DATE: **November 7, 2026**
SERIES: **The Gospel Is**
MESSAGE: **For Everyone**
PASSAGE: **Romans 16**
SPEAKER: **Ryan Harmon**

So, Sunshine just mentioned the genealogies of the Bible, which leads me to a question. In your personal reading, when you come to those genealogies or any long list of names in the Bible, what do you do? Be honest. I'll go first. I'm tempted to skip over them. Tempted to just breeze right past and get back to the meat, get back to the theology, to the truth. Just kind of dwell there.

It's interesting that God, in all his wisdom, infinite in wisdom, gave us a relatively small book. And then in parts of that book, he filled it with just names. Isn't that interesting? Why would he do that? Why would he include that many names? Why, when Paul writes the letter to the Romans, would he come to the conclusion and list so many names?

Caleb mentioned as he was finishing that we have some fun things in store. I don't know if he was referring to me mispronouncing all the names, but maybe you'll get a chuckle out of that. When it comes to the book of Romans. The answer is really, there are two answers. The first one is really boring, because that's how letters typically ended in the ancient world. They'd end with a number of names, greetings to people that the author of the letter knew.

But I think for our purposes, and where I would like to draw our attention tonight, is that as this glorious exposition, explanation of the gospel comes to a close, we are reminded through these names that the gospel is not an idea merely to be considered. The gospel changes lives. The gospel meets real people right where they are. Turns their life upside down and changes their life. Because the gospel is for everyone. And the gospel changes the world.That's what we want to consider as we finish up our study this evening. So open your Bibles with me to Romans, chapter 16.

Now, as you turn there, we finished last week, and that was the end of the body of the letter, the beginning of chapter 15. And Paul once again offered a reminder to this church in Rome about the importance of unity. Unity brought about, empowered by, the very Spirit of God. He went on to give some biographical information, let them know about some of his plans, that he was going to extend his trip all the way to Spain. He planned to preach the gospel everywhere.

But first, before he closes this letter, he's now going to let us hear about some of the specific people that are in this church in Rome, this church that he longed to visit. So Paul begins in Romans 16 by focusing on one person for the first two verses, and we want to draw some attention to her. So he begins in Romans 16 with verse one, saying:

> *1 I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea; 2 that you receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and that you help her in whatever matter she may have need of you; for she herself has also been a helper of many, and of myself as well.*

So Paul begins with someone that he knows, not someone in the church in Rome, but someone he's commending to them, our sister, he says, Phoebe, who is a servant, he says, and also a helper of many and a helper, in fact, of Paul himself.

Now, I wish we knew more about Phoebe. Don't know that much about her. This is the only place in the New Testament where she is mentioned, and because of that, it's impossible to know the exact nature of her ministry, the way that she helped many and even helped Paul himself. But this word helper that occurs there in verse 2 might give us a little insight.

That word could be translated benefactor or patron. And it appears that Phoebe may have been a very wealthy businesswoman. And she then, with her wealth, chose not to extend her own life, not to advance her own ends, but to advance the ends of the gospel. So it's very likely that Phoebe was a patron of Paul helping fund his ministry as he shared the gospel throughout the world.

But I also think it's important to remember, Phoebe's ministry, while we don't know the details of it, it draws important attention to just the nature of ministry, period. When Paul calls her a helper and a servant, that's the nature of ministry. When all of us are caught up in ministry, and we're all called to ministry of some sort, what we do is we serve, and we help. I think it, at the root, that's what all ministry essentially is.

When I preach, I am seeking to serve. I'm seeking to help. When someone decides to be an usher and they greet you warmly on a Saturday night, on a Sunday morning, that is an act of service, all aimed at helping you. helping you as you gather with God's people. When our worship leaders lead, what they are doing is they are serving, they are helping. That is the heart of what ministry is all about. To offer service and helping one another.

Now, Phoebe helped in such a significant way that Paul draws particular attention to her. We know that at this time, letters would always be delivered by hand.

Couldn't email, right? There was no postal service. And so you had to send somebody. You had to send an envoy, essentially like an ambassador who would carry a letter. And that's precisely what Phoebe did for the church in Rome. That's why Paul commended her to them. We know that because of her track record of service, because of her spiritual maturity, Paul entrusted her with a significant responsibility. That was a great privilege, and it carried a lot of weight.

So he was going to send his letter to the Romans with her. It was her job then to bring it to them, probably even read it to them, and he wants to commend her to them, because we need to understand in that cultural context. Paul sending a woman was very unusual. Because in this world, women often were not considered to be trustworthy. That's the way the world viewed women at this time. And so Paul, in commending Phoebe, in sending Phoebe, was making a dramatic statement about how the church is to be different, that all people have dignity.

And Paul honored the ministry, the track record, that Phoebe had. And you could consider it to be worthy of bearing this letter, this letter that many consider to be the greatest piece of theology ever written in the hands of his sister, Phoebe. So when she arrived in Rome, he expected they would welcome her, they would bring her into their fellowship and then they would help her with whatever need she had as she continued to minister while she was in Rome. See, Paul saw Phoebe as God saw Phoebe, not as the world saw Phoebe, and therefore he extended this great responsibility to her.

Now as he continues, he's going to go through a long list of names, twenty-six different names that I'm about to read. Within this list from verses 3 to verse 16, we find twenty-six different individuals, at least, depending on how you count. We find at least three house churches. We find families, at least two of them, and some commentators think that what Paul's doing here is he's just listing every single person that he knew in Rome. Now, we don't know if that's the case or not, but he names a lot of people.

So as we go, I'm going to read rather quickly, and then we're just going to try to make some summarizing comments about what we can glean from all these names. Now, as I read, I'm going to count on the fact that as I mispronounce names, you will not know. Because none of us really know how to pronounce these names, okay? So verse 3, he says:

> *3 Greet* Prisca [which is a shortened name for Priscilla we've heard about elsewhere, Priscilla] *and Aquila* [so this is a husband and wife], *my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, 4 who for my life risks their own necks, to whom not only do I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles; 5 also greet the church that is in their house. Greet Epaenetus, my beloved, who is the first convert to Christ from Asia* [that's a cool distinction, isn't it?]. *6 Greet*

> *Mary, who has worked hard for you. 7 Greet Andronicus and Junias* [again, probably a husband and wife team]*, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners, who are outstanding among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me. 8 Greet Ampliatus, my beloved of the Lord. 9 Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and Stachys my beloved. 10 Greet Apelles, the approved in Christ. Greet those who are of the household of Aristobulus. 11 Greet Herodian, my kinsman. Greet those of the household of Narcissus, who are in the Lord. 12 Greet Tryphaena and Tryphosa, workers in the Lord. Greek Persis the beloved, who has worked hard in the Lord. 13 Greet Rufus, a choice man in the Lord, also his mother and mine. 14 Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas and the brethren with them. 15 Greek Philologus and Julia* [again, probably a husband, a wife team]*, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them. 16 Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you.*

Now, if I were to list off all the people in my life that were significant, it would be very unmeaningful to you, the same way that these names don't mean a lot to us. But trust me, they meant a lot to Paul, because each one of these names represents a person who was saved by the power of the gospel. Saved by Jesus Christ himself, now brought into the family of God.

Now, we don't have time to go into each name, but there are some remarkable things that we can discern about this community in Rome and about some of the names that I think says a lot about why Paul has been so adamant about the unity that he was calling the Church to.

So here's what we find. In this list that I just read, including the first two verses with Phoebe, we find seventeen men. Now that was very normal in a letter, but we also find ten women, and that was very abnormal. Again, driving home the point that Paul and the Church greatly valued, that in Christ, men and women both have dignity and they both have ministry to do in the church.

Men and women, many of whom Paul called his fellow workers. The word literally means those who are working with me, pouring out energy with me. And Paul, in some way, is saying their ministry is just as significant as my ministry. Men and women, husbands and wives, but also those who were single. That's a dynamic in the Church, existed in the church in Rome. Jews, those Paul called kinsmen—he named that a number of different times—but also Gentiles. We know the church in Rome was predominantly Gentiles. That was part of the problem. That was part of the struggle they had. And so that was something they were having to work out as they were this diverse people working out life together.

We know from the names, it won't really occur to us, but we know from looking at names that some of these names are names of people who were slaves. Some of

them were slaves who had been freed, some of them were children of slaves. But also it appears that there's also free people, just people who are generally free, and yet those also who are in a household. So there were a number of times that said greet those in the household of Andronicus. That might mean that Andronicus himself is not a believer, but those in his household, those servants of his and his household, are.

Now, this would mean that there are rich and poor. There are people in different class structures within this very church. So what we know is that this church in Rome, like every church that exists, was filled with people from varied backgrounds. There was great diversity in this church. There's great diversity in this list. And yet, Paul called them to work towards unity.

Sometimes, I think in our world there is an idea that if we can just get rid of differences, then there will be unity. But that's not what the church is about. In the church, there's no need to diminish differences. What the need is, is we need to focus on what we share in common, we share Jesus Christ. We all follow the same Savior. We are all servants of the same Master. While the world tries to say, let's just eliminate all differences so we can have peace and unity in the church, we say it doesn't matter that we are different. We share the most important thing in common. We are united because we follow Christ and that overshadows everything else. Everything else.

And Paul has laid out the gospel for, labored to lay it out, with great clarity. One thing that's interesting about the book of Romans is although the teaching is quite deep, Paul has never talked about false teaching in this letter. It makes this letter really rare. But before Paul is finished, probably anticipating the fact that wherever there is a church that is holding up the truth, there will be attacks, there will be false teachers that try to undo, undo the work of God. And so Paul gives a warning here in verses 17 to 20 about just that, that these these people that he loves, that he's called to live in unity, they are also called to be vigilant. To be watchful to uphold the truth. So he continues in verse 17, he says:

> *17 Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them.*

It's a bold statement, right? Run from them.

> *18 For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting.*

Now, Paul is writing this so that this church won't be unsuspecting. We want to be aware. We want to be watchful. Verse 19:

> *19 For the report of your obedience has reached to all; therefore I am rejoicing over you, but I want you to be wise in what is good and innocent in what is evil. 20 The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.*

Well, last week we talked about how there are times in the church where there is conflict over non-essential issues, and we aren't to be people who enter into division over what is non-essential. There clearly are things that are essential, and Paul has laid out essential things in this entire book. The reality of sin. The fact that we cannot save ourselves. The fact that we all stand under the wrath of the one holy God. The fact that only the cross of Christ can save. The fact that it is his spilled blood which accomplished forgiveness. The fact that we are saved by grace through faith. That God empowers us by His Holy Spirit. All of these things are absolutely essential, and we are to be on guard against anyone that speaks against these essential truths.

Now, before we continue on I just want to highlight that I think this is why community is so absolutely essential and so valuable. Have you ever noticed that sometimes if you start to believe a lie, start to believe something untrue about yourself—God could never forgive me, my my sin is too great, I should walk around filled with shame—sometimes even though we speak that truth to ourselves, sometimes it just doesn't land. And part of the role of community is to look one another in the eye and say, here is what is true. Here is who God is. Here is how his forgiveness is complete. Here is how there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

And in the community, we can guard the truth together, speaking it first of all to one another, but then also being on guard against false teachers that will seek to erode the truth. Lone Ranger Christianity. Just me and my podcast. It's dangerous. It's dangerous because God uses the community of faith to help us as a people be on guard, and to stand up for truth, to be on defense against false teaching.

Satan has strategies. Last week we talked about how a primary strategy in a church is to cause division. But there's no doubt he is a liar and he seeks to spread lies. It's what he seeks to do. And as a community, the church is to stand up to hold fast to what is true. And we can do so full of hope because Paul said, the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. That is Satan's demise that is sure, that is to come. So with that warning in mind, Paul now continues, and we learn a little bit about his team. Verse 21:

> *21 Timothy my fellow worker greets you, and so do Lucius and Jason and Sosipater, my kinsman. 22 I, Tertius* [this is who wrote the letter, I wrote this letter, I] *who write this letter, greet you in the Lord. 23 Gaius, host to me and to the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the city treasurer greets you, and Quartus, the brother. 24 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.*

This ending is funny because Paul kind of comes to an end like five times. You think, okay, well, we're done now. Not quite done. But he does tell us about his team. He sends greeting, eight more names, Jew and Greek, both united in the advancement of the gospel, working with Paul. Paul wasn't out there alone. Sometimes that's what we think about him, but Paul had a team. And he and his team were hard at work to advance the gospel in the Gentile world.

So all of these people represent lives that were changed and people who had been caught up in the mission of God to spread the gospel, to make it known, to do just what Paul has done in this letter, to lay it all out. And here before we read these last three verses, verses that are words of praise, it's just helpful for us since this is our last week of really walking through the text, just to remember where we have been.

As Paul looks back and he reviews the gospel that he has proclaimed, it leads him—we're going to read it in just a moment—it leads him to words of praise, to words of joy and thanksgiving. Remember at the very beginning, we talked about it again last week, Paul said I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, for the Jew first, and also the Greek. As he continued, he talked about the deep need that we are all in because of sin. Every single person. Every single person in this room, every single person who has ever lived, has followed in the footsteps of Adam and Eve and has rejected, turned their mind from, God. Rejected the one holy God. And because of that, every single person stands under the wrath of God, unrighteous, caught in sin.

When we turn our mind from God, Paul said in Romans 1, we go down this awful descent into sin and destruction and chaos. We worship that which is not meant to be worshiped. Because of that, each one of us was absolutely stuck, desperate, in absolute need, incapable of saving ourselves. But God acted. God responded. And the gospel is God's response to our desperate need.

In love, the holy God, because he himself is perfectly righteous, sent his Son into the world so that we, the unrighteous, can be declared righteous. Not because of anything we have done, but because of what he did for us. Roman says that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Through our faith in him, we are justified by his blood. We are forgiven. We are reconciled to God. We are brought into a new life full of joy and peace and hope only available in him, and we live now a life

empowered by the Holy Spirit. And we await a glorious future. Nothing can separate us from God's love. That's Romans 1 through 8.

Paul continued, he talked about how we now, because of the work of God, we now, Jew and Gentile alike, are brought together in the one person, Jesus Christ. A united family of God. And this was always God's plan. This is what he was working at. And we now, because of God's work in our lives, are able to step in and live lives of genuine love and unity. We are able to glorify him.

The gospel is for everyone. The gospel changes lives. It is the power of God for salvation to deliver us, to free us, to save us from sin and death, and into a life that is altogether different from the world. That's the gospel. That's what Paul was unashamed of. That's what Paul gave his life for. And that's what leads him to these words of praise as he closes this amazing letter. Verse 25, he says now as a word of doxology, just giving glory to God, he says:

> *25 Now to him who is able to establish you* [it could be strengthen you, to establish you] *according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past, 26 but now is manifested, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, leading to obedience of faith; 27 to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory forever. Amen.*

Paul can't help but end in praise because when the word of God is proclaimed, when the gospel truth is pronounced, it demands a response. Demands a response to consider our sin. Ultimately, consider that a holy God has made a way for an unrighteous people to be declared holy. The gospel demands a response of surrender. A response of faith. Then it demands a response of gratitude. A response of thanksgiving, a response of joy, a response of giving God glory. Magnifying his name because of what he has done. That's how Paul ends this amazing letter.

The question is, what are we to do? Have you surrendered? The gospel is for you. That you might surrender, that you might be reconciled to God, that your life might be turned around. Shall we share it with our friends? Absolutely, the gospel is for everyone. All have sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God. All people. All people long to hear the truth of the gospel.

Shall we give him praise? Shall we glorify him for the work he has done? Yes, today and every day. That's what we should do. We should be people full of praise. We are living a brand new life, now and forever. We are doing it because of the grace of God and because of the gospel. Let's glorify him together now.

Our Father, we do thank you that you have established us according to your gospel, through the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of your mystery. Although it was long hidden, it has now been revealed. And you, by it and by your grace, have brought us into the life that is truly life. Life with you, the only true God, the only wise God.

Lord, we could never do it on our own, and so we give you glory for doing for us that which we could never do for ourselves. We thank you for the cross. We thank you for your grace and we give you all the glory. And we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

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