

The Gospel of God

Romans 1:2-4

A couple weeks ago I introduced us to the book of Romans, the Gospel of God's Righteousness, and we looked at the first verse. There we met the messenger of the gospel. We saw that the Apostle Paul was a slave of God's, called and set apart for the God's gospel message.

I believe those three things are essential for anyone who preaches the gospel: a sense of slavery, that Jesus is Lord and I am His servant; a sense of being sent, that God called you; and a sense of separation to the gospel that makes it the one focus of your life.

This week we're going to continue to verse two as we study the gospel message itself. The gospel of God is the theme of Romans and Paul describes it here (1:2-4).

Romans 1:1-7 is one long sentence in the Greek text. Paul begins by identifying himself (1:1); then he describes "the gospel of God" (1:2-4); next he explains how that gospel goes to the nations (Gentiles) through Paul's apostleship (1:5-6); and, finally (1:7), he greets the saints in Rome. Today we'll focus on verses 2-4 and the description of the gospel.

Listen again as I read the first seven verses of Romans 1:

- 1 Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God**
- 2 which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures,**
- 3 concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh,**
- 4 and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.**
- 5 Through Him we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name,**
- 6 among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ;**
- 7 To all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.**

In Romans Paul is going to expound on the phrase "the gospel of God." The word gospel means good news. Paul is writing to the Romans to explain God's good news that he preaches everywhere. So here at the beginning Paul tells us some important things about this good news, the gospel.

1. The Gospel was Promised (1:2).

Why does Paul begin by stating that the gospel of God was that "**which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures**"? It's because he wants to show that he didn't make up the gospel. It wasn't Paul's idea. Rather, it comes to us right out of the Old Testament, the "holy Scriptures."

In fact, as Paul writes the book of Romans he quotes from the Old Testament scriptures 61 times in these 16 chapters. Paul demonstrates that the gospel is not a new religion. It is the fulfillment of an old religion. The God of the Old Testament is the God of the New Testament. What he was preparing and promising then, he fulfilled in the coming of Jesus.

There are over 300 specific prophecies in the Old Testament about Christ, many of which were fulfilled at His first coming. Jesus did not come with a new religion that was disconnected from the old. Jesus said in Matthew 5:17: **"Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill."**

In John 5:39 Jesus told some religious Jews, **"You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me."** A few verses later He says, **"For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me."**

Everything written in the Old Testament was written so we would believe in Jesus, the Son of God who came to give His life for us.

One writer put it this way:

"I find my Lord in the Bible wherever I chance to look.
He is the theme of the Bible, the center and heart of the book.
He is the rose of Sharon. He is the lily fair.
Wherever I open my Bible, the Lord of the book is there.
He, at the book's beginning, gave to the earth its form.
He is the ark of shelter bearing the brunt of the storm,
the burning bush of the desert, the budding of Aaron's rod.
Wherever I look in the Bible, I see the Son of God.
The ram upon Mount Moriah, the ladder from earth to sky,
the scarlet cord in the window and the serpent lifted high,
the smitten rock in the desert, the shepherd with staff and crook,
the face of my Lord I discover wherever I look in the book.
He is the seed of the woman, the Savior virgin-born.
He is the Son of David with whom men rejected with scorn.
His garments of grace and of beauty the stately Aaron deck,
yet He is a priest forever, for He is of Melchizedek.
Lord of eternal glory, whom John the apostle saw,
light of the golden city, lamb without spot or flaw.
Bridegroom coming at midnight, for whom the virgins look;
wherever I open my Bible I find my Lord in the book."

Peter says that holy men of God moved along by the Holy Spirit wrote the Scripture. You have holy God moving along holy men by His Holy Spirit to produce, says Paul, a holy Scripture, unique, pure, the work of God. This book is not just another religious work, it is the very word of the living God. It is the Holy Scripture.

2. The Gospel is the Person of God's Son (1:3-4)

The second thing he says about the gospel of God (1:3) is that it concerns his Son. The gospel of God is all about the Son of God. Jesus didn't just come preaching the good news. He is the good news. Paul emphasizes several things about the Son of God:

A. His Name – “Jesus Christ our Lord”

Jesus, means “Savior.” Christ, means Messiah, “the anointed one.” Lord, means “sovereign ruler.” He is Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins. He is Christ, for He has been anointed by God as King and priest. He is Lord, for He is the eternal God whom we must love and worship.

B. His Eternal Pre-existence – “who was born ...”

Literally that reads “concerning His Son ... who was made ...” Look at Romans 8:3, “**For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh.**” God sent His Son to take on human flesh. So the Son existed as the Son of God before He became a man. This means that Christ is and always was the Son of God.

The gospel of God is not about God arranging human affairs in a better way. It is about God penetrating human affairs from outside in the person of his Son who is the perfect image of the Father and is Himself God.

C. His Humanity – “of the seed of David according to the flesh”

The third thing Paul says about the gospel of God is that this divine Son became a man. The work He had to do - the mission He was on - required that He take on human nature, along with his divine nature. God did not choose a man and make Him His son; He chose to make His eternal, one-and-only Son a man.

And not just any man, He was the right man. He was born in the line of King David in the Old Testament. Why is that part of the gospel of God? Why is that good news? The answer is that all the promises of the Old Testament depended on the coming of the Messiah - the anointed One - who would rule as king in the line of David.

God promised David that one of his descendants would sit on his throne forever (2 Sam. 7:12-13; see Isa. 11:1; Jer. 23:5-6). Israel's Messiah and Savior would be of the seed of David. But, David's line on the throne over Israel ceased to exist at the time of the Babylonian captivity, 600 years before Christ.

But the New Testament writers clearly affirm that Jesus was born in the line of David. In His humanity Jesus was a descendant of King David. Both His mother, Mary and His adopted father Joseph were direct descendants of David.

And look at that phrase “**according to the flesh.**” This means that Jesus is not only fully God; He also is fully human. He shares in our human nature, except for our sinfulness (Gal. 4:4; Heb. 4:15). Thus Jesus could bear the penalty for our sins, since He had no sins of His own. He could be the perfect high priest, who offered Himself for human sins (Heb. 2:14-18). He can sympathize with our weaknesses, which encourages us to come to Him when we are tried and tempted.

D. His Power – “declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.”

But there is one more thing Paul says about "the gospel of God." Not only was it planned and promised before it happened; and not only is it concerning his divine, pre-existent Son; and not only is it the news that this Son has been born as the human son of David to fulfill the Old Testament hopes and dreams of righteousness and peace and joy in the kingdom of God; but, in verse 4, he says, **"and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead."**

The word "declared" means, "appointed," "determined" or "fixed". This does not mean that Jesus became God's Son through His resurrection or that He was just shown to be God's Son at the resurrection. Rather, He was elevated to a new level of power as the Son of God by virtue of His resurrection, so that at the name of Jesus, every knee will bow (Phil. 2:9-11). In other words, in view of the resurrection, Jesus is the powerful, reigning Lord. The point is that at the resurrection Christ moved from being Son of God in lowliness and human limitation and weakness to being Son of God with power.

This resurrection from the dead was "according to the Spirit of holiness." What does this mean? It means God's Holy Spirit raised Jesus from the dead. In Romans 8:11 Paul says, **"But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you."** This teaches that we will be raised by the Spirit of God who dwells in us, in the way that Christ was raised. So the Spirit was involved in raising Jesus from the dead.

This is what Jesus meant after the resurrection when he said, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth" (Matthew 28:18). It's what Paul meant in 1 Corinthians 15:25-26 when he said of the risen Christ, "He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be abolished is death." In other words, Jesus is the Messianic king. He is reigning now over the world. He is putting all his enemies under his feet. There will come a day when he breaks forth out of his invisible rule with visible glory and establishes his kingdom openly and gloriously on the earth. That is what Paul means by "Son of God in power." He is ruling now. He is working his purposes out through his Spirit and his church. And the day will come when Christ will defeat every enemy, and every knee will bow and confess that he is Lord to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:11).

The gospel of God is not primarily about you and how Jesus can help you find happiness and peace and fulfillment. Rather, it is from God and about God. It concerns His eternal Son, who humbled Himself to come from heaven and be born as a descendant of David according to the flesh. But after He offered Himself on the cross, God raised Him from the dead and He ascended into heaven. As Peter put it on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:36), "... know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified."

It ultimately doesn't come down to, "Can Jesus give me a happy life?" Rather, the crucial question is, "Who is Jesus?" Is He the eternal Son, risen from the dead, exalted as Lord? If so, then make sure that He is your Savior and Lord!

