

The Apostle and the Gospel

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Date: 01 June 2014

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[0 : 00] I want you to open your Bibles to Romans chapter 1. I'm really excited to begin preaching through the book of Romans. We're going to be in Romans for a while. We're going to take our time to get through Romans because more than any other letter that the Apostle Paul wrote, really more than any other book in the Bible, the book of Romans lays out for us what the Gospel is all about and how Christ has won our redemption, what He has done, and then how that works in our lives and how we ought to respond to that and then the changes that eventually ought to take place in our hearts and lives as we come to embrace the Gospel and understand the Gospel and be transformed by the Gospel.

And so we're going to begin this morning with the first seven verses. I want you guys to stand with me as we read together. The Apostle Paul opens this letter and says, Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the Gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by His resurrection from the dead.

Father, we thank you at the outset of this series through Romans that your Spirit inspired Paul to write this letter so that countless generations of believers might benefit from the incredible things that are revealed here in these 16 chapters.

So help us this morning as we start. Help us to get a clear view of what this letter is all about. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen. You guys take a seat.

I'm not one of those pastors or one of those preachers who thinks that being a pastor or being a preacher is the hardest job in the world. I've read enough books written by other pastors and I've read enough Facebook posts by other pastors and seen that there are some who would paint the picture that the hardest thing you could ever do in life is to choose to be a pastor and the hardest job you could ever endeavor to pursue is that of a pastor.

[2 : 48] And I'm not sure that that's true. There are difficult moments in being a pastor but I'm not sure that being a pastor and accepting that calling upon your life is any more than accepting the fact that God has called you to minister the gospel as an operator at a chemical plant or as a mechanic at a car shop or as a hairdresser at a beauty salon.

We are all called in the various places of our lives where we work to minister the gospel to people and every job is difficult and every job has its easy functions. So I don't know that being a pastor is more difficult than what you all do during the week whether you stay at home with kids which is incredibly difficult or whether you go off to work.

I don't know that what I do is necessarily just by its nature any more difficult than what everybody else does but there are awkward moments to being a pastor.

There are odd things that you experience and that you have to deal with that not everybody else just that there may be strange things in your jobs that other people aren't going to experience.

One of the things that always strikes me is just a little bit awkward and I've done it I can't even count the number of times that I've done this but it's to preach a funeral for someone that you've never met and that you really don't know anything about and then it gets even more difficult even more awkward when you don't know anybody in their family.

[4 : 12] When you get a phone call from a funeral home and there's a family that you've never heard of and never met but they need a preacher and the funeral home director thought of you so he called you and so you agreed to do it.

You always agreed to do it because it's a chance to share the gospel at a funeral with people that I don't know so I've never turned one of those down and I've done a lot of them but it's an awkward

kind of moment when you have to try to talk about somebody that you don't know anything about when you have to try to address people and empathize with people that you don't really know it's hard to relate to people when you don't know anything about them in fact I remember one time in particular this was so funny people react in different ways to you when you do those things and they don't know you I can remember I had been I did this one funeral and I had been in full time ministry by the time I did this funeral about five years so I had probably done 30 or 40 of these things by then because I typically do you know I don't know four or five a year and then I had also been preaching for maybe 15 years I've been preaching for quite a while by the time I preached this particular funeral so I've been in the ministry for a while full time I've been preaching for quite a long time

I mean I already had two degrees in teaching how to do ministry I've been doing this stuff for a while and I preached a funeral for this family I didn't know and then at the end of the funeral I sort of stood at the back that's how they wanted to arrange things so people could exit through the back and I greeted people at the back door as they left and I can remember in particular one of the family members came up to me and he shook my hand and he stared me straight in the eye and he said son someday you're going to make a pretty good preacher I don't know how to respond to that because I just preached a funeral right in front of you today like five minutes ago but someday I'm going to be decent at this someday I'll be okay at this it's a strange thing it's kind of weird when you have to do those kinds of things but the fact of the matter is a lot of the times we have to minister to people we have to share the gospel with people that we don't really know all that well that we don't have a connection with and that's exactly what's happening here in this letter the apostle Paul knew some of the people in the church at Rome we know that from the end of the letter where he greets some of them but this was not a church that he started most of the letters that he writes

Paul wrote 13 of the 27 books of the New Testament everything Paul wrote that we have in here was a letter addressed either to a church or a particular individual and all of those letters with the exception of Romans and Colossians were written either to churches that he himself had started he planted those churches or they were written to individuals that he had personally mentored and disciplined so that when we come to the book of Romans it's different than his other letters even Colossians was written to a church that Paul was familiar with a church that had been begun by one of his own co-workers so even there he had a closer relationship than he has with the Christians in Rome he's never met the people in the church there with the exception of a handful of folks he doesn't know them they do not know him they only know of the Apostle Paul by reputation that's the only way that they know of him in fact the church in Rome was a little bit odd it was a little strange because it was sort of composed of Christians who had come to Rome from various places all over the empire it wasn't like most of the churches that we find in the New Testament where the Apostle Paul or another Apostle simply went there and started that church sort of from scratch preaching in the synagogues and then outside the synagogues and put a church together of new believers the church at Rome was composed of a lot of people who had heard the gospel in other places in fact there was at one time all of the Jews were kicked out of Rome because they were being blamed for some things that they really didn't do and as they were gone some of them were converted and some of them came back and became a part of the church at Rome when many of the Christians fled from Jerusalem after Pentecost when persecution began there some of them went back to Rome where they were from and so the church at Rome was a little bit different it didn't begin the way that many other churches in the New Testament began and so the Apostle Paul didn't have the kind of relationship with the Romans that he had with most of the people and the churches to whom he wrote letters which means that in this book he has to sort of systematically lay out for them what he has been teaching and preaching through all of these years of ministry because he has a plan he wants to go to Rome and he wants to use Rome as a stopping off point as a staging point for him to go further all the way to Spain so that he can begin to do ministry and start churches in Spain he's got big plans and big ideas but in order to get to Spain he needs to stop off in Rome and he needs the people of the Roman church to support him so he writes this letter in order to really effectively introduce himself to them say here's who I am here's what I've been preaching here's what you can expect me to preach in fact you can see that if you just look down a few verses in verse 9

Paul says God is my witness whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his son that without ceasing I mention you always in my prayers asking that somehow by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you he's never made it there he's tried a few times but he's never been able

to go to Rome and get to know these believers there he says in verse 11 for I long to see you that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you and then in verse 13 he says I want you to know brothers that I have often intended to come to you but thus far have been prevented so Paul's wanted to go to Rome for a long time but he's never been able to make it there circumstances have arisen things have happened the Lord has directed him to other places so that he's never quite made it there and now he's headed that direction eventually and he wants them to know who he is he wants them to know what he teaches what he preaches so that they can then support him as he moves on towards Spain which is why this letter is the longest of all the letters that we have in the New Testament it's certainly the longest of Paul's letters by far the only thing that competes with it is really the book of Revelation which is not so much a letter it's a collection of letters followed by John an account of John's vision so if you're just talking about just letters this is the longest one by a long shot in fact this letter is longer than almost any other ancient letter that has ever been discovered by archaeologists it's long for a letter

[10:50] I mean none of us write letters that are pages and pages long if you write a letter to someone and nobody really does that anymore we send them emails and text messages but if you did for some reason sit down with pen and paper and write a letter what would it be two or three pages tops and this goes on page after page after page sixteen chapters because Paul needs to take time to help them to understand the gospel that he preaches which means that now we have before us a book that helps us to see and understand the gospel of Jesus Christ and so as we walk through this particular letter it's going to take us quite a while we're going to spend our time we're going to take our time because I believe that the most important thing for us to understand the most important thing for us to know as individuals as a church is to know and understand and be rooted and grounded in the gospel of Jesus Christ and this letter will do that for us like nothing else and so I want us to begin just by looking at what Paul tells us about himself and then the few little bit of introduction that he gives to the gospel that he preaches so he tells us essentially three things about himself in verse 1 he identifies himself as Paul a servant of Christ

Jesus called to be an apostle set apart for the gospel of God the first thing that Paul tells us is that he is a servant of Christ in fact literally if you were to translate more literally it would say that he is a slave of Christ Paul thinks of himself as having been bought and owned by Jesus Christ he doesn't belong to the world anymore he doesn't belong to his old former life in Judaism he belongs to Jesus Christ on the cross has paid a price for Paul he has ransomed and redeemed Paul and he now owns the apostle Paul in fact hold your place there I want you to turn over to Galatians chapter 1 listen to what Paul says in Galatians chapter 1 in verse 10 he tells us am I now seeking the approval of man or of God or am I trying to please man for if I were still trying to please man I would not be and this is the same word I would not be a slave or servant of Christ so for Paul this category of slave of Jesus is all encompassing and it sets him apart it makes him different than other people in the world in fact it determines his course of action if he were not a slave of Christ then he would try to do things and say things in a way that would please other people around him he wouldn't be so offensive in his teaching he wouldn't say things that were so difficult and so hard for others to hear he would sugarcoat things he would soften things he would change some of the messages that he gives but he says that's not an option for him he belongs to

Christ and he must deliver the message that Christ has given him to deliver he is a slave of Christ Christ and in fact we are all if we are followers of Jesus we are all bought by him redeemed by him and marked out as his very own possession this is not something that is unique to the apostle Paul being a slave of Christ this is something that is true of all those who have trusted in him all those who have believed in him we become his servants his slaves which means that all of our actions and all of our thoughts ought to be determined by him and oriented toward him so that we can't be people pleasers if Paul couldn't be a people pleaser because he was a slave of Christ we can't be people pleasers because we are slaves and servants of Christ if Paul couldn't alter his message because he was a servant of Christ then we can't alter our message because we are servants of Christ we share this in common with him and yet we are tempted all the time aren't we we are tempted all the time to dial back on our witness we are tempted all the time to soften the message as we try to deliver it to people but there's no way to soften a message that says you're a sinner the wrath of

God hangs over you you must believe in Christ there's no way to soften that there's no way to make that easier for a world that rejects the idea of a wrathful God rejects the idea of an objective reality

by which we can measure our actions against so that sin is real there's no way to soften this message it comes in as difficult and hard and however tempted we might be to avoid saying the hard things we need to identify with Paul and recognize that we have been bought and paid for and we are now owned by Jesus and we do not have the right to change the commission that he has given to us we like Paul we're slaves we are servants of Christ but he says a lot more about himself than that in fact he goes on to say some things about himself that are that are unique to him that we don't we don't share in common with him he says that he is called to be an apostle that's significant in almost all of

Paul's letters he begins by introducing himself as an apostle over and over again his letters began Paul an apostle Paul an apostle because for him it was crucial that those who read his words understood that those words come with authority an apostle just means someone who is sent out by someone else that's all it means and Paul could at times use the term to describe someone who was say an apostle or a messenger of a particular church he does that in Philippians he describes somebody as simply a messenger of the church of Philippi and he uses the word apostle but most of the time in Paul's letters he introduces himself not simply as an apostle he introduces himself as an apostle of Jesus Christ or an apostle of Christ Jesus because if you're an apostle then you come with the message and the authority of the one who sent you out so when Paul claims that he is an apostle of

[17:19] Christ over and over in his letters he is telling us that he comes and he writes with the very authority of Jesus himself we can't pick through Paul's letters and choose the things that we want to believe and the things that we want to reject we can't comb through his letters to select out the parts of Paul's message that sound good and that we think oh that'll work in today's world that'll work we can do that and then to discard the things that we think that!

we can't do that today that doesn't work in our world we won't we'll ignore that part of Paul's message you can't do that because Paul is an apostle he is an apostle of Christ and he comes with the very authority of Christ which means that everything that we read here throughout this letter is going to come to us not only as the words of Paul but as the word of Christ himself in fact Paul says that he is a called apostle he has been called to this task and then he helps us understand better what that means in the next thing he says called an apostle and then he clarifies that he has been set apart for the gospel of God that's how Paul thinks of himself called to be an apostle set apart that calling sets him apart for something in particular for the gospel of God he has been set apart for a very specific crucial task in the establishing of the church in these early days of the church he is set apart for the gospel called as an apostle now most of time when we come across the word called or calling in

Paul's letters it refers to our salvation it refers to the work of the Holy Spirit to cause new spiritual life to well up within those whom he has chosen and then they believe that's what calling means it is the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of someone and God calls but here it seems as Paul is using it in another sense doesn't it sound like he's talking about his vocation the way that we use it a lot well that guy really has a calling to be a doctor that's his calling we say that sort of stuff all the time but you can't really separate those things for Paul you cannot separate Paul's conversion from his call to be an apostle because for Paul they're one and the same for Paul they happen simultaneously turn over again to Galatians chapter 1 I want you to hear what Paul has to say about his own calling to be an apostle in Galatians chapter 1 verse 11 he says

I would have you know brothers that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel for I did not receive it from any man nor was I taught it but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ it says down in verse 15 when he who had set me apart that's the same word that he uses in Romans 1 1 set apart but when he who had set me apart before I was born and who called me there's the word calling who had called me by his grace was pleased to reveal his son to me so this is salvation he called me he set me apart he revealed his son to me and yet listen to what he says why did he do that in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles you cannot separate out when was you can't say well Paul was well he was saved at this time and then he received his calling to be an apostle at this time for Paul it all happens at once it's all one one event Christ appears to him on the road to Damascus Paul immediately begins to see and recognize that the one he has been persecuting is indeed the Messiah and he's not only converted but in that moment Jesus commissions Paul with taking the gospel to all the Gentiles that is to all the nations and so all that happens at once so when Paul says in Romans 1 that he's called to be an apostle

and set apart to or for the gospel of God he means that he's both saved for the sake of the gospel and he means that he has been given a clear commission to preach the gospel just as he said in Galatians specifically Paul's call was to preach the gospel to the Gentiles look down in verse 5 and see what Paul says here he says through Christ we have received grace and apostleship why to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations and he says to the [22 : 10] Romans including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ he received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles among all the nations now don't get hung up on this phrase obedience of faith because when Paul uses this term what he means for us to understand is that the obedience itself is faith for the apostle Paul the only kind of obedience that counts before God is faith and so when he says that his task is to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of Christ's name among the nations what he means is I have a calling and my call is to go and preach the gospel so that people might respond to the command to repent believe and be saved that's the only kind of obedience that Paul is initially concerned with here believe trust no exercise the obedience of faith when you hear the gospel and his entire mission his entire life is all about seeking the obedience of faith among the nations among the non-Jewish

Gentile nations of the world that's what Paul is about and he says to these Roman Christians listen my calling my being set apart is for this singular task that the name of Jesus might be exalted among the nations as people trust in him and you Romans are among the nations so I'm coming to see you I'm coming to preach to you so that I might bear some fruit among you and so that then you might send me out to continue this mission of gaining glory for the name of Jesus among the nations as people trust his whole calling and life summed up in just a couple of verses but he doesn't leave us there and he doesn't leave the Romans there because even though he will spend literally the rest of this book explaining the gospel he gives us sort of a quick summary of what he believes about the gospel in the middle of this introductory paragraph!

for the gospel of God and then in verse 2 he tells us two things in the following verses about this gospel the gospel is promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures now underline that make a note about that in your bible Paul did not view himself even though he has a unique call to preach the gospel among gentiles he did not think of himself as preaching or proclaiming a new message Paul hasn't made something up Paul didn't think up some new message that would be palatable to the gentiles that would be acceptable to them and then decide to simply shove aside all of his upbringing and all of his own Jewishness and move on and preach some new message that is not Paul's calling that not what he did the apostle Paul saw the gospel that he proclaimed as rooted in predicted by prophesied by spoken about witnessed to by the

Old Testament prophets themselves this is not just some new thing this is the fulfillment of the word of God through his prophets in the Old Testament in fact throughout Romans Paul is going to quote from 13 different books of the Old Testament he will quote from the Old Testament more than 50 times in this letter in order to defend and prove his gospel this is nothing new this is the fulfillment of the promises God made to Israel this is the fulfillment of all that God spoke through the prophets nothing new here except that now we have more insight now we have more understanding because not only was the gospel promised beforehand in the prophets spoken about in the prophets but this is a gospel that is centered upon Jesus notice what he says this gospel is promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures and it is a gospel that is about or that is concerning his son that's the gospel message!

in a nutshell!! The gospel was prophesied in the Old Testament and the gospel is thoroughly about Jesus it is about God's son if you preach a so-called gospel that merely references God that's it if you tell people you need to believe in God you need to follow God you need to listen to what God has to say then you have not preached the gospel because the gospel does not consist of a vague message about God in general the gospel is a message about the son of God Jesus Christ and you don't have good news without Jesus you don't have a gospel without the son of God at the center of that gospel we believe in a very particular God we believe in a God who has revealed himself and made himself known supremely in his son

[27 : 51] Jesus and if you water that gospel down so that it merely becomes a spiritual message about believing in God you have lost the gospel for the apostle Paul the gospel is always and only about Jesus it is a message concerning his son and then lest we think that we can define Jesus in any way that we want Paul spends some time saying to the Romans now I want you guys to know

that the Jesus that I proclaim is the same Jesus that you guys believe in and is the same Jesus promised in the prophets he needs to make sure that they understand because there are lots of false teachers in the world there are a lot of false prophets who will proclaim someone with the name of Jesus and yet that someone bears no resemblance to the Jesus in the Bible would bear in Paul's day no resemblance to the

Messiah that had been promised to the prophets of old and Paul wants to make sure that the Romans understand not only does he preach a gospel that is centered upon the Son of God but that Paul has a biblical!

biblical understanding of who that Son is there's just three things that I want you to take note of that Paul mentions and you can miss the first one easily because we want to move ahead to what he says in verse!

at the second half of verse 3 about being descended from David but you have to pause for a moment and recall that Paul introduces Jesus here as the Son of God that's important because he's going to go on to talk about Jesus as the Son of God in another sense in these verses but you have to begin with Jesus before he becomes in the second half of this verse before Jesus becomes or is made the seed of David he is already the Son of God notice how it's worded the gospel is a gospel concerning God's Son who was descended from David according to the flesh literally it says who was made or who was born of David according to the flesh who became the seed of David according to the flesh Jesus was already eternally the Son when he became the seed of David that's crucial that's crucial there's there's a there are three steps that take place in these verses first there's Jesus already Son of God eternally the Son then there is Jesus in the flesh descended of David and then it moves on to another level where we're told in verse 4 that he's declared to be the Son of God in power according to the spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead he is Son eternally he is lowly flesh descendant of David in his earthly life and ministry in the flesh and then by the power of the resurrection now we see that he is Son of God in power Son of God eternally descendant of David in the weakness of the flesh while on earth and now displayed and made to be seen as Son of God in power after the resurrection that's that's the order of things eternal son lowly descendant of

[31 : 28] David living a human life resurrected declared shown to be Son of God in power that's not a pattern that Paul follows only here in Romans turn over to Philippians if you would I want you to see this because it's so crucial I think to understanding Paul's conception of who Jesus is that we understand this threefold division here turn over to Philippians if you can't find it it will be on the screen but in Philippians chapter 2 Paul takes one of those side ramps off of his main point to begin to just talk about Jesus for a bit and he says this about Jesus in verse 6 that in the form of God he did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped but made himself nothing taking the form of a servant being born in the likeness of men now pause for a moment there you have Jesus who is in the form of

God that is he possesses the being of God he is divine and then he takes upon himself the form of a servant and is born in the likeness of men see this eternal divine nature always existing Paul says in Romans son of God here in Philippians he says in the form of God eternal always existent lowly coming into the world as a man in Romans more specific a man from the line of David and then there's the third turn being found in human form he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death even death on the cross verse 9 therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name so that the name of Jesus every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father so here it is eternally in the form of God God by nature lowly man risen exalted resurrected Savior it's the same pattern it's the same pattern here in Romans chapter 1 he is eternally the son of God the gospel concerns the one who is the son that is his identity he is the son in relation to the father he becomes the seed of David in the flesh lowly on this earth and then through the power of the resurrection he is shown to be the son of God in power this is who Paul proclaims not a vague notion of Christ the fulfillment of all the promises made about the Messiah and the descendant of David the Old have a descendant who would sit on his throne forever that can only happen if a

David has an unending succession of descendants who sit on the throne that goes on forever or b if David has a singular descendant who lives forever on the throne we know it's not option a because already by the time of the writing of the New Testament Israel has gone centuries without a descendant of David on the throne that's not the solution to the fulfillment of the promise is of a

coming one that the prophets called the root of David and the righteous branch this promise that one would come and sit on the throne but not only that but that righteous one would be the righteousness of God that he would in some way be also divine!

so that you have God reigning on the throne and the descendant of David reigning on the throne simultaneously in one person and Paul says I come to preach a gospel and it is about that one I preach a gospel concerning this one who is the eternal son of God descended from David according to the flesh and now declared to be son of God in power through the resurrection that's who I preach that's who I proclaim and if we preach and proclaim any other Jesus we have not preached we have not proclaimed the Savior promised in the Old Testament and the Savior depicted in the New Testament the gospel is very specific it is a gospel about Jesus and about a particular Jesus revealed in the pages of scripture and all of this matters greatly not only for the Romans it matters for you and

[36 : 27] I because Paul said that his mission was to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of the name of this one this Christ this Messiah this Jesus including all who are called to belong to Jesus Christ the reality is that someday a preacher will preach your funeral might be me I might outlive some of you could be but all of us will have a preacher preach our funeral and for some of you that preacher will know you well and he'll say all kinds of kind things about you and remember things and share things for others of you he may not know you very well at all and he'll preach just a vague sort of sermon and try to eulogize you well and none of that will matter it won't matter who preaches your funeral it won't matter whether he does a good job or a great job it won't matter who's there it won't matter who hears on the day when some preacher preaches your funeral!

the only thing that will matter will be whether or not you have given the obedience of faith to the Jesus proclaimed in this word that is the only thing that will matter and the only thing that will ever matter for the people that you love is whether or not they have trusted in the Jesus of this book that's the only thing that will ever matter your kids will not live forever your grandchildren will not live forever!

your best friend will not live forever your cousins your aunts your uncles your parents will not live forever and the only thing in the end that matters is not who preaches their funeral who shows up at their funeral or who celebrates their life the only thing ultimately that matters is whether or not they have rendered the true obedience of faith and trusted!

in Christ in this Christ in this Messiah in this Jesus nothing else matters but that we receive the good news of Christ crucified for our sins and risen so that we might have life