

Jesus: God's Good News

Romans 1:2-6

January 8, 2017

Introduction:

I'm not one much for watching television. We own a TV of course, but truth be told it's used by me almost exclusively for playing video games or watching movies. Plus, we don't have cable, which leaves us with whatever we can get in by broadcast television, which isn't all that much. Not that there's anything worth watching anyway: I find the majority of shows advertised during the few commercials I do see to be reprehensible. Other than what I might stumble across on PBS or the occasional Green Bay Packers game, I barely watch any TV at all.

But there is one program I do watch on almost a regular basis and that's the NBC Nightly News, although that is almost as depressing as the shows I don't watch. The news is rarely about anything one could consider as "good" news: just story after story about the atrocities committed by ISIS, political corruption, natural disasters, plane crashes, rising unemployment, police shootings, nuclear threats from North Korea, and new medical studies showing that your favorite food will give you cancer. Happy, happy, joy, joy. I must be sadistic to keep watching the news broadcast every day because it's rarely about anything positive. When it comes to "the news" you can expect story after story of misery, death, and disaster with a little heartwarming human interest fluff-piece thrown in at the end, as if that could possibly off-set the hoard of negative news stories preceding it.

Let's face it, good news is in short supply these days, which makes this morning's passage all the more refreshing because it's all about "good news" – the good news of the gospel. Last week we looked at the first verse of Paul's letter to the Romans, where he introduced himself as **"Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God..."** but we stopped mid-sentence because after Paul mentions the gospel he goes on to elaborate on the nature of that gospel over the next few verses. But this morning we're going to camp out on this wonderfully rich middle section of Paul's opening greeting of his letter and consider what this "good news" of the gospel is all about.

But to do that, I'll need you to open your Bibles to Romans 1, which is located on pg. 939 of the pew Bibles should you be using those. Our focus today will be on v. 2-6, but let me start reading at v. 1 to avoid beginning mid-sentence. Again, we're in Romans 1, reading v. 1-6. **"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, Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ..."**

There are a couple of main observations Paul makes about the gospel in this passage that I want to unpack for us today and the first of them is this...

1. The gospel was promised through the prophets

Right after mentioning that he was set apart for the gospel of God, Paul elaborates on the gospel, saying it is that, “**which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures...**” The first thing Paul wants these Roman believers to know is that the gospel he’s going to present to them is not some new and novel idea that he concocted. You might remember that Paul was often accused of being anti-Jewish. His emphasis on salvation being by grace through faith, and not by the works of the law, led him to insist Gentile believers didn’t need to follow Jewish ritual observances such as circumcision and dietary restrictions. This didn’t sit well with Judaizers who insisted that Christians needed to follow the Law of Moses and it certainly didn’t sit well with the Jews who viewed their former colleague and a threat and a traitor. As a result, they accused Paul of denying the Law and preaching a radical new message that had absolutely no connection with God’s Word given to Moses in the Law.

Thus, Paul wants to set the record straight right from the get-go with these Roman believers and say in no uncertain terms that his gospel is not something invented by him, but rather it is the fulfillment of all that the prophets throughout Scripture had been pointing to all along. Now were I to elaborate on this point, in terms of how Jesus was the fulfillment of all which the OT was pointing to, that would be a lengthy sermon series in itself! But Paul, of course, is only saying what Jesus himself said in Matthew 5:17, where Jesus stated, “Think not that I’ve come to destroy the law or the prophets. I am not come to destroy but to fulfill.” Or during what must have been the greatest Bible study ever, as Jesus walked down the road to Emmaus after his resurrection, he begins talking with the two men and then, “...beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself” (Luke 24:27).

So Paul wants to be clear that the gospel he preaches is precisely what all the OT prophets were pointing to. Every drop of blood split on an altar, every sacrificial lamb offered up, every promise of a king who would reign eternally, every vision of a day when the enemies of God’s people would be defeated, every prophecy of a time of peace and prosperity for those who love God, have been fulfilled in Christ. Without Jesus, the OT would stand incomplete.

It would be like reading *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy and stopping after the second book. Well, does Frodo destroy the Ring or doesn’t he? Is Aragorn crowned king or not? The OT by itself is like an unfinished novel. Will God’s promises to Israel be fulfilled? Will David’s throne really be established forever? Will God’s people finally enter into their rest? Without the gospel, the entire storyline of Scripture is left hanging. So in essence Paul is saying, “Let me tell you how the story ends. The gospel I preach was given to me by Christ who, as the original author of all the prophecies of Scripture, knows how the final chapters tie up all the loose ends.” Paul’s goal then is give confidence to his readers that what he’s going to proclaim to them in this letter is not in contradiction to the OT but rather is the long-awaited proper fulfillment of it.

For us then, as we study Romans over the next couple of years, it’s worthwhile to notice how often Paul quotes Scripture throughout. Paul doesn’t make his points in a

vacuum: he repeatedly uses either OT stories or quotations to demonstrate that Christ is the fulfillment of all of God's promises. Paul wants us to take confidence that God's plan of redemption has been consistent throughout: that all that the OT predicted and foreshadowed has been fulfilled perfectly in Christ. So then, we should find great confidence that what Paul has to teach us is in complete harmony with the entire OT because the gospel reveals the appointed fulfillment of it.

But moving on now, far more essential than how the gospel was promised beforehand by the prophets is who the gospel is about and that brings us to our second point...

2. The gospel is centered upon Jesus Christ, the Son of God

Looking back in your Bibles, at the start of v. 3 Paul states that the gospel he has been called to preach is **"concerning his Son,"** referring of course to Jesus, the Son of God. This gets down to the heart of the matter. What Paul said about the gospel being promised beforehand in the Scriptures is really just the on-ramp to the central focus of this whole section and of the gospel itself. The good news is that God became one of us not to condemn us but to save us. God the Father sent his Son, the second Person of the Trinity, to become a flesh and blood human being, born to Mary his mother, to redeem us from the penalty of our sins. Jesus Christ stands at the center of the gospel.

Everything else Paul has to say until the end of v. 6 is a further elaboration on who the Son is and what he has done. We're going to break this down into a few sub-sections as we study the rest of this passage and the first thing Paul says about the Son of God is that...

a. According to the flesh, he was the son of David

Look back in your Bibles as I read v. 3. In regards to the gospel, it is **"concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh..."** Paul is speaking here of the humanity of Christ. He is emphasizing first off that Jesus was indeed a flesh-and-blood human being. Jesus did not merely appear as a man without actually becoming one, as some heretical groups have claimed throughout history. Scripture is abundantly clear that Jesus was God incarnate, that the Son of God became a real human being. Throughout the gospels we find Jesus engaging in very human actions, such as eating and drinking, weeping, bleeding, sleeping, sweating, and talking, just to name a few.

It is necessary for Jesus to be truly human for a couple of reasons. The first one is found in what Paul is alluding to here in v 3 by saying that Jesus was **"descended from David according to the flesh..."** God had made promises in the OT that he would establish David's throne forever. For example, it says in Jeremiah 23:5, "The days are coming," declares the Lord "when I'll raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land." Or Isaiah 11:10 it says, "In that day the Root of Jesse [i.e., the Son of David] will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his place of rest will be glorious." In order for numerous promises from the OT to be fulfilled, Jesus needed to be of the

lineage of David on his human side. Biologically Jesus was genetically related to David through Mary and by adoption he was related to David through Joseph who adopted Jesus as his own child. So then, the gospel is good news because it tells us God has fulfilled his promises made centuries earlier to give his people a king who would sit on David's throne forever and establish perfect justice and peace.

But the second reason this is good news is that since Jesus was truly human, he could perfectly identify with us. Unlike all the previous high priests, Jesus didn't have to offer sacrifices year after year: he himself was the spotless lamb, who could identify with us because he was indeed one of us, whose death dealt with our sins once and for all. As Hebrews 9:12 says, "But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come... he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption." Thus, in Hebrews 4:15 we're told, "We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

So, the gospel is good news indeed! Not just good news, but great news, amazing news, a most glorious news that floods our hearts with joy. That's what the book of Romans is all about: Paul proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the fulfillment of all the OT promises, who has taken up the throne of David, and has perfectly identified with us in his life, death, and resurrection.

But the flip side of the coin regarding Jesus is not only was he the son of David by virtue of his humanity, but he is the very Son of God in his deity. So then, the second sub-point for us to consider regarding Jesus is that...

b. According to the Spirit, he was the Son of God

Paul goes on to describe Jesus in v. 4 saying, "...and **(he) was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord...**" What does it mean that Jesus was "**declared**" to be the Son of God? It certainly doesn't mean that Jesus became the Son of God only after his resurrection from the dead. Jesus existed as the Son of God, as the second Person of the Trinity in eternity past. The apostle John was clear when he said at the beginning of his gospel that, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

Rather, Paul is referring to salvation history and saying that through his resurrection, Jesus is now being rightly revealed as the Son of God, whom he always was, yet who in the past had remained hidden. Back in the OT, the Son of God hadn't been revealed. While there were hints of the Trinity throughout the OT, for the most part that aspect of God's nature hadn't been disclosed. As far as the Jews were concerned, there was only one God, Yahweh, and any notion that God existed as three Persons – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – was unknown to them. It wasn't until

Jesus came that God's revelation about his Triune nature became known. But even during Jesus' earthly ministry, that wasn't easily grasped. The claims Jesus made about himself in relationship to God as his Father were baffling to everyone who heard it, even to the disciples.

It wasn't until the resurrection that the blinders truly came off and the disciples rightly understood that Jesus was no mere rabbi but was in fact God incarnate. Christ's resurrection "**declared**" to the world what Christ always was: the Son of God. With the resurrection, all authority on heaven and on earth had been given him, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow and tongue confess Christ as Lord. The resurrection was the ultimate vindication of Jesus: it showed that his claims to be one with the Father were true. That's why the resurrection is an important part of the gospel message: anybody can claim to be God and then die because of it. But to claim to be God and then rise from the dead, just as he predicted he would, that's undeniable proof of the truthfulness of Christ's words. The resurrection is the final and ultimate revelation that Jesus was far more than a great teacher: he was God incarnate, the very Son of God, come to save sinners.

So those first two clauses describe who Jesus is: fully human who was the promised son of David and he was the divine Son of God, who was hidden in the past but has now been clearly revealed through his resurrection. But now, for our third sub-point, we're going to consider what we receive from God, which is of course as good of news as anyone can imagine. There are three things that come through Christ that Paul briefly mentions in v. 5-6 which brings us now to our third sub-point...

c. **Through him comes grace, obedience, and glory**

Look back at your Bibles at v. 5. Let me just read the first phrase there, "**...through whom we have received grace and apostleship.**" The first item Paul mentions that comes through Christ is grace and secondly, apostleship. Grace is unmerited favor. It means we didn't earn it. We didn't deserve it. There was nothing about our words or deeds or character that swayed God into showing kindness to us. God didn't look at us and think, "What a bunch of nice people. After all the good things they've done, I think I owe them something." Paul wrote about our need for grace in Ephesians 2 when he described us as being "dead in our trespasses and sins." There was nothing in us that would convince God to be favorable towards us. Instead, he described us as "children of wrath" – people deserving only God's righteous just punishment for our sin and rebellion. And yet, he saved us by sending his Son to die for us, so that Paul would then say in Eph. 2:8-9 that "it is by grace you have been saved, through faith. And this is not of your own doing; it is a gift of God."

This was especially personal to Paul. He had received the grace of God in calling him to salvation and he furthermore received even more grace by being called to serve the Lord whom he once persecuted as an apostle. I can imagine Paul writing these words here in v. 5 with tears in his eyes as he recalls how God's grace was showered upon a vile and wicked man such as he. "To think that God would save me, a man who nearly destroyed the church, and on top of that call me of all people

to serve him as an apostle! What amazing grace!” What possibly could be any greater news than to hear that God has shown grace to sinner by fully paying for their sins through Christ Jesus?

My friends, do you marvel at the grace God has shown to you? The only thing God owed you was his wrath and yet instead he gave you his Son? Instead of the punishment you deserved for your sin, he purchased forgiveness through the cross. Rather than lock the gates of hell behind you, he has opened the gates of heaven before you. This is good news indeed! What could there possibly be reported on in the news that could offset the hope and joy we have received through the gospel news that through faith in Christ we have been made son and daughters of God?

But the good news of the gospel is more than just fire insurance. What makes the gospel good news is far more than allowing us to escape the fires of hell once we die. Notice what Paul says next. He says the gospel is about Christ, **“through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith.”** The gospel doesn’t just save us, it changes us. It transforms us. It takes our disobedient hearts that once hated God and loved sin and completely converts them into hearts that willingly strive to do his will.

You see, one of the ways I know for a fact that I wasn’t a Christian when I was in high school was that salvation meant nothing more to me than an escape from hell. Even though I could formulate the right theological answers about needing to have faith in Christ’s death and resurrection in order to go to heaven, it never touched me any deeper than that. Salvation to me was simply about what happens after I die. So my thinking was, “Great, Jesus died for me, so I don’t need to worry myself about the eternal consequences of my sin” and then back to sinning I went. I had no interest in a life of obedience. Being enslaved to sin wasn’t a concern as long as I didn’t have to suffer in hell as a consequence. I didn’t realize that true biblical salvation is a salvation from not only the penalty of sin after death but also the power of sin in your life. Anyone can want to avoid hell – you’d be a fool not to. There’s nothing special about that. But to desire to be free from the power of sin, to suddenly long to live a life of obedience, that can only come from the gospel transforming your heart by the power of the Holy Spirit.

So then, what makes the gospel good news isn’t merely that it saves you from hell in the future, it saves you from the power of sin right now. It liberates you from the bondage of your will to sin and sets you free to bear the fruit of righteousness. Through God’s grace, we don’t have to wait until heaven to experience eternal life: we begin to enjoy it right now as we see the blossoming of the regenerating power of the Spirit as it transforms our hearts into those that truly desire to obey God, not in order to earn his favor but as a grateful response for already having received it.

That then leads to the final observation I want to draw out of our text this morning and that is how the gospel ultimately is about the glory of God in Christ. Look back in your Bibles one more time at v. 5-6. Paul says there, **“...through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for**

the sake of his name among all the nations, including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ...”

Let me put it like this: if you think the gospel is primarily about you and your salvation, then your gospel is too small. Yes, one of the goals of gospel is to bring about the salvation of God’s elect. Certainly, for any of us who have experience the grace of God in the gospel and have discovered the heart-transforming power of the Holy Spirit that leads us into obedience, you know the joy of salvation. But the gospel has something far, far greater to accomplish than merely our salvation. Paul says the reason we have been given grace that leads to the obedience of faith is “**for the sake of his name among all the nations.**” The glorification of Christ among all the nations is the ultimate goal of the gospel. God wants to make the name of Christ great among all people. He has saved sinners so that we can declare to all the world that Christ alone is worthy of all honor and praise.

In other words, the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ is to be proclaimed. We are to go to all the nations and tell them what it is that God has done for us through Christ, so that in turn they might believe, be saved, and glory in Christ. Were God to only save men from their sins but never have that message proclaimed, if salvation remained only a private matter that people kept to themselves, if it was nothing more an accounting trick that gave us righteousness on paper but never displayed itself in a transformed heart that in turn created those who loved and cherished Christ above all earthly treasures, then the gospel would have failed. A gospel that doesn’t in the end make much of Christ in the hearts of those who it receive it is a failed gospel in light of what Paul says here. It falls short of the ultimate goal of making the name of Jesus Christ great among the nations.

As a result, the work of missions and personal evangelism isn’t an optional tag-on to the Christian life: it is the proper fulfillment of what the gospel began in you. The gospel has not achieved its ultimate goal if you die and go to heaven: it’s goal is only fulfilled when in your life you proclaim the glory of Jesus as your single most soul-satisfying desire. It only happens when others can see that Christ is worth more to you than anything here on earth. God has saved you in order for you to show to the world in word and deed that Christ is supremely valuable over all else, such that you’d be willing to suffer loss and persecution, and even death in order to gain him.

Conclusion

So then, let me close with this application for us: first delight yourself in the grace of God given to you in the gospel. God has graciously given to you what you did not deserve: the Son of God took on flesh and lived among us, suffering and dying in our place on the cross, so that whoever would believe in him should not perish but have eternal life. Never ever lose sight of the fact that it is by grace you have been saved, not by works. Let it be a deep well-spring of joy knowing that God has been so wonderfully gracious to you.

The second, bear the abundant fruit of obedience in your life. God saved you from far more than hell: he saved you from a self-centered, sin-controlled life in the here and now.

The good news of the gospel is not just that you are free from the punishment of hell but that you are free of the power of sin right now. Live in that freedom. Say no to sin and yes to righteousness. Bear the fruit of obedience in your life that God has called you to bear, for your good and for his glory.

And third and finally, make much of Christ by proclaiming him to the nations. Show by word and deed that there is nothing in this whole universe that should be treasured more than knowing Christ Jesus as Lord. Be about the business of telling others of who Christ is and what he has so graciously done for sinners. Your salvation is not the end point: it is only the start of a life that is lived in willing obedience to him and in joyful proclamation of the glories of his name. May God find us here at Grace Fellowship faithful to do just that with every moment of our lives. Let's pray.

This sermon was addressed originally to the people at Grace Fellowship of Waterloo, IA by Pastor Rob Borkowitz. Copyright 2017.