

Title: Send Me A Letter

Text: Romans 1:1-7

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Theme: Romans

“My Baby, she wrote me a letter.” So was the song from 1967. Letter writing for most of us is a lost art now that we are socializing through Facebook, email, and Twitter. Nevertheless, the feelings we once experienced upon receiving a letter are not forgotten.

Today, we begin a new series that focuses upon a letter. This letter was written about A.D. 57 by the Apostle Paul but still speaks to us today. You see, Paul was writing to an audience of both Jews and Gentiles, but predominately Gentiles.

Throughout this study we will address some major themes like God’s faithfulness, righteousness, and reconciliation but God wants us to wrestle with a broad spectrum of subjects.

Notice...

Romans 1:1

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God—

I. Paul writes this letter.

- A. He is a servant of Jesus Christ.
- B. He is called to be an apostle.

* The word “apostolos” means a delegate, a special ambassador of the Gospel, it is one who is officially a commissioner of Christ, a messenger, or one who is sent. Typically we see an apostle as one who has the divine ability to build the foundation of new churches by preaching the Word, teaching others to live by Christ’s commandments through the example of their own lives, and preparing the people to serve one another.

C. He is set apart for the gospel.

* What do we mean when we say something like Paul was an ambassador of the Gospel? Just that...he was chosen by God for the specific task of spreading the story of Jesus.

Romans 1:2-4

²the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures ³regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David, ⁴and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.

II. Paul wants us to understand the “Gospel.”

A. The gospel was promised in the Old Testament.

Isaiah 52:7

⁷How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, "Your God reigns!"

Isaiah 53:3-5

³He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

⁴Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted.

⁵But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.

B. The gospel is about Jesus.

* The Gospel is the “good news” of Jesus Christ.

C. The gospel explains the human nature of Jesus.

D. The gospel explains the divine nature of Jesus.

E. The gospel explains the power of Jesus.

*Recently a firefighter who attended church was told by one of his colleagues that belief in Jesus was for weak people. Doesn't that seem odd?

Imagine having a fire hydrant in the yard that runs along the side of your house. I doubt that you ever looked at the fire hydrant and felt any shame. You may drive by a firehouse every day, and never think, *If this community didn't have weak people, we would never need firehouses.* And when you pay property taxes—taxes that help finance fire departments—you never get angry at yourself, thinking, *If I could just handle fires on my own, I wouldn't have to write this check.*

Imagine a person whose house is on fire. The fire is raging out of control, and soon a fire truck pulls up, sirens blaring. The person runs out of their house in a rage and says, "How dare you come to my house and think that I can't handle this fire myself! Firefighters are for weak people—not for me!" What would you think of someone like that? You would think they were insane.

We know that fire departments are for "weak" people because a power exists that we simply can't deal with on our own: fire. Actually, we admire firefighters because they are people who have committed themselves to take on the power of fire at personal expense.

Christians are weak in the same sense that a community is "weak" for having fire departments. They are people who acknowledge that a power exists that they can't confront and live—the holiness of God. This, however, is not cause for shame, because there was a man, Jesus, who dealt with that power at his own personal expense on a cross. When someone is rescued from

the flames, they're not thinking about their weakness; they're overjoyed that someone would risk it all to save them.

Romans 1:5-6

⁵Through him and for his name's sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith. ⁶And you also are among those who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.

III. Paul wants us to know our place.

* I'm not talking about being put in our place. The world is full of people who want to do that. No, Paul wants us to know about the relationship that God wants to have with us. There is, however, only one way...

A. It is only through Jesus...

Romans 5:6-8

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. ⁸But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

a. Through Jesus we receive grace

Ephes. 2:8-9

⁸For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- ⁹not by works, so that no one can boast.

b. Through Jesus we receive our marching orders

* It is through our relationship with Jesus as modeled by Paul and other believers that we understand our role and responsibility.

B. Paul says that we belong to Jesus Christ.

* Slavery in the Greco Roman cultures of the New Testament is more like indentured servanthood. It's not what we think of as slavery. When you and I see the word "slave" in the Bible, you immediately think of 17th, 18th, and 19th century New World slavery: race-based, African slavery. When you do that, when you read it through those blinders, you aren't understanding what the Bible's teaching.

By our choice, however, we give up our freedom to sin and choose instead a lifetime of commitment to the one who saves our lives, our very souls.

Romans 1:7

⁷To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

IV. It is a letter to the church.

A. First to those at Rome and then to a larger group.

* Most letters begin simply by identifying the sender, the recipients, and a greeting. Paul takes six verses to connect him with the readers before mentioning his audience.

* Let me take a moment to also explain the term, "saints." We are not talking about a group of canonized characters chosen by an ecclesiastical structure. In other words these are not people picked by people. The "saints" of the scripture are all those people who have been washed in the blood of the lamb.

What?

These are the people who have accepted Jesus as their Lord.

- B. This is a letter written to you and me from God and from the Lord Jesus.

Conclusion: What am I asking of you today?

Each week I will ask you to read a portion of Paul's letter before we gather on Sunday mornings. During this week I challenge you to read Romans 1:1-15.

I am asking you to pray that God will show you what he wants you to learn from these scriptures.

I am asking you to put into practice what you learn.

Paul wrote you a letter, through the Romans, but a letter to you nonetheless.

* I have to confess that I generally hate chain letters and emails that threaten me if I will not obey and pass along a particular letter or email. Most of them I delete or throw in the trash. But every so often I receive something that is so important, so vital that I don't need to be threatened, I want to share this news with others around me.

I pray that you will find the message of Christ in this letter to be like that. I pray that you will choose to **pass the word along** to your brother. Maybe you will choose to join me at the altar this morning in a prayer of commitment, as we commit to sharing this letter with our family, friends and community.