

THE WORLD IS WATCHING
Romans 1:8-13

(Read Romans 1:8-13)

Intro: Regardless of what we think or hope, Church, the world is watching us. Whether they pop popcorn and sit down to watch the antics of a prosperity preacher on TV or they watch with amazement as a Christ Follower goes the second mile for a stranger, the world is watching.

Paul had never been to Rome, so he was writing to people that he'd never met. But he had certainly heard about them. And he encouraged them with his words that we just read. He was also buttering them up for when he arrived, but Paul was a man of integrity, so he wasn't lying. There were lots of good things about the church in Rome and their reputation was well known.

Rome was a tough city. Christians were considered atheists because they didn't worship the Caesar, who considered himself a god and expected to be treated as one. Yes, Caesar wanted worship. And Christians, who, of course, worshiped only Christ, were atheists as a result. Atheists got thrown to the lions. But Rome's Christ Followers, who knew that their highest allegiance is to the one whose name they bear, didn't bow to any less than the God of the universe.

Word got out. Rome was known as the city on seven hills since it was literally built on seven hills. It was from that kind of vantage point that, in Paul's words, the Roman Church had a faith proclaimed in all the world. They were literally a city on the hill. A city of faith that was visible to the world. The world was watching the Church in Rome and the word was out that there was something about these followers of Jesus Christ. There was something different about them. They were the real deal.

There's a lot that we can learn from these few verses in Paul's introduction to his letter to the Romans. Specifically, we can learn about building one another up by what Paul says about Roman Christ followers. Let's look at it and see.

First, I have a question for us . . .

What is proclaimed about us ABC?

- Paul is thankful because the faith of the Romans, *is proclaimed in all the world*. (v. 8b), so, I'm talking about reputation here. I'm not talking about some kind of selfish quest to have a good reputation. Instead I'm talking about how we represent Jesus? What do people see of Jesus as they look at us? What do they learn about relationships as they see us relating to one another? What do they learn about compassion as we reach out in caring ways to our community? What are we known for?
- Maybe you've heard. Maybe you already know, but if not, what do you want to hear about ABC? What is being proclaimed about us? You see, it's not just that the world is watching, and we have a reputation to maintain, we are representing God himself – how are we doing with that?
- You see . . .

God is watching too

- Paul tells the Romans, *God is my witness* (v. 9) and he is. He's our witness too. This is not a manipulative statement, it's true. God is watching. He has given us directions in the Word: how to love one another, and how to serve one another, and how to treat strangers and aliens.
- He has given us directions in his Word that we are to be witnesses to the good news of Jesus Christ. That means our lives need to represent Jesus, and when we need to, we need to share verbally. Yep – we need to tell others the good news of what has made us different and renewed and hopeful and full of joy. God is watching. How we're doing with that? You can't fool God. He knows. What does he see? What does God see as he looks at us? Is he saying “Well done, good and faithful servants!” or is he seeing servants who are asleep at the wheel?
- God is watching. Does he like he is seeing?
- Next, Paul mentions that he's praying for the Romans AND that brings up a good point on this issue of building one another up. It's this:

You cannot hate the ones you are praying for

- Whether it's somebody in the church or somebody outside of the church, if you got a problem with them, pray for them.

- There's an expression from the hip hop world that has gotten some traction in modern parlance – *haters gonna hate*. In short, it simply means that when critical people put us down, or hate us, they are to be simply dismissed, forgotten, and blown off. Don't bother with them. The problem is, for almost anyone that's wishful thinking. It's true that haters are going to hate, but it's easy to hate haters in return. As Christ Followers, we must not fall into that trap. Let's respond to hate with the love of Jesus. Too many people, and for good reason, see Christians as haters. Let's not be haters.
- Instead, let's pray. Let's pray for one another. Let's pray for haters. Let's pray for people we completely disagree with. Let's pray for those who would consider us their enemies. That's pray for those who do hateful things. Let's pray for enemies of our nation. Let's pray for enemies of the Church. Let's pray that they see Jesus. Let's pray that they come to salvation. Let's not pray for their demise, let's pray for them to be with us in heaven because they have made a profession of faith because we shared the love of Jesus with them. You can't hate people you are praying for.
- The next time you're tempted to be angry or hateful towards someone, whether it's to their face, or to their back, pray for them instead. Pray that you will love them with the love of Jesus. That will strengthen the church even as it strengthens you.
- Paul was hoping to get to Rome so he could encourage his friends there – the friends he had never met face to face. But he wanted to be encouraging to them in return and that brings up the next truth . . .

Encouragement is something that must be shared

- Paul's tells them he wishes to bring a spiritual gift, *that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith.* (v.11).
- As we mutually encourage one another, we are stronger. It just happens. There are some people who are better at this than others. Paul's partner in ministry was called Barnabas, but that wasn't his real name. His real name was Joseph, but because of his encouraging nature, he was called Barnabas, which means literally, "Son of Encouragement". Wouldn't that be a cool reputation to have the name remembered down through history, "Son (or Daughter) of Encouragement". Well, we can. Let's start now if we haven't already.
- In seminary I had a guest professor who assigned us to read a little book by a man by the name of Ken Blanchard entitled THE ONE MINUTE MANAGER. For such a tiny publication I learn lots of good things from it. What I remember most though, is to *catch someone doing something right*. Blanchard writes, "*I believe the key to developing employees and building a great organization is to wander around and catch people doing things right. This is a powerful management concept that isn't used as often as it should be. Unfortunately, most leaders tend to focus on the things that are being done wrong so they can fix them.*"
- I read that book in 1985 and I have endeavored to utilize its wisdom ever since. Not because I like to butter people up, but because it works. Sitting around waiting for someone to do something wrong, or creeping in the bushes watching for mistakes to happen or sins to be committed, is a recipe for frustration and futility. In the end, no one wins – and they shouldn't. Let's encourage one another, and let's be known as encouraging people to a frustrated and beaten down world.
- Finally, Paul points out what just naturally happens when a church is a city of light on a hill. As we pray, and as we encourage . . .

A harvest comes by what others see in us

- Let's be ready for it. I alluded to this a bit ago, but let me take it a bit further.
- When I was in my first year in college, I worked nights loading trucks in a local factory. A guy named Jesse whom I had graduated with also worked there in production and we struck up a friendship. We had not seen each other for at least 3 years since I had been in New Mexico at Navajo Mission and had been out of the area. In those short years he was already the father of a couple of little kids and was supporting an ex-wife and a new girlfriend. He wasn't happy. He saw something in me and he knew that it was Jesus. So, he asked me about it and I was completely unready to know how to share the good news of salvation with this hurting guy. I almost messed up as I stumbled my way through leading him to Christ. I'm not proud of that. I don't know what happened to Jesse since I left that factory a few months later. But I knew then and I know now that I needed to do much better. I was much better prepared when a young prisoner in the county jail told me when I showed up there for Bible study one Wednesday, "I want what you got!"

- You see, the world wants what we got when they see Jesus shining through us. Paul was praying for a harvest from the good things happening in the Church in Rome and we need to as well.

Conclusion: The world is watching ABC. Make sure that what they see is the genuine love of Jesus shining through us. I pray that our reputation is that we are people of encouragement who pray for one another and who are praying for them. This is how we build the Church and how we build one another up. It's just as I often say. Let's go and be Jesus to people. Amen.