

## Romans, Part 3 4-24-22

### *A Call to Be Called*

Romans 1:1-7 *Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God,<sup>2</sup> which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures,<sup>3</sup> concerning His Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh,<sup>4</sup> who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord,<sup>5</sup> through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for His name's sake,<sup>6</sup> among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ;<sup>7</sup> to all who are beloved of God in Rome, called as saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.* Our focus this morning will be on the last three verses we just read – verses 5-7 of Romans 1. There are a number of words repeated in these three verses that are of importance. The name of Jesus gets in there twice. Grace is mentioned twice as well. But there is another term found twice that most American believers, I find, are not as familiar with – but we should be. That is the word *called*. The term is there in verse one as well, where Paul says he is called as an apostle; but, in our key verses, Paul says the Roman believers are also the called of Jesus Christ, and then a few words later there it is again – *called as saints*. So, this morning, I would have us open up this important New Testament concept of calling. We will see that it is one that speaks to our sense of identity, our understanding of who we are as followers of this Jesus.

First, however, let's together walk down a couple of side-roads that also speak to issues of our identity. These are in verse 7 where Paul is addressing the believers in Rome, but, by extension, all of us who love the Lord. And how he describes us should shape our identity. He says that believers are *beloved of God*. Loved by God. Isn't that fantastic? Who are you? American? Male? Female? Trans? Mom? Engineer? Pittsburgher? God's word says we are the beloved of God. Let's get T-shirts announcing that. If you read the gospel of John you find out that the apostle who wrote that book never refers to himself as *John*, or even as "I" – instead his self-designation is *the disciple whom Jesus loved*. He doesn't call himself the disciple who loved Jesus, but the disciple Jesus loved. To John, that was the more important thing. And, I don't think he means that Jesus loved only him although you could imagine the other disciples being slightly annoyed with John over this. But, for John, this matter of being the recipient of Christ's love was such an overwhelming, major reality that it just eclipsed everything else. Who is

John? Not the great author and historian, not the brother of James and the son of Zebedee. What seems of greatest weight to John is that Jesus loved him.

For you and for me, this same redemptive reality had best be at the core of our self-image, of our identity. If you want to walk in gospel joy, let this sink in for you – you are loved by God. In a sense, Romans is an exposition of that idea as Paul spells out how God has loved us, but here he just states it briefly and simply. But the idea is just huge and is why I will often pronounce as our benediction this line – *May you go in the awareness, that the central, greatest and most significant reality in your life is the love of Jesus the King.* I say that because of little bible verses like this and because I have come to see how psychologically critical it is that we walk in this identity - *the beloved of God.*

Then next, he says you are called to be *saints*. Maybe that goes on our T-shirt too. Beloved Saint. Some would think you are rather full of yourself to take that title, but we are only agreeing with God's word here. We are saints – not meaning by such that we are super spiritual, that we are holier than most, but simply that God has called us out of this corrupt world, brought us into his kingdom and has begun to transform our thinking and behaving. Saint means “holy one” and “set apart.” We are made holy by the merits of Jesus imputed to us. We are made holy by the Spirit of God who gives us a new life and a changed heart. We are set apart to join with the church in glorifying Jesus and fulfilling His call. And should this really be our identity? Oh my, yes. Oddly enough, if we grasp it rightly, if we understand this is all of grace we are humbled by our status not puffed up. But oh, is this liberating. We are free from having to “make it.” We are already beloved saints. We are free from having to impress others. God already calls us His beloved – what is there left for a human to offer us or take from us? Very, very little. I mean, really now - you are beloved saint. Wow! Turn to each other and say that right now – Just give your neighbor one of these and say, “wow.”

So now we turn to our main consideration for today. It is also about our identity as those who are the called of the Lord. We will spend the rest of our time on this idea which is a major theme in your New Testament. Paul uses the language of calling throughout his letters. One example – Ephesians 4:1 *Walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called.* In Romans 8:30 he says that those the Lord predestined He also called. Jude does the same thing in his letter. Jude 1: 1 *Jude, a bond-servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to those who are the called, beloved in God the Father, and kept for Jesus Christ.* There you get the beloved emphasis as well as the focus on being called. Revelation 17:14 *The*

*Lamb will overcome because He is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those who are with Him are the called and chosen and faithful.* So now we get another T-shirt – Called, Chosen, Faithful. Our text in Romans gives us more about this calling. Verse 6 says we are the called of Christ Jesus. And verse 7 says we are called as saints.

Let's break down this idea of calling by looking at it under four headings. We begin by seeing the compulsion of the called. The compulsion of the called. Here we note that the word "called" is a passive form of the verb. It implies a caller, a source of the calling. Our text says plainly that the caller is Jesus. He is the one who roamed Palestine saying to certain individuals, "follow me." He called them to Himself, to be his disciple and they responded, which leads the curious to ask, "did the disciples choose to follow or were they compelled?" It is sort of like asking, "did they enlist or get drafted?" At first glance, it appears they were drafted. We are not told that any of the disciples applied for a position. Jesus just sovereignly and unilaterally chose them. In John 15:16 *You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you.* The language here sounds a lot more like being drafted doesn't it? Compulsion more than choice. I am not saying there was no choice for Peter, James and Matthew, but the emphasis is on the idea of being effectually drawn to Christ. Imagine a conversation with Thomas, one of the disciples. You ask him, *did you choose to be a disciple?* I think he would look at you funny and say something like, *not exactly.* I can't think of them seeing themselves as having made much of a choice. They were simply drawn in to the privilege of walking with Jesus. The apostle Paul would have thought of it even less as a choice. He was knocked down, blinded and arrested by Jesus on the road to Damascus. He wrote of being laid hold of by Jesus – not the other way around. No – no. This calling of which Paul writes is more of a compulsion than a choice. There is no personal violation here, it is rather like a lover who would say, "I was swept off my feet."

Now, in the matter of gospel calling, we do recognize the distinction between an outward call and an inward call. When the preacher urges you to turn from sin and put your faith in the risen Jesus, that is a calling of sorts. It is outward – perceptible to the ears. And clearly enough, it is resistible. One may and many do refuse the outer call to faith. But there is another calling we may refer to as the inward call. The life-giving, regenerating voice of the Father to the inner man. Jesus said in John 6:44 *No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him.* What is that? This drawing? It is the inner call. This isn't from a preacher, but from the Spirit of God. JI Packer wrote - *Ministers knock at the door of men's*

hearts. *The Spirit comes with a key and opens the door.* Os Guinness wrote a wonderful book all about calling and in it he says *Following Christ is not our initiative, merely our response, in obedience. Nothing works better to debunk the pretensions of choice than a conviction of calling. Once we have been called we literally have no choice.* Now, to a called person this lack of choice as one might see it is not a negative thing. It is the work of a good, gracious, sovereign Savior. It is the source of humility, gratitude, eternal praise. We confess that if the Lord had waited on us to apply to Him, He would be waiting still. And the last thing the doctrine of calling would lead to is pride. Instead it becomes our deepest source of joy and confidence because we know that our faith is the work of God Himself and therefore certain to last.

But next we ought to note that our calling is not just to a happy, satisfied passivity. No – no, we are called into an active engagement in the mission of our calling Savior. This is the mission of the called. You can see in verse five what Paul says our calling is unto – *to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations.* How awesome is that? We are graciously drafted into the Lord's army and given an incredible task, a blessed mission to make disciples of all the nations, or, as Paul words it – to bring about the obedience of faith in every place. That language sort of helps us understand what making disciples means. What is our goal when we lead someone to Jesus, when we enfold them into the church, when we teach them? It is their growth in obedience. Obedience to what? The law of God. More importantly, their obedience to whom? The Lord Jesus. We pray, *thy kingdom come, thy will be done.* This is what we are praying for – increasing conformity to the will of our King.

Think with me for a minute about this word *obedience* or *obedient*. It is a word that has kind of fallen on hard times of late. I don't know of any books entitled, "Growing in Obedience." Or "The Obedient Disciple." We think obedience is good for dogs but we are reluctant to apply the term to humans. How big a crowd would I get for Obedience Class for Humans? It can suggest to us a mindless and slavish adherence to the will of another. But in Scripture obedience is all good. Why? Because the one we obey is Jesus. If Christ is the Master, obedience is terrific, wonderful, life-giving. It is fulfilling and delightful. Sinatra can sing of the glory of doing it all "my way," but we know better. We know real joy is found in living His way. We sing *Trust and obey, for there's no other way, to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.*

Some of you, I know, grew up in a home or church in which obedience was pounded down as a joyless duty. You didn't see a lot of happy obedience. I get it.

So, you react negatively to a call to obey and you want to say – *No-no. Christianity is not about rules but about a relationship. It's not about law-keeping but about grace and faith.* We have to get past that kind of shallow either-or thinking. It is not obedience vs faith, not rules vs relationship - what is it? Paul calls it the obedience of faith. The obedience of faith. The law-keeping which flows out of trusting Jesus from the heart. The obedience of faith suggests that faith is the source of our obedience. We do what Jesus teaches because we trust His heart. We know He loves us and seeks for our good – so His law, His counsel is sweet and desirable. Not burdensome and draining. No. We preach that Jesus loves you, Jesus forgives you, Jesus has you in His hand – so go forth and do His will, obey His commands, and lay down your life for His mission.

That mission He says is advancing the obedience of faith – gospel obedience to what end? To the end that the Lord's name is honored, hallowed, exalted. For His name's sake. Ultimately, it is all about the fame of Jesus, His glory. This is so critical to keep front and center in our thinking. One question I like to ask men who are entering the ministry is: *are you pursuing a life in ministry for the Lord's sake or for the sake of people? Is your calling primarily to serve God or serve humans?* My experience is that those who go into pastoral work or missionary work primarily to do good for humans end up burned out, disillusioned. Humans aren't as appreciative as they hoped. Humans are not as responsive as they hoped. If your sense of calling is not centered on Christ, it won't sustain you. Reggie McNeal writes: *Bewildered and broken, spent leaders end up never accomplishing the great task of their life calling. They may claim that their failure is due to having too large a heart for people. This is a self-delusion. The problem is not having a heart large enough for God. By not developing the discipline of saying "no" to some needs that would claim them (and other distractions) they could not say "yes" to the mission of God's call.* He means that if you are pulled and controlled by the demands of people, you won't last. Certainly, we are called to be servants to one another, but our primary identity has to be in relation to our Master, whose we are and whom we serve.

That said, our Master does point us to the harvest fields, with a specific reminder that the kingdom we are working toward is international in scope. It includes all the Gentiles, or all the nations. The vision here is one in which worship of the true and living God is found in every place on the globe. John Piper is noted for saying, missions exist because worship doesn't. The worship of the Lord's name is the end of our missionary enterprises. It is for that we pray, and give and labor. This vision is expressed beautifully in the hymn by Isaac Watts. Ponder this and

read it with me prayerfully – *Jesus shall reign where'er the sun Doth his successive journeys run; His Kingdom stretch from shore to shore, Till moons shall wax and wane no more.// To Him shall endless prayer be made. And princes throng to crown His head, His name like sweet perfume shall rise With every morning sacrifice // People and realms of every tongue Dwell on His love with sweetest song; And infant voices shall proclaim Their early blessings on His name.* The praise of God's name, obedience to his law, throughout the globe – that is the mission of the called of Jesus Christ. The calling is gracious, but my oh my, is it ever colossal and challenging. It is a mission only suitable to beloved saints.

That leads us to our next thought which is the power of the called. The power of the called. How might we, as Jesus followers, live distinct and holy lives in a high-pressure world. How might we fulfill the commission with which we have been charged? The power is found in our calling itself – when we grasp it. Here are three more P-words to go with power. The first is privilege. Privilege. We debate in our world about who has privilege, but God's word settles it – the called of God have privilege. Whether the Lord has called you to serve Him in the US Senate or in a Haitian village, the calling of Jesus is always a promotion. Always a promotion. There is another P-word. Here we add this one – pleasure. Pleasure. The call of God is not unto a miserable existence of depravation. It is a call to joy in His service. John Newton wrote this, which I think we who follow Christ need to understand. He says *Our pleasure and our duty, though opposite before; Since we have seen his beauty, are joined to part no more: It is our highest pleasure, no less than duty's call; To love him beyond measure, and serve him with our all.* Duty and pleasure, joined to part no more. Beautiful!

Then finally, our calling becomes our power to persevere. There is power, privilege, pleasure, perseverance. Understanding calling is key for sure. Os Guinness is brilliant on this point. He writes: *Every time the marsh gas of sloth rises from the swamps of modern life and threatens to overcome us, the call of God jerks us wide awake. Against the most sluggish temptation to feel "Who cares?" calling is the supreme motivation, the ultimate "why." God has called us, and we are never more ourselves than when we are fully stretched in answering. There is no yawning in response to this call.* You get what he is saying? The marsh gas of sloth. You know what that is about don't you? You get up in the morning but your heart seems to lack purpose. There is nothing to energize your labor. You become sleepy and apathetic. What is the remedy? Calling. We remember whose we are and what we are about. We drink in the privilege and the pleasure so that the joy of the Lord becomes our strength and we keep on keeping on. The devil will seek

to persuade us that our labor is vain, that we are serving a deceitful master, that we are wasting our lives when we could be going for the gusto. The antidote to all this is the calling of God – walking worthy of it. Guinness goes on to write - *The truth of calling addresses all these entry points of sloth. Personally, summoned by the Creator of the universe, we are given a meaning in what we do that flames over every second and inch of our lives. Challenged, inspired, rebuked, and encouraged by God's call, we cannot for a moment settle down to the comfortable, the mediocre, the banal and the boring. The call is always to the higher, the deeper, and the farther.*

That would be a great place to end but there is one more consideration that is somehow better yet. We have seen the compulsion of the called, the mission of the called, the power of the called. Now we close with the master of the called. Sometimes we get the mission ahead of the master and that can prove fatal – but the master is always first. He is before the mission. Last appeal to Guinness - *We are not primarily called to do something or go somewhere, we are called to Someone. We are not called first to special work, but to God Himself.* Central to our identity is this – we belong to Jesus. We are His! I Corinthians 6;19-20 *You are not your own, for you have been bought with a price.* Read that together with me again – Romans says we are the called of Christ Jesus. “Of Christ Jesus” refers to possession. We belong to Him. Ever been in a place or a group and feel that you did not belong? Belonging is a key to identity. God’s word settles it for us. We are His. We belong because we belong to Christ. And Christ is before the mission, above the mission and the end of the mission – it is all for the glory of His name. Romans 11:36 *For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.*