

## Romans 16:21-27

### Summary and Summit of Romans

#### **Intro:**

We've come a long way in our study of Romans. And as we're concluding the series, I can't help but feel like I'm farewelling a friend whose company I've enjoyed very very much. It need not be a sad farewell – the book of Romans remains as God's gift to his church we can always return to – but we are coming to a farewell nonetheless, where Paul made his closing statement, which captures his heart and affection for the glory of God, the Gospel and the mission of the Christian church.

Working through these verses will be like climbing upward, each step we take building on the one before until we reach our summit. I say this both to entice you to follow along closely, and also to mentally prepare you for the journey of five steps we'll be taking to get there. The five steps I have in mind follows Paul's structure of thought, in which he shows:

1. God's power in the Gospel to save and secure his people
2. Which was a mystery hidden, but now revealing Jesus
3. And this good news is global good news
4. Summoning all people to an obedient response of faith in Jesus
5. Through whom God is forever glorified

#### **God's power in the Gospel to save and secure his people**

Let's begin - God's power in the Gospel to save and secure his people. Verse 25 reads: *"Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ..."* What strikes me is that Paul, in the conclusion of his letter, re-emphasises the ongoing relevance of the Gospel to Christian life. God continually strengthens his people in and by (or "according to") the Gospel. It may not be immediately obvious why this is such a big deal, but it is true many people conceive of the Christian life as something which begins with the Gospel and then graduates to more important doctrines and practices. But look at the way Paul frames Christian life in this letter. At the beginning of the epistle, Paul made the claim: *"I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes..."* and now, after a detailed explanation of that Gospel, he concludes his epistle with the claim: *"[God] is able to strengthen you according to my gospel..."* That is, Paul understood the Christian life as a life encapsulated by the Gospel – that not only begins with the Gospel, but also carries in the Gospel.

#### **Which was a mystery hidden, but now revealing Jesus**

But what is this Gospel? In a nutshell, it's news of God providing atonement and redemption in Jesus – undoing the curse, power and penalty of sin we are under; and restoring the believing church to Himself forever. Paul immediately goes on to say, this Gospel was somewhat of a mystery in OT times. Look at verse 25-26: *"Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but has now been disclosed..."* That is, the Gospel hasn't always been as clearly perceived and understood as we understand it now in light of Jesus. That is **not** to say the generations before Jesus knew nothing about true atonement and redemption; only that their knowledge and understanding came by way of types and shadows of which Jesus is the reality.

To show you what I mean, think about Moses. Moses, was a 'type' of Jesus – who lead God's people through an exodus, gave a law, supplying bread from heaven, a journey initiated from a Passover sacrifice; so the NT regards Jesus as the antitype (the substance or reality) of what Moses foreshadowed. Jesus leads God's people through a new exodus from death to life, giving a new law, who is himself bread from heaven and the ultimate Passover sacrifice.

In other words, the Gospel concealed in types and shadows in the OT, has now been fully disclosed in light of Jesus' life, death, resurrection and ascension. He is, therefore, the fulfilment and interpretive lens of the OT - as Jesus himself taught his disciples in Luke 24:27 *"...beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself."* And again in John 5:46 we see Jesus insisted the OT ought to be primarily understood and interpreted as a reference to him - *"If you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me."*

This is why Paul could say so confidently that "the [Gospel-]mystery... was kept secret for long ages but has now [in the light and understanding of Jesus] been disclosed... and made known..."

### **Globally good news**

And this clear revelation of the Gospel: that God has indeed provided atonement and redemption in Jesus – is globally good news. Dare I say it, incomparably more important than global headlines about climate, politics and sexuality which bombards us each day. I mean this sincerely. Paul said, *"through the prophetic writings"* [by which he means Christian Scripture] good news of God providing atonement and redemption in Jesus *"has been made known to all nations."* That is to say, God has already published the single greatest headline for all human history. Whether you are tall or short, young or old, male or female, employed underemployed or unemployed, depressed or stable, single or married or divorced or widowed – absolutely everybody ought to be given opportunity to consider the Gospel headline, that God is restoring his world and his people through Jesus.

### **Summoning all people to an obedient response of faith in Jesus**

Say this true, that this Gospel is headline news of God's power for salvation to everyone who believes, a timely question is to ask: What kind of response are we supposed to make? Like, what would be an appropriate reaction to this news? It's not a trick questions, but it is a question which requires an answer. Even the late atheist Christopher Hitchens, understood the importance of responding to the Gospel one way or another. He said: *"I would say that if you don't believe that Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ and Messiah, and that he rose again from the dead and by his sacrifice our sins are forgiven, you're not in any meaningful sense a Christian."* Hitchens' answer is telling. In light of all he knew about Jesus and the Gospel, Hitchens understood "belief" was central to an adequate response. The apostle Paul agrees. He said it this way: *"...through the prophetic writings [the gospel] has been made known to all nations... to bring about the obedience of faith."*

We could say it this way: upon hearing the Gospel, the proper response to God is obediently by faith. Jesus beckons us to this. He said to a grieving lady, *"I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?"* And another time Jesus said, *"...as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may*

*have eternal life.*” Time and again, Jesus beckons us to a response of belief or “faith” in him. Such faith is indeed the obedient faith God calls us to in light of the Gospel.

### **Through whom God is forever glorified**

With this in mind, we come to the highpoint and concluding summit of the letter, where Paul expresses his heart and affection for the glory of God in the Gospel. His final words: *“...to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.”*

This is the axis on which Paul’s theology turns – the glory of God. But what is this “glory”? Why draw attention to it here? It may help is to remember that God’s glory is one of the major themes throughout Romans. So I’m not surprised he touches on it one last time before signing off. As a major theme in Romans, we discovered God’s charge against all humanity is that we have *“exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things (Romans 1:23).”* In other words, we have treated God’s infinite perfection and beauty and significance as no more interesting and admirable than a square of toilet paper. We have belittled God’s greatness by substituting His greatness, amongst other things, with sex and drink and ambition, as C.S. Lewis said. And that’s a problem; we are sinfully bent against God. But Paul also showed us, now through Jesus *“we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. (Romans 5:2)”* Through faith in Jesus, richly prizing God for who he is, regains it’s rightful place in our affections. This is precisely what God aims to do in his church, as Paul said later on: *“to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory... (Romans 9:23).”* And it is why we see a Christian church lay aside racism, sexism and classism in order to *“...welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God. (Romans 15:7)”* So Paul finishes utterly gripped by the goodness and centrality of God’s glory – *“...to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.”*

And that seems like a pretty good place to farewell our series. In the Gospel we see God’s power to save and secure his people; a mystery hidden, but now revealing Jesus; which is good news for the world; summoning all people to an obedient response of faith in Jesus; through whom we delight in the glory of God, forever.