

Romans 16:17-27

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[0:00] Good evening everyone. I think that is the best Amen I've ever heard in a long time. I've been to Malawi and they love an Amen as well, but that was superb, Alistair. If you have your Bibles, Romans 16 is where we are this evening and we're bringing home this Letter to the Romans.

This series that we've been in for since, it feels like about 1993, I don't know about anyone else, but we've been in here a long time, but it's been fantastic. And it's an absolute joy for me and it's absolute joy for us as a church to finish this letter, this glorious letter.

So Romans chapter 16 and verse 17. And let me pray and let's ask that God would be so gracious and kind to us as we come to his words this evening. Let's pray.

Oh, our gracious Father, you are so, so good to us. And Lord, we ask now as we finish this letter that you would encourage us and that you would equip us and that you would inflame us to take your gospel, the good news about your son, the risen Lord Jesus Christ, to the world.

And this is our prayer that you would help us now because we ask in his name. Amen. So a few weeks ago, I had the privilege of doing a wedding up in Inverness.

[1:23] And I've lived in Scotland my whole life, but I'm really ashamed to say that is the first time I've ever been to the Highlands. First time I've ever been to the Highlands. But it was a thoroughly lovely experience.

Glorious weather. The colours of summer are everywhere. And I've got the view where I'm looking down on the Murray Firth. I think that's what it's called. I looked into it, the Murray Firth. And there is the sun shining on the water.

And it is absolutely glorious. I mean, I feel like I'm in a Visit Scotland video campaign here. It's glorious. And we're staying at this lovely hotel the night before the wedding. And after the rehearsal, we come back to our hotel room.

And it's quite late. So we decide we quite want something to eat. But we can't be bothered going out again. So we're going to eat in the hotel. But at that time of night, we go down to the hotel.

And we discover that the only thing you can eat at that time of night is fine dining. So we thought, well, we're only in Inverness once. So let's go for it. Let's go out and let's go fine dining.

[2:23] So after a while, and I'll get this on the screen for you here because this is good. After a while, I'm studying this menu for a while. I'm studying this menu. And I look and I think, I don't have a clue what half of these things are.

But I'm just going to go for it. And I ordered slow cooked pork belly, pork fillet, fennel puree, rumbledy thumps, bok choy, and all topped with just a glistening of apple cider.

Now, you're probably thinking to yourself two things. Firstly, what is a rumbledy thump? And I'll be honest, I still don't know what a rumbledy thump is. The second question, how does he know that off the top of his head?

And the reason I know that off the top of my head is because it was awesome. It was so good. I mean, my taste buds were having a party like they've never seen before. It was absolutely incredible.

And the reason I knew during the meal that I was having a good time was that because I actually stepped back and I put my fork down just so I could savor it and take it in. Now, I'm from a family of boys.

[3:28] We didn't really do put your fork down. It was more shovel it in. It wasn't as much fine dining as time dining. And if you weren't quick, you didn't eat. So this is the meal. And I'm loving this meal.

And I come to the end of this meal. And at the corner of the plate, I eat up a little bit of pork fillet. And I think I want to finish there. It's where I want to finish. So it goes into my mouth. Awesome. Absolutely incredible. So incredible was it that I turn into this kind of pork fillet, pork belly evangelist. And I start telling everybody that I meet about how amazing this pork fillet was.

Alex, who's sitting across from me from my wife, I'm telling her about how incredible it was. The people I met the next day at the wedding, I'm telling them how incredible it was. My friends and family, I'm telling them how incredible it was.

And here I am tonight. And I'm telling you how incredible this meal was. So this week, I'm in Romans chapter 16. And I'm asking myself, how should I feel?

[4 : 27] How should we feel as a church as we leave this book of Romans? No, how should I feel? But also, what should I do? What should we do as we leave the book of Romans?

I mean, I think if we close it shut tonight and think, oh, that was nice. On it goes the shelf again. I think we've kind of missed it. How should we feel and what should we do as we leave this book of Romans?

It occurred to me this week, it's probably a bit like that meal, isn't it? In fact, I would say that the whole book of Romans has felt a bit like that meal. I mean, there's been times where I've wanted to put down my fork and think, I just want to savor that.

I just want to take that in. I mean, we got to Romans chapter 8, which I think is my favorite chapter in the Bible. I just want to take it in. But the question now as we come to the end and as we take our final bite, our final mouthful, as it were, of this letter, and as the original readers of this letter, as they take their final mouthful, what are they supposed to feel and what are they supposed to do?

And what I want us to see this evening is that as they finish this letter, Paul wants the last taste on their lips to be one of praise.

[5 : 36] Praise. The book of Romans, the letter to the Romans, I should say rather, is meant to inspire doxology. It's meant to inspire, that's a big word meaning just praise of God.

That's what it's meant to inspire. It's meant to inspire praise of God and it's meant to inspire mission. To take this glorious news of Jesus Christ, this gospel, to the whole world.

Because it tastes so good. In other words, God is awesome. And as my mind, as it tries to comprehend how good he is, how gracious he is, as my heart is gripped by grace, oh, I want to worship him with everything that I have.

And I want to tell everybody that I meet about his goodness. Now here's what I want us to see just really quickly this evening as we finish this letter, as we finish our Romans meal, the taste that these readers are left with, and the taste I think we want to be left with, this praise taste, this taste of praise, it's got three flavors to it.

And as they take their final mouthful, as those three flavors, as they hit the palate, they're meant to inspire praise. And Paul wants them to know and go.

[6 : 57] So what Paul is saying is, let the praise of God, let the praise of God propel you to go and proclaim the greatness of God. Now, are you ready for this?

Let's forget about the PowerPoint for a minute, okay? It's a cracker, but we can wait for it. I can do it without it. Here's the first flavor. Now, if you've got it there, look at verses 17 to 20. Verses 17 to 20, the first flavor of this praise taste is the church.

And Paul is saying to them in these verses that the church is the miracle worth fighting for. Now, what is the miracle? Well, scan your eye over the first part of chapter 16, which John so beautifully and helpfully took us through last week.

Now, what do we see? We see Paul give us a long list of names. These are the people who are in this Roman church. And Paul is effectively saying, would you say hello to them for me?

That's what he's saying. Would you greet them? Now, is that just a bunch of names? That's what we were considering last week. Well, no. It is so much more to it than that.

[8 : 06] Just look at these names. Here are Jewish people. Here are the names of Greek people. Here are the names of rich people. Here are the names of poor people. Here are the names of free people.

Here are the names of slaves. Here are female names. Here are male names. Here is a different church. But here is one church.

That is the beauty of what God has done through Jesus Christ. Where the world would look at this group of people and say, where the world would look at this people and say, different and

irreconcilable, Paul wants them to know and Paul wants them to see that because of the gospel, because they have Jesus as their Lord, whoever they are, whatever they do, wherever they are from, their common life in Jesus Christ makes them one.

One. And look, if you've got it there, chapter 15 and verse 5, just flick back one page. Or if you've got a really small Bible, maybe it's half a page. Paul writes this, chapter 15 and verse 5.

May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice, what are they going to do with that one voice?

[9 : 33] Please glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Now you see why we were singing that last song, weren't you? That's why we were singing that last song.

These people God has called together, not just to sip tea and play happy families, but he's called them together with a purpose, to be a worshipping community that's on mission for the living God, declaring his greatness to the watching world.

And as people see that community in action, as they see unity and diversity, what a powerful witness to the transforming power of the gospel to the watching world.

Now I used to live for a few years in Bristol, in the southwest of England. And the thing about Bristol is it's a very multicultural city. For me, I'd spent my whole life in Edinburgh and Glasgow, and a bit in Aberdeen as well, whole life in Scotland.

And so when I came to Bristol, I was amazed about just how many different people were in Bristol. In fact, remember when I moved there, one of the estate agents who I asked to kind of suss it out for me, I lived in this area called Montpellier, which was on the border of St. Paul's, and she told me that it was bohemian and earthy.

[10 : 48] Now I don't know what that means. I think it means it's a bit rough and ready. So this is the area that I lived in. And at the bottom of my street, I had this junction, and I had a Somalian community here.

I had a Jamaican community here. There was an Indian community over here. There was an English community around it all. And then there was a token Scot in the midst as well. So this was what Bristol was like.

And I heard a story when I was down there about one of the local churches in one of these local communities. And one day, the local MP, he'd heard about their work, and he goes to visit one of their Sunday services.

And he walks in, and what does he see? He sees different people, different skin colours, different accents, dressed differently. And what are these different people doing?

Well, they're laughing, and they're smiling, and they're singing, and they're praying, and they're hugging, and they're praising, and they're gathering, and they're doing it all as one.

[11 : 50] And he sees the beauty of unity in diversity. He sees the church. And the story goes something like this. He goes up to one of the leaders of that church, and he remarks, he said, all these years, I've been spending millions of pounds trying to get people from that area to talk to people from that area, let alone live alongside them.

And I come in here, and I see that you do it for free. What does he see? He saw unity in diversity. He saw the beauty of the church.

And so as Paul lays out this list, as he talks about the implications of what God has done for them in and through Christ by creating one new man, in Christ, smashing down all the barriers that kept them apart, he wants to see that that is the miracle worth fighting for.

And so in these verses here, Paul is telling them to do all that they can to protect that miracle for the glory of God. Now, how are they going to protect that miracle?

Well, they're going to do it by protecting and uniting around the gospel message that is brought around the miracle in the first place. Now, remember what Paul had said, Paul's saying, right back at the beginning of this letter, chapter 1, verse 16.

[13 : 12] The power of God. Where is the power of God? It's in the gospel. The Greek word there, *dinamos*, it literally means the explosive power of God. It's to be found in the gospel message.

So you can understand that if you take away, if you start to dilute that gospel message, then you're going to rid the gospel of its power. Because what does Paul envisage is going to happen in these, to this church?

People are going to come into their midst and they're going to try and twist and distort that gospel message. What does he say at verse 17? watch out for these people.

What will they try and do? They will try and cause divisions. They will put up obstacles. They will pitch to you untruths. And they will try and deceive you. And how are they going to do it?

They're going to do it by smooth talk and flattery. Now, we don't know what that deception was. We don't know exactly what it was. But it's not too hard to imagine, is it? A scenario where a church of, you know, devout Jews come along and start teaching this church that, yeah, Paul, he's a nice guy but sometimes he's, you know, gets things messed up and actually you do need to obey the Jewish laws to be a good Christian.

[14 : 25] And you can imagine how something of that would happen. But whatever the teaching is, how are they going to recognize it that it's false? Because it's going to fly in the face of everything that Paul has been outlining in this letter so far.

This is the gospel, says Paul. This is the gospel in Romans. Protect yourselves, protect your church by protecting the gospel message and watch out for one another as you do that.

And so, with danger always on the horizon for this church, what does Paul want them to do? Notice three little phrases. Firstly, at verse 19, what does he say? He talks about your obedience. He's called them at chapter, beginning of chapter 12 to live a life of worship to God.

to make their lives both individually and corporately all about being a living sacrifice and how are they going to do that? Well, they're going to be radical in how they obey.

And he commends them for that. Do you see that in verse 19? He rejoices that he knows that he's heard that these guys have a reputation for being obedient. Saying, no, I'm not going to go my own way.

[15 : 35] I'm not going to just go with the world on this one. I'm going to go with God. I'm going to be radically different here. I'm going to go with God's word and what he's said. I'm going to honour him with my life. And I'm not going to bow like everyone else to what the world says.

It's not an incredible thing if you just pause there for a minute to be known for as a church. Radical obedience. And the thing about everyday obedience is that it's not glamorous, is it?

We're not going to get a call from Peter Jackson the next day after you've been obedient to something and saying, hey, listen, could we make a motion picture, a bio doc about your life and how you've been obedient? We're not going to get that call.

Because that doesn't sell to Hollywood, does it? It's not going to get us book deals. It's not going to get us attention. But here is the encouragement from these verses. That everyday obedience to God and everyday following of his words gets us God's affirmation.

And maybe that's a word for some of us here this morning who are just struggling thinking, am I making a difference? Am I doing anything in this world? Well, here's the thing, that Paul loves their obedience and God loves our obedience.

[16 : 48] You know, I must say I've heard a couple of instances even this week of people in this church making costly decisions, making sacrificial decisions, making gospel decisions because they want to be obedient to the word of God.

And can I just say I find it massively encouraging? And I really do, I find myself rejoicing with Paul on this one. When he sees obedience in the church, you know, I wonder how you're doing with everyday obedience this evening.

You know, are there some decisions right now in your life that you need to make for the glory of God in your life? It's a big challenge to us, isn't it?

Paul rejoices in the obedience of these Christians to the word of God. They are making everyday gospel decisions for the glory of God.

And you see, to spur them on even more, here's the second phrase Paul uses at verse 19. What does he say? He wants them to be wise in what is good. And quickly followed by the third phrase he wants them to be, at verse 19, he wants them to be innocent about what is evil.

[17 : 57] So he wants them to be discerning. That's what he wants them to be. Now what are the encouragements for them as they seek to do that? We'll look at verse 20. Who is on their side? The God of peace.

What encouragement for this church living in a world of chaos and division. They would seek to work its way into the church and infiltrate it. Who is on their side? The God of peace.

And not just that, look where else what he says, and the grace of Jesus Christ. Grace and peace. What is he telling them to do? What is the big point here?

The big point is that God will provide everything that you need. Keep looking to him. Keep running for him because his will be the victory. There's the miracle, says Paul.

The gospel message of Jesus Christ, the power of God that has created this new people. Fight for that. Fight for the miracle of the church.

[18 : 58] Fight for it by fighting for the very gospel message that has brought you together. So there's the first flavor of this last bite of Romans. Flavor of the church.

The second flavor is at verses 21 to 24. And it's mission. Paul is saying to them that here is the mission worth working for.

And here Paul gives us even more names. Loves a name, does her brother Paul. Remember Paul, he's penning this. Or as we'll see in a minute that he's probably dictating this letter from Corinth.

He's over here and he's sending it over to the church in Rome. So in the first half of chapter 16 we learn some names of the people who are in this church in Rome. That is the guys who are going to open this letter and read it for themselves.

Well in this section here we get some names of men who are at this side of the letter. That is Paul's fellow laborers in the gospel. The people who are with Paul.

[20 : 01] The people who are at the Corinth end of the letter. That's what we get. And you see that he lists eight such men. Eight men he lists here. Quickly look with me.

Who does he mention? Timothy. Paul's loved and fellow worker in gospel ministry. Timothy sends his greetings to this church. Lucius, Jason and Sospiter.

I also said that a lot better than me but I've been working on that. That's what I think. These guys most likely relatives of Paul's who he's led to the Lord. They're sending their greetings as well.

Tertius probably a slave who was writing down this letter word for word as Paul's dictating it.

What an amazing privilege by the way for Tertius. He's sending his greetings. Gaius, probably a prosperous businessman who lives in Corinth who's leading one of the house churches or certainly opening his home for one of the house churches and being a host to the apostle Paul.

He sends his greetings. And Erastus, the city treasurer who's trusted in Christ, this man of honor, this man of position, he sends his greetings as well.

[21 : 11] Paul wants them to know about these eight men. Now the real gold here is not in so much as what these men do, although that is important.

The real gold here is noticing why Paul bothers to mention them. Why does he mention them? Now every time Paul mentions names in his letters, he's doing it with a purpose.

Because letter writing in this culture, very timely, time consuming I should say, and really expensive. So you do not waste your words. So Paul is deliberately mentioning these men here.

Why is he doing that? Why does Paul want these guys in Rome to know about these guys who are laboring with him in Corinth over here? Why does he do it? Answer for their encouragement and for their inspiration.

Here are eight men, says Paul. Different men, different gifts, different resources, different circumstances. And what have they done? They have all bought in to the mission.

[22 : 09] They've all bought in to the mission. And what's the mission? The mission is to take the gospel, the story of God's salvation, the story of how God has made a way for sinful men and women to be reconciled to him and live and enjoy him forever through Jesus Christ.

Take that gospel to the ends of the earth. Take it to your whole world. Take it to your circles. That's the mission. That's the mission.

And here are eight men who have bought into that mission and who are working hard along with Paul and using whatever they have, whatever they have for that mission.

Just think about a few of them really quickly. Tertius sacrificing his time to help Paul write this letter. Now, is Paul having difficulty writing at this point?

Is Tertius helping him translate this letter into Latin so that it can be understood by people at the other side, perhaps? But whatever it is, do you see how Tertius is giving up his time, listening to Paul, writing it all down and using his skills to write this letter?

[23 : 23] Why is he doing that? Because he buys into the mission. Gaius, this wealthy man who we read about at the beginning of 1 Corinthians, he's baptized by Paul.

What is he doing with his resources? Is he living the high life? Has he got a speedboat and a house in the south of Spain? No, he's not. What is he doing? He's hosting a church.

And he's using what God has given him for the furtherance of God's kingdom. And why does he do it? He does it because Gaius has bought into the mission.

And Erastus, this man of high position, is he seeking to climb the career ladder? No, he's not. He's seeking to live for the glory of God and telling others about him in the place where he works.

And why does Erastus do it? He does it because he's bought into the mission. Here are eight men who have bought into the mission.

[24 : 26] Here are eight men who are working hard for the mission. Here are eight men who are spending themselves for the mission to take the gospel across the globe.

And why are they doing that? Because their hearts have been so utterly gripped by the greatness and sheer brilliance of the person and their savior, Jesus Christ.

And you see how that praise of God has propelled them to go and work hard for the gospel and proclaim the gospel, live for Jesus Christ. You know, it was William Tyndale, the man probably most famous for translating the Bible into English at some point in his life.

And it was really hard to do so. And he was burnt at the stake because he did it. He said this. He said, Evangelion is a Greek word signifying good, merry, glad, and joyful news.

And it makes a man's heart glad. And it makes him sing. And it makes him dance. And it makes him leap for joy. Question. Does the gospel make you, does the gospel make me sing and dance and leap for joy?

[25 : 43] Has Jesus gripped our souls? Have we bought and do we cherish and do we love the gospel of Jesus Christ? And have we bought into the mission that Paul lays out here to take the gospel to the world?

Are you using your time for that mission? Are you using your resources for that mission? Are you using your job and position that God has given you for that mission?

And I was reacquainted with the story of the English cricketer C.T. Studd this week. That's the guy on the screen. Just to put you out your misery there. That's who that guy is. I'd heard the story before about C.T.

Studd, but I maybe just hadn't appreciated just how good a cricketer he was. He wasn't just a good cricketer. I mean, we're talking about a seriously talented and highly acclaimed man who played for England.

I mean, he's got to be good, I think, to play for England. But in any event, he becomes a Christian and he gives up his cricket career and he goes on to become a highly devoted missionary and he's taken the gospel to places like China and India.

[26 : 54] Incidentally, you can have this one for free. There's a great biography of him by Norman Grub. You can get it for really cheap on Kindle just now. That's for free. But there it is. But we have to ask ourselves, why would C.T.

Studd give up his cricket career to go and share the gospel with those in far-flung lands? Well, here is what he said as he thought about his life and as he thought about what he should do with his life after he became a Christian.

Now, this is great. Listen to this. He's recorded as saying this. How could I spend the best hours of my life in working for myself and for the honors and pleasures of this world when thousands of souls are perishing without having heard about Jesus Christ?

The best hours of his life. And he would later go on to write the poem that's cherished by so many. The poem with these words, Oh, let my love with fervor burn. And from the world now let me turn. Living for thee and thee alone. Bringing thee pleasure on thy throne.

[28 : 02] Only one life. It will soon be passed. Only what's done for Christ will last. That is inspiring stuff, isn't it?

I find that massively challenging as I think about my life. You think, I think about Moses in Psalm 90. What does he say? He says, Lord, teach us to number our years, number our days.

What are we doing with our days on this earth? Have we bought into this mission? Here's a man.

Here's men in this letter, but here's a man C.T. Studd who is bought into this mission and living his life for the glory of God and expending himself for the mission of God to take the gospel around the world.

But it's an example, isn't it, of what happens when the gospel of grace grips us and is the person of Jesus Christ as he thrills us. And it produces in us, doesn't it, that deep sense of wonder and awe and worship and praise and that deep sense of obligation and debt and it propels us to mission. Here are eight men, says Paul. Different men, different gifts, different resources, but who are using whatever they've got, whatever God has given them for this mission.

[29 : 20] Now, of course, this guy Paul, isn't he? He's already outlined in this letter that praise has propelled him to travel around Asia Minor proclaiming the gospel. What is his desire? We saw at the beginning of chapter 15.

He wants to go to Spain. I mean, this is not a guy who, like, lacks godly ambition, is it? Or that I would have the mindset of Paul, that I want to go to everywhere in my circles and spread the gospel.

Paul says here, as he finishes this book of letter of Romans, here is the mission worth working for. And that's the second flavor of the last bit of Romans.

Here's the third one. And we'll find it in verses 25 to 27. And it's of God's glory. Paul says here is the message worth living for.

So do you see how Paul finishes his letter by lifting their gaze to the greatness of God, the God who has made this whole salvation venture possible.

[30 : 20] And he tells them again that salvation, this plan that God has had since the beginning of time to bring sinful men and women to himself, that they can be saved through Jesus Christ, that they can be made one with God, this is the God who has made this all possible.

It's not us who have made this possible. It is God who has made this possible. And notice in passing how Paul describes God here. Verse 25. As the one who is able to establish them.

As if to remind them that the God who saved them is the God who is able to hold them and keep them. And the God who is able to see them home. Is this mission terrifying?

It is absolutely terrifying. What is the comfort in this mission? That the power is from God and it is God who's holding us. This is all of him. He is the one who commanded this whole salvation thing. Do you notice that in verse 26? He is the eternal God. He is the only wise God. Salvation from beginning to end is the plan of the eternal God.

[31 : 29] His plan since the beginning of time to win a people for himself. A plan centering on Jesus Christ, heaven's reigning king. The eternal son of God. God sent from heaven's courts to rescue sinful men and women from their sin.

He would give his life on the cross to win that people. A people from all around the world and win them to himself in order that they might sing his praises. And with one voice live for and glorify the God who has saved them.

That's the message. That's the message. What does Paul do with this message? Verse 25. He proclaims it. He proclaims it.

And you can't help this. Maybe this was just me. But you can't help but read these verses. I read them this week and I could hear Paul's voice in the back of my head. And what was he saying? He was saying, join me.

Join me. Give your life for this mission. There is nothing that compares with giving your life for this mission. Join me. Join me in making much of Jesus Christ.

[32 : 34] Join me in making Jesus Christ known to the lost world. To a lost world that desperately needs to hear about him. For you see, the greatest man that ever lived.

He calls us to join him in the greatest mission that the world will ever know. Here is Jesus Christ. That's what Romans says, isn't it? As we come to finish.

It's a call to know and it's a call to go. To go and proclaim. To take this incredible message to the far-flung corners of the earth. Yes. But to take it to our streets.

And to take it to our offices. And to take it to our sports teams. And to take it to our families. And to take it to our friends. And to take it to anywhere else that you find yourself.

To make Jesus known. To make him great. And to bring. God would use us to bring men and women to faith in him. So the question as we leave the letter to the Romans is.

[33 : 37] Will we go? Will we go? Will we be God's people who are captivated by praise and who go and proclaim? So there it is.

The last bite of Romans 16. The miracle worth fighting for. The mission worth working for. The message worth living for. And let me close just by reading the chorus of the song that we're about to

stand and sing.

Which I think so beautifully ends the book of Romans. You can almost say it's a theme song for the whole book of Romans. And it's this. All glory be to Christ our King.

All glory be to Christ. His rule and reign we will ever sing. All glory be to Christ. And how does Paul end this letter?

Alistair led us in it earlier. Let's end there. We'll say it together. How does Paul end this letter? Amen. Let me pray. Oh our gracious Father.

[34 : 39] We thank you. Thank you for your word. Thank you for the letter of Romans. Thank you that we have it in our own language.

Thank you that it tells us about your greatness. And the extent that you have gone to to make us yours. And as we close our time together in it tonight.

I ask gracious Father that its message would continue to be fuel for mission. Oh would the person of Jesus Christ. His work.

His death. His resurrection. May that continue to thrill our hearts. And may that praise of him propel us to go and proclaim.

Oh would you help us to live for you and your glory this week we ask by your spirit. To be those who proclaim your glorious message to this lost and broken world.

[35 : 37] Oh our gracious Father we thank you for our time this evening. And we pray these things in the glorious name of Jesus. Amen.