

Gospel Foundations

Romans 1:1-7

What is the gospel?

I have asked that question hundreds of times over the years.

I wish I could say I have received the correct answer most of the time, but sadly that has not been the case.

Often people have answered that the gospel is about doing nice things and being a nice person.

Some people think it is about reading your bible, praying every day, and going to church.

It is good to be nice and it is essential to read your bible, pray, and go to church, but that is not the gospel.

One of the most troubling conversations I ever had was with the leader of a denomination who answered the question with, “It’s not my job to articulate the gospel.”

I’ve been in rooms where people have proclaimed the gospel to be whatever you feel it might be.

The question of “What is the gospel?” has produced many sad and troubling answers and whenever I ask it I am always reminded of the great importance of getting the answer right!

We find that same concern throughout the New Testament and that is certainly true in the book of Romans.

Hopefully, all the kids got one of these sheets this morning and you are following along because this is an opportunity for you to jot down some ‘fun facts’ about Romans.

This is Paul’s longest letter in the New Testament and it is one of only two that he writes to churches he did not plant.

He is most likely writing this letter to the church in Rome because he is planning to go on a missionary journey to Spain and he wants to visit Rome before he goes and get help from the Christians there as he goes.

There are 16 chapters in this book, written down by a man named Tertius as Paul dictated to him.

Like all of God’s word, each chapter is filled with deep and glorious truth about Who God is, who we are, and how we can be made right with God through Jesus Christ.

[I’m calling this journey through Romans “Changed by the Gospel of Jesus Christ” because truly understanding and believing the right answer to the question “what is the gospel” is the most life changing experience anyone could ever have. We begin our journey this morning with the **first seven verses of chapter one**. In these verses Paul gives us some crucial gospel

foundations. There are four glorious and essential truths that we are given here. The first is this, that...]

Point #1 – The true gospel can only be found in God’s Word. (Verses 1-2)

In the Bible God has clearly and powerfully revealed Himself and His plan of salvation; therefore, it is the standard by which all truth claims are measured.

Like most of Paul’s letters, Romans begins by telling us who the letter is from. (Verse 1).

There are three very significant things that Paul claims about himself here.

First he calls himself ‘a servant’. Most literally translated this word means *slave*.

I like what Ian Paisley writes concerning this word, he says, “The slave is His Master’s instrument. He has no will but His Master’s. His is not to question but to obey.”

Many in the modern church would want to drive a wedge between Paul and Jesus as if Jesus would want something different than Paul.

That is because they have created a Jesus of their own imagination.

The true Jesus is Paul’s Master commanding his obedience. Paul says and does what the LORD desires.

To slave he adds that he has been ‘called to be an apostle.’

The word ‘apostle’ means one who is sent with authority.

Paul is saying here that he has been *called by God* and empowered with the authority to speak on behalf of Jesus.

In Galatians he says he was taught the gospel directly from Jesus.

This claim of apostleship leaves no room for middle ground which is true of the entire New Testament.

The writers of the Bible are either faithful witnesses or liars.

We don’t get to say, “I like what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13, but not so much what he says in 1 Timothy 2.”

He either has authority for all that he writes or none of it.

Thirdly, he says, he has been ‘set apart’.

That is he had been chosen by the LORD to be dedicated to the particular purpose of preaching the gospel.

Now look at what he says in verse 2 concerning the gospel (**Verse 2**).

The good news of what God has done for humanity rests upon the unshakable ground of Divine promise which was consistently announced over the course of many centuries through His chosen servants and written down for God’s people.

If we put all that together we have a clear claim that the true gospel has been made known to us by God speaking through His servants which has been kept for us in His written word.

When people start talking about ignoring the Old Testament or that Paul (or the other apostles) didn't get it right you can be sure that whatever they are preaching is a false gospel.

[In Jeremiah 2. God uses the picture of a spring of living water compared with broken cisterns. Any of the kids with us this morning know what a cistern is? A cistern is a holding tank for water. In the olden days they made cisterns in the ground and if they it did not work all the water would leak out and they would only have mud left. Have you ever tried to drink mud? It is tastes bad a can make you sick. God says to the nation of Israel that turning away from Him is like turning away from refreshing and life giving water to drink mud.]

That's what happens when people try and come up with a gospel of their own.

They turn away from the authoritative life giving word of God for things that promise satisfaction but bring death instead.

If you hear people say something like, "The gospel of Paul is not the gospel of Jesus" what you are about to hear is a twisted picture of Jesus made to suit their own desires rather than the kingdom of heaven.

I am always amazed when people talk like they know better than Paul or the other apostles.

It is his height of arrogance and foolishness.

[Paul is a slave to Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which is God's revelation of Himself through His written word. No matter what anyone else may say, this book is the only place to find the true gospel. Having given us the authoritative source for the gospel the apostle directs our attention to the central focus of the gospel. He shows us in verses 3 and 4 that...]

Point #2 – The heart of the gospel is the person and work of Jesus Christ. (Verses 3-4)

There is no good news apart from the Son of God entering into creation and conquering the grave.

The beginning of verse 3 is directly connected to the phrase 'the gospel of God' at the end of verse 1. (Verse 3a stop at 'Son').

While events and ideas are certainly important to the gospel message it is primarily about a Person, namely God's Son.

There is no gospel or good news about Jesus apart from who He is.

We are told three things about Him in **verses 3-4**, listen with me.

The word 'flesh' is referring to the substance of Jesus' human body.

When He came into the world he did so in a genuinely physical manner.

While He was conceived in a super natural way He experienced the process of developing real bone, muscle, skin, organs, and a nervous system inside Mary's womb.

He physically belonged to a real family and in His family tree there is King David.

I agree with commentators like Matthew Henry who believe both of Jesus' earthly parents belonged to David's family tree.

This was according to God's promises in the Old Testament.

In 2Samuel 7 God promises to establish David's throne forever through a future Son.

Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Micah and several of the psalms foretell that the saviour God promised to His people would be a son of David, and therefore the rightful heir to his throne.

There are two important truths here. One is Jesus' genuine humanity and two His God given credentials to fulfill the Bible's promise of a Saviour.

In addition to Jesus genuine humanity we are told this in **verse 4**.

He is the Son of David, but greater still He is also 'The Son of God'.

I believe there is little doubt that believers in every Christian church of this time period would here the full significance of that title.

Jesus was, is, and always will be the second Person of the Trinity.

Charles Hodge rightly says that the title 'Son of God means He is equal in power and glory to the Father and therefore His relationship to the Father as His Son exists for eternity.'

Harrison and Hagner say, "...declared does not equal became but rather his son ship veiled by the incarnation is made unmistakably plain by the resurrection.

It is the irrefutable evidence that all that Jesus claims to be He actually is.

He is truly human and truly God and therefore He can truly save us.

He is more than a saviour though, notice how Paul refers to Him at the end of verse 4.

He is, 'Jesus Christ our LORD'.

To call Jesus LORD is to say that He is above all earthly thrones and power and that He alone has final say over every aspect of our lives.

If Jesus is all that he claims to be and we know that He is on account of the resurrection than how could it be any other way.

This is absolutely essential to the gospel.

It is impossible to deny who Jesus is and be saved.

If we say that His humanity was a mere illusion, then how can he justly stand in our place and free us from the punishment that we deserve? Impossible.

If we deny His Divinity, then we make Him into an idolater and a liar who would have no worth to offer on our behalf.

This is an all or nothing proposition. Either Jesus is the Son of David and the Son of God the LORD of all or there is no gospel.

[Praise God Jesus has been raised from the dead and so we can be completely confident in the gospel. You may say, “How can you say that with such certainty?” Because the eye witness testimony is impossible to ignore. Paul’s testimony alone is compelling. The first time He saw Jesus alive he was dead set against the gospel, but meeting Jesus in person changed everything. What conceivable reason would he have to lie about that when doing so cost him everything, to suffer immense hardship, and sacrifice to the point of death? People don’t lie in order to suffer loss. The only reasonable explanation is that Paul really did meet Jesus face to face. He knew Jesus had died and he knew first hand that He is now alive. That is the heart of the gospel. Now what is the point of it? Why did God do such an amazing thing in and through His Son. That’s the next pillar established for us here, that...]

Point #3 – The purpose of the gospel is to change to world. (Verses 5-6)

When the good news of who Jesus is and what He has accomplished is announced it is an invitation to everyone who hears it to turn from their rebellion and see the goodness of all that God commands.

Look with me at the beginning of verse 5. (stop at ‘apostleship’)

Charles Hodge makes a convincing case that we should understand the word ‘through’ here to mean the source from whom Paul has received ‘grace’ and ‘apostleship’.

Because of Jesus’ perfect humanity and the infinite worth of His divinity He is able to supply grace to His people.

Paul was keenly aware of his need of grace.

He was very prideful and self-righteous before he met Jesus face to face.

He was happy at the death of Christians and was on a mission to put believers in jail.

Then as he was going along the road about noon Jesus showed up in blazing glory asking, “Saul, Saul (that is Paul’s Hebrew name) why do you persecute me?”

I imagine in that moment he thought he was a dead man, but instead of giving Paul what He deserved Jesus gave him grace.

Flowing from that grace Christ bestowed upon him apostleship, the authority to speak in the name of God's Son concerning what has been accomplished by the power of His resurrection.

He tells us why Jesus has given him grace and apostleship. **(Verse 5b-6)**

More than one commentator points out that the phrase 'obedience of faith' can be taken two ways.

It may mean that through the ministry of the apostles people from among the nations obey the gospel by believing it, or it could mean that believing the gospel produces obedience to the LORD in the life of the Christian.

It may be, as Colin Kruse suggests, that Paul intentionally says it in a way that allows for these two possibilities because he intends to say both things at once.

Believing is obeying and believing produces a heart that desires obedience.

I can think of no greater change than going from rebellion against God to believing in Jesus and wanting to obey the LORD.

God's mission is for that to happen 'among all the nations.'

That has been happening, it is happening, and it will continue to happen until Jesus comes.

I know things may seem a bleak at the moment, it may seem as though the gospel has lost ground over the last hundred years or so, but if we look at the big picture we will see that it is not so.

Jesus continues to build His church to the glory of His name and there will be believers from every corner of the globe in eternity as a result.

[Just take a moment to think of how things have changed through your lifetime. What are some inventions that have changed the world? But what have they really changed? Life is definitely more convenient. We have probably become less active and more easily distracted. We have extended the average life expectancy by a few years, but none of those things can change the human heart to know and love God. And nothing can change the way people live and relate to one another like that!]

I submit to you, and even some secular historians have concluded, that no name has reshaped the world as much as the name of Jesus Christ.

Listen, no name will endure into eternity like the Name of Jesus.

[God's purpose in the gospel is to change the world. To take hell bound people lost in sin and transform them into people who live in the light of the eternal hope of what Jesus has done for

us. Amazing. Closely connected to the purpose of the gospel is this fourth foundational truth about the gospel which is given to us in verse 7. It is that...]

Point #4 – Believing the gospel means belonging to God. (Verse 7)

Accepting Jesus' redeeming work is much more than a transaction of forgiveness, it is a fundamental change in how we relate to the LORD. It is a matter of knowing and experiencing His eternal and unchangeable affection.

As I mentioned near the beginning of this sermon, Paul did not plant the church in Rome.

Scholars think the church was founded within a few years of Jesus' death and resurrection by Jews from Rome who were in Jerusalem at Pentecost when Peter preached the first recorded sermon after the LORD ascended into heaven. (Acts 2:10)

Though Paul did not plant the church he did know people who belonged to it.

Aquila and Priscilla whom he met in Corinth at the beginning of Acts 18 were almost certainly a part of the church in Rome at some point.

It is also very possible that believers from a number of places where Paul had preached travelled to and from Rome and had some connection with the church while they were there.

As we will see next week, in Romans 1:8 he tells the church about how their 'faith is proclaimed in all the world' which makes it clear he is familiar with this church.

It is because he knows about the faith of these believers that he can write this in **verse 7a**.

I really appreciate that the word 'all' is used here.

This letter is written to the whole church. Every believer whether it be the newest member or the longest, both pastor and parishioner, rich, poor, young, old, man, woman, slave, free, Jew, or gentile.

Every genuine believer it says here is 'loved by God.'

No doubt someone will say, "Wait a minute doesn't God love everyone?"

Listen, I wholeheartedly believe in John 3:16, "*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.*"

That invitation is genuine and it is for all. God has acted in innumerable ways that are loving towards all people.

That is something different from being the object of His eternal, infinite, and unchanging affection.

When our sins are covered by the blood of the Lamb, when the righteousness of Christ is placed upon us and God sees His perfection upon us rather than the wickedness of our rebellion God is no longer simply acting in love towards us but He has an incomprehensibly deep and abiding delight and affection for us that He does not have for the unbeliever.

That is evident in Paul describing these believers as ‘called to be saints.’

The word ‘called’ here is the exact same word he used in verse 1 describing himself as ‘called to be an apostle’.

Just as God acted in Paul’s life to set him to a glorious task, so too He has acted in the life of every single believer.

The word saint is not a word to describe a group of extra special Christians, it is a word that refers to all believers.

It means to be set apart for God.

Being in Christ means we have been called out from a world lost in darkness to belong to God.

To that he adds this to his greeting (**Verse 7b**)

Grace is something the believer always needs.

Any right understanding of our own helpless condition, even the most basic grasp of the greatness of God, and the smallest appreciation for what Jesus has accomplished for us will lead us to the conclusion that our only hope is Grace.

That the LORD acts in immeasurable and undeserved kindness towards us.

From that grace comes ‘peace’.

Paul certainly has in mind the Old Testament idea of peace, the Hebrew word shalom.

Commentator Everett Harrison captures the understanding of the word writing that peace here means a person’s ‘ultimate well being in every regard.’

That is the goal of the gospel which is ultimately realized when Jesus comes again, but even in the here and now we have a taste of it in belonging to God.

These are foundations of the gospel which the rest of the book of Romans is going to help us see rightly.

We will see in chapter after chapter the apostle show us the gospel from the Scriptures.

This is the only place we can find the true gospel.

We will see in chapter after chapter that the person and work of Jesus Christ is the heart of the gospel.

He is genuinely human, the son of David. He is truly and fully Divine a fact that was clearly demonstrated we He conquered the grave after dying for our sins.

Any gospel which disregards Who He is and what He has done is no gospel at all.

God’s purpose in promising the gospel and fulfilling those promises is to change the world.

That has happened, is happening, and will be complete when our Saviour sets the sky ablaze and gathers us to Himself.

He is going to do that because if we are in Christ, if we have believed the good news concerning God's Son then we belong to Him as the objects of His eternal and unchanging affection.

What is the gospel? It is the good news of what our Great God, Who is worthy of all worship and praise, has done for people through His Son Jesus Christ.

Jesus has lived and died to make forgiveness possible, He has been raised from the dead because He has overcome the grave, and He gives life to everyone who turns from their evil ways and believes in His Name.

That's the gospel? Do you believe it?