us.

We gain the patience to accept difficulties and sadness, so we can console and encourage people around us. We testify the truth, even in the midst of lies and falsehood. We take in the injured and give our time and money to those in need. And in knowing that God will soon complete His works in this

world, we can continue walking, upholding the values of His Kingdom to come.

God's power, which can transform individual lives as well as changing the world, is made manifest through the gospel. And as such, we should spread this good news to all parts of the world and not "be ashamed of the Gospel." Let us walk according to the Good News, empowered by the Holy Spirit.