

The book of Romans has transformed many lives. The words of Romans were central in the conversion of John Calvin. Calvin was actually writing a commentary on Romans in his 20s when he began to realize that what the Catholic Church in France was teaching in the 1500s did not match up with what he was reading. **Calvin** credits Romans as instrumental in his conversion to Christ. He wrote,

“The book of Romans was my entrance to all the most hidden treasures of Scripture. The subject then of these chapters may be stated thus - man’s only righteousness is through the mercy of God in Christ, which being offered by the gospel, is apprehended by faith.”

Romans changes people’s lives because it clearly communicates, as Calvin described, “the mercy of God in Christ.”

Pastor Nick and I are excited to preach this new sermon series called “Romans and Us” because we will get to proclaim the mercy of God in Christ and show how the message of Romans gives life to our new mission and values.

About 7 months ago, the church council of Calvary - the elders, deacons, and pastors chosen by the church and we believe called by God to lead - unanimously approved a new mission statement and a new set of 4 values. Our mission and values were communicated to the church through the Heartbeat, a hand out in your mailboxes and our website which is www.calvarytwincities.org.

We have a mission statement and values because church is more than a mood booster, more than a social event, more than a time to have fun with friends. Though I believe God intended the church to include of all that, we are on a mission. We are here for a reason. We are a community that has a common goal, something we are striving for, something we are living for.

Our **mission statement** is on the bottom of this screen: Our mission is to proclaim the good news of Jesus, in word and deed, here, near and far. That is our mission. That is our purpose. That is why Calvary Christian Reformed Church exists.

Our values are above the mission statement. These values show what we are committed to and describes what type of church we are. And we are going to say them together because I want everyone to know these values. Our hope is that when someone asks, "What kind of church is Calvary?" You can answer with these values. Calvary Christian Reformed Church is "let's say together"

- "Christ-centered"
- "Bible-believing"
- "Gospel-motivated"
- "Community-building"

Today, we will focus on how and why Calvary Christian Reformed Church is Christ-centered. Romans 1:1-7 is centered on Christ and teaches us about who Christ is...

The gospel of God is centered on Christ.

Christ is the Messiah who was prophesied hundreds of years before his birth.

Christ is fully man as a descendant of David.

Christ is fully God as the Son of God.

Christ resurrected from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit.

It is through Christ that we receive grace.

It is through faith in Christ that our obedience flows.

It is the name of Christ that we have been commissioned to spread among all the Gentiles, or in other words, to all the ethnicities of the world.

Christ is the person we belong to.

Christ fills us with peace.

Christ is the Lord of our lives.

Calvary Church is Christ-centered because the gospel of God is centered on Christ.

The gospel of God is not a what, but a who. It's not a concept to be grasped, or rules to follow, or a made up story, but the gospel is a person, that person is Jesus the Christ, the Messiah, the Savior. It's all about him, not us. The Christian faith is all about a person and our relationship with that person. If Jesus is not who the Bible says he is, if Jesus doesn't exist, or if he did and he died and did not rise from the dead, we are wasting our time. But if we really believe what we really believe, that Jesus is who he is and did what he did, than we are fulfilling our purpose in this life by centering our lives on Christ.

The more we think about Jesus, the more we will center our lives on Christ. The more we think about how Jesus is Almighty God, who has been in perfect relationship with God the Father and God the Spirit for all eternity, that all things in heaven and on earth have been made through him and for him. This is a picture of the **Milky Way Galaxy** and a telescope in Chili. This entire galaxy, this vast rotating disk of stars that spans at least 170,000 light years, was made through Christ and for Christ. He willingly humbled himself and became a helpless baby, and grew up facing all the temptations we do but never giving in to sin, that he could have struck down the entire Roman army with 1 word of his mouth, but he was silent like a sheep to the slaughter to take the punishment we deserve, that in victory he rose from the dead, appeared to his disciples, ascended to heaven, and now reigns over all the earth and will one day return with truth and justice and judgment, the more we think about all those truths, the more we will center our lives on Christ. The gravity of Christ's goodness and love and mercy will draw us closer to him. Christ is the center of our universe. Our lives revolve around him.

Each one of us can tell if our lives are centered on Christ based on our relationship with him. Romans 1 describes the type of relationship we should have with Jesus. Verse 5 says "through him we have received grace" which makes him our savior. Verse 4 says Jesus Christ is "our Lord." We owe him our allegiance and our obedience. Jesus Christ is our Savior **AND** Lord.

Many people in the church in America like the Savior relationship, but not the Lord relationship. They like the idea of being forgiven. They like the idea of not feeling bad about their failures. They like the idea of going to heaven. But people often don't take seriously that Jesus is Lord. That's why many people say they are Christians, but deny him by their lifestyle. Jesus said, "If you love me, keep my commands." He is saying, if you really love me, if I am really Lord of your life, if you want to center your life on Christ, then keep my commands." He doesn't say, "Keep the commands you want." Or "keep my commands when you feel like it" or "Keep my commands when it's easy." No, he says, "If you love me, keep my commands."

This is not an easy teaching to follow. It's not easy to sacrifice things we like to do that are sinful! But Jesus said, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."

Now we all know we can't do this perfectly, but it's good for each of us to think about our relationship with Christ.

Is Jesus Lord of your life? Is Jesus Lord of your marriage? Is Jesus Lord of your dating relationship? Is Jesus Lord of your singleness? Is Jesus Lord of your spending habits? Is Jesus Lord of your weekly routine? Is Jesus Lord of your Sunday routine? Is Jesus Lord of your everyday conversations? Is Jesus Lord of your career? Athletics? Is Jesus Lord of your iPhone screen usage? Is Jesus Lord of your eyes, what you look at? Is Jesus Lord of your prayer life? When I think...

Here at Calvary Christian Reformed Church, we want Christ to be the center of our church and that is why we have Christ-centered preaching. I'm hoping you've noticed, but Pastor Nick and I ALWAYS, ALWAYS connect the passage to Christ. You won't come to Calvary and hear a sermon without the name of Jesus Christ being proclaimed.

We do this because we are following the example of Apostle Paul and Jesus himself. Verse 2 says God "promised beforehand through his prophets in the

Holy Scriptures regarding his son." Ultimately, the prophets and the kings are pointing to a Messiah who will deliver God's people from captivity of sin. These sacred writings, these precious books, these valuable documents written over thousands of years, preserved, taught, protected, all testify to the Messiah.

Jesus himself makes the claim. After his resurrection, Jesus appeared to a few discouraged disciples of the road to **Emmaus**. They are bummed because they think this powerful prophet named Jesus of Nazareth has been killed and now someone has stolen his dead body. And Jesus replies, **26** Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" **27** And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

Jesus says all the Prophets and all the Law of Moses points to himself. He is the center of God's redeeming story, and therefore, Christ should be the center of the church.

That is why Paul is writing to the church in Rome. His mission is to instruct these house churches to be Christ-centered. It wasn't easy for the Roman Christians to submit to Jesus as Lord of their lives.

The Christians in **Rome** were living in one of the biggest cities of the world. They were constantly bombarded with pagan religions, with sexual temptations, with gambling on gladiatorial games, with sinful pride, and with cultural rejection. It seems the gospel of Jesus came to Rome because of Pentecost, as Acts 2 includes "visitors from Rome" in the list of people hearing the wonders of God in their own language. They most likely came back home and share the news with the people in their synagogue, which included some Jews and some native Romans known as Gentile "God-fearers." Many people were believing that Jesus was their Savior and Lord. The church was growing so fast that Emperor Claudius removed all the believers from Rome in 49 AD.

The Roman historian Seutonius, in a historical work on the Life of **Claudius**, wrote the emperor “expelled the Jews from Rome because they were constantly rioting at the instigation of Christos.” Scholars aren’t sure what he means by rioting, maybe gathering together for worship, rejecting the pagan Roman gods, or maybe calling for a political change, but this Christ movement was becoming a big deal. This ban was lifted in 54 AD when Claudius died, and soon after is when this letter would have been delivered to the Romans house churches to be read aloud in each congregation throughout the city. Paul was intentional about building up churches in metropolitan centers, so the churches would take responsibility for evangelism in their own areas.

Paul’s hope is that each church would be a Christ-centered church. The message of Romans to all churches today is to be Christ-centered, but sadly many churches are not.

There are many theologically liberal churches right here in the Twin Cities. And when I say theologically liberal, I do not mean politically liberal. In my mind, they are not the same thing. Many churches follow a generic, good feeling religion about doing good things and being a nice person. They sadly reduce Christ to be only a moral teacher or a role model to imitate, not a Savior or a Lord. And many people think this is Christianity. But in reality, this is a different religion entirely. This “cultural Christianity” or this “liberal Christianity” has been a problem in the United States for decades.

J. Greshem Machen, a Presbyterian pastor and professor at Princeton, wrote an important book in 1923 titled *Christianity and Liberalism*. He exposes this theological liberalism disguised as true Christianity. He writes this:

“The modern (theological) liberal finds salvation in making the world a better place by doing good deeds, not liking the wrath of God or someone else bearing his sin, while Christians find salvation by the atoning sacrifice of Jesus through new birth in the Spirit.”

I've talked to many people in the Twin Cities with this theologically liberal worldview. I just talked to someone at the 50th and France Employee Christmas Party about this a few weeks ago. This party was for any business or non-profit employees who have a 50th and France membership. This membership provides us a place at the Edina Art Fair, at Open Streets on 50th, and other outreach events. I was talking to this lady and she asked me where I work and I said, "I'm a pastor at Calvary Christian Reformed Church just down the street." She said, "Oh that's great!" and we talked a bit about Calvary. Then I asked her, "Are you connected to a church?" And she replied, "Kinda, not really. I think life is about doing the right thing ya know, being a good person." That was her philosophy on life. She was content in living her life with that goal "to be a good person."

I think that philosophy, that liberal Christianity that is being taught in so many churches, is one of the most dangerous deceptions of our time. It's dangerous because it seems so simple and so good. How can you argue with that? Be a good person? But so many people stop at that, not going any deeper. I wanted to ask, What about evil? What about your evil? What's the solution for that? How did this world begin? How will this world end? What happens after death? All questions that most people don't really have good answers for.

We find all the truth we need about God and about ourselves in Christ. We strive to be Christ-centered people in a Christ-centered church because as Romans 1:6 says, we are "called to belong to Jesus Christ." We are centered on Christ because we belong to Christ. And as the last verse of our passage says, we are loved by God. Think about that for a sec. The God-man, the Messiah, the one who did all the stuff I just talked about, knows us by name and loves us more than we can ever imagine. That is another reason why we are a Christ-centered church.

Thanks be to God. Let's pray.

