

“Jesus, the Reason for Life”
Romans 1:1-17
September 9, 2007

Gerald Mander was a successful advertising agent who had achieved most of what he wanted from his career.

But slowly he began to question the purpose of it all.

Mander says, (In my youth) “when I thought about my “career”—always a hot topic around our house—certain images would fly through my mind.

“Since so many of the images were from the advertisements of the period, the world of advertising seemed (right for me).

There was something about that life-style, those big cars, the great white yachts, the polished people on them and the life of leisure and pleasure: The Dream.

It wasn't so much that I was especially interested in wealth or that I ached to have all the goodies that were being shown in the ads...

I didn't want to own the cars and yachts so much as I wanted to be like the people who did.

“Despite some early setbacks, by (the time I was in my 40s) much of my dream was realized.

By then I had already concluded a successful career as head of a theatrical publicity agency and joined a celebrated San Francisco ad agency, which became Freeman, Mander and Gossage.

“We concentrated on so-called class clients. Triumph, Land Rover, Eagle shirts, Paul Masson wines, KLH audio, Scientific American, Advent Corporation, and Random House publishing.

Ours was the most elegant office in town. I was commuting coast to coast weekly, taking five-day vacations in Tahiti, eating only in French restaurants, jetting to Europe for a few days' skiing.

“At some point, not very long into this new career, I began to realize a kind of hollowness in myself.

I caught myself smiling pasty smiles. I noticed that despite all (I had) I was not having a good time.

“I think I hit an emotional bottom...while cruising through the Dalmatian Straits, observing rocky cliffs, rolling seas, dazzling sky, and colors as bright as a desert.

Leaning on the deck rail, it struck me that there was a film between all of that and me.

“I could "see" the spectacular views. I knew they were spectacular. But the experience stopped at my eyes.

I couldn't let it inside me. I felt nothing.

Something had gone wrong with me.

“I remembered childhood moments when the mere sight of the sky or grass or trees would send waves of physical pleasure through me.

Yet now on this deck, I felt dead.

I had the impulse to repeat a phrase that was popular among friends of mine, "Nature is boring."

What was terrifying even then was that I knew the problem was not nature, but me..."

“If one seeks critical moments to explain later acts...then perhaps that was one such moment for me.

It was clear that I had chosen a fraudulent path toward an equally fraudulent image of a very cold sort of "happiness."

“One of my partners in the ad agency was Howard Gossage, a genius of sorts who for years before he died... agonized about the absurdity of working in such a profession.

He said, "I'd hate to go to my grave remembered as the man who invented Beethoven sweatshirts or competitions for paper airplanes."

“(Gossage) loved to tell the story of the retired adman who once said to him: "I got out of this business when I woke up one day and (realized I didn't really care) whether they sold more Quaker Oats

than I sold Cream of Wheat. " (From "Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television" by Jerry Mander)

Mander's circumstances are certainly more exotic than those of most of us but the condition of his soul is probably reflected in the souls of millions of Americans - even Americans in churches on Sunday.

How many people struggle with the "why?" of living?

"Why am I doing all this?" "Where is all this activity and effort taking me?"

Some achieve their goals but still end up very dissatisfied.

Others struggle and never achieve their goals and end up frustrated and angry at life.

Still others never try – assuming the system is rigged anyway or they want something other than an 80 hour work week, a three car garage and a vacation home they never have time for.

Am I right? Is there often uneasiness about life, even among Christians?

Is it possible for life to be truly satisfying and worth it?

I want you to hear from a man who was probably in his 50s, maybe even 60s. – He was no novice in life.

This man had more reason than most of us to be incredibly discouraged and tempted to just coast out of life.

Five times flogged with 39 lashes

Three times beaten with rods

Once stoned until they thought he was dead

Three times shipwrecked and subject to drowning

He had nearly frozen to death, nearly died of hunger, spent years in prison, and in danger more times than he could count.

This wasn't Bruce Willis or Matt Damon in the movies - this was for real.

The man was the Apostle Paul.

What I'm captured by is how focused he was, how deliberate he was, and how perfectly at peace he was with his place in life.

The Apostle's greatest written work, his magnum opus is the book of *Romans*.

It is the most comprehensive and systematic declaration of the Christian faith of all the books of the Bible.

It is a letter, a letter written within thirty years of Jesus' resurrection, to the church in Rome.

It begins and ends as a letter but between it reads more like a theology primer – setting forth the basics of becoming and living as a Christian.

For the next six months, apart from two weeks around Christmas, it is our intention to carefully study the message of this great letter.

You are invited not only to listen but also to join others and me in this study.

Each week, in anticipation of the next week's message, you will be provided study questions to use in your own preparation.

Those study questions will be provided in your bulletin and on the church's website.

During the week that follows the sermon, over 30 of our small groups will be discussing more of the implications of that particular section of *Romans*.

If you are not already part of a small couples', men's, or women's small group, we encourage you to get the information in the Welcome Center today and join us in making this study of God's Word as fruitful in your life as possible.

We are also encouraging all of you, whether you are in a small group or not, to purchase a Romans' Notebook to keep your notes.

The Notebook contains other resources to help you in your study.

I'd like you now to please stand and follow along as I read from the beginning of the Apostle Paul's letter to the church in Rome – READ *Romans 1:1-17*.

The opening words of Romans are clearly introductory.

Here Paul:

- introduces himself to the church in Rome.
- mentions his credentials – why it is they should read what he has to say.
- speaks of his long-standing desire to visit them and of his ongoing concern for them.
- And Paul ends the introduction in verses 16-17 with a strong affirmation of his confidence in the message he proclaims.

Yes, the opening words are an introduction but they are so much more.

Unlike Gerald Mander, whom I mentioned earlier, these words are powerfully descriptive of a man with a purpose for living.

What caught my attention as never before was the singular focus of Paul's life.

Education, relationships, career, recreation, and everything else about his life was guided and made valuable by his one passion in life.

What's impressive is that whether he was in prison or out, it didn't affect his ability to live out his purpose.

Whether he was in one country or another, whether he had much or had nothing, whether he was sick or healthy, or whether he was acclaimed or ridiculed made no difference to the fulfillment of his life's objective.

What was that single focus, that consuming passion, that life-purpose?

Do you think you know what I'm going to say?

As you look at the text again you see Paul in verse 1 declaring himself an apostle, set apart for the gospel.

- In verse 5 he writes, “we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith.”
- In verse 9 he writes, “I serve with my whole heart in preaching the gospel...”
- And in verse 15 he writes, “I am so eager to preach the gospel to you also...”

With all that I think I could build a good case that Paul’s primary purpose was to proclaim the gospel.

And the application to us would be to commit our lives to that same purpose – to witness and evangelize here and around the world.

It would serve as the motivation for the worldwide outreach we have as a church with missionaries serving among more than 20 different people groups.

But that is not what I see as Paul’s singular purpose.

The proclamation of the gospel is clearly one **outcome** of his purpose but it is not the focus of his life.

Then what is?

The answer is in the first six English words of the letter: “Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus.”

Paul understood and never forgot who he was.

He had the most humble and at the same time the most privileged position – a mere servant but a servant of Jesus - God the Son.

Jesus was, for Paul, both the source and the sum of his life.

Paul’s identity was never in doubt.

Too many of us spend a lot of time trying to find out who we are or trying to be something.

I think Paul would say, “give it up” - “All those things you’re trying to be or do don’t matter”.

You have just one simple role to play - be Jesus' servant.

Look at verse 6 "You are called to belong to Jesus Christ".
Look at verse 7 "You are loved by God and called to be his people".

Jesus is the very source and the sum of our lives!

In verse 9 Paul reveals his passion - "God, **whom I serve with my whole heart** in preaching the gospel of his Son.

Paul's life was based on a relationship - a relationship with Jesus and he longed for one thing only, to serve Jesus.

In my study, I was impressed over and over again how much these opening words of Romans are all about Jesus.

Everything Paul writes is about Jesus.

Look at it in your own Bible:

V1 Paul the servant of Jesus

V2,3 The gospel regarding Jesus

V5 Through Jesus and for his name's sake

V6 Called to belong to Jesus

V7 Grace and Peace to you from Jesus

V8 I thank my God through Jesus

V9 I preach the good news of Jesus

On whatever subject Paul speaks he constantly connects it to Jesus.

He wrote in 1 Corinthians 2:2 "For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

In verse 1 Paul speaks of the gospel; that is the English translation of a word that means "good news".

What is this "good new?"

Again look at verse 1 - what does he call it?

"The good news of God" but keep reading to verse 3 -

The good news "regarding his Son".

God's good news is Jesus!

Jesus is the good news.

Elsewhere Paul wrote 2 Timothy 2:8 “This is my gospel, **Jesus Christ**, descended from David and raised from the dead.” (word order rearranged)

Christianity is about Jesus - it all connects to him or it isn't Christianity.

- When elsewhere Paul speaks of commands to be obeyed he speaks of them as us responding to the knowledge of Jesus.
- When he speaks of obeying he speaks of Jesus who gives us the example and power to obey.
- When he speaks of the promises of God - he speaks of them as all finding fulfillment in Jesus.
- He calls Jesus the head of the church.
- We were created in Christ Jesus to do good works.
- Jesus is the object of our worship.
- Jesus is the one who will bring all history to a conclusion.
- It is Jesus' love that motivates us to love others.
- We are constantly reminded to think like Jesus thought - to have the same mind that he had about people, issues and things.
- We are exhorted to forgive as Jesus has forgiven us.
- We are to remain pure because we belong to Jesus.
- The Bible says we live and move and have our being in Jesus.

(See Huldane, *Romans*, 20-21)

The whole of life revolves around Jesus - **He** is the Good news!!

Don't miss it - real Christianity is not just about getting people to convert to a different religion or philosophy than the one they have. It is not ultimately about convincing them of the truthfulness of certain principles or historical facts.

It is not like getting people to subscribe to the philosophical tenets of Islam, Hinduism or Buddhism.

Don't miss it - Christianity is about Jesus, people meeting and trusting Jesus.

I'm afraid that some of us in conservative evangelicalism have so long been concerned about the facts of the Bible and the correct

doctrines of the Bible that we have the tendency to come across as just convincing people of a creed rather than being friends bringing other friends to the person of Jesus.

But who is this Jesus?

In verses 3 and 4 Paul very precisely identifies Him -
 Jesus the Son of God, who is fully human, descended from David and is the Messiah promised throughout the OT.

And by his resurrection he is declared, appointed, recognized to be the sovereign (Lord), saving (Jesus), Messiah (Christ).

Paul was convinced that Jesus was and is God who became man – Jesus, the saving God.

Ultimately, Paul lived for one thing - to serve Jesus.

That purpose dictated every decision Paul made.

You never get the impression Paul was ever confused about his purpose in life.

Now remember, like us, Paul had to make a living; he had to sleep, eat, work, travel, and engage people like any other human being.

He had obligations that required his attention but he never, never lost sight of the one central controlling relationship in the midst of all that “stuff” of life – he was a servant of Jesus Christ.

I want you to see this singleness of purpose further in how Paul describes what motivates him to obey Jesus.

Look first at verse 14 where Paul says, “I am obligated to the Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish” or in other words Paul knew himself to be obligated to all non-Christians.”

The text clearly says Paul is obligated to non-Christians but **how** is Paul obligated?

In what way is he obligated to them?

Does Paul owe them something?

You can be obligated to someone in two different ways:

The first way, for example, is if I loan you something then you are required to repay – you are indebted or obligated to me.

The other way to be obligated is if I give you something that I want someone else to have, expecting you to give it to them for me.

You are obligated to the someone else but not because of the someone else but because of me.

Paul had been given something by Jesus that belonged to those who had not heard of Jesus.

Paul was obligated to give it to them.

It isn't that they deserved to hear about Jesus but that **Jesus** deserves for them to hear.

Paul's motivation was not the unbeliever – Paul's motivation was Jesus – Jesus who is the focus of his life.

That becomes even clearer when we look at verse 5 “Through him and for his name's sake we” are commissioned to proclaim the good news.

Why did Paul desire to bring people from all nations to Jesus Christ?
It was to honor Jesus.

Pastor and author John Stott wrote, "We should be troubled when Jesus' name remains unknown. We should be hurt when it is ignored, indignant when it is blasphemed, and all the time anxious and determined that it shall be given the honor and glory which are due to it.

“The highest of all missionary motives is NEITHER obedience to the great commission (important as that is) NOR love for sinners who are alienated and perishing (strong as that incentive is...) BUT RATHER zeal - burning passionate zeal for the glory of Jesus Christ.” (Stott, Romans, 53)

It's all about Jesus!

If tomorrow morning when we awaken we are clear that our unambiguous purpose is to use whatever opportunities and

means we have to simply serve Jesus, we will not lack for a purpose worth our lives.

Paul's **purpose** is Jesus - to live as a servant of Jesus.

Paul's **motivation** is Jesus - to see Jesus receive glory.

But notice also that Paul's **confidence** is Jesus.

Paul speaks to this in Romans 1:16-17 "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."

When thinking of these verses remember first that Paul has already defined the gospel. The gospel, the good news is Jesus.

Therefore, it is just as correct to read this verse as, "I am not ashamed of Jesus." Why?

"Because the gospel, Jesus, is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes."

Paul depends completely on Jesus to make this present life worthwhile and to guarantee his eternal life.

It all hinges on whether what Paul believes is actually true.

How is Jesus the power of salvation?

Paul answers it in Romans 1:17 "For in the gospel (in Jesus) a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith."

Paul will flesh this out in chapters 3, 4 and 5 but here, in introductory fashion, he gives us the essence of the whole letter.

Can we know God?

In spite of the atheism that is pushed on us in the public square, most of the world for most of history has wanted desperately to know how to relate to that which is obviously outside of us and larger than us.

Every religion and most philosophies are attempts at explaining how to relate to their idea of God.

Paul comes saying it is possible to have a relationship with the Living God.

But that relationship doesn't come about in the way we usually think. As you know, every other religion in the history of the world requires its adherents to somehow **earn** the right of access to their idea of God.

Even many who call themselves Christians fall prey to the same faulty thinking.

So did Martin Luther and many who preceded and followed him. Luther wrote of how for a long time he hated these words in Romans 1:16-17, specifically the words, "the righteousness of God."

He had been taught that this "righteousness" was God's holiness and hence God's anger toward the unrighteous sinner.

Luther tried so hard to qualify himself for God but in suicidal misery knew that he fell far short.

Then as he says it, "by the mercy of God" he awoke to what Paul was actually saying.

God grants **his** righteousness, his holiness, to us through faith.

And how does a holy God do that?

Verse 17 answers it, "For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith..."

Remembering, as we saw earlier, that the "gospel" is Jesus, we can read verse 17 this way: For in Jesus a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith..."

Jesus is the good news. When we trust Jesus, when we receive Jesus, we receive the righteousness of God – The perfect holiness of Jesus is imputed to us.

Or as Paul wrote of it elsewhere, 2 Corinthians 5:21 “God made him (Jesus) who had no sin to be sin for us, **so that in (Jesus) we might become the righteousness of God.**

Paul’s confidence is in Jesus – that by his relationship with Jesus who is God, Paul is safely and eternally connected to God.

Others may ridicule the gospel as fanciful, simplistic, childish, or worse.

But Paul says he is convinced of who Jesus is and what Jesus has done on the cross and in the resurrection.

To Timothy he said in 2 Timothy 1:12 “Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day.”

One of our staff missionaries works in a repressive Islamic country. For several years one of the nationals who is a Christian has been talking to his friend about Jesus.

The Christian was recently abducted, threatened and beaten severely because of his relationship to Christianity.

The Muslim friend learned of all this and as a result obviously was at a decision point.

Would he renounce the Christian or would he truly believe?

That Muslim friend recently announced his desire to be baptized as a Christian.

Can you imagine the conviction and confidence he must have to make such a decision?

How firmly must he believe, Romans 1:16 “I am not ashamed of (Jesus, because he) is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes...”

Do you truly believe that?

Paul’s whole life is centered in Jesus.

His purpose is Jesus - to be Jesus’ servant.

His motivation is Jesus - to bring Jesus glory.
His confidence is Jesus - Jesus is truer than anything else.

Life would be a lot simpler if our purpose was as singular.

- There would be no more cynicism about life.
- We would have a confident optimism based on God's power and God's description of the future.
- We would see each day for the opportunities it holds for knowing Jesus and serving him.
- Life would not be judged successful or unsuccessful based on education, or job, or salary, or things necessary or luxurious, or vacations or diversions but it would be judged successful simply by service to Jesus.

Can we say with Paul, as in Philippians 1:21, "For to me to live is Christ?"

Luther's account of his salvation follows on page 15

Luther's Account of his own Conversion

The following selection is taken from the *Preface to the Complete Edition of Luther's Latin Writings*, it was written by Luther in Wittenberg, 1545. This English edition is available in Luther's Works Volume 34, *Career of the Reformer IV* (St. Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 1960), p. 336-337. In the first few lines of this selection, Luther writes, "during that year;" the immediate context indicates he is referring to the year of Tetzels death (July, 1519). This puts the date for Luther's conversion, in his own view, two years after the posting of the ninety-five theses.

Meanwhile, I had already during that year returned to interpret the Psalter anew. I had confidence in the fact that I was more skilful, after I had lectured in the university on St. Paul's epistles to the Romans, to the Galatians, and the one to the Hebrews. I had indeed been captivated with an extraordinary ardor for understanding Paul in the Epistle to the Romans. But up till then it was not the cold blood about the heart, but a single word in Chapter 1, "In it the righteousness of God is revealed," that had stood in my way. For I hated that word "righteousness of God," which, according to the use and custom of all the teachers, I had been taught to understand philosophically regarding the formal or active righteousness, as they call it, with which God is righteous and punishes the unrighteous sinner.

Though I lived as a monk without reproach, I felt that I was a sinner before God with an extremely disturbed conscience. I could not believe that he was placated by my satisfaction. I did not love, yes, I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners, and secretly, if not blasphemously, certainly murmuring greatly, I was angry with God, and said, "As if, indeed, it is not enough, that miserable sinners, eternally lost through original sin, are crushed by every kind of calamity by the law of the decalogue, without having God add pain to pain by the gospel and also by the gospel threatening us with his righteousness and wrath!" Thus I raged with a fierce and troubled conscience. Nevertheless, I beat importunately upon Paul at that place, most ardently desiring to know what St. Paul wanted.

At last, by the mercy of God, meditating day and night, I gave heed to the context of the words, namely, "In it the righteousness of God is revealed, as it is written, 'He who through faith is righteous shall live.'"

There I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous lives by a gift of God, namely by faith. And this is the meaning: the righteousness of God is revealed by the gospel, namely, the passive righteousness with which merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written, "He who through faith is righteous shall live." Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates. There a totally other face of the entire Scripture showed itself to me. Thereupon I ran through the Scripture from memory. I also found in other terms an analogy, as, the work of God, that is what God does in us, the power of God, with which he makes us wise, the strength of God, the salvation of God, the glory of God.

And I extolled my sweetest word with a love as great as the hatred with which I had before hated the word "righteousness of God." Thus that place in Paul was for me truly the gate to paradise. Later I read Augustine's *The Spirit and the Letter*, where contrary to hope I found that he, too, interpreted God's righteousness in a similar way, as the righteousness with which God clothes us when he justifies us. Although this was heretofore said imperfectly and he did not explain all things concerning imputation clearly, it nevertheless was pleasing that God's righteousness with which we are justified was taught.

<http://homepage.mac.com/shanerosenthal/reformationink/mlconversion.htm>