

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: Romans – Jesus’ Gospel Sets You Free!

The Power of the Gospel

(Romans 16)

Study #28

Introduction: Clarifying the win...

For the San Antonio Spurs, a “win” is a championship ring! The division and conference wins were great. But the team and the city want the whole enchilada. We’re hoping for another NBA Championship!

If it’s graduation time at your house, a “win” looks like walking across a stage.

In each arena of life, we can picture a win.

In athletics, there is a stopwatch or a scoreboard to tell us when we are winning. In academics, teachers let us know if we are winning or losing by our grades. In business, sales or stock prices declare the winner.

So... what is a “win” in Jesus?

We’ve placed faith in Jesus for salvation and now have eternal life and that is certainly a win! But, if possible, we’d like to know what a win looks like NOW.

If you listen to certain kinds of speakers or read certain books, you’ll get the idea that a comfortable life in an upscale neighborhood is a Jesus win.

Some would tell us that a Jesus win means the enjoyment of good health, upward mobility, in short, the American Dream.

I don’t think so - and neither do you. This kind of thinking doesn’t square with the general tone of the Bible, and if material success and physical health are what a Jesus win looks like, then a huge percentage of the world’s population is prohibited from ever experiencing a Jesus win.

So, how do we clarify a win in Jesus? I believe that here, at the very end of Paul’s letter to the church at Rome, he gives us a couple of pictures of what a Jesus win might look like.

One of them is pretty concrete and mundane. The other piques our curiosity and captures our imagination.

This final chapter of Romans has two prominent features. One is a combination of a strong warning and an exhortation, coupled with an amazing promise. The other is a collection of names.

One glance at this chapter and you’ll see that Paul spends the bulk of it listing names. We’re surprised that after a content-filled first fifteen chapters, the last is filled with the names of his friends and teammates, men and women who served Jesus with him.

I’m not going to go into a lot of detail here, but I want us to see enough to appreciate who these good people he names are. We listen as he starts off by mentioning a woman named Phoebe.

Final Greetings; Networking for the Kingdom (16:1-16; 21-24)

Greetings TO those in Rome from Paul (vv. 1-16)

Phoebe - the letter carrier (vv. 1-2)

[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.

The only thing we know about Phoebe is what we read here. So, based on these comments, what do we know about her?

Well, we know that she was a servant of the church at Cenchrea, Cenchrea being a seaport near Corinth. (See Acts 18:18)

To say that she was a “*servant*” is to say that she demonstrated a prime Christian virtue. It may also say that she was an official in the church, as a very fair translation of “*servant*” is “*deaconess*.”¹

We also know that she was going to be traveling, by ship, from Corinth (where Paul was) to Rome. We are to understand that the letter he is writing (Romans) will be hand-delivered by Phoebe.

In the early church, traveling Christians depended on their fellow-Christians’ hospitality. Paul wants the Romans to know that Phoebe has been a great help to him, to many others, and to the cause of Christ. She is deserving of all consideration when she arrives. And he mentions her to be sure that she is treated well.

His comments about Phoebe are followed by personal greetings to a fair number of other people whom he also mentions by name.

General greetings (vv. 3-15)

Now, it may strike you as odd that Paul knows so many people in Rome, since, as we’ve already learned, he hadn’t ever been to Rome.

So, how did he come to have so many friends in Rome? No doubt it was because, in the first century, all roads led to Rome.

In every society there is a hub around which everything else revolves. During the years 1999-2008, I had the pleasure of traveling to Russia a number of times for some Bible teaching.

One of the things that strikes most visitors to Moscow - and that never ceased to amaze me - is the size of the train stations.

There are at least nine major train stations in Moscow and they are all enormous, with dozens of lines. In Russia, all lines lead to Moscow.

In France, all roads lead to Paris. In the UK, all roads lead to London. In the United States, all roads lead to Washington D.C., Atlanta, Dallas, Denver, Los Angeles.

In Paul’s day, Rome was a destination spot for the Empire. And some of the people he had met in other places had moved to Rome. They are now a part of the church there, and he sends them his greetings.

Among those he greets are some with whom he has served in Gospel ministry.

Christian fellow workers in the Gospel

PRISCA AND AQUILA (VV. 3-5A)

[3] Greet Prisca² and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, [4] who for my life risked 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.

This is one of the more famous husband and wife ministry teams in the New Testament. Rather, I should probably say wife and husband team, since whenever they are mentioned in the New Testament, Prisca (or Priscilla, as she is sometimes called) is always mentioned first.

Her “firstness” may be attributed to her more forceful personality or to a higher social standing. Or, it could be due (this is my own opinion) to her being the more prominent leader of the two in spiritual things.

They served the Lord together and are mentioned in a couple of places besides here in Romans 16.

In Acts (chapter 18), we read that they met Apollos, an eloquent man who was mighty in the Scriptures. This, despite the fact that all he knew about Jesus was based on the baptism of John. Still, Apollos was fervent in spirit, boldly speaking out in the Jewish synagogues. Apollos’ knowledge was accurate, but limited.

¹ Greek “*diakonos*.”

² Ten of the 29 people mentioned here are women. Prisca is the only woman mentioned here who is mentioned anywhere else in the New Testament.

Priscilla and Aquila took Apollos aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately. They mentored, disciplined and trained him.

They used to live in Ephesus (Acts 18:26; 1 Corinthians 16:19). Now they live in Rome and are hosting a house church there.³

Paul tells us that this couple had risked their lives for him. We don't know when this might have happened or what were the circumstances of their sacrifice for Paul. But clearly they were very dear to him. He sends his greetings to them from Corinth.

Then there is Mary.

MARY (v. 6)

[6] Greet Mary, who has worked hard for you.

There are at least six women named "Mary" in the New Testament - and this is the only time this particular Mary is mentioned.⁴

With no specifics given, Paul wanted the Roman Christians to know that she has "**worked hard**" for them. He sends his greetings to Mary.

Other fellow workers are mentioned.

ANDRONICUS AND JUNIAS (v. 7)

[7] Greet Andronicus and Junias, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners, who are outstanding among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me.

We know nothing about these two except what we read here. And what we read here makes us wish we knew more.

They are Jewish Christians ("**my kinsmen**") who have been Christians longer than Paul had been a Christian.

³ Remember, all churches were house churches, as there were no "church buildings" until sometime in the third century AD.

⁴ That is, unless she is one of the better known Marys who has now moved to Rome, but is not identified as such.

He refers to them as "**outstanding among the apostles**" in the broad sense of someone who leads in the cause of Christ in a pioneering way.

We don't know if they are husband and wife, or if they are two men who serve together as a team (the Greek doesn't make it clear whether Junias is male or female). Clearly, they had suffered for Jesus (he calls them "**fellow prisoners**") and Paul sends his greetings.

OTHERS

Then, with almost no commentary, we read of Urbanus, who was a fellow-worker in Christ (v. 9a) and Apelles, who was an approved workman for Jesus (v. 10a).

Paul sends his greetings to those who are of **[10b] the household of Narcissus**⁵ who are believers, to Christian workers **Tryphaena and Tryphosa** (v. 12a)⁶, and to a woman named Persis (v. 12b) who has "**worked hard in the Lord.**"⁷

He remembers Rufus (v. 13) and the mother of Rufus, who had served Paul himself as a mother cares for a son. Paul writes that Rufus was a **[13] choice man in the Lord** - and it is easy to believe he was that!

This Rufus was one of the two sons of Simon of Cyrene, the man who carried Jesus' cross on the way to Golgotha. (Mark 15:21)⁸

Then, beyond those who labored with Paul in the spread of the Gospel, he had other good friends in Rome to whom he also sent greetings.

⁵ The household of Narcissus was well known in Paul's time in Rome. He was a wealthy freedman of the Emperor Tiberius, Tiberius Claudius Narcissus, but was executed by order of Nero's mother Agrippina soon after Nero's accession to the throne in AD 54.

⁶ Possibly siblings/twins? It was common to give twins names derived from the same etymological root.

⁷ A nickname for a woman from Persia.

⁸ Some have wondered if Rufus' mother became "mother" to Paul when Barnabas fetched Paul from Tarsus to become his colleague in ministry at Syrian Antioch? Possibly. Honestly, though, there is no evidence for this. All we know is that at some point and in some way Rufus' mother was very important to Paul.

Friends and family

There was Epaenetus (v. 5b) who is identified as ***“the first convert to Christ from Asia.”***⁹

There was Amblivatus (v. 8)¹⁰ and there was Stachys (v. 9b), both of whom Paul dearly loved.

There were friends with ties to royalty, too. Among them were those of ***“the household of Aristobulus”*** (v. 10b)¹¹ and Herodian, a kinsman (meaning, fellow Jew) of Paul. (v. 11a)

In addition, Paul asked that greetings be sent to others, including ***[14]...Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes,¹² Patrobas, Hermas and the brethren with them...[15]...Philologus and Julia,¹³ Nereus¹⁴ and his sister, and Olympas,¹⁵ and all the saints who are with them.***

In all, he *“Hello’d”* twenty six people and five households and wraps up this section of the greetings with an soft encouragement.

Greetings all around (v. 16)

[16] Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you.

That whole ***“holy kiss”*** thing is alive and well in many parts of the world today. When we have gone on missions trips to Uruguay, South America, we have experienced this.

⁹ The household of Stephanas was the first fruits of Achaia. (1 Corinthians 16:15)

¹⁰ Amblivatus - from a well-known Roman family, with a family burial plot in Rome.

¹¹ Herod Agrippa I had a brother by this name, who lived in Rome as a private citizen. This Aristobulus was a personal friend of Claudius, the Emperor.

¹² Hermes - name of the god of good luck, extremely common.

¹³ Philologus and Julia may have been a husband and wife team. These are names that appear in first century documents in connection to the imperial household

¹⁴ Nereus - possibly Flavia Domitilla, a Christian lady of the imperial house who was banished to the island of Pandateria, off the Campanian coast by her uncle Domitian in AD 95, but was released after his death in the following year.

¹⁵ Olympas - short form of Olympiodorus.

We have been warmly greeted by the sisters AND the brothers there with pecks on the cheek (or, at times, “air kisses” so as to not offend American sensitivities - Uruguayans are very sensitive people!).

The same has been true when I have gone to Russia. (Ah, there’s nothing like a rough sandpaper face rubbing against another rough sandpaper face...)

Paul wants that wholesome practice of warm greetings to continue. He would want it to continue in 2013, too.

Here in San Antonio, a holy kiss wouldn’t necessarily be out of line, but its close relatives - the holy handshake and the holy hug - have the same effect of affirming affection and love in Christ. Let’s by all means be the church that greets each other warmly!

Paul also assures the folks at Rome that all the churches of Macedonia and Achaia send their greetings to them.

Then, skip on down a few verses and you’ll see that after sending his greetings TO those he knows in Rome, he sends greetings to Rome FROM some of those who are with him.

Greetings FROM those with Paul to Rome (vv. 21-24)

Fellow-workers (v. 21)

[21] Timothy my fellow worker greets you, and so do Lucius and Jason and Sosipater, my kinsmen.

We know Timothy as Paul’s right-hand man and colleague in the work of Christ. It is possible (likely?) that those in Rome either knew or knew of Timothy, too.

The others he mentions here - Lucius, Jason and Sosipater - have Latin names and may be known there, as well.

We know that Paul didn’t normally write the words of his letters, but dictated them to a secretary (amanuensis). In the case of this letter, the man who wrote down Paul’s message to the Romans sent his Christian greetings.

The secretary (v. 22)

[22] I, Tertius,¹⁶ who write this letter, greet you in the Lord.

And finally, there are others who send their greetings, through Paul, from Corinth, to Rome.

Corinthian officials (v. 23)

[23] Gaius,¹⁷ host to me and to the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the city treasurer greets you, and Quartus,¹⁸ the brother. [24] The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.¹⁹

And so we wonder why Paul would want to devote valuable Bible space to something as mundane as greetings? I believe that there are two reasons for having done this. First, the greetings established credibility.

- To establish credibility

Imagine that you are writing a letter with a weighty message and some serious challenges to a group of people you've never met. Why should they pay any attention to YOU?!

Well, to help them get to know you and to trust you, you might send your greetings to some people who live in the city to which you are writing.

That is exactly what Paul has done. By sending his "Howdy" to folks he knows who are now entrenched in the life of the church at Rome, he has created a trust-link between himself and the church.

¹⁶ In the Roman world, slaves were often referred to by number. "Tertius" means "third". He may have been the 3rd slave of some wealthy slave owner in Corinth.

¹⁷ Gaius = Titius Justus of Acts 28:7, who extended the hospitality of his house to Paul and the infant church at Corinth when they were expelled from the synagogue next door.

¹⁸ "Quartus" means "fourth." Perhaps another slave?

¹⁹ Verse 24 is not present in most of the more reliable ancient manuscripts of Romans. It likely was not a part of the original letter, but was added by a later scribe.

So, sending his greetings was a strategic move to build rapport, trust, and credibility.

And there is another thing that this long list of greetings does.

It helps us understand that when you boil life down to its most basic elements, right there at the most elemental level, it's all about relationships.

- It all boils down to relationships

These names represent milestones, touchstones, cornerstones in Paul's life. They are teammates and cellmates, family, friends, co-workers. These names of people who were dear to Paul are the stuff of life.

You, too, have people who are dear to you. As you grow in Jesus, you will collect more.

- You will serve with people at VBS and in Sunday School and while packing groceries for the Food Pantry. You'll create bonds with the people with whom you serve.
- You'll go through hardships with others in a Care Group or in an Interface group. You'll be close for the rest of your lives.
- You'll correspond with a missionary who is going through a personal earthquake and ties will be established that will never be broken.

Of the many hopes we have in Jesus, one of the most beautiful is the hope of relating deeply and genuinely with an ever-expanding circle of friends and partners and brothers and sisters in the family of God.

We are in this together, and, to return to our first thoughts this morning, it is a Jesus win when we are able to enjoy healthy relationships with each other in the church. What a privilege to know that we are in this together!

Now, having explored the lists of names, we'll conclude our time in Romans by looking at the last paragraph of exhortation Paul includes.

Many scholars have observed that these verses (vv. 17-20) are very much unlike much of the rest of Romans in style and, to some extent, in substance.

But, it is just like Paul to warn a church he has never had personal contact with against the kinds of enemies he has encountered just about everywhere he has ever gone with the Gospel! So, warn he does...

A Final Warning; Victory via Truth and Love (vv. 17-20)

Watch out for Troublemakers! (vv. 17-18)

Beware of those who contradict Paul's teaching (v. 17)

[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.

And what are those things that they have learned? Well, they have learned certain things about the Gospel of Jesus.

Teaching about the Gospel

Specifically,

- that all people everywhere are condemned before God because of sin and have no hope of salvation, in and of themselves (3:23);
- that Jesus died on the cross as a substitute, taking our place and bearing our sin so that we would never need to (3:21-26);
- that we are saved by the grace of God when we place our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ for eternal life (5:1); and
- that once saved, justified, reconciled and adopted, nothing can ever unsave, unjustify, unreconcile, or unadopt us. Nothing can separate us from God's love. Nothing. (8:31-39)

Teaching about submission to the Lordship of Jesus

They have learned what is to be their posture toward the Lord Jesus Christ. In light of His great mercy, they are to offer themselves as living sacrifices to God, knowing that doing that is the best possible way to live. (12:1-2)

Teaching about the outworking of the Christian life

They have also been taught that they are to love and care for and serve each other in the Body of Christ. (12:9-13).

They are to be in subjection to the governing authorities. (13:1-7)
They are to not judge each other or hold each other in contempt when it comes to those behaviors where there is no "thus saith the Lord" (14:1-9).
We can hold to different convictions and still love each other.

What was true for the Romans is true for us, too! We are to keep our eye out for anyone who would tell us something different.

Anyone who would contradict these basic essentials of the faith are nothing but trouble-makers.

Trouble-makers are slaves of their own appetites (v. 18a)

[18] For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites²⁰

They are motivated by a slavish need to see others enslaved to laws and rules. The impact on those they would influence is tragic. They deceive the naïve.

By their speech they deceive the naïve (v. 18b)

[18b]...and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting.

This is what is at stake: the spiritual health of God's children and the vitality of their walk with the Lord.

So, false teaching is not to be tolerated. And, to their credit, the Roman church had not been tolerating it.

Keep Up the Good Work! (v. 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.²¹

²⁰ See Philippians 3:19 - here and there the reference is to false teachers who make the Gospel a pretext for indulging their own appetites.

²¹ See *[Matthew 10:16] "Behold I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves"* and *[1 Corinthians 14:20 -*

Just because he had not been to Rome, we shouldn't think that Paul hadn't heard how the church was doing there. He had received reports, and the reports all told him that they were doing great!

The church at Rome wasn't perfect - no church was or is! - but he commends them for being a maturing, healthy congregation.

And so, given the reputation they had earned for fidelity to the Gospel and for love and service, a brief warning was all that was needed.

As well, given the good track they were on, he proceeds to make them a promise. This is the promise that piques our curiosity and sets our imagination on fire. This is the promise that gives us another image of a Jesus win.

YOU! - Taking Part in God's Victory! (v. 20)

*The God of PEACE*²²

[20] *The God of peace...*

Our God is not a God of discord, but of concord. He is a God of peace. He is not a weak peace-keeper, but a STRONG peace-maker.

He brings peace out of chaos. He has made peace between us and Him by the death of His Son, Jesus. He gives us peace, day by day, as we trust Him. He longs to fill our souls with His peace.

And this God of peace is going to crush Satan!

The God of peace will CRUSH Satan

[20] *The God of peace will...crush Satan...*

This is an echo of Genesis 3, where there is a prophecy that the seed of the woman (that "seed" is Jesus) would crush the head of the serpent who had deceived Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

Brethren, do not be children in your thinking; yet in evil be infants, but in your thinking be mature.

²² See 15:33, another place where Paul refers to God as "*the God of peace.*"

In the movie, "The Passion of the Christ", there is the scene where Jesus is confronted by Satan in the Garden of Gethsemane. From between Satan's feet a snake slithers toward Jesus. Jesus stands and quickly crushes the serpent's head. It's a great scene.

No mistake about it. Our enemy is real. He does real harm. But there is a God who is sovereign over the devil. And our God will crush him.

And then Paul adds the twist that makes this promise so interesting and so enticing.

The God of peace will crush Satan under YOUR feet

[20] *The God of peace will...crush Satan under your feet.*

The Roman church, this church that was doing so well, clinging to God's truth, obeying His commands, loving and serving each other, will have the delight of feeling the head of the serpent crushed beneath their feet.

That promise, I believe, holds for all of God's people through the ages. The hope is held out to you and to me that we will get to participate in Satan's crushing defeat!

There are days when I'm really eager for that stomp.

While much of the evil in the world and much of the suffering we see is a direct result of the fact that the world is broken and people are sinful, Satan has had his role in the mess.

And there will come a day when the enemy is vanquished. He will be no more. The book of Revelation tells us that he will be cast into the lake of fire, to tempt and to torment no one ever again.

In some way, we will participate in this final defeat of Satan.

However, it seems that this final defeat is not exactly what Paul has in mind here at the end of Romans. I say that because of the word "*soon.*"²³

²³ Commentators are divided on the significance of the word "*soon*" here. Some (for example, Cranfield) believe that the promise is still reserved for the far distant

The God of peace will SOON crush Satan under your feet

[20] The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.

That thought of “soon” is delicious because it is so undefined.

What does Paul have in mind? In what way might Satan be crushed SOON - NOW - by people or by a church that is following Jesus?

The promise begs for us to release our creative imaginations. And here is where my own imagination goes.

Where we see God breaking through, we are seeing the crushing of Satan.

When someone, long held in the grip of addiction to drugs or alcohol - or anger or depression - finds freedom in Christ, Satan is being crushed.

When a relationship that once was sweet but has soured over the years turns sweet again because both parties have agreed, before God, to reconcile, we are crushing Satan’s head beneath our feet.

When a Christian who has meandered on a passionless journey for months or years, apathetic and lukewarm, heats up for Jesus, climbs up on the altar and presents himself as a living sacrifice, we are witnessing the crushing of Satan.

When you share the message of Jesus, trusting in the power of the Holy Spirit to bring conviction AND CONVICTION COMES (!) and the one who is hearing the Gospel responds, believes, puts faith in Jesus, Satan is being crushed beneath your feet.

When you, fueled by your desire to be “on mission” for Jesus’ Great Commission, launch out on a venture to serve in His Name in whatever way you might launch out, God is crushing Satan beneath your feet.

A win for Jesus is not a balanced budget, a building program, or increasing attendance at church. A Jesus win, I am increasingly convinced, is usually wrapped up in a story.

What a hope. That our enemy - the hater of our soul - will die a thousand deaths as we crush Him by our righteous, fervent, faith-filled lives.

[25] Now to Him who is able 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.