

Rom 1 7-17
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Last week we looked at Paul's introduction of himself at the start of the letter to the Romans.

“Paul a servant of Christ Jesus,
called to be an apostle
and set apart for the gospel of God”
And he goes on to tell us many things about the gospel –
Who the gospel comes from – God;
Where the promise of the gospel can be found –
in the Old Testament Scriptures;
Who the gospel message is about – Jesus;
The number one reason God wants the gospel preached –
so the name of Jesus will be glorified;
Who is the gospel for – everyone;
What happens in people's lives when they accept the gospel –
the obedience that comes through faith.

This week Paul addresses the Roman Christians,
and no surprises for guessing what he wants to talk with them about.
The gospel.

But this week instead of explaining things to them about the gospel,
he's telling them about his attitude to the gospel.

Paul is a whole hearted servant of the gospel.

But that's not where he begins.

He begins by addressing the Christians in Rome.

“To all in Rome who are loved by God
and called to be his holy people.”

In older versions, instead of 'holy people' it said 'saints'.

But it means Christians.

People who've been made holy by the blood of Jesus.

Doesn't mean they live perfect lives,

but in God's sight they are holy because Jesus died for them.

That's who this letter is to.

The Christians in Rome.

Those who are loved by God and called to be God's holy people.
As it says in previous verse,
those who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.

Why does Paul call the Christian folk in Rome,
“those who are loved by God”?

Does it mean that God doesn't love the other people in Rome?

Well yes he does.

God loves every person that he has made.

But he doesn't love them all in the same way.

Do I love all the children who are coming along to our youth group?

Yes I do.

I love them in that I would earnestly seek their welfare.

If they had a drama at school,

and they wanted someone to come

and help them talk with their parents about it,

I'd love to be able to help them.

I love them in that I want to see them in the kingdom of God.

I want to see them embrace the gospel.

I want to see them saved by the blood of Jesus.

But will I take them in to a clarinet exam

and play the accompaniment to their pieces?

No I won't.

If they want to do that, their own parents need to organise it.

It's an expression of love that I'm willing to offer to my own children,
that I'm not willing to offer to the kids in the youth group.

God is like that,

in that he doesn't love all people the same way.

Now I understand that for many folk,

that is an uncomfortable thought.

God loves some people in a different way to how he loves others –
but it's true.

Everyone who lived in Rome God loved as creator.

He made a beautiful world for them to live in.

He sent the rain to water their crops.
He gave them friends and family to love.
That is God's general love for every person.
But some people in Rome God loved in special way.
He loved them not only as creator but as Saviour.
Some people in Rome, God called to be his holy people.
Some people in Rome, God called to belong to Jesus Christ.
Some people in Rome, God chose to forgive their sins.
Some people in Rome, God adopted as his children.
Some people in Rome, God chose to make them like Jesus.
Some people in Rome, God sent his Holy Spirit to live inside of them.

And it's not just some people in Rome nearly 2000 years ago.
If you're a Christian,
God has loved you in a special way.
That's not to say that he doesn't love other people.
He does.
But he has loved you in a special way.
He's done a whole pile of things for you,
that he hasn't done for everyone else.
That's a privilege.
You have been loved.
You are called to be one of God's holy people.

And these Christians in Rome were not just loved by God.
That's a magnificent thing.
But they were also loved by Paul the apostle.
Now Paul was a man who hadn't been to Rome,
he hadn't visited the church there.
Most likely,
he had only met a smattering of the people in the church there.
And yet he loved these Roman Christians.
In verse 8, he thanks God for them.
In verses 9-10, he constantly remembers them in his prayers at all times.
And in verse 10, he longs to be able to visit them.

Why does Paul love a group of people,
most of whom he hasn't met?
He loves them because they are bringing glory to God.
He loves them
because they have responded to the preaching of the gospel,
and he serves God with his whole heart by preaching the gospel.
It's a natural thing isn't it?
If you devote your life to serving a particular cause,
then you love people who join your cause.

I'm sure you can imagine someone
who is passionate about climate change.
They spend their life campaigning for it.
Then when they hear of someone else in another country
who is like minded,
their heart goes out to them.
They love them even though they have not met them.
That's what it is like for Paul with the Roman Christians.

Now when you love someone and you live in a different place,
you really want to see them.
That too is only natural.
But Paul is a very driven man.
He is totally devoted to the preaching of the gospel.
He doesn't want to visit the Roman Christians
merely because that would be a very happy experience for him.
He wants to visit them for two reasons:
In verse 11,
he wants to visit them to give them a spiritual gift to make them strong.
and in verse 13,
he wants to visit them so that he can have a harvest among them.
What sort of spiritual gift does he want to give them?
He wants to build up their faith somehow,
so that they will be stronger, better followers of Jesus.
What sort of harvest does he want to have among them?

He wants to preach the gospel,
so that more people will come to faith,
so that Jesus will be even more glorified.
That's why he wanted to visit them.

That's very bold!

I would be a little concerned if I said something like that,
that the church that I was planning to visit,
might think,

“Oh, he's not interested in us at all.

He's just interested in his cause.

I would be worried

that they actually might not want me to come and visit.

But Paul is wearing his commitment to the gospel on his sleeve.

He's absolutely transparent with them.

I want to come and visit you,

so I can encourage your faith and evangelise your friends.

That's it in a nutshell.

But you see for Paul to be passionate about the gospel
was not about putting notches on a bed post or something like that.

He's not reducing the people he's dealing with
to mere pawns in his cause.

He's loving them.

What is the best way to love someone who is not converted?

Surely it must be to preach the gospel to them.

There can't be anything more loving than that.

The gospel is good news.

It offers the hearer a chance to embrace God's offer of mercy.

It offers the hearer a chance to become a child of God.

It offers the hearer a chance to be transformed
to become like Jesus Christ.

What's the best way to love someone who is a believer?

Surely it must be to strengthen their faith.

If someone is a believer,

their passion is for Jesus.

If you are able to help them to love him better –
that's a great gift.

The cause of the gospel is a cause that's about loving people.

Paul loves people,

that's why he wants to preach the gospel to them.

He's an enthusiast for the gospel of Jesus Christ.

As he continues,

he tells the Romans three more things about his attitude to the gospel.

He's obligated to preach the gospel (verse 14).

He's eager to preach the gospel (verse 15).

He's not ashamed of the gospel (verse 16).

Paul is obligated to preach the gospel.

If I tell you,

“I've got a present for Mr Jones

but I can't take it to him.

Could you please take it for me?”

And you accept the present,

then you have an obligation to deliver that present.

You can't keep the present for yourself.

It's an obligation.

You have to pass it on.

God has told the apostle Paul.

I have a gospel that is for all the nations.

Can you please take it to the nations for me?

Paul has accepted the gospel.

But it's not just for him.

He has to pass it on.

He has an obligation.

He's in possession of something that is not just for him.

Paul's attitude to the gospel is somewhat of a contrast to ours.

He feels an obligation to pass on the gospel.
Often we feel that passing on the gospel is an optional extra.
We think,
“I’m a Christian and that obliges me to keep the 10 commandments,
or to do unto others as I would have them to do unto me,
but proclaiming the gospel,
that’s for ministers and missionaries.
I have no obligation to do that,
it’s an optional extra.”

But in fact,
if we don’t pass on the gospel message,
we are in fact holding onto something which belongs to someone else.
God intended that the gospel message should be passed on.
The gospel is for the nations,
not for us to keep to our selves.
We have an obligation.

Well Paul didn’t only feel an obligation,
he also felt an eagerness.
It’s easy to feel an obligation and then do something out of duty.
But Paul was eager to preach the gospel in Rome.
He was like a child wanting to open a Christmas stocking.
He just couldn’t wait.
If we are honest,
we will admit that far from being eager,
we are often reluctant to preach the gospel message.
Why is that?
Someone might say,
our situation is very different today.
We live in a society where there are all sorts of different faiths out there.
But while our situation is different in Australia from 100 years ago,
our situation now is more like the one Paul found himself in.
The Roman Empire was a melting pot of hundreds of different religions.
Why are we reluctant while Paul was eager?

Someone might say,
 People aren't very receptive today.
 They just don't want to talk about faith issues.
 I'm not convinced that is entirely true.
 In my experience some people are happy to talk about faith issues
 and some are uncomfortable.
 But in any case,
 were the people of Paul's day any more receptive?
 Paul was arrested, imprisoned, beaten and stoned,
 all for preaching the gospel.
 It's not that the people of his day were more receptive.
 So why are we reluctant to preach the gospel while Paul is eager?
 I'm convinced that the heart of the matter lies in the next verse.
 "I am not ashamed of the gospel,
 because it is the power of God
 for the salvation of everyone who believes:"
 Paul realises the gospel is the power of God for salvation.
 We forget that the gospel is the power of God for salvation.
 We substitute all sorts of other things for the gospel of God.
 And then we get frustrated when people don't respond –
 and we say,
 "Why won't people become Christians any more?"
 What sort of things do we substitute for the gospel?
 The first would be a worship experience.
 It doesn't matter whether you like praising God to JS Bach or Hillsong,
 whether you like chaotic spontaneity or reverent formality
 in your service style,
 the experience is not the gospel.
 It's not the power of God which saves.
 It's great to enjoy praising God,
 but the gospel message is the power of God that saves.
 The second thing we substitute for the gospel
 would be fun, friendship and community.
 If people join in with us and see what a good time we have together
 then they will be drawn to join us.

It doesn't matter whether your idea of a good time
is a church 4 wheel drive trip,
taking the youth group roller skating,
singing in a choir together,
or having a progressive dinner.

They're all fun things.

They helpfully build relationships.

But people won't be converted by them.

It's the gospel.

The message that Jesus has died on the cross for the sins of the world,
he has risen to life to defeat death,
and he calls people everywhere to become his followers and have
eternal life.

That is the message that God uses to change hearts.

The gospel is the power of God,

for the salvation of everyone who believes.

Ok we're getting to the tricky bit now.

There are going to be some of these as we work through Romans.

14 years ago I preached this passage and I just left the last verse out.

This time I'm going to be braver.

Paul has said that he's eager to preach to the gospel in Rome.

And he's said the reason he's eager to preach the gospel

is because he's not ashamed of the gospel.

It's the power of God for salvation,

why would he be ashamed of it?

That's verse 16.

Now verse 17.

Why is the gospel the power of God for salvation?

Here's what he says.

1:17 "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'."

Ok we're going to break that up into 3 bits.

1. "In the gospel, the righteousness of God is revealed."

What does that mean?

Option 1.

It could be talking about God's character.

When we look at Rom 3,

we will see that the gospel shows God as both just and merciful.

It's his righteous character

that enables him to be just and merciful at the same time.

Option 2. It could be talking about God's actions.

God has made promises to come and save his people.

In the gospel we see God fulfilling those promises.

We see his righteousness because he's doing the right thing.

Option 3. The righteousness of God could mean

the righteousness from God.

Then it would be the righteousness he gives to the Christian.

You and I are right in God's sight.

Jesus won our righteousness on the cross.

And that is revealed in the gospel.

Well I don't want to choose.

They are all good options.

So I'll have one with the lot.

In the gospel,

God's righteous character, his justice and mercy are revealed.

In the gospel,

we see God fulfilling the promises he's made to save us.

In the gospel,

the right standing Christian people have in God's sight is revealed.

All of the above.

2. The second part of the verse.

"A righteousness that is by faith from first to last."

OK there's a translation issue here,

but we are just going to run with the NIV.

However you think about that righteousness of God,

it is accessed by the Christian by faith.

Indeed we will see in Romans 4 that it was always accessed by faith, even by God's people in the OT.

They didn't become righteous by following the Law but by trusting in God's promises.

That means if you want to be righteous in God's sight, you can't do that by hitting your Christian Key Performance Indicators. Half an hour of prayer and Bible reading followed by a day speaking nicely to everyone you come across won't do it for you.

You will have to rely on Jesus to do it for you.

3. The third part of the verse.

"The righteous will live by faith."

There's a translation issue here too.

And this time we can't skip it.

Word order is flexible in Greek.

So you could say "The righteous will live by faith."

Or you could say, "The righteous by faith will live."

We need to go with the second option.

Paul's concern is not how righteous people are going to live.

His concern is how sinful people are going to become righteous.

We become righteous by faith.

And then on account of our faith,

we live instead of dying.

Now at this point,

I would have some sympathy with you

if you wished you had turned up fourteen years ago

when I left the last verse out.

Let's try to make it simple.

Why is the gospel the power of God for salvation?

Because by faith, God makes people righteous.

You must put your trust in Jesus.

There is no alternative path.

Let us pray that we might feel our obligation to share the gospel.

Let us pray that we might be eager to share gospel.
Let us pray that we might not be ashamed of the gospel.
Let us pray that the gospel we proclaim would always be by faith.