

Romans 1:1-7

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[0 : 00] Well, do open your Bibles to Romans chapter 1.! We've seen of me that the book of Romans is a book about God.

! Over and over, again throughout this letter, the apostle tells us things about God. And we saw the first two of those things last week. First of all, this God has joyful news for you.

He has great news. The second thing we find out about God is that this news centres upon his son, Jesus Christ. And as he spoke about the Lord Jesus, he spoke in two directions.

He spoke of his humiliation, his birth and his life and his ministry and his death. And then he speaks about his exaltation, referring to his resurrection and his ascension and that Jesus Christ is reigning today.

He's the judge of all the earth and one day he'll return. And so we begin to learn about God, that he's got joyful news. And these joyful things concern his son.

[1 : 06] And Paul adds layer upon layer about this good news, where he says, verse 5, 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.

To all those in Rome who are loved by God, called to be saints, grace to you. Peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

He's expanding on those facts about God. The gospel of God and the son of God. And he tells you that all of this comes to you through grace. And it comes to you through Jesus Christ.

And it's for his name's sake and for his glory. And it's for his fame and not our fame. That it is for his sake, for his glory, that you who are in Christ are called, loved and saints.

And so he sets out in this context of the gospel what we learn about God. And he wants to say to you, it's by his grace, for his glory. And we receive immense blessings.

[2 : 25] So I want us to see point one, that these blessings come through grace. These blessings from God come through grace. It's a greeting of a letter. It's amazing what's packed into it, isn't it?

We write letters, dear sir, dear madam. And they had kind of a formalized way of addressing letters in that day. And Paul takes the set pattern.

And he adapts the rules and the set patterns. And he gospelizes them, if I can put it like that. He takes the normal Greek greeting. Which was to say, joy to you.

It's a similar word to the word grace. And he takes the normal Hebrew greeting. The word peace to you. Shalom. And the apostle Paul picks up both of those. And he greets these believers.

And he says to you, verse 7, grace to you and peace to you. From God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. It is rooted and grounded in these glorious facts about God.

[3 : 27] It's a greeting to a church in Rome. It's just a little letter. In the grand scheme of all the correspondence that was going on in the Roman Empire. All the various emails and letters that were flying back and forth in the civil service.

All the greatness of Rome. What does this little letter matter? Why do we care about this little fellow Paul? Who was he in the kingdom of Rome? He's a nobody. He's just a citizen somewhere on the coast waiting for a boat.

With a couple of months to spare. And he writes to a small little group of people in Rome. Where did they meet? Did they meet in a room? Certainly wasn't a great building.

There were loads of great and grand buildings in ancient Rome. But I don't think the church in Rome met in them. In the ancient world. In the ancient civilization.

With all the greatness and all the grandeur. And all the civilization. All their laws. The Pax Romana. All roads leading to Rome. Paul writes a little letter.

[4 : 29] To a little group of people. Meeting in a little room. And he's got something to say. Which is of greater importance than all the greatness of Rome. He's something to say which still burns today. Rome is a subject of ancient history. It's a subject of archaeological digs. People go don't they. And they dig up bits of bone. And they dig up bits of broken pot. And get very excited about it. But this little letter. With this little introduction. Centres on God. And the gospel of God. And the son of God.

And the grace of God. And the glory of God. And the love of God. And it tells you that those. Are greater realities than the Roman Empire. It's astonishing. It's astonishing that. As we look at this letter this morning. We're touching things which are timeless. We're touching things which. If in the pleasure of God. This world exists. 2000 years from now. Will still be burning.

[5 : 30] When all the glory of the West. When COVID-19 is not even remembered. When our culture will be the subject. To archaeological digs. This letter.

Will still burn brightly. Because it will tell of a God. Who is full of grace. And that grace is for his glory. And that grace comes to us. In Jesus Christ.

So. What we learn here. Is that God is full of grace to us. And that grace comes to us. Through the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ. Now.

If I was going to ask you this morning. What is grace? I think. We'd have a stock answer. Wouldn't we? What have I told you that grace is? I think you would say. Probably. That it is the free.

And merited. Favor of God. Some of you might say. It's God's riches. At Christ's expense. You might say that. But I think what I've learned this week.

[6 : 28] Is God's grace. Is richer. And deeper. And what Paul is bringing out here. In this word. Is strong and deep. Because the Greek word for grace.

Grows out of the Greek word for joy. And the Greek word for grace. If you like. Is just a smaller concept. Of the Greek word for joy. So the largest concept.

When you're thinking about grace. The grace of God. You need to think about joy. At root. Grace is joy. Think about that for a moment.

Because I think that helps you understand. Something of. The majesty of the gospel. That we're speaking of the gospel of God. That concerns the son of God.

And we speak of God's grace. That comes to you and I. Through Jesus Christ. It's not simply that this makes us joyful. It is not simply that God brings joy to us.

[7 : 25] As wonderful as it is. At root. In the idea of the grace of God. It's the fact that God. Takes joy in us. That God.

Is the one who takes pleasure in us. That God is delighted. With us. As his people. That God is full of joy.

Over his people. We bring joy to him. Now. We're used to thinking. Aren't we? That grace. Is something that we don't deserve.

We are used to thinking. That. It's the grace of God. That we don't deserve. We understand that.

We're comfortable with that. We're okay. We're saying that God.

Loves us. And we're okay. We're saying that God. Lavishes his love on us. But I think. We get very uncomfortable. When we say that God.

[8 : 23] Takes delight in us. That God is full of joy. In us. That God takes pleasure. In us. That God is delighted.

In us. And with us. Because we don't think. That sounds quite right. It doesn't fit. Of course it doesn't fit. It's telling us. Exactly. What grace means. It is the unmerited.

Favor. Of God. But we're using. Too small a word. When we use the word favor. Because joy is a smaller word. And yet it's a bigger word. Isn't it? It is the joy of God.

That is magnified here. So you say to yourself. This morning. Or you should be saying to yourself. What I bring joy to God. There were believers in Rome.

That brought joy to God. And you say to yourself. This morning. There's something not quite right. This morning. Because you know your own hearts. Don't you? And you know your own secret sins.

[9 : 25] And you know your open sins. Let alone your secret sins. And as far as you're concerned. It is simply staggering. That the word of God. Would ever say. That God is delighted with you.

Because you know. That he's got every reason. Not to be delighted with you. To feel no delight. In looking at you. To take no pleasure. In knowing you. To take no joy. In seeing you. Or in seeing

anything.

That is in your life. And that's exactly the point. We're trying to say. That that is exactly. The issue of grace. That is the point.

That we grasp. But we don't go on. To measure it. You see. The point that we grasp. Is that we don't deserve it. We can get that. That it's unmerited.

You understand that. But it's much stronger than that. Isn't it? Jerry Packer says. It's not unmerited. It's demerited. We're actually in the demerit column. When it comes to grace.

[10:21] We're actually on the wrong side. And yet he chooses to love us. He chooses to take joy in us. And to take delight. And pleasure in us. You know that he's not treating us.

As we deserve. And because he is not treating us. As we deserve. We're just staggered. But grace is more staggering than that. It's not just that he's not treating you.

As you deserve. He's loving you. With those who are in Christ. He is happy in you. And happy with you. So it's no wonder is it.

That John Newton. When he comes to describe it. He says it's amazing grace. So why on earth. Why on earth. Should God rejoice in us like that. Why should God take such joy.

And we bring him such pleasure. I'm going to come back to that in a moment. But I want to show you the other side. Of what the apostle Paul is saying. When he speaks of grace. For he says specifically of himself. Can you see it in verse 5.

[11:23] Through whom we. That's the royal we. Or the apostolic we. It means. I have received. We have received grace. And apostleship. To bring about the obedience of faith.

For the sake of his name. Among the nations. Including you. Who are called to belong to Jesus Christ. So can you see. That he's saying something specifically. About himself.

Isn't he? He's saying. That God. Took pleasure. In calling him. To be an apostle. That God. Took great joy.

In taking this man. Do you remember him? He was once a bitter. Persecutor of the church. And not only of the church. But of the Lord Jesus. And he meets Jesus. On that Damascus road.

And Jesus says to him. Saul. So why are you persecuting me? He's a man. Who's given himself. With all his energy. To murder. And to persecute Christians.

[12:18] And it fills God. With great delight. To call him. To serve as an apostle. And to grant him his grace. He gives him.

This specific. Joyful calling. To serve him. As a witness. Of the resurrection. Of the Lord Jesus. From the dead. And Paul becomes. A builder of the church. The prophets. And the apostles.

They're the foundation. Of the church. And Paul is a channel. Of the Holy Spirit. Through whom the word of God. Is given. And God takes pleasure.

In turning a persecutor. Of the Lord Jesus Christ. Into a preacher. A blasphemer. Into a builder. Of his church.

God takes. The chief. Of sinners. And makes him. Into what Paul calls himself.

[13:12] The least of all the saints. And that is grace. And so God not only. Enjoys. Calling us. Into his kingdom. But God takes joy. In using us.

In his kingdom. In his kingdom. And so you think. What? Me? It's unbelievable. Yes it is unbelievable. So. God can take a man. Like John Newton. A slave ship captain.

It's unbelievable. And turn him. Into a preacher. Of the gospel. And God takes joy. In calling us. And equipping us. To serve him. Grace means. That God.

Delights in you. And in using you. In his service. And it is by grace. That some are called. To preach. And it's by grace. That some are called. To teach. And some are called.

To shepherd. And some are called. To serve. And some are called. To distribute. To the needs of the saints. And some are called. To careful. The needy. And the poor. And some are called.

[14:05] To lead families. And some by grace. Are called to be fathers. And some by grace. Are called to be mothers. And some by grace. Are called to be. Obedient children.

And grace. Is God. Delighting himself. In you. In order that you might. Serve. in his kingdom. It's amazing. So what we see, first of all, is that God is full of grace to us. But the second thing we need to ask is, well, why is God so gracious to us?

Why should such an amazing thing happen? Why should God be so joyful at his work in our lives? What's the purpose of God's grace?

And I think it helps us in this passage, because he goes on to say, doesn't he, look at verse five, through whom we've received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations.

Two reasons. First of all, God lavishes his grace on us to bring about the obedience of faith among the nations. That's what's stated here, isn't it?

[15 : 14] To bring about the obedience of faith among the nations. So let me talk to you a little bit about that little phrase, the obedience of faith. It can be taken in two ways. Either it means the obedience that flows from faith, or it means to say that faith is obeying God.

Let me span that out. And obedience that flows from faith means simply this. It means just believing and doing. That's what it may well mean. Believing and obeying. They're inseparable, aren't they? It's what James teaches. Paul doesn't contradict James and his letter. It's simply saying to you that the Christian life is not merely lip service.

You know that. It's not, I love Jesus, Jesus loves me, isn't that wonderful, isn't grace amazing, full stop. That's not it. That's not all there is to obedience.

Faith and obedience, believing and doing, they're inseparable. James says, faith that works is dead. God loathes lip service. He speaks to the people of Israel, and he says, they came near me with their lips, but their hearts were far from me.

[16 : 32] Isaiah said this, of the people coming to worship, he said, who has commanded this of you, that you tread my courts? It's a really graphic picture of what they were doing. That was the extent of their so-called faith in God, that they came trampling and trundling into worship, and they trampled out.

And God says, who asked you to do that? You tread the courts of the law. That's not obedience.

That is simply lip service, and your heart is far away from God.

Treading the courts of the Lord. Jesus said, if you love me, keep my commands. And faith always flows into obedience.

That's the nature of the good news of the gospel. The other way we could take it, the second way we could take it, is in the grammatical sense, and that is, obedience is faith.

That faith is obedience, in this particular sense. God says, believe the gospel, doesn't he? That is a command. When we say, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, yes, it's an invitation, but you've got to understand this morning, that that is a command by God as well.

[17 : 48] that when God says to you, repent, that is a command. It is an invitation to take hold of the Lord Jesus, to embrace the gospel, to move into great blessings he has for you, but don't think that it's not a command.

And so to refuse to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, is great, great sin. And we invite people, don't we, to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, but it is their duty, to believe in the Lord Jesus.

That's exactly what Paul's saying here. That's why God shows grace, because he wants to bring about the obedience of faith among the nations. He wants to call men, women, and boys and girls, to believe in Jesus Christ, to repent and do the will of God, and live lives of obedience to him.

I'm not really sure that we need to decide. Either way, that Paul means. Either way, in the context, it means that the joy of God, is to have his people, believing in his son, and joyfully obeying his son.

And that brings God great joy. To have people believing in his son, and obeying his son. And he desires that, to see that among the nations. To bring about the obedience of faith among the nations.

[19 : 14] His passion, is setting his joy upon broken creatures such as we are. And it is a passion for the whole world. For every nation, for every people, for every tribe, for every language.

Praising and serving his son, Jesus Christ. And that fills God's heart with joy. And that is what the joy of the grace of God is all about. That is why he takes joy in us.

Because he takes joy in exalting his son, in all the world. That is amazing grace. Look at how he states it. Look what he says in verse 5 and 6.

Through whom we've received grace and apostleship, to bring about the obedience of faith, for the sake of his name, among all the nations, including you.

He's just been basking, hasn't he, in this glorious truth. That this is what fills God with delight, to bring people to believe in his son, and exalt his son.

[20 : 20] And as he basks in that glorious gospel, he turns and he says, and you are included in it too. And you. Thank us be to God.

What are we? We're a little church in Ealing, West London. And Paul says to us, including you, he takes joy in us this morning.

And his desire for you and I is that we obey him in faith, and that we believe him in obedience. And that is why God has shown such grace.

Not only because he desires this gospel to be spread through all the nations, but he takes this joy in exalting his son. Paul goes on really clearly to say it, doesn't he, in verse 5.

He says, for the sake of his name. It says, it's not about you. It's not about you. It is, but it's not. It is about Christ's name and the exaltation of Christ's name.

[21 : 25] And it's for the sake of Christ's name. It is for the sake of Jesus Christ and for his name. And so the glory does not belong to Paul.

It doesn't belong to the church at Rome. It doesn't belong to us. So let our name perish. Let our name perish. It's not the glory of the apostles. It's not the glory of the martyrs who suffered in Rome. It's not the glory of the reformers and the reformation. It is for his name's sake that the name of Jesus Christ will go on and on and on. And even when the world is done and it's perished, it is for his name's sake and for his glory and it is for his name's sake that we will not perish.

And we won't perish. We will last forever and live forever with the joy of the Lord upon us because it's for his name's sake. And that is great news.

That is better news than your tax return. That is better news than your new job. That is better news than finding the perfect wife or the perfect husband. That is better news than having the model children.

[22 : 35] That is better news than having a clean bill of health. It's better news than anything. It's better news than a vaccine. It is for his name's sake.

And God is full of grace. Why? Because he will exalt his son. And the third thing we see is that what does God's grace do for us? What does God's grace do for us?

And it brings us to verses 6 and 7. So can you see there's three things. He says, including you, including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.

To those who are in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints. The first thing is there in verse 6, isn't it? You are called to belong to Jesus Christ.

God doesn't leave you, he doesn't leave us alone in our little lives. He speaks and his voice reaches us. His voice in his word says, this is my son.

[23 : 44] Believe him. Believe him, my son, Jesus Christ. And with that voice calling to us, calling us to come to Jesus Christ, the power of the Holy Spirit persuades us.

And the Holy Spirit enables us to lay hold of Jesus Christ. And so when we speak of the call of God, it entails all of that, the proclamation of the word, the releasing of the word of God to our ears and the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts and minds.

He's persuaded us and he's changed our mind and he's enabled us to say, yes, I believe by the grace of God. So the grace of God first of all calls you to Jesus Christ.

And secondly, he says it is the grace of God that brings us to the point where we're not only called, but look in verse 7, the grace of God brings us to the place where we are loved by God.

What a title. You look at Rome, you look at the titles that were in Rome of the emperors and the various people that held positions of all the many things and all the many titles.

[24 : 58] But there's one title that stands out above all. It's this title, isn't it? I'm writing to you people in Rome, which people? Funny little group of people meeting in a funny little room and you are the ones who are, verse 7, loved by God.

Isn't that a great thing to say? The people who are loved by God. That is a distinguishing love.

That is a love which sets people apart. That is a love which distinguishes that there are a group of people in Rome and they are loved by God.

It's part of the nature of their calling that they have been called by God. It's tied in with the doctrine of election that there is a people that God has set his love upon from all eternity.

And it is this powerful force of gospel truth. I'm writing to people living in Rome ones who are loved by God. God says that to us as his people in Ealing today.

[26 : 07] He says, I'm writing to you in Ealing. You who are loved by God. He loves me. He takes joy in loving you.

You. Me. You, he is saying, you are the ones that I have called. You are the ones that I have loved.

The third thing is there in verse 7 and it's very simple. That you've been called to be saints. More accurately, it should be called saints.

It doesn't say to be. It's saying you already are God's saints. So that means sainthood and saintliness is not something that you should aspire to and something that you hope to reach at some point.

No, you already are the saints of God. You're different. You are separated out from the earth. You are separated out from the rest of this world to be his holy ones.

[27 : 20] And not merely to become his holy ones, that's included, but you already are his holy ones. Set apart in Jesus Christ. You are one of God's saints right now, right here.

You are called. You are loved. You are saints. And that is what grace does. So then he says to you at the end of verse 7, he says, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I think we should probably start our services with this kind of greeting really. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

But I want you to remember there is joy flowing in that word grace. When he says grace to you, he is saying the joy of God be in you and be upon you.

His joy is in you and to you and for you. And when he says peace to you, he is saying God's completeness and wholeness mended, not broken, no gaps, but the wholeness of our humanity restored to us in the Lord Jesus Christ.

[28 : 38] And I'm saying to you, he says, from the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, that wholeness comes from knowing God that God is the Lord. That God is gracious to you.

And God's joy has accomplished our calling and our standing in love and our standing as saints. What a great thing. What a great thing grace is.

That grace for the glory of God. And let us enjoy it and revel in it. Let's pray together.