

1 Romans: The Road Less Traveled

- Session 1: Unfolding the Map

2 Table Talk

- Name, Aldersgate service you attend, anything you want others to know about you.
- What do you know about the Letter to the Romans?
- What do you hope to learn in this study?

3 "All Roads Lead to Rome"

- Romans is a summary of "the gospel"
- It is an introduction and summary of all of Paul's thoughts
- It offers the road map for how individuals get into heaven
- It's focus is on "justification by faith"

4 The "Romans Road"

- Romans 3:23 - all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God
- Romans 5:8 - God demonstrates his love in that while we were sinners Christ died for us
- Romans 6:23 - the wages of sin is death, but the gracious gift of God is eternal life in Christ
- Romans 8:1 - there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ
- Romans 10:9 - if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved

5 Where the "Romans Road" Leads

- The Narrative of the Romans Road (and much of evangelical Christianity)
 - I'm a sinner deserving God's wrath
 - Jesus died for my sins
 - I believe in Jesus
 - I will go to heaven
- Fine as far as it goes. But is this the full story, the destination, the full gospel message which Paul intended to share?

6 Missing the Bigger Map

- A text without a context is just a pretext for whatever you want it to say.
- The modern assumption is that Romans is primarily about the salvation and eternal destiny of individuals.
- Paul has a greater map in view, one that encompasses the whole biblical story and God's plan of salvation for the whole creation.
- "Salvation is not just God's gift to his people; it is God's gift through his people." - NT Wright

7 A Journey Through the Old Testament

- The "Romans Road" and some other versions of the gospel act as if nothing happened between Genesis 3 and the crucifixion of Jesus.
- Assumption is that God took the first shot at rescuing people through "the Law" but it didn't work. So he scrapped that idea, set Israel aside, and sent Jesus instead.
- But the way Paul sees it, God's purpose for Israel was always the focal point and means through which God would save the whole creation.
- God does not scrap the Israel plan, but fulfills it through his covenant faithfulness in the person of Israel's faithful Messiah, Jesus Christ.

8 Solid Footing

- Roman roads had multiple layers of foundation and many remain today.
- The letter to the Romans has multiple layers that are built upon one another to give us solid theological footing and a clearer destination. The "Romans Road" is just part of the top layer.
- The destination is much greater than we might have thought!

9 The Author

- Pharisaic Jew, trained under Rabbi Gamaliel
- Persecuted early church
- "Conversion" to Christ (Acts 9)
- Becomes apostle to the Gentiles
- Missionary church planter

10 The Audience

- Probably majority Gentile, more established as Christians because Jews had been expelled from Rome by Claudius (49 AD) and only now returning.
- Paul writes to dispel some erroneous conclusions they had about Jews and Jewish Christians
- Purpose: uniting Jewish and Gentile Christians in common faith in Christ

11 Roman House Church

- Romans 16 suggests that there were five house churches in the city, probably meeting in apartment blocks or shops.
- Most would have been from the lower classes of Roman society.
- Paul assumes a church structure:
 - Egalitarian - assuming male and female apostles, patrons, and coworkers
 - Involves both Jews and Gentiles together regardless of differences
 - Pays no attention to whether a person is slave or free
 - Those with higher social status will be hosts and patrons
 - No gender or ethnic hierarchy (though perhaps socio-economic hierarchy left intact)

12 Dating Romans

- Written before taking the collection to Jerusalem (Romans 15:23-28; Acts 24:17)
- Written after letters to the Corinthian church and likely written from Corinth (Romans 16:1) during the winter he spent there prior to his trip to Jerusalem in the spring of 57 AD (1 Corinthians 16:6; Acts 20:3).
- Phoebe carries the letter to Rome, indicating Paul's trust in women as fellow workers. She is from Cenchrae, a port near Corinth.
- The dates correspond with the reign of the Emperor Nero (54-68) whose early period showed promise. He was the one who allowed the Jews to return to Rome. In 57 AD, Paul had no reason to believe Nero would become the vicious enemy of Christians that he did (Romans 13).

13 What Romans Is...

- A letter written in part to prepare the audience for Paul's long anticipated journey to Rome.

- A letter written to people whom Paul has yet to meet in person. It is more ambassadorial than friendly, introducing his gospel message.
- A letter about the righteousness of God and the human righteousness that derives from God's saving activity on behalf of his people and on behalf of the whole creation.
- Paul's masterpiece among his letters.

14 What Romans Is NOT...

- A summary of all of Paul's theology. (Leaves out some major themes like Jesus' return, the Lord's Supper, etc.)
- A systematic theology summarizing all of Christian thought.
- A summation of the gospel in a few verses.
- A cessationist polemic against Judaism.
- A roadmap on how to get to heaven when you die.

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- What is so disruptive about Paul's understanding of salvation is his challenge for us to hear the gospel in its vastness...Of course, God's action in the gospel speaks to the lives of individuals, to what we refer to as the 'spiritual life.'

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- And, of course, God's action reaches beyond the 'spiritual' to include the redemption of our institutions, the reconciliation of ethnic groups, and the confrontation of empires of all sorts. If we think that God's power is restricted to the sphere of the 'spiritual,' then we have a fairly small notion of God.

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- What we also need to hear is Paul's understanding that the gospel encompasses the cosmos, the whole of creation—all the way out and all the way down in human life.
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- - Beverly Gaventa, When in Romans

18 The Righteousness of God

- "For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, 'The one who is righteous will live by faith.'" Romans 1:16-17
- The "righteousness of God" - an expectation that the God of Israel would be faithful to his promises made in covenant with the patriarchs. God's righteousness is God's covenant loyalty.
- "Faith" = faithfulness; not passive agreement but covenant loyalty, "allegiance"
- "Salvation" = not just individual eternal destiny, but salvation as restoration of the purpose of God in humanity for the whole creation

19 True Worship

- Paul sees the human problem, slavery under Sin and Death, as being the result of humanity (Adam and his offspring) failing to worship God and choosing idolatry instead (Romans 1)
- As the second Adam, Jesus breaks the power of Sin and Death, restoring the ability of humans to truly worship (Romans 8).
- That worship involves giving the whole self over to God (Romans 12).
- For Paul, there is an integral relationship between worship and ethics.

20 Structure of Romans

- Chapters 1-4 - The gospel unveils that in Jesus, Israel's true Messiah, God has been faithful to the covenant established with Abraham and has thereby brought the order of salvation to the world. Through the faithfulness of the Messiah, God has created a worldwide (Jewish and Gentile) family of faith.
- Chapters 5-8 - God has fulfilled the covenant in solving the problem of the "sin of Adam." In Jesus, God has done for this new family what he did for Israel in fulfilling the promise of Abraham. They are freed from slavery to sin, led by the Spirit, and look forward to an inheritance—the redeemed creation. This is the result of God's covenant love expressed in the death of Jesus.

21 Structure of Romans

- Chapters 9-11 - The tragedy of the gospel's revelation of God's righteousness is that Israel failed to believe in the Messiah. And yet, Israel's fall is the means by which salvation is extended to the whole world. This cannot mean that Jews are forever disbarred, however. God desires that more Jews (like Paul) will come into covenant relationship by recognizing that the Gentiles are enjoying their promised blessings. Gentiles are thus warned against anti-Jewish arrogance.

- Chapters 12-16 - How to live as the new humanity, Jew and Gentile together, that reflects God's intention for the world.

22 Course Syllabus

- Session 1 - Introduction
- Session 2 - Romans 1-4
- Session 3 - Romans 5-6
- Session 4 - Romans 7-8 (Part 1)
- Session 5 - Romans 8 (Part 2)
- Session 6 - Romans 9-11
- Session 7 - Romans 12-16
- Session 8 - Reading Romans for Today

23 Texts for the Course

- The Bible in multiple versions (electronically available on Bible app, biblegateway.com)
- Into the Heart of Romans: A Deep Dive Into Paul's Greatest Letter by N.T. Wright.
- When in Romans by Beverly Gaventa

24 Assignment

- Read Romans through in one sitting. Notice the major shifts and get a sense of Paul's argument. What questions or problems do you think he is addressing?
- Read Chapters 1-4 in more detail:
 - What is Paul's primary focus?
 - What questions does the text raise for you?
 - How would you summarize the text?

- Questions?