

Romans: I Am Paul

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[0 : 00] Good morning. For those of you who don't know me, my name is Eric. I'm the youth guy here at Watermark. And as the youth guy, I get to have lots of fun conversations with teenagers.

And I think the thing about teenagers is they say what lots of adults are thinking, but which the adults know they'll get in trouble for saying. So a few weeks ago, I was talking with some teenagers, and I was telling them, hey, you guys should try reading the Book of Romans, because it's this awesome book.

And one of the teenagers looks at me and he says, I'm not really that interested. The Book of Romans doesn't do anything for me. It kind of makes me feel brain dead. And I said, okay.

So I figure, you know, a lot of us here probably have that same thought. We're just not voicing it because we're adults and we know that we shouldn't say things like that. But then I was talking with a couple of kids last week, and I was talking to them about reading something else in their Bible, and one of the kids said, you know, it's just so confusing reading the Bible because there's these letters, and instead of just saying hi, they have these really long intros with lots of big words, and I'm so exhausted by the time I just get through the introduction and I don't know what half the words mean, why can't they just say hi and then get on with the letter?

And so I figure introductions are tough for people. And of course today we're going through the introduction to the Book of Romans, so I know I've got my work cut out for me. And when we look at this passage, we open it up, and the first word that we see right there at the start of the passage is Paul.

[1 : 35] Paul is the author of this letter, so I figured a little background on his life might be helpful in understanding what's going on here and why it's so significant. Paul was born as a Jew. He was named Saul originally.

He was raised as a religious leader. He was taught by the greatest teachers of his time, the Old Testament basically. He was brought up, he became a great religious leader, and he was passionate about what he believed in.

He was in fact so passionate about it that when this new thing called Christianity started popping up on the scene, and people started leaving Judaism to follow Christianity, he thought, I have to do something about this.

And so he gathered up a group of people, and they went around, and what they would do is when they found Christians, they would arrest them, beat them, and sometimes kill them. And he did this out of a passion because he thought that he was serving God.

He said, this is how God wants me to serve him. Go, stop people from becoming Christians because they are leaving the true faith, they are leaving the true God, and they are going and following this false God.

[2 : 46] So he went around, he traveled around, he would arrest Christians, he would beat Christians, he would kill Christians. And one day he was on his way to a city called Damascus to arrest more Christians.

And this light shined out of the sky. It knocked him down to the ground. He was blinded. And a voice came out of the light and said, Saul, why are you persecuting me?

I can only imagine it must have been a terrifying moment. Lying on the ground, this bright light making it so bright that you can't even see, and a voice coming out of nowhere saying, why are you doing this?

And so Saul does the most logical thing. He says, who are you? Why is there a voice talking to me out of nowhere? And the voice says, I'm Jesus who you are persecuting.

From that moment on, Saul's life is utterly transformed. He realizes that these Christians that he has been persecuting actually are worshipping the true God. That this Jesus that he's been trying to stop people from following is the one that he himself is supposed to be following.

[3 : 50] And his life is radically transformed from that moment on. He never is the same again. He goes around and he starts trying to tell people that they should become Christians. And he starts trying to hang out with the Christians because now they're brothers.

And the problem is he has a reputation already established as someone who hates Christians and tries to kill them. So when all the Christians hear that Paul is a Christian, they're like, it's a trap. It's a trap. He's coming in here.

He's trying to trick us. He's trying to tell us that he's a Christian so that he can get in. He can meet all the high power guys. He can get access to them and then he can arrest them. Or maybe he's just trying to meet more of us so he can figure out who the right people are to arrest and kill.

And so people didn't want him joining them. But eventually a couple of Christians reached out to him. They got to know him and they realized this guy is for real. There's something different about this guy. He has changed. And they took him in and they introduced him to the rest of the Christians in their community.

And he continued telling people about Jesus every chance he got. And it got to the point where now instead of him being the one who was going around arresting Christians, he was the one that people were trying to arrest because he was telling everyone about Jesus.

[5 : 05] And eventually God called him to go and travel around the known world and tell people about Jesus. And so Paul in obedience, he started going by Paul when he started interacting more with non-Jews because Paul is more of a Greek name.

He started going by Paul. He started traveling around the world telling people about Jesus, sharing this great news. And on one of these journeys where he traveled around to tell people about Jesus, he wrote this letter that we now have that we call Romans.

Now, the exact reason that he wrote it is up for debate. We do know a few things. We know that he wrote it to introduce himself to the church at Rome because he hadn't been there before.

We know that he wrote it so he could tell them about his upcoming plans to visit them so that they could be prepared when he arrived. And we know that he wrote it to teach them a lot of stuff because there is a lot of teaching in the book of Romans.

But one of the biggest things that he constantly, constantly comes back to in the book of Romans is this great passion of his life, the gospel.

[6 : 12] And I think here at Watermark, we see the word gospel on stage every week, right? And we think, oh, it must be pretty important because they stick it on stage every week.

And we talk about it a lot and we've done studies on it in community groups. But I think for a lot of us, it's probably just a buzzword. We hear it and we think, oh, that's something big, something important related to Christianity.

But if I were to stand up here right now and say, what is the gospel? How many people could give me a solid answer on that and feel confident with the answer you're giving?

Or if I were to say, how many of us live lives that are absolutely transformed by the gospel in every way, all the time? How many of us does that actually apply to?

How many of us do that? How many of us can't do that to be an expert in every way? How many people of us may have done that? How many people of us are going to give you a step up? Because I know I fall short of doing that a lot. And with Paul, he looks at the gospel and he says it is gorgeous. He says it is beautiful.

[7 : 16] And I think for a lot of us, we see it as just a simple teaching. The simple set of information. And while it does include information, it is way more than that.

It's something way bigger. If I had to give a definition, just simple, basic, I would say the gospel is the good news that God saves sinners through the death and resurrection of Jesus. And that's short, that's simple, that's sweet, but I think when we look at the gospel, it's more like a diamond. That's the illustration I like to use. Imagine you have this huge diamond, and you look at it, and at one quick glance, you can say, wow, that is gorgeous. But when you have this huge, gorgeous diamond, do you just look at it quick, say that's gorgeous, and then put it away and not worry about it anymore? No one does that.

Think about any girl you've ever met who just recently got engaged. She has this diamond on her finger, and she wants to look at it from every different angle that she possibly can, because every time you spin it, it looks a little bit different, and it's still beautiful. And then she wants to take this gorgeous diamond, and she wants to show it to all of her friends, look at this.

I think he took out a 30-year mortgage to buy it. It is gorgeous. And you take this diamond, and at one glance, you can look, and you can see that it's beautiful, but no one just takes one look and then throws it in a drawer for later.

You take one look, and then you spin it, so you can take another look and see it differently, and then you spin it, and you take another look, and another, and another, and another, and you do that for years. And after 10, 15, 20 years of looking at this diamond, there can still be times where you spin it just a little bit, and the light catches it in some way, and you're like, whoa, I've never seen it in that beautiful way before. It's something so simple that at one glance, you see its beauty, but it's something so complex that you can spend years examining it and still be thrilled by its beauty. And I think it's the same way when it comes to the gospel.

[9 : 14] We see this good news that God saves us, and we rejoice in that. But then we take it, and we spin it, and we look at it from all these different angles, and it just gets more, and more, and more beautiful as we do that. So in this passage, Paul looks at the gospel from a bunch of different angles, and what we're going to do today is we're just going to look at a few of those angles and see how does this show us about this great beauty that is the gospel. So the first thing, he says it in verses one and three. He says that he was set apart for the gospel of God, and then if you jump down to verse three, it says concerning his son. The gospel is deeply personal. I think a lot of times we think of the gospel just as this information that we need to know. It's a set of facts. Know it. Believe it.

You're good. The problem is, Paul says it does include information, but it's way, way more than that. At its foundation, the gospel is deeply personal. The word gospel actually literally means good news, but it's not just good abstract information. It's good, deeply personal news about Jesus.

It is the key to our relationship with God, and it's not just the key to that relationship, but it's the heartbeat of the relationship that keeps that relationship going on a day-to-day basis. It's not this abstract idea that we believe and then move on to something bigger and better. It's at the heart of what it means to walk with God, to be a Christian, to follow him. The gospel is deeply personal.

The second angle that I want us to see is down in verse 16. He says, the gospel is the power of God for salvation. Again, when we think of the gospel as something we need to believe to be saved, we look at it and we think maybe it's like a spark that starts this big fire. Yeah, it's a little bit powerful.

I mean, it got that fire going, but in and of itself, it's just this little small thing. I know that's the way that I thought of it for a long, long time, and I'm guessing there's other people here that are the same way. But Paul doesn't just say the gospel has a little bit of power.

[11 : 37] He says the gospel is the power of God for salvation. It's the power of God that starts our salvation. It's the power of God that maintains our salvation. It's the power of God that keeps us going in this walk with God on a day-to-day-to-day-to-day basis. It's not just the spark that starts the fire, but it's the fire that is started by that spark. It is big. It is the power of God.

And when we think of the gospel as just this information that we need to believe, we say, I believe this, and I move on to something bigger, something better, something more powerful. But what he's saying is the gospel is the power of God. If we try and move on from it, we're separating ourselves from our power source as Christians. It's like if you take a light bulb and unscrew it from its socket and then say, turn on. It can't do it because it's disconnected from its power source. In the same way, if we try and move on from the gospel to bigger, better, more powerful things, there aren't bigger, better, more powerful things. If we try and separate ourselves from the gospel in our walk with God, we're disconnected from our power source. We can't operate like we are supposed to because the gospel is the power of God for salvation. The third angle of the gospel that I want us to see is that the gospel reveals God's righteousness. Now, I know righteous is not a word that we use ever today. Maybe surfer dudes back in the 90s used it. Righteous.

But really, no one uses it. Right? And so it's tough for us to understand because it's a big word and we never use it. And it's even tougher to understand because it actually has multiple meanings. I don't know if you know this, but righteousness actually is a legal term and a relational term. So it refers to a legal standing with someone and a relational standing with someone.

So to be, it sort of includes this concept of justice inside it. And so to be righteous in a legal sense means that you stand before the judge and he declares you right in the eyes of the law. You are not guilty.

You are right. And it's not just that you're not guilty, but you're like above, a few levels above not guilty. You are right. To be righteous in a relational sense means that you have a proper relationship with someone. That you're not going behind their back and doing things to destroy the relationship, but that you have this proper relationship with them. And the Bible says that God's righteousness is revealed to us in the gospel. It's shown to us in the gospel. And here's the thing, is that in and of ourselves, we are unrighteous in both sense of the word. God didn't create us that way. God created us good.

[14 : 33] God created us righteous. God created, the Bible says God created man in this garden. It was good. It was beautiful. That God interacted with man as his king. That God gave commands and man obeyed. And man legally had this standing as righteous. But it also says that God came down and walked in the garden with man as a friend. That they would talk to each other. Just like I'm talking to you now, but they'd have back and forth interaction too. And the Bible says that God would talk with man as a friend.

That they had this right relationship as friends. They were righteous. And God gave man this command, don't eat the fruit from this one tree. And man disobeyed.

Legally, man rebelled against his king. Legally, man moved into a state of unrighteousness. Man was guilty, deserving of a legal punishment of death. Relationally, man severed this relationship with God.

Man moved into a state of unrighteousness in this relationship with God. And we deserved a relational penalty of separation from God. And every single one of us since has followed in those footsteps of rebelling against God, of not listening to him, of choosing our own way instead of his, of being our own king, of trying to be the ruler of our own world. And each of us is in this state of unrighteousness on our own. But Paul says that in the gospel, the righteousness of God is revealed to us. And just like righteousness is a word with multiple, multiple definitions, God's righteousness is revealed to us in the gospel in multiple ways. It's shown to us by God, and it's revealed in us by God.

God is shown to us by God, and in us by God. Here's what I mean. Jesus came to the earth. He lived a perfect life. He was righteous. He had a perfect legal standing before God. He had a perfect relational standing before God. And he was killed on a cross. He fulfilled the legal requirements for our unrighteousness by dying. But it wasn't just a legal thing. It was a relational thing. As he was hanging on the cross, he cried out right before he died, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

[17 : 04] This relational requirement, this relational penalty that we owed was also paid by Jesus on the cross. In the cross, in the gospel, we see God's righteousness because God didn't simply shrug off our sin and say, that's not a big deal. We see God's righteousness because he, as the just ruler, required full payment for everything that we have done wrong.

But in the cross, God's righteousness is also revealed in us. Because Jesus didn't just die to pay the penalty so we can see, oh, God actually takes this seriously. No. Jesus died so that that penalty could be paid for us. He died so that we can take his righteous standing before God as our own. He died so that in a legal sense, we can move from being guilty to being right before God. Because our debt has been paid by another, by Jesus. He died so that in a relational sense, we can move into the state of being righteous before God. Because our penalty of separation from God has been paid by another, by Jesus. And Paul says in another place that God made him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf so that we might become the righteousness of God in him. That there's this trade of places that happens. That God shows us his righteousness, that he shows us that he's serious about our sin and about the penalty being paid. But then he takes it and pays it for us.

That he shows us that he's serious about it, but then through us shows the world that he is this great, forgiving God. This great, loving God. This great, righteous God.

God. This great, loving God. This great, holy, loving God. Elaborate. And takes us and makes us his own. It's a beautiful angle to view this diamond through.

The fourth angle that I want us to see today is that the gospel is received by believing. Paul says that it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

[19 : 28] That means everyone. Now, if you look at any religion outside of Christianity, everyone will agree something is messed up. Something is wrong between us and God.

And there's something that has to happen to bridge that gap. Some think we just have to be a good enough person. If our good deeds outbalance our bad deeds, then we're set. He'll be okay with us.

Sometimes, some think maybe we have to make lots of sacrifices and then he'll be okay with it. Some think maybe we just have to give lots of money to whatever religious organization we're a part of and then God will be okay with us.

Regardless of the religion, every religion outside of Christianity bases our acceptance with God on what we do, on how hard we try, on how hard we work, on how good we are at doing it.

And in Christianity, it says there's nothing you can do, there's no amount of effort that you can put in that will make you good enough. No amount of hard work, no amount of trying can get you to God and bridge that gap that is there.

[20 : 37] Actually, it says our best efforts are like filthy rags. That we stick them before God and we say, here, look at what I've done. He's like, get those away from me, they're disgusting. And in Christianity, we see there is this gap between us and God and there is something that needs to be done to bridge that gap and that although we can't do it, there is another who has come and done it for us.

That Jesus steps in and he does what we could never do. He fulfills God's requirements legally, relationally. And rather than just sitting back and saying, hey everyone, look, I did it, why can't you?

He steps in and he says, here, this is for you. It's a gift. And like any gift, it has to be received. And the fact that we can't earn it is actually good news for us because all we have to do is believe.

Say, yes, I believe. I accept it. Thank you. And the Bible says it will be ours for all who believe. It's amazing.

These different angles. The last angle I want us to look at today is the fact that the gospel is life transforming. The end of verse 17, Paul says, the righteous shall live by faith.

[21 : 59] He says if we are righteous, if we have this right legal standing before God, if we have this right relational standing before God, it's not just that it changes the way we interact with God and then everything else stays the same.

He says if our relationship with God legally and relationally has been changed, it has to impact everything in our lives. He says if we are righteous, if we have received this gift, if we have been changed in our relationship with God, it says we will live by faith.

I think faith is sometimes a tricky concept. One time I was talking with a group of teenagers. I asked them, what is faith? One of the kids said, faith is believing something you have no proof for.

It's close, but that's not quite it. I'd say faith is believing something you can't see, but you can have lots of proof for it. You just can't 100% prove it. So the classic stereotypical example is sitting in a chair.

Everyone here today walked in here. We saw this chair. We had no way of proving that that chair could hold us if we sat on it. We had lots of reasons for believing it. We looked around and we saw other people sitting in chairs and the chairs weren't collapsing under their weight, so we figured maybe it can hold ours.

[23 : 11] You know, if you've been here before, last time you came in, I don't think your chair collapsed under you, so there's good reason to believe that it would do it again, that it would hold you again. There's no visible damage to your chair that you're in right now that would make you think, oh, it's going to collapse when I sit down on it.

But really, there's no way that you could prove when I sit on this chair, it's not going to collapse under me. And yet pretty much everyone in here is sitting on a chair. We took a step of faith to sit down in that chair.

We had reasons to believe that it would hold us, but we couldn't prove it, but we acted on those reasons. And Paul says that if we are righteous, if we have received this gift, that we will live our lives by faith.

I think this concept of living by faith can be sort of abstract and tricky for us. So I have a story that I think illustrates really well what it means to live by faith. A few weeks ago, I was walking down the street.

I had this little five-year-old on my shoulders. We're walking along, having fun. There's like a group of people around us. We walk by this 11-foot-high wall, and he leans down to me and he says, Uncle, I can jump off that wall all by myself.

[24 : 19] And I thought, this kid is crazy. Or he just doesn't recognize how much it would hurt to jump off an 11-foot-high wall onto concrete. But he is five.

I didn't want to crush his dream, so I just sort of nodded my head and said, uh-huh, and kept walking. And then he leans down again and he says, Yeah, it'd be really easy. I'd stand on top of the wall, and you'd stand at the bottom of the wall, and I jumped, and you would catch me.

And at that moment, I realized, this kid isn't crazy. He's actually making a very reasonable statement because I can reach up, and I could catch him if he jumped off that wall. His statement wasn't based on the fact that he was crazy.

His statement wasn't based on the fact that he underestimated how big of a task it was to jump off the wall. His statement was based on the fact that he believed that I was big enough and reliable enough to catch him if he jumped. Living by faith is like that with God.

It means that when God calls us to do something, we don't look at the size of the task that God has called us to and say, that's way too big for me. We look at the size of the God who is with us. We say, it doesn't matter how big the task is.

[25 : 29] He's big enough and reliable enough to get me through it. And what it means for each of us to live by faith could look totally different. But Paul says, if the gospel is true and if we have been changed by it, it's going to impact the way that we live.

And the thing is, when we live this way, he says that the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith. And there's some debate about what exactly this means, but I think one of the big things is that this type of faith, it's contagious and addicting.

When you have this faith and you see it and it works, it leads to more faith. It is contagious and addicting. Going back to that story, imagine that five-year-old on my shoulders and he says, I can jump off this wall, you can catch me.

And I said, yeah, let's go for it. And I stuck him up there on top of the wall and we counted down, three, two, one, and he jumped and I caught him. What's the first thing he would say to me when he was in my arms? Again, again, again!

That was so fun! It's addicting. Once you see that it works, you want it more and more and more. And literally, if I had let that kid, he would have done it all day long.

[26 : 45] It's also contagious. I had this group of kids around me when that conversation happened. If I had stuck him up there on top of the wall, the rest of the kids probably would have been tugging on my shirt and been like, he's crazy, he's stupid, he's going to die.

And they would have yelled at him and said, don't do it! But as soon as they saw him jump, as soon as they saw me catch him, as soon as they saw that I actually was reliable to not let him fall to the ground and crack his skull open, they would have been lining up behind him saying, me next, me next, me next!

Because it's contagious. When you see this type of faith in action, you want it. It spreads. Living by faith is something that is contagious and addicting.

Life by faith leads to more life by faith in yourself and in others. So as we come to the end of our time together today, I want to ask you, what does it look like to live by faith this week?

For some of us here today, we're not Christians.

[27 : 54] Maybe living by faith means taking that first step and saying, God, I trust you. I believe that this gospel is true. I believe that you will make me righteous if I believe in you.

I will believe that you will give me this right legal standing and relational standing before you. And to live by faith means just trusting in him. Maybe if we are Christians, living by faith means stepping out in obedience to something that God wants us to do, even if it doesn't make sense to us.

Could be something like tithing, being generous. God, I worked hard for that money. If I give it away, what's going to happen to me? Could be something like stopping looking at porn.

I know that's a major issue in the church today. Maybe someone here, God's like, I want you to pack up and move around the world and do something for my kingdom that is huge.

And we look at him and we say, God, you're crazy. He says, hey, it's not about the size of the task I'm calling to you to. It's about how big I am, how reliable I am to get you through it.

[29 : 09] What does it look like for us to live by faith this week? As we think about that, remember, it's not our ability to live by faith that saves us.

It's the gospel, the power of God for salvation to all who believe. This deeply personal relationship with God where his righteousness has been revealed, where we have received it, this right relationship with him, this right legal status with him, this gift, but a gift that transforms us and never leaves us the same.

Let's pray. Amen. Father, we thank you for the gospel. We thank you that it is your power, that you have given it to us, that although we did not deserve it, that Jesus came, that Jesus gave us this right relationship and legal status with you, that you offer it to us freely and that we don't have to earn it, that it's its gift.

I pray that as we move throughout this week that we would recognize this gift for what it is, that we would see this beautiful diamond through so many different angles and that every different angle we'd see more beauty inside of it.

God, help us to fall more in love with you. As we fall more in love with you, help us to live lives that are marked by this trust in you, this recognition that you are big enough, you are strong enough, you are reliable enough to sustain us.

[30 : 54] God, we love you. In Jesus' name, amen.