

The Nature of the Gospel

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[0 : 00] Well, as I said when we were reading, last week we introduced ourselves to the letter of the Romans and we hope to spend some time studying this letter over the coming weeks.

And last week we asked ourselves a very simple question, we simply said, what is the book of Romans all about? And we highlighted four things. We said that Romans is all about the Gospel, it's all about the church, it's all about the world and it is all about the Christian life.

And these themes will come up again and again and again as we work our way through this letter. But in many ways it is the first of these that is the primary theme of Romans.

This letter is all about the Gospel, the good news of salvation in and through Jesus Christ.

And that's clear from the very first sentence of the letter because at the beginning Paul says, Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the Gospel of God.

[1 : 12] And in these verses Paul is just introducing his letter, but in doing so he is teaching us some vital things about the nature of the Gospel.

And today I want us to just go through these verses, verses one to six and see what Paul is teaching us so that we can learn more about the nature of the Gospel.

Now if you read Romans, which I hope you did, I gave you homework last week to read through the letter to the Romans. If you weren't here last week then that's your homework for this week to read all the way through Romans. I won't test you, I won't probe to see if you did it.

But it's good to sit and read through Romans from beginning to end to see how you find it. If you do that, or really if you read any of Paul's letters, you discover that he is very, very good at using very few words in order to say an awful lot.

In many ways he's the complete opposite of me because I use many words to say very little. But in Paul you find a huge amount of information condensed in just a few short verses and that's exactly what we find here in verse six because at one level this is just Paul's introductory comment.

[2 : 24] If you've got the ESV open in front of you, you'll see that the heading above verses one to six, one to seven rather, says greeting. And at one sense that's all it is. It's a greeting and yet within these words of greeting, Paul swamps us with rich and astonishing theology.

And even in these six verses, it's actually quite easy to get lost. And so I want us just to start by just breaking down what Paul is saying so that we can see clearly what has been said before us in these verses.

So verse one, Paul says, he introduces himself, Paul, servant of the gospel, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God.

And I've highlighted gospel in red because that he then goes in the next verses to give us more information about what that gospel is.

In verse two, he gives us some, some information about the gospel, he says, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scripture.

[3 : 35] So that's just a wee bit of background information about the gospel. Then he comes back to his main theme and he says it is concerning his son. And then we miss out a bit, Jesus Christ our Lord.

So if you follow the line of the sentence, it says Paul set apart for the gospel of God, concerning his son, Jesus Christ our Lord. The gospel is all about his son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

But in between his son and Jesus Christ our Lord, Paul gives us two pieces of supplementary information about Jesus. And I've tried to put a couple of arrows to show that.

It says that his son was descended from David according to the flesh and also that his son was declared to be son of God in power according to the spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead.

So Paul is saying gospel promised by God is all about Jesus. And here's two important pieces of information about Jesus. Then Paul picks up on his own name and talks about himself and the call to which he has been, the work to which he has been called by God.

[4 : 46] He says, through whom we have received grace and apostleship and that has a purpose to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations.

And then he finishes off by saying that his readers are included in this too, including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.

So I hope that's clear. I love colors and I love diagrams. So I look at that and it's like, that's exactly, that makes sense to me. But I hope that it's clear to you too that the basis of what Paul is saying is this is about the gospel, which is concerning his son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

And then the rest of it is giving us supplementary information about that gospel and about Paul's role in that good news message.

So it's clear that Paul is saying a lot of important things. And I want us just to look at these things together briefly this morning. So what's Paul saying about the gospel?

[5 : 51] Well, the first thing he says in verse two is that the gospel was promised beforehand by God through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures. Here Paul is making it very clear that the gospel is not something new, rather it's the culmination of all that God promised through the Old Testament.

And that's a very, very important point for Paul's position because the Jews often accused Paul of rejecting the Old Testament in Acts 21. They were saying, this is the man who's teaching everyone everywhere against the people and the law and this place.

So the Jews were saying, Paul, he's against the Old Testament. He's against the temple. He's against the law. Paul is saying, no. He's saying the gospel is not a rejection of the Old Testament. It is the fulfillment of it. And here Paul is highlighting the relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament. Paul is adamant that the gospel is not some novelty.

It's not something that's just appeared out of nowhere. It's not something that he has made up. And in chapter four, Paul goes into more detail by talking about Abraham and he shows that Abraham was saved in exactly the same way as we are by faith.

[7 : 08] And in all of this, Paul is reminding us of the unity of Scripture. We started reading the biggest story to the children, which is just a summary of that one message that runs from Genesis right through to Revelation, a united message of salvation.

And that's really important for us to recognize because a lot of people think that in the New Testament, God was abandoning the Old Testament. Sometimes you hear people say that, that the Old Testament was kind of a mistake or it went wrong so that when the New Testament began, God ripped up the Old Testament and started completely afresh.

People think that, but it is not true. The Old Testament is not abandoned in the New Testament. It is fulfilled and it all fits together beautifully.

Another thing that Paul reminds us of here is the fact that all of this is God's doing. If you look at that verse 2, if you think about who's the subject of everything, it's God.

God is the one who promised. It's God's prophets and it's God's Scriptures. They are holy because they are the Word of God. And that's teaching us two important things.

[8 : 30] First of all, the Gospel is God's message. Now that's really important to recognize. This is what makes Christianity unique.

It's not a man-made Gospel. It's not something that humans have thought up. This is God's good news. He is the one who initiates it.

He's the one who accomplishes it. He is the one who announces it. It's God's doing. So whenever any of us talk about the Gospel, we are speaking on God's behalf. As Paul says, we are ambassadors for Christ.

And it's vital that we remember that that is what makes our message powerful. The power of the Gospel does not lie in our skill or our eloquence or in our powers of persuasion.

And sometimes if you think about trying to share the Gospel with other people, you think, oh, how can I do it? I stutter, I stumble, I make mistakes. The power of the Gospel has got nothing to do with your eloquence or your skill.

[9 : 35] The power in the Gospel lies in the fact that it is God's message. And as we live in a world that seems so uninterested and so dismissive of the Gospel, we need to remember that.

This is the power of God unto salvation. Can God draw every single person in Carla Way to come and believe this Gospel too righty can?

Too righty can. It's God's message, God's power. So we're seeing that it's God's message, but we also see that the Gospel is God's promise.

Verse two is telling us that the Gospel is a promise made by God to you. So when God says that the righteous shall live by faith, as verse 17 tells us, that if we put our faith in Jesus, we are saved and given eternal life.

When God says that he is making you a promise, God has sent you. If you put your faith in Jesus, I promise to save you.

[10:44] Now notice how remarkable that is. Often we can think that favor with God is achieved by us making promises to him.

So we might say, Lord, if you listen to me, then I promise to do this. Lord, if you help me, I promise to do this, I promise to do that. If this goes the way I wanted to go, I promise that I'll do this and I'll do that.

We think that our favor with God is based on the promises that we make to God. But the amazing thing is that the Gospel does not say you will be saved because of your promise.

The Gospel says you will be saved because of God's promise. Now that is absolutely amazing.

It's not about you promising to God, it's about God promising to you. That's why the Gospel is such good news. God says, you put your trust in my Son.

[11:49] I will save you. That is my promise that I will never, ever break. So the Gospel is promised beforehand by God.

The next thing that Paul says, and in many ways this is the main emphasis of these verses, is that the Gospel is concerning his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. We'll leave them a little bit and just to one side for now.

The point here is that the Gospel is all about Jesus. Now remember last week we were saying that as we study Romans it will help us do two things.

It will help us understand the Gospel and it will help us explain the Gospel to other people. And here Paul is giving us step one for both of these things.

If you want to understand the Gospel, if you want to understand the message of Christianity then first and foremost you need to recognise that it is all about Jesus.

[12:52] And that is really important because a lot of people think that you can have God without Jesus. It's quite common for people to think, well I believe in God, I've got nothing against the church, I respect what the Bible says and I hope one day to go to heaven.

And of course it's good to think like that, all of these things are good but it's vital to understand that none of these things are possible without having Jesus at the very centre of everything.

Because if you believe in the true God then you believe in the God who is Father, Son and Spirit.

So the only correct view of Jesus is the view that says Jesus Christ is God.

That's the foundational presupposition of the Gospel. You might respect the church and enjoy coming along. That is brilliant but we must recognise it is Jesus' church.

He is the head of the church. And we may like the Bible and respect its teaching but the whole Bible is focused entirely on the person and work of Jesus Christ.

[14:03] The only way anyone can get to heaven is through Jesus. It is all about him. And so that is step one of understanding the Gospel.

But it also means that if we are explaining the Gospel to somebody, so if somebody comes to you and says what's Christianity all about, what's the Gospel message all about? Step one is to say well first and foremost Christianity is all about Jesus Christ.

That's the first thing that we should say, he is the focus, he is the foundation, he is the centre of the good news of Christianity.

It is all about him. So as we go through Romans we are going to try and put together just a short explanation of the Gospel that we will be able to use as we speak about it.

Step one in that process is well first of all we need to recognise that Christianity is all about Jesus Christ. And in these statements we see that Paul teaches us two important things about Jesus.

[15:13] He is highlighting two key truths concerning Jesus. The first is sonship. Jesus is God's son. Now that's really important.

Remember we are talking about the relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament. You go back to the Old Testament you see that God gives lots of promises concerning the Messiah, the Savior who is going to come.

God promises that the Messiah would come to be with us. He promises that the Messiah would be king. He promises that the Messiah would crush the serpent's head, which is what we were reading to the children about.

He promises that the Messiah would be rejected by humanity. He promises that the Messiah would suffer agony. He promises that the Messiah would bear the sins of others.

He promises that the Messiah would be led like a lamb to the slaughter. He promises that the Messiah would be sacrificed and would die for our guilt.

[16:13] And every time God made one of those promises, he was talking about his own precious beloved son.

Always remember that for us the Gospel is a free gift, but for God it came at the highest price. We see the sonship of Jesus. We also see the lordship of Jesus. Jesus is Lord. And that lies at the heart of the Gospel. In Jesus we see all the preciousness of the Son, but we also see all the authority of the Lord.

And we must keep both of these in view whenever we think of Jesus. As we look at Jesus the Son, we see the depth of love that lies at the heart of the Gospel. But as we look at Jesus the Lord, we see the magnitude of his power, his majesty and glory.

And it is these two together, the power and the love that make the Gospel simultaneously the most important message that you can ever hear and the most beautiful message that you will ever hear.

[17:35] And I really hope that we can see that, the importance and the beauty of the Gospel. And that is something, that's one of the many reasons why the Gospel is just so astonishing.

Because God is giving you the most important message that you could ever hear. And that is no exaggeration.

This is a method of eternal life and death and everything in your life pales into insignificance compared to the importance of this message. God is telling you the most important thing that you could ever hear and yet at the same time it is the most wonderful thing that you will ever hear.

Because it's a message of love and joy and peace and security. And the Gospel is not a trade-off between seriousness and happiness.

So often in life we have to make a trade-off between seriousness and happiness. So for example we have our houses and maybe we get some money and we think to ourselves well I would love to take a holiday with my family and do something joyful.

[18:51] But at the same time maybe I should do something important like pay off my mortgage. And there's a trade-off between seriousness and happiness.

If you trust in Jesus there is no trade-off because the most important thing in your life is also the most wonderful. God gives you eternal life and joy that is unspeakable.

And all of that is through his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. But in between those two statements we have two bits of important information and in many ways it's here that Paul is kind of just swamping us with quite deep theology.

What does he say? Well verse 3 he says that his son was descended from David according to the flesh and then in verse 4 he says and was declared to be the son of God in power according to the spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead.

Now if you look at these two statements you see that they kind of balance each other out. On the one hand Jesus is son of David, on the other hand he is son of God, on the one hand he has descended, on the other hand he has been declared and on the one hand it's according to the flesh and on the other hand it's according to the spirit of holiness.

[20:18] And there's a lot in these verses and we can only really scratch the surface. One of the main things being highlighted is that Jesus is both human and divine.

He is one of us but he is also God. And Paul is highlighting some important points that again relate to how the whole message of the Bible fits together.

Verse 3 he talks about Jesus descending from David and again he's emphasising continuity with the Old Testament promises. There's a direct link between David who was the greatest Old Testament king and Jesus and that means that Jesus himself is royalty.

The line of David is a royal line and Paul is highlighting the fact that Jesus has come as king. And of course when Jesus began his ministry what was it that he said? He said the kingdom of God has come.

He is the king of that kingdom. And if we go back to 2nd Samuel chapter 7 we see that God made a promise to David. When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your father I will raise up your offspring after you who shall come from your body and I will establish his kingdom.

[21 : 30] He shall build a house for my name and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. And Paul is highlighting the fact that Jesus is the ultimate fulfilment of that promise.

Jesus is royalty. He is king. But not only is he royalty he is also now part of humanity. That's what it's highlighted when Paul says according to the flesh.

Jesus is a physical descendant of David and that's confirmed in the genealogies that we have at the start of Matthew and Luke. And of course that reminds us that Jesus is a human just like Paul, just like David, just like you.

And so although David is the royal Davidic king in becoming that he has actually humbled himself by taking up our flesh and experiencing all the weakness and limitations of human life.

Jesus knew what it was like to struggle, to suffer, to be sordidful and to face all that we face as humans living our life.

[22 : 44] And the culmination of that humiliation was when Jesus went to the cross and faced death. Now I want you to imagine that you could see Jesus being led away and being taken towards the cross to face execution.

If you could see that you would look at that man and you think well who is he? He's obviously a criminal, he's a nobody.

You'd say he's definitely not the king of the Jews or the son of God. When Jesus died he died in what looked like total weakness.

But in verse 4 Paul reminds us that this is not the end of the story because it is in the resurrection that we see who Jesus really is. He had humbled himself by taking on our flesh and by dying on the cross but the resurrection shows that he is not weak at all.

In fact he has conquered death and he is now exalted as son of God in power as king of kings and lord of lords.

[23 : 59] So in other words at the cross Jesus was the son of God in weakness. But now after the resurrection he is the son of God in power.

And we have to ask ourselves the question is that how you view Jesus? When we think of Jesus it's very easy just to think of him in terms of weakness. We think of him being born in obscurity.

We think of him facing temptation and suffering throughout his ministry. We think of him being betrayed, beaten, assaulted, insulted and we think of him dying. Of course all of these are true.

Jesus was brought to the very depths of weakness and sorrow but we must never forget that all of that is in the past.

Because now, right now when we think of Jesus we need to be thinking of the one who reigns over every inch of this universe in absolute power.

[25 : 05] There is not one inch of this universe that Jesus does not look upon and say that belongs to me. Because he is the one who is son of God in power.

He is the one who is exalted. He is the one who has the authority. He is king. He is lord. He is the one who reigns.

And boy that means that we have got to take him seriously. So often we can have just a view of Jesus that just puts him in a wee box.

Sometimes in a positive box where we think of him in good terms but still just in a box. We kind of look over Jesus and put him in part of our lives.

We need to never forget that he is over us. He is the one who reigns. And that's why our relationship with Jesus is not something in our lives.

[26 : 09] It's everything in our lives. Paul teaches us some wonderful truths about Jesus.

We'll move on quickly. Paul then turns the focus to himself. And in verse 5 he talks about his own role in God's purposes. He says through whom we have received grace and apostleship.

Now notice the two words there, grace and apostleship. Grace basically means a gift. That grace is given by God. Apostleship means to be sent.

And so an apostle is one who has been sent. Paul has been sent by God. And the great emphasis of these two words is that Paul is saying that anything that he now is, is all God's doing. We can look at Paul and we think what an amazing guy he was. What a capable Christian he was. But Paul would say, look I am nothing but for the grace of God.

[27 : 09] I am the least of the apostles, he writes in 1st Corinthians 15, unworthy to be called up an apostle because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am.

And of course exactly the same is true of all of us. Any good that we have, any strength that we have, anything that we achieve as individuals or as a church, it is all God's doing.

We are totally reliant on him. Paul relied on God, so do we. It is through his grace and his strength that we are able to serve and accomplish things for him.

So Paul has been sent. But why has he been sent? What is the goal? Well that is the next thing he tells us. The purpose of that is to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among the Gentiles.

And again here Paul is teaching us some important things about the Gospel. First of all he is telling us what the response to the Gospel should be, the obedience of faith.

[28 : 18] That is our really interesting statement because it reminds us ultimately that faith is obedience, unbelief is disobedience. And that makes perfect sense because God has done everything required for our salvation and he asks of us one thing.

He asks for us to trust him. And that is ultimately a question of obedience or disobedience. But who is it that God wants to trust him?

Well the answer is all the nations. And that of course is highlighting the fact that the Gospel is for both Jew and Gentile which is a key theme in Romans that we will explore in the coming weeks. He is telling us that in Jesus Christ there is hope for absolutely everyone. For everyone no one is excluded.

The Gospel is for all nations. That's why we need missionaries. That's why we pray for missionaries. That's why we are missionaries here in Carly. Because we are surrounded by people who desperately need to hear the good news of the Gospel.

[29 : 33] So Paul tells us what the response is, obedience of faith. Who is it for? All nations. He also tells us why. People are to respond to the Gospel for the sake of his name.

And that sums up so much of what Paul has been saying in these verses because the focus is on God. It's God's promise. It's through his prophets. It's about his son.

He has given the grace. He has sent his missionaries out with this good news and it's all for the sake of Jesus' name. And again that makes perfect sense because Jesus is the one who is now exalted at the right hand of God.

He is the Son of God and power. We live in him, through him and for him. It's all for his name's sake. As we read at the very beginning of our service, worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing.

It's all for the sake of Jesus' name. So in conclusion, what have we learned about the Gospel? Well we've learned that it's promised by God.

[30 : 47] The whole Bible is pointing us towards this message. It is all about Jesus. He is the one who fulfills all that the Old Testament pointed towards.

He's the one who humbled himself by taking up our flesh. He is the one who is now exalted as Son of God in power. God has sent Paul and his fellow apostles with this message and they are totally dependent on God for all that they are and all that they do.

And the great goal of that Gospel is to bring about the obedience of faith among all the nations for the sake of Jesus' name. And so we see that the Gospel stretches across Scripture, it stretches across history, it stretches across the whole world and above it and over it and in it all is Jesus Christ.

It is all about him. But at the very end Paul says something amazing to these Romans.

He says that all of this includes them, including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.

[32 : 03] These Roman readers are part of that glorious message. And the amazing thing is that exactly the same thing is true of you.

God gives us this amazing Gospel message and he says that's including you. And these two words including you are two of the most wonderful words that you will ever hear.

Because they are telling you that whenever God makes a promise in the Gospel he is making that promise to you. All that God has achieved in the Gospel he has achieved it for you and all the blessings of the Gospel are blessings that God wants to share with you.

And that's all because God wants you as his people. That's what Paul says about these Romans, they are called to belong to Jesus Christ.

And so are you. And that's such a beautiful phrase, you are called to be the possession of Jesus Christ. In other words you are called to be his.

[33 : 26] So although the Gospel is all about Jesus, it is all for you. And as you go through Romans I want you to remember these two words including you.

Because Paul in this letter will describe many of the wonders that the Gospel gives us. And never forget that if you are a Christian all of these are including you.

When Paul says that we are more than conquerors that's including you. When Paul says that all things work together for good for those who love God that's including you.

When Paul says that the Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God and if children then heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ that's including you.

And when Paul says that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus that's including you.

[34 : 34] And if you are not yet a Christian then please realise that God wants to include you too.

And these words are a call to you. You are called to belong to Jesus Christ as well.

May God grant that we all answer that call in faith. Let's pray. Our Father we thank you for all the promises of the Gospel and for all that your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ has done for us.

We thank you for the way in which that Gospel message fits together so perfectly. Stretching across the pages of scripture, stretching across the ages of history and stretching across the nations of the world.

And over it all we see our Lord Jesus Christ reigning as Son of God in power. And that is only because he was willing to also be Son of God in weakness.

[35 : 46] Stretching on the cross so that we might be saved. We thank you so much for your love and for the hope of this Gospel message. Give us all eyes that can see and ears that can hear and hearts that love you and that will follow you.

Amen. Amen.