

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)

Romans 1:1

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the bible again. Starting this week and continuing through the end of the year, we will be studying the Book of Romans—at a pace of roughly one chapter every two weeks. Today, we begin with Romans chapter 1, verse 1.

We have just finished studying the Song of Songs, which is a book that describes the growth of a believer's life entirely from the perspective of experience. The Lord uses four calls to depict four stages of life growth. It begins with the call of love, which stirs us to love the Lord and to follow Him; then, in the call of resurrection, we experience the work of the cross; next, in the call of ascension, we see the nature of spiritual warfare; and finally, in the call of humility, we develop a stature that matches the Lord, joining the ranks of the overcomers, awaiting Christ's return to marry the church as His bride.

After the Song of Songs, the Lord is now leading us to study the Book of Romans. Romans and the Song of Songs correspond to each other—both describe the believer's life journey in following the Lord and growing spiritually. The Song of Songs uses poetic language to describe experience, full of rich imagery, while also leaving room for various interpretations.

Romans, in contrast, is written with precision and clarity. The author, Paul, received a complete Greek education; his thinking was rigorous and his logic sharp. At the same time, he was a student of the greatest rabbi of that era, Gamaliel, and was well-versed in Jewish law and the Old Testament scriptures. Paul uses precise wording and careful logic to describe the believer's journey: from receiving salvation, to life growth, to sanctification and glorification, to the building of the church as the corporate expression of God.

Romans provides a solid doctrinal foundation for the experiential lessons found in the Song of Songs, and the Song of Songs, in turn, becomes the experiential outworking of the teachings of Romans.

The author of Romans, Paul, originally named Saul, was a Jew from the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews. He was born in Tarsus of Cilicia, a renowned center of education. He was a strict and zealous Pharisee, fervent for God's law, persecuting the church and carrying letters from the high priest to arrest those who called upon the name of Jesus. After he received grace, he experienced a complete 180-degree transformation and even became the apostle to the Gentiles. Through three missionary journeys, he established many churches among the Gentiles, and wrote thirteen epistles to encourage the saints, support the churches, and present the truth—earning recognition as "the apostle of faith."

Romans was written around late AD 56 to early AD 57. At that time, Paul was nearing the end of his third missionary journey. He had raised an offering among the Gentile churches to take to Jerusalem to support the poor saints there. Acts 20:2-3 records that Paul stayed in Greece for three months, and it was likely during this time, while residing in the house of Gaius in Corinth, that he wrote Romans. Due to an eye condition, Paul was unable to write the letter himself and dictated it to Tertius, who wrote it down (Romans 16:22-23). Once completed, the letter was entrusted to Phoebe, a deaconess of the church in Cenchrea, to deliver to the church in Rome.

When Paul wrote Romans, he had not yet visited the church in Rome, but he already knew many of the saints there. In chapter 16, when he greets the church, he mentions 25 people by name. The church in Rome was likely established early on. Acts chapter 2 records Peter's first sermon at Pentecost, delivered to Jews from various regions who had come to Jerusalem for the feast. The disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

Acts 2:8-11 specifically lists people from fifteen different places who heard the disciples proclaim the wonderful works of God in their own dialects. Among them were visitors from Rome—both Jews and proselytes. These people witnessed the

glorious birth of the Jerusalem church when 3,000 were saved through Peter's message. Upon returning to Rome, they began to gather, forming the Roman church.

After Stephen's martyrdom, persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and some saints may have fled to Rome. Later, as Paul fulfilled his ministry, some of his co-workers, such as Priscilla and Aquila, also went to Rome. The Roman church likely met in at least three different homes, one of which was the home of Priscilla and Aquila.

Though Paul knew many of the saints in the Roman church, he had never visited them, nor was he fully aware of the practical situation of their church life. On one hand, he felt a warm affection for the church and was burdened to share spiritual gifts to strengthen the saints. On the other hand, not seeing specific problems in their church life allowed him to present the gospel message objectively: from personal salvation and life growth to corporate church building as God's testimony. He recorded this in a systematic, rigorous, logical, and precise manner. This was truly God's special arrangement and a unique grace given to the church, providing the New Testament with such a comprehensive discussion of salvation.

Most of Paul's other letters were written with a specific burden—either to address certain church problems or to encourage the saints toward unity. These issues often prevented Paul from objectively presenting the full scope of salvation as he did in Romans. Thus, Romans is a very special book.

At that time, Paul was about to conclude his third missionary journey, having already traveled throughout the Mediterranean region. He kept in mind Jesus' final commission before His ascension. Acts 1:8 says, "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." In that era, the "end of the earth" was considered to be Spain, west of Rome. Paul hoped to visit the church in Rome first and be sent out by them to carry the gospel to Spain, thereby fulfilling Jesus' commission. The Book of Romans thus became the platform for Paul to present the gospel and seek the Roman church's participation in further gospel outreach.

Throughout church history, Romans has always held an important place. In God's sovereign arrangement, the New Testament was compiled beginning with the four Gospels, introducing Christ; followed by the Book of Acts, showing the establishment of the church; and then Romans as the first epistle. Martin Luther, the catalyst of the Reformation, said that every believer should memorize every word of Romans and treat it as their daily spiritual nourishment. John Calvin, author of Institutes of the Christian Religion, said that anyone who understands Romans has found the key to understanding the whole Bible. The modern theologian J. I. Packer also stated that all the paths in Scripture lead to Romans.

Generally speaking, seminaries devote an entire year to teaching Romans. I hope that over the next six months, all the saints will dedicate themselves to entering into the message of Romans. This investment will become one of the best investments of your life. Before we begin the main text, I would like to take this opportunity to first introduce the structure of the Book of Romans.

The theme of Romans is the full gospel. The gospel is not just about a person believing and receiving salvation, but also includes that person being justified, reconciled to God, becoming holy—the experiential growth of life. Therefore, Romans is often called the believer's gospel book. That is to say, after you know Jesus, believe in Him, and are saved by grace, all the life experiences and growth that you must go through are fully contained in the book of Romans.

I have summarized the message of the 16 chapters of Romans into four sentences:

Sinners, by faith, receive judicial redemption—condemned, yet justified; they experience organic salvation—daily sanctified and ultimately glorified; they understand God's wisdom in election—submitting to His arrangement in mercy; they commit to the church—growing, transforming, maturing to become God's testimony.

If the saints memorize these four sentences, they will be able to remember the main message of the entire book of Romans. At the Chungke Christian Assembly and at Reading Chinese Christian Fellowship, I have spent more than a year with the saints sharing on Romans; in total, there were 40 messages. At the beginning of

each message, we would read these four sentences together, so the saints would know where we were.

First sentence: Sinners, by faith, receive judicial redemption—condemned, yet justified. This includes Romans 1:1–5:11. Among these, 1:1–17 is the introduction of the whole book; 1:18–3:20 speaks of condemnation; 3:21–5:11 speaks of justification. In this section, the word "sins" mostly appears in the plural, referring to the acts of sin.

Second sentence: They experience organic salvation—daily sanctified and ultimately glorified. This is from Romans 5:12–8:39. Among these, 5:12–8:13 speaks of sanctification; 8:14–8:39 speaks of glorification. In this section, "sin" mostly appears in the singular, referring to the sin nature within man.

Third sentence: They understand God's wisdom in election—submitting to His arrangement in mercy. This is from Romans 9:1–11:36. This section unveils the mystery of the gospel: how the gospel began with the house of Israel, then turned to the Gentiles because of Israel's rejection; and before Christ returns, the remnant of Israel will be saved as a whole.

Fourth sentence: They commit to the church—growing, transforming, maturing to become God's testimony. This is from Romans 12:1–16:27. Among these: 12:1–15:13 speaks of the saints offering their bodies as living sacrifices, developing their gifts, participating in service, building up the church, and becoming God's testimony; The final section 15:14–16:27 is the conclusion and greetings.

Verse 1: "Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God."

Paul begins by introducing himself as a bondservant of Jesus Christ. The Greek word for bondservant is *doulos*, which originally means "a bound slave." A more accurate translation would be "slave" or "bondslave"—someone who has sold themselves

and lost their freedom, possessing no rights of their own but wholly owned by their master.

When we become the Lord's bondservants, it is not out of voluntary will, nor are we hired hands, but rather we are purchased by the Lord. Jesus has bought us with His own precious blood; therefore, we no longer belong to ourselves but belong to Him.

As the Lord's bondservants, we should not have our own sovereignty, no personal choices, no freedom to make decisions. This is actually a blessing: when we make decisions ourselves, our flesh tends to take the lead, and we often do things we regret. But if we truly become the Lord's bondservants, the Lord Himself will bear all responsibility—He will supply us, guide us, and lead us. Our only responsibility is to obey. Therefore, the Lord says: "For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." (Matthew 11:30) Because the Lord bears all the responsibility.

Paul says he is a bondservant of Jesus Christ. Paul is very precise with his words. To be Jesus' servant means to be joined to His death. Therefore, Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4:11: "For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake." To be joined to Jesus' death means to experience restriction, rejection, despising, and even being hated. When Jesus served on earth, He served in the form of a man—He is the perfect example for us.

Our restrictions usually arise because we are unable to do certain things due to lack of ability. Jesus was the exact opposite: though He was the Son of God with divine power, He would not act out of His own initiative because He was serving in the form of a man. To be able to do something and choose not to do it is a far greater restriction than simply being unable to do it.

The phrase "in Jesus" connects us to Jesus' humanity, while "in Christ" connects us to the risen Christ. As Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4:14: "Knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus."

Paul introduces himself as a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle. The Greek word for "apostle" is apostolos—the English "apostle" comes from this

word. Apostolos means "the sent one," "an envoy," and often refers not just to one person, but to a team.

When was Paul called to be an apostle? Paul, who once persecuted Christians, has his conversion recorded three times in Acts: First, in Acts 9:1–19: Paul was carrying letters from the high priest, arresting Christians and bringing them to Jerusalem. On the road to Damascus, a great light shone upon him, causing him to fall to the ground. He heard the Lord speaking to him and was struck blind. For three days he could not see, eat, or drink. The Lord sent Ananias to lay hand on Paul so that he could regain his sight.

In Acts 9:15–16, the Lord said to Ananias: "Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake." This was the mission the Lord gave to Paul.

Second, in Acts 22:1–21: many years later, after completing three missionary journeys, Paul was being persecuted in Jerusalem and testified before the Jews. He recounted his conversion and said in Acts 22:21: "Then He said to me, 'Depart, for I will send you far from here to the Gentiles.'" He was called to establish churches among the Gentiles.

Third, in Acts 26:12–18: Paul, having been arrested, testified before King Agrippa: "But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you. I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me."

You can see that each time Paul testified for the Lord, his vision of being called became clearer, and God's commission to him became more defined. Paul says he is Jesus Christ's bondservant, called to be an apostle. Before God, he is a bondservant; before people, he is an apostle. His ministry is to bring God to people,

and then bring mature people to God. Just like parents raising children—it is full of trials, but also full of joy when seeing their children grow and mature according to God's calling. How glorious it is when the children grow into their God-appointed function!

"Separated to the gospel of God"—the Chinese Union Version emphasizes being sent to do something, that is, to preach the gospel of God. Of course, this aspect is present, but in the original text, KJV translates it: "separated unto the gospel of God." The meaning is broader: Paul was set apart unto God's gospel—he was not merely doing something; he himself was set apart and belonged to the gospel.

How can you be set apart unto the gospel? There are four aspects:

1. Your existence must be for the gospel: Where you live, what you wear, what you do—everything is for the sake of the gospel.
2. Your labor is for the gospel: Here "labor" refers to life-related labor—like a mother giving birth. In the process of labor, life is supplied, and through your laboring in others, their life will grow.
3. Your life testimony must bear witness to the gospel.
4. Your very constitution must be shaped by the gospel.

Paul was a person set apart unto the gospel. In Romans 1:1, he says he was separated unto God's gospel; in Romans 1:9, he further calls it the gospel of His Son; and by the end of the book, in Romans 16:25, Paul says, "according to my gospel." It is not that Paul was boasting, but rather that he was entirely constituted with the gospel of God—he had become the gospel.

The Chinese version hesitates to translate it this way and renders it "the gospel which I preach," but according to the original text, KJV translates it exactly as: "according to my gospel." Paul had been so fully constituted with the gospel that he could boldly say: "My gospel is the gospel of the Son of God; it is God's gospel."

The Greek word for gospel is euaggelion, meaning good news, great tidings, or gospel. At that time, the term was often used when a new king ascended the throne, ushering in a new era. The new king would often issue tax reductions or pardons; and an official would ride on a white horse, carrying the king's decree to proclaim this great tiding to all cities.

This gospel is singular—though it contains many riches, it ultimately points to one Person—Jesus. To man, this is good news. I love the translation "great tidings"—like an endless tide of living water, continuously flowing and supplying fresh life to us.

Our experience of the gospel is very broad and very rich—forgiveness, healing, protection, provision, blessing, peace, and more. When Jesus came to earth, after 30 years of ordinary life in Nazareth, He began His public ministry. After being baptized by John, and after being tempted by the devil for forty days and nights in the wilderness, Jesus began His ministry. He returned to Nazareth and, as was His custom, entered the synagogue. That day, He read from Isaiah. Luke 4:18–19 records Jesus' first sermon: "The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD." This is the gospel.

Let us pray together: Lord, thank You. You have led us through our study of the Song of Songs, and in this coming half year, we will read Romans. Romans is the gospel book for Christians, unveiling the truths of spiritual growth and the realities of service in the church. Bless our time in Romans.

Let us truly know what the gospel is. The gospel is not merely about me being saved by grace; it is about my life growing and my service in the church. Help me truly understand the gospel and receive the full benefits of the gospel. Bless my daily Bible reading. I pray in the Holy Name of Jesus Christ.