

Keener Romans Session18 Podcast

All right, so you've been spending some time in Romans, right? Yeah. We're going to take a deep dive into the very end, chapter 16. Okay.

And it's packed with details about Paul's world, the early Christian community. It's kind of like the credits rolling after a movie. Oh, yeah.

Except these credits give us these incredible insights into the people who were part of this movement. Absolutely. And we're using lecture notes from a New Testament scholar, Dr. Craig Keener.

Sounds good. And his verse-by-verse commentary, it's really eye-opening. It's good stuff.

You know, it's funny because it's so easy to overlook this chapter because it seems like just a simple list of names. But when we dig deeper, we uncover a rich tapestry of relationships, of challenges and triumphs that bring the early church to life. It's almost like stepping back in time and eavesdropping on their conversations.

I love that. One of the things that struck me was how different mail delivery was back then. Oh, yeah, totally.

No post office to pop a letter in. Nope. Can you imagine relying on a traveler to carry your message, hoping it actually reached its destination? I know.

That's so interesting, right? Really highlights the personal nature of communication in the ancient world. Absolutely. Dr. Keener mentions examples from Cicero's letters where he talks about the anxiety of waiting for important correspondence and the relief when it finally arrived.

Right. Like, ah, thank goodness. Each of these greetings in Romans represents a deliberate effort to connect, to build community across vast distances.

Oh, yeah. Across huge distances. It makes you appreciate the significance of these names even more.

So much more. I know. Like, here's Timothy, who Paul calls my fellow worker.

They had such a close relationship, almost like father and son in the faith. That's right. It's fascinating to see their bond reflected in these simple words.

It's a reminder that these weren't just abstract theological concepts being discussed. These were real people with deep connections, shared experiences, working together to spread the gospel. And speaking of connections, we see greetings from Jason and Sospator, who traveled with Paul on his missionary journeys.

Their names pop up in the Book of Acts, too. It's true. Which makes you realize how intertwined their lives were.

Yeah, for sure. And how much they relied on one another for support and encouragement. Right.

And so it's like piecing together a puzzle. We see glimpses of their journeys, their hardships, and their triumphs. And it all comes together to paint this vibrant picture of the early church.

And then there's Tertius, the scribe, who actually wrote this letter for Paul. It's cool that he includes his own greeting. It reminds us that literacy was a precious skill back then.

And that scribes played a crucial role in spreading these messages. They really did. And Dr. Keener mentions that the name Tertius means third, which suggests he might have been the third born son in his family.

That's right. It's these little details that make these figures come alive. They do.

They're not just names on a page. They're individuals with stories and families and lives that intersected with this growing Christian movement. It makes you wonder, what were their hopes and dreams? What challenges did they face? How did their involvement with Paul and the early church shape their lives? Those are great questions.

And it leads us to some even more intriguing figures, like Gaius. He's described as the host of the whole church, which makes me wonder, what did that look like in practice? What did that really mean? Did he have this massive villa outside Corinth to accommodate everyone? Or was it more about his generosity in hosting smaller gatherings? That's where things get really interesting. Dr. Kiener suggests that maybe it was a bit of hyperbole, a way of emphasizing Gaius' exceptional hospitality, which was a highly valued virtue in ancient cultures.

But it's also possible that he had a larger space that could accommodate the growing Christian community. So many possibilities. It's a reminder that we don't always have the full picture, and that sometimes we have to read between the lines and use our imagination to fill in the gaps.

And that's part of the fun of studying history. It's not just about memorizing dates and facts. It's about trying to understand the lives and motivations of people who lived in a very different time.

Okay. So let's move on to another interesting character, Erastus. He's described as the city treasurer.

But Dr. Kiener throws in this intriguing detail that he might be the same Erastus mentioned in an inscription as an aedile, which was a wealthy official who often made donations to the city. So what's an aedile? What do you make of that? Okay. So an aedile was a public official responsible for maintaining public buildings, organizing games, and festivals, and even regulating trade.

They were typically wealthy individuals who used their own funds to supplement city projects hoping to gain popularity and climb the social ladder. So if this is the same Erastus, it raises some fascinating questions. It does.

Was he a Christian convert who used his position to support the church? Or was he simply a friendly official who respected Paul and the Christian community? That's a tough one to answer definitively. Dr. Kiener points out that Paul later left Erastus in Corinth, which suggests a deeper connection than just a casual acquaintance. It's like a historical mystery, makes you want to dig deeper and see if there's any other evidence that sheds light on Erastus' role in the early church.

And it highlights how these greetings, which might seem like simple formalities, can open up whole new avenues of inquiry. Before we move on to Paul's final praise, I want to touch on something that Dr. Kiener mentions about this chapter. Apparently there's some debate among scholars about whether this final section was actually part of the original letter or added later.

This whole idea of textual criticism fascinates me. How do scholars even begin to figure out what's authentic and what might have been added later? Or changed over time? That's a great question. And it's like detective work, really? Scholars spend years studying ancient manuscripts, comparing different versions of text and looking for clues that can help them reconstruct the most accurate and reliable version of the original.

Wow. So it's not just about reading the Bible. It's about understanding the historical context, the process of transmission, and the meticulous work of scholars who dedicate their lives to preserving these ancient texts.

It's a reminder that even something as seemingly simple as reading the Bible involves layers of interpretation and historical understanding. That's right. And that's what makes it so fascinating.

And that is what makes it fascinating. So in Dr. Kiener's opinion, was Paul's final praise likely part of the original letter? He believes it was. He points to the stylistic and thematic coherence with the rest of Romans.

It's like the final movement of a symphony, bringing all the main themes together in a powerful and moving conclusion. So it's not just a tacked-on afterthought, but a deliberate and essential part of Paul's message to the Romans. It is.

This is where it gets me thinking. He's reminding us that after all the theological debates and intellectual wrestling, there's this profound sense of awe and wonder at the heart of the Christian faith. Okay, so let's unpack this final praise section and see what gems we can uncover.

Sounds good to me. Let's dive in. Paul starts by talking about God establishing us in accordance with my gospel.

And I think it's interesting that he calls it my gospel. Yeah, I noticed that too. It makes it feel very personal, like he's invested in this message, not just intellectually, but with his whole being.

That's a great point. It's not just some abstract theological idea for him. It's the core of his life and his mission.

And you know, it's interesting to think how that personal conviction must have fueled his ministry. He's not just delivering a lecture, right? He's sharing something that has profoundly transformed him and that he believes can transform others as well. Right.

And this establishment, this grounding, is rooted in the preaching of Jesus Christ. It's a reminder that the gospel is about a person, a relationship, not just a set of rules or doctrines. He also mentions the revelation of the mystery.

What exactly is this mystery that Paul is referring to? Well, you know, for centuries, the prevailing thought was that salvation was primarily for the Jewish people. But through Christ, that barrier is broken down. The good news is for everyone, Jew and Gentile alike, this was a radical concept at the time.

It's amazing to think about the implications of that. It's a complete game changer for the early church. That's right.

And Dr. Keener makes this connection to the scriptures of the prophets, showing how God's plan was foreshadowed in the Old Testament. It's like this beautiful tapestry being woven together with threads from the past pointing to the present. Oh, I love that analogy of a tapestry.

It really captures that sense of continuity in the unfolding of God's plan throughout history. And it speaks to the way that the Old and New Testaments are intertwined and illuminate each other. It's like we're seeing the bigger picture, the grand narrative that encompasses all of creation and all of history.

Exactly. And then there's that powerful phrase, the obedience of faith among all nations. It's not enough just to hear the message we're called to respond to it, to live it out.

I think that's such a key point. It's not passive belief, but active engagement. Faith requires action, a willingness to align our lives with God's will.

It's like saying yes to God's invitation and allowing that yes to transform us from the inside out. And that invitation is extended to everyone, regardless of their background or nationality. That's the beauty of the gospel.

It's a universal call to experience the love and grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ. And then Paul ends with this resounding declaration to the only wise God, be glory forever. It's like a grand finale, a triumphant celebration of God's wisdom and power.

It's a fitting end. It is. To a letter that has wrestled with such deep theological questions.

That's right. It's like Paul is saying, after all is said and done, all glory belongs to God. That's right.

It's a reminder that even in the midst of our human levitations and struggles, there's a bigger picture, a divine plan that's beyond our comprehension. And that awareness should inspire us to approach our faith with humility and a sense of wonder. You know, I'm struck by how Paul manages to weave together the letters, main themes in this final praise.

It's not just a summary. It's a powerful culmination that brings everything into focus. It's like he's taking us on a journey through arguments and explanations, and then finally leading us to this place of awe and gratitude.

It's quite masterful, really. It makes you realize that these closing verses aren't just an afterthought, but a vital part of the letter's message, leaving us with a sense of wonder and a renewed commitment to living out the truth of the gospel. And that truth continues to resonate across centuries, challenging and inspiring us to find our place in God's grand story of redemption.

Dr. Keener's insights have really brought these greetings and praises to life for me. I know. They're not just names on a page anymore.

They're individuals who played a crucial role in the early church. It's fascinating to think about how these seemingly ordinary people like Tertius the scribe or Gaius the host contributed to the spread of the Christian movement, their acts of service, their hospitality, their willingness to use their skills. It all made a difference.

It reminds us that we all have a part to play. We do. No matter how big or small our role may seem.

And that even seemingly small actions can have a ripple effect impacting others in ways we may never fully understand. So true. And those final words of praise from Paul, that reminder of God's wisdom and the universal call to obedience.

It's a powerful way to end this deep dive into Romans. It makes you think, doesn't it? How are we living on our faith today? What kind of legacy are we leaving behind? Yeah, it really does. You know, when you think about it, those early Christians didn't have it easy.

They faced persecution, hardship, constant challenges, yet they persevered. And they built a community that spread like wildfire across the Roman Empire. What do you think fueled their passion and commitment? You know, I'm struck by their sense of purpose.

You know, they believed they were part of something bigger than themselves, something worth sacrificing for. And they seem to find strength and encouragement in their shared faith and in supporting one another. I think that's a key takeaway from this deep dive into Romans 16.

It's easy to get bogged down in the theological arguments and the historical details, but at its heart, this chapter is about community. It's about people coming together, supporting one another, and spreading a message of hope and transformation. It's like Paul is saying, look, this faith isn't just about individual belief.

It's about living it out together, encouraging one another, and building something that's greater than the sum of its parts. Exactly. And that's a message that resonates just as powerfully today as it did back then.

We all need a sense of belonging, a community where we can share our struggles, celebrate our victories, and grow in our faith. It makes you wonder, what kind of greetings are we

sending out into the world? How are we supporting and encouraging those around us? That's a powerful thought. It's a challenge to consider how we're contributing to the ongoing story of faith and how we're impacting those around us.

Are we building bridges of understanding and compassion? Are we offering hospitality and support to those in need? And what kind of final praises are we leaving behind? What legacy of faith and service are we passing on to future generations? I think that's a beautiful way to frame it. We're all part of this grand tapestry, weaving together our lives and experiences and leaving our mark on the world. It's inspiring, really.

It is. It makes you want to step up and play your part to make a difference in the lives of others and to contribute to something bigger than yourself. Absolutely.

And that's the beauty of studying the Bible. It's not just about acquiring knowledge. It's about being transformed by its message and inspired to live a life that reflects God's love and grace.

I think this deep dive into Romans 16 has done just that. It's given us a glimpse into the heart of the early church, reminded us of the power of community, and challenged us to consider how we're living out our faith today. I couldn't have said it better myself.

It's been a pleasure exploring this chapter with you. Likewise. Until next time.