

September 25, 2016 by Steve Brandon



Loving the Romans

Romans 1:8-15

- 1. Thankful to God (verse 8)**
- 2. Wanting to Come (verses 9-13)**
- 3. Eager to Preach (verses 14-15)**

I invite you to open your Bibles to Romans, chapter 1. This morning, our text covers verses 8-15. However, since it is still a part of the introductory section of the book, I want to read from verse 1.

Romans 1:1-15

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh 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, 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, including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ,

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.

First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world. For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you. For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you— that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine. 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.

Last week, we looked at Paul and what he said about himself. He is a slave of Christ Jesus. He is an apostle, one sent out by Jesus Christ. He is set apart for the gospel of God. Last week, we looked at the Scriptures, and how the gospel was promised beforehand in them. Last week we looked at Jesus, who is the Son of God, who died for our sins, who was raised from the dead. Last week we looked at Paul's call (which is our call as well), to bring about the obedience of faith among the nations. That is, calling people to faith in Jesus Christ and seeing their faith expressed in their obedience.

This morning in our text, we will see Paul turning his focus to those in Rome. And Paul's words are kind words. They are words of affection. Indeed, they are words of love—love for the Romans. My message this morning is entitled, "Loving the Romans." Because this is what Paul is expressing in these verses. He is expressing his heart-felt love for those in Rome.

First of all, this love is expressed in how he is ...

1. Thankful to God (verse 8)

... for the Romans.

You can see this in verse 8.

Romans 1:8

First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world.

You are thankful for those you love. And Paul was thankful for those in Rome. And he expressed his thanks to God for them in verse 8.

This expression of thanks is nothing unusual for the apostle, Paul. He often began his letters with a note of thanks. In fact, he wrote 13 letters contained in our New Testament. And in 9 of the 13, he begins his letter with an expression of thanks to God for those to whom he was writing.

Now, it's not that he wasn't thankful in the other letters, like 1 Timothy and Titus. Paul was eminently thankful for these men. But he simply didn't mention his thanks right off in his letter.

The reasons that Paul gives for his thankfulness are varied. In 1 Corinthians, Paul was thankful to God because God had given them grace (1 Cor. 1:4). In Ephesians, Paul was thankful to God for their faith in the Lord Jesus and their love toward all the saints (Eph 1:15). In

Philippians, Paul was thankful to God for their partnership in the gospel (Phil. 1:5). In Colossians, Paul was thankful to God for their faith in the Lord and their love for the saints (Col. 1:3-4). In 1 Thessalonians, Paul was thankful to God for their faith, love and (he adds) hope (1 Th. 1:2-3). In 2 Thessalonians, Paul was thankful to God because their faith was growing abundantly and their love was increasing (2 Thess. 1:3). In 2 Timothy, Paul was thankful to God in simply remembering Timothy (2 Tim. 1:3). In Philemon, Paul was thankful to God for Philemon's love and faith (Philemon 1:4).

Now, what is particularly interesting here in Paul's letter to the Romans is that Paul had never been to Rome. And so, his knowledge of the church was second-hand. And that's exactly what Paul is thankful to God for.

He is thankful that their faith is known. He is thankful that their faith is proclaimed in all the world. In other words, though Paul has never been to Rome to see the church, he has heard about the church. In fact, news about the church has spread far and wide. He says, "proclaimed in all the world." Of course, this doesn't mean "to everybody, everywhere," because Paul is seeking to bring the gospel to a new region, where Christ has never been named before. In fact, this is the major purpose of Paul's writing Romans in the first place.

Remember, Paul is in Corinth, writing to those in Rome. He is writing so that after he travels to Jerusalem to deliver a gift to the believers who have been hit by the famine, he may come to Rome and be helped on his way to Spain. And the reason that he is going to Spain is this:

Romans 15:19-20

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.

And so, when Paul says that the faith of the Roman church "is proclaimed in all the world," he doesn't mean "to everybody, everywhere," because he is trying to go to a place where nobody has ever heard of the church of Rome. Rather, Paul means that their faith He means that their faith is proclaimed "all over the world." Their faith has reached the ears of Paul.

Indeed, Paul has run into a few people from the church in Rome. If you glance at Romans, chapter 16, you will find Paul sending greeting to nearly 30 people by name who are in the church in Rome. How did Paul get to know 30 people in a church that he has never met? It's because their faith "is proclaimed in all the world."

Now, at this point, it is good to stop for application. First of all, do you know of any works of God that are being "proclaimed in all the world?" That is, where a church has been unusually blessed of God, and people have gone out from that church to make an impact in the world?

There are many mega-churches making a real impact in the world. My mind is drawn to Grace Community Church in Sun Valley, California, where John MacArthur has been faithfully preaching through the Bible for almost 50 years. The number of people that have been trained up and sent out from that church is astonishing to me. Countless missionaries have been sent out by that church. Countless people have been impacted by that church and moved on throughout the world. I'm part of that number, having been trained at the Master's Seminary, which is closely linked to the church. Yvonne is part of that number, having been saved at that church. SR is becoming a part of that number, as he is attending the Master's University, which is closely linked to the church. Hanna wants to be a part of that number. This is to say nothing of Grace to You, the radio outreach of the church, which is broadcast around the world such that John MacArthur's voice is always on the radio waves someplace on the planet.

Grace Community Church is but one place that God has blessed to be used all around the world. And the reason that I know about it is that I was deeply impacted by the church.

I know that there are other churches like this. And your mind may drift to some churches and ministries that have impacted your own life. There are certainly other ministries like this. In the Weekly Word this week, I a picture of all of the locations hosting a "Cry Out" women's prayer event last Friday. Somewhere near 100,000 women joined in prayer for our churches and for our nation on Friday. And somewhere in that great big map, we had a little group assemble right in this room to Cry Out to God as well.

There are some churches and ministries that God has chosen to bless in great ways. I have mentioned only two of them this morning, but there are many, many others. Perhaps some come to your mind. Now, when you hear of such a church, or such a ministry, what is your response? Are you thankful to God? Are you thankful to God for the way that he has uniquely blessed these places?

Paul would have been. He was thankful to the church in Rome, which was far from being a "mega-church, but which was making an impact in the world in his day. I think in many ways, they were making an impact because of the strategic location of Rome. In the ancient world, Rome was the center of culture and commerce of the known world. There was a saying, "All Roads Lead to Rome." The opposite would also have been true, "All Roads Lead from Rome." And so many of those in the church in Rome would have taken some of those roads on their way out to the world. So much so that Paul, having never been in Rome, knew at least 30 people from that church.

And Paul saw it and rejoiced in it. And he wanted to partner with them in the work, as he would visit them and they would help him on his journey to Spain (Romans 15:24).

Do you thank God for the work that he is doing around the world? Do you pray that his work would continue? This is the prayer that Jesus taught us to pray, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done" (Matthew 6:10). Are you praying that we might be such a church?

Rockford is no Rome. We aren't in a strategic location like Los Angeles or New York, where the world comes into that city and where the world goes out from that city. And I'm not such a great leader. And we aren't such a great people. But, we can make some impact in the world. My trip to India with Leadership Resources is a step in that direction, to make a small impact in a far-away place. In a few weeks, we will have a gathering of pastors, with staff from Leadership Resources, letting them taste what their oversees training is like. Perhaps some of

my local pastor friends will join in the effort with LRI and go overseas with them. And maybe our name isn't proclaimed, but Christ is proclaimed, and in this I rejoice.

As I sent out invitations to join, one pastor wrote, "Thanks for the invite but I will be joining our Free Church initiative, Pathways Training, two weeks later that is built on similar principles. I thank you so kindly for reaching out to me." But, we can make some impact in this city, as we go to our neighbors and friends and co-workers and talk about our faith in Christ.

I would be content if Paul could say of us, "I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the [Rock Valley Region]." That throughout our region, all would know of Rock Valley Bible Church. That's only going to happen as you are speaking with other people about your faith. And then, perhaps, you might talk about our church.

This past week, Yvonne and I went to the county health department to follow up on an immunization that we took before our trip to India in May. We took the Hepatitis A immunization shortly before leaving. It requires a 6-month follow-up booster shot. So, we were in for the booster.

Anyway, while we were in the room with the nurse, she asked about our trip to India. And thinking about Romans and thinking about the gospel and praying for opportunities to speak with others, I proceeded to tell her about our trip.

"It was wonderful," I said. "We were able to visit some people who used to be sun-worshippers, but had turned to Christ. Really, they were sun-worshippers. They had flags with pictures of the sun that flew over their home. But, when they came to faith in Christ, and trusted him for forgiveness of their sins, the flags came down, as they now worshiped Jesus. We had a great time on our trip."

Having said that, I waited for the nurse to make any sort of comments. The conversation transformed into small talk. So, I tried to engage her by asking if she had ever been to a foreign land. She said, "No." And then, she made mention of how blessed we are in America and how many refugees they have served at the health department.

I said, "It was great to go with Yvonne. Part of our trip was training pastors how to interpret the Bible and preach it. Yvonne came along because many of the pastors' wives joined them on the trip."

And in all of these sorts of comments, she was pretty much uninterested. But these are the sorts of conversations that we need to have with people if ever our faith is going to be proclaimed in the Rock Valley Region. Are you praying for such conversations? Are you willing to step out in boldness to have such conversations?

Well, let's move on. Paul's love for the Romans is expressed in how he is Thankful to God (verse 8) for the Romans. And secondly, how he is ...

2. Wanting to Come (verses 9-13)
... and see the Romans.

We see this in verses 9-13.

Romans 1:9-13

For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you. For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you—that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine. 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.

Paul had an earnest desire. He wanted to go to Rome. He wanted to meet with the church in Rome. This longing to be with the Roman believers is an expression of his love for the Romans. We long to be with those that we love. He loves them through their bond in Christ, and he desires to visit and be with them.

And so, he prayed about it. He prayed about it often. That's what verses 9 and 10 are about.

Romans 1:9-10

For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you.

Can you imagine what this is like? Paul says that he is praying "without ceasing" (verse 9). He says that he is mentioning the Romans "always in my prayers" (verse 10). He says that he is praying that he might "at last succeed in coming to you" (verse 10).

Down in verse 13, he speaks about how often he has tried, but hasn't succeeded in coming to Rome. In fact, he says that he has been "prevented" from coming.

Now, we don't know why Paul was "prevented" from coming. He may have been prevented by some unexplained circumstances. Perhaps a sickness, a travel arrangement that didn't work out, the boat that he was planning to use needed repair, a financial arrangement that fell through, or some sort of other delay, which mean that he didn't have time to get to Rome.

These circumstances may have been caused by Satan, seeking to thwart some of Paul's ministry efforts. Paul wrote of a similar desire to see those in Thessalonica. "But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face, because we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, again and again—but Satan hindered us" (1 Thess. 2:17-18).

These circumstances may have been caused by the Spirit of God. Do you remember when Paul and Silas and Timothy were on their missionary journey? They were seeking to go through the region of Phrygia and Galatia. But was "forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia" (Acts 16:6). After that they attempted to go into Bithynia, "but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them" (Acts 16:7).

A good Proverb to know is this: "A man's heart plans his way, But the LORD directs his steps" (Proverbs 16:9). For whatever reason, the LORD was directing the steps of Paul away from his plan. In Acts 16, it was so that he could get to Macedonia (Acts 16:9-10). A trip to Galatia or Bithynia would have prevented him from preaching the gospel in that needy area. And when Paul tried to go to Rome, but was prevented, it was for some reason.

Again, there's a great point of application here for us. There may be times in your life when you make some well-thought-through plans. God-glorifying plans. But, they simply don't work. In these cases, whether circumstances or Satan is preventing you from carrying out your plan, you can rest that ultimately, it is the Spirit of God who is directing you. God knows your heart. He knows your plans.

And for some reason, God has prevented your plans from taking place. And you may never know (like Job) exactly why your plans have been thwarted. But, act like Paul. Keep praying. Keep asking. Like Dory in "Finding Nemo" says, "Just keep swimming; just keep swimming." Perhaps, at long last, you may succeed in your plans.

So, why did Paul want to come to Rome? Verse 11 tells us why.

Romans 1:11-12

For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you—that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine.

Paul's coming to Rome was for a spiritual reason. He wanted to give them grace. Literally, verse 11 reads, ...

Romans 1:11

For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual grace to strengthen you—

Paul wanted to be the means of grace in the lives of the Romans. Presumably, this would be through the words he said to them. For in Ephesians 4:29, Paul wrote, "Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear." In other words, as Paul would speak these "building up" words in the lives of those in Rome, grace would be given to them to strengthen them and to encourage them.

Indeed, that's what he says in verse 12, ...

Romans 1:12

that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine.

Paul wanted to encourage those in Rome. But Paul also realized that such encouragement isn't simply a one-way street. Paul knew that he would also be encouraged by his visit to Rome. That's why he wanted to go so badly, because he would encourage those in Rome. And those in Rome would encourage him! And who doesn't want encouragement.

This is what a church ought to be. We ought to assemble for mutual encouragement. Where we speak truth into each other's lives and build up one another with our words. Too often, church can be a place where we tear down, rather than build up.

Paul gives another purpose for his desire to come to Rome. He says it in verse 13, ...

Romans 1:13

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.

Paul wants to "reap some harvest among" the Romans. Paul probably envisions a harvest of souls who would hear the gospel and be saved. This leads perfectly to our last point this morning.

Paul's love for the Romans is expressed in how he is ...

3. Eager to Preach (verses 14-15)

... the gospel to the Romans.

Look at verses 14 and 15.

Romans 1:14-15

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.

Paul says that he has an obligation to fulfill. It's to the Greeks and to the barbarians. It's to the wise and to the foolish. That is, it is to everyone. Whether they be civilized or not, whether they be intelligent or not, the gospel is for them. Paul is under obligation to preach the gospel to all.

Romans 1:14 (KJV)

I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise.

Why? Because the news is too good to withhold! Paul's obligation is really our obligation as well. Jesus told us to "Make disciples of all nations." Making disciples begins with preaching the gospel.

I was so encouraged this week by a chance encounter that I had. I went to Beef-A-Roo this week (because I had some buy-one-sandwich-get-one-free coupons). I was meeting with several other pastors in the area to begin planning for our Winter Youth Retreat in January. I had a wonderful time with them, talking about ministry.

When it was time to go, I looked over across the restaurant and saw a good friend. I saw Phillip Aaron (our Phil's adult son). I saw him meeting some men. At first, they looked like Mormons to me. But then, again, I was thinking, "What would Phil be doing meeting with Mormons?" They must be some business guys. But as I went over to say hello, my initial suspicions were confirmed. They were indeed Mormons. They had their badges on their front pockes.

Phil was engaging these men with the gospel. I had a chance to say hello and shake their hands. And hear a bit about what they were talking about. They were talking about 1 Peter 3:18-19, which speaks about Jesus being made alive in the Spirit and preaching to the spirits in prison. And they were talking about whether there is a chance to be saved after you die, a key tenet in Mormon doctrine.

I so wanted to sit down and engage them with the gospel. But I wanted to be sensitive to Phil's efforts with these men. I didn't know the circumstances. And I knew that if I sat down, that I would change the dynamics of the entire conversation. And Phil wasn't inviting me, saying, "Hey Steve! Why don't you come and join us." And I felt that Phil was fully capable of talking with these guys. So, I left.

Later, as I told our Phil about how I saw his son at Beef-A-Roo, I found out the back story. Apparently, some of these guys came to his home and began talking with Phil's wife, Kelly. And she said, "You guys really need to talk with my husband." So, Phil spoke with them and said that he would love to have a conversation with them, but it needs to be in a public place. And here he was, sharing the gospel with Mormon missionaries.

And do you know what's so encouraging about this? Phil is no pastor. He has no formal theological education, beyond what he has received from church and his own pursuits. And he's doing the work. He's doing the work that all of us are called to do. He's preaching the gospel.

This example here is the very thing that I would love to see happen in the lives of all of us at Rock Valley Bible Church. That we would all be eager to preach the gospel. You say, "What's the gospel?" A very simplistic summary comes from Romans 6:23, ...

Romans 6:23

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

Furthermore, we can look in 2 Corinthians, where Paul tells us,

2 Corinthians 5:14-15

The love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on September 25, 2016 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.
