

Fullness of Time: Welcome to Rome

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This is a statue of the Roman Emperor Nero when he was a child

When he was 11

His mom, Agrippina

Married the Emperor Claudius

Becoming his 4th wife

This is a great story

Claudius' 3rd wife – Messalina

I mean... he shoulda known

Messalina?

It writes itself

Messalina was habitually unfaithful to
Claudius

In fact

Picture this today in modern politics

Messalina was having an affair

Or you could say, messing around

Messalina was having an affair with a
Roman senator

And then they got married

Publically

While Messalina was still married to
Claudius

In fact, they got married before Claudius
even knew they were having an affair

But he's the emperor

So he killed them both

And then he became fairly distant from their son together

Britannicus, who was like 7 at the time

Are you following me?

Maybe this will help:

You've got Claudius and Messalina

His 3rd wife

And they have Britannicus

Then she cheats with Silius

And Claudius has them both executed

Enter Agrippina

And she already has a son, from a previous marriage

11 year old, Nero

So you've got this rivalry / jealousy thing
going on

Nero & Britannicus are about the same
age

But Aggripina wants *her son*, Nero, to be
the next in line

So Agrippina grooms Nero

And, frankly Claudius

So that Nero could be the emperor when
Claudius is gone

And it helps that he's distant from
Britannicus

Because Britannicus' mom was such a
Messalina

Have I just driven the joke in the ground too much?

Agrippina convinces Claudius to adopt Nero a few years later

Setting the stage for him to be next in line

But then a problem happens for Agrippina's plan

This is beginning to feel like a soap opera

The problem is that Claudius began to renew his relationship with Britannicus

And if he & Britannicus get back together
Nero's out

Nero's mamma can't have that
So she poisons him

Historian David Shotter – “Claudius’ death in 54 AD has usually been regarded as an event hastened by Agrippina because of signs that Claudius was showing renewed affection for his natural son.”

If I die and you read that Amy was hastening...

True story – Claudius had a food taster
Because emperor's get poisoned
So Agrippina conspires with his food taster
and poisoned him

Side note - I've got to give this one little detail

Do you know what his food taster's name is?

Hallotus

The guy's got an ex-wife named Messalina

And he's got a guy with bad breath tasting his food

Perfect

That was in October of the year 54

Jesus' resurrection was in 30

So 24 years after Jesus' crucifixion

24 years after the launch of the church

And Nero – age 16 – takes the throne of the Roman Empire

Now – let me just say this:

If you're not a Christian

We are so glad you're here today

Or joining us online

If you're not a Christian – this is just good history

Hope you enjoy it

But if you're a Christian

These words are super important

And the Roman empire is the backdrop

The canvas

For everything you read in the New Testament

So it helps to get a picture of that

I'll show you why Nero becoming emperor in 54 is important in just a second

But before I do

Let's give just a little bigger context:

Julius Caesar – 49BC – 44BC*

First emperor?

Not really

He didn't start the empire

He just killed the Republic

He was assassinated (*)

And declared that his adopted son (great nephew) Augustus would be emperor

The Roman leaders were still used to a Republic, so they didn't like this

And it started a civil war

Caesar Augustus – 27BC – 14AD

Caesar Augustus ushered in a new era of peace

He served as emperor for over 40 years

And ushered in Pax Romana –
Roman Peace

For approximately the next 200
years!

He's mentioned in the New
Testament as well:

**In those days Caesar Augustus
issued a decree that a census
should be taken of the entire
Roman world. – Luke 2:1**

Tiberius – 14 - 37

He would have been the Caesar
during the time of Jesus' ministry

His trial & crucifixion

And the first years of the church

Caligula (AKA Gaius) – 37 – 41*

I put an asterisk on 41

Because he was assassinated
after only 4 years

Also his wife

Also his 1-year-old, only daughter

Claudius – 41 – 54*

Claudius wasn't brutal with
Christians like Nero

But he was difficult

He made proselytizing (evangelism)
illegal

Which is a problem when Jesus,
your leader

Gives you a great commission

To go and make disciples of all
nations

Ancient Roman historian Suetonius
writes that, "**since the Jews constantly
made disturbances at the instigation**

of Chrestus, the [emperor Claudius] expelled them from Rome"

This was in the year 49

5 years before Nero became emperor

We read about this in the NT as well

Acts 18:1-2a - After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome.

49 AD

Nero – 54 – 68*

He also has an asterisk

Because he also died in office

But he died by suicide

In fact, the first Roman emperor to
willingly give up power

Was Diocletian

Who served over 200 years later

Every other emperor either died,
committed suicide, or were
assassinated

So Claudius kicks the Jews – the Christians
– out of Rome

Because of Chrestus (Jesus)

And now because he's dead

They were allowed to return

In 54, at the start of 16 year old Nero's
reign

So now that the doors are reopened for
Christians to enter

Now that the emperor who made
proselytizing (evangelism) illegal is dead

Paul does what Paul does

He sends a letter

By messenger

A Christian named Phoebe

To the church in Rome

**Romans 16:1 - I commend to you our
sister Phoebe, a deacon of the
church in Cenchreae.**

We read a moment ago how Aquila and
Priscilla had met Paul after they were
kicked out of Rome by Claudius

So now that Claudius is dead, Paul
sends Phoebe in with a letter

He says, "I commend to you our sister
Phoebe"

And then he lists a whole bunch of people

Like – give my regards to this person and that person

And who does he list first?

It's his pals Aquila and Priscilla:

Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my co-workers in Christ Jesus. They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them. Greet also the church that meets at their house. – Romans 16:3-5a

Now you maybe thinking

Wait a minute

If we're just starting the series on the book of Romans

Why are we starting in chapter 16?

That leads me to a very good point

They would have read this in one setting

This wouldn't have been a summer series

Or a few weeks in the fall or something

This would have been read all at once

That's really important for where we're going today

Let me show you

**Turn, if you will, in your Bible to Romans
1**

If you're using the Bibles in your seats

That's page 767

And by the way

We'd love for you to take that Bible home with you if you could use it

I know a lot of times

People have Bibles that are hard to understand

Because they're written in 17th century, formal English

The King James Version

I have a college degree in the Bible

But I never did well with Shakespeare

So I struggle reading the King James

So we'd love for you to have one that's a little more current translation

And we'd be honored for you to have the one in your hands

Look at Romans the first chapter with me

And remember:

Phoebe brings this letter from Paul

And they would have read it aloud in one sitting

It starts in Romans 1:1 {Read 1:1}

He's introducing himself

He turns the attention to Jesus in the next few verses

Do you see that?

And then in verse 7, he officially lists the Roman church as the recipients

Today, we think of the church of Rome

As Catholic – large – powerful – wealthy

A center of leadership with the pope & Vatican

But that wasn't this church

In fact, there's debate about this

But I believe that none of the Apostles
or significant leaders had been there at
this point

And so Paul is writing to a sizable group

In Romans 16, he personally extends
greeting to over 25 people and families

And now he's bringing them core teaching

To prepare them during such difficult
times

Verse 8 says {Read 1:8}

Why is there faith being reported all over
the world?

They just got out of a 5-year exile

Claudius kicked them out

And now they've been able to return
because he's dead

{Read 1:8-10}

“I pray that now at last by God’s will the way may be opened for me to come to you.”

Now at last... because Claudius is dead

They had no idea that Nero would be worse

He says in verse 13

{Read 1:13}

And then he ends the introduction in verses 16-17

{Read 1:16-17}

The introduction – the first 17 verses of this letter

Are kind & warm

They’re very personal

14x in 17 verses he says “you” or “your”
Talking very personally to the people in the
Roman church

But then notice what happens in verse 18

In verse 18, the warm & kind vibe goes
away

And it switches from “you” & “your” to “they”
and “them”

In the next 15 verses, Paul says “they”
or “them” over 20x

And not a single “you”... or “your”

Do you see that?

He’s changing direction

In the first half of chapter 1, he’s
speaking to the Roman church

In the back half of chapter 1, he's still speaking to the Roman church

But he's talking about the secular Roman culture

Are you with me?

Those 15 verses are full of blunt teachings

Important topics

They're a little shocking to us

Might've been shocking to them

And they deserve more time than I have this morning

So you can read them this week

And I will spend the entire message next week on them

But remember how I said that this would have been read in one setting?

Phoebe – or another reader – would have gotten to the end of chapter 1

And the church would've been a little puffed up

Paul just dogged the sinful Romans

It would have had a feel a little bit like a political primary

You know, in the general election

Both candidates want to reach a bit to the middle

Sound reasonable and moderate

But not in the primaries

In the primaries, we're throwing red-meat to the base

Getting the crowd all fired up

So as Phoebe finishes reading chapter 1

The crowd would be all lathered up
“Get it, Paul”
“Come on somebody”
People are waving hanky’s in the back
row

And then Phoebe turns the page to chapter
2

{Read 2:1}

Wait a minute...

{Read 2:2-4}

“God’s kindness”

Verse 11 {Read 2:11-15}

“Who invited this guy to write a letter?”

Chapter 3 verse 9 {Read 3:9-10}

So what are you saying?

Chapter 3 verse 21 {Read 3:21-24}

Let me put this up here so we can all work through it together a second

This righteousness is given (not earned) **through faith** (not works) **in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile,** (those inside the church and those outside the church) **for all** (of us) **have sinned and** (all of us) **fall short of the glory of God, and all** (of us) **are justified freely by His grace** (not our goodness) **through the redemption that came by** (the only one who could bring it) **Christ Jesus.**

And that should lead all of us

Inside the church and outside the church

All of us

Heterosexual and homosexual

Certain and uncertain alike

All of us

To our knees before the One to whom

Therefore God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus **every knee should bow, in Heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. – Philippians 2:9-11**

You say, but what about the juicy stuff in the end of chapter 1

That's Truth

And the world needs to hear it

It is Truth

And we all need to hear it

I'm getting there

Next week

Don't worry - I covered 2½ chapters of the Bible

And 117 years of Roman history in week 1

I got all kinda time for 15 measily verses in week 2

Just be patient

I need us to *feel*

What Paul had them feel when Phoebe read the letter

There is no difference between the kindness and love

That I, Paul, feel for you

In the first half of chapter 1

With the kindness and love

That God feels for the immoral
sinner

In the second half of chapter 1

And when some of His kids

That He loves dearly

Gets all snooty because they know
the truth

And it causes others of His kids

That He also loves dearly

To walk away from Him

Because of them

It's time for the church to put away our
hanky

A recent survey – of 16-29 year old non-Christians:

State that 3% of them have favorable views about evangelicals

That's us

Bible believing Christians

While 87% felt we were judgmental

And 91% describe us as “anti-homosexual”

80% - of church kids in the same age group – feel the same way

“Anti-homosexual”

However you approach this discussion

We should all agree that “anti-homosexual” should not be the number one perception of Christ's church

Kara & Arica school bus story