

Romans 1:1-7 The GOOD NEWS about Jesus, God's son. 1 Cor. 15:1-6

How many letters have changed the course of history? Four, that I can discover.

In 1860, 11-year old Grace Bedell wrote to presidential candidate Abraham Lincoln, assuring him of her support but remarking that he might get more votes if he grew a beard—because his face looked very thin.

In 1917, an intercepted telegram sent to the German Ambassador was instructing him, to continue trying to keep the U.S. neutral in the war (in WW1), but if we seemed determined to enter the conflict then he was to promise Mexico German financial support for declaring war on the U.S. Splashed across American newspapers, this telegram so infuriated people that it changed popular sentiment and we entered the war.

In 1939 Franklin Roosevelt received a letter from a German citizen living in New York. Albert Einstein had written to warn him that Germany had begun building nuclear weapons and that the U.S. should do the same. Roosevelt famously responded, "this requires action," and soon after that the Manhattan Project was begun.

But there is only one letter that has changed the course of world history multiple times! And you have a copy of it in your Bible. Around 56 A.D. a Jewish evangelist wrote to a group of largely Gentile Christians in Rome, to introduce himself prior to his arrival and to explain the message that he carried about how Jesus of Nazareth proved that he was God's son and the savior of the world.

We don't know what impact it had on those first Roman readers. We do know that three centuries later (386 A.D.), it changed the broken heart of a playboy; this man we now call **Saint Augustine** and he decided to enter the ministry. Augustine wrote the definitive theology that guided Christian thinking for centuries and his biography is still worth reading for spiritual nourishment.

Then again in 1513 this letter revolutionized the thinking of a guilt-ridden Catholic monk, **Martin Luther**, and the Protestant Reformation was born. And again in 1738, just hearing the introduction to this letter read during a church service, left this man's heart feeling "strangely warmed," restoring the doubting faith of British missionary, **John Wesley**; thus the Wesleyan revival was born. And, once again in 1915, a young Swiss theologian Karl Barth decided to write a modern commentary on this letter. By the end of his writing, Barth's liberal theology had become evangelical.

No other letter has had such a continuing impact throughout history. This letter to the Roman Church is powerful and it has continued to radically change countless lives over a span of 2,000 years with the simple but profound message **that the one who would be righteous before God must live by faith.**

Romans 1:16-17

For I am not ashamed of the **GOSPEL**; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith...as it is written, '**The one who is righteous will live by faith.**'

In fact it was this particular verse in Romans that transformed guilt-ridden Martin Luther into the father of the Reformation. Think about this for a moment, we will certainly come back to this scripture in detail in a few weeks, but right now, just ask yourself

- ***How can my faith in Jesus make me righteous before God?***

This is just one of many life changing questions that Romans will answer for you. And if you will join with me in walking through this life-transforming letter then I think your world, and my world, this church's world, and who knows maybe the entire world **will once again be changed for the better.**

So let's begin at the very start. If you would, again open your Bibles to Romans, chapter one, we will look at verses one through seven. Traditionally such ancient introductory letters always begin by giving the author's name, rank, authority, and essential message. And since Paul was introducing himself to the center of the civilized world, he was very careful to follow protocol.

NAME: Paul,

His name used to be Saul--named after the first king of Israel--but after he became a Christian he changed it to just **Paul**; which in the Greek language means "**small**" or "**humble**". And as you come to learn what he thought of himself both before and after his conversion, this name change makes sense.

NAME: Paul,
HEART: a **SLAVE** of Jesus Christ

But next, very strangely, he calls himself a "**slave**" of Jesus. While your Bible may say "servant" or "bond servant" the appropriate word here is slave and it is exactly what Paul meant. Realize this: even as a Christian Paul was proud of his free-born Roman citizenship and used it in his defense on several occasions (Acts 22.28). So, you would think that in writing his introduction to Rome, he would call himself a fellow citizen. But

the group of Roman believers that he was writing to perhaps included a large number of slaves and otherwise mostly lower class artisans who would love to be called a Roman citizen. But a Roman slave was never able to be a citizen; they were not even considered persons and the working class was not much better off. They had no privileges, no protections, they were property; to be free...to be a Roman citizen would be their greatest dream.

So here is a Roman citizen, intentionally introducing himself as a slave, as a humble nobody in God's kingdom, and one who would later inform them that both he and they have a better citizenship and freedoms far greater than anything Rome could provide (Philippians 3:20).

What a joyous message for slaves and the working poor to hear! But for the moment, unless they had already read some of his other letters, Paul's naming himself a slave might have been confusing for them. Unless they were familiar with the Jewish idea of a "voluntary slave" (*whether or not Romans had such a class*), in which a person realizing that their life as a slave under their master is so much better than any other life they could live, that they voluntarily bind themselves to their master for life they might not have understood why he called himself a slave.

Hearing this letter read from an obviously well educated aristocratic person who now called himself "**small**," and was voluntarily living as a slave; no longer seeking any status or privilege, except as he found it in his Lord and savior Jesus--that would catch their attention.

So, ask yourself, what did Paul find in Jesus that made him so grateful that he would gladly leave behind his privileged self-directed life, and bind himself as a slave to Jesus? There's a clue coming up which will answer that question, but for the moment, let's press on.

<i>NAME:</i>	Paul,
<i>HEART:</i>	a SLAVE of Jesus Christ
<i>COMMISSION:</i>	called to be an APOSTLE (MISSIONARY)

Next, though he has told the Romans that while he considers himself to be nothing, nevertheless his master, King Jesus, has commissioned Paul to serve as his "**apostle**."

To be commissioned as an apostle is to serve as an emissary, a representative of a king (in another letter Paul would use the term "ambassador"). Now an apostle can even be a slave, yet when given this commission by a King, he is also given all the authority of

the king to accomplish his assigned task. Interestingly the Latin translation of the Greek word "Apostle" is "Missionary." So a missionary is one who has been commissioned by King Jesus to serve as his representative.

Our military has a similar designation for service called the "Officer of the Day (or Deck)." This means, whatever your normal rank, when you are made Officer of the Day, you have all the authority of your commanding officer for doing your assigned task.

For example, during WW2, one time when General Dwight D. Eisenhower had to be away from headquarters on business, he made his trusted Lieutenant "Officer of the day." In walks a very blustery Brigadier General demanding that the Lieutenant expedite a requisition that Ike had not yet authorized. When the young officer said that he could not do that, the angry General demanded, "do you see this star on my shoulder?" "Yes sir", replied the Lieutenant, "but if you look on mine you will see four stars."

Thus while declaring himself a nobody, but having been given the particular task of serving as an emissary for King Jesus, Paul announces himself to Rome with all the authority and boldness that such a commission gives him.

		<i>verse</i>
<i>NAME:</i>	Paul,	1
<i>HEART:</i>	a SLAVE of Jesus Christ	
<i>COMMISSION:</i>	an APOSTLE = MISSIONARY	
<i>TASK:</i>	set apart [to share] the GOSPEL	

And what was Paul's specific commission?

To share the **Gospel** and, as he wrote in verses five and six, *to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles* (which includes you and me).

<i>The "GOSPEL" is:</i>	GOOD NEWS
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Now the word "Gospel" is Old English, but it means the same as the Greek word that Paul used; it means "good news".

		<i>verse 1</i>
<i>The "GOSPEL" is:</i>	GOOD NEWS	
<i>Its author is:</i>	GOD	

And Paul writes that this GOOD NEWS was specifically sent to us by God
GOOD NEWS from GOD! God wants to send you some GOOD NEWS!!!
Now you know why this letter has changed so many lives!

		<i>verse</i>
<i>The "GOSPEL" is:</i>	GOOD NEWS	1
<i>Its author is:</i>	GOD	
<i>It was earlier shared by:</i>	PROPHETS & SCRIPTURE	2
<i>And it tells the story of:</i>	GOD'S SON	3

Paul goes on to write that God had earlier shared this same GOOD NEWS about His son Jesus through His **prophets** and through the **Scriptures**. So if these Romans knew their Hebrew Bible they should already know what this GOOD NEWS is supposed to be, and could easily fact-check Paul's message against it.

For example, one Sabbath day at the start of his own ministry, while **Jesus** was attending synagogue worship, he was given the scroll from Isaiah and opening it up he began to read:

<p>'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring GOOD NEWS to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.' Isaiah 61:1 - Luke 4:19</p>

Closing the scroll he then told those gathered, "**today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing (4:21)**. So just as Jesus began his ministry declaring that he had been appointed by God to bring a message of GOOD NEWS to his Jewish listeners, so Paul is now bringing the same message to us Gentiles.

And what is this GOOD NEWS from God, this world changing message?

<i>The GOOD NEWS is that</i>	GOD'S SON	<i>verse</i>
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God has sent us his son,

<i>The GOOD NEWS is that</i>	GOD'S SON	<i>verse</i>
<i>By human pedigree</i>	A DESCENDANT OF DAVID	3

who by earthly heritage was a descendant of David. This meant that he could officially claim the title: King of the Jews.

<i>The GOOD NEWS is that</i>	GOD'S SON	<i>verse</i>
<i>By human pedigree</i>	A DESCENDANT OF DAVID	3
<i>Was proven to be God</i>	by miracles	4
<i>And by</i>	the voice of God	
<i>And by his</i>	his RESURRECTION from the dead	

And, according to Paul, there were three distinct proofs that the one who claimed to be God's son, while being a descendant of David, was also truly God:

- By the miracles he performed,
- By God's voice twice coming from the sky (both at his baptism and again on the Mount of Transfiguration),
- And by his return to life after his very public crucifixion and proven death.

Now this screen might be confusing because your Bible verse reads: ***and [he] was declared to be Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord,*** (Romans 1:4). But you see the Greek language used no punctuation, nor that wonderful little word "and"--so I think Paul actually was giving a list of three proofs; other apostles have also referred to these same three proofs.

<i>He was declared to be the Son of God by his power and by the Holy Spirit and by his resurrection from the dead. Romans 1:4</i>

So perhaps it would have been clearer if our modern translation read that Jesus was

- declared to be the Son of God by his power
- and by the Holy Spirit
- and by his resurrection from the dead.

Paul continues with this God/man's description

<i>His human name is:</i>	JESUS
<i>His human title is:</i>	MESSIAH (Hebrew) CHRIST (Greek)
<i>Which means</i>	"THE CHOSEN ONE"
<i>And he is now</i>	OUR LORD

This title: Messiah, or Christ, which means the "Chosen One" connects Jesus to all those prophecies and Old Testament scriptures that foretold what God's son would do.

So far, Paul has told us WHO this GOOD NEWS is about:

- Which is a man named Jesus, who was proven to be God's son
- By fulfilling all the Biblical prophecies for God's anointed savior of the world
- By performing miracles that only God could do
- By audible testimony of God's Spirit, claiming Jesus God's son
- And most emphatically by his return to life after his death.

But have you noticed that he has not said WHAT this GOOD NEWS is?

Where is the GOOD NEWS?

What is in this message from God, and what is it that God's son did which so changed Paul's life that he now calls Jesus Christ his LORD ?

The whole message of GOD'S GOOD NEWS, and the clue to Paul's motivation, that we have been waiting for is summed up in (verse 5) in a single word: **GRACE.**

Paul said that he received both **GRACE** and his appointment to Apostleship from Jesus. Now if you are like those first freedom-hungry Roman readers, by now you should be falling all over yourself to learn what is this **GRACE** that Paul received from Jesus Christ, and that he is now offering to us Gentiles.

Here it is:

the **righteousness of God** is given, through faith in Jesus Christ, for all who believe.

Romans 3:22

since we all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; we are now justified by God's **GRACE** as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,

Romans 3:23,24

as it is written, '**The one who is righteous will live by faith.'**

Romans 1:16-17

This then is the message—the GOOD NEWS—sent to us directly from God, that has so often changed the course of not only individual lives but, through them, also world history. If you want to stand before God as "**RIGHTEOUS**" then you must put your faith in **God's GRACIOUS gift of justification that has been provided for you by his son Jesus.**

This is the Gospel, the GOOD NEWS of Jesus God's son.

And if you have never thought about it before, or if you had always hoped that your own goodness might somehow merit God's favor and save your life, then this is God's GOOD NEWS for you; it can and ought to change the course of your history as well.

The book of Romans has so much more to say in detail about how we are justified by grace, through faith in Jesus, God's son—but this is enough for today.

I hope you will take this thought home with you and dwell on how it could change your world: you can be counted as **RIGHTEOUS** before God simply and only through your faith in him.