

“GRIPPED BY THE GOSPEL.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Scripture Texts: Romans 1:1-4, 15-17; 16:25-27

Introduction.

Four years ago when we started this journey into Paul’s letter to the church in Rome, I shared how daunting it seemed to me. Romans is called the Mt. Everest of the books in the Bible and preaching it seemed to me like climbing Mt. Everest. I shared that I waited forty years to preach this great letter.

Over these past four years I have come across several pastors who waited long into their ministries to preach Romans. Paul himself preached the Gospel twenty years before writing this masterpiece of a summary of the Gospel.

Even though we are coming to the end of our sermon series on this book, may we never come to the end of our reading of this letter and of our being influenced by it. I urge you to read it again and again.

This morning I want to conclude with a strong urgent plea to read the book of Romans. You can read it in about an hour and a half. Or listen to it on your phone. My friend Tim Bayly listened to the audio version while mowing his yard every week for a couple of years before preaching it.

Two reasons to keep reading and studying Romans

First, this is a letter written by a man utterly gripped by the Gospel of Jesus Christ. His own life was radically changed by the Gospel. He was saved and set apart by God for the sake of the Gospel. So were the lives of those he proclaimed the Gospel to, and so have been the lives of countless millions who have come under its influence since then.

This one book of the Bible has had greater impact and influence on the history of the church and Christianity, and even on the world, than any other book ever written.

John Chrysostom, archbishop of Constantinople, around 400 AD had it read to him twice a week.

Augustine, one of the greatest of the early church fathers, traced his conversion to Romans.

Reading Romans 1:17, Martin Luther finally grasped the truth that God justifies us to Himself by sheer grace and mercy through faith alone, not by works. This text opened the doors of paradise for Luther and not only changed his life but changed the course of history. The Reformation could be attributed to one monk wrestling with one verse, 1:17, the righteous shall live by faith.

Martin Luther wrote in his Preface to the Epistle to the Romans, “This Epistle is ... the very purest Gospel, and is worthy not only that every Christian should know it word for word, by heart, but occupy himself with it every day, as the daily bread of the soul. It can never be read or pondered too much.”

Two hundred years later in England, John Wesley reluctantly went to a small Bible study where someone read aloud from Martin Luther’s Commentary on Romans. That night he says, “I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for my salvation; and an assurance was given me that he had taken my sins away, even mine; and saved me from the law of sin and death.”

From Wesley’s spiritual new birth came the greatest evangelical awakening and revival of the 18th century in both England and America, known as the Great Awakening. Some historians say every single revival in history can be linked in some way to this powerful letter of Romans.

The great English poet Samuel Coleridge said, “Paul’s Epistle to the Romans is the greatest piece of literature ever written, the most profound work in existence.”

John Knox said, “It is unquestionably the most important theological work that has ever been written.”

John Piper who took eight years to preach it, said: “Romans is the greatest letter ever written in the history of the world by anybody — Christian or non-Christian.”.

William Tyndale believed that every Christian should learn Romans by heart.

You should want to read the book that has had the greatest impact on mankind, the book most used by God in our world, for the transformation of our hearts. Read it, listen to it. There is nothing you can read that will do your soul and your life more good.

Second, Romans answers the most pressing questions there are about life and our own lives.

What is the condition and destiny of humanity outside of Christ?

Are we really all OK, or are we in serious, dire trouble spiritually?

What was my own spiritual condition before Christ saved me?

What did God do in Jesus Christ to save me from that condition?

How did God overcome my stubborn resistance to Him?

How did He enable the gift of faith in me?

What is the meaning of justification with God by faith?

How can a sinner be right/justified with God?

How can a holy God be justified with sinners?

How should I now live in light of God’s generous gift of salvation and His Spirit at work in me?

How does that affect my relationships, at home, work, life at church and in the community?

How do I live the Christian life? How do I defeat sin?

How can I have peace and confidence about the future as I approach the end of my life?

Romans is the fullest summary of the greatest realities in the universe and it dives more deeply into those realities than any other book. Here is the Gospel spelled out, the very power of God for the eternal salvation of our souls.

The Roman Road

Back in June 2012 Todd, Reed and I took an epic road trip from Lynden to Anchorage, Alaska. Five ten-hour days, 500 miles a day, 2500 total. We took with us the Bible of the Alcan Highway, called the Milepost Guide to the Alcan, 600 pages literally mile by mile.

Let's take the most epic road trip you can take in this life that leads to eternal life. Not five days, not 2500 miles, but five stops, five steps. The trip is the Roman Road and it is mapped out in the book of Romans, one of the best maps on the journey toward eternal life. There is a map in your boxes.

Milepost 1, Step 1.

Romans 3:10-11 There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands.

Romans 3:23 For all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God.

The Roman Road starts at the same starting point for every single person, we are all sinners and we are all in need of salvation. We are all guilty of sin against the one holy, righteous God.

The word Gospel means good news. In order for it to be good news there has to be some bad news that it is a response to. The bad news is our sin, our unrighteousness that separates us from the God who created us.

The Roman road starts full of potholes, washed out pavement, impassable conditions. This is the human problem. Sin.

Milepost 2, Step 2.

Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death.

Romans 5:12 Just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.

When sin entered our world, so did death. Death is the price, the consequence of sin. That should get our attention as to just how serious sin is. It is the cause of all the death in our world. We all deserve both physical death in this life and eternal death in the life to come.

God is God, He is pure, holy, righteous, perfect and just, He must be true to Himself and punish all sin and disobedience. The sense of justice that we all have in us comes from God. If God didn't punish sin, He would be unjust.

Milepost 3, Step 3.

Romans 6:23 The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 5:8 God demonstrates His own love toward us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Romans explains we were in such a mess, if we are to be saved, only God could do it.

There is only one hope, one solution, one road out of our problem. The Son of God, Jesus Christ came to earth to die for our sins on the cross. Because He was without sin, His death fully paid for all our sins and secured our salvation. He fully paid the debt we owed, and God accepted Christ's death as full payment.

Jesus' resurrection proves that God accepted Jesus' death as the payment for our sins. While we were unlovable, while we were unworthy, while we were lost and far from God, God moved toward us even while we were moving away from Him.

Milepost 4, Step 4.

This gift must be accepted, received. There must be a response. This is where the rubber meets the road.

Romans 10:9-10 If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.

Romans 10:13 Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

Do you accept the bad news about your condition? Do you believe what God says about you is true? Do you believe eternal death is a reality to be

faced honestly? Do you accept the good news of the Gospel offered to you in Jesus Christ?

John 11:25-26 Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, 26 and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?”

Milepost 5, Step 5.

By taking these steps we come to the end of the journey, which is to be reconciled to God as our heavenly Father, to have peace with God and to have freedom from any fear of death or judgment. This is the reward to all who respond in faith.

Romans 8:1 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Romans 5:1-2 Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ... and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

This is spectacular news: no more guilt, no more punishment, no more wrath, no more condemnation. Eternal life, peace with God forever.

Conclusion and application.

From Paul’s opening greeting (1:1) to the doxology (16:25) the gospel saturates this book.

“I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome” (1:15). Why was Paul so eager to preach the gospel? Because he wasn’t ashamed of the gospel (1:16). Why? Because it is the power of God for salvation (1:16). Why? Because in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith (1:17). And why is the righteousness of God needed? Because the wrath of God is being revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness (1:18).

Romans teaches us our daily need for the gospel. Most Christians have an incomplete, even a defective grasp of the Gospel, of what happened to make them a Christian and the miraculous thing it is to be a Christian.

The more the Gospel exposes my own ungodliness and unrighteousness, the more profoundly grateful I am for the righteousness of Jesus Christ that removes God's justified wrath and reconciles me to Him. This is the cause for worship and the desire for obedience and faithfulness.

It has been a humbling blessing to preach these 16 chapters that have so powerfully been used by God in the history of His church. It is my prayer that we have been made rich by His Word and changed by it.

May we love Jesus more than ever. Jesus is the gospel. Romans makes much of Jesus and we will do well to do the same, to love Him more. Have you experienced the saving power of this gospel in your life? Because of God's abounding grace to you will you give your life over to Him in worship and in obedience and service?

Have you been gripped by the Gospel not just to be saved but to be able to live each day in the freedom and joy it gives, and in the faith it gives for facing every challenge.

Romans 16:25-27 Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, ... *27 to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.*

Soli deo gloria. To God alone be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.

Prayer: Holy Father, as we humble ourselves before your holy Word and especially this most wise letter given to us by your Holy Spirit through the pen of your chosen apostle Paul, would you be pleased to send your Holy Spirit to be our teacher, our guide, our help, and open our eyes and hearts to see your wisdom and truth, and grow in our knowledge of your will that we might walk in a manner worthy of our Lord. Fall afresh on this church and each one of us for your glory and our edification. In the name of Jesus Christ, your Son and our Savior and Lord, Amen.