

Evergreen Presbyterian Church

Pastor Adam Parker

March 30th, 2025

Sermon Title: “To All Who Are In Rome”

Sermon Text: Romans 1:7

Rom. 1:7 ¶ 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.

Main Point: The people of Rome (and all of us!) need the grace and peace that God gives through the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Outline:

1. Romans
2. Called Saints
3. Beloved of God

Introduction

I’ve been reading a book on the history of Europe from the first through the second world war. And at one point the author, Ian Kershaw, includes a quote from a protestant clergyman in Germany in 1929. I wonder if this at all feels familiar:

“If we were to ask them about the meaning and purpose of life, the only answer they could give would be: ‘We don’t know what the purpose of life is, and we’re not interested in finding out. But since we are alive, we want to get as much out of life as we possibly can.’”

This was almost a hundred years ago. But this spiritual malaise, which existed before the Wall Street Crash of 1929 and which led to a worldwide economic

meltdown and eventually contributed to the rise of the Nazis, is sadly still familiar to us, isn't it? Materialistic obsession and thinking gives a very thin purpose to a person. And if you take away those things, if you take away those comforts, it often leaves a vacuum that has a lot of room for self-destructive ideas.

As Christians, one of the most important things we can do is to live in the place where we do, as witnesses to the truth so that people around us know that there is a greater purpose to their life than just having things and getting stuff. We need a deep purpose, a real purpose... what you might call a "thick" purpose that can't be easily lost.

Paul is writing to the Romans here. A people living in a materialistically abundant society, a place in which people are very excited by what they can have and do, but who needed a deeper purpose. And Paul gives it to them, if they'll listen.

If they will come to Christ, they will find an incredible meaning, purpose, and reason for living.

Paul is totally convinced (and I want you to be convinced today) that being a follower of Jesus means knowing why you live, what you were made for, and having peace with the God who created you.

And so my outline for today is very straightforward. Who are the recipients of this letter from Paul? And the answer, from this text is that Paul tells us three things about them. First, they are the church of Rome. Second, they are recipients of grace and peace. And then third, they are beloved of God the Father and Son.

1. Romans

First, Paul's recipients are the church in Rome.

I want to say a couple of things about this church he is writing to.

This wasn't a church that Paul had ever been to. He talks in this letter about his desire to eventually come to Rome, but this is a church that didn't seem to have another Apostle who planted it – either Paul or anyone else. In Romans 15:20 he says that he would not "build upon another man's foundation." So if Rome's church is not another man's foundation, then where did this church come from?

The most likely explanation for the church in Rome goes back to the day of Pentecost. In Acts 2:10 we are told that there were “visitors from Rome” in Jerusalem on the day when the Spirit was poured out. It is not at all a stretch to say that these people were moved to believe in Jesus Christ, and they took that message back to Rome with them.

Again, you see something that will also come out in our evangelism Sunday School series. We make a serious error when we think that only pastors and elders have the task of telling others about Jesus. It belongs to average Christians, too. All disciples have this duty.

It appears that Rome may have initially been planted by just average Christians coming back and spreading the word of God.

This was a church that was composed of both Jews and Gentiles living alongside of each other in Christ. Paul, in this letter addresses both groups numerous times. So this church is made up of people from all walks of life, and all kinds of backgrounds. It’s a beautiful expression of what the Gospel of Jesus Christ does, where it erases the artificial boundaries that divide people from one another. It brings together very different people.

And man do we need this.

We live in a moment when people on both the far left and the far right speak in ways that are intended to divide and segregate people. It seems like the political spectrum is like a weird globe where if you go too far in one direction you end up on the same side as the other. Both extremes attempt to divide based on race, almost as though either people of different races shouldn’t mix together, or because to be with different races makes people “unsafe.” There is this strange sort of voluntary of version of Jim Crow that seems to be coming back in some corners of the culture, which is very sad and shows a loss of gospel thinking in our land. And we know this, because the gospel actually brings people of different races and ethnicities and backgrounds together. There is a reason why Paul tells us that in Christ there is neither Jew or Greek, slave nor free: because they’re all in Christ and in his church together.

Here you have this church of Rome, and it could not be made up of two more different and theoretically antagonistic groups. There was no one in the world more different than Jews and Gentiles, and here they were in Rome, worshipping alongside one another, and rejoicing in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

There are many amazing cultural changes that the gospel brings, but this was one of the most noticeable things in Rome when the pagans looked at the Christians. It wasn't just that Jews and Gentiles were worshipping together, but it was that rich and poor also went to the same place and worshiped the same God and stood shoulder to shoulder together and listened to the same preaching of the word. They shared the same Lord's Supper. They prayed the same prayers together. James writes his letter reproving any Christian who would despise a poor person, for example.

Slaves and masters even stood on the same even ground in the gospel. Paul writes to the slave-owning Philemon that Onesimus the slave is his brother in Christ, and Paul seeks to persuade Philemon to willingly let Onesimus go free for the sake of the gospel. So you can see there that Paul also knows that the gospel brings real change.

It doesn't mean there weren't complex social dynamics or challenges or even conflict. I'm not saying the early church was utopia, but they were all together in Jesus. And this was one of the most noticeable things about the Christians in the Roman world: that they didn't divide people based on their position in society or their ethnicity or upbringing. And when they did, they were corrected. They were all made in the image of God and united to the same Christ.

And it is still an amazing thing about Christians today: we do not despise someone based on their ethnicity or background or their finances or where they're from. And this is a message that both the far left and far right need to learn from Christians. But for us to have that message, we need to believe and practice it just like the early Christians did.

2. Called Saints

Second today, I want us to fixate on Paul's insistence that the Roman Christians are "called Saints."

I feel like I've picked on the ESV a lot in the past, but sadly I'm going to do it again. The ESV translates this passage as Paul describing the Roman Christians as those "who are loved by God and called to be saints." The problem here is that there is no verb for "to be." The translators have read those words into it, perhaps to make the English read more smoothly.

But in the Greek it literally says "To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called saints." There are two adjectives here: Christians are loved, and they are called. Christians are "*called* saints." Not just the Christians in Rome, but all Christians. Notice. This word "called" is an adjective, not a verb.

If you are a Christian, then Paul is talking about you. And if you're not a Christian then Paul is talking about who you could be by coming to Jesus.

You might think that to be "called saints" means that Paul is saying they are "referred to" as saints. You know, like, "Some people call you Roman Christians saints." But no. That's if the word was a verb. It's not a verb.

This is where the English language is funny. We have lots of words for the same thing, and we also have lots of words that mean many different things. The Greek word for "called" here is not the word for when you refer to someone or something. That is the word "*lego*" or "*kaleo*." It's not like when I say that this ruling elder is "called Micah" or if someone asks my name and I say I am "called Adam." The word here is "*klaytos*" which is the word for *called*, it's descriptive of the Christians. *Klaytos* is the same word in the New Testament for how God draws people to himself.

The word Paul uses here is the same word he uses for his own calling as an apostle at the very beginning. Sometimes in the Bible the word "calling" refers to the general preaching and offer of the gospel. But often it refers to God's work of changing the heart and bringing someone to him. If you remember, Paul's own calling to Christ was dramatic, and almost even violent. In Acts chapter 9 you almost sense that God grabbed hold of Paul and yanked him to himself. Paul did

not make himself an Apostle, he was called by God to it. And Paul tells the Romans, “You are also called.”

I know that many Christians are offended by the idea that God called them. We want to believe that we did this, that it was completely our decision, that God didn't have to change our hearts or anything of the sort. We want to believe that our being “in Christ” is our own doing. But for Paul, it enhances the Romans' sense of belonging to Jesus to know that they were called, drawn, brought in by Jesus Himself, and on that basis of their union with Christ made saints.

The other reason I'm emphasizing that they are “are saints” and not that they're called “to be saints” is first of all linguistic as I said. There is no word for “to be” here in the Greek. But second of all, it's important because here is the question: are you a saint already in Christ, or is Paul saying that's supposed to be your aspiration – to *one day* be a saint?

So you see why this matters. Their sainthood is not just future, it is present. It is something that they are called, period. And because they are saints, they should embrace this about themselves, and then live it out. You were called by God as a saint in Christ.

You see, their calling and sainthood is not a mission, it is a description of who they are. Their calling happened at a point in time. They were “called” saints, not “born” saints. Now they are supposed to *live* as the saints that they are.

And so here he's highlighting the grace of God by reminding them what they were rescued from – who they were before. Paul will explain in chapter 6, when we get there, that they were once like everyone else in Rome, dead in trespasses and sins, but then they were “called” saints.

Remember what Paul is doing here: he is covering them in a sense of God's grace toward them. He is showing them how the work of God has permeated all that they are, and all that they have. They are saints. And they are saints, not because of their own idea or their own initiative, but because of God who is “rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us” (Eph. 2:4).

This also means that this is not just a future thing. So many times I think we as Christians imagine, “some day... some day I'll take these things seriously. Some day

I'll live these things out." We sort of push off the calling until later, thinking we're not up for it yet.

But for Paul, it's not like someday you'll be a saint. Instead, it's a present reality if you are resting in Jesus Christ. You'll see this in Paul's letter as we go through it that one of the great tasks that Paul has before him is to get Christians to see who they already are, and to live in that reality of who they really are.

Christian, immerse yourself in who you are. Immerse yourself in God's word. Immerse yourself in Christ, read the Scriptures in order to see him, to know him, and to take hold of the present reality of who you are already. Seek to increase your knowledge of him and your love of him because you are united to this One Who is the Savior of sinners, not because you hope to someday have him, but because to know Jesus is to know who you are in him.

Why does this matter? There are lots of things I could say, but let me try this. Ed Welch has this amazing book called *When People are Big and God is Small*. The whole book is a book about the fear of man. And here is what I appreciate about what Welch says in that book. He says that we fear other peoples' opinion of us because we attach our worth to what "they" think of us. We find our value in other people who aren't God. And this means that when they love us, we feel loved and important. And when someone is angry with us or dislikes us, we feel low and unimportant. That's what the fear of man really is.

And living that way makes us incredibly vulnerable, doesn't it? Preachers deal with this a lot. I mean, here I am, each Sunday preaching. How easy would it be for me to only feel as good as my last sermon? Or to preach in such a way so as to never incur anyone's dislike? It would be very easy and tempting to try to say things in a way that never step on toes, and that just sort of pleases and flatters everyone! And imagine going home each week wondering: what do this 150 people think of me today?

The answer to this is that all of us – me included – have to find our worth in what God says about us, not in what the mood of those around us says. And what does God say? He says, "You are my called child. You are a saint. You are not the worst thing people think about you. Nor are you the worst thing you have ever done, which I already know about you."

And we are incredibly vulnerable to this fear, though, if we don't have a deep enduring sense that we are in Christ and that what he says about us is really the truth about who we are.

What Paul is offering us here is a deep and enduring sense of who we are in his Son. Not just who God *wants us to be*, but who he actually says that we are. This is why much of what the message of Romans is drives us not just to follow Christ and pursue holiness, but to know who we are already in Jesus Christ. Christians need a thick, transcendent, deep sense of self, not a fleeting weak, changing sense of self that depends on other people and their opinions.

How can we have that for ourselves? We have it by knowing the God who called us, by knowing the lengths he went to in saving us, and by seeing that we aren't just tolerated by God, but that we are called by him.

3. Beloved of God

Third, Paul tells the Roman Christians that they are beloved of God.

I just said this a moment ago, but so many Christians think to themselves, "God just accepts me on a legal technicality. He tolerates my presence because I trust in Christ." It's this very lowly and sad sense of self. And that's fine if it's true. But the problem is, the Bible doesn't talk about us that way!

Paul doesn't talk that way at all. Instead, he says that Christians are "loved by God and called saints." So you see that this calling that God has given to us doesn't find its source in something about us. He doesn't say, "To those in Rome who are righteous and therefore beloved by God." He says, "loved by God and called saints."

Let me do this, though: notice how closely connected the love of God is with the grace and peace that we receive in Christ. Without the love of God, there is no grace or peace to you or me or anyone else.

I mentioned before that we often have a weak sense of self. We often base our mood and feelings on how well we're doing today, and on how other people feel about us. But imagine if you really took this to heart: that we are loved by God.

The Bible is a book that overflows with a sense of the love of God for his people. The Bible insists on the love of God. He has different loves for different people. There is some sense in which he loves all the world, and adores his creation. All mankind are bearers of God's image, and in that sense he loves all mankind. There is a preserving love that God has for all of creation and for those who bear his image.

At the same time, Paul is writing this verse to a specific people who need to hear these words. He says to the Christians, "You are loved by God." This is a special love, a saving love. This is a love that is theirs in Christ. This is more than the common universal love that God has for all creation, this is a love which was set upon us in eternity before we were even born, and it's a love that He never revokes.

And when it comes to how you see yourself, Christian, let me say this: God does not look at you and see shame. He does not look at you (in Christ) and see filth. He does not look at you and see unworthiness. Because if you are united to his Son by faith, you have received more than just a general love from God, you know his saving love. God loves you. You are beloved by God.

This is not a flimsy love, it's not a thin love, it's not a shallow love that sort of changes with the weather. It is the deepest, strongest bond of love that can ever be known even in human relationships. You may love your child or your husband or your wife or your father or your mother or your friends. But there is no love on earth that is stronger than the love that God has for his people.

I'm so excited to get to Romans chapter 8, and I will preach this passage deeply and fully when we get to it, but probably nowhere in the Bible do we see the deep unbreakable unshakable love of God for his children than at the end of that great chapter where Paul tells us:

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?

As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered."

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:35-39 ESV)

You see, we don’t just have “love.” We’re not talking about a sentiment. Love is not a thing. Love is an action of God. It’s not just an abstract notion. It’s not just love as an idea. It’s not like there’s just love out there somewhere, and we find it somehow and gather it in like a substance. It’s not a thing. Love is always personal. It is the love of three persons (two are mentioned here) that Paul says is foundational to our identity and who we are. It isn’t the love of crowds or the hate of crowds that gives us value. It is the love of “God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” And Paul is saying to Christians, “This is love that God in Christ has fixated on you.”

Saint Augustine:

“Grace then is from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, by which our sins, which had turned us from God, are forgiven; and from them also is this peace, whereby we are reconciled to God. Since through grace hostilities dissolve once sins are remitted, now we may cling in peace to him from whom our sins alone had torn us.... But when these sins have been forgiven through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, we shall have peace with no separation between us and God.”

Paul tells us in Ephesians 2:4-5 that “God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ – by grace you have been saved.”

Think about that.

We see the love of Jesus Christ, because in him our sins are forgiven and we are cleansed. Later as Romans goes on, we will see how this is possible that God can forgive sinners without compromising his justice even one little bit.

But as you listen to this, I feel confident in saying that you are either someone who has been made alive with Christ, or you are someone who has not been made alive with Christ.

If you have not been made alive with Christ, then the message here is *not* that “Oh well, you’ve been shut out”. The message is, “Come to him. Believe in him. Trust in him.” Find the same love that Paul speaks of here. It’s free for the taking. It’s free to be received. Simply come.

You’re going to keep hearing this constantly as we look at the book of Romans: believe on the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, and in knowing Jesus you will know the love of God that surpasses all understanding.

Let’s pray.