



CHRISTIAN CRUSADERS

7401 UNIVERSITY AVE., CEDAR FALLS, IOWA 50613
(319) 277-0924

INFO@CHRISTIANCRUSADERS.ORG
WWW.CHRISTIANCRUSADERS.ORG

The Roman Road: Four Ps from Paul

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Pastor Tim Boettger

Romans 1:7-17 (ESV)

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.

First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world. For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you. For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you — that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine. I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some harvest among you as well as among the rest of the Gentiles. I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

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 for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."

We looked last week as we opened Paul's letter to those in Rome. We looked at who Paul is as a person, and we learned that Paul is a passionate person. He has been his whole life. He passionately persecuted the followers of Christ. And then he had a powerful conversion by Jesus when he encountered the living Christ on his road to Damascus, to actually go there to persecute Christ's people there. And then after this powerful conversion, we see Paul persevered through many challenges and trials and hardships in his life, following Jesus, proclaiming the good news of Jesus. Now he's in his late 50s. We understand, probably writing from Corinth this letter with a scribe who's penning it for him. And he's greeted those in Rome, those that are loved by God, the followers of Christ in Rome. And of course, he's wanted to go to Rome many times. He loves the people in Rome. He loves God's people across

the globe. And Rome is this epicenter where the gospel could go forth from there. And Paul writes to them in hopes that he would get to them eventually. And at the beginning of his letter, I want to let four things settle in on you today as we start this letter, four P's from Paul. He says to all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be his holy people. Grace and peace to you from God our father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

The first thing Paul wants for believers in the world, for those in Rome and for you and me, is this peace, the peace of God? When the Bible speaks of peace, we see two different kinds of peace described. We see a peace with God and a peace from God. The peace with God comes to us through the shed blood of Jesus. And that is a peace that you and I can have. It's not having animosity between us and God relationally. You know, you and I can have tension in any relationship we have. You can have tension with a spouse or with your children, or with extended family members or friend or coworker, and you don't have peace there. And something needs to be done to reconcile or to have peace brought about if some tension is there like that. My wife and I have had to work through many disagreements and challenges to get back to peace and harmony with each other. And the Bible says as much as depends on us, as far as we can, we should live at peace with everyone. And that includes God. And we have peace with God through the forgiveness of our sins, through the shed blood of Jesus. Paul is not talking about that kind of peace, relational peace with God. He's talking about a supernatural peace from God that he wants those who already have peace with God to experience, to know this is a supernatural guarding of our hearts and minds and experience.

Not just that there's no animosity between us and God anymore, but that we're experiencing in the midst of this crazy world, a peace from God. He described this peace and how to attain it in Philippians chapter four when he said, do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God and the peace from God. This peace that comes from God, which transcends all understanding, will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. This is the kind of peace he's saying. Grace, I want God's grace and riches for you, and I want his supernatural peace to be a part of your life. The prophet Isaiah said it this way: God will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are stayed on him because they trust in the Almighty. Isaiah 26, verse three. God Himself will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are stayed on thee. Paul went further in Philippians four eight when he said, fix your mind on things that are good, righteous, pure, and holy. If you and I are going to walk in this peace from God, we have to be a people of prayer, Paul says, and a people who train our minds to fix on those things that are good and righteous and pure and true and holy that are revealed for us in the scriptures.

The first thing Paul wants for us and for the believers in the world, grace and peace. And just in line with his instruction about attaining and walking in this peace from God found in Philippians, he says this: first, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you. Constantly, I remember you in my prayers at all times. He's a man of prayer we see here. Not only does he want peace for all of us who know Christ for anyone, and this is open to everyone in the world. He models for us here at the beginning of his letter to those in Rome: A Life of prayer. Now, prayer is so powerful. Prayer is talking with God. This is the idea of you and I communicating with the Almighty. It's really a privilege we've been given by God to have the opportunity to walk with him and talk with him, and I can't help but take the time to encourage you today in your prayer life. I wonder how many of you are listening today really spend time talking with God. This is what Paul says: He thanks God through Jesus Christ for the believers in the world, those in Rome, constantly. He's praying. Pray at all times. The scripture says, do you have an ongoing conversation with God? I want to encourage you with what prayer is not today. It's not something that has to be formal. It's not something that has to be exciting, intimidating, long, or rote and not.

It's not something you can fail at or succeed at in a sense of a worldly measure of prayer. Prayer is a way of communicating with God, and God wants us to communicate with him. Peter wrote it this way under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit: From God, cast all your anxieties upon him. Lay your burdens before him, because he cares for you. God wants to hear from us. The book of Psalms is people just pouring out their hearts to God. If you don't have a prayer life today, friend, I want to encourage you to start learning how to talk with God. I get so shocked by how many people I've met as a minister in numerous churches who, as I get to know them, find out they really don't pray. They're nervous about praying. They're insecure about praying. If this is you, I don't care what your age. I want to encourage you. Maybe just in the quietness of your heart, start learning to talk to God. Start learning to say, Lord, I understand that you listen. You hear people, you respond. I have things I want to talk with you about and just learn how to grow comfortable in talking with God. Paul wants peace for these people, all of us. God wants peace for you and me. A supernatural peace that transcends understanding. But we can't apprehend that peace without a deep, abiding relationship with God that develops when we have peace with God through Jesus Christ.

And then we start to develop a personal relationship with him through prayer. And Paul is modeling this for us here. He prays all the time. He says, and this is what we learn from Paul here. And then Paul begins to describe the next p here, his plan, his plan. 'I pray that now, at

last, by God's will, the way may be opened for me to come to you.' (Romans 1:10). See, Paul is a man who wants peace for the people in Rome. He's praying for them. He's praying about his life, and he's planning his life out before God. He has become a servant of the Most High God. He calls himself as one who's in chains for the gospel, the good news of Jesus. And he wants a plan on how he can spread the good news of Jesus as best he can. And he wants to go to Rome and encourage those people there. He says, 'I long to see you so that I may impart some spiritual gift to make you strong. That is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith.' I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters,' he says. 'I've planned many times to come to you but have been prevented from doing so until now.' He's sharing with them his plan.

He's offered them peace, the peace of God. He wants them to know. He prays for them. He models a life of prayer. And now he's showing us how to pray. In our lives before God as his people. And notice he says something here. He's praying for it. He thinks the opportunity is going to come. He's tried to do it before and it hasn't happened. He's been blocked from coming. We see this in the book of Acts. Paul was prevented from doing numerous things by God himself that he thought he wanted to do, so God would work and accomplish his plans through him. You know, when we talk about planning in life at the beginning of a new year here, we're still in this first month, and people do New Year's resolutions and things like that. Here is some great teaching from Paul about how we plan before God. You know, Solomon said this. Paul is not he's saying he's praying about it. He's been prevented. Now he's hoping that he can come to him. King Solomon said this: 'Many are the plans in a man or woman's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails.' When you and I make plans, we should listen to what James teaches us. Life is so unpredictable. It's hard to control. We can't manage everything. James said this: 'Listen, you who say you're going to make plans and do something today or tomorrow, we'll go and do this city or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.'

He says, 'Well, you do not know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life?' he says. 'You're a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you want to say this: If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that. But if we lock in our plans and guarantee that we're going to be successful with our plans, we're, in a sense, James says, playing the fool. We're boasting, we're being arrogant, and Paul is modeling this for us. 'I've wanted to come to you. I've planned to come to you, but I've been prevented from coming. Now I'm praying that I can come to you.' There is this great dynamic you and I need to pay attention to in our lives. One is the purposes, the plans of our heart, and two is the purposes and the plans of God. And

we can plan, we can envision, we can make steps in the direction, but we should hold our plans loosely, always staying open to what God has for us. We ought to say, James says, 'If it is the Lord's will, I will do this or do that.' I have a pastor friend who has trained himself to say, 'Lord willing,' every time he talks about his plan. He says, 'Lord willing will meet tomorrow, for this, Lord willing will do that.'

And that is a great biblical attitude that he has developed around thinking about the plans in his life and what lies ahead. And so Paul offers peace to us. He models prayer for us. He shows us about planning before God and praying about our plans. And he says, 'I don't I don't want you to be unaware that I that I plan to come to you. Many times I've been prevented, but in order now, I might come to you and have a harvest among you, just as I've had among other Gentiles.' Now he uses this word harvest because he's talking about coming there and sharing the good news of Jesus. This is not our terminology. This is God's terminology. It came directly from Jesus himself when he was teaching in Luke chapter ten, when he sent out his followers, and he told them two by two to go over a town and place that he was going to go, and they were going to till the field of souls for him. And he said this. He said, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send forth laborers out into the harvest field.' This is an image that God has given us about his call for us to go into the world and share the good news of Jesus so people might come to know this peace with God through the shed blood of Jesus, and then be his friend and learn to walk with him forever.

And Paul is wanting to go there so he can encourage them in doing this, and he can do this himself. He says, 'I'm obligated to the Greeks and the non-Greeks, to the wise, to the foolish. That's why I'm so eager to preach this good news of Jesus, not only to you who are in Rome but it would spread from there.' And then he says this, 'For I am not ashamed of the gospel. There's power in the name of Jesus. Friends, I'm not ashamed of the gospel, the good news of Jesus, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes, first for the Jew, God's chosen people, and then to the Gentiles, anyone else in the world. For in the gospel, the righteousness of God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last. As it is written, 'The just will live by faith,' Paul would write. Later in this letter, he said, 'How can they know unless we tell them?' and he's going, and he wants to encourage them to stir up the sharing of the name of Jesus, the good news of Jesus, the work of Jesus on the cross, our need for the forgiveness that was apprehended for us there.

And what Paul is saying here is, if I can encourage you in this, stir this up and preach it to you, as you already know, there's power in it. He wants peace for them. He models prayer for them and planning to get out the power of the gospel. That's what's happening here at the beginning

of the letter that Paul writes to those in Rome. He's letting them know that he wants to stir them up to share the power of Jesus with the world around them. And this, friends, is our calling. You and I have been given a trust as we embark on the Roman road. Friends, here it is. We're carrying the good news of Jesus entrusted to us, and those given a trust must prove faithful. Oh, what a great way for him to start his letter. Now he's going to expound on the gospel in such in such an in-depth doctrinal way. It's known as the best Magna Carta of the Good News of Jesus. Of all of the Scripture. I look forward to going farther in it with you. Let's pray together. Father, thank you for Paul's heart that you stirred in him the desire he had for people to know your peace, peace with you and peace from you. The desire he had for people to know how to pray and walk with you and talk with you and plan before you in prayer to share the power of Jesus with people. Help us follow in this way as well. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.