

Summary: The Gospel is not primarily about “me” – it is about the Son of God and what he has done (1:1-4). And the purpose of the Gospel is to bring about the Obedience of Faith among all nations (1:5-6). This means that we are to live as a colony of heaven – as a beachhead of the kingdom of God among the nations (1:7-15).

In the worship notes in the bulletin, I ask the question, “Why do we have a sermon every week?”

We live in the “information age”

where we are overloaded with information and images, sights and sounds.

A thousand years ago if there was an earthquake in China,  
you NEVER would have heard about it.

But many of you heard about it within *minutes*.

With all of the information that pours in through television, radio, and internet,  
why do you sit and listen to a preacher for half an hour on Sunday morning?

Later, in Romans 10, Paul will ask

“how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard?

And how are they to hear without someone preaching?” (Romans 10:14)

And so Paul concludes that

“faith comes from hearing and hearing through the word of Christ.” (Romans 10:17)

We have just concluded our 11 week series on Psalm 119,

and we saw that the Psalmist simply could not stop talking to God about his Word.

“Seven times a day I praise you for your righteous rules” (v164)

“I long for your salvation, O LORD, and your law is my delight” (v174)

“Plead my cause and redeem me; give me life according to your promise” (v154)

Psalm 119 taught us that God’s Word dwells at the center of our lives.

In an “information age” where words and images bombard us constantly,  
we are too easily distracted.

We need the simplicity of the preaching of the Word to draw us back to Jesus.

No matter how complicated and high-tech our world may become,

we will always need to have a simple messenger standing before us,  
proclaiming the gospel of Jesus.

Because the Word did not become silicon and microprocessors.

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

And so I can say with Paul:

*I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.*

*For in it (in the gospel) the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith, as it is written, “the righteous shall live by faith.”*

One of the few things that is agreed upon by everyone, everywhere,  
is that this is the basic statement of the theme of Paul’s epistle to the Romans.

(People disagree about what it means!

But they agree that whatever it means, this is the heart of Romans)

What is the gospel?

If you look carefully at verses 16-17 you will notice that Paul does not define the gospel.

He says that the gospel is the power of God for salvation.

He says that *in* the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed.

But he does not say what the gospel IS.

And the reason is because he has already told us what the gospel *is* back in verses 1-4.

Paul only uses the word “gospel” 9 times in Romans (three more times in its verbal form),  
but those uses are strategically placed.

It is the focus of his opening sentence,  
and is used four times in chapter one:

1:1–“set apart for the gospel of God”

1:9–“God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son”

(verb) 1:15–I am eager to preach the gospel to you

1:16–“I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation...”

The word “gospel” also is at the heart of his closing sentence in Romans 16:25.

In fact, I’d like you to look at Romans 1:1-4 as I read 16:25 –  
watch for all the connections:

16:25–“Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith—to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.”

Both at the beginning and at the end of Romans

Paul speaks of the gospel,

the old testament prophecy about the gospel,

its fulfillment in Jesus Christ

and the purpose of the gospel: to bring about the obedience of faith.

So here in chapter one, as we talk about the Gospel of God,  
we will see three things:

1. The Gospel of God is about His Son (1:1-4)
2. The Purpose of the Gospel of God is the Obedience of Faith among All Nations (1:5-6)
3. And This Means You (1:7-15)

### **1. The Gospel of God is about His Son (1:1-4)**

So what IS the gospel?

The Gospel of God – the good news that God has proclaimed to us –  
is “concerning his Son.”

The good news is not about you.

The gospel is the good news about Jesus.

*The whole gospel is included in Christ, so that if any removes one step from Christ, he withdraws himself from the gospel.* (John Calvin on Romans 1:3)

Verses 2 & 3 are both dependent clauses relating back to the “gospel.”

Paul has been set apart for the gospel of God –  
the gospel which he promised beforehand... (v2)  
the gospel concerning his Son... (v3)

Verse 2 relates the “gospel” to the OT scriptures–  
the relationship is that of promise and fulfillment.  
The prophets promised the gospel beforehand.  
They spoke of the good news ahead of time.

Verse 3 then states clearly what the gospel is about:  
the gospel is about the Son of God– (“the gospel concerning his Son”)  
and then two more clauses depend upon “his Son”  
who was descended from David (v3)  
who was declared to be the Son of God (v4)  
So the gospel is about the Son of God:  
The Son who was of the seed of David according to the flesh,  
The Son who was declared the Son of God in power  
according to the Spirit of holiness by the resurrection of the dead

So the good news of Jesus is what the Old Testament promised.  
The Holy Scriptures (which in Paul’s day meant the OT)  
spoke beforehand of the Son of God.

Indeed, you could argue that the whole Old Testament is the history of the son of God.

Think back to Adam, whom Luke calls the Son of God,  
as he was created after the image and likeness of God.  
Adam was supposed to rule over creation as God’s vicegerent.

But Adam failed – and through his sin, death entered the world (Romans 5).  
And God promised Abraham that his offspring would inherit the whole earth (Romans 4),  
in other words,  
that his offspring would receive the inheritance that Adam forfeited,  
but that promise was not fulfilled by the law (Romans 3).

God called Israel to be his son – to succeed where Adam failed –  
but Israel failed to live like the Son of God,  
and so God promised David that his son would be the son of God.

You might say that the whole of the five books of Moses (Genesis-Deuteronomy)  
is all about how Israel was called to be the Son of God,  
coming to a sort-of fulfillment in Joshua.  
And then the rest of the Old Testament, from Judges through Malachi,  
is all about how Israel failed to be the Son of God,  
and so God promised that the son of David would succeed where Israel had failed.

And so therefore Paul says that the gospel – the good news –  
which was promised beforehand through the prophets,  
is the gospel concerning his Son,

*who was descended from David according to the flesh.*

What does he mean “according to the flesh”?  
The Son (who was in the beginning with the Father)  
was descended from David according to the flesh.  
For Paul, the “flesh” refers to the weakness of humanity.

Later in Romans 8 Paul will say that we  
“walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit” (Rom 8:4).

Some translations say “sinful nature” – but that is misleading,  
because Paul is speaking of the same thing in chapter 1.  
The Son of God “was descended from David according to the flesh” –  
and yet our Lord Jesus did not have a sinful nature.  
Rather, he was descended from David according to the weakness and frailty of humanity.

*And was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness  
by his resurrection from the dead. (v4)*

What does this mean?

Wasn't Jesus the Son of God before the resurrection?

Certainly.  
But in the resurrection Jesus becomes the Son of God in a way that he had not before.

In verse 4, the word translated “declare” *ορισθεντος* does not mean “declare”--  
it means “appoint” or “ordain” or “constitute” –  
Jesus was appointed or ordained the Son of God *in power*.

Prior to this he *was* the Son of God,  
but he was the Son of God in weakness--the Word made flesh--  
now, in the resurrection he is ordained with his eschatological ordination--  
he is appointed the Son of God in power.

Think of the Psalm that we sang earlier:  
“You are my Son, today I have begotten you”-- (Psalm 110:4)  
a passage which Hebrews cites as a reference to the resurrection (Heb 1:5; 5:5)

As Richard Gaffin puts it,  
“the resurrection of Jesus is his adoption (as the second Adam)” (R&R, 118)

THIS is what God had promised beforehand through the prophets:  
that he would take David’s son and exalt him to his right hand.  
And it is only in Jesus Christ that we discover that only the eternal Son  
could become the eschatological Son.

That is why the *gospel* is all about him.

If you think about it, the Son of God is “son” in at least three distinct senses:  
He is the eternal Son of God and always has been.  
When the Word became flesh and dwelt among us,  
he became the Son of God in a second sense.  
In his incarnation he was the Son of God  
who was beginning to fulfill all that Adam, Israel and David had failed to do.

But what Paul says here is that there is a third sense of the “Son of God” –  
the eschatological Son of God –  
the “Son of God in power” who sits at God’s right hand in glory.

And it is only by the resurrection from the dead –  
it is only by his triumph over sin, death and the devil –  
that the eternal Son, who had become the incarnate Son,  
now is constituted as the eschatological Son of God in power.

That is why the good news – the gospel of God –  
is emphatically the gospel *concerning his Son*.

And throughout Romans Paul will continue to return to this theme.

But secondly:

## **2. The Purpose of the Gospel of God is the Obedience of Faith among All Nations (1:5-6)**

Paul says that it is through Jesus Christ our Lord that he has 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. (1:5-6)*

Paul will spend a lot of time talking about the details of his message in Romans.  
But here at the beginning (and also at the end)  
he sets forth the *purpose* of his message.  
The reason why Paul preaches the gospel – the good news concerning the Son of God –  
is to “bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name  
among all the nations.”

What is Paul saying?

Paul has received his apostleship – he has been sent for this purpose:  
the overall concern of his apostolic ministry is to bring about the obedience of faith.

If you recall, we saw at the beginning that this phrase “obedience of faith”  
also plays a key role in the final doxology in Romans 16:25-27.

The purpose of Paul’s apostleship is to bring the nations to the obedience of faith.

Okay, so what is this “obedience of faith”?

Some have said that “obedience of faith” means “the obedience which is faith” –  
in which case Paul’s concern is simply that people believe in Jesus.  
Others have said that “obedience of faith” means “the obedience which faith produces” –  
in which case Paul’s goal is to see actual obedience in the life of the church.

Some people have been known to make a big stink about this.

But if we think about what Paul means by “faith,”  
we really don’t want to choose between them.  
The obedience of faith *must* include believing in Jesus –  
and the obedience of faith *must* include a life of obedience that flows from faith.

Paul would be just as horrified as James at someone who said  
“Oh, yes, I believe in Jesus, I just don’t obey him!”

[Just think of how Paul responded when he thought of the question,  
“Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?”

*By no means!  
How can we who died to sin still live in it? (Romans 6:1-2)]*

The purpose of the gospel of God concerning his Son  
is to bring about the obedience of faith –  
namely, a people who believe the gospel and who live accordingly.

In other words, “the obedience of faith...among all nations”  
is Paul’s way of summarizing the Great Commission:  
“make disciples of all nations,  
baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,  
teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.” (Mt 28:19-20)

The phrase “obedience of faith” helps us think about what the Christian life is all about.  
The gospel has not come to you simply as an intellectual truth that you must believe.  
If all you do is believe certain things about Jesus,  
that is *not* the obedience of faith.  
Rather, the gospel calls for a faith that expresses itself in action.

Think back to Abraham.  
We often remember the great statement of justification:  
“Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness” (Genesis 15:6)  
But we also need to remember God’s call to Abraham:  
“I am God Almighty. Walk before me and be blameless” (Genesis 17:1).

Paul’s phrase “the obedience of faith” captures both ideas.  
Faith is at the heart of the Christian life.  
The righteous will live by faith.  
But this faith is a faith that obeys God.

Just try to imagine what would have happened if Genesis had said,  
“Abraham believed God, but didn’t bother to leave Ur of the Chaldeans.”  
“Oh yeah, God Almighty, I believe in you –  
but this leaving Ur business is just too hard for me – I’d rather stay here.”

Well, then we never would have heard about Abraham!

Because that isn’t faith.

Our Confession says beautifully that by faith a Christian acts upon what he hears in Scripture:  
“yielding obedience to the commands,  
trembling at the threatenings,  
and embracing the promises of God for this life, and that which is to come.” (WCF 14.2)

So Paul says that the purpose of his apostleship – the purpose of his preaching of the gospel –  
is “to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his [Jesus’s] name  
among all the nations...”

### 3. And This Means You (1:7-15)

because this “includes you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.” (v6)

Because the whole purpose of his description of the gospel in verses 2-4,  
and the whole purpose of his explanation of the purpose of the gospel in verses 5-6  
is to set up why he is writing this letter.

Normally when I’m beginning a sermon series  
I start with a basic explanation of the author, the purpose of the book, etc.

But today I’ve been following Paul’s outline.  
Paul does not start by explaining the purpose of his letter.  
He starts by telling them what the gospel is  
(Jesus Christ in his person and work);  
and what the purpose of the gospel is  
(to bring about the obedience of faith among all the nations).

Only after stating what is really important  
does Paul turn to the reason for the letter.

He gives his standard greeting in verse 7:  
“To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints:  
Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

And then he explains the reason for his letter in verses 8-15:  
*First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you,  
because your faith is proclaimed in all the world.*

In all his letters (except Galatians) Paul begins by thanking God for the recipients.  
Paul rejoices that the gospel has come to Rome,  
and that all over the world, everyone knows about the church at Rome.  
Such was the fellowship between churches in the first century  
that word spread quickly of all that happened.

And the faith of the church in Rome had been tested.  
In 49 AD the Emperor Claudius expelled all Jews from Rome  
due to Jewish disputes about a man named Chrestus.  
Most scholars believe that this refers to early debates about Christ (Christos).

By the mid-50s when Paul seems to have written this letter,  
many Jews had returned,  
and certainly when Paul went to Rome at the end of the book of Acts  
(probably around the year 60)  
there was a sizeable Jewish population in Rome again.



The church in Jerusalem included both Jews and Gentiles,  
but Paul does not seem to suggest that there were any major conflicts between them.

Rather, in the book of Romans Paul lays out his basic message –  
a message about the implications of the gospel

And Paul writes that

*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.*

Paul will say more at the end of the epistle about his reasons for wanting to go to Rome –  
and indeed beyond Rome to Spain –  
but here he explains that he wants to come for their benefit:

*For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you –*

This may sound arrogant to some,  
but then again, Paul is an apostle,  
and his coming would indeed bring great benefit to the church.  
Some have said that when Paul realized how it would have sounded  
he added the next line:

*that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith,  
both yours and mine. (v9-12)*

But if Paul thought that the first line was too strong, he could have changed it.  
After all, he dictated this letter and could easily have altered it.

But instead he put both there.

As a preacher of the gospel Paul wanted to strengthen the church in Rome.  
And as a fellow believer he wanted to see mutual edification.

I don't mind saying that when I get in the pulpit,  
my goal is to impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you!  
And yet through our life together in the congregation,  
we are to encourage each other mutually.

But Paul adds that

*I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented),  
in order that I may reap some harvest among you  
as well as among the rest of the Gentiles.*

(This makes it clear that there is a significant Gentile portion of the church in Rome).

*I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians,  
both to the wise and to the foolish.*

*So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. (v14-15)*

Here Paul lays out what we see in the book of Acts:

that his ministry was a ministry to the Gentiles –  
not that Paul ignored Jews (he himself was a Jew),  
but rather, Paul preached the gospel to all nations –  
(to the Jew first and also to the Greek)  
and he sought to bring about the obedience of faith among all nations.

In other words,

Paul desired to preach the gospel to you –  
and to bring you to the obedience of faith,  
so that the gospel might continue to flourish and grow.

I rejoice when you say that you believe in Jesus.

But that is not the purpose of the gospel.

The purpose of the gospel is not to create a bunch of people who believe in Jesus.

The purpose of the gospel of God is to bring about the obedience of faith among the nations.

*You* are to be a community where the kingdom of God takes root and flourishes.

We are a colony of heaven.

NOT a ghetto of heaven, mind you!

But a colony – destined to increase and flourish

as the obedience of faith continues to be brought about

by the preaching of the gospel of the Son of God in power,  
our Lord Jesus Christ.