

An Introduction

Romans 1:16-17

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, January 21, 2018

If you are joining us for the first time today, you came on a good day. Because we are starting a new series on the Book of Romans. So if you want to go ahead and turn there, you can turn to the Book of Romans. And as you are doing that ... when I first came to Grace Fellowship Church, we did a series called “Foundations of the Church.” We talked about some foundational, or fundamental, issues in the church. We talked about what the church is and what the church does. We talked about why the church is necessary and what the ideal church looks like. Then we talked about the suffering church. I told you that a foundation is no good if it doesn’t stand up to suffering. It is no good if it doesn’t help you in a storm and in the rain and bad weather. We spent months looking at that in the Book of 1 Peter. But this week, I want to build on that and talk about the foundation under the foundation, to talk about the ground under the house.

As any builder will tell you, a house is no good if it sits on bad ground, if it's on bad land. If you follow the recent mudslides in California, you'll know this was the problem. The ground is bad. California is a dangerous place to live. (You guys are smart living way up here). Mudslides in the wintertime, fires in the summer, it's glorious. It's a great place, but the ground was bad. We don't to have that problem here at our church. We want to stand through the storm.

To say this another way, I told you last week that it is our vision to proclaim grace upon grace to Chilliwack, British Columbia and to the ends of the earth. But what does that mean, “grace upon grace?” We hear that word, we sing it in our songs and read it in our books, but what is grace? The book of Romans tells us that. That's the theme of the book: how to proclaim grace. One author said that Romans is the most pure gospel, or the most pure grace. It gives it in its purest forms without any strings attached. It just lays it out for all to read. Another author said Romans is the great cathedral of the Christian faith. And for this reason, it puts grace on the top shelf. It makes grace stand head and shoulders above all else.

John Calvin said that this book is the entrance to the treasures of Scripture. Donald Grey Barnhouse said it's the most pure milk of the word. One author, Alva J. McClain, in a rather lengthy quote, said:

Romans tells us what Christianity is. Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians tell us about the Body of Christ, the mystery which was unknown in ages past. And first and second Thessalonians deal with the coming of the Lord and the transformation of the church. But in all of these Letters, Romans comes first and they come later because Romans is the introduction to Christianity.

I want to tell you this morning if you're not familiar with Christianity, if it's a new thing for you, this is a wonderful book for you to study, because it introduces the Christian faith to you. It actually comes right after the book of Acts. Because Acts tells you how the church got started, and Romans tells you what the church believes. Just so that you can see this for yourself, it might help to tell you about a few men in history who were impacted by reading the book of Romans.

By the way, how many of you have been impacted by reading this book? Yeah. We all have, I think. Let me tell you some men in history who were converted while reading the book of Romans.

One of them was a guy named Augustine. Sometime around the fourth century AD, a pagan philosopher moved to Milan, Italy to teach philosophy and to indulge in sin. His name was Augustine. Milan was a very sinful city, an evil place. And Augustine was an evil man, so he moved there to indulge in it and go wild. He went to wild parties, visited terrible places. He had a child with a prostitute. But he fell under the preaching of a minister named Ambrose, who loved this pagan and taught him the Bible, taught him about his sin and showed him Christ. And Augustine was blown away, he'd never heard that before.

And it came to a breaking point where he broke down in a garden one day and began weeping over his sin. He couldn't stop. He didn't know what to do until he heard a child singing *Tolle Lege, Tolle Lege* in Latin, which means "take up and read, take up and read." And he looked down at the bench he was sitting on, and lo and behold there was a copy of the book of Romans. And he opened it, and he read Romans chapter 13, which says, "let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, make no provision for the flesh in regards to its lust." Augustine did that, and he was converted on the spot. He said, "it was like a lightning bolt came down from heaven and took all my doubts away." He went on to become one of the greatest scholars the church had ever known. And it started right here with this book, the book of Romans.

Another man who had a similar experience was Martin Luther. We like talking about Martin Luther here at Grace Fellowship, because he's so quotable, and he had such an impact on the church. But as a young man, Luther joined the monastery on account of a promise he made to God. He got caught in a thunderstorm and he almost got hit by lightning. And out of fear he said, "God, if you get me through this, I will become a monk." And he did. And he hated it, because he couldn't live up to God's standards. He said, "As hard as I tried, I couldn't keep the law." He said, "I stayed up all night, I fasted all week. Did all these things and I could not satisfy God." Until finally, he understood the message of the book of Romans. He was actually teaching in a seminary. He was teaching as an unconverted professor (very interesting), and he started teaching this book. And he came across Romans 1 verse 17, "for in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written. 'But the righteous man shall live by faith.'"

Luther read that passage and he said this,

I greatly longed to understand Paul's epistle to the Romans and nothing stood in the way, but that one expression "the righteousness of God." Because I took it to mean the righteousness whereby God is righteous and he punishes us. ... Night and day I pondered this, until I grasped the truth that the righteousness of God is that righteousness whereby through grace and sheer mercy He justifies us by faith. Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise." He said, "The whole of Scripture took on a new meaning to me. And whereas before the righteousness of God had filled me with hate, now it filled me with love. This passage of Paul became to me a gateway to heaven.

And that passage, interestingly enough, would go on to be a gateway for other men too, like John Wesley. We don't hear a lot about John Wesley today. But in the 1800's, Wesley started a movement called Methodism, which took over England and the American colonies. Thousands were converted under his ministry. It was even said that he traveled the globe seven times on horseback trying to reach all the people that he ministered to. He actually learned to write on horseback. My guess is that would be like riding while you're driving or maybe texting while you're driving. But before he did all of that, John Wesley was an unconverted pastor in the Church of England (sounds just like Luther's testimony). He was a lost pastor because he said, "I couldn't keep the law either. I couldn't be good enough for God." Until he read that passage I just read to you, and then he read Luther's thoughts on it. And John Wesley said this, he said, "I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for my salvation. And an assurance was given to me that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death."

And we could mention other men who were impacted by this book, but let me just ask you a question. Can you say with John Wesley that you have been saved from the law of sin and death? This morning as you hear those testimonies, can you say that Jesus has taken away your sins, even yours? Have you passed through the gateway to heaven? Do you see God as a friend and not an enemy? Do you love Him and not hate Him? With Augustine, have you ever wept over your sins, wept over your depravity, broken down and been crushed by it? If you haven't, I want to encourage you to take up and read this book, because that's what this is about.

The book of Romans tells you what grace is. It introduces you to Christianity. If you're not a Christian, or you're confused on the subject, pay attention to what we're going to be talking about on Sunday mornings, and read this book. In fact, as I was studying for this, I came across a list of subjects that Romans talks about. And I'll just tell you, it talks about everything - the whole kitchen sink is in here. It talks about God and why there is so much evil in the world and how we can escape it. You ever watch the news (we'll talk about this in a minute) and wonder "How can I escape all that mess?" Romans tells you how to do that. It talks about Christ's death and His resurrection and the significance of that. If you've ever wondered what's the big deal of this cross and this Jesus and all this stuff? That's what this book is about. It tells you how the Jews were saved in the Old Testament. They were saved through faith, saved through trusting in God, the same way that we are. It talks about the Holy Spirit and what He does today. It talks about election and predestination. It talks about assurance and eternal security. It talks about God's plans for Israel and how Gentiles have been grafted into the kingdom. If you read through the Old Testament and wonder "How did we get here?" (I think most of us are not Jewish). "How did we come into the picture?" That's what Romans tells us.

It talks about the struggles of the Christian life, the fight against sin, fight against the flesh, the fight against evil and depravity. It talks about the church and its place in the world. It talks about the Christian and his place in government. It talks about personal preferences and how to get along with people who disagree with us. It talks about everything. The whole Christian life is in this book. It's been called Paul's *magnum opus*, because it was the greatest thing he ever wrote. You could say it this way, it's been said if you stand on the shoulders of giants, you can see everything. And if you stand on the shoulders of Romans you can see everything God wants you to see, which is why we're calling this series *The Book of Romans in 3 Months*. Some of you are

laughing at that title. It can be done, because I want you to see everything. I want you to see the gist of it from the high view, the high ground, how the pieces fit together.

Maybe we could use the Cathedral illustration to say it this way, I want you to see the cathedral in all its glory and enjoy the view and the architecture and peep in through the windows. It's hard to do that if you get close up. And so, we're going to step back a bit and look at this book from a distance. We're going to cover it in three months. We may come back another time and go through the book of Romans verse by verse, in depth like we normally do. But I want you to see that the totality of the book and so we're going to go through it quickly.

With that said this morning, I just want to give you an introduction to the book of Romans, to kind of whet your appetite for the book. Let me introduce you to Paul's introduction to the Christian faith. As Stan already read for us, Romans is a letter written by Paul to the saints in Rome. We'll talk about Rome later on; very fascinating city. Rome by the way is a 3000-year-old city. It's been inhabited continuously for 3000. And we'll get into that down the road, but verses one and seven tell us that. They talk about Paul and who he was writing to, the saints in Rome. Verse eight says that he writes it to thank God for them and in verse nine to pray for them. He says he longs to see them in verse 11 and to preach the gospel to them in verse 15.

And then he says in verse 16, he starts off with "for". You see that word there, the word "for". In other words, this is what Paul is writing this for. This is a summary of what he's going after. And if you read it, it says, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it, the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "But the righteous man shall live by faith." If you notice as you read that, there are four "fors" in that passage, because this is the point of it. This is the goal of Romans, the righteous man shall live by faith. You can get right with God, which is what the word righteousness means, right with God through faith. You can find grace through faith, you can find forgiveness through faith, you can find answers through faith. As Luther says, faith opens the door to paradise.

I'm guessing some of you grew up in churches that taught that salvation was all of faith, all of grace, but they said righteousness played no part in that. I'm not going to ask for anybody to raise hands. What I mean is that they taught you that you can live like hell and go to heaven. (Well, you got that impression, anyway). You can sin whenever you want, and God doesn't care. But that's not true because. If you notice, Paul says in verse 17, "The righteous man shall live by faith." In other words, your faith is producing righteousness in you. You are saved by faith, you are saved by grace and completely by that. But if you do that, you will become a righteous man.

On the other hand, some may have grown up in churches that taught that salvation was all of the law and none of faith, or faith had very little to do with that. Faith was rarely talked about. In the words of one Puritan author he said the church he grew up in was all about turning, returning, half turning and whole turning. He said it was about blessing, bending, begging, crossing, knocking, ducking, washing, rinsing, lifting, whispering, stooping, bowing, repeating and shifting with a hundred things more to do every Sunday. He said it was all about works and the law. Paul says that's not true either. Both of those ideas are wrong. In this brief passage he says

salvation is all of grace, all of faith. But if you are saved, you will be righteous and live a godly life. And that's what I want to talk to you about this morning.

Let me introduce you to the book of Romans in this passage. And in doing so, I'm going to introduce you to the Christian life. Here, I've got four introductions for you this morning, four key points for the book of Romans, four introductions. And the first one is this, an introduction to the gospel. First, Paul introduces you to the gospel. As many of you know, Christianity is all about good news, which is what the word "gospel" means. We have a very positive religion. The way some Christians talk today, you would think they were sucking on sour grapes all the time. But that's not true, we have joy and we have peace and we have hope because we have a gospel. And to show you this, Paul starts off in verse 16 with this phrase, he says, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel".

The word gospel here is *euaggelion* in Greek, which means "good news" or "glad tidings". We get our word "evangelist" from this word. An evangelist is someone who proclaims the good news, tells people the gospel. And Paul says, "I'm not ashamed of this." He says, "I'm not embarrassed by it." I've told you before Christianity was very shameful to the ancient world. The pagans were embarrassed by it, because they thought it was a weak religion. It was feeble and frail in their minds, because the ancient gods fought each other, and the Christian God didn't do that. Father, Son and Holy Spirit, they have perfect harmony. The pagans thought that was weak. Or the pagan gods would commit evil acts with each other. If you read about the Greek gods, it's almost embarrassing the things they would do. Plato said our gods are worse than our men. And the Christian God didn't do that either, so they thought that was a weak. And the pagan gods were detached and apathetic and uncaring about the world, and Jesus was the total opposite of that. They thought that was shameful, and they despised Christians because of it.

One secular author said, "If you want to be a fool then become a Christian. That will do it. It will make you a fool." Another one said, "Christianity is for idiots, slaves and weak-willed women." Those are the worst insults he could think of. But Paul says here, on the contrary, he says this to the people in Rome, the people in the headquarters of the Greek and Roman religion, he said, "I'm not ashamed of the gospel. I'm not embarrassed by the Christian faith." As a matter of fact, he's so unashamed about it that he writes a letter that's 7000 words long at a time when ancient letters were normally very small.

I did some research on this, and the average letter in the first century was less than a hundred words. If you read through the New Testament, you come to the book of Philemon, that's about the size of a normal ancient letter. The long-winded author Seneca wrote for about 900 words, or so, and he was considered long-winded. This letter is 7000 words in Greek. As a matter of fact, it's 70 times the size of a normal first century letter.

One scholar was doing some research on this. He said, "You know what? If you had to go through and edit this thing and make corrections and rewrite stuff, it could cost you thousands of dollars to just write the letter, let alone send it." And Paul did it because he was not ashamed of the gospel. He wanted everyone to know what he wanted to shout from the rooftops. As a matter of fact, the Romans would have gotten this letter and read that verse 16 and perked up and said, "No kidding. Paul, look how big this thing is." But he did it because it's good news.

Let me ask you, do you need some good news this morning? Does anybody need good news? Do you need some encouragement? I looked for good news this week in the British Columbia newspaper, and there were a few little things like a cooking shop or something like that. But then it talked about a gang shooting and a sexual assault in Victoria. It talked about freezing rain in the province and a court case involving immigration scams. And I thought, "Where is the good news?" Then I opened up the Chilliwack Progress, thinking, "Chilliwack is nice place. It should be better." It talked about fighting on the school board right there in the first page and an explosion caused by drugs. And I thought, "Wow. That's depressing." Paul says, "I have good news for you. I have hope.", writing to people in the city of Rome, people in one of the worst cities in human history. He says, "I have something positive to tell you. Jesus came to deal with this."

A man once asked, "Why doesn't God do something about all the evil in the world?" To which he was told, "God did do something, he sent Jesus Christ." It's what Paul says in this book. In 7000, words he spells out for you what God did to solve the problem of evil in the world. In fact, if you survey the book of Romans, which we'll do this in the weeks to come, you'll notice Paul spends three chapters talking about the world and he spends 13 chapters talking about Jesus because that's the good news. That's the focus of our religion. I'm afraid if we're not careful, we get so caught up in talking down on the world, down on society, down on culture that we forget to talk about Jesus Christ. We forget to give them hope.

And several years ago, I went to a Together for the Gospel conference, and Kevin DeYoung told the story about his son's first sermon. He was seven years old and he wanted to preach to the family like daddy did, so they let him. And he stood up in front of everybody, and the son's first sermon went like this, he said, "You're all going to hell, let's pray. Amen." I mean that's funny, but some Christians talk like that, don't they? "You're all going to hell, let's pray. Amen." Or they say, "You're all lost. You're all wrong.", and then that's it. They don't say anything else.

Friends, let me tell you something, that is not good news. There is no hope in that, that's not the gospel. The gospel is that you're all lost, but Jesus came to save you. The gospel is that yes, we're all wrong, but God did something about it, He sent His son. And if you trust in Him, He can save you from that. He can pardon you from this terrible place. Yes. The world is evil and it's getting worse, but in the words of John 3 verse 17, God did not send His Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. And that's what we tell people, and that's the message of this book.

Look, I understand you can't get to the good news until you give the bad news. And that's true. You can tell people they're lost, tell them they're going to hell, because it's true. But there's also the truth that God sent His Son to deal with that and to give them a way out. And that's what you have to tell them to.

And that leads to another introduction to the book of Romans. And we'll spend a little more time on this one, because I really like this one: an introduction to the power of God. As Paul is introducing this book, he introduces us to the gospel and he introduces us to the power of God, because they go together. If you have the gospel, you have power, good news. I just told you

those testimonies of Luther and Augustine and John Wesley. Those are powerful, aren't they? And they get your attention. We heard testimonies last week from some of our men about what the Lord had done in their life. That's powerful, because we have a message of power. If you read on in verse 16, it says, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes".

If you notice you see the word "for" there again because Paul is building an argument here. He's saying that this leads to this, leads to this. The gospel leads to power. The word "power" there is *dunamis* in Greek, from which we get the word "dynamite". Paul says, "I'm not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the 'dynamite' of God." If you think about it, no one lights a stick of dynamite and says, "Oh well, that's not going to do anything." You light a stick of dynamite and you know something's about to happen. Paul says when you preach the gospel, you know something is about to happen. It changes things, it rearranges your life.

It's been said that there are no CIA Christians and undercover believers. If you're a Christian, people know it. I've been told you're going to be surprised when you get to heaven by how many people you didn't think are saved that are there. And that's probably true. There'll be some, but I don't think there'll be tons, because this thing changes your life.

When I was washing windows, I worked with a guy who could testify to this. He was a former alcoholic and a bad one. He got drunk every day to the point that he had a beer for breakfast. This is the worst I think I'd ever heard of it. But I asked him, I said, "You got drunk every night. Didn't you have a hangover in the morning? How'd you go to work the next day like that? You must have been a wreck." And he said, "I just drank another beer." He said, "breakfast, lunch and dinner." And that went on for years, until someone told him that Jesus died for drunkards, until someone told him that Jesus loved alcoholics. And he said that was like throwing a stick of dynamite into his life; and it changed everything for him.

This is an interesting story about that guy. I love that guy. Not only did he love to read the Bible, but he loved reading Christian books. And he wasn't used to reading. If someone gave him a copy of Stuart Scott's, *The Excellent Husband* (you guys know that book?), he read it three times, because he said, "I didn't get it the first two times. I read it three times." But the gospel does that because it has power. Paul says in verse 16 it has the power of God. That's the strongest power in the universe. That's the greatest power known to man. That's the power that created the earth, the animals, you and me, the sky - everything. And you can't get touched by this power and not change.

If I told you I got hit by a truck on the way to church this morning, you would say, "No, you didn't, because you didn't change. Where's the evidence? You're not in the hospital." Let me tell you, if you got hit by God, I would tell you the same thing. Where's the evidence? Where's the proof? This thing hits you like a truck. To say it another way, we all want to change the world, don't we? You read the newspaper, you read how bad things are, and you want to change that. You want to do something about it. This is what will change the world.

You hear a lot of people talking today about stopping world hunger and stopping world violence and stopping world hate. I don't want to get political here, but they talk about doing away with

guns. And you can do that, but people are just going to pick up rocks and throw them at each other. They've been doing it since before the beginning of time. You can get rid of all the bombs if you want to, but people will just pick up sticks and hit each other with those, because it doesn't get to the problem. The problem is inside of us, not outside of us. The problem is in here, not out there. We're sinners at heart, sinners by nature, and only the power of God can change that. Only God can reach inside of a man and change him from the inside out and raise him from the dead.

Laws can't do that, you guys ever heard the phrase "You can't legislate morality"? You can give someone laws, but that doesn't mean they're going to do them. As a matter of fact, a lot of times in human history you give people laws, and that probably means they're going to do the opposite. I'm not going to ask you how many of you sped on the way to church today. The reason, because the problem is on the inside of us. I think we all understand that we're born dead to God. Or if you don't, we're going to get into that and as we go through the book of Romans. But Romans 6 verse 23 says, "...the wages of sin is death..." And Ephesians 2 verse 1 says we were dead in our trespasses and sins before we were saved.

A seminary professor was trying to explain this to his students, this idea of the power of God and God raising the dead. And so we asked him, and he said, "What can a dead man do? The Bible says we're dead in our sins, dead in our trespasses, so what can a dead man do? What can a corpse accomplish?" And the students thought about that for a minute. And finally, one raised his hand at the back of the room, and he said, "Stink. A dead man can stink." Friends, on our own power that is all we can do before God. We can stink. If you think about it, you can't go a day without sinning; you can't go a whole hour. Some of you sinned on your way to church this morning, especially if you have kids. And if you want to change the world, you're going to have to start here with your sin. If you want to save it, you going to have to start with the power of God, because that can reach inside and change you from the inside out.

This is how the ancient world changed by the way. It didn't change by laws or politics. It didn't change by rules and commandments. It changed as people heard the gospel and believed it, as people read the book of Romans and experienced the life-changing power of God. To put more thought on this, Donald Grey Barnhouse, the former pastor of Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, was once asked about the secret of his preaching. He was asked why he made such an impact on his audience. And he said, "I looked at them like a bunch of barrels full of gunpowder, and it's my job to throw sparks into them, to throw dynamite in there." That's what Paul is doing in this book. That's what we need to do to change the world. We throw sparks into gun barrels. We throw dynamite into it and watch God raise the dead and see His power, which leads to the next introduction to this book: an introduction to faith. Paul introduces you to the gospel, he introduces you to the power of God, and then he introduces you to faith.

This is where the power comes from. We were singing about that this morning. This is how the power of God enters into the human soul, it goes through the door of faith. As Luther said, "Faith is the gateway to heaven and it opens the door to paradise." I told you before, that's what Romans is about, the righteous man shall live by faith. In fact, the word faith appears 50 times in this book, it's about five times per chapter, because this is the theme of Romans. And if you read in verse 16, Paul says this. He says, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek." We'll talk about

the Jew first and also to the Greek in a moment, but Paul says the gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.

That word “everyone”, we read that kind of stuff and don't think about it much today. That was a revolutionary word in the first century. Nobody thought everyone could be saved in Paul's day. It was unheard of. The whole idea of human rights didn't exist. For example, slaves had no rights; they were considered inhuman. Aristotle, the famous philosopher called slaves animated instruments or breathing tools. To him, they were on the same level as a hammer or a shovel. It's amazing how we think people who like that are so wise, and they say things like that about human beings. But that's what they believed. Slaves couldn't be saved. Certain races could not be saved in Paul's day.

The Romans hated groups like the Germanians and the Gauls. They committed wholesale genocide on the Carthaginians. The city of Carthage was almost lost to human history, because the Romans slaughtered them, because they didn't consider them to be human. They were worthless.

But Paul says here that God sees things differently. To Him, salvation is for everyone who believes. If you think about it, you don't have to be a Roman citizen to believe. You could be someone else. And you don't have to be a free man to believe. You could believe as a slave. You could believe as a poor person, you could believe as an uneducated person. You could believe as anybody. You don't even have to be a Jew, Paul says here. When he says “to the Jew first and also to the Greek”, the idea is the Jews were the first ones to hear the gospel. Jesus came preaching to them. They were the first ones with the opportunity to. They were the ones with the Old Testament. If anybody knew about salvation, it should be them. And Paul says this message is for the Jew first and also to the Greek, or Gentile, the ones who didn't have the Old Testament.

We could say it this way, if you grew up in a church or not, it doesn't matter. You can believe in Christ no matter where you came from. We could say, act on Christ. If you have faith in something, you act on it. You don't just talk about it. If I have faith in one of these chairs over here, I don't just talk about it, I sit in it. I put all my weight in it. I trust it. If I have faith in this building, I walk into it trusting that it's going to protect me and keep me safe. And in a similar way, when you trust in Christ, you do the same thing. You enter into Him. You trust in Him. You put all your weight on Him. You join His church, and you read His word, and you witness to your neighbor. But you don't do it because it will save you, you do it because you believe it. You don't do it because you're earning your way into heaven, you do it because Christ has earned that way for you. You don't sit in the chair believing you're earning it. That's just silly. A chair is doing all the work. In a similar way, you don't trust in Christ believing you're earning it either. He does all the work. He gets all the glory. That's what it means to have faith in Him.

I've talked to people who have said throughout the years, "I don't know if I believe enough. I don't know if I have enough faith." Maybe some of you have said that before. But I want to encourage you this morning, that's not the point. The point is that Christ is enough. It's not about whether you're enough at all. Or they say, "Please pray for me, because I don't know if I believe or not. I don't know if I'm saved." And I say, "Yes. I will pray for you. Let's pray right now." But you need to pray for yourself too. You need to believe for yourself. Faith is a personal thing. I

can't do it for you. I can't sit in the chair for you, you have to sit in the chair for yourself. Trust in Christ for yourself.

By the way, verse 17 goes on to say, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes; to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith." If you notice that phrase, "from faith to faith", it is another way of saying it is all of faith. It begins and ends with faith, starts and stops there. There are some false versions of Christianity that say, "You start with faith and you end with works." It's not true. That is totally a lie. You start with faith, and you end with faith. The works are all of Christ.

And tying this into our evil world for a minute, we've been talking a lot about saving the world today. I guess I saw the newspaper, and I got on a saving the world rant when I was writing this sermon. But Paul talks about that in this book. That's one of the points. But an elderly bishop once said on his deathbed, he said, "As a young man, I wanted to change the world, but I couldn't, so I tried to change my country. And I couldn't do that, it was too big, so I tried to change my town. And that was too big too, so I tried to change my family. And that was too big, so I had a revelation," this Bishop said, "I got on my knees, and I asked Jesus to change me, and He did." Friends, this is what Paul is saying here in this book. This is the message of Romans. Don't worry about changing the world until you change yourself first. Don't worry about your nation or your town or your family or all that stuff on the evening news until you trust in Him. We get so caught up in talking about how bad the world is that we forget how bad we are. And we holler and shout and rant at the TV, but we forget that our hearts are darker than any of that. If anybody in this room spent a whole day inside your head, they would never talk to you again. Amen? We need to trust in Christ. We need to have faith in Him. That's the only way we can be made right with God, which leads to one more introduction to this book.

Paul introduces you to the gospel in the book of Romans. He introduces you to the power of God, the life-changing power of God. And he introduces you to faith. Fourth and finally to tie this off and kind of round it off, Paul introduces you to righteousness. He introduces you to righteousness. Like I told you, this is what Romans is about: how can a man be made right with God. If our heads are that bad that no one could even spend a whole day in them without wanting to talk to us again, if we are that evil, well how do we get right with God, right? How can we approach a holy Being like that? And Paul answers this question in verse 17. He says, "For in it, the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'But the righteous man shall live by faith.'"

Righteousness was a big theme in the Old Testament. If you've read through it before, you'll know that the Jews were constantly obsessed with giving commandment after commandment, after commandment to be right with God. Paul would have known that as a Jew, they came up with a list actually of 613 commandments. We've all heard of the Ten Commandments, but if you are a Jew living in the Old Testament times, you would have had something like 613 of them. And some groups like the Pharisees and the Essenes added more than that. They could have had thousands of Commandments. And the funny thing about it is, or the sad thing about it is, nobody kept them, nobody. As hard as you tried, nobody could follow all of those laws.

If you remember Jesus' conversations with the Pharisees, it was always kind of an ironic conversation because they would pick out some petty little thing and say, "We're not doing this." And Jesus would say, "Oh, yeah," and tell them all the laws they're breaking. This was the problem Luther and John Wesley had: they couldn't keep the law either. Luther said, "If a monk could be saved by monkery, it was me." He said, "But I couldn't. There's no way I could do it." John Wesley said he went to the American colonies as an unconverted minister. And on the way back, in despair and discouragement, he said, "I came to convert the heathen, but who will convert me?"

But here's the good news, friends. This is what Paul is telling us: the righteous man shall live by faith not by works, not by keeping the law, not by being a good person and trusting in my own power, but through faith in Christ. That's a quotation of Habakkuk 2 verse 4. Some say the book of Romans is an interpretation of that one verse. In Habakkuk's day, Israel had become evil. They they'd gone down the tubes. You open the newspaper in Habakkuk's day, and you saw all kinds of terrible things: child sacrifice; you saw adultery being rampant; violence was everywhere. And Habakkuk wondered, "Who can be saved from this? How can anyone be righteous?" And the Lord said, "The righteous man shall live by faith."

Righteousness has always been through faith. It was that way in Habakkuk's day. It was that way in the Old Testament. It's that way today. And here's why, friends. This is the point, and this is what we're going to be expounding in the book of Romans. Here's why righteousness is through faith: because Jesus Christ was righteous. Amen? Do you guys get that? Does that make sense to you? He was born of a virgin, born without sin, and He stayed sinless His entire life, so that when He died, He died a righteous man. And when He offered His life on the cross, He gave a righteous offering. And God took that righteous offering, and He applies it to you in faith. He took His perfect life and transfers it to your imperfect life, if you believe in Him. If you sit in the chair and enter the building.

I had a roommate in college who played on our basketball team. And he had a 34-inch vertical, which means that my roommate could jump about three feet off the ground. His feet would be somewhere here. And he would make fun of me because I can't jump three inches. When he would jump, his feet would come up to my neck. And sometimes I would just push him out of anger (not him - his feet because that's all I could see). But do you know what? If we're trying to jump to the moon, who cares? If we're trying to jump into outer space, what does it matter how high he can jump. Friends, I want to tell you this morning you need to jump into outer space if you want to be made right with God in your own power. You need to jump to the moon if you want to save yourself with your own resources. You can't do that.

I don't know where everybody is at this morning, some of you may be feeling convicted of sin, convicted of something going on your life. And you're looking at other people in the room and you're saying, "But they're so perfect, and they're so great, and they're so wonderful." Let me tell you something friends, we all have to jump to the moon if we want to get to heaven on our own works. And we can't do that, but the good news is that Jesus Christ already has. And if you believe in Him, He will give you the rewards of His righteous life. That's the ground we stand on as a church. Amen? This is the grace that we proclaim: it is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

Let me ask you this morning is Christ in you? Is your life built on Him this morning? Are you standing on this solid ground? Are you sitting in the chair, like we talked about? Have you entered the building? Are you standing on grace through faith, or are you standing on something else? They say that a self-made man is a sloppy piece of work. Does that describe you? Are you a self-made man? If you are, you don't need to be, because Jesus Christ has offered you salvation. If you're trying to jump to the moon, you should stop right now, because He went to the cross in your place if you trust in Him. Will you trust in Him?

It was said that when a man in India first read the book of Romans (he wasn't a Christian, but he read the book) he said, "Yeah. That describes India to a tee." But I think that describes God too. I would say this morning, if you read this book, you would say it describes Chilliwack. This book describes every town on the planet, but it describes God too. And it teaches us about His grace, and it teaches us about His mercy and the salvation He gives us in His son. Let's pray that the Lord will bless us as we study it. Let's pray that He will use it to give Himself glory here in our town. Let's pray.

Father we thank you so much for the work of Your son. And as we come to the Lord's table this morning, Father we pray that He would be honored, that Christ would be glorified. And so we remember Him in the bread and the juice. Lord, we're speechless as we think of Your great love that You would not only save us from sin, offer salvation to us, but you would write us such a book like this that explains it from start to finish and leaves no stone unturned. Lord, we do pray that You would bless us as we open these pages. Father, we do want to understand Your word as we sang about this morning. We do want to enter it to hearts and change our lives.

Father, I thank you for a church like Grace Fellowship and the dear people here who do want to understand the Bible, who want to glorify You in it. And I pray that we would do that through the book of Romans. Lord, I pray if there's anybody who doesn't know Christ, that this morning You would open their hearts to the saving love of Your Son. Thank you for what He has done. Thank you that the salvation is available to everyone who believes. And may there be some here who believe today for the first time. We pray it in Christ's name. Amen.