

September 4, 2016 by Steve Brandon



Eager to Preach the Gospel

Romans

This morning we begin our exposition of the wonderful book of Romans. Indeed, this is a wonderful book. Some have called it the "Magnum Opus" of all of Paul's letters. That is, the best of Paul's writings. It is the longest. And it could easily be argued that it is the best.

Indeed, it is the most theological of all of Paul's letters. The truths of Romans are grand. Nearly every crucial doctrine of Christianity is addressed. Paul addresses the awful depths of our sin (chapters 1-3). He presents the glorious wonders of our salvation (chapter 3). He details how we are justified by faith and can have peace with God (chapter 4). He describes the imputation of Christ's righteousness to us (chapter 5). He exhorts us to live righteously (chapter 6). He counsels us in our battle against sin (chapter 7). He comforts us in the secure love of Christ (chapter 8). He explains the sovereignty of God (chapter 9). He urges the priority of missions efforts (chapter 10). He talks of the future of Israel (chapter 11).

But, far from a mere doctrinal letter, the book of Romans is eminently practical. In the second half of the book, Paul describes how those in the church should act toward one another (chapter 12). He tells of how those in the church should act toward outsiders (chapter 13). He pushes for the unity of the church through accepting one another (chapter 14).

Such grand themes have caused many to look at Paul's letter to the Romans as a sort of systematic theology, as if Paul's purpose in the letter is to present an organized doctrinal thesis on Christianity. But I think that it's an error to see it this way. See it as a systematic theology which would lead us into a mere study of theology, rather than grasping Paul's heart in the letter.

See, Paul isn't giving us a theology lesson in Romans. Rather, he is giving us a missionary appeal for support. Let me show you what I mean.

Turn with me to chapter 15. My message this morning is going to be an overview of the book. And I think that the best place to begin is in chapter 15. Because, here is where he lays out his major purpose in writing. I want to begin reading in verse 15. It's here that he turns his attention to those in Rome. He writes, ...

Romans 15:15-16

But on some points I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by God to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

It's right here that you see Paul's commission from God to bring the gospel to the Gentiles. This came the very first day of his conversion on the road to Damascus. He was blinded by a light and led into the city (Acts 9:4, 9), where he began to pray (Acts 9:12). While in the city, the Lord appeared to a disciple at Damascus named Ananias (Acts 9:10). The Lord told Ananias that Paul "is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel" (Acts 9:15). And this was communicated to Paul.

And this is what Paul did! Paul was a missionary who carried the name of Jesus to the Gentiles. He carried the name of Jesus to the Jews. He stood before kings and proclaimed the gospel to them.

After Paul was commissioned he spend a decade with the Lord, learning about the Christian faith. And then, His missionary career began. It began with a prayer meeting in Antioch with the leaders of the church. And the Holy Spirit spoke to those who were fasting and praying. He said, ...

Acts 13:2

"Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."

And so, Barnabas and Saul set out to sea, heading west. You can read about their journey in Acts 13 and 14. He sailed to Cyprus, I to Perga in Pamphylia, then travelled on land to Pisidian Antioch. He then went to Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe, where he was stoned and left for dead. He then went from Derbe, back to Lystra, and back to Iconium.

Acts 14:22-23

encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.

In Acts 14:23, we read about the appointment of elders in every city. Then, Paul and Barnabas return by sea to the church in Antioch and "declared all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles" (Acts 14:27). That was Paul's first missionary journey.

After some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us return and visit the brothers in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are" (Acts 15:36). There was a dispute between Paul and Barnabas.

So, Paul takes Silas to the cities. This time, he began his journey northward, eventually coming to Derbe, Lystra (where he picks up Timothy), and Iconium. He continues on westward, through Phrygia and Galatia. The Holy Spirit forbid them from speaking the word in Asia (south). The Spirit of Jesus prevented them from going into Bithynia (north). He passes by Mysia and ends up at Troas on the coast, where he receives a vision to come to Macedonia (Acts 16:9).

So, he sets sail and lands at Samothrace (an Island). Then, he arrives at Neapolis and journeys on to Philippi, where he started a church. He travelled to Amphipolis, Apollonia, and Thessalonica (where he began another church). From there, he went to Berea, Athens, Corinth (where he spent 18 months) (Acts 18:11), and Ephesus. Finally, he travelled to Caesarea, Jerusalem, and ended in Antioch (Acts 19:23). That was his second missionary journey.

God was using him mightily! He was planting churches. He was seeing people come to Christ! You just can't keep Paul down. He left again for his third missionary journey. He was a missionary at heart, bringing the gospel to the Gentiles.

He again travels across Asia Minor through the regions of Galatia and Phrygia, "strengthening all the disciples" (Acts 18:23). And he comes to Ephesus where he remains for three years. And it is here that we read, ...

Acts 19:21

Paul resolved in the Spirit to pass through Macedonia and Achaia and go to Jerusalem, saying, "After I have been there, I must also see Rome."

And so, he travels through Macedonia, and he arrives in Corinth. It is probably here in Corinth that he pens his letter to the Romans. He writes, ...

Romans 15:17-21

In Christ Jesus, then, I have reason to be proud of my work for God. For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience—by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God—so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ; and thus I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else's foundation, but as it is written, "Those who have never been told of him will see, and those who have never heard will understand."

And this is why he wants to come to Rome! He wants to preach the gospel where Christ hasn't yet been named. Christ has been preached in the east, all around Jerusalem and Galatia and Macedonia, but not so much in the west. And here you can see Paul's heart to reach out to others with the gospel; those who have never heard before.

Now, it's not that they hadn't heard the gospel in Rome. Indeed, they had. There was a church there, which had probably been started by some folks who had come to Jerusalem during the days of Pentecost. It says in Acts 2:10 that some had visited Jerusalem from Rome. These people had heard the gospel in Jerusalem, and brought it back to Rome where a church was started. This was the church to which Paul was writing.

But, from Paul's perspective, there was much more opportunity for the gospel around Rome. And so, he longed to be there.

This is what's so exciting about my trips to Nepal and India. I get to go to places where the gospel hasn't really penetrated. Oh, to be sure, the gospel is there. But, the church is in its infancy. For instance, when Yvonne and I went in May to Arunachal, we went to the Bagra village where there is enough Christian presence to have a church, but it is still in its infancy. They just received their translation of the New Testament in 2008 into Galo. And certainly, there are some missionaries there working on the translation of the Old Testament!

But there are whole villages where not a single person is a Christian! Currently, people there are engaged in the worship of the sun! And they need to hear the gospel.

There are some faithful workers there in Arunachal, working hard to bring the gospel to these people. They are praying for them. They are visiting them. They are preaching to them. They are waiting for the Lord to open their hearts to the things of Christ.

It is so different than here in America, where churches are on every corner and where Christianity has been in our country since its founding. But not so in India. And not so in Rome. But, the church there was weak and there was much opportunity for the gospel.

But, Paul's gaze wasn't merely upon Rome. His gaze was beyond Rome. Let's continue reading in Romans 15, ...

Romans 15:22-29

This is the reason why I have so often been hindered from coming to you. But now, since I no longer have any room for work in these regions, and since I have longed for many years to come to you, I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain, and to be helped on my journey there by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a while. At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem bringing aid to the saints. For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem. For they were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the

Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material blessings. When therefore I have completed this and have delivered to them what has been collected, I will leave for Spain by way of you. I know that when I come to you I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ.

It is here that we see Paul's ultimate gaze: Spain. The gospel hadn't yet gone to Spain yet. In Spain, there was no church, no converts, no contacts. People in the darkness who need to hear the message that the light has dawned (Matthew 4:16).

Here's Paul's plan. He has a gift from the churches in Macedonia and Achaia (where he had just been), to help with some famine relief efforts in Jerusalem. He needs to go back and deliver it to the saints in Jerusalem. And then, he's heading west.

And so, we see Paul's third missionary journey come to an end as he travels back to Jerusalem. Returning back through Macedonia, setting sail from Philippi (Acts 20:6), he came to Troas, where he spent seven days (Acts 20:6), Wanting to arrive in Jerusalem for Pentecost, he briefly stops in Miletus and has his final farewell to the Ephesian elders who had come to the coast to visit him (Acts 20:17). And he made it to Jerusalem in time for Pentecost, a strategic time of the year. Paul's plan was to regroup and head west to Spain, through Rome.

Now, in God's providence, Paul made it to Rome. But, not how he had expected. He came as a prisoner. His crime? Preaching the gospel! He was arrested in the temple under false charges (Acts 21). For his own safety, they transported him to Caesarea, where Paul remained imprisoned for several years. Here, he was able to preach to a couple governors, who had jurisdiction over Israel: Felix (Acts 23) and Festus (Acts 24). He was even able to address King Agrippa (Acts 26).

But, when the rulers wanted to return him to Jerusalem for trial, Paul appealed to Caesar, knowing that he stood no chance in Jerusalem. And so, he was sent by ship to Rome, where he was to stand trial. His trip was adventurous, as they had to dodge a storm. They even shipwrecked in Malta. But, eventually, Paul made it to Rome, as a prisoner for preaching the gospel.

And that's where the book of Acts ends. It ends with Paul in Rome. He's under house arrest, ...

Acts 28:31
proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.

Now, we don't know if he ever made it to Spain or not. There is no evidence that he did. My guess is that he didn't. But, he wanted to. Why? Because he had this burning passion to preach Christ, where Christ had never been named before!

I tell you all of that for this. You won't understand Romans unless you understand Paul's passion to preach the gospel. Paul's letter to the Romans is a missionary support letter. He wanted the church in Rome to help him in his efforts to preach to bring the gospel to Spain. Look back again at Romans 15.

Romans 15:24
I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain, and to be helped on my journey there by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a while.

When Paul says that he wants the church in Rome to "help [him] on [his] way." That's a polite way of asking for money, for funds to help him bring the gospel to Spain.

The book of Romans is not unlike the sorts of letters that I receive almost every week. Yvonne and I have many missionary friends (some of whom we support financially) who regularly send us letters (or emails). These letters update us on their ministry, telling us of their vision for the future, sharing particular prayer requests, and giving opportunity to send finances their way to help them in the work. These letters are always a joy, as I read them and hear of God's working in foreign lands.

And then, there are missionaries who are new to us, who want our support. And hardly a week goes by that I don't hear from someone new going out to the mission field, looking for support. For instance, here's an email that I just received this past week. It reads in part, ...

Dear Church Leader,

I am writing to you, to introduce myself and humbly ask that you consider partnering with me in my work of training national pastors in service of the global church.

I have recently been appointed as an International Trainer with an organization called Training Leaders International (TLI). Our family of five will soon be relocating to Minneapolis where TLI is headquartered. From there I will be leading 5-6 international teaching trips each year to provide theological education to pastors in underserved regions of the world where they have little-to-no access to such teaching.

The need is great. Local pastors and church leaders are eager to learn. Expat missionaries and training schools are requesting our help. Just this month I traveled to ... Haiti where we were able to teach 20 local leaders two courses—the Doctrine of God and Biblical Theology. They were thrilled at the opportunity to have two weeks of focused study on these important subjects. ...

In 2008, my wife and I then took our three children to Turkey where we served for the last seven years with the International Mission Board. While there, we ministered to Turkish and Kurdish Muslims doing evangelism and pioneer

church planting. Due to some medical and educational issues, our family returned stateside this spring, but our hearts are still very much overseas. So we are excited by the opportunity to continue international ministry through TLI.

Because our previous work was fully funded through our denomination, we are now starting from scratch in the effort to raise support. I am writing to ask that your church consider supporting us for the sake of Christ's name among the nations. If you are interested, I would be happy to set up a time for a call or video conference. I am also planning a trip to northern Illinois in mid-September, so that might provide a great opportunity to meet with you, or another church representative, in person.

Thank you for your consideration, and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Grace and peace,

I don't know this man, but I know his brother. I think he's worthy of support, as are dozens of other missionaries that I know about and that you might know about. And it's difficult to know how to give, because the need is so great. And our resources can only go so far.

Regarding missionary support, I often feel like a kid in a candy store who has been given a dollar. He has to figure out how to spend the dollar. The opportunities to purchase candy are endless. There are Snickers and Kit Kats and Almond Joys. There are M&M's and skittles and bottle caps. There are mild duds and sweet-n-sours and licorice. There are Jawbreakers and Jolly Ranchers and Cadbury Eggs and candy corn and Andes Mints and Bazooka Bubble Gum and gumdrops and Gummi bears and dum dums and smarties and everlasting gobstoppers!

All of these options look good. All of these options are tasty. But I'm a kid, and I only have a dollar. I have to decide how I'm going to spend the dollar.

So it is with missions. The need is great, far beyond our ability to support it all. But, with a heart to give and some means at our disposal, we can support some missionaries. And the book of Romans is a missionary support letter.

Paul is seeking support from those in Rome to help him on his journey to Spain. I don't think that Paul's support was simply confined to financial support. When he said (in verse 24), "I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain, and to be helped on my journey there by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a while" (Romans 15:24), Paul is asking for any kind of help. He is asking for prayer, finances, partners to go with him, support with resources - perhaps someone owned a boat or helped him with clothes or books. He is asking for contacts in Spain, help with the language, help with travel advice, and flat out encouragement. All of these ways of help would have been received gladly by the apostle Paul.

And a great application to us will be next Sunday morning as Bob Clinton comes to be with us along with some faithful laborers from India, Joel and Tara. We have helped Bob Clinton and First Love financially over the years, contributing to the purchase of land and construction of Children's Homes and church buildings, to supporting children in these homes, supporting with earthquake relief in Nepal, and supporting Bob personally.

We have prayed often for First Love and their work in prayer meeting and from this pulpit. Some of us have traveled to be with them. We have sought to encourage them in the work.

Well, they will be with us next week, sharing the work that they are doing in India and Nepal. We will have a great opportunity to "help them on their way." And so, I encourage you, when they come to "help them on their way."

In the book of Romans, Paul was seeking help because of his passion for the gospel. The reason why I went through Paul's missionary journeys was to show you his heart to preach the gospel. But, it's not only from the book of acts that we get Paul's passion. It also comes from the text of Romans itself. Turn back to Romans, chapter 1.

Romans 1:13-15

I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, 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. I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

From everything that we know of the apostle Paul, this is entirely consistent. You can see it in his life. You can read it in his words. And I think that's the primary reason why Paul expounds his theology to the Romans. He says, "Here's the gospel that I preach. Here's the gospel that I am eager to preach. Here's the gospel that I'm bringing to Spain. Will you help me in the work?"

Do you know this gospel? Are you eager to preach this gospel?

I remember hearing a man speak about a conversation that he had with a pastor. This man had asked how the church was doing. The pastor said, "It's doing great. I just finished preaching through Romans." And the man replied, "How did it change your church's evangelistic efforts?" The pastor was a bit confused. This man explained how missions and evangelism is at the heart the book of Romans and how any proper exposition of the book should propel the church in a zeal for the gospel. This pastor's face sunk. Because he didn't preach along these lines. He was too concerned with a focus on the wonderful doctrines that he missed the heart of the apostle Paul.

This is my heart and my hope as we work our way through Romans: That it would stir our hearts for the gospel. That we would be eager to preach the gospel. That we would be eager to speak with our friends. That we would be eager to speak with our neighbors. That we would be eager to speak with our relative.

And by God's grace, I'll be able to keep the theme alive. And I'm also praying for God to stir my own heart toward evangelism, towards being bold to speak with others about Christ. I'm praying that we might finish with the book of Romans, and that we might be stirred to evangelism in greater ways than ever before.

Here's my theme for preaching through the book of Romans: "Eager to Preach the Gospel." It comes straight from verse 15. It talks about Paul's passion to preach the gospel. It begs the question to all of us, "Are you eager to preach the gospel?" Perhaps you are here this morning and you say, "I don't even know what the gospel is?"

Let me take you through "The Romans Road," simply pulling verses from Romans that bring us to the essence of the gospel. If you are wanting to be eager to preach the gospel, these verses might be helpful for you to memorize.

Romans 1:16

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.

Romans 1:18

The wrath of God is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.

Romans 3:10

None is righteous, no not one.

Romans 3:23

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

Romans 5:8

But God demonstrates his own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

Romans 6:23

The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus, our Lord

Romans 8:1

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Romans 10:9

if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be save.

Romans 12:1-2

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. 2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

May God make us eager to preach the gospel.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on September 4, 2016 by Steve Brandon.

For more information see www.rvbc.cc.
