

ROMANS SERIES ONE

JUMP FOR JOY

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Romans 1

In the musical Le Mis, the protagonist is a supposedly righteous man named Javert who believes in the law and follows it to the letter, but his fixation on righteousness turns on him, because he is a man without grace or love. All he has is contempt for anyone who breaks or opposes the law. He becomes a man bent on hate, punishment and death. There is an ugliness to the way he seeks to separate himself from the likes of others. Others like poor Jean Valjean, who is a thief and a beggar and who cannot help but steal and lie until an old bishop extends the most extravagant offer of grace-filled love. Valjean is undone. He has been caught stealing the Bishop's silver candlesticks and at the moment the police are about to haul Valjean off to the dungeons for the rest of his life, this bishop calls him a son and makes no claim against Valjean. What's more, the bishop puts the candlesticks back into the bag of Valjean. Valjean becomes a new man through the power of grace. This is totally unacceptable to Javert, a man consumed by his hate for sinners and his disdain for grace. He cannot and will not accept the new life of people like Jean Valjean and so his life becomes the pursuit of destroying Valjean.

In the book of Acts we see a character similar to Javert. His name is Saul. He is a Pharisee who has dedicated his life to the law and he has no room in his heart for followers of Jesus. The first time we see him in Scripture is in Acts 7 when he is present for the killing of Stephen. In the very next chapter, Saul has stepped up his hate. "On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. ²Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. ³But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison." (Acts 8: 1-3)

Saul shares this addiction with Javert, to hate in the name of righteousness. He has nothing but disdain for Gentiles, sinners, or anyone who does not live up to the law. He hated the notion of living by grace, and even more, he possessed great disdain for Jesus. So it is with this backdrop that we understand the author of Romans. "¹Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God— ²the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures ³regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David, ⁴and who through the Spirit^[a] of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God^[b] by his resurrection from the dead." (Romans 1:1-4)

To really grasp what has happened in his heart, let us read the next verses together. "...Jesus Christ our Lord. ⁵Through him and for his name's sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith. ⁶And you also are among those who are called to belong to Jesus Christ."

"Called to belong to Jesus Christ?" Wow! What a change! Friends, Romans is a book that lays out the glory of Jesus. It tells us why a 'Javert' can become a 'Valjean,' and why a Saul can become a Paul. So, in this book Paul lays before us the most magnificent gift, the gift of living in the love, grace, and presence of Jesus Christ.

Look at the way he starts this book: “Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus...” (Romans 1:1a) One of the words Paul loves to use in talking about Jesus is **kuroj**. It refers to the undisputed master of others, someone who has complete and rightful power over another.

Over Christmas, we had a new addition to our family, Bella. Her first day in our house became a kind of showdown. Yeah, yeah, she looks sweet, but she’s got teeth like this! So we go into the ring like two ninja masters, where only one can return. I was **kuroj** of my house. Paul saw Jesus as the undisputed master over all creation. “¹⁵He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. ¹⁷He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.” (Colossians 1:15-18) Jesus is **kuros** (cue’ros).

Paul introduces himself here as (doo’ los), which means servant, but it is not a servant in the manner that we think of a servant. We think of a servant as someone who is charged with executing the mundane tasks of life for someone else. **douloj** is the extreme opposite of **kuroj** – **duloj** is someone who has lost his will and identity to another.

Old Testament Tradition

Part of what Paul is going back to is a provision in the Mosaic Law that provided for an indentured servant to voluntarily become a permanent bond-slave of a master he loved and respected. “⁵But if the servant declares, ‘I love my master and my wife and children and do not want to go free,’ ⁶then his master must take him before the judges. ^[a] He shall take him to the door or the doorpost and pierce his ear with an awl. Then he will be his servant for life.” (Exodus 21:5) For example, I might have had mastery over Bella, but I do not yet have mastery over her heart because that is given not taken! God will not force it, either.

It must have been a baffling choice to others. Why would you give up your whole life to be enslaved to someone else? The whole awl thing through the ear just sounds bad! What would cause this?

- Hey, my boss is such a good manager. He graduated first in his class from U of J Business School. He made millions on the olive oil markets. I admire his talent.
- My master has good people skills. He is fair and diplomatic with all of his employees
- My master is really climbing the corporate ladder.

What would cause you to sign over your life to another? It is simple, isn’t it? It is love. It is a kind of love that is rare and sweet. It is not the kind of love we see much today. This love is so powerful that it motivates Paul in an entirely different direction.

Paul was a Pharisee (**f a r i s a i w n**) which means “the separated.” He was separated from sinners and the unrighteous, a little snooty.

One group of Pharisees was known as the “bloody Pharisees” because they constantly covered their eyes in public for fear of seeing a woman and being tempted. There is a problem with covering

your eyes when traveling in public. You run into stuff. So they always had bumps and cuts from falling down or running into stuff. They wore it as a badge of being “holier than thou.”

Paul was a Pharisee. He wanted to be separate from others in the sense of Javert. He was proud of his humility. Then comes the change. “¹Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God.” (Romans 1:1) He uses this little participle **iej** “to, or unto.” Do not miss the significance of the change. “As a Pharisee I was separated away from others out of my smugness and pride but now, as a follower of Jesus, I am separated **ejj** unto Jesus.”

A lot of Christians work at separating themselves away from others. They do not dance. They do not drink. They do not smoke. They do not date girls who do those things. But they really have not become Christ-like. The spiritual life does not consist in all the things we give up. It consists of Jesus becoming alive within us. This was the deep spiritual truth that Paul now sees.

There are two oak trees in my backyard. Of course with all the terrible, bitterly cold storms we had lately, the leaves have changed colors and died. When we become Christians, we have a lot of sin, clinging to us like dead leaves. We can try to knock and pull all the dead leaves off. My son, Chandler, loves to go out and shake the trees and make all the leaves fall off. That is what many Christians try to do. They work really hard to pick and shake and knock off all those old dead leaves. But what do you have left? It is just a skeleton of a tree. It is not really pretty.

I have another oak. Its leaves change but do not fall off in the fall or winter. It is not until the spring, when the sap begins to flow and push, that new leaves start to come in and old leaves start to be pushed off.

Paul used to be separate but now he is separated unto Christ. It is the power of Jesus Christ flowing within him that led him to the spiritual life. Paul lays before us the most magnificent gift, the gift of living in the love, grace, and presence of Jesus Christ. “⁵Through him and for his name's sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith. ⁶And you also are among those who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.” (Romans 1:5-6)

We live in a world that struggles to understand a calling. We are busy “trying to find ourselves,” “discovering our inner children,” and “becoming one with nature.” The problem with all this is that you might find yourself. I recommend a mirror, but that’s just me. In the end, Paul says you will be disappointed because if you see yourself in truth, you will see the emptiness, the depravity, and the aloneness. If we are separated unto ourselves, we are just dead trees with no leaves.

Friends, what we need, what we truly desire, is the flowing of that sap in our veins to feel the desires and passion of Jesus himself in our souls. This requires one thing. That is all. Abandonment. **doloj** – We give our lives up. We make Him the master of our lives. We are separated, but not separated from stuff, separated unto Jesus. It is amazing how complicated we make the spiritual life but, in the end, it means abandonment to Jesus.

We were at a friend’s house, swimming. My daughter, Colie, is a thrill-seeker. I have no idea where she gets it. She cannot swim yet, but she wanted to jump in the pool, in the deep end. I was standing in the deep end, calling to her. “Jump! I’ll catch you. Jump!” She said, “Catch me, Daddy!”

Here is what it means. Abandonment means that I will trust him with my health, my family, my money, my job, and my relationships. Everything in us fights that.

“Jump!” He says. One day, Paul jumped and he never looked back. Some of you here this morning have trusted Him as Savior for all eternity but you are hanging on to this mortal life. It is time to jump. There is a tendency in all of us to make our own way. We trust God in a limited fashion. We are our own shield and strength. We seek shelter and protection in our own abilities. Abandonment says: I give all that up to You, Jesus.

Song: “Made Me Glad”

In this song there is a great line about abandonment. After we have said that God is our shield and strength, our strong tower. With a deep and contemplative moment, the song says:

Whom have I in heaven but You
There's none I desire besides You
And You have made me glad

Singing these words does not mean that I stop liking anything else. Rather, it is a way of describing Jesus as the sap and me as the tree. That which I come to love and desire is the result of Jesus living in me. The desires and passion of Jesus become mine.

Then the song repeats this thought that in my need, in my emptiness, You [God] are the one to whom I look. You are my very present help in time of need.

“Made Me Glad”

I will bless the Lord forever, I will trust Him at all times, He has delivered me from all fear, He has set my feet upon a rock, And I will not be moved, and I'll say of the Lord
You are my Shield, my Strength, My Portion, Deliverer, My Shelter, Strong Tower, My very present help in time of need
Whom have I in heaven but You
There's none I desire besides You

What is it that you hang on to that keeps you from jumping? “Jump,” He says. This is your moment, your moment to jump, to call him **kuroj**