

Gospel Centered: Challenge for 2022
Romans 1:8-17

INTRODUCTION:

Good morning, Trinity! And Happy New Year! This morning we want to set aside some time to pray. As we look forward to what 2022 will bring, or maybe you are looking with anxiety based on the craziness of the previous years. Either way, we thought it would be appropriate to spend some time in corporate prayer.

So, I want to invite you, as you are willing and able, to posture yourself for a time of prayer. Now, that may look like kneeling there at your seat, it may look like holding your hands out as a symbol of not only speaking to the Lord but desiring to hear from Him. Maybe you want to come and kneel at the altar here this morning. Whatever it may look like for you, I want you to know that there is freedom in this place for this time.

I'm going to mention some categories that we can be praying for. And I invite you to pray audibly or silently, whatever your comfort level, for those things. I will then voice a corporate prayer as we close our prayer time together. So, let's posture ourselves for a time of prayer.

Psalm 103:2 says, *"Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits."* So, this morning, I want us to begin by remembering all God's benefits toward us by thanking Him for all He's done. Bless the Lord by praising Him for what He was done in your life and in the life of our church...

Ask God to move in power in and through His Church around the world. That 2022 would be a year in which the people of God magnify His name afresh...

Ask God to speak to our hearts this morning. As we look into His Word that the words on the page would leap off the page and lodge in our hearts...

Father, we gather together this morning acknowledging that today is the day that The Lord has made. It is our heart's desire to rejoice and be glad in it. We are indeed grateful for the evidence of Your hand in our lives and in our church. We beg you, Lord God, to keep Your hand upon us. To lead us, guide us by the power of The Holy Spirit, and to give direction to us. Father, I pray that as we open Your Word this morning that it would serve to challenge us and to

strengthen us. We surrender our lives to you this morning. We know that You have been at work in the lives of our brothers and sisters across the globe already and we ask that Your Spirit would not pass us by. We desire to lift high the banner of Jesus and trust that in doing that You will build your Church and you will draw people to Yourself. Thank you, Lord, for the time of worship we have enjoyed and thank you in advance for how you will challenge us this morning. For it is in Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Thank you for your prayers this morning. You know, nothing significant happens apart from prayer.

INTRODUCTION:

For those of you that are guests, my name is Chris Wigley, and I serve as one of the Pastors here at Trinity. And whether you are in the room or you are joining us online, we are thrilled to have you today. And on behalf of our church family, and our staff team, we welcome you.

We would love to connect with you. If you would, simply text the keyword, "TBCMP," that stands for Trinity Baptist Church Mt. Pleasant, to the number 94-000. You will then be prompted to click on a link that will provide us with basic contact information to follow up with you. And here's our promise to you... we promise not to bombard your inbox. Again, we would love the opportunity to connect with you and to pray for you.

If you were here last week, you had the privilege of hearing our Student Minister, Carlos Martinez preach. How many of you are grateful for Carlos for a great word last week?

Now, I noticed that he only preached for like 25 minutes and I believe you guys got out a little before noon. So, I figure that I have some extra time this morning to use. Just kidding.

Today I am going to work through a message that I hope challenges us as a church. I want us to take a look at what it means to be gospel-centered. And I want to spend a little time talking through how we are going to do that this spring.

So, I want to invite you to turn with me to the book of Romans. We are going to be in chapter 1 and verses 1-17 this morning.

Now, if you do not have a bible with you this morning, there is a bible located in the seat rack in front of you. And if you do not own a bible, we want that bible to be our gift to you. Those bibles were donated to us, and we would like to pass that donation on to you. Romans chapter 1 and we look at a Gospel-centered community.

MESSAGE:

The first thing that I want to point out is...

1) The Power of Thankfulness

After spending some time greeting the Church in Rome, Paul begins verse 8 with an expression of thankfulness for what God has done. Let's read it together.

⁸ First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world.

Paul says the first thing he wants to share with the Church in Rome is his thankfulness for them. You know, there is power in expressing thanks. Not only it is encouraging to the one expressing thanks, but it is encouraging to those in which you are grateful.

ILLUSTRATION: Thank you Notes

You know, there is just something to receiving a thank you note. I know it tends to be a lost art in our day and time, but when someone takes the time to hand write a note to just say thank you, there is something powerful and encouraging about that.

I also think it is a good practice beyond curtesy. When we acknowledge that we have reason to be thankful, we are reminded of the generosity and kindness of others and that often allows us to recognize that we are known and loved. There is powerful in thankfulness.

When I think about how Paul begins this passage by thanking the church in Rome, it is a verse that I feel like I can, from my heart, say to you, Church Family. This verse, "I thank my God," is also echoed in Philippians 1:3. ***"I thank my God in all my remembrance of you."*** Paul was thankful for the Churches he partnered with in ministry. And Trinity, I am grateful to God for you for many reasons.

I am thankful for your love and support for me and my family. I know other pastors that do not feel that love and support from the church they serve. And I can't relate. My family and I have been blessed by you over the past three years. You have loved us well and I say, "I thank my God for you."

I am thankful for your heart for ministry. I have personally observed how you have surrounded the hurting in our community. You have responded to those in crisis. Even those halfway across the world that you will never know this side of Heaven, you have loved wholeheartedly. I thank my God for you.

I am thankful for how you serve. One thing I hear in our community is how awesome our kids and student ministries are. And while we have incredible staff, it is not possible without the volunteers that make it happen. You love on every kid that comes through our doors with the very love of Jesus. You serve selflessly. I thank my God for you.

I am also thankful for your generosity. If there is one thing that can be said of the people of Trinity Baptist Church, it is that you live openhandedly. Just as an example, in 2021, you gave \$1,052,515 dollars to our budget. That is simply amazing! That is a 5 year high for our church! In times of uncertainty, you have been, and continue to be, a generous people. God is using you in profound ways. You are motivated by the example of the giving of God in the most precious gift ever given, His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sin. Because of your generosity, our ministries have moved forward this past year and people all over the globe have benefited.

You know, when we give, we don't give to a church, we give through a church. We are not a bank. We are a church. Dollars given to Trinity are not held here. Yes, we are wise in our expenditures, our Stewardship Team helps us with that. But when you give your gifts, they are then disbursed in ministry efforts locally and globally. We don't give to a church; we give through a church. And we join in God's activity in the world. I thank my God for you.

And in verse 8, Paul is very specific as to why he is thankful for the Church in Rome. Look at the verse again. ***⁸ First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world.*** The Church in Rome was world renown for their faith. In other words, the whole world was aware of their faith.

Did you know that is also true of you? There is a catalogue of Mission partners that would testify to that. By the way, if you have not read through the Missions Catalogue that our Missions Team worked to put together, you need to. I promise you will be blown away by the work that you are helping to accomplish around the world.

In fact, I want to show you a map of the areas in which you touched in 2021. **[Show World Map Graphic]**. There are other areas beyond these highlighted by contributions to the SBC's Cooperative Program. By way of sending a team on a mission trip, local engagement, serving on our campus, online church, church growth, and by giving to worldwide ministry partners, your faith is proclaimed in all the world. And this is just a beginning.

One of the things that I am most proud of in our 2022 budget is the increase in missions. This year, we plan to spend \$100,000 in mission initiatives. I thank my God because your faith is being proclaimed in all the world.

So, we see how a Gospel-centered community is powered by thankfulness. Secondly, we see in Paul's opening here...

2) The Power of a Gospel-centered Community

Look at verses 9 through 15. *⁹For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you ¹⁰**always in my prayers**, asking that somehow by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you. ¹¹For **I long to see you**, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you—¹²that is, that we may be **mutually encouraged by each other's faith**, both yours and mine. ¹³I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some harvest among you as well as among the rest of the Gentiles.¹⁴I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. ¹⁵So **I am eager to preach the gospel to you** also who are in Rome.*

There are several things we see about a gospel-centered community of believers in this passage. The first thing we see is the constant and consistent lifting of one another in prayer. Paul says he mentions the fellow believers, "always in prayer." We need to be a community that lifts each other up in prayer.

And notice something here. Paul is lifting these brothers and sisters in Christ up in prayer in light of his thanksgiving for them. In other words, he's not just praying for them when crisis hits; he is praying for them even when crisis is not at the forefront. You know, I am often good at praying for people in the midst of crisis, but what about making the praying of others normative outside of crisis?

Can we commit to one another to lift each other up in prayer in 2022? As names and faces of this congregation pop into your head, or even when you encounter them, pray for the strengthening of their faith. Wouldn't it be cool if all over this campus on Sunday mornings people huddled up in prayer? Wouldn't it be a powerful expression of the unity we share in Christ? Wouldn't that serve to bolster the faith of our congregation? Well, let me just give us the freedom to do that! Let's pray for one another always.

ILLUSTRATION: Praying for me

A church member on Sunday mornings, before the service starts, has pulled me aside and prayed a prayer like this, "Father, I lift up to you my Pastor today. I pray that you would encourage him and give him the words to say to your people. Strengthen him. I thank you for him. In Jesus name."

Can I tell you something? That is like rocket fuel to me. And I know it would be you as well. Let's be a people that are committed to praying for one another.

What else do we see in this passage about a gospel-centered community? Verse 11 says, "I long to see you." A longing to see one another and to be with one another is a powerful tool.

There is also the sharing of spiritual gifts. Paul says in verse 11 and 12 that he desires to impart, or utilize, a spiritual gift The Lord has given him. He also anticipates that the believers in Rome also have a spiritual gifts that will be of benefit to him. A gospel-centered community is one that is defined by a mutual strengthening of faith because of the utilization of spiritual gifts.

There's also preaching the gospel in a gospel-centered community. Verse 15.

Now, this is huge! Follow me for a minute. Who it is that Paul is writing to? Believers! People that were saved and belonging to the Church of Jesus at Rome. And it is to those people that he is eager to preach the gospel. Here's the principle. **The gospel is not just for the unsaved.** The gospel is

necessary for the saved. We must always live by the power of the gospel in our lives.

Listen, I need the gospel now just as much as I did before I trusted Jesus as Lord and Savior! I need to be reminded of God's love for me, even in the midst of my sinfulness. I need to be reminded that apart from the power of the gospel, I cannot walk according to the Spirit. I am always reminded of my flaws and failures, but I also must be reminded that I can find victory in Christ. My insecurities speak loud, and try to define me, but I need to know who my identity is in Christ! I need the preaching of God's Word to convict me in areas of sinfulness so that I can repent, know that there is forgiveness and power to walk in a new way. A gospel-centered community doesn't shy away from sin, it preaches sin, but also redemption and restoration in the person and work of Jesus Christ! Why? Because that's the gospel. That's the good news! In a world filled with bad news, why not proclaim the good news of Christ Jesus?!

Paul was eager to preach the gospel to even the believers because of the power contained in it.

What else do we get to see about this gospel-centered community? Verse 13 talks about reaping a harvest. When we preach the gospel, when we teach God's Word, we ought to expect people to respond.

Beloved, the answer to the world's problems is found in hope that only comes by way of a personal relationship with Jesus. The world is so lost, it doesn't even know it's lost. And if we love God, then we love what He loves. And God so loves the world. Which is why we must love the world in such a way that we tell them about their sin, and not only tell them about their sin, but where love, forgiveness, restoration, purpose, and fulfillment can be found. Good news!

The vision of our very church is rooted in this understanding. I want us to look at our vision statement again. It's good to keep this before us. We exist to become a gospel-centered community (there it is), redeeming brokenness through hope in Jesus Christ. Now, let's say it together as if we are proclaiming it to the world! Ready? We exist to become a gospel-centered community redeeming brokenness through hope in Jesus Christ! AMEN!

This begs the question, "How do we become that kind of gospel-centered community?" Three ways. First, ...

A) Worship Together

Look at verse 11. "¹¹ For I long to see you." The Gospel-centered community in Rome **longed to see one another**. They longed to gather corporately and worship The Lord together. But it was a challenge for them, just as it is a challenge for us today. The early church often gathered together under the threat of their lives. Yet, even in that environment, they longed to see one another.

It is my heart's desire to see a people at Trinity that long to gather together in worship. Long to see and greet one another. I know there are health concerns and you and I need to be wise, but is there a longing in our hearts to gather with the people of God?

Let me give you a reason why you need to make being a part of worship this spring a priority. Starting next week, we will begin a series of sermons where we will work our way through the Old Testament book of Daniel. **[Show Daniel Graphic]** It is a remarkable book. It is a story of faithfulness being surrounded by unfaithfulness. It is a story about godly living in an ungodly world. We need to be Daniels. We need to be courageous and committed to living according to God's Word and not compromising truth for culture's desires.

A Gospel-centered community worships together and secondly, ...

B) Participate in a Group

In verse 12, Paul says, "*that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine.*" The way we mutually encourage one another is by getting connected and committed to a group. It is in the context of a Bible Study Group that we are known and loved and challenged and cared for. It is in a group that we discuss the Scriptures and by so doing strengthen one another's faith. It is vitally important to your spiritual growth, and mine, that we participate in a group.

The greatest hour of my week is Sunday nights at 5:30pm. That's when I meet with the group that Cathy and I are a part of. Did you know that our entire staff is involved in a group? Do you know why? Because everyone needs a group.

We are committed to increasing the number and opportunities to get connected in a group. We have groups that meet on Sunday mornings, Sunday evenings, Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays. We have groups for newly weds,

groups for parents of preschoolers, parents of kids, parents of teens. We have groups for single ladies. We have multi-generational groups. I promise you we have a group for you. And if we don't, we will start one.

And we want to make it as easy as possible for you to get connected in a group. Today and next Sunday, we have a group fair going on in the Lobby area. Stop by today and pray through which group you are going to give a try.

Let me give you a little advice. Finding the right group is like finding the right pair of shoes. You have to wear the shoe for a little bit before you make the purchase. Identify a couple groups that interest you, give one of them a 30-day challenge, attend that group for a month. And if at the end of that time, the group doesn't fit you, try the other! But if I was a betting man, I think by the end of that 30 days you are going to see the benefits of being a part of a group.

We become a gospel-centered community when we worship together, when we participate in a group, and when we...

C) Go on Mission

Look at verse 15. ¹⁵ *So **I am eager to preach the gospel to you** also who are in Rome.* A gospel-centered community preaches the gospel everywhere they go. And this is Jesus' desire for His followers. In Matthew 28:19-20, Jesus gives what is known as the Great Commission. ¹⁹ *Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,* ²⁰ *teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."*

There are three ways we live on mission. On our campus, in the city, and around the world. We live on mission on our church campus by serving in a ministry area. If you're not serving, you're not utilizing your spiritual gifting. In the city when we serve along our group and when we are at work and at play. And finally, around the world when we join in on a mission trip.

Get ready, this year we are planning to go back to Honduras. We are also exploring other international opportunities. Some of you need to go ahead and get your passport because God is going to call you to serve on an international trip.

Listen, we do not define our success as a church by how many people gather in worship. We define success by how many people we send out as the Church.

So, we've looked at The power of thankfulness and the power of a gospel-centered community. Now, in the time we have left, let's look at...

3) The Power of Being Unashamed

Look at verses 16 and 17 of Romans 1. ¹⁶ *For **I am not ashamed** of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.* ¹⁷ *For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."*

Paul is not ashamed of the gospel. But noticed why. It is the power of God for salvation. When we live lives where we are not ashamed of the gospel, where we readily share the gospel with others, we will see the power of God at work.

Every time I have the privilege of leading someone to The Lord, I am amazed. Truly, it blows me away. Because I can stand up here and deliver a sermon that I know stinks. Yet someone comes forward to give their life to Christ. Tell me that's not the power of God.

I think sometimes we think we can't share the gospel because we don't have the right words. Listen, the power of the gospel lies not in your words. The power of the gospel rests solely on God. It is God that stirs. It is The Holy Spirit that convicts. It is the sacrifice of Jesus that draws one to Him. You and I don't have the ability to save. Only God does. And when His gospel is shared, He works.

What is the gospel? One verse. Romans 6:23. ²³ *For the wages of sin is death,* [what we earn because of our sin is eternal punishment in a real place called Hell], *but the free gift of God* [the free, underserved, gift of the atoning sacrifice of Jesus who died in our place], *is eternal life* [how do you get this eternal life?] *in Christ Jesus our Lord.* That's the gospel.

CONCLUSION:

I've talked enough. I'm going to invite the band to come back up and lead us in a time of response. 1) Faith in Jesus as Lord, 2) Prayer concern, 3) Surrendering to the call of God on your life.