

Who wants to be a saint? That's what we're going to talk about this morning as we draw ever closer to the advent of our Lord Jesus who's called all people to sainthood.

OPENING PRAYER

READ Romans 1:1-7

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the Gospel of God,² which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures,³ concerning His Son, Who was descended from David according to the flesh⁴ and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by His resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord,⁵ through Whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of His name among all the nations,⁶ including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ,⁷ To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The purpose statement for Paul's ministry in this reading is, "**we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith.**" The key idea is "**obedience of faith.**" Before we get to that, however, I want to explore the context of Paul's address to his readers.

Paul identified himself as "**a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle.**" What he was saying was that he had a direct call from God to preach about the ministry of Jesus. He spoke as a man who believed his authority was God-given, which begs the question, "Where does this authority come from?" Paul tells us. He wrote that the word he preached was anticipated by the "**prophets in the Holy Scriptures,**" which would be the Old Testament prophets.

In other words, Paul's authority was the Bible, which his readers held sacred. This authority he claimed was rooted not in his imagination or feelings but in the authority of the Word of God. He's saying, if you don't believe what I'm telling you, look it up.

He didn't stop there, however, but he pointed to a particularly important prophesy in the Scriptures. When he wrote that he was an apostle of Christ Jesus **"who was descended from David,"** he was thinking about the words of the prophet Samuel: **2 Samuel 7:16, "Your house and your kingdom shall endure before me forever; your throne shall be established forever."**

Paul wrote like this because what he was about to say would challenge his readers to their very core. Like us, they didn't like change. Thus it was imperative that he establish his authority with them.

Upon establishing his authority, Paul explained that the purpose of his letter was **"to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of (Jesus') name among all the nations."**

"Obedience of faith": One way to think about this phrase is as regards the propositional statements or truth statements of our faith. For example,

- God forgives sins through water baptism. Do you believe this? (Yes.)
- Through water baptism God gives people the Holy Spirit. Do you believe this? (Yes.)
- The Holy Spirit transforms a person's life, making them into a child of God. Do you believe this? (Yes.)

So if we believe these things, do we have **"obedience of faith"**? I don't think that's what Paul had in mind, for even **"the demons believe,"** as James pointed out (James 2:19).

The problem with the affirmation of propositional statements alone is that it does not include personal evidence. For example, we say that a person's life has been transformed by the Holy Spirit through water baptism, but we don't ask the question, **"HOW has your life been transformed by the Holy Spirit?"** Which is kind of like a student telling their teacher that they wrote a research paper but the dog ate it.

Personally, I believe all kinds of things. I know more about the Bible and Jesus, church and doctrine, heaven and hell, forgiveness and eternal life than your average bear, but to tell you the truth, sometimes I still feel like there's

something missing, something I don't get about what it means follow Jesus. I mean, why do I sometimes have a flash of rage when someone cuts me off on the freeway instead of a flash of patience and love? Why do I sometimes resent people who condescend to me instead of feeling empathetic toward them? And why do I worry about things I have no control over instead of trusting God and believing his promise to care for me? The devil made me do it? The dog at my paper?

Upon a closer reading of the passage in question it appears Paul does provide us with some direction in this matter in his salutation. He wrote, **Romans 1:7, "To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints."**

These 7-words, "**loved by God**" and "**called to be saints**," I believe, are more than a pious greeting.

We're "**loved by God**": I used to think I needed to make myself lovable in order to be loved by God, you know, just as we make ourselves lovable for the person whom we intend to marry. But that's not how God thinks about his love for us. Please put your hand on your heart. Jesus said, **John 3:16, "For God so loved the WORLD that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."** Is your heart beating? If so, you're a part of this world which Jesus died for. He died for YOU; you're loved by God.

But maybe you feel unworthy of God's love, or perhaps you feel like God might kind of love you, but really he's just putting up with you, like you do with that irritating in-law over the holidays. Stop it! God loves you the way you are. You are his child, forever adored by him.

Paul wrote, **Romans 5:8, "God shows His love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us."** God doesn't consider our imperfection, our sin, when he looks upon us. Rather, he sees his son, Jesus, and he loves us. My friends, nothing in heaven or on earth can take that love away from you.

Paul also wrote that we are "**called to be saints**." To be "called" by God means he laid a claim on your life and declared, "She belongs to me," "He belongs to me."

Paul wrote that our calling is to be “**saints.**” This is our purpose. Unfortunately, because of church tradition we have a terribly warped understanding of what a saint is. But according to the Bible, a saint is someone Jesus died for. To be called to be a saint is to be a child of God by virtue of his grace, and in that grace we have a mission to serve the Lord.

And this brings us back to the question, what is “**obedience of faith**”? This is about having faith that we are loved by God. It’s having faith that we are God’s sons, God’s daughters. It’s having faith that God will protect and lead us until the end. It’s having faith that we have been called by Almighty God, that he has written our names on his heart, and that he is going to give us everything we need to serve him.

But perhaps you’re discouraged with your own life and wonder, “Why am I so lame if God has done all of these wonderful things in and for me?” That’s an honest and valid question. I think one of the reasons our walk with the Lord sometimes falls short of our expectations is because we don’t take seriously the claim God has on our lives. For example, when I think of my work as just making a living, I become tired, anxious, and bored. But when I remember that I am employed by God, that he is my boss, that I serve a higher purpose, I feel accountable, empowered, motivated, and happy to be doing what I’m doing. This attitude totally transforms how I do my work and how I treat the people around me.

And I’m not talking about being a pastor. I’ve done and been many things, and I’ve discovered my heart is shaped by my relationship with God regardless of my vocation. When I understand that it is God whom I am serving, that he is in charge, everything changes.

St. Paul wrote, **Colossians 3:17, “whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus.”**

Brothers and sisters in Christ, we are all called to serve God in whatever it is we do. I like to think that we do our work as though the Lord stood right alongside of us all the while. So if you’re a mechanic, you do your best work possible for a reasonable price in the name of Jesus. If you’re a teacher you use all of your resources to be a blessing to your students, helping them to grow as citizens who

can make a difference in the world in the name of Jesus. If you're a housekeeper or a bookkeeper, an attorney or a computer programmer, an engineer or a CEO, you do your work to the best of your ability, treating others with respect and being honest in your dealings in the name of Jesus.

So here's our assignment this week. First, whenever we're wondering if our life counts for anything, say, "I'm loved by God." Say it with me. (I'm loved by God.)

Second, when we're wondering what the purpose of our life is, say, "I'm called to be a saint." Say it with me. (I'm called to be a saint.)

Friends in Christ, this week may you be encouraged to know that God loves you and that He has called you for his own purpose with grace.

This week may you do everything in the name of Jesus.

And this week may you have the opportunity to share this good news with another person who really needs to hear it, in the name of the Lord. Amen.