

Why are we studying Romans?

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[0 : 0 0] We are going to turn now to the scripture reading for this morning, which you'll find in Paul's letter to the Romans. And we're going to read first of all in Romans chapter 1. It's page 938 in our Bibles, and then we'll have a second reading shortly when we turn towards the end of the epistle.

Just a few words by way of introduction. Why are we starting a series on Romans? Well, over the last couple of years, quite a number of you have asked me specifically to tackle this book.

And in particular, Terry McCutcheon has been badgering me incessantly about it, and I never like to upset Terry. So there we are, we're starting Romans. The second reason is that it's rather a long time since we spent a considerable amount of time in a major epistle of Paul.

And since we need a balanced diet of teaching in the church, I felt it was time that we did devote ourselves to that on Sunday mornings. And Romans is surely a letter that has been, in the history of the church, one of the most powerful in transforming and changing God's people and his church.

Remember that it was in coming to terms with the book of Romans, that God opened the eyes of Martin Luther to the glorious message of salvation and liberated him and liberated, indeed, the continent of Europe from the bondage of medieval Roman Catholicism.

[1 : 3 0] So it's no wonder that in the preface to his commentary on Romans, Martin Luther says this, It is like the daily bread of the soul. It can never be read or pondered too much.

Just recently on holiday, I was reading again some old books about my great, great, great grandfather, Robert Moffat, who was one of Scotland's greatest missionaries. He set sail for the Cape in Africa in 1816 when he was aged just 21 and he laboured for 60 years for the cause of Christ there.

He was born in Scotland, but he left at the age of 16 to go south to the Manchester area for work. And before he went, he promised his mother that he would read a portion of the Bible every day.

And he did that. And in his memoirs, in fact, in his biography, his son tells of how one evening he was pouring over Paul's letter to the Romans and having read it many times before, God opened his eyes and the light of the gospel of Christ flooded into his soul.

And that was the beginning of 60 years and more of labour in the mission fields of South Africa. And there are many, many stories just like that about this great letter.

[2 : 4 8] So this is a book that when men and women have grasped its real message, has changed not only their lives, but has changed nations and indeed continents for centuries to come.

So that's another good reason to start studying Romans. The third reason is that when I asked Edward a little while ago, just as we were coming to the end of our time in the book of Acts, what I should perhaps do next as a major study, he just said to me, well, why not just turn the page and go on?

So that's what we're going to do. And in fact, when the term starts for Release the Word, our Students and Young Workers programme on Thursday nights, they too are going to spend most of this year studying Romans in detail.

So that's rather daunting for me to have all these bright young things pouring over the text of Romans and coming up with all kinds of questions. But I trust that it will be good for us all.