

# All the nations

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[ 0 : 00 ] As a youth, I lived a hedonistic lifestyle. My friends and I would get together and we would boast of our sexual exploits with women.

I was into philosophy and was actively involved in a sect for nine years. I began an affair with a young woman and she was my lover for 13 years and she gave birth to our son.

I came to Christ, I ditched my lover and I am famous for my prayer, grant me chastity and continence but not yet. Who am I?

There was a certain ambiguity, that's right. But let me tell you that sects and philosophy did not do it for me and one day I threw myself down under a fig tree and I cried my eyes out and I repeatedly said to the Lord, how long, O Lord, how long, Lord, will you be angry to the uttermost?

Do not be mindful of my old sins for I felt my past have a grip on me and it uttered wretched cries, how long, how long is it to be?

[ 1 : 26 ] Tomorrow, tomorrow, why not now? Why not put an end to my impure life in this very hour? Who am I? And as I was saying this and weeping in the bitter agony of my heart, suddenly I heard a voice from a nearby house chanting as if it might be a boy or a girl saying and repeating over and over again, pick up and read, pick up and read.

And I hurried to the place where I'd put down the book and I seized it and I opened it and in silence I read the first passage on which my eyes lit and it said, not in riots and drunken parties, not in eroticism and indecencies, not in strife and rivalry, but put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh in its lusts.

Romans 13. And I neither wished nor heeded to read further at once with the last words of this sentence, it was as if a light of relief from all anxiety flooded into my heart and all the shadows of doubt were dispelled.

Who am I? And if you are here this morning, you can help us with the answer. Augustine. Look at that, they're trying to be very quiet down the front.

You did a great job. Augustine. Bishop of Hippo in North Africa which is in the country of Algeria these days and it was written, God spoke a life-changing message, a life-changing word to Augustine in 387 AD out of Paul's letter to the Romans.

[ 3 : 29 ] And so as we come to Romans, we are coming to a book where God has given us a message with the power to transform people. Now we're going to spend a few weeks sampling Romans, we're not trying to cover the lot, we're just dipping our toe in, we're spending a fair bit of time in chapter one and then we're going to bounce to three other chapters on the way.

In places it is a really difficult book, it's a wonderful book, it's the most complete explanation of the Christian faith in the Bible, it deals with sin and justification and righteousness and God's sovereign purposes for his, God's sovereign choices, his justice, God's eternal purposes for his people, the place of the Jews and the nations and how they should relate, how they might live with one another in Christ.

If you go back across church history, you actually see that there's a whole series of really famous Christians that have been converted by encountering the words of this book.

So people like Augustine and Martin Luther in the Reformation and George Whitefield in some of the revivals that happened in England and the United States and John Wesley who wrote hymns and was a great preacher, they all credit the letter to the Romans with their conversion and their establishment in Christ.

I can tell you that when I came to Christ in 1977, I joined a Bible study group which I'd never been part of before, never knew what they were and our leader took us through Luke's Gospel that first year and I think in a way grounded me in the faith but the place where he went the second year, he

took us verse by verse, passage by passage through the book of Romans and it was just a life-changing eye-opening place to come to in terms of being established in Christ and established in the Scriptures.

[ 5 : 25 ] I'd really like you to have it open, so if you've got Bibles with you tonight, have it open at Romans chapter 1. And it begins, Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God and then in verse 7, 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.

So you see that Paul is a letter and its author is the apostle Paul. If you jump to the very end of Romans to chapter 16 verse 22 and don't go there, it says, I, Tertius, who wrote this letter, greet you in the Lord.

And so the words of the letter are the apostle Paul's, but they are written down by a scribe by the name of Tertius. It's a letter which is written to believers in Rome and he describes them as everybody who is loved by God and who is called to be holy.

It's a grand letter. It's about God's really big picture purposes in Christ. And it begins again. 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. So God's message is a person, Jesus Christ. And Paul is not politically correct.

[ 7 : 20 ] He just comes straight out and unashamedly says, I am a slave of Jesus Christ. I think every one of your English translations says a servant of Jesus Christ, but it actually says, I'm a slave of Jesus Christ.

I'm not ashamed to be a slave of Jesus Christ. I have been called into his servants. I have been given a mission. My life has become one of total obligation to Christ.

I was transformed in a moment on the Damascus road when the Lord Jesus confronted me about my hatred of the Lord and my hatred of his people. And I have come to know and to treasure the Lord Jesus Christ.

And he tells the story about his coming, not here, but in numbers of places in the New Testament. And in Acts 26, he says it in a very short way.

He says, he tells the story again, he says, I said when I heard the voice, who are you, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.

[ 8 : 23 ] But rise and stand upon your feet for I have appeared to you for this very purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those things in which I will appear to you, delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles to whom I am sending you, the nations to whom I am sending you.

He has been brought from darkness to light. The Lord Jesus has saved him for a purpose.

He has commissioned him for a task. He's an apostle. It means a sent one. He's been sent by Jesus and God has sent him to the nations with his momentous announcement about the Lord Jesus Christ, God's great news.

And in verse 2, it says about this message, it says, this is a message which God 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.

Now it's a mouthful and it's earful and this is harder work than some of the passages we come to sometimes. But it's a much anticipated message.

[ 9 : 54 ] He's saying to us, this is a message about God's king which was promised in the Old Testament. The prophets were looking forward to the day when God's king would be revealed.

And this king was born into a human family. He was born into Joseph and Mary's family. And his human ancestry goes back to King David.

But he says more than that, he's not just got human ancestry, he's got divine ancestry. It was proved when the spirit of God raised him from the dead.

And so you hear and you read in this passage that Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all working together. God's gospel is about the Father's Son who became flesh and died and was raised from the dead by the power of God's Spirit.

So, this is not impersonal theology. This is not dry and dusty stuff.

[ 11 : 05 ] It's not an academic exercise. It's not like bringing Jesus down and putting him in the slab and the morgue and pulling him into bits and saying, oh, that's interesting. He's got vessels and a heart and kidneys and a brain and this is very personal.

Paul refers very personally to Jesus Christ our Lord. He's somebody that he knew and he writes to people who know him personally as well.

I think it's one of the great evidences of true Christian faith in somebody's life. You know, to be able to call Jesus my Lord was a huge change for me when I came to Christ because for the first time my prayers changed from being dear God to dear Lord Jesus.

I knew him and I began to understand how important he is and I saw that Christian faith is personal and it's relationship it's not religion and Jesus is not somebody that we know about and we recite facts about he is somebody that we know he is not just God who is out there he's God in here.

So Romans is a letter which is written to Christians who know a person their Lord Jesus Christ but there are also clues here to the big picture purpose of this letter and it's verse 5 it says 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.

[ 13 : 06 ] So Paul's been given this apostolic mission for a purpose it's God's purpose it's not his purpose and the purpose expressed here is to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name God's name among all the nations.

It's an interesting expression it's a strange expression it's only used in one other place in the New Testament and that's in Romans chapter 16 verse 26 and right at the end of Romans it says but this has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations according to the command of the eternal God to bring about the obedience of faith.

So the letter begins with the expression it ends with the expression and you could say in marketing terms and I think it's a pretty crass way to speak about the scriptures but in marketing terms God's gospel is results orientated.

God has a purpose and his purpose is to bring men and women and boys and girls to himself we are brought to the obedience of faith.

To come to Christ is to be brought to the obedience of faith. I don't know if you've ever talked about you coming to Christ in those terms before but that's a scriptural way of saying you have been brought to the obedience of faith.

[ 14 : 32 ] Very strange expression. He could have said something like well you've been brought to the obedience of good works but he doesn't. He says to the obedience of faith and he's highlighting for us that God wants us to obey him by putting our faith and trust in him.

To believe in him. So if you ask the question would you want to be obedient to God and I think everybody here probably wants to be obedient to God well what does that mean? You can't live a good enough life believe the gospel.

Be obedient to the gospel believe what God has said. So God has purposes he has strategy and his strategy is to tell who Christ is and what he has done as far and wide as you possibly can into all the world.

God but obedience of faith is not about doing a whole lot of good works to achieve our salvation it is doing the one thing that God asks us to do in response to what Christ has done and that is to believe him.

I love this story there's a story in a biography of a bloke called John Chapman and most of you won't know who he was but he was a pretty famous preacher around Sydney for a number of years he's an older man now and he tells a story in his biography about preaching at Sydney University one day and I'm going to read you verbatim what he says you may have heard me use it before but I was talking to a young bloke after a uni meeting and he said to me that what he was going to do was live it up until the end of his life have a really great time and then just before he died he would become a Christian and I said to him well how do you know that you'll be able to become one at the end and he said I could become a Christian whenever I like and I said you can only become one when God says and he insisted that he could do it so I said well if it's easy as that why don't you give us a demo why don't you show me how you'll pull it off how you'll do it by becoming a

[ 17 : 06 ] Christian right now if it's that easy you'll be able to pull it off anytime wouldn't you yeah but right now I don't want to come on you aren't trying very hard if you can really do it do it now should be a piece of cake and he started to get a bit touchy I don't want to try a bit harder want to

want to I don't want to well I said that's the problem isn't it what makes you think you'll want to at the end young man was having himself on he had seen and heard the truth about the Lord Jesus Christ he knew it was true he knew it had consequences into eternity but for the present he refused to believe his heart was in fact very hard to

God he was outside the kingdom he had not been brought to the obedience of faith he refused to exercise faith it was an act of the will to say I don't want God big question for me with Romans 1 and it's probably not even occurring to you at the moment but I want to take you there and it is why does Paul want to minister in Rome the gospel was already there the church had begun it was established without his influence in chapter 1 verse 14 he said I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks both to the wise and the foolish and that is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are at Rome who is he obligated to it's there in the verse Greeks and non-Greeks who isn't he obligated to people here this morning got to keep quiet who isn't he obligated to I'm not under obligation to the Jews well done Tashi he doesn't say the Jews I'm not under obligation to the Jews but I am under obligation to the Greeks and the non-Greeks the barbarians the babblers in other words he describes the whole of the world outside Judaism and why is he saying that because he's the apostle to the nations they're the ones that I have been sent to even though I always preach to the Jews when I first come to a city they are the ones I've been sent to I've been sent to the nations and I am under obligation to them but at the end of Romans in chapter 15 he says it's always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation and you read that and you think well he seems to contradict himself on the one hand he's saying I am eager to preach the gospel to you and on the other my ambition is to preach the gospel where

Christ is not known but he knows it's known there and I think he gives some reasons in verse 11 I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift 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 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 nations now I want to explain something quickly to you that that is quite tricky so I need you to listen it's a little bit different I want to give some history in the year 49 AD so this is and the letter to Romans is written in 58 AD nine years before

Romans was written the emperor Claudius kicked all the Jews out of Rome and there's a Roman historian called Suetonius who is no friend of Christians and he wrote a note that the emperor did this because the Jews were fighting over a Christos now you need to know that in Greek the name Christ is Christos in Acts chapter 18 this event is confirmed if you ever want to think about you know the the New Testament is thoroughly historical in Acts chapter 18 this event is confirmed because in verse 1 it says Paul left Athens and went to Corinth and there he met a Jew named Aquila a native of Pontus who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome Paul went to see them and because he was a tent maker as they were he stayed and worked with them and every

[ 22 : 27 ] Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue trying to persuade Jews and Greeks so what we're reading is that the emperor in Rome the king of the world was fed up with the behaviour of Jews and so fed up with the behaviour of Jews in Rome that he kicked them out of the city by imperial decree now when he did that he did not make a distinction between Jews who believed in Jesus and Jews who didn't believe in Jesus they're all Jews and so they're all out and he effectively says I'm sick of your bickering get out of here and what that would have meant at that moment was that that all that was left of the church were believers who were not Jewish to start with and so Jewish customs like food laws and special days would no longer have been a big deal for Gentile or international

Christians in Rome the church in Rome has suddenly become an international church and they didn't have to have to worry about fitting in with the believers of Jewish heritage now this is not the same but think about this if imagine the Australian government decided to kick everybody out of Chatswood with Anglo heritage get on the boats stop the boats get on the boats and send them back to Europe now I'm looking around and I think there's an awful lot of us who would be out of here we'd be gone and there's a few of us who would be left which is really good and if only mainland Chinese were left Brian how many Asians in Chatswood at the moment last census 46%

Asian percentage there's more isn't there Brian's done all the statistics out of the census for us so we're just looking at that the other day I think it's a really big percentage in Chatswood which is pretty obvious if you go down the street on Sunday but if only mainland Chinese were left they may have very little idea about our traditions and our history they may not even realise that we had a book of common prayer I would imagine that many of you tonight wouldn't even think twice about what a book of common prayer is and guess what they would have to build and run this church as best they could with the Bible in their hand and with believers around them do you think they could do that of course they could if all this was stripped away could a church happen and be run here in Chatswood without all the external stuff that we've got of course it could and so we would suddenly or the people who were left would be free from defending an institution and they would have a fresh start in pursuing Christ it'd be a blessing to us sometimes to take all this stuff from us this stuff's a blessing in one way but it's a distraction in others and so it's a bit like that in Rome you don't have any

Jews left or very few Jews left confusing things with issues like circumcision or eating prawns or food offered to idols the Roman Christians could pursue and worship Christ without being encumbered by the baggage from a different culture and a different people and we're not slandering the Jews because we know what the book of Hebrews says the book of Hebrews says that the temple and the system of worship in Jerusalem was only ever a shadow of what God would achieve in Christ Christ they didn't need so the international Christians did not need the same mindset change that the Jewish believers did and so I think that Paul writes this gospel to Rome to strengthen the Christian church there they are an international church he wants to make sure that they know the true gospel they've been established at the centre of the empire

God has given them a strategic ministry to believers who know nothing of Judaism and Paul wants them to be clear about the freedom that they have in Christ and I think he helps them pastorally some of the believers of Jewish heritage it's nine years later they're beginning to come back into Rome Priscilla and Aquila are mentioned in Romans chapter 16 they're no longer in Corinth they're now back in Rome and so Paul spends a lot of time in this letter explaining the place and the significance of the Jews in God's purposes which you see in chapters 9 to 11 and he explains how the church is to get on with one another with different beliefs and backgrounds and that's what goes on in chapters 13 and 14 when it speaks about the weak and the strong you know you who are strong ought to bear with the failings of those who are weak and I think it's very clearly that he sees the Jewish believers as the weak ones in that circumstance so brothers and sisters

[ 28 : 39 ] Romans is a glorious description of God's big picture purposes and what they mean it's about God it's God's gospel not our gospel and it's about what God wants from his people and you see very clearly in this letter that God is strategic he is purposeful he's not muddling along wondering what he will do next it's been his strategy since before he called Abraham and his purpose is to bring all the nations under his blessing and he's not someone who looks at different nations and discriminates like we do and we think why would God want them or how could he possibly tap into them he said to Abraham all peoples on earth will be blessed through you Jews had narrowly kept the promises to themselves as a generalisation and God and God seized one Jew a Jew who hated him and hated his people the apostle

Paul and he made him his own and he sent him on an international mission telling people what God had done in Christ and so God's purpose is to bring men and women to himself and he does it with a message and the message is the precious gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ that's what Romans is about strategy is not a dirty word all of us think strategically I think in our church we are a church we've been an older church which is probably in the process of renewing and when a church of 300 people which might be our church supports 9 or 10 people doing ministry in other places that's actually a strategy for bringing God's message to the world and so Tim who was here last week from the Middle East and spoke to us and Kylie quietly teaching people in the Middle East they are working strategically to strengthen the church in a place where it is really dangerous to be a believer it's a great thing when we support strategic ministry to other places 300 people providing resources to many ministries beyond here that's just terrific and we ought to continue to do it but it's really important for us to be strategic in Chatswood or in our workplace or in our school or in our university community and I don't know if you go off to uni and you see the great mass of people who don't know Christ you can sometimes throw your hands in the air and say where do I start what do I do and I want to say under God to take personal responsibility for what

God has given you don't look around at everybody else think about where God has placed you the family that you're in the sporting team that you play in the workplace you find yourself in the school or the university he's taking you to

I said to mums and bubs the other day don't ask me why I was at mums and bubs I'm not really a mum and I'm not a bub or I was a bub but it was a long time ago but I said to them I don't think that God is trying to add to our load and asking us to do more and more and more so that we end up being burdened Christians falling down all over the place with too much to do because he's a hard taskmaster he's not like an Olympic God saying you he's not doing that he calls us to be faithful with what he has given us in the place in which he has put us he's a strategic God he's able to use all his people to his glory and so if every one of us was nurturing just one relationship where we were bold to speak to our friend about Christ and I don't mean going having coffee tomorrow and say I've really got to tell you about Christ because the preacher told me to last night

I mean nurturing friendship being a real friend being in relationship but in the context of the relationship being unashamed about your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and praying for the opportunities to speak about him because if we all did that then 300 people from here are going out into the year and into the week or wherever we're going and we are having an impact all over the place with more than 300 people it's a big gospel it's a big task but not too big I took great encouragement another we war story tonight how's that two in a row sorry Joyce but I worked for a while with a man called Gary Stewart who works out in Walgett these days and we were chewing the fat down at the river for one of our staff meetings one day I think we were catching carp out of the river and talking ministry that's my justification and I think he was feeling overwhelmed at the task because he could see the needs of people and a number who didn't know Jesus and he just said it's such a big job what do we do at church how do we minister and I think the grace of [ 34 : 07 ] God spoke to me and said one at a time we work one person at a time in the relationships that we have and we take the opportunities that God has given us so don't be overwhelmed be faithful to Christ with what God has given you because the big picture is accomplished by doing the little things by being faithful and taking the opportunities that God has given you Amen I'm going to pray we do pray Lord Jesus that you would help us to see the wonderful task that you have set before us to wonder at the gospel to see the powerful transformation that you have given us in this extraordinary message about the Lord Jesus Christ and we pray tonight for each of us that we wouldn't walk from here discouraged and overwhelmed by the size of the task but that each of us might be encouraged in the power of your spirit to build genuine friendships with people where we are not ashamed of

Christ and where we bring a word to bear in season as you give the opportunity but we do pray Lord Jesus that you would give us the opportunity that you would open doors and that we would find grace and empowerment to be faithful to you to enjoy and delight in your good gospel and to see its impact in the lives of many people around us and we pray this in Jesus precious name Amen movement back and hear what you want to see if you find quelque chose to be ■ to me to be the nietTeeth