

Keener Romans Session15 Podcast

Welcome back, everybody. We're diving into something pretty fascinating today. We're looking at a lecture by Dr. Craig Keener, all about Romans 15.13-15. Oh, yeah.

I've heard good things about this one. Yeah, Keener's one of those scholars who really brings the text to life, you know? Totally. We're going to be exploring themes like hope, ethnic reconciliation, and even, get this, Paul's ministry, described as a priest presenting an offering.

Now, that's an interesting take. I'm curious to hear how he connects that. Me too.

But hold on, there's more. We'll also be looking into the whole signs and wonders thing, like how they played a role in spreading the gospel. Ah, yes.

Keener's known for his work on the supernatural and the early church. Always gets people talking. For sure.

He even shares stories about paralyzed arms being healed and rain stopping for days. Oh. So, get ready for some mind-bending stuff.

It'll definitely get us thinking about what we believe and why. No doubt about it. God.

And how these events might have shaped the growth of the early church. Okay, so let's start with this idea of hope. Keener keeps coming back to it, saying that hope appears more times in Romans than almost any other book in the Bible.

So, what's the big deal about hope in this context? Why do you think he's emphasizing it so much? Well, you know, he makes a really important distinction between, like, biblical hope and just, you know, wishful thinking. Yeah, like crossing your fingers and hoping for the best. Exactly.

That's not what he's talking about. Biblical hope, it's much deeper. It's about expectation, trust, and... Trust in God's character and his promises.

Yes. It's that deep-seated confidence that God will do what he said he'll do. Keener uses the example of Abraham waiting decades for a son.

Oh, that's a good one. That kind of radical trust is definitely not just wishful thinking. Right.

It's a completely different category. And he connects this hope to the Holy Spirit, empowering believers, giving them the strength to persevere. So, it's not just a passive feeling, then? Not at all.

It's active. It's about confidently anticipating that God will fulfill his promises no matter what. I like that.

So, how do you think this kind of hope impacts our lives today, you know, in the 21st century? That's a great question. I mean, we all face challenges and setbacks, right? Definitely. It's easy to become discouraged, lose hope.

But Keener's perspective, it's like, it offers this solid foundation to stand on, even when things are tough. It's like a lifeline when we're feeling overwhelmed, reminding us that God is still in control. Exactly.

It gives us the strength to keep going, even when we don't see the way forward. So, we've got this foundation of hope, but then Keener brings up this whole idea of ethnic reconciliation, you know, breaking down walls between people. And he gets pretty personal, sharing his own experiences with racism and prejudice.

Yeah, his honesty is really refreshing. I mean, he admits that when he first came to the U.S., he was kind of naive about the whole thing. Yeah, he said he hadn't really encountered it before.

Right. But then he talks about how his understanding grew through friendships and experience, you know, really getting to know people from different backgrounds. And he doesn't shy away from sharing his wife's experiences with racism in France and Congo.

It's a good reminder that this isn't just an American problem. It's a human problem. Definitely.

It's everywhere. So, I'm curious, have you ever come up against barriers like that? Maybe not based on race, but, you know, other cultural differences. Oh, yeah, for sure.

Haven't we all? I think about Paul's context, too. You know, Jews and Gentiles. Historically divided.

Centuries of animosity. Exactly. But if God could bring them together, what does that say about the potential for reconciliation in our own communities, even with all our differences? That's a powerful thought.

If God can overcome those seemingly insurmountable barriers, maybe there's hope for us, too. Right. It's like Keener saying that the gospel has the power to break down any wall.

OK, so let's shift gears a bit and talk about Paul's ministry itself. Sounds good. Keener describes it using priestly language, almost like Paul is presenting the Gentiles to God as an offering.

What do you make of that? It's definitely a vivid image, isn't it? Like, Paul's not just out there preaching and teaching, but he's actively presenting these new believers to God. And Keener ties it back to that idea of living sacrifices from Romans 12.1. Right. Both Paul and those he was ministering to are offerings set apart for God's purposes.

Now, hold on. Living sacrifices. What does that even mean? It sounds a bit intense.

Well, it's this idea that our entire lives, not just specific actions, become an act of worship and service to God. Think about how that could change how we view everything we do. Wow.

Yeah. From our work to our relationships, everything takes on a whole new meaning. Exactly.

It's a radical shift in perspective. So it's not just about bringing people to Christ, but about helping them live out their faith in every aspect of their lives. That's a huge responsibility.

Absolutely. And it reminds us that evangelism isn't just about getting people to say a prayer. It's about discipleship, about walking alongside them as they grow in their faith.

Yeah, it's a long-term commitment. Now, there's one thing about Paul that's always kind of puzzled me. His boasting.

I thought boasting was always a bad thing. Yeah, it definitely has a negative connotation for us, doesn't it? Yeah, like it's arrogant or prideful. But Keener points out that in Paul's time, boasting could actually be a way of establishing credibility or defending your accomplishments.

Oh, interesting. So it wasn't necessarily about ego, but about context. Exactly.

Remember, honor and reputation were super important in that culture. So boasting wasn't always seen as a negative thing. So in a way, it was a form of self-defense.

Yeah, in a sense. But here's the thing. Even though Paul sometimes boasts, Keener's point is that he's not doing it to promote himself.

It's always about highlighting what Christ has done through him, not what he's achieved on his own. Oh, I see. So it's like he's saying, look, I don't normally brag, but in this case, I have to point out what God has done through my ministry to the Gentiles.

Exactly. It's a clever strategy, really. He's using a cultural practice to emphasize a spiritual truth.

That's pretty cool when you think about it. OK, so Paul was strategic in his use of boasting, but he was also very intentional in his approach to missions. Absolutely.

Keener talks about this idea of Paul breaking new ground, always pushing into areas where the gospel hadn't been preached before. Right. He wasn't content to stay in like comfortable, established Christian communities.

He had this burning desire to reach those who had never even heard the name of Jesus. He was like a spiritual pioneer, constantly expanding the frontiers of the Christian world. Yeah, a real trailblazer.

And remember that comedy agreement we talked about earlier? With Peter, right. Yeah. They divided their efforts strategically to reach both Jews and Gentiles, effectively.

Peter focused on the Jewish community, while Paul mainly reached out to the Gentiles. It's interesting how they worked together, recognizing their different strengths and target audiences. It was a brilliant strategy.

And what's really remarkable is that Paul wasn't just interested in preaching the gospel. He wanted to establish self-sustaining churches, communities that could thrive and grow on their own. Yeah.

He wasn't about building his own personal empire. He wanted to empower local believers to take ownership of their faith. Right.

It's a great model for missions today, too. So how does that apply to us? I mean, most of us aren't, you know, traveling to far off lands to plant churches. Where are the un-evangelized frontiers in our lives? That's a great question.

It might not be a geographical location, but maybe it's a specific group of people you've never considered reaching out to before. Or maybe it's a challenging topic or issue that you've avoided addressing from a Christian perspective. It could even be a part of ourselves, a hidden corner of our hearts where we haven't fully surrendered to Christ.

Exactly. There's always new ground to be broken, both within ourselves and in the world around us. OK, so that's a lot to chew on already.

But now let's talk about the part you've probably been waiting for. Keener's take on those signs and wonders. OK, let's do it.

This is where the lecture gets really interesting, maybe even a little controversial for some people. Keener shares all these stories about supernatural events that happened during Paul's ministry, particularly in areas where Christianity was totally new. It's fascinating how he connects these events to Paul's mission.

You know, it's not just about the spectacle. It's about how they serve to authenticate his message and draw people to Christ. Yeah.

He argues that these signs and wonders actually played a key role in convincing people of the truth of Christianity, especially in cultures steeped in other religious traditions. Right. Imagine living in a world where gods and spirits are just part of everyday life.

And then someone comes along claiming there's only one true God and suddenly miracles start happening. It would definitely make you pay attention. OK, let's hear one of these stories.

Keener talks about this incident in Suriname where a man with a paralyzed arm challenged the Christian god. And his arm was instantly healed. Just like that.

And this event, this miracle sparked a massive movement of people converting to Christianity. Pretty powerful stuff. I know it might be hard to believe for some people, but this is what Keener presents in his lecture.

Right. It definitely pushes us beyond our modern sensibilities where we want scientific explanations for everything. But Keener's point is that these events were instrumental in spreading the gospel, especially in places where people had completely different worldviews.

It's a good reminder that God can work in ways that we might not fully understand, even in ways that seem impossible to us. And it wasn't just about healings. Keener also tells a story about a rainstorm in China that destroyed a pagan statue.

Leading to a wave of conversions. It's like nature itself was responding to the proclamation of the gospel. Pretty wild, right? Definitely.

Whether we take these accounts literally or metaphorically, they highlight the power of the gospel to challenge existing belief systems and open people's hearts to something new. OK, one more story before I wrap up this section. This one's a doozy.

It's about a pastor in Nigeria who was building a church roof and boldly declared that it wouldn't rain until he was finished. Bull move. And guess what? It actually stopped raining for four days.

And then the whole village converted to Christianity. Wow. Talk about putting your faith on the line.

Right. Does this story, I don't know, does it change how you think about the way God works? Maybe. It definitely pushes us beyond our comfort zones.

Yeah. But that's what makes this deep dive so compelling. It's an invitation to wrestle with these big questions about God, faith and the nature of reality.

It's like Keener saying, don't be afraid to question, to explore and to consider perspectives that might challenge your assumptions. Exactly. We might not always have all the answers, but that's OK.

The journey of faith is about asking questions, seeking truth and being open to where God might lead us. It's about embracing the mystery and trusting that God is bigger than our limited understanding. I like that.

Embracing the mystery. It's a good place to start. It's incredible how one person's declaration could impact an entire village.

It really makes you think about the power of faith. It really does. And, you know, it ties back to that idea of hope that Keener keeps emphasizing.

He's really adamant that biblical hope isn't just some fleeting feeling. Right. It's much deeper than that.

It's rooted in something solid, something unshakable. Like God's character, his promises, the fact that he always keeps his word. Exactly.

It's that deep seated confidence that no matter what happens, God is in control and he's working everything out for our good. So how can we tap into that kind of hope in our everyday lives? You know, when we're facing those inevitable challenges and setbacks, it's easy to lose sight of the bigger picture. Absolutely.

But that's where this biblical hope comes in. It's like having this anchor in the midst of the storm. Yeah, I get that.

Think about the early Christians. They faced persecution, hardship, uncertainty, all kinds of craziness. Yet they held on to this incredible hope in God's ultimate victory.

They had that long term perspective, that vision of what God was doing in the world, even when things look bleak in the present. Right. And Keener suggests that we can do the same.

It's about shifting our focus from our immediate circumstances to the bigger picture of God's plan. So it's not about ignoring the struggles or pretending everything is fine, but about facing them with the assurance that God is still working, even when we can't see it. Yes.

And that changes everything. It gives us the strength to persevere, to keep going, even when we want to give up. That's a powerful perspective.

OK, let's circle back to Paul's boasting for a second. I've got to admit, I'm still kind of wrapping my head around that. Keener makes this point that boasting wasn't always seen as negative in Paul's culture, which is so different from how we view it today.

Yeah, it's a real cultural shift, isn't it? For us, boasting is like the ultimate no-no. Right. Arrogant, prideful.

But Keener reminds us that in Paul's time, boasting could actually be a way of asserting your authority, defending your accomplishments. So it was more about context than character. Exactly.

And remember, honor and reputation were super important in that culture. So boasting wasn't always seen as a negative thing. It could actually be a way of earning respect and credibility.

So it was more about playing by the rules of the game, so to speak. Yeah, I guess you could say that. But here's the key point.

Keener emphasizes that even though Paul sometimes boasts, he's not doing it to promote himself. It's always about highlighting what Christ has done through him, not what he's achieved on his own. He's using a cultural practice to make a spiritual point.

Exactly. He's flipping the script. Instead of boasting about himself, he's boasting about God's work in his life.

Okay, that makes a lot more sense now. So we see that Paul is strategic in his use of boasting, but he was also strategic in his whole approach to missions, right? Absolutely. Keener talks about this idea of Paul breaking new ground, always pushing into areas where the gospel hadn't been preached before.

That was his passion. It was like he had this map of the world in his head, and he was determined to plant the flag of the gospel in every corner of it. And remember that comedy agreement he had with Peter.

Yeah, they were like a dynamic duo, each focusing on a different target audience to maximize their impact. Peter focused on the Jewish communities, while Paul primarily reached out to the Gentiles. It was a brilliant strategy.

So in a way, they were like dividing and conquering the spiritual landscape. In a sense, yes. And what's really remarkable is that Paul wasn't just interested in preaching the gospel.

He was passionate about planting churches that could thrive and grow independently without him having to micromanage everything. He wanted to empower local believers to take ownership of their faith and build something that would last. It's like he was saying, this isn't about me.

It's about building the kingdom of God. And he knew that the best way to do that was to equip and empower others to carry the torch. That's a great model for us today, isn't it? It's not about building our own little empires, but about empowering others to discover the truth of the gospel for themselves.

Absolutely. It's about releasing people into their God-given potential and watching them flourish. OK, so Paul was all about breaking new ground.

But Keener mentions a specific place that Paul had his sights set on, Spain. And at that time, Spain was like the edge of the known world. Yeah, it was like the ultimate frontier.

And for Paul, it represented this vast, uncharted territory where the gospel hadn't yet penetrated. It was his Everest, his final challenge. Exactly.

And I think it speaks volumes about his dedication and his understanding of the Great Commission. To him, it wasn't enough to preach to the converted. He felt compelled to reach those who had never even heard the name of Jesus.

So how does that translate for us today? We're not all called to be globetrotting evangelists. Where are our Spains? You know, where are those places or those people that we've been hesitant to reach out to? That's a great question to ponder. Maybe it's not a geographical location, but maybe it's a particular group of people that we've always felt uncomfortable around.

Or maybe it's a challenging issue that we've been avoiding addressing from a Christian perspective. It could even be a part of ourselves, a hidden corner of our hearts where we haven't allowed the light of the gospel to shine fully. Right.

It's about being willing to step outside our comfort zones, to challenge our assumptions, and to trust that God can use us to break new ground, even in the most unexpected places. It's about being pioneers for the gospel right here, right now, in our own unique contexts. Exactly.

And that's where those signs and wonders that we talked about earlier come back into play. Okay. Let's dive back into those amazing stories that Kiener shared.

He seemed to suggest that these supernatural events weren't just random occurrences. They actually played a role in convincing people of the truth of Christianity, especially in cultures that were already steeped in different religious traditions. Right.

And it makes sense when you think about it. Imagine living in a world where gods and spirits are a normal part of everyday life. And then someone comes along claiming there's only one true God, and suddenly these impossible things start happening.

It'd be like, whoa, maybe this guy's onto something. It would definitely make you reconsider your worldview. Right.

These signs and wonders were like a divine calling card, attracting attention to the message of Christianity and challenging the power of the local deities or the traditional beliefs. So it was about disrupting the status quo and presenting a new possibility. But wouldn't people have been skeptical? I mean, even today, we had a hard time believing things that we can't explain scientifically.

Oh, I'm sure there were plenty of skeptics back then, too. But there were also those who were open to the possibility of the supernatural, especially in cultures where the spirit world was more readily accepted. And even for the skeptics, witnessing something truly extraordinary could plant a seed of doubt, a questioning of their previous beliefs.

It's like cracking open the door to a whole new way of seeing the world. Exactly. And I think that's one of the things that Keener is trying to get us to consider.

Are we too quick to dismiss the possibility of the supernatural? Are we missing out on a dimension of reality that we've been conditioned to ignore? It's a provocative question, for sure. Okay, so Keener shared a bunch of these stories, like the one from Suriname, where the guy with the paralyzed arm was healed, and the one from China, where the rainstorm destroyed the pagan statue. It's amazing how these events seem to coincide with the spread of the gospel.

It's like these signs and wonders were part of a divine strategy, a way of God breaking through the noise and getting people's attention. And not just getting their attention, but prompting them to respond, right? Exactly. Keener emphasizes that these events were often accompanied by a call to repentance and faith.

It wasn't enough to just witness a miracle. People were challenged to respond by changing their lives and aligning themselves with this powerful God who is doing these amazing things. It's like God was saying, okay, I've shown you who I am now.

What are you going to do about it? It's a powerful challenge. And it raises some interesting questions for us today. Yeah, like we might not be seeing those kinds of signs and wonders on a regular basis today, but are we still called to proclaim the gospel and call people to repentance and faith? Absolutely.

I think the principle remains the same, even if the context is different. So it's not about the method, but about the message. Right.

The message is still the same. God loves us. He sent his son to die for our sins, and he offers us forgiveness and new life.

And we're still called to share that message with the world. And while we might not experience those mind-blowing miracles on a daily basis, can we still have confidence that God is at work in our lives and in the world, even if it's in quieter, more subtle ways? Absolutely. We can trust his promises, rely on his strength, and be agents of his grace and love in the places where he's called us to serve.

So we might not be parting the Red Sea or healing the sick with a touch, but we can still make a difference in the world. We can still be instruments of healing, reconciliation, and hope in our families, communities, and workplaces. Exactly.

And that's a pretty amazing calling, wouldn't you say? To be able to reflect God's love and grace in tangible ways, to bring hope to those who are hurting, and to be part of something bigger than ourselves. That's what the Christian life is all about. It's not about seeking out the extraordinary, but about recognizing the extraordinary in the ordinary.

Well said. It's about seeing the hand of God at work in the everyday details of our lives and responding with gratitude, obedience, and love. It really is amazing when you stop and think about it.

The seemingly small things we do can have a ripple effect that we never could have imagined. Yeah, it's like that butterfly effect thing. But Keener goes even further.

He sees those signs and wonders as an integral part of God's bigger story. Oh, absolutely. It's not like they're just random, isolated incidents.

They're woven into the fabric of God's mission, his purpose in the world. So they're not just about the spectacle. Right.

It's not just about wowing people with supernatural displays of power. There's a much deeper purpose behind them. It's about revealing something about God's character, his nature, his way of interacting with humanity.

Exactly. It's like God breaking into human history, challenging our preconceived notions of what's possible and saying, hey, I'm here and I'm doing something new. And these events often seem to happen at key moments, you know, those turning points in history, especially when the gospel was being introduced to new cultures and communities.

Oh, yeah, for sure. Imagine you're one of those people who witnessed these events firsthand. I mean, seeing a paralyzed arm suddenly healed or rain stopping for days, that would have been mind blowing.

It would have completely shattered their understanding of the world. Suddenly they're confronted with something that defies all logic and reason. It's like those moments when you realize that there's so much more to reality than you ever imagined.

Exactly. And that's where the message of the gospel comes in. It's not just about seeing these amazing miracles.

It's about understanding the source of that power, the one true God who is capable of such extraordinary acts. Right. It's about connecting the dots, seeing the bigger picture.

It becomes an invitation to repent, to believe, to experience the transformative power of God's grace for yourself. It's a call to step out of the familiar, the comfortable, the predictable and into a whole new reality shaped by the truth of the gospel. OK, so those signs and wonders served a specific purpose in the early church.

But the question is, how do we apply those insights from Keener's lecture to our own lives today? I mean, we live in a world that's pretty skeptical of the supernatural. It's all about science and reason and evidence. That's a great question.

And I think it invites us to really grapple with some fundamental issues about the nature of belief itself. Do we limit ourselves to what can be scientifically proven? Or are we open to the possibility that there might be more to reality than meets the eye? It's like we're so focused on looking through a microscope that we forget to look up at the stars. Yeah, I like that analogy.

And Keener's exploration of those signs and wonders, it kind of pushes us to consider whether we've become too narrow in our thinking. Like have we boxed God in, limiting his power to what we can comprehend? Maybe. But the truth is, God is bigger than our limited understanding.

And he can work in ways that we may never fully grasp. So it's not about abandoning reason or critical thinking, but about acknowledging that there might be more to the story, right? Exactly. There might be dimensions of reality that we haven't even begun to explore.

And that's kind of exciting, don't you think? It definitely opens up a whole new world of possibilities. But even if we don't see those kinds of dramatic miracles happening around us today, can we still be confident that God is at work in our lives and in the world, maybe in quieter, less obvious ways? Oh, absolutely. We can trust his promises, rely on his strength, and be agents of his grace and love right where he's placed us.

We may not be parting the Red Sea or healing the sick with a touch, but we can still make a difference. We can still be instruments of healing, reconciliation, and hope in our families, our communities, our workplaces. It's about recognizing those everyday miracles, those small acts of kindness and compassion that often go unnoticed.

Exactly. Those seemingly insignificant moments that, when you add them all up, can actually change the world. So as we wrap up this deep dive into Romans 15.3333, what's the main takeaway you hope our listeners will walk away with? What's the essence of what Keener's try to communicate? I think it comes down to this.

Even though we might not experience the same kind of signs and wonders as the early church, we can still have that same unwavering hope. That same bold confidence in a God who's still moving, still working, still accomplishing his purposes in the world. And, you know, that same commitment to mission, to spreading the gospel, to making a difference.

It might look different for us today, but the calling is still the same. Yeah, it's about finding our own spanes, those places where we can step out in faith and be a light in the darkness. It's about embracing the adventure of faith, trusting that God will lead us and use us even in our weakness and imperfection.

Well said. Thanks for joining us on this deep dive. And for you listening, we hope this conversation has sparked something in you, maybe challenged you to see the world and your place in it a little differently.

Keep exploring. Keep questioning. Keep seeking the truth.

Until next time, grace and peace to you.