

Romans 1:1 Introduction

The book of Acts took us on many adventures through different parts of the world and showed us how God extended His grace and mercy to all men everywhere as servants like Peter, Paul, Luke and others faithfully witnessed to the fact that our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is the One on whom all should believe as the only One who could save us from the penalty of our sins.

You might remember how when Paul was on his third missionary journey he had been traveling through Asia which today is Turkey and he passed through the city of Ephesus where he was the center of attention.

He ended up staying in this city for over two years teaching daily in the school of Tyrannus. It was in Ephesus during this time when the seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish priest, tried to cast out a demon from a man.

Act 19:15 "One day the evil spirit answered them, "Jesus I know, and I know about Paul, but who are you?"

Act 19:16 Then the man who had the evil spirit jumped on them and overpowered them all. He gave them such a beating that they ran out of the house naked and bleeding.

Act 19:17 When this became known to the Jews and Greeks living in Ephesus, they were all seized with fear, and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honor."

Some time later in Ephesus Paul was at the center of a riot because the local silversmiths felt that their business of making idols was being jeopardized because of Paul's teachings of Christ.

Well, because of the uproar and also because of Paul's previous desire to go to Rome (Acts 19:21) he leaves Ephesus and goes through Macedonia and then down to Achaia which is Greece and ends up in the city of Corinth.

It was around the year A.D. 55 or 56 that Paul arrived in this city with a task set before him of going to the different churches to gather collections to take back to the Jerusalem church before he went to Rome.

It was in Corinth that Paul wrote a letter to the Christian church in Rome. In fact in that letter he told the Roman Christians in Rom

15:30 "I urge you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me.

Rom 15:31 Pray that I may be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea and that my service in Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints there,

Rom 15:32 so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and together with you be refreshed."

His plans were to deliver the money which came from the Gentile churches in Asia, Macedonia, and Achaia and bless the poor Jewish believers in Jerusalem. From there he would then go to Rome.

Of course his plans were thwarted to some extent when the Jews had him arrested and they pressed charges which eventually forced Paul to appeal to Caesar and the rest we just got through studying in Acts when through Paul's adventure on the high seas he was finally delivered to Rome, but instead of a free man he was in chains.

From the time he was in Corinth and wrote to the church in Rome to the time he finally arrived in Rome, three years had gone by. No one is certain as to how the church in Rome was started.

Paul had never been to Rome and so he certainly was not responsible for bringing the gospel of Jesus Christ to that city. In fact there doesn't seem to be any evidence that any of the apostles ever went to Rome prior to Paul writing to the Romans or else he would certainly have made mention of them in this letter especially if any of them were still there.

So who brought them the gospel? Well, it's not unlikely that many of the Romans themselves brought the gospel back to Rome around the time surrounding Pentecost some thirty years prior.

You'll remember what Luke records for us in Acts 2:1-10 Let's turn there.

Many of those visitors embraced Jesus Christ as a result of Peter's witness to them of the risen Christ. Act 2:41 "Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day."

Of those there's a very good chance that some Romans believed and went back to Rome with this glorious news. Keep in mind too that a relatively short time after this event in Jerusalem on Pentecost, possibly a few years had gone by when Stephen was stoned to death for his faith on Christ.

It was after this incident that the Jews were dispersed throughout Judea and Samaria preaching the word. In all likelihood some of those people eventually ended up in Rome where they may have had relatives.

And so some 30 years later it really shouldn't surprise us that Paul could say of them in Rom 1:8 "First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world."

Not only had the Roman Christians wholeheartedly embraced their Lord and Savior but their faith was being extended everywhere as they came into contact with people who passed through Rome and quite possibly the Roman Christians themselves were going out from Rome to many parts of the world bringing the love of Christ wherever they went.

Paul certainly heard of their love and faith in Christ and commends them for it and gives thanks and glory to God. Paul loved these Roman Christians for precisely this reason, because they were faithful to lift up the name of Jesus Christ and they shone for the Lord and their light was being spread all over the world.

And we see in turn that these Roman believers loved Paul. They knew he was called by the Lord to be an apostle to the Gentiles. And many of them were Gentiles. In fact in our final studies of Acts we see their love for Paul being shown.

Act 28:15 "The brothers there (that is in Rome) had heard that we were coming, and they traveled as far as the Forum of Appius and the Three Taverns to meet us. At the sight of these men Paul thanked God and was encouraged."

They came out from Rome 30 and 40 miles to meet this pen-pal if you will who was special to them. But it's precisely because of this letter written 3 years prior which is the catalyst for their love as they sense Paul's concern and love for them and their love for the Lord.

It's this letter which was inspired by the Holy Spirit of God that Paul penned. And it's this letter that we are going to be examining, because it's this very letter which really sets the foundation for the premise that our salvation is based entirely on faith in Jesus Christ, not in any good work we could do to earn salvation.

It was this very letter which set afire the heart of a young Roman Catholic monk by the name of Martin Luther as he read of how Christ justified him by faith in Christ alone.

It was this same monk who realized that all he had seen in the church at that time which included paying money to the church to gain access to heaven, called indulgences, was nothing more than an abandonment of the word of God and the salvation we have in Christ alone.

It was the letter to the Romans and the prompting of the Holy Spirit which turned Luther around and found this young monk being used by God to start a revolution in Europe. A revolution which involved the pen and the zeal of a new believer in Jesus Christ and the work of God in this man's heart to bring the gospel of Christ to the world.

In his protesting the Roman Catholic church, because of its evil practices at that time, Martin Luther was the one responsible for what is known today as the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century.

And even today bible believing, evangelical Christians outside of the Roman Catholic church are known as Protestants connected to Luther's protesting some 550 years ago. And though you and I may not be actively protesting against the Roman Catholic church as did Luther, we must be actively protesting against any movement which compromises God's written word and against the one true gospel found only in the atoning work and resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Our protesting comes in the positive form of not only speaking the truth in love, but living the truth in the power and love of the Holy Spirit of God who indwells and seals us for eternity.

And so, the backdrop for a part of God's word, which hopefully inspires and encourages us as we come to the letter addressed to the Romans around A.D. 58, written by the apostle Paul and inspired directly by God Himself as He gives Paul utterance.

If you're not already there please turn with me to the book of Romans. Let's pray.....

If we were to outline the letter to the Romans we would find that it has 4 main divisions. William Barclay outlines it this way. "Chapters 1-8 deal with the problem of righteousness. Chapters 9-11 deal with the problem of the Jews, the chosen people. Chapters 12-15 deal with practical questions of life and living. And chapter 16 is a letter of introduction for Phoebe, and a list of final personal greetings."

Paul begins this letter with a salutation and an introduction of himself.

Rom 1:1 "Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God--

One of the things that you find with Paul is that he understood his position before Christ. He understood that the Creator of all the universe mercifully and graciously made a way for Paul to have fellowship with Himself.

And this has always been God's desire; to have fellowship with man. We see this in the very beginning in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve were created first and foremost to be in communion with God and then as an extra blessing to have fellowship with one another. Humanity can be expressed in the word fellowship or communion.

This is why we exist, to have communion with God and in that we bring glory to Him. Paul understood that he didn't deserve this communion because of his own sin which separated him from God.

But, he also understood that Jesus Christ is the one who gave His life as a ransom so that Paul might once again have fellowship with God. And it's in this context that Paul calls himself a servant of Christ Jesus.

It's interesting that one of the favorite expressions of Paul for Jesus is Lord. The Greek word is Kurios and it designates that someone is in total and absolute possession of a person or thing.

And so in contrast to Jesus who is Lord Paul calls himself Doulos which is the Greek word for servant as the NIV puts it but a better translation would be slave or bondsman.

Paul knows that since Jesus purchased him and gave him eternal life, and since Jesus is Kurios, Lord and Master of his life, Paul humbly submits himself to his new Master. And by calling himself a slave he is saying that I have no rights whatsoever except for the right to serve My gracious God, without whose love and sacrificial gift I would be bound for hell forever. I am eternally indebted to Him.

This is what Paul was saying to the Corinthians when he wrote in 1Co 7:22 "For he who was a slave when he was called by the Lord is the Lord's freedman; similarly, he who was a free man when he was called is Christ's slave.

1Co 7:23 You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men."

By acknowledging ourselves to be slaves of Christ we acknowledge God's Divine authority over us. But to be a slave or bondservant of God carries with it another aspect, and that is the privilege to be at His disposal.

Jesus says in Mat 20:26 = "whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant,>

Mat 20:27 <and whoever wants to be first must be your slave-->"

Those who were deemed great in the Kingdom of God, men like Abraham, Moses, David and all of the Patriarchs and Prophets, were men who understood themselves to be servants or slaves of God out of gratitude for God's grace for them.

1Ki 18:36 "At the time of sacrifice, the prophet Elijah stepped forward and prayed: "O LORD, God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your SERVANT and have done all these things at your command."

1Ch 6:49 "But Aaron and his descendants were the ones who presented offerings on the altar of burnt offering and on the altar of incense in connection with all that was done in the Most Holy Place, making atonement for Israel, in accordance with all that Moses the SERVANT of God had commanded."

Dan 3:26 "Nebuchadnezzar then approached the opening of the blazing furnace and shouted, "Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, SERVANTS of the Most High God, come out! Come here!" So Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego came out of the fire,"

Paul was humbled to be part of God's Kingdom, but as a slave he understood that to be the most effective in this kingdom he must be the least and not see himself as the greatest.

This is a problem in the church today. There are lots of people who want to be noticed, they want first place, they desire the honor of position, but they miss what it is to be great in the Kingdom of God as God measures greatness because they do not desire to be a servant a *doulos* for the *Kurios*.

William Barclay in his commentary on Romans says that "when Paul calls himself a slave of Jesus Christ he is setting himself in the succession of the prophets. Their greatness and their glory lay in the fact that they were slaves of God, and so did his. So then, the slave of Jesus Christ describes at one and the same time the obligation of a great love and the honor of a great office."

What Paul understood about his calling, we need to realize about our calling as well. We've all been called to slaves of Jesus Christ with the idea of being greatest in the Kingdom of God, while we humbly submit ourselves to the King and not try to usurp His authority or glory by boasting of some greatness in our lives. That attitude shows that we are in fact least in the Kingdom.

Paul was a humble man, a slave of Jesus Christ who would be used mightily by God to bring the message of Jesus Christ to the entire world. Great in the Kingdom of God? You bet he was; precisely because he was the least.

"Called as an apostle". Every servant understands the position to which he has been called as the calling of God for a purpose. The Greek here is literally "a called apostle". In other words Paul didn't assume this position, he didn't volunteer or seek this position in the sense that there was an opening he decided to fill.

He was where he was and was what he was because God came to him and gave him this office. Therefore, God was the One fully responsible for putting Paul in this position and only God can get the glory for the way He decides to use Paul in this position.

The word apostle means "one sent". It intimates that God is the One who is doing the sending. In it's general sense we are all apostles because we have been called by God to be sent out into this world to witness of the Christ.

This is not unlike the word deacon. When we think of the word deacon in the church we usually think of the official position

which is reserved by God for faithful men that they might serve the Body of Christ. In fact the word deacon means servant.

Now, who would deny that anybody in the Body Christ should be a servant? Men, women and children who are believers are servants or deacons or deaconesses in this sense.

But there is a special calling to serve in a special capacity when we talk of the office of deacon. And this is what Paul understands when he calls himself called to be an apostle.

Yes we are all sent by God, which is what apostle means, but there were those who were sent and called by God to perform specific duties reserved only for them to accomplish specific tasks by God.

And so we speak of the apostles as a group of men who had been give great responsibilities to set the foundation of the church of Jesus Christ. Paul was "one sent" as a special messenger to the Gentiles, to call them to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ.

Their specific qualifications as apostles are listed in the word of God, not the least of which is being personally chosen by Jesus Christ for such a high office.

Jesus personally chose the 12. When Judas betrayed the Lord and ended up killing himself we read in Act 1:21 "Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us,

Act 1:22 beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection."

In other words someone who followed Christ personally and witnessed His life, death and ultimate resurrection. To be an apostle in this sense one had to personally have witnessed the resurrected Jesus Christ.

Paul conveys this truth when speaking of his own apostleship.

1Co 9:1 "Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not the result of my work in the Lord?"

Where did Paul see the risen Jesus? On the road to Damascus while Paul, then called Saul, was still persecuting the church of Jesus Christ.

Paul's apostleship was not something he was boasting in but rather saw as something he certainly didn't deserve precisely because he was a persecutor of the church.

He states this in 1Co 15:9 "For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

1Co 15:10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them -yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me."

Paul was humbled to be called by God. As an apostle, however, he still saw himself first and foremost as a servant. His servant-hood revolved around the calling as he was set apart for the gospel of Jesus Christ as we read the last part of verse one.

You and I, if we have placed our faith in Jesus Christ, must realize that we too have been called out by God to be slaves of our Lord out of gratitude that He has set us free.

We may not be an apostle in the sense that Paul was, but we are apostles in the sense of the general term which means ones who are sent with a message.

Our Kurios, our Lord and Master has called us and given us the same message He gave to Paul. That message is the gospel of Jesus Christ.

When we begin to think of our calling in that light, the light which shows us that God has personally intervened in our lives by calling us to Himself and giving us this message, then hopefully we begin to see the privilege of being a servant of the Most High God.

And instead of seeing our Christian faith as merely an opportunity of being associated with the visible church we can see it as the Spiritual reality that it is. We have a God who called us from darkness to His light and He has a plan for our lives which is to accomplish His will and that He might be glorified in our lives.

So, often we think we've been called to Christ's Kingdom to be set free from responsibility. No we've been set free from the penalty of our sin. The adventure and the blessing of being a child of the living God, our risen Savior comes when we understand that we are slaves. His personal chosen servants.

The entire letter to Romans revolves around this truth. And that truth is centered on Jesus Christ who is the truth.

We are servants of Christ. But when we relinquish our lives we find that Christ's life in us is the only true peace in this world that we need. And instead of wandering through this life wondering why we're here, we experience the kind of direction and purpose we were created for.

That's the joy of our salvation; knowing that Christ is using us and lifting up Himself in our lives as we witness to His love and forgiveness.

In one sense we can put ourselves in Paul's place. And hopefully we can all say and walk in a way where we can say Drew, or Charlie or Betty, put your name there..... a bondservant of Christ Jesus, called as a messenger, set apart for the gospel of Jesus Christ.

That's no small thing. Give glory your Lord and Master and walk as one who has been called to be a servant of the Most High God.