

SERMON: ROMANS 1:1-15**LOOKING FORWARD TO SHARING THE NEWS OF CHRIST !**

Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God which He promised before, through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness by the resurrection from the dead.

Through Him we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name, among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ.

To all who are in Rome, beloved of God, 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 you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world. For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers, making request if, by some means, now at last I may find a way in the will of God to come to you. For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established—that is, that I may be encouraged together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me.

Now I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that I often planned to come to you (but was hindered until now), that I might have some fruit among you also, just as among the other Gentiles. I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise. So, as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also!

Can you sense the eagerness and the warmth in the opening words of Paul's letter (epistle) to the Christian congregation in Rome? He is looking forward to being with them and sharing with them the wonderful truths of the Gospel, the Good News of forgiveness and salvation in Christ.

It's really quite similar for you. Today you stand in the doorway of Advent, looking forward to the joyous celebration ahead, the annual celebration of the arrival of God's Son in the flesh. You celebrate because He came to lift you out of your most dreaded plight—being a disobedient and rebellious urchin fit to be condemned, punished, and banished by God. But the Gospel, the Good News of Jesus who came to earth, says, "In Jesus a better sentence awaits—your sentence is canceled, your punishment is lifted. Not Guilty!"

Paul, describes himself as a *bondservant*, a slave of Jesus; that is, owned by Christ from top to bottom. Paul does not see his position as a sorry, pitiable state. He sees it as a privilege. He is one of Christ's apostles and messengers, set apart and sent out, to proclaim the message of forgiveness and peace in Jesus—for all! You and I as well are also bond-slaves of Jesus, owned by Him at the price of His blood. If you think that you are answerable only to yourself, are your own boss, run your own life, determine your own future; it's just not so. Christ, who rescued you from condemnation, who paid the price to set you free, has made you His own. Happy to say-- He is your master and owner, and you are His slave—a slavery of rescue, of life, and of joy! Paul was looking forward to and preparing to go to Rome. You are looking forward and preparing for the joyous celebration that lies ahead—the celebration of the arrival of your Savior on earth, born to be your brother.

This Rescue was promised long ago. Many have looked forward to His Advent, His Arrival, and His Rescue of forgiveness whenever it would come. Looking forward to the Arrival of the Savior, has a long history behind it. Adam and Eve rejoiced in it. The Old Testaments prophets proclaimed it. Christmas, without our particular outward trappings, is a celebration as old as the first Gospel promise. The Old Testament believers awaited Jesus. Paul awaited sharing the message of Jesus with the Roman believers. You are in good company as you step into Advent awaiting to celebrate Christmas.

The Savior was a unique, not ordinary. He was born of the seed of David according to the flesh. He had true flesh and blood. Though he lay in a manger at birth, He was royalty, heir to David's throne. Yet even more, He was the powerful, holy Son of God, who rose victoriously from the dead. Ponder that and don't just repeat the phrases thoughtlessly. He is one who came back from the grave alive, of His own will and power. He was God as well as man. No wonder Paul was so intense! He had seen the resurrected Jesus. He was given grace and forgiveness even though he had persecuted Christians. He was given the privilege to be a messenger and ambassador

for this Jesus, whom he had seen first-hand, Son of God and Son of Man. Imagine knowing and experiencing something like that! No problem being an eager witness—right?

And for you too! With eyes of faith worked by the Holy Spirit of God, you know your Savior. He is the One to whom you bear witness at Advent and Christmas time, “The Savior has come!” Do not celebrate an “outward Christmas” only, a Christ-less Christmas. Do not leave Christ in church at your “church-Christmas.” In the gatherings you have, in the greetings you send, it’s more than just “Season’s Greetings” and “Happy Holidays.” Like Paul, you will be Christ’s messenger to those around you. Paul says to those at Rome, “You also are the called of Jesus Christ. . . . You are called to be saints. . . . Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” Paul tells the believers in Rome, “You also are included! You are saints—holy in God’s eyes through Jesus! God’s grace and peace are lavished upon you. You!” That is your message and greeting for this Advent and Christmas season also. Let your listeners know—pass on to them that they with all of their shortcomings and trespasses against God, are nevertheless, through Jesus, saints forgiven and going to heaven!”

Paul thanks God for the faith of his listeners—his readers. Likewise, thank God for the faith of those around you this Christmas. Paul explains how he prays for them without ceasing—regularly and repeatedly. This Advent pray for those whose lives connect with yours, for those to whom you give gifts, for those to whom you extend verbal greetings “Christmas Blessings in Jesus the Savior!”, for those to whom you send a card “Peace in the forgiveness won by Jesus,” and for those with whom you spend the holiday together. Pray for them, that they may be brought close, and closer, to Christ in His Kingdom. They are people whom you long to see indeed bodily, but more so within the realm of the Holy Christian Church, that group of all believers in Christ of all time and nations, people whom you want to see in the dwellings of heaven. Pray for your contacts this Christmas season.

Paul is waiting to see the Roman Christians *in person*. In-person contact is best, better than a letter. They didn’t have telephones, and FaceTime, and Skype. But we do, and still we prefer to see our Christmas family and friends and church members in person when possible. In-person-words, words spoken when eyes and faces can be read, are most effective for being a messenger of Christ. People can see and understand that you care. People realize that you are speaking from your heart, not just reading a script. People can more easily discern your own humble trust in the Savior and your rejoicing in His birth (coming to earth) to rescue.

Paul wanted to see them in person, not just for their benefit, but for his—a mutual building-up. Do you know who is built up in the faith at a worship service—the people who listen, or the pastor who speaks? Both! In Bible Class, where there is more give and take between people and people, people and the pastor, who is built up—the people or the pastor? Both! Many a pastor, maybe every pastor, has made a shut-in visit, a nursing home visit, a hospital visit—from which he has left more edified in spirit than when he came, because of the faith and the words of the one he visited. Mutual edification—building up—is an Advent and Christmas blessing that comes from sharing together the Gospel of Christ.

Sometimes “in person” can’t be done because other priorities come into play. Paul explained the same to his readers at Rome. *Now I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that I often planned to come to you (but was hindered until now), that I might have some fruit among you also, just as among the other Gentiles.* But the Lord knows that and steers all these things. If you need to have Christmas without the family, or without certain family members or certain friends, realize it’s not “bad luck.” The Lord has a better plan for each of you. And His plans don’t just revolve around earthly, physical joys; but what’s best for souls and their faith in relation to His Kingdom!.

Paul made it clear that he had no “favorites.” His previous absence from Rome wasn’t due to his preference for Antioch or Jerusalem. He was ready to be a messenger of the Good News of Salvation to the cultured Greeks, and to uncultured foreigners—“barbarians.” He was willing to preach Christ to intellectually advanced and to simple plain people. He would go even to Rome—to rub elbows with the high-class aristocrats there or with the lowest of slaves there. As you walk into this Advent and Christmas season, be ready to share “the Gospel of Jesus,” the Great News of salvation for sinners, with high class and low-class, with those who might think they are far too good to come into our church and those who wonder if they’re good enough to come into our church. The Gospel message—Good News message of Christmas—is for everyone, and it is yours to share. In your contacts this Advent and Christmas, you are each like Paul the Apostle, longing to preach Christ, to others--Paul to those in Rome, you to those within your circles in South Dakota, North Dakota, or wherever you live.

So be it! Amen!

Pastor Kanzenbach---