

Romans 16 - Paul's Cosmopolitan Co-Workers

So here it is, the final sermon from Romans – and it might look like we have a really bad passage – after all that deep theology, this morning we're looking at a bunch of names! Not the passage you want to get on the reading rota! Well read Craig!

It's been a long series, we started in January - But you can count yourselves lucky, Martin Lloyd Jones preached through Romans in 85 sermons! That's about 1 year and 8 months of Romans!

At the start, I spoke about the importance of this book to Martin Luther and in the protestant reformation, how it changed Europe.

But has it been important to you? Has the message of grace had an impact on you? Have the first few chapters about just how sinful we are changed your view of yourself and mankind? Have you realised or been reminded about just how incredible it is that Jesus died for your forgiveness? Since chapter 12, as we have looked through loads and loads of practical commands and instructions, have you been encouraged to live differently for Christ? Last week we thought about sharing this message with others – have you tried to do that? Or invited people to church?

I would guess that we could all answer yes to some of those questions, but not all of them. Change in the Christian life is slow and often we slow it down even more! By being less engaged than we could be with God.

Perhaps you want to listen again to one bit on the website?

But more than that, I think people from outside, look at the church and even if they *do* hear all that theology they want to ask “does that really work”

And inside the church as we struggle with life, the question we begin to ask ourselves is “is this working? Should I keep throwing myself into this, or should I find another way”

I want to persuade you this morning that this last passage is really important:

It first reminds us that we need each other,

It second answers the doubt “does this really work?”.

How? Because we see it working in real people's lives.

So firstly, we need each other.

It's really easy, especially after we thought last week about sharing this message with others, to think of Paul as some sort of Superman. And to think we need to be superman/woman too. When you imagine him, do you think of him doing everything on his own?

Just look down at the page at how many people he worked with!

And listen to some of the things that he says:

- they risked their lives me
- the church meets at their house
- they worked hard for you

- they are outstanding among the apostles
- my dear friend,
- our co-worker,
- my dear friend,
- their fidelity to Christ has stood the test of time
- women who work hard in the Lord
- chosen in the Lord
- his mother has been a mother to me
- give her any help she may need from you, she has been a benefactor of many people including

These are really deep personal greetings, full of warmth and praise, rather than thinking of Paul as a lone gun, some sort of Superman, we ought to think of him as part of a big team – in fact a church! Full of different people with different gifts.

And just to give you an idea of quite how important – you explain a few things about money – and how expensive writing this letter would have been for Paul.

Letters were very expensive: Writing, copying, sending. It's estimated that the modern equivalent to write and send the letter of Romans would have been over £2000, and that includes the fact that some scribes were working for free (like Tertius who says hi in v22). Quite a thought.

I wonder if you like figures, like I do:

The average ancient papyrus letter was only 87 words, (based on the manuscripts we have discovered) The philosopher Seneca averaged 995 – and Paul averaged 2495 – But *Romans*, his longest letter is 7114, and our reading today was around 10% of that.

Paul spent a lot of money writing these names, the modern equivalent of this reading today is about £200. This chapter of Romans is longer than the average ancient letter, so what does that mean? This bit must be important! The greetings, the relationships behind, are important!

Christians need each other – we need the love and support and care of each other!

We need God and the gospel message, we also need help and support to live it, and to be partners in the church.

That's why we say that after this part of the surface finishes, and we have tea and coffee together – church is still happening, an important aspect of church!

So, since they are important let's spend a bit of time actually looking at these different names and what we can learn about the people.

I think the main lesson as we do this is that **the gospel really works**.

You know what a difference it makes when you don't just hear the theory of something explained, but when the person sat next to you talks about shows you how it's transformed their life, it really works!

We know the gospel works in Rome, **because of** the church it produced!
It produced a varied church, a hard working church, and a wise church.

We'll spend a bit of time on each of those.

Firstly, the **gospel produced a varied church**. And by that, I mean a church with a real mix.

We've got **Jews and Gentiles**.

Look at v3 – Priscilla and Aquila, Jews we know about from Acts.

And v7 - Andronicus and Junia, my fellow Jews who have been in prison with me. There are others.

Then look at v12 Tryphena and Tryphosa – are Greek names, meaning dainty and soft.

Even more Greek in v15 there is even someone called Olympus!

This gospel which is for Jews and gentiles works!

Remember a few weeks ago we said that Jews and Gentiles were a bit like Whites and Blacks in the time of racial segregation! They just didn't get on or do things together!

Yet here in the church, because of the gospel there are Jews and Gentiles side-by-side as brother and sister.

And next we see, there are **both men and women!**

There are couples – v3 Priscilla and Aquila, v7 Andronicus and Junia – but not just that, there are women mentioned alone.

Look at v6 “Greet Mary, who worked very hard for you”

And v12, those two Greek women Tryphena and Tryphosa, and *also* Persis all of whom are singled out for praise as hard workers.

So the gospel saves and brings together men and women – and they have equal status before God –because that's the message. Even though they didn't in the culture!

Indecently, it's worth noting as we say this that Paul is clearly not anti-woman. An accusation that's often made, but it's clearly not true is it – he works with and greets *and praises* these women!

He lists Priscilla's name before Aquila in v3 (and some people try to read a lot into that) – I don't think that's necessarily too significant, but he *doesn't* say “greet Aquila and his wife”!

The gospel for everyone works, it *is* for everyone, and it draws everyone.

There are **rich and poor!**

Look at the end of v10 “Greet those who belong to the household of Aristobulus” that would have included some slaves.

The commentaries tell me that Ampliatus (8), Urbanus (9), Hermes (14) Philologus and Julia (15) are all recorded as being popular names for slaves.

And then cast your eye to v23 where Gaius and Erastus are mentioned, important people – Erastus is the public director of works in Corinth, a major city – this guy is a big name.

And yet a big name is sending greetings to slaves.

The gospel breaks down pride, it levels class divisions, it works!

We even see it working across **age ranges** too: young and old!

Look at v13

“Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother, who has been a mother to me, too.”
Young and old, both called by this same gospel, to the lord!
Isn't it wonderful?!?

So... worth reflecting – if we think some people are outside the reach of the gospel. (We think?) Their too posh, too wealthy? Not educated enough? Foreigners who just stick together and don't mix?

We see here that the gospel works! And it draws together a real mix of people, to become one church!

When the message of Jesus impacts a society or an area – it draws people from every corner so that the church reflects that society.

Our church should represent and look like this area of Stevenage!

And I'm not sure we do exactly. That's why we need to reach out.

The second aspect of the church in Rome which shows us that the gospel works is the church is **a hard working church**.

Not only do we see Paul working hard, and at the end of chapter 15 he asks for prayer support. But also, I wonder if you noticed this, the list of names is not just a list of friends, it is actually a list of workers.

The gospel works! It doesn't just draw converts, it doesn't just make church members, it makes church partners/workers.

If you just cast your eyes down you'll see it everywhere.

V1 Phoebe is a deacon

V2 she has been a benefactor

That means she's given money to support Paul, and other work as well as being very busy herself!

V3 Priscilla and Aquila are co-workers

V6 Mary worked very hard

And as we've said, many of the women are singled out for praise – particularly because they work really hard.

V9 Urbans is a co-worker.

Then later v21 Timothy – a co-worker, also sends his greetings, as does Tertius v22 who has been Paul's scribe, used his gifts to serve the gospel by writing down this letter!

If you're a Christian, you're not just into a friendship group at church, but you made a co-worker with others at church, for God!

That's challenging isn't it.

I wonder what he'd say about me.

“Greet Dan, he showed up – pretty regularly”

What would he write about you?

Now, especially for the PCC, and our church planning and direction - It's worth pausing for a moment and taking on board just how fantastic it is to see this *team*, this partnership.

Paul was not a lone ranger – he worked in partnerships!

Wherever he went, he had people alongside him watching, learning, and working hard in a partnership.

There are 26 *people named* in the list, as well as a house church, two households, a mention of a particular family and a group of friends – there are LOADS of people mentioned!

The gospel draws people together, to work really hard together.

We need teamwork, to have a good PCC, to have people volunteering to lead the children's work.

People who will pray with and support one another – not only Dave myself!

And if the gospel works, that's what it will produce in our church and in your heart.

It's not only the named people who work hard.

And that hard work, doesn't contradict the message of Grace.

What leads to the hard work in our passage?

Well, it's hinted at in a little phrase that comes up over and over again, it's there in v2, v3, v9 and especially v12.

Look at v12 – these ladies work hard *in the lord*.

That is, they are in Christ by virtue of their faith, and then they work hard – after that.

That is the message Romans through and through a God who forgives us freely, and our response is to give ourselves fully to him.

Lastly, and more briefly, The gospel produces a wise church.

Look at v16 and 17.

Many people find this quite a surprising verse.

It's easy to imagine this team we're learning about, full of friends and love – we feel that affection all the way through – not least here! V16

Greet one another with a holy kiss!

And serving Jesus together *is* a great way of making deep friendships.

However, there are *also* gospel enemies.

Not everyone is a friend and a partner. Even though there are many partners

V17 "I urge you, brothers and sisters, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way *that are contrary to the teaching you have learned*. Keep away from them. For such people are not serving our Lord Christ"

Who are these enemies? What do they look like?

Are they persecutors?

Well they may be, but that's not what Paul picks out.

These gospel enemies, are enemies because of their teaching. They teach things contrary to the teaching you have learned.

And that may be a surprise – not persecutors, but false teachers.

But it fits with what we've been seeing doesn't it.

Romans 1v16 I am not ashamed of the gospel [good news/ good message], because *it* is the power of God for the salvation of *all* who believe.

God's power is in the *message*.

So when people get the message wrong, the end of v17 "keep away from them".

How else can we spot them? Well, two things. V18 they serve their own appetites – they receive, they take – they gain from what they teach – whether it's money, status, power or whatever. They serve themselves not Christ.

Then also v18 they use smooth talk and flattery.

They *relax* the gospel... so it sounds smoother, easier, and they flatter.

"God accepts everyone just as they are" they say

But they don't say "but he doesn't leave you just as you are"

Jesus Christ is saviour – they teach, he'll forgive you! But they miss out Jesus Christ is *lord*, you must obey him.

God is love, they say – but they don't say "God is light, in him there is no darkness at all" – and "God opposes all evil, he is a consuming fire"

And how are the romans doing, are they wise?

Yes! Look at V19 "Everyone has heard about your obedience, so I rejoice because of you"

They stick to the message, and they bear good fruit in obedience.

So why does he say this?

Because although they are wise, they need to keep being careful.

And as unfashionable as it may be in our culture (where apparently truth can change from one person to the next) – good clear accurate *teaching* is a benchmark for us.

The gospel produces people and a church which cares about teaching, and holds not simply to personal truth but to God's truth, and God's gospel. That needs to be the case here.

That's why are home groups and as a central place on Sunday, we had good clear biblical teaching – the hard truths as well as the easier ones.

So, we've seen real people, with real changed lives – *because the gospel works*.

I hope you're not lonely and isolated, spiritually I mean – in your faith.

I hope that you can share with and see amongst friends here, spiritual journeys and spiritual growth – see how the Lord is working in other people as well as yourself.

Because we need that encouragement! God's truth, and brothers and sisters around us living it and being changed by it!

Do you know? I have friends who I would never be friends with if they weren't Christians!

People really different to me who make quite unlikely matchups.

Do you have friends like that? Friends you have to bear with actually – because to you they seem just so strange/weird.

The gospel works – it should do that for us.

This passage should be a huge encouragement to us! The gospel really is worth investing all of ourselves in, it really can help those we care for, those we meet – the gospel really changes lives and it really works.

Praise God? (yes, and that's where Paul ends – all this is to the praise of God!)

“Now to him who is able to **establish you** in **accordance with** my gospel, the message I proclaim about **Jesus Christ**, in keeping with the revelation of the mystery (hidden for long ages past), but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings - by the command of the eternal God, so that **all the** Gentiles might come to the obedience **that comes from faith**— to the only wise **God** be **glory, forever** through Jesus Christ! Amen.