

Strengthen & Reach

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[0 : 00] Good morning. My name is Matthew Capone, and I'm the pastor here at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church, and it's my joy to bring God's Word to you today. A special welcome if you're new or visiting with us.

We're glad that you're here, and we're glad that you're here not because we're trying to fill seats, but because we're following Jesus together as one community. And as we follow Jesus together, we become convinced that there's no one so good, they don't need God's grace, and no one so bad that they can't have it, which is why we come back week after week to hear what God has to say to us in His Word.

This morning, we're continuing our series in the Book of Romans. You'll remember that the Book of Romans is a letter written by the Apostle Paul in the 50s AD, and the Book of Romans is called Romans for a very simple reason, which is that it's written to the churches in the city of Rome.

It is about the gospel, the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection, and Paul's hope is that the recipients, these churches in Rome, would be established in the gospel.

In previous weeks, I've said to you, and he says that later in verse 11. Verse 11 is not later now, it's actually this morning, so we're going to look especially at Paul's hope that they would be established.

[1 : 19] And there are many applications that we will find throughout the Book of Romans, and they come back many times. There's this special focus, this special concern that Paul has for the mission and the unity of the church.

And as I've told you before, there are many spokes. Those spokes are going to come back over and over again to the hub of the gospel. I've also been reminding you to not fear.

If you're worried about how slowly we're going through Romans, we will speed up. I'm going to honor that promise this morning. We are going to do, in fact, a whole eight verses. I have to confess, I'm a little bit sad about that.

Martin Lloyd-Jones, famous for his series on the Book of Romans, spent six and a half sermons on this section. So you can either thank me or complain about me, whichever your preference is. But we are going to be in verses 8 through 13. And this week, because we are moving quicker, it's going to be a little bit more of an overview. We're not going to be able to go into as much detail as we have the last several weeks.

[2 : 26] But we're going to be asking this big question, which is, how do we grow as Christians? How do we grow as Christians? And another question Paul is going to get at is, why, in fact, should we go out in mission?

We don't want to be merely self-licking ice cream cones, but we want to actually be people who are spreading the good news of Christ. And so Paul is going to get at that as well. Not just our growth, not just the growth that happens inside of the church, but the growth outside of the church as God brings more and more people to faith.

It's with that that I invite you to turn with me now to Romans 1. You can turn in your worship guide. You can turn on your phone. You can turn in your Bible.

No matter where you turn, remember that this is God's Word. And God tells us that His Word is more precious than gold, even the finest gold, and it's sweeter than honey, even honey that comes straight from the honeycomb.

And so that's why we read now Romans 1, starting at verse 8. Verse 11.

[3 : 53] Verse 11.

I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's Word.

Our Father in heaven, we do thank you again for your simple mercies. We thank you for giving us the health and the strength to be here this morning. We thank you for your work in the life of the Apostle Paul that he wrote this letter.

And we thank you that it's been preserved for us. We confess this morning that we need your help. We can't figure it out on our own. We can't hear your voice clearly by ourselves.

And so we come simply asking for your help, that you pour out your Spirit now. You'd open our ears and our eyes. You'd clear our minds. You'd soften our hearts.

[5 : 18] That we would be able to see and hear and understand and believe everything that you've written in your Word. And we ask these things in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

It was two weeks ago that we looked at Romans chapter 5. And if you were here, you remember I told you this story about Stanley McChrystal, the retired four-star Army general who was interviewed about crisis leadership.

And he said, For a team, you need to answer one question, which is this. What does success look like? And so we talked from verse 5 about that very question. Paul tells us back then success looks like bringing about the obedience of faith.

And so we define the obedience of faith as bringing people to recognize and to serve Jesus as their King. McChrystal said this, that you have to continue to reiterate what winning looks like to your organization.

I bring up that review from verse 5 to highlight the logic of this letter by Paul, that he is building an argument, and he's actually circling around the same themes over and over again.

[6 : 33] So verse 5 gave us this mission, what success looks like for Paul. Now in this verse, he's going to apply that specifically. To bring about the obedience of faith is sort of this broad view of what's meant to happen.

That could apply to any people anywhere. Now Paul turns to the people who are right in front of him, the ones receiving this letter. What does the obedience of faith look like for this church?

What does it look like for people to recognize and serve Jesus as their King in this particular city?

We're going to see here, Paul tells us two things, that it is to strengthen and to reach.

You don't need to remember that, by the way. I put that as the sermon title. Whenever I can put the main points as the title of the sermon, I consider that a win. And so you have that. To strengthen and to reach is what Paul is here to tell this audience.

He tells us that specifically in verse 11. For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you. In other words, these folks have already recognized Jesus as King.

[7 : 42] He's writing to a church, and so these are folks who have already seen Jesus as their Lord and their Savior. They've already been reached. So the recognized part has already happened.

It's not now that they need to recognize. It's that they need to obey Jesus as their King. They need to proceed with the rest of the Christian life. And so Paul wants to see them established in that more and more.

He tells us that that's going to happen by this spiritual gift that he wants to give to them. There's some debate about what Paul means here by the spiritual gift. Some people say, well, the spiritual gift that Paul means to give is the content of the letter of Romans.

He can't come and see them, so he's just going to write to them everything that he would say. Other people say, no, look at verse 12. He seems to be saying there's this encouragement that's going to happen when they see each other face to face.

And so the spiritual gift is going to be the fellowship and the sharing that happens as Paul encourages the church, and the church encourages Paul. There is, in fact, probably both things going on.

[8 : 49] Paul has longed to see them for something that can only happen in person. We'll talk about that in a little bit. And he also longs to see them to instruct them. So this letter, in a sense, serves as the second best option.

I've been trying to see you for a long time. I haven't been able to. I'm going to write you a letter so you can at least have some of the blessing that I want for you, some of the spiritual gift, the part that I can put into writing.

Of course, there's some that can't be put into writing. If it could be easily solved just by writing a letter, Paul would not tell us here how upset he is. He goes on to tell us it's not just that he wants to strengthen them, verse 12, that you can strengthen me.

So there's this mutual encouragement that's meant to happen. There's something that's going to occur when Paul can be physically present with these people. He's going to see their faith. They're going to see his faith.

And together, both of their faiths are going to grow and increase. Verse 11, Paul's desire here to strengthen the church really is the center of the first half of this passage.

[10:03] It tells us about everything that's going on in verses 8 through really about through 13. So verse 13, he tells them, by the way, it's not just that I want to strengthen you.

I've been trying to accomplish this for a very long time. And the way I've been trying to accomplish it, verses 9 and 10, for a very long time is that I've been praying about it.

I've been praying about it constantly. And as I think about these things, verse 8, I praise God for the way that your faith is already strengthened. It is so strong that people are hearing about it all over the world.

Verses 10 and 13, but wow, what a bummer. God has prevented me from coming to you. So I've been wanting this.

I've been longing for it. I've been desiring it. I've been praying about it. I've been thinking about it. But for whatever reason, in God's sovereign plan for the world, it hasn't happened. And so, oh no, what do I have to do now?

[11:01] I have to write a letter. What a second best option. Paul doesn't tell us why it is that God has chosen in his providence to prevent Paul from visiting Rome.

I'm going to suggest to you at least one reason. Because Paul was not able to visit Rome, he wrote this letter that we are reading now.

Wow. What a bummer for the church in Rome in the first century.

What a great gain for God's church around the world and across time. This is not the main point of the passage, but don't forget this one thing.

It may seem at times like what needs and must happen is blocked. God's purposes are much greater and bigger and wider.

[12:04] The loss of the Roman church, Christian, is your gain. Paul wants them to be established by his presence. Oh no, he can only establish them through this 16-chapter letter.

And so, that's the summary essentially of what's happening at the very beginning. The first half of this passage, Paul is saying this. Wow, I praise God that you are growing so much and people around the world are hearing about it.

And I want to see you face to face so that we can grow together even more. Which brings us back to the question I asked you at the very beginning.

How is it that we grow as Christians? Do you want what Paul says here? Do you want to become more established in your faith? Do you want your knowledge and understanding and trust and confidence and obedience to grow?

If you do, what's the secret sauce? What's the recipe? Well, Paul provides us here.

[13:14] He doesn't give us all the answers. He does give us one answer in particular. In these first few verses, Paul reminds us, Christian community is essential to our growth in our faith.

Christian community is essential to our growth in our faith. Now, notice what I didn't say. I didn't say that's the only avenue for our growth in our faith.

It is a primary avenue. Yes, there's content and knowledge. If they weren't, Paul wouldn't have written a 16-chapter letter, right? There are things that he wants the church to know.

And Paul makes it clear they have missed out by not seeing one another. This is on page three of your worship guide.

What inspires and fortifies other believers is when they perceive the faith in other Christians. Seeing other believers trust God in the course of everyday life reminds us that God is indeed faithful and encourages us to trust him as well.

[14:32] We need each other's faith to grow. Yes, we need good doctrine. Yes, we need to understand what Paul has already told us in chapter one.

We need to know what he goes on to tell us through the rest of the book. And we are not meant to do it alone. One of my favorite things about this church, people ask me sometimes, well, tell me about your church.

Which is such a wide question, I'm not really sure what they're asking. And so I'll just kind of go demographics. I'll say, well, we're an intergenerational church. So we have lots of older folks and

lots of younger folks.

And you know, we also have people in between. We have lots of medium folks and lots of middle folks. And that's great. Why? Because we can encourage one another.

And as Paul say here, verse 12, that is that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine.

[15 : 36] Paul, of course, knows so much more about Christianity than they do. And he needs to be encouraged and sustained by their faith.

Brothers and sisters, we need the same thing. We need to be encouraged and sustained by one another's faith. And so that's why we do many things.

That's why we gather together on Sunday mornings. That's why we have a greeting time as a small symbol of what we hope overflows out into the rest of the week. That our small and brief drive-by interactions on Sunday morning would become deep, substantial, connected interactions.

That's why we talk so much about being a thick community. We're people who don't just see each other for a minute. We want to be people who are involved in one another's lives. I still remember when I was in college, one lunchtime in the cafeteria, there was a gathering of students, and there was one student who was not a Christian but was just very curious about religion and Christianity and how it worked.

And he posed to me this what if. He said, what if you're a Christian and all you did was just read the Bible by yourself? That would be fine, right? And as a 19-year-old, I didn't really know what to say.

[16 : 55] I thought, well, that's a really interesting question. I'm not sure what to say to this guy. As a 35-year-old, I can tell you this. That is incredibly ironic. It's incredibly ironic because as you're studying the Bible by yourself, what are you going to do?

You're going to come to passages like this that say it's important to not be by yourself. So what are you going to do? You're studying the Bible by yourself, and you read Paul, and he says, hey, it's actually really important for you to be with other Christians.

You're reading this passage that's to the churches in Rome. It's to a community of people who are gathered around together. In other words, the whole Bible is predicated.

It's built on. It's established. It's on this idea that God has a people who gather together. The idea that you could somehow be separate from God's people doesn't make sense in the scope of the Bible.

There's no category for it. It is not there. Why do you not read the Bible by yourself? Because it's not written to you. It's written to God's people.

[18 : 01] You're one of God's people. Yes, it's written to you in a certain sense. It is written to the church in an even greater sense. Yes, Paul is glad he can write to these people, and that is not enough.

He longs to see them face to face. Do you want to grow as a Christian? You must do it with others. Now, if you're tempted to think to yourself, yeah, but I'm just so advanced, you know. I just know so many things. There's nothing I can learn from anyone else. There's a lot to unpack there.

One of the things to unpack is this. Do you know as much as the Apostle Paul? No, you don't. Paul needed other Christians. Christian, you need other Christians too. Yes, being strengthened contains content.

[19 : 05] It's not less than that. It's so much more than that. Christianity is not a correspondence course. It's not a virtual campus. No, Paul wants to see them face to face.

I tell folks in our new members class, this church is not a vendor of religious services. We do not provide a buffet of religious products and experiences.

No, we're actually a spiritual community. We are a spiritual family. We exist as a unit, right? We don't just come, take what we want, and then leave.

No, we live life together. If you look on page 14 of your worship guide, you'll see what it is that we're about as a church. It's going to sound surprisingly like Romans 1, verses 8-13.

You'll see that on the top right, we're about thick community, which means we're about being engaged and involved in one another's lives. We take seriously the principle that Paul outlines here.

[20 : 06] We want to be mutually encouraged. We know that takes more than just shaking each other's hands on Sunday morning. We want robust discipleship.

That's what Paul is doing here in this letter. He's laying out for them the truths of the Christian faith, and he says, you know how that happens? It happens together.

And then what's there at the bottom? We have gospel hub that we would be receiving and sending people out as they PCS and move and relocate. Man, that sounds a lot like Romans 1, verse 8. I thank God through Jesus Christ for all of you because your faith is proclaimed in all the world. The joy that we have as Christians, it is joy we find together.

It is not joy we find alone. Do you want to grow as a Christian? Then embrace God's people.

[21 : 11] Find other Christians to go on the journey. You remember Paul's definition of success from verse 5.

It was to bring about the obedience of faith, and we've talked about people recognizing and serving Jesus as their king. So we've talked about the serving part. We've talked about the strengthening part.

Now we're going to go back to the reaching part, because Paul also has a lot to say about that. It's not just that they're going to obey Jesus as king. No, Paul's not satisfied with that.

Paul wants many people to recognize Jesus as king. And so that takes us to verse 13, which is the transition verse here. Paul's not satisfied with growth inside of the church.

Paul wants growth outside of the church. Paul's not content that the members of the church would just become stronger and stronger in their faith. No, he wants people who are not in the church to embrace faith.

[22 : 33] And so he's looking for this fruit, and he says, I want this fruit from both of you. I want it from your group, and I want it from the other group. You'll find this on page 7 of your worship guide.

The harvest, or the fruit Paul longs for, is the work of God in changing lives to righteousness, both by new conversions and by growth in godliness.

So he's talked about growth in godliness. That's the strengthening. Now he's talking about new conversions. All of that is the fruit that he wants. It's not enough for Paul to strengthen those who are Christians.

He also wants to reach those who aren't. Verse 14 goes on to tell us why this is so important to him. It says this, I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and the foolish. Now there are at least two things happening in that verse. One of them is Paul's sense of obligation. What does he mean? He's in a sense saying, hey, I have a debt that I need to pay off.

[23 : 43] Now that's not really how we think about sharing the gospel, I would imagine. We don't think about it as this debt that we need to pay. Paul, however, does. And commentators, multiple commentators, explain it this way, that there are two kinds of ways you can owe someone a debt.

If you loan me \$100 and I need to pay that back to you, I owe you the money that is yours that you gave me. But there's a second way I can owe you a debt.

Let's say your grandmother came to me and your grandmother said, here is \$100 for John. Well, I now owe John \$100.

It's not something John gave to me. No, it's something I received from his grandmother that now I have to pass on. Paul is saying that he owes a debt to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish, in that second sense.

In other words, God has given Paul the gospel to pass on. And until Paul passes on the gospel, he is in debt to those who need to receive it.

[24 : 52] He has a debt that must be paid off. God has given him a task to fulfill something that belongs not to Paul, but belongs to those outside of the community.

And so it's a reminder, the gospel does belong to us as something that's our hope and our confidence. It does not belong to us as something that we have exclusive rights over.

No, it's meant to be spread and shared. It's meant to go out and be part of this harvest that Paul talks about, the church growing and expanding. And so he sees himself.

He has this debt he needs to pass on. He needs to pay it off. And the rest of his life is going to be fulfilling the task that God has for him. He then goes on to tell us who he owes this debt to.

He owes it to the Greeks and to the barbarians, to the wise and the foolish. So he owes it to people who speak Greek and those who don't speak Greek, which is Paul's way of saying he owes it to people regardless of what culture they're in.

[25 : 59] Okay, it doesn't matter your nation or ethnicity. This sounds a lot like verse five again.

Remember, the scope of Paul's mission was among all the nations. Well, we shouldn't be surprised then when that same theme shows back up.

Here's who he owes it to, all the nations. Okay, so all cultures. He also owes it to the wise and the foolish, which is Paul's way of saying it. I owe it to people who have gone to Harvard, and I also owe it to people who didn't graduate from high school.

This is not limited to one socioeconomic class or type of people. No, part of what's offensive about the gospel is you don't need to be elite to access it. What we hope is true of our church is that it represents all sorts of people from all sorts of backgrounds.

If we were to say this today, we might articulate it in this way. The gospel is for those who stay at the Broadmoor. The gospel is also for those who work at the Broadmoor.

The gospel is for those who are enlisted. The gospel is also for those who are officers. The gospel is for those who are native Coloradans and have a bumper sticker.

[27 : 08] The gospel is for those of us who are transplants. Praise God for his grace. The gospel is those who are old, and it is for those who are young. Paul's debt is to everyone.

He's not to pick and choose. No, he's to go out and share. And so this reminds us of another element. Again, this is on page 14 of your worship guide.

What is it that we're about as a church? We want to be about fervent witness. We want to take seriously that we have a debt. God has given us something that's meant to be shared.

We're not here to be a self-licking ice cream cone. We're not here just so that we could grow alone by ourselves. No, it's meant to be passed on to others. Our faith is meant to be shared.

This is on page 8 of your worship guide. What a freshness would come to our motivation if we saw ourselves as great debtors to our neighbors, our community, our city, to the poor as well as the rich.

[28 : 11] This kind of a indebtedness might even make us run the risk of appearing a fool by telling a deluded sinner we will pray for him. Christian, do you know that you hold something that belongs to someone else?

Do you know that the gospel is not just meant to be something we hold in here, but something we share out there? It is for you, this is verse 13, as well as the rest of the Gentiles.

Now, as I've been telling you, there's many spokes. Those spokes are constantly coming back to the hub of the gospel. And the same thing is true this week. Go back to the very beginning, verse 8. Paul is giving thanks for the growth that's happening in this church through Jesus Christ. In other words, Paul is doing the same thing we've done this morning.

When Paul prays, whether he's giving requests or giving thanks, Paul prays in the name of Jesus. Why? Because it's in Jesus' name that he has access to the Father.

[29 : 29] Jesus is the one who has paid the price that we should have paid. He's received the penalty that we should have suffered. And now, as we've talked about many times, as he sits at the right hand of God the Father, he represents us.

And so we have access, not access that we've earned or deserved, access that's been given to us. It's Jesus' life and death and resurrection that gives them what Paul has just talked about in the previous verse, that they would have grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

That's the grace that allows them to grow as they're strengthened through mutual encouragement. It is the grace that motivates them for the gospel to be not just for folks in here, but folks out there. 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 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.

[30 : 45] Let's pray together. Our Father in heaven, we do praise you and thank you again for your word, which you use to strengthen us. And we thank you that you've also given us your people.

We ask that you would use both of us, both of those, to grow us up in grace, that we would grow in our knowledge and we would grow in our love. We would do that as we follow Jesus together as one community.

We ask these things in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen.