

“Though I lived as a monk without reproach, I felt that I was a sinner before God with an extremely disturbed conscience. I could not believe that He was placated by my satisfaction. I did not love, yes, I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners.” So said Martin Luther in the year 1545, recounting how he habitually sunk in terror and dread at the thought of the righteousness of God, knowing he was entirely unworthy, that all his works were but hay and straw before the blaze of God’s holiness. But when the Lord opened up the true meaning of salvation to him, that this righteousness was a free gift given to sinners who lay hold of Christ by faith, then all was made new for him and he could not stop speaking about the justifying love and grace of Almighty God. The Lord quite literally changed his tune. And we have something similar, though to a greater extreme, with the apostle Paul. He hated and opposed and persecuted Christ and His church. If you remember Jesus’ words to him at his conversion, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me.” To persecute Christ’s body was to persecute Christ Himself. But this was his life; this was his mission. But what happened? The scales fell from his eyes and he was never the same. Now Paul, with all of his spirit, until the very end of his life, would proclaim the name of this same Jesus to all nations, never tiring of living for and speaking about his blessed Savior. The Lord changed his tune as well. And we see the fruit of this in Paul’s return to Jesus over and over again in this Christ-saturated, gospel-filled introduction to the letter to the church in Rome.

Point 1: Paul wants the Romans to know that the OT speaks about Jesus

Though the apostle had not yet met this congregation face-to-face, and though he was about to bring some teaching that would’ve been new to their ears, he wanted them to be fully assured that he wasn’t spinning this teaching out of his own imagination. The apostle wasn’t out to prove himself a religious genius of sorts, there to ooh and aww them with his doctrinal ingenuity, but instead he rooted the authority and the content of his message in the Old Testament Scriptures. You see, for Paul, there was no absolute and sharp distinction between an Old Testament message and a New Testament message, or between an Old Testament God and a New Testament God, but instead there was a sweet harmony between the two, the New Testament being the organic fulfillment of all of the promises of the Old Testament. There was one God, one people, one faith, one covenant of grace, and one Mediator, who is the Lord Jesus Christ.

And in verse 3 we see what this gospel was all about, that it was, “...concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh.” So, what can we say about Paul’s words here? First, Paul wanted the Romans to know that Jesus is the center and the heart of the gospel message he was bringing. This wasn’t a message about Paul, or about human religious achievement, but, instead, it was a message about God’s eternal Son, the One well-pleasing to His Father, about Jesus, the One who saves us from our sins, about the Christ, the much anticipated and promised Messiah, and about our Lord, the

One who now has sovereign authority over all things, reigning over all the world and its kingdoms for the sake of His body, the church. But secondly, the apostle shares with the Romans that this Jesus was of a royal lineage according to the flesh, coming as He did from the line of King David. The eternal Son of God, who had no beginning, came into this world, stepped into space-time-history, bridging the seemingly impassable chasm between heaven and earth, all in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. Undoubtedly many of his hearers would've had this prophecy in mind from 2 Samuel 7, where the LORD says to King David, "When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever." Since the revelation of this promise, the people of God would have wondered who this was would come after David whose kingdom would last forever and ever. The people eventually go into exile, they're subjugated by foreign rulers—but where is the promise of His coming?! Now Solomon, David's son, of course did take the throne after his father, but eventually he died. But now Paul is saying that this Jesus is the royal, promised, divine Son of David, and His kingdom, having been established by His coming, cannot fail, will not fail, but will endure so that even the very gates of hell shall not prevail against it! And if you are in Christ, you are participants and inheritors of that same kingdom. Let this be an encouragement to you, brothers and sisters, that if God has made a promise, and if He has made you a promise, that He will surely keep it. If He has fulfilled these ancient, world-historical, redemptive promises concerning His Son, then certainly He can be counted on to bring to pass all that He has told us. Don't doubt, for example, that He, "will strengthen you and help you," (Is. 41:10); that He, "will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Him," (Is. 26:3). Don't doubt that He freely gives wisdom to those who ask (James 1:5); and that He will supply every need of yours according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:19). These words of God aren't pious platitudes, just things that Christians say with no real meaning behind them; but these are God's promises to us and to our children. So let us all be people who seek His promises out; for they are nothing short of green pastures and still waters for our souls. We're all filling our minds with something; let's fill them with His promises.

Point 2: Paul wants the Romans to know that the grace they receive is through Jesus

And we see this especially in that little phrase in verse 5, "Through Him". But perhaps before speaking about the fact that we receive grace through Jesus, we should very briefly touch on why we receive grace through Jesus. Jesus' earthly ministry, as we well know, was characterized by weakness and suffering and sorrow. But this was just one phase or one stage of His mission. Elsewhere the apostle testifies, "For he was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God." And he is getting at the same thing here in verse 4, sharing with the church in Rome, that Jesus, though crucified in weakness, now, after being raised from the dead, has entered a new stage of His mission, having all power and authority, and being so

invested with the Holy Spirit, that as our glorious Mediator He now pours out upon us His Spirit and the gifts and graces of that same Spirit. In other words, Jesus' resurrection demonstrates that He is who He said He was, and it also provides the sure foundation for all of the mercies we receive from heaven. Paul is telling the Romans that this Jesus He proclaims is a truth-telling, grace-giving Savior.

In this introduction, we see some glimmerings of that grace he'll unfold more fully in later chapters. First, in verse 6 we see that we are those who are the called of Jesus Christ. Because of grace, God powerfully, effectively calls us out of our former darkness, out of our enmeshment with the world, out of the snare of the devil, all in order to bring us into sweet, life-giving, soul-purifying fellowship with His Son. Friends in Christ, we belong to Jesus Christ, both in body and in soul; may this be a comfort to you in life and in death. But let this also be a reminder to us to not long once again for the meat pots and breads of Egypt, as the Israelites did only shortly after having been rescued out of slavery. The world and its lusts will try to whisper persuasively into our ears. But in our lives, privately and publicly, let's remember that we belong first and foremost to Jesus Christ.

Second, according to verse 7 we are those who are beloved of God. Sometimes life can become overwhelming. We have kids to drive from place to place, meals to cook, work deadlines to meet, demanding schedules, homework, peer pressure, sometimes we receive opposition from others, sometimes we're ignored. Life can be full of hard things. And sometimes we need that word of consolation and encouragement, that we are loved. Well, the apostle tells you this morning: you are loved, you, personally, are loved by God; even when we were His enemies, God set His steadfast love on you, and nothing can now separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord, "neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing". And we love because He first loved us. How can we love? We can love others by praying for them, going out of our way to befriend them, encouraging them with God's word, maybe striking a conversation with someone new after service, by helping others with our time and talent, and we know the list of ways we can love others goes on and on. How would God have you love your neighbor this week? But this love we have from God, and this belonging we have to Jesus, all come to us through Jesus, and this is something the apostle wants the church in Rome to know.

Point 3: Paul wants the Romans to know that their obedience is for Jesus

And here we have in mind verse 5 especially, "Through Him we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name." The whole trajectory of Paul's theology and of his mission is Christ-centered. The source of His calling was Christ, the content of His mission was Christ, he's decided to know nothing except Jesus Christ and Him crucified, and the goal of His calling was Christ, to bring honor to His name wherever

he went. We have a summary of this in Acts 9:15, "But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel." And what a worthy name is the name of Jesus, this name that is above every name, this name that the holy angels and the saints in glory exalt in the splendor of holiness, this name that every knee will bow down to on the Last Day, this name that the apostle would give life and limb for in order to make known to a lost and dying world. We all know too well the remaining influence of sin in our own hearts, that we so often find that our heart is curved in on itself, seeking its own purposes and desires and pleasures. But is such a life, a life curved in on ourselves, ultimately satisfying? If we in our last days sing along with Sinatra "I did it my way," don't we discover only too late that we've been doing things the wrong way? The apostle offers an alternative vision for how we should orient our lives, an alternative highest good and goal, and it has to do, not chiefly with ourselves or even with our nearest and dearest, but it has to do, supremely, with living for the sake of the name of Jesus Christ, living as those Christians John speaks of in his letter, those who "have gone out for the sake of the name."

And all of this doesn't simply apply to those who go out on a missionary journey for Jesus, but all of us, whoever we are, whatever our age, whatever station in life we presently find ourselves in, all of us, without exception, can and should live our lives for the sake of Jesus' name. And living for Jesus more often than not looks like obedience and faithfulness in what we might consider the small things—honoring those in authority over us, looking not only to our own interests, but also to the interests of others, turning from lusts, telling the truth, being content with the lot that Providence has measured out to us, prayer, and, as our Lord has taught us, doing unto others what we wish they would do to us. Are we willing to become small in the eyes of others, to have no name even, are we willing to put away any quest for greatness in order to bring honor to the name of Jesus? Paul wanted the Romans to know that Jesus was worthy of all of this. May God make us a people who live for Jesus, knowing Jesus has lived and died for us. Amen.