

Pastor Kyle Mercer
Centered & Sent: Vision Sunday

January 4, 2026

Series: Romans

Romans 1:1-6

BIG IDEA - VISION BEGINS WITH GOD AND HIS WORD, CENTERS ON THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST, AND LEADS TO FAITH THAT BECOMES OBEDIENCE

Happy New Year, Two Cities Church. You guys are already looking thinner. Congratulations, guys. Grab your Bibles. We're going to be in Romans. I'm going to meet you there in a few minutes, but at the beginning, I want to let you know that we are pressing the "go" button as a church in 2026. We have another mountain to climb, and we're going to do it together.

In fact...get ready for this...we're launching three things right now today. That's right. You're about to feel like you're at an Apple keynote event just for a moment, because we're going to be launching three things. The first is grab your journals. Grab this journal. Look at this. Isn't this incredible? We gave you one for the Multiply Initiative.

By the way, guys, put your name in this, because we have, like, 55 of these with great notes and no name. Put your name in here, your Social Security number, and a list of your fears. Okay? We'll get it back to you. Guys, you may look at this, and you may say, "Kyle, this is really nice. I mean, how could you give all of these away at all of our campuses for free?" Somebody always pays for free. Right? There ain't no such thing as free. Somebody always pays for free.

We can do this because of the generosity of this church. This journal is for our journey. We're going to be in the book of Romans for an entire year, and if you will show up and take notes and come ready to worship, God is going to do a great work in your life. The first thing is we're launching this year in Romans, and we gave you a journal for the journey.

The second thing we're launching today is the Multiply Campus. I have some pictures of our launch meeting that we had, our launch gathering. By the way, we love Pastor Cory and the whole team down there. Listen to me. Every time we plant a church or launch a campus, I think of this picture. Have you ever seen this picture? What's going on in that picture? You have to look for a second. I can't believe they caught this on National Geographic.

Can you see that all of the penguins are staring there (this is a real picture; this is not AI), and one penguin goes? Later, the other penguins go. When I see the launch team, I see that one little penguin jump out. Some of you are on the edge like this. You're from Davie County. You live way closer to Davie than to this campus in Winston-Salem. You need to stop just watching, and you need to jump.

In fact, guys, here's what I want to say. I want to say this to those at the Multiply Campus. We are headed to Davie as quickly as possible. Okay, here's what happens. The leaders of a church set the direction; the people set the pace. So, if you know people, if you have resources, if you want to help us with open doors and people of peace, we're trying to get to Davie County as quickly as possible, but the Multiply Campus is a place to prepare. So, we're excited about that. That's the second thing we're launching today.

The third thing we're launching today...at all of our campuses, but if you're at our Winston-Salem Campus, you can see it maybe most visibly...is our response culture. Yes, these are kneelers. We have carpets here. Get ready. Some of you don't even know you're going to come forward at the end, but I'm going to start calling people forward. I'm never going to embarrass you, but just to come and pray.

Listen, guys. Whenever you come forward and pray, you invite God in, and you transfer the burden to him. We're going to pray with you. We're going to pray for you. This is all about responding to God's Word. That's what worship is. Worship is responding to God's Word, and everybody responds to God's Word. Some of you do it with apathy, some of you do it with indifference, but we want to respond with white-hot worship.

So, with that said, guys, I have a lot to cover in Romans, particularly today, even as we launch and introduce all of this. By the way, next week, we'll tell you more about the app we're going to be launching as well. With that said, we're going to pray and dive into Romans 1.

Lord, thank you for a great 2025. It's over. Some of us might have not had a great 2025, and it's time to have the heart funeral. It's time to forgive. It's time to repent. It's time to grieve...whatever it is. Lord, we believe on the conviction of Scripture that the future is as bright as the promises of God, that the best days, by the power of the Holy Spirit, are

ahead of us, Lord. We also don't know what 2026 holds, but we know the grace of God is there, and we're excited to walk together into 2026 as a church. Amen.

All right, guys. Romans 1. Again, I'll meet you there in a minute. This is a little bit of an extended intro. I apologize for that, but I have to introduce Vision Sunday. Why do we have a Vision Sunday? I can't point you to a Bible verse. I can't be like, "Look. In this Bible right here it says..." It *does* say we have to gather weekly, but it doesn't say we have to have a Vision Sunday.

The verse on vision that everybody knows in the Bible, if you grew up in the church, is "Without vision, the people perish." I say, "Without vision, people go to a different parish." People need vision. You need vision. Okay? The reason I have a Vision Sunday is so that, as a church, we know where we're going.

Every December, I have to kind of decide with our team and everything like that... And we do it even before that, but as I start to write this, I'm like, "Where are we headed as a church?" because everybody is headed somewhere. Everybody ends up somewhere. Very few people end up there on purpose. I heard one pastor say, "I'll tell you why most churches don't do Vision Sundays: because if the pastor got up there, he'd have nothing to say."

What would you say about *your* life? What's the vision for your life? Most people are like, "I have no idea." Okay. That's too big of a question for you. What's the vision for your year? Most people have no idea. That's not a good thing, because here's what vision is. Vision is a picture of the future that produces passion in the present. Man, do you need that. It's a picture of what *could* be with the conviction that it *should* be.

What vision does is it takes all of the emotions of tomorrow and pulls them into today so you can begin to feel the emotions of tomorrow. What if you baptize your best friend this year? What if your prodigal son or daughter came home, and what if you got down right here and prayed with them by the end of the year and God did a great work? Maybe the best part of you can start to feel the future right now, and you're like, "That's what I want."

Here's the problem with vision. We all need it. Without it, you're aimless, anxious, apathetic, and depressed. Some of you have no vision. Some of you have multiple visions, which leads to di-vision. What is di-vision? More than one vision. You need a singular vision, but the problem with vision is we lose it because it leaks. Vision is about the future, but your life is about right now.

No matter how hard I preach and how much Bible I give you, you have to go home and eat lunch. Your kid is going to get sick next week, and something else terrible is going to

happen, and you're going to have to keep going, "Okay. I have a vision for the future that produces passion in the present." But it leaks, so we have to be reminded of it. Okay?

Now, here's the vision. You're going to see it arise out of the entire book of Romans. It's very simple. It's *centered and sent*. It's like, what else do you want to be? Do you want to be distracted and distant? Is that your vision for your life? How about scatterbrained and sheltered from the world? I don't think so. You've tried those. They don't work. We're saying *centered and sent*.

By the way, we are a both/and church. We're not an either/or church. We're not just "Be centered on God's Word, become a holy huddle, and escape from the world." Which, by the way, leads churches to have a bunch of goofy conversations about things that don't matter. Whenever churches are fighting over eschatology, end times, goofy details, I'm like, "This church is not missional. This church is so ingrown that all it does is fight with itself."

But you can't just be sent, because if you're just sent, you're going to get burnt out. You're going to feel like, "I didn't sign up to be in the military." You need to be filled up so you can be sent out. Here's what we want. The church should be full of people full of vision. With that said, Romans 1. Centered and sent. Centered on God's Word, sent into God's world. I'm going to read you six verses, and then we're going to walk through them.

"Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ..."

All right. We're finally in Romans. Get ready. Buckle up, Buttercup. We're going to be here for a year. It's 433 verses. We're going to talk about every verse in this book. Why one year? We just thought, "Let's try to do it in one year." Have you ever heard of John Piper? He's a famous pastor from Minneapolis, Minnesota. He preached the book of Romans. It took him seven years.

In fact, when he got up... I listened to his intro. He got up when he first started to preach and went, "Guys, I'm going to preach through Romans, and it's going to take five years." John Piper is so intense that he went, "And during this series, some of you will die." He

wasn't trying to be funny. He was like, "And then you will understand Romans better than me." He ended up preaching Romans for seven years.

Romans is something I felt like I had to get ready to preach. I've been preaching for a decade every Sunday. Paul, the guy who wrote this letter, has 13 letters. I've preached here through nine of the 13 letters. Romans is the longest letter. Romans is the deepest letter. It's hard to overstate the impact of Romans.

Here's what I'm trying to tell you: get ready for your life to be rocked this year. I mean, there are going to be some things about God you're going to learn that you may not like. There are certainly going to be some things you're going to learn about yourself that you don't like. You're going to be challenged.

Guys, this book set Saint Augustine free from sexual sin. That's what he said. The church father in the 400s, the guy who wrote the *Confessions*, which is the first autobiography in human history, came to Christ and was set free reading Romans. Martin Luther, who started the Protestant Reformation, which is one of the biggest things that has ever happened in human history... He was reading Romans 1, which we're going to be in for a few weeks. It's a little intimidating. So, we're going to dive into this.

Now, the impact of it on my own life... I can remember hearing John Piper preach through Romans 9, 10, and 11 and my understanding of God transforming. I can remember walking to UNC Greensboro's campus as a brand-new graduate from college. Here I go to the campus to do campus ministry. A few friends and I are memorizing Romans 1. I'm walking to campus thinking about my life and "What am I doing? Am I going to lead anyone to Christ? What's going on here?" and Romans 1 was a great encouragement to me.

So, here's what we're going to do. Four things about vision from Romans 1:1-6. It's going to be very simple. First, *vision starts with God and his Word*. You knew I was going to say that. Look at verse 1. **"Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God..."** Okay. We have to start with all of Paul's letters where Paul starts, which is with him identifying himself.

Why does Paul do this? Why does Paul introduce himself to the Roman church? Because he didn't plant that church. He has never been to that church. He hopes to go to that church. In fact, in his mind, the way they thought about the world back then, you had Jerusalem, you had Spain, and right in the middle was Rome. So, Paul basically goes, "Hey, I want to get to Spain." He'll talk about this later. "I want to get to Spain. On the way, I'd love to stop and have you help me."

By the way, you probably don't know this about Romans. Romans is a financial support letter. You're like, "No one ever told me that." Yep. You're like, "This is a really long one." You've gotten some in your mail before, but this is the longest support letter you've ever gotten. He doesn't even get... Like a lot of people, they leave the "Hey, we need support" until the very end. That's what he does. He's giving all this theology, all this mission, all this practical living. In chapter 15, he's going to ask for support.

So, Paul writes this. Here's what I want you to understand: Paul always introduces himself and roots who he is in Christ. So, here's the first thing: if you have vision, you're going to be a confident person. If you have vision from God's Word and a vision of God... Here's the thing: Paul knew *whose* he was, so he knew *who* he was.

This is true for men and women, but particularly, there are some young men, and I can't really figure out... There are a lot of things I can't figure out. I have no idea. There are a lot of young men who have all this nervous energy. They're just anxious, nervous guys. They're insecure. I don't know what's going on. I don't know if it's a bad relationship with their dad. I don't know what it is, but they make *me* nervous, and I'm not a nervous person.

I'm not an anxious person at all, and when I get around them, I get anxious based on their anxiety. They don't know how to look you in the eyes. They don't know how to shake your hand. They don't know how to talk. I mean, it's not good. We need men and women to be confident. Not goofy confidence in something you did sometime that's probably not going to last. I'm talking confidence in who Christ is and what he has done.

Notice what Paul says here. You can see verse 1. He says, "I'm a servant and an apostle." Low vision, high vision. Think of it that way. Some of you think way too highly of yourself. You do. You know, your mom told you you were a snowflake, and you got a participation trophy, and whatever else. You meet people like this. Confidence should be a marker. Normally, confidence is a marker of competence, but people can fake it. So, some of you are way too confident. Some of you are insecure.

Paul says, "I'm a servant and an apostle." Humility and authority. This is what you want. Here's what *servant* means. It means servant, obviously. Actually, it really means slave. Here's what it means: "Jesus is my Lord, and I'm all in." If you could say that right now, we could be done with this sermon. Like, done. That's all you needed. If you're there, just go home right now. You got it. You got all you need.

Paul goes, "Hey, listen. I'm just a servant of Jesus." Have you ever noticed everyone is talking about servant leadership, but no one is talking about being a servant? "Oh, yeah. I

read this great book. It helped me in my business, because I'll be a servant..." Stop that. How about just being a servant, not a servant with a strategy?

People go, "Oh, I heard at Chick-fil-A they do servant leadership." Okay, fine. Servant leadership. Whatever. How about being a servant? Take *leader* off of it. Why does *leader* always have to be on it? Why does there always have to be a path forward for you? How about "I'm here to serve just like Jesus was"? Jesus said, "I didn't come to be served but to serve and to give my life as a ransom for many."

Paul says, "I'm a servant, but I'm an apostle." *Apostle* is all about authority. By the way, *servant* means I'm *under* authority; *apostle* means I'm *in* authority. That's what you want. Ladies, do not marry a guy who has no authority in his life. That's the most dangerous guy in the world. He doesn't have a good relationship with his dad. He doesn't really work for anyone. He doesn't have a good job...no boss. He's not a member of a church...no pastors, elders, or leaders. I mean, forget that guy. Run. Put your Nikes on and run.

Listen. In marriages, 50 percent of problems are solved if you're both Christians and appeal to a higher authority, which is God's Word. The reason secular, modern, worldly marriages are in so much trouble is because *this* person is appealing to *this* podcast, and *this* person is appealing to *that* podcast. *This* person is appealing to *their* friends at work, and *this* guy is appealing to his friends at the bar or whatever.

Here's the other thing. Paul has this vision of God that says, "I'm a servant and an apostle," and then he says, "I'm set apart." Interesting. If you're going to be centered, you have to be set apart. What does *that* mean? It literally means separated. Think about it this way. Paul is going to say, "I'm set apart *from*, and I'm set apart *for*." You need both. So, we're going to ask this. You don't have to answer it out loud because I don't want to embarrass anyone here. What do you need to be set apart *from* and set apart *for*?

This is interesting. I did a lot of research on New Year's, on resolutions, on goals, on "Why don't things work? Why do only 9 percent of people accomplish their New Year's resolutions?" One of the most profound but simple answers is because people try to pick things up without putting things down.

You're going to have a workout routine? *You*? You are going to have a workout routine. I don't think so. There's a 0 percent chance unless you drop at least two other things in your life. You're going to read the Bible every morning? I don't think so. Not with your social media addiction. Not with you staying up to watch three episodes every night. No. You're not going to. You do not pick something up until you put something down.

Paul says you have to be separated *from* and separated *for*. Separated from...what? Sin, obviously, at the base level. All of you in here have something stupid and sinful you're doing that you should stop doing. And it's not the thing you tell people at Community Group; it's the thing you know you don't need to be doing. Anyway, *that* thing. Okay? "Hey, what if I was separated from that?"

Then, set apart *for*. That's the answer to the question...*What is your life going to be about?* The Pharisees would say they were separated or set apart unto the law. Basically, what they meant was "If I'm a Pharisee, I know what my life is about. My life is about the law." Paul goes, "If I'm a Christian, I know what my life is about. It's about Jesus and the gospel."

Now, here's the truth. Most of us, if we had to answer the question, "What is your life really about...?" We know the Christian answer. Right? "Jesus." You know, they tell the story of the kid in Sunday school. One day, they ask, "All right. Who shows up at Easter, has big ears, and carries eggs?" He says, "It sounds like the Easter bunny, but Jesus?"

That's what some of you have been doing your whole life. "I know the real answer, but Jesus?" The reason most people are not more centered on God's Word and sent into God's world is because the two greatest desires in people's lives are to be comfortable and be liked.

That can lead you a lot of different places. You want to make a lot of money so you can be comfortable or whatever. You want to be a bartender or a barista or a butcher. There was an article a while ago about young men choosing those careers because they could choose their own hours. So, people are like, "I want to be comfortable."

Honestly, a lot of you just want to be liked. You hate to admit that you've become that petty, but that's your biggest desire with your neighbors, your biggest desire with your classmates, and the biggest desire with your aunt, or whatever. It's like, "I don't want to bring anything up because I just..." "Being liked by other people. I hate to say it. That's the biggest goal of my whole life."

Paul says he's separated unto the gospel of God. We're going to talk about the gospel a lot. It takes Paul eight chapters to talk about the gospel. Just so you know, here's Romans in a nutshell: eight chapters on what the gospel is and why Paul is not ashamed of it, then three chapters on what is going on with the Jewish people, and then the rest of it is four or five chapters on application of the gospel.

So, here's what the gospel is. The *gospel* is good news about what God has done for sinners in Christ. Here's what I want you to know: there's only one gospel. Man has many gospels; God has only one gospel. See, it says *the* gospel. Here are man's gospels.

The *prosperity gospel*. There are different versions of this. It's like, "If you have faith in God, you won't get sick and you'll always have enough." The prosperity gospel didn't come into existence until we had millionaires. That's a historical fact. You can't teach the prosperity gospel in most of the world. It's the goofiest thing ever.

People are like, "We're poor, we live in a hut, and there's no upward mobility. This is silly." But in America, we believe this kind of stuff. It's kind of like, "Hey, you'll be healthy and wealthy. Just trust the Lord." People get really resentful at the church for teaching that or they get very down on themselves because they think they didn't have enough faith.

The second gospel people believe is the *therapeutic gospel*. "God doesn't want to save you from sin; God wants to save you from not living to your potential." God is like your Boomer parents. All he wants you to do is be healthy and happy.

Then there's the *moralistic gospel*. You know that one. That's "Be a good person and God will owe you." A lot of people in church believe that, because as soon as something goes wrong, they say, "But, God, come on. I don't get sick. How do I get to be sick? God, I was in church every week." "My kid is rebelling? God, we had an agreement. I do things for you, and then you do things back for me. This is how it works."

By the way, notice it's the *gospel of God*. Meaning, it came from God and is about God. God is the most important person no one ever talks about. In this series... Get ready. I don't know what you think is going to happen when you come to church usually. Get ready to meet God, because the gospel is God's self-disclosure. You're going to get to know his character, his attributes, and his motivations.

Okay. That's all the first thing. The first thing is I want you to see that you have to have a vision of God, but secondly, you have to have a vision that arises from God's Word. Quickly, look at verse 2. "**...which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures...**" Could you be centered on God's Word this year? Paul says, "Guys, we love the Bible because the Bible tells us about Jesus."

By the way, if you ever wonder... Maybe you're new. You're visiting. You're not a Christian. Welcome. You may think it's kind of strange, because we don't really live in an age of books anymore. The spoken word is now more powerful than the written word, because you can YouTube everything and podcast everything and everyone is watching four-hour conversations with Joe Rogan. Then you have movies and all that.

Think about it. For the first time in human history, the spoken word is easier to get to and has a bigger reach. So, it's like, we're about books? The average guy, once he

graduated from college, will never read another book in his life. Blue-collar tradesmen, truck drivers... As a general rule, they don't read. Women read. It's like, "Who reads?"

When I became a Christian, I barely read. I had the mentality of "C's make degrees." I was in high school, and I wasn't a reader. I came to Christ, and I had an insatiable appetite to read all of a sudden. It's because the Bible is the living Word of God. By the way, this is why Christians love education. Sometimes we get so embarrassed. We think Christians are stupid, and we're behind the times, and modern secular people are so much more educated than us.

Listen. Christians built Harvard. They built Harvard six years after they landed. They were still freezing. People were still dying of starvation and they were building Harvard. Go read the official statements of why they built Harvard. They built Harvard because they wanted educated ministers and educated civic leaders. They built Harvard. Christians love education because we love the Bible.

By the way, Paul is saying Christianity is the fulfillment of Judaism. I don't mean that to be disrespectful to Jewish people. I've been to Israel before. The first time you go to Israel... We'll go. You guys will come. It'll be fun. We'll go again. But the first time you go to Israel, it's like all of these people with beards and hats. They're just walking around.

You feel it as soon as you get on the plane to Tel Aviv. You're like, "Oh my gosh! Everybody here is Jewish." You feel it everywhere...the kosher food and all this. I'm in Israel, and the whole time I'm like, "Christ is the fulfillment of all of this." I know it's incredibly offensive to say that to people, but that's what Paul is saying. He goes, "Guys, don't divide the Old Testament and the New Testament."

People want to do this all the time. "In the Old Testament, God is angry. In the New Testament, Jesus is loving." People want to act like God had some middle-school years we called the *Old Testament*. You know, it was awkward. He's doing better now. We're in the New Testament. Everything is fine.

Paul is like, "Guys, this is all promised fulfillment." Then, this is what Paul is going to show you in Romans. This is the summary of Paul, because he writes to these Jewish people, too, who had been reading the Old Testament Scriptures. Here's what he says: "Guys, the fulfillment was better than we thought." We've all been promised something, and then we got it, and it was like, "Eh, it's not what I thought I was going to get." Paul goes, "It's better than what we were promised."

Next, we have to be *centered on Christ and his work*. This is just the foundation. Centered on God and his Word and on Christ and his work. Verse 3: "**...concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the Son of God**

in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord..."

Paul loves to talk about Jesus. Can I encourage you? In 2026, if you're going to be centered and sent, you have to talk a lot about Jesus. You can't just talk a lot about Christian ethics, Bible reading, prayer, discipleship, and whatever. Those are all good things. The center of the Bible is Jesus. I want you to understand that.

The entire Bible is announcing and anticipating him. The entire Old Testament is preparing and pointing to him. Then, whenever Paul or any of the writers want to really motivate you... And that's how you know you're getting at the center of something. Whenever Paul wants to motivate somebody, he always points back to Christ. Everything is connected and related to Christ.

What would you do if someone's marriage was falling apart and it was really bad? Paul would go to them and say, "Guys, your marriage is a picture of Christ and the church." He'd say to the husband, "Jesus Christ was crucified for his bride. She didn't even know what she was doing at the time. Could you sacrificially love your wife in some small part the way Christ loved you?" That's what works. "Three hacks on how to have a better date night." Come on. That doesn't work for people with real problems.

Or for some of you it's generosity. Some of you are scared to give. Some of you are stingy. Some of you are bad stewards. Many of you are generous. How do you motivate someone who's stingy? You know, egg prices are up or whatever. What do you do? Well, what does Paul do? "Do you know that Jesus Christ was rich but for your sake became poor that you might be rich?" It's like, "Are you motivating me by the gospel to be generous?"

Or how about some of you in 2026... Your 2026 is not going to be what it needs to be if you don't forgive someone...your dad, your uncle, your mom, your sister, your ex- whatever. It's time to forgive that person today. You need to be set free. How do you do that? Forgive others as Christ has forgiven you. It has to go deep.

How about mission? Are you going to be missional this year? Not unless you realize that Jesus became like those he wanted to save. You're going to need to become like those (minus him, of course) who you're trying to reach, which normally means you're going to have to serve and sacrifice and suffer and do things you don't want to do.

Here's what I want to say. All this is going to be unpacked. In verses 3 and 4 is the humanity and divinity of Christ. You can look at it. You can just read verse 3. He's descended from David. Then in verse 4, he dies and is resurrected and declared to be the Son of God in power.

If we just focus on the humanity of Christ, we become a theologically liberal church. Sadly, most of the mainline denominations (maybe all of them) are theologically liberal. They have nothing left to say to the world, because Jesus is just a good role model, and he's a good example, and the resurrection isn't real, and the Word of God isn't binding, and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. That's the theologically liberal church.

The theologically conservative church (that's us) can emphasize the divinity of Christ and forget his humanity. People grow up in churches like that. Jesus is big and scary, and you'd better not sin. "Come back next week." It's like, "Ah!" That's why when Dane Ortlund writes a book called *Gentle and Lowly*, every Christian conservative church buys it. Why? Because it's half the conversation we were never having.

He's going to show you the divinity and the humanity of Christ, but what's interesting is the phrase *declared to be the Son of God in power*. What does *that* mean? We're going to do this a lot. "What does that mean? That's confusing." Wasn't Jesus always the Son of God? Yes. That's why it doesn't say he was declared to be the Son of God. It says he was declared to be the Son of God in power.

Most people who understand Christ understand Jesus has two natures, human and divine. The Bible also teaches that Jesus has two stages of ministry, his humiliation and his exaltation. What Paul is saying is the crucifixion is the end of Jesus' humiliation. Born poor, misunderstood, false trial, die in front of your mom at a young age, and be buried in a tomb that's not your own. That's the end. We're done with humiliating. Jesus Christ is done being humiliated. He's now raised in power.

Most people, when they read Romans, think Romans 1:16, our theme verse: "For I'm not ashamed of the gospel, for it's the power of God." That's the second time Paul says *power*. It's not the first time Paul says *power*. Here's what Paul is saying, and this will be unpacked more in Romans 8. We live in a new era, a new age. The church age is the age in which Jesus Christ is risen, reigning, and returning, and we have access to the power of the Holy Spirit, which leads to verse 5.

Look at what Paul says. Verse 5: "**...through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations...**" I said we need a vision of God and his Word and a vision of Christ and his work. Here's the key thing: *he's calling us to both ability and responsibility*. This will make sense in a second. Notice Paul says, "We've been given grace and apostleship." To accomplish vision is going to take a lot of grace.

So, Paul says *grace*. Most people, when they think about grace, think about all of the bad things they did, and they're so grateful for grace. People have whole seasons of their

life... "The grace of God covers the first four years of our marriage. The grace of God covers my time in grad school." Okay, fine. "The grace of God covered Christmas break." I get what you mean.

Basically, what you're saying is you can do a bunch of sinful things, and because you trust God, the grace of Christ covers your mess. True, but that's half of it. Immature Christians only embrace that part of it. Grace doesn't just forgive your past; it empowers your present.

So, you can be like, "Oh, the grace of God forgives me for drinking way too much last night." Yeah, and the grace of God was there to get you off the couch before you did that. It's not just there to clean up your mess; it's there to give you a ministry. Here's the key thing: you will not experience the grace of God like you could if you don't have goals. The grace of God follows gospel goals.

Let me say it this way. He says, "Grace and apostleship." *Grace* is ability; *apostleship* is responsibility. You need a lot of grace because you have a lot to do. I mean, if you just start with yourself, you're pretty much a mess. You know, you're wrong about 10 different things, you're ignorant, and you're willfully blind. Who knows? You have besetting sins you've kind of been trying to manage, and you have big sins you've been trying to hide. Your marriage is a 4 out of 10, and one of your kids...

You have so much to work on. It's unbelievable. It's going to take your whole life. So, you just go, "Okay. Well, my goal would be to be the godliest version of myself." Okay. Set that goal and then ask God for grace. The other goal is for the church to reach the entire world. Well, let's get busy. What else are we going to do? So, you reach your neighbor, you reach your friends, and you try to be a witness at work. That's what we're going to be doing.

Look at the goal. He says, "**...to bring about the obedience of faith...**" Have you ever heard of that phrase? Who talks like this? Right? No one says, "Obedience of faith," but Paul mentions it here, and then he mentions it again in Romans 16:25. So, a phrase that you and I don't even really think about and no one even uses...

Paul begins and ends his letter with "My desire is the obedience of faith." In other words, "By the power of the preached word of the gospel, I want to create faith in people's hearts. God has to do it, but I want to see that faith created, and I'll know that faith is there when obedience takes form."

How do you know what you believe? I've told you this before. We wouldn't need counseling, therapy, anthropology, and psychology if it was obvious what you believed. You understand that's what you're doing. "What do I believe?" Who knows what you

believe? The only way you know what you believe is to watch how you act. That's the only way.

If you watched you live, what would you think you believed? "Well, all my money is mine. I can get away with things. No one is going to know. Lying is okay in certain situations." If that's what you're doing, then that *is* what you believe. What Paul is saying is "Don't have a dead faith, which is lips without life. Don't have a demonic faith, which knows right theology, like the demons do, but doesn't love it. Have a dynamic faith."

Here's where it's all going. This is what I want to end with: *our vision has to be for the nations*. Look at verse 5. "**...through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations...**" We have a global God, not a tribal deity. God loves every people in every place.

This is why the Bible ends with these visions of tribes and tongues and languages and nations, which is really... Maybe every generation feels like this. Probably like many of you, I'm reading Twitter. I'm following the news all the time. I just feel like in the last year or two, it's like every conversation is about foreign policy.

I'm like, "What *is* my foreign policy?" Everyone is saying, "Well, hold on. Venezuela, Ukraine, Russia, Israel, Hamas..." I mean, it's constant. Everyone is going, "What's the foreign policy?" I'm not here to talk to you about your foreign policy. I want to ask you this: Do you love the nations?

I think Christians could completely disagree on a foreign policy and the best way for a nation to interact with other nations and what's good for the nation and how involved should... I'm not talking about that. I'm just letting you know...it's interesting...everybody right now wants to have a conversation about the nations. Christians are first and foremost called to love the nations.

I'll be honest. That has not been something I've been great at highlighting. It's very much highlighted in the book of Romans, so we're going to get to it. Guys, you should love people in China, in Africa, in the Middle East. You should go, "You know what? I want them to come to know Jesus Christ."

I realize I could have been born in another place in the world. Sometimes your geography is your destiny. There are a lot of places in the world. A mature Christian goes, "There are a lot of places in the world where there's no Bible and there are no believers. Maybe I could do something about that. Maybe our church could do something about that." We have to care about missions.

Now listen. Paul cares about missions, but here's the other thing I want you to understand: Paul knows who he is called to. Paul particularly is like, "I'm really passionate about missions, and I'm trying to get to Spain." The interesting thing is we don't know from church history or Scripture if Paul ever gets to Spain. He's writing this letter to stop in Rome to get to Spain. We don't know if he ever made it, because this is his third missionary journey.

Do you know who God has called *you* to? You could ask this question: Who has God put in front of you? You know, your kids, your classmates, your neighbors. We're not going to reach the nations if we're not reaching our neighbors. We're just playing games.

Certain churches feel really good about that. "Look at how much money we're giving away all over the world." And nobody in this city has been baptized in your church in 13 years. It's symbolic. "Hold on. Look at what we do. Look at how much we gave away." Who are we talking to? None of us are reaching anyone here. Why do we do this, guys?

Do you notice the phrase *for the sake of his name*? I've talked to non-Christians before about missions, and they get really cynical, which I'm fine with. I get it. They'll say things like, "Is this like Christian colonialism? Is this Christian imperialism? What are you doing sending a family to go live in a place that's harder than America? What are you doing?"

You get this sometimes as a pastor. Sometimes you get this from grandparents. "What are you doing taking my grandkids away from me?" This is real stuff. So I have to wrestle. What are we doing? "What do you mean for the sake of his name?" Here's what people say. There are three reasons for missions.

First, people say obedience to the Great Commission. That's true. "I need to obey what God has said. God told me to do it." The Great Commission is in all of the Gospels. I get it. It's at the end of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. That's one reason, but that's not Paul's main reason for doing missions.

Paul's second reason for doing missions is love for fellow man. We're going to get to Romans 9. In Romans 9, and I think again in Romans 11, Paul says he weeps over his Jewish brothers and sisters who do not know Christ and wishes he could be accursed and they could take his place. That's the guy who writes this. Okay?

So, yes, I want to be on mission because God's Word says so. Yes, I want to be on mission because I genuinely care about people, and I don't want them to go to hell, and I want them to be forgiven, and I want them to have hope and purpose and freedom and fulfillment and all that.

Paul doesn't give either of those as the foundational issue. The foundational issue is "I want Jesus Christ to be known and worshiped and famous all over the world." I'm telling you, years ago I went on this trip and was in China, and I visited six different missionaries. When you meet missionaries who have been in a place for a long time, that's what keeps them there.

"I came here because I wanted to make the name of Jesus Christ famous," because sometimes you don't even love the people you're trying to reach, or maybe you love them, but you don't like them, and you're working through all that. Sometimes you don't feel like obeying what the Bible says just because the Bible says it.

But if you're like, "You know what?" As John Piper famously said, "Missions exist because worship doesn't." Missions is a means to a greater end: Jesus being worshiped, which is why Paul ends like this. Verse 6. It's a very short verse. **"...including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ..."**

Here's what I want you to notice. We just covered six verses. We're going to be here all year. What I want you to notice is in the first verses, he talks about himself, his call to ministry, his role. He talks a lot about Jesus. He talks about the Bible. He talks about God. Then, in the final verse that we're closing on, he finally looks at you.

He says, "By the way... Yeah, I'm an apostle, and I have authority, and I have a new identity. I have a new mission. I'm part of a greater story. I have the Bible and the Word of God, and I have promise, and I'm seeing the fulfillment. Guys, I'm going out for the sake of his name." Then he looks at you and says, "And I'm talking to you too. *You*."

See, Paul gets really personal. There's a reason we chose the theme *centered and sent*. I did not want a theme that was church focused. Our theme for the year wasn't "We're going to be a church for new people." It's like, "What? Huh?" "The only thing you can do to have this vision is come to this church and hope a new person shows up."

But if you're single or you're single again, you can go, "I can be centered and sent." If you're struggling with depression, you can go, "Maybe, just maybe, the answer is being centered on God's Word this year. Maybe the answer is to stop focusing on myself and start focusing on some other people. Maybe that's the answer."

You could be a new married couple and go, "Marriage is a lot harder than we thought. Maybe we should center our marriage on Christ. Maybe we should stop being goofy about everything. Maybe we're fighting all the time because we're so focused on each other. Maybe we're too face-to-face and we need to start being shoulder-to-shoulder." That's what we're doing.

Guys, I don't want you to have what I heard this week called *deferred life syndrome*. If you've never heard of it, here's what it means. It means you think your life hasn't started yet. They say this happens with a lot of people today. They keep going, "You know what? When I make X amount of money..." "When my kids are out of the house" or "When they're out of diapers" or "When I get married" or "When I get the job, that's when my life starts." No. I hate to break it to you. Your life has already started.

I want to give you an encouragement and a challenge. Nobody in your life needs to change for you to be faithful and fruitful. That is so powerful to know. It's so freeing to know. Nobody in your life needs to change for you to be faithful. Your spouse doesn't need to change. Your boss doesn't need to change. Your kids don't need to change.

You just have to decide, "You know what? That's it. I'm going to be centered. I'm going to get up every morning and read my Bible, not in the future, because my morning routine is my life. I'm going to start sharing Christ where I am. I'm not going to keep thinking that when I get to that next season and I get that next promotion and I'm a little more safe in my job, that's when I'll start doing it."

Here's how we want to end. We have the kneelers here at the Winston-Salem Campus. We have the carpets, whatever campus you're at. We want to have an opportunity to pray and respond. I've told you this before. If you're serious, you'll have a plan. So, we're going to end with two things, a plan and prayer, but we don't have time to plan right now. That's hopefully what will happen in your Community Groups.

I want to invite you to pray. I'm going to ask you to stand in a second. We're going to pray and come down. All you're doing is saying... And I'm not here to manipulate you. If you don't want to come down, don't come down. I'm saying if you want to come down and just say, "You know what? There are things that are hindering me and holding me back. I'm just going to come here. It's a visual demonstration.

I'm laying down my excuses. I'm scared, but I'm coming forward, because I'm tired of being scared. I'm tired of my big goal in life being to be liked. I'm tired of fearing everybody. I'm tired of caring what everyone thinks, so I'm going to come down." Some of you just go, "I need help. Centered and sent, Kyle? I don't know how to read my Bible." Come forward. We'll pray with you. We'll help you. Let's pray.

Lord, I pray for people to be centered and sent. Centered on your Word, sent into the world, gathered around your Word, going into the world. Lord, I know there are going to be stories that are going to happen. Lord, would you give us vision? Would you be so kind? The Bible is your vision.

Would you give us vision of what our lives could genuinely look like in the life of our family if we were really centered on your Word and were truly sent into your world? Lord, as people come, as we pray, Lord, would you meet them uniquely? Would you do a work *in* us before you do a work *through* us? We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.