

When in Rome: The Gospel Unchained

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[0 : 00] Welcome here for this Sunday, April 26th, 2026. I haven't been saying the year lately, I don't know why, but I did it for a long time and then I didn't and I don't know.

We know what year it is, I hope. But my name is Kent Dixon and it's my joy to be the pastor here. We're continuing in our sermon series, When in Rome, and we're making our way through the book of Romans.

We'll be uncovering some of the timeless truths that this book holds. And these truths are as true and relevant today as they were when the Apostle Paul first wrote them.

Our passage for this morning, and you can go ahead and turn here, Romans 1, verses 8 to 17.

Romans 1, 8 to 17, which says, First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world.

God, whom I serve in my spirit in preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness. How constantly I remember you in my prayers at all times.

[1 : 09] And I pray now, at last by God's will, the way may be opened for me to come to you. I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gifts to make you strong.

That is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith. I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that I planned many times to come to you, but have been prevented from doing so until now, in order that I might have a harvest among you, just as I have had among the other Gentiles.

I am obligated, both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish. That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are in Rome.

For, you know this passage, For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes, first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.

For in the gospel, the righteousness of God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written, the righteous will live by faith.

[2 : 27] So last week, we considered Paul's four views. And those were the views he has of himself, the gospel, his commission and his calling, and then the believers in Rome.

So we looked at four different things there. And if you want to catch up on the series at any point, or review any of the previous sermons, you can find them on our website. Conveniently located under, any guesses?

Sermons. So this morning, our sermon is titled, The Gospel Unchained. Sounds dramatic, right?

And we're going to begin to see not just Paul's deep understanding of the meaning of the gospel, but also its significance, as well as its impact.

So in our passage this morning, we can recognize three main things. Paul makes it clear that he prays for his fellow believers. Paul also explains his mission, and what he wants to do for and with the Roman believers.

And then finally, Paul declares or proclaims the power of the gospel. So I don't know if you're like me, but I still vividly remember sitting through many sermons over the years, years and years, many, many sermons, and thinking, I'm a logical person, I'm a flow of thought kind of person.

[3 : 51] I always have been ever since I was little. So I would hear, oh, he's going to talk about this, and he's going to talk about that, and he's going to talk about this. Partly because I was little, and I was going, okay, when I hear that last word, we're in the home stretch.

Right? Hopefully not. But anyway. So first of all, let's look at Paul praying. And you can follow along on the slide as well, obviously.

Paul makes it clear that he thanks God for the Roman believers. He says that right in his opening. He would have expressed thanks to God through? Louder.

Thank you. Excellent. Scripture makes it clear over and over in both statements and examples in the lives of countless people that we witness in the pages of Scripture, that we are to be, anyone who follows Jesus, is to be a person of prayer.

1 Thessalonians 5, 16 to 18 says, rejoice, always, pray, continually, give thanks, sometimes, or in all circumstances.

[5 : 04] Why? Because this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. Pretty clear, right? So is your life, is my life, characterized by joy, characterized by gratitude to God for all that he has done?

Do you give thanks to God in good times? But maybe not so much in bad times? Right? When bad circumstances happen, do you stop and think, Lord, teach me, open my eyes to what I should learn here, or do we just think, rats?

I'm a rats person sometimes. So, is your life characterized by joy, and gratitude, good and bad situations? Because, friends, God is always with us.

It's important for us to seek him, and lean on him, never blame him, when our circumstances are difficult. Right? As I said a moment ago, Lord, open my eyes to this.

What do you want me to learn here? Am I holding on to something that you want me to let go of?

Open my eyes to that. So remember that through Jesus, God experienced the depth and breadth of humanity, the heights of joy, and the depths of grief and pain.

[6 : 23] Jesus knew. God knows. He understands that he wants us to lean on him in everything. And sometimes I think, humanity, we say, oh, if I have to lean on somebody else, it must make me weak.

It must make me this. It must make me somehow flawed. But we are created by God to trust him, to lean on him, to seek him for guidance in our lives.

So through Paul's comments in that, in our passage today, we learned that the Roman church had developed a vast reputation for their faith and devotion to God.

Right? We've talked about that a little bit already in this series. So it comes up again, speaking to the church in Thessalonica, Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 1 verse 8, Therefore, Paul says, we do not need to say anything about it.

Right? He said, he's pointing it out. He's pointing out that people, but he also doesn't want to dwell on it. Right? He doesn't want to give somebody credit when the credit is for God. So Paul recognized how the gospel was spreading in and through the churches.

[7 : 44] And he wanted to affirm and encourage them in their dedication and commitment to the Lord. As God is my witness. You know that phrase, right?

It's an expression we sometimes hear when someone wants to declare to someone else that undeniable truth of what they've said or done. That's how it's usually used.

As God is my witness, this is true. Right? And I don't think people always mean it literally when they say it. Is that, do you think that's fair? But Paul definitely seems to here.

He declares that God himself bears witness to the fact that he has prayed for the Roman believers constantly. Right? He's saying, God knows that I've been praying for you.

And knowing Paul, he likely prayed for all churches, all believers. We do that often in our pastoral prayers on Sundays. You probably do it in your own prayers.

[8 : 42] We're not just praying for ourselves. We're praying for God's will to be done through the church around the world. I hope. So more than just praying for the church in general, more than just praying for the Roman believers in general, he's been asking God to make a way for him to visit them.

Right? He sees that relationship as important. So it's good to be reminded that Paul praying for his brothers and sisters and for God to make it possible to visit.

These sincere prayers come from someone who serves God with his whole heart. Paul isn't self-serving. That's something we can learn about him.

But God's serving. He was seeking and submitted to God's will and not his own. He preached to spread the gospel, to draw people to Christ, and gave God the glory for the great things he had done.

Not to draw attention to himself. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4 verse 5, For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.

[10 : 03] See all those important distinctions there? Paul's also someone who is dedicated to preaching the gospel. We know that about him. He said in 2 Timothy 4 verse 2, Preach the word,

Be prepared in season and out of season.

Correct, rebuke, and encourage with great patience and careful instruction. Paul's main drive to want to visit the believers in Rome wasn't to serve some kind of personal agenda, but out of a sincere desire to see them and be with them in person.

He didn't want to just talk at them from afar. He wanted to be with them. And I think that's a key thing that we can see in Paul's messages over and over to churches, in his many communications to churches.

He wanted to be with other believers. He wanted to be encouraged by them as much as he wanted to encourage them himself.

Paul says in Philippians 1 verse 8, as he writes to the church in Philippi, God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.

[11:22] See that? There it is again. And also, did you see that? God can testify, right? As God is my witness. There it is again. Friends, are we moved by this kind of love?

The kind of love that God ultimately has for all of his children? I've often thought this myself.

Knowing that you will spend eternity with other believers, do you tolerate them?

Or are you drawn to the family of God the way that we see Paul was over and over? In the next section of our passage for this morning, we can recognize that Paul moves into an explanation to his readers.

So he wants to explain why he wants to be with them and also what he wants to share with them.

So first, Paul says that he wants to impart some spiritual gifts, and you probably heard that, to help strengthen them, right?

And we hear a similar kind of message in 1 Thessalonians 3, verses 2 and 3, where Paul says this to the church in Thessalonica. We sent Timothy, who is our brother and co-worker in God's service, in spreading the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you in your faith so that no one would be unsettled by these trials.

[12:50] For you know quite well that we are destined for them. Trials were coming for the church, Paul knew, and he wanted to prepare the believers. Second, Paul says that he wants them to be mutually encouraged, both the church by him, but also him by the church, that important symbiotic relationship.

And that's another common theme for Paul. We see it in 1 Thessalonians 5.11, where Paul says this, therefore, encourage one another and build each other up just as, in fact, you are doing.

So as we've considered, Paul was also encouraged by the faith of other believers and how that drew people to Jesus, right? He recognized in people how they were modeling Christ for others.

And that's really not just a consistent theme for Paul, but for all the disciples. So the words of the Apostle John in 3 John, chapter 1, verses 3 and 4.

It gave me great joy when some believers came and testified about your faithfulness to the truth. See that? Recognizing and encouraging.

[14:11] Telling how you continue to walk in it. He says, I have no greater joy than to hear that my children, the people he had modeled faith for, are walking in the truth.

Mutual encouragement. Faithfulness to God, sharing, declaring the truth of the gospel, those were core values in the early church.

And they're just as important today, if not more so. Then Paul talks about wanting to have a harvest. We know that imagery from Scripture. He wanted to have a harvest among the Roman believers.

And he says, just as I have had among the other Gentiles.

Now you may hear that and think, oh, there's Paul taking credit for something. Not at all. He's recognizing what's happening. As God works in his people. Paul's deep love for non-believers, and in particular, non-Jewish believers, comes through loud and clear here.

[15:20] John gives some good insight into the harvest Paul is speaking of. John 15 verse 8 says, this is to my father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

People who are dedicated to following Jesus, and who truly love the Lord and others, will bear fruit in their lives, that both declares who they follow, but it also shows how God's love flows through them into the world.

John 15 verse 16 says, you did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you, so that you might go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, and so that whatever you ask in my name, the Father will give you.

As people who have been chosen by God, we have this deeply humbling responsibility of living our lives with words and actions that then model Jesus for people and lead them to him. Another thing that Paul is looking to get across in this section is his desire to fulfill his obligation. So Paul is always very clear in his communication.

[16:51] Paul says in 1 Corinthians 9 verse 19, though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible.

So while we don't owe God anything for the grace that we have received, Paul is saying this, right? He didn't owe Jesus for his sacrifice, for the gift of salvation.

Paul recognized that he must share this truth with as many people as he could. Paul's dedication and commitment to the gospel, it came out of his deep gratitude for all that he had personally received from God.

Paul's commitment and sharing, and perspective on sharing the gospel was also inclusive, which is a hot button word these days, but this is the pure definition.

It's inclusive and didn't discriminate between Jews and non-Jews, right? Paul saw everyone as being open and available to receive the gospel.

[18:02] And he even goes on there to say, even to the wise and foolish. That could mean lots of different things, right? Literal and figurative. People who want to hear and are open to hearing, people whose ears and hearts are maybe closed to the gospel message.

So Paul was open to everyone, recognized that the gospel was for everyone, and he was committed to sharing it. Next, Paul declares.

So he closes out his comments in this section by declaring the power of the gospel, right? We may know the gospel, but do we recognize its power, its literal power to change lives, to restore?

It's interesting, though, that he does that. He starts by saying that he is not ashamed of the gospel.

So obviously that's an English word choice, right, that comes from the translations that we have.

But I think that what he's getting at here is that he is confident of the gospel. His confidence runs so deeply that he is not ashamed to declare it.

[19:16] He believes everything that it represents. And there's a lot that the Bible presents as true and factual through the gospel. Confidence in the gospel also ultimately means confidence in both God the Father and in Jesus.

That we believe what the Bible tells us about both of them, about their character, about their promises. It's all revealed in Scripture.

And Paul is declaring the gospel is the root. Let's hear Jesus' words from Mark 8, verse 38. If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels.

That sounds pretty serious, right? Jesus is saying that if we are ashamed of him or his words, his acting as an advocate to his Father when we die may be in jeopardy.

Shame about Jesus or his teaching, which, God willing, I mean that honestly when I use those words, you're here this morning because you are not ashamed of this message.

[20:38] But shame about Jesus or his teaching will result in Jesus, ultimately, what it's saying there in Mark is he will be ashamed of us. When we die and come before his Father, he will be ashamed of us.

So we'd best not take the gospel or our calling to share it with others who don't know Jesus yet, we must not take it lightly. But Paul doesn't stop at the importance of the gospel.

He immediately adds there that the gospel is God's power at work. And it's God's power at work as a literal, this is not some random illustration he's giving, it's a literal means of salvation for anyone who believes in it.

If you believe the gospel, you believe Christ and his words and his sacrifice, and you accept that, the gospel will change your life. 1 Corinthians 1.18 says, for the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing.

But to us who are being saved, it is the power of God. Friends, the gospel is the means of salvation for anyone who believes in it.

[21:59] But I have a question for you. For those of you who know video games, you'll get it. Not everyone will. I'll explain it. Is the gospel some kind of cheat code for eternity?

So in the video game world, if you have a cheat code for a video game and you enter it in on your keyboard or whatever, it can give you access to other things, can allow you to bypass things, to

minimize risk, things like that.

Is the gospel a cheat code for eternity? Is it somehow elusive and hidden and secret knowledge that only the super religious can access?

What do you think the answer is? No. John 1.12 says, Did you catch that?

Anyone who receives Jesus and believes in him by way of the cross and Christ's sacrifice can become a child of God.

[23 : 13] It's really not complicated. Similarly, John 3.36 says, Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them.

Jesus is the only way, the only way to be forgiven, the only way to live in eternity in relationship with God. The gospel also reveals the righteousness of God, as Paul says in Romans 3.21-24.

This is what that says. But now, apart from the law, the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the law and the prophets testify.

This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There's no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

And all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. It's not our righteousness or our sinless nature, somehow, that can save us in any way.

[24 : 39] It's only through Jesus that we can be reconciled to God. Only the righteousness of Christ will cover us.

So is that it? Not exactly. We're expected to be faithful to this truth that we first learned and believed.

After all, we are called believers. believers. We're called that for a reason. And then we're called to live in the light of what we believe that first changed us.

Does that all make sense? As Paul says in Colossians 2, verse 6, so then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him.

The same gospel we received and accepted should then shape our lives and everything about us. If the gospel hasn't changed us, if it hasn't changed me, if it hasn't changed you, then did we truly ever understand or accept it in the first place?

[25 : 59] Friends, let's seek to be changed people. People with humble hearts and attitudes that point other people to Jesus.

Amen.