

I Know you are, but What am I?

Romans Part 1

Sermon 1

4.14.24

Opening: We live in a world that loves to accumulate titles.

A. Examples:

1. A typical listing on Spotify for a Christian artist: _____ are artists, songwriters, and worshippers, husband, and parent to three awesome kids and they have been nominated for a grammy and recently released a new album...

2. A social media profile may say that Blank is an international influencer with more than 100k subscribers on YouTube. They love traveling the world and making people smile through their work....and of course, they drive a Subaru with lots of stickers supporting their favorite causes.

3. The other day, I was meditating on a phrase that I could not remember the source.

a. I was sure it came from Aristotle, or Socrates, or Teddy Roosevelt or some great icon of learning and leadership.

b. But, according to Google, the phrase came from a character I wasn't allowed to watch growing up.

c. The American theologian from the year I was born, Pee Wee Herman.

d. "I know you are, but what am I."

B. The Apostle Paul could have opened this letter with: Philosopher, Pharisee, Author, Political Prisoner, Reformer, international influencer, preacher, friend, spiritual father and director,....

1. Instead, he opens with the following: Servant, called as apostle, set apart.
2. He was nothing apart from Jesus, and other labels didn't matter.
3. The labels were subsumed under his relationship to Jesus.
4. Who was Paul presenting himself to be to Rome? Christ's slave and herald.

Introduction: Romans is the most intimidating book.

A. Romans is, arguably, the most important book in the Bible.

1. The Reformation started with Martin Luther reading Romans.
2. Romans changed John Wesley's life and direction and before him, a guy named Augustine.
3. Most great reformations and revivals began with people reading and seeking to understand this letter Paul wrote to Rome.

B. Romans is also the most debated and written about.

1. There are more commentaries and books written about Romans than any other book.
2. Also, some of the longest sermon series have been through Romans.
 - a. Martyn Lloyd-Jones preached 12 years on Romans (366 sermons)
 - b. John Piper did 8 years.
 - c. I know a guy in Springfield who started a church and began with Romans. The church closed before he finished the sermon series.

C. I have no intention of preaching Romans for the rest of my life.

1. I don't have the time to preach everything in Romans, but I do have time to say what the Spirit wants to say to us in this season.

2. What I hope to do is expose us to this powerful letter.

3. Some sermons will cover large portions; others will cover much shorter.

D. Part of my hope is that we will use this time to seriously read and listen to what God is saying to us through this book.

1. One way I hope to help you is by providing these Romans notebooks.

2. My sermon notes are always online for you to use.

3. Get a Bible and mark it, interact, underline.

4. Take notes in the Bible app.

5. Reading and understanding Romans has the potential to change our lives.

Scripture

Romans 1:1–7 (CSB)

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle¹ and set apart for the gospel of God—² which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures—³ concerning his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who was a descendant of David⁴ according to the flesh ⁴ and was appointed to be the powerful Son of God according to the Spirit of holiness by the resurrection of the dead. ⁵ Through him we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the Gentiles,⁶ including you who are also called by Jesus Christ.

⁷To all who are in Rome, loved by God, called as saints.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

1. The Church in Rome hadn't met Paul yet.

A. They surely knew of him, but only a handful had met him in person.

1. The Apostle desires to visit and share the Gospel in the greatest city of the world.
2. So, Paul sends this letter sometime around A.D 56-57 in preparation for a future visit.

B. These kinds of letters had a certain form.

1. They all start with a greeting.
2. If you were going to introduce yourself to a group of believers that you have never met, where would you start?

a. Most Women start with their family:

1. Hi, I'm a wife and mother of...and I have three beautiful grandkids...if I would have known how great grandkids were I would have had them first (haha).
2. Most women start with family.

b. Most men start with a vocation or hobby.

1. Hi, I'm Paul, I collect guitars and love baseball. Oh yes, I'm married....
2. If we have a shared hobby, we talk about it for the rest of our time.

C. The Apostle Paul begins with his relationship to Jesus.

1. Paul identifies his master, his office, and his purpose. (NICNT)
2. The Apostle Paul knew who he was, who Christ was, and who he was talking to.

Let's work backward from Paul's progression:

2. To all in Rome.

Romans 1:7 (CSB)

⁷To all who are in Rome, loved by God, called as saints.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

A. The Romans were believers of mixed backgrounds.

1. The majority were Gentiles or non-Jewish.

a. This is partly because all of the Jews had been expelled about a decade before but had started to return.

b. The majority of the Church was non-Jewish.

c. The Church was reflective of the city.

d. Some Jews, some Gentiles,

e. Between 10-20% of the Roman Empire was in some sort of slavery, so approximately 5-10 million people.

f. But in Rome itself, a city of close to a million, 300,000-350,000 could have been in some form of slavery.

2. Why does this matter? Healthy churches look like their cities.

a. An all-white church in a diverse city is not healthy.

b. An old church in a young town is not healthy.

c. Our churches should reflect the age, economics, and culture of our communities.

3. When I talk about this church, I tell how our oldest member is in their 90s, and our newest is a few weeks old.

a. We reflect our communities.

b. That is a sign of health.

B. The believers in Rome were distinct from their fellow Romans.

1. Caesar was the center of everything Roman.¹

a. The Caesars claimed to be the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

¹ Wright, Tom. *Paul for Everyone: Romans Part 1: Chapters 1-8*. London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004.

- b. The Caesars claimed the title of Son of God.
- c. The Caesars were not just kings, but they were deity.
- d. The Caesar's "birthday" was celebrated as "good news," also called the gospel.
- e. Therefore, they were the center of everything in the Roman Empire.

2. But for believers, Jesus is the center of everything.

a. Jesus' claim to be the Son of God was blasphemous to the Jews and treasonous to the Romans.

b. This put Jesus' followers at odds with culture and politics.

3. Even though they lived in Rome, their Roman status was not their primary identity.

a. Roman citizens had great privileges and opportunities.

b. But that was secondary to the call of Christ.

c. No matter where we live or what our titles might be, Our call to Christ is always primary.

C. The believers in Rome were Loved by God.

1. The Apostle Paul calls them "Loved by God".

a. To be loved is the primary goal of human existence.

b. Deep down, our most fundamental need is to be loved.

c. To be loved by:

1. Parents and family.

2. We want to be loved by friends.

3. And for the younger generations, we must feel loved at work.

2. When you know you are loved, you go further.

a. When a kid gets a new pair of shoes, they want to show you fast they can run:

1. The kid thinks it's the shoes that makes them run fast.

2. But the adult knows it's the love of the audience, the love of the one cheering them on, that makes them run fast.

b. Living in a wicked city, it was the love of God that kept the Roman believers pressing forward.

c. In a few years, many of those believers would be martyred in that city.

1. The Apostle Paul would be imprisoned and beheaded there.

2. Others would face great persecution by Nero in AD 64 (8 years away), with many of them murdered in the streets, crucified, burned, or fed to dogs.

d. How could they do this?

1. Knowing they were loved by God changes everything.

2. As you face trouble, opposition, and just downright hardship, remember you are loved by God.

3. One of the first attacks of Satan is aimed at your memory of God's love for you.

D. Called as Saints.

1. To be a saint is not to be perfect.

2. To be a saint is to be part of God's Kingdom

a. Paul repeatedly calls people saints that I would not.

b. This is especially true in the book of Corinthians, where that group of church people was all kinds of messed up.

3. To be a saint is to know who has called you, saved you, and changed you.

a. Rome was full of slaves, freedmen, citizens, plebes, magistrates, Senators, and all sorts of people.

b. The Kingdom of God consists of saints: dearly loved men and women who are now called children and saints.

2. Called by Jesus Christ

A. The Apostle ensures that the opening of the letter is about Jesus.

1. Jesus is their hope, their purpose, their source and their reason.

2. But who is Jesus?

3. The Apostle packs in a lot in a few words:

Romans 1:1–7 (CSB)

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle¹ and set apart for the gospel of God—² which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures—³ concerning his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who was a descendant of David⁴ according to the flesh ⁴ and was appointed to be the powerful Son of God according to the Spirit of holiness by the resurrection of the dead. ⁵ Through him we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the Gentiles,⁶ ⁶ including you who are also called by Jesus Christ.

⁷ To all who are in Rome, loved by God, called as saints. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

B. He is the promise of the Holy Scriptures.

1. Even the Gentiles in Rome would have heard about the promises about Jesus in the Old Testament.

a. How Jesus was the promised suffering servant and victorious King of Isaiah.

b. How Jesus fulfilled Psalm 22 perfectly through His crucifixion.

2. The Apostle Paul knew that **Jesus was no accident of history but had been promised long before.**

a. Jesus is not like any other ruler, king, or influencer.

b. Jesus' appearance, Jesus' death, and Jesus' resurrection were all part of a predetermined plan by God.

C. He is the topic of the Old Prophets.

1. The Apostle knew that the future Messiah was a favorite topic of the prophets.

2. They saw glimpses and shared the hope.

3. But what they saw didn't compare to what was happening in the day of Romans:

Matthew 13:17 (CSB)

¹⁷ For truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see the things you see but didn't see them, to hear the things you hear but didn't hear them.

4. Even though the days they were living in were hard, they were blessed.

D. Jesus is the descendent of King David

1. Jesus' earthly throne went back a thousand years.

2. His Heavenly throne knows no beginning or end.

3. The Caesars could claim whatever they wanted, but their claim never matched that of Jesus.

E. He is the powerful Son of God, confirmed by the Spirit of holiness and the resurrection.

1. Many ancient rulers believed they would live forever, and established pyramids, rituals, and religions around this idea.

2. But none of them were ever resurrected.
3. Jesus was Confirmed by the resurrection.
 - a. This event is what demonstrates to us that Jesus is King, and Lord, and Savior, and Healer, and Provider.
 - b. All other rulers delayed death as long as possible because their deaths were permanent.
 - c. Jesus accepted death because He knew His was temporary.

F. He is Lord Jesus Christ (KING KING Jesus)

1. Christ is not a name, it's a title.
2. The Apostle, writing to those under the shadows of King Caesar, reminds them that Jesus is King.
 - a. King Jesus King
 - b. Lord Jesus Christ
3. This statement was blasphemous to the Jews and treason to the Romans.
 - a. But this statement is salvation to those who believe.
 - b. It isn't enough to proclaim that there is a God or that Jesus is God.
 - c. What we are to proclaim is that Jesus is King of the universe, and we serve Him.
 - d. At the end of the age, "every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord."
 - e. What are they professing: That Jesus is indeed King and has conquered all other kingdoms.
4. And even though those in Rome, and Paul himself, would be mistreated, persecuted, and martyred by the leaders of the Roman Kingdom, they knew that the real, true King was King Jesus.

3. Who was Paul?

A. Servant/Slave of Christ Jesus

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God.

1. Paul gives the least amount of attention to his identity.
2. And he begins with I am a slave of King (Christ) Jesus.
 - a. The phrase connotes total devotion, suggesting that the servant is completely at the disposal of his or her Lord²
 - b. And in a city with hundreds of thousands of people in slavery, Paul understood what it meant to give His life completely to a master.
3. This is a lesson we need to learn and practice.
 - a. To be so devoted to Jesus that we go where he says, and we do what he commands and gives what he asks.
 - b. To identify with Jesus to the point that all other titles disappear under Jesus' Lordship.
 - c. That all the other titles merely describe what we do not who we are.

B. Paul was An Apostle (messenger, witness) of Jesus.

1. Paul used this in every letter he wrote.
 - a. To be an apostle was to declare that he had seen Jesus and that he was an official messenger of Jesus.
 - b. Apostle was Paul's office, like mine is pastor, and like others may be a prophet or evangelist.
2. But Paul's message was plain:

² Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996), 41.

- a. He was called to tell about Jesus.
- b. If Caesar had his official messengers, and they would go throughout the Roman world proclaiming Caesar's demands and even declaring Caesar's gospel, Jesus had His messengers who were empowered to perform signs and wonders to convince and display to the world that Jesus is King.

C. Paul, set apart for Jesus.

1. In the Old Testament, the Levites were set apart from the rest of Israel to minister only for the Lord.

- a. Here, Paul picks up this thread and says he was set apart for the Gospel of King Jesus.
- b. Paul, viewed as a servant, was set aside for this cause and purpose only.

2. To an extent, I understand this.

a. Sometimes, I am reminded that I'm in Licking, MO, for one purpose: because Jesus sent me here.

b. My activities in Licking all originate from the calling of God to be here:

- 1. I didn't come here with a vision.
- 2. I didn't come here to build buildings.
- 3. I didn't come here to provide for my family.
- 4. I'm here because Julie and I felt we were set apart to minister Jesus in Licking, MO.

c. My friend Justin is raising money to return to Japan.

- 1. And we support him not because it's a good thing, or so that he can experience the world, or travel.
- 2. We support him because we confirm that the Lord has set him apart for this purpose.

d. And as the Apostle Paul said in Romans 1:11, Justin and I declare to our places of calling, “we long to impart some spiritual gift” among the people of our calling.

Apply. For this congregation, the question remains: Are you doing and being who God has called you to do and be?

A. Are you walking in faith and obedience to your purpose?

1. There are many reasons why we struggle with this:

2. We struggle when:

a. Our picture of who Jesus is and who we are is not in focus or perspective.

1. Jesus can never be too big, but I can.

2. Jesus can be out of focus, and that happens when the lens is on me instead of Him.

b. I forget my master, my office, and my purpose.

1. This is easy to do.

a. The demands of work.

b. The requirements of a family.

c. The stress and toil of life.

2. First and foremost, you belong to Christ.

a. Not to your kids, not to your spouse, not to your job.

b. Responsibilities are part of our calling, but not your calling.

c. We struggle when we forget how loved we are.

1. To those in Rome...loved by God.

2. You may find yourself in a wicked situation.

- a. Your present arena may feel like you are surrounded by enemies that want to tear you apart.
- b. And the reality is, they may do just that.
- c. But when I remember that I am loved by no one less than the King of the Universe, all of the problems and sufferings take on a different perspective.

2 Corinthians 4:17–18 (CSB)

¹⁷ For our momentary light affliction is producing for us an absolutely incomparable eternal weight of glory. ¹⁸ So we do not focus on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

Prayer

A. The worship team is going to lead us in one more song.

1. I encourage you to take this time together to:
2. Be reminded of God's love for you.
3. Clarify God's calling and purpose for your life.
4. Repent of areas that have taken on too much importance.
5. Dedicate our lives fully to Jesus.

B. Prayer