



BETHEL
PRESBYTERIAN

MINISTRY OF THE WORD

Volume 8 Issue 34

August 30, 2009

The Gospel of God, Part 1

The Roman Gospel

There are words in the English language which speak volumes: Illegal Alien, Computer Virus, 9/11. The Romans had similar “buzz” words, one of which was *euangelion*. This word was used in the Emperor Worship cult. Many of the Caesars claimed to be divine and therefore demanded worship from every person in the empire...

- Free or slave.
- Rich or poor.
- Known or unknown.

Thus, favorable events relating to the emperor were proclaimed to the citizens as *euangelion*, that is “good news” about their god. The town herald would stand in the village square and shout...

- “Good news! The emperor’s wife has given birth to a son.”
- “Good news! The emperor’s heir has come of age.”
- “Good news! The new emperor has ascended to the throne.”

Thus the Christians at Rome were well-aware of *euangelion*. Now the opening verses of this epistle are appropriately devoted to discussing “Good News.” Yet the “Good News” which Paul is discussing was of an entirely different order than the trivial and vain proclamations concerning the emperors. The “Good News” which Paul is discussing is the good news of the LIVING and TRUE GOD! In Romans 1:1 we read about “the

gospel of God.” Would you notice that God is the most important word in this epistle.

Romans is a book about God. No topic is treated with anything like the frequency of God. Everything Paul touches in this letter relates to God. It is GOD’S gospel to which Paul refers here- the stress falls upon its divine origin and character. And so Paul devotes himself to establishing what truly is the “Good News of God,” the Gospel of Christ Jesus!

We are going to begin looking at the Gospel of God beginning first with Its Messenger. The most glorious message, into which “angels have longed to look” (1 Peter 1:12) that ever could be heralded has been entrusted to us. What sort of people ought we to be?

The Messenger’s Condition

Romans 1:1a, “Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus.”

The word for bond-servant has a wide range of connotations in the Bible, and yet the emphasis is on subservience and insignificance, NOT HONOR. The term expresses total belongingness, total allegiance, and absolute ownership of the “Lord” to whom one was enslaved.

Now Paul was a “Hebrew of Hebrews,” thoroughly at home in the Old Testament. Therefore when he uses this term he undoubtedly is reflecting on the Old Testament idea of the “bond-servant of God” — a common theme in the Old Testament.

- Abraham was the servant of God, Genesis 26:24; Psalms 105:6, 42.
- Moses was the servant of God, Numbers 12:7, 8; Deuteronomy 34:5; Joshua 1:1, 2, 7; Psalms 105:26.
- David was the servant of God, 2 Samuel 7:5, 8ff; Isaiah 37:35.
- Isaiah was the servant of God, Isaiah 20:3.
- The Prophets were the servants of God, Amos 3:7; Zechariah 1:6.

Now when you look at the “servant of God” from the perspective of the Old Testament, the basic idea is that of humility and dependence upon God. Perhaps in the most famous passage detailing the constitution and calling of THE Servant of the Lord, Isaiah spoke of him, “...for I am honored in the sight of the Lord, and My God is My strength” (Isaiah 49:5b).

In view of this, when Paul identifies himself as the “bond-servant of Christ” he is really saying that he is one who is wholly dependent upon God. Paul’s statement would have been striking to the Greco-Roman world in which he lived...

- Freedom was highly prized in Paul’s day.
- A Greek did not think of himself as a slave to anyone (whether king or god).
- No one therefore would boast of their slavery!

And yet here, Paul accurately identifies himself as an insignificant, humble slave whose life was not his own, but God’s! This is “The Condition” of everyone who would be the Messenger of God! The Faithful Messenger of the Messianic Kingdom is the slave of God, the one who in humility lives in constant dependence upon the Lord!

Those of you who would be a Faithful Messenger of the Lord, what kind of life ought you to expect? Nothing less than a life which brings us to the point of constant reliance and dependence upon God. This is where God would have His Messengers! Christ exhorted His disciples thus:

Luke 21:36, "But keep on the alert at all times, praying [recall this word speaks of a Godward look of dependence and devotion] in order that you may have strength to escape all these things that are about to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man."

Peter knew it...

1 Peter 4:19, "Therefore, let those also who suffer according to the will of God entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right."

Paul's will for all Christians everywhere was for their complete and total dependence upon God...

1 Corinthians 7:35, "And this I say for your own benefit; not to put a restraint upon you, but to promote what is seemly, and *to secure* undistracted devotion to the Lord."

In fact, Paul not only preached it; he lived it...

2 Corinthians 12:7-10: "And because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me—to keep me from exalting myself! Concerning this I entreated the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He has said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.' Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong."

With this I ask but one question: Ladies! When it comes to having a baby, what ought you to do with labor pains? You work with them! Likewise, let us not regret the gifts and callings of God when they come in the form of trial and difficulty. Rather, let us work with them that we might rest more wholly upon Christ!

The Messenger's Calling

Romans 1:1b, "called as an apostle."

Or literally, this could be translated, "an appointed or called apostle." The term apostle appears seventy-nine times in the New Testament. It primarily refers to "being sent." And that is the basic meaning of apostle: he is one who is sent. In fact, in the secular Greek world of Paul's day, the word referred to someone who was officially commissioned to a position or task, such as an envoy or ambassador.

In Classical Greek cargo ships were sometimes called apostolic, because they were dispatched with a specific shipment for a specific destination. Paul was called and sent by Christ TO DELIVER THE MESSAGE OF SALVATION- this is what an Apostle Isaiah. Christ told the Apostles,

John 15:27, "And you will bear witness also, because you have been with Me from the beginning."

Thus in the Apostolic age, an apostle was one who was sent by Christ to deliver the Message of the Gospel. How does an Apostle differ from any other person Christ sent out? The Apostolic office was invested with the Authority of Christ. As such an Apostle...

- Was chosen, called, and sent forth by Christ Himself, John 6:70; 13:18; 15:16, 19; Galatians 1:6.
- Was endowed in a special measure with the Holy Spirit, Matthew 10:20; John 14:26; 15:26; 16:7-14; 20:22; 1 Corinthians 9:2; 2 Corinthians 12:12; Galatians 2:8.
- Was inspired, John 14:26; 16:13.
- Had the power of working miracles, Matthew 10:8.
- Could communicate this power by the laying on of hands, Acts 9:15, 17, 18; 19:6.
- Had the gift of “distinguishing of spirits,” 1 Corinthians 12:10.
- Performed specific signs as a mark of their Apostolicity, 2 Corinthians 12:12.
- Served as the foundation of the church, Ephesians 2:20.

Now with this I want you to notice that this phrase is much more than just a declaration that Paul was an Apostle! The emphasis here is on the fact that he was called. Paul’s position as an apostle was not his own doing. He was CALLED as an apostle. He did not volunteer for the office, nor was he elected by fellow believers. When Paul was still blind from the miraculous encounter with Jesus on the Damascus Road, the Lord said to Ananias about Paul.

Acts 9:15, “He is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel.”

In relaying this message to Paul Ananias said this:

Acts 22:14-15, “The God of our fathers has appointed you to know His will, and to see the Righteous One, and to hear an utterance from His mouth. For you will be a witness for Him to all men of what you have seen and heard.”

Paul told the Corinthians this:

1 Corinthians 1:17, “Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel...”

Truly Paul recognized that he was chosen by Christ to be invested with the responsibility and authority to preach the gospel. And that is the emphasis here! From this we conclude that the Faithful Messenger of God is the one who recognizes that he has been CALLED by Christ to minister the Gospel.

Isn’t that taking this verse a little too far? Isn’t this verse just speaking about Apostles?

It is! Yet notice Romans 1:6-7, speaking of the Roman believers, Paul says that they were...

Romans 1:6, “called of Jesus Christ.”

This the same word as in verse 1. While great apostles have been called by God, so has EVERY believer. All believers have been chosen “of Jesus Christ”- that is, they have been gathered unto and intimately united to Christ.

Romans 1:7, "called as saints."

Literally this means devoted to God on account of their calling. The basic idea which emerges from these verses is that every Christian is the property of Christ AND therefore has been called unto His service! What service is that? Among other things, and especially in this context, it is the service of the gospel.

Matthew 28:19, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations..."

2 Timothy 2:2, "And the things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also."

See it is not just the Apostles; it is EVERY CHRISTIAN! Everyone in Christ has been chosen by God and given the calling to extend Christ's kingdom. Those of you who would be a Faithful Messenger of the Lord do you realize this calling? God has called you to be a witness! So many of us struggle with our witness because we think...

- It's Optional!
- It's something that spiritual giants do!
- It's what you do when you have extra time!

Does it not follow? Since from the beginning of the world God planned to save a people for Himself (Ephesians 1:4), and Christ came into this world to save sinners (1 Timothy 1:15), and the path through which Christ's people are saved is through the witness of people (Romans 10:14), and He has commissioned the whole church with the task to "make disciples" (Matthew 28:19) that God has saved you for the purpose of using you to extend His kingdom!

Indeed, we have been saved to witness/engage the culture in which we live! I love the exhortation of Christ to the one He just delivered.

Mark 5:18-19, "And as He was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed was entreating Him that he might accompany Him. And he did not let him, but He said to him, 'Go home to your people and report to them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He had mercy on you.'"

This "report" is not necessarily the whole gospel presentation. Indeed the "gospel" to which Paul is referring is the whole epistle. Rather, "to report" is to bring the truth of God's word to bear on society.

Now when you and I realize this, with Paul we too will be compelled to minister the gospel.

1 Corinthians 9:16: "For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel."

The Messenger's Commitment

Romans 1:1c, "set apart for the gospel of God."

This is not the usual term we associate with being "set apart," (*hagiois*, verse 7). This a different term which

basically refers to separation. When used of a person, it implies both a negative and a positive action:
Negative: The cutting off of all interests and attachments which are extraneous to the “set-apart end.”
Moses spoke to the entire nation:

Leviticus 20:26, “Thus you are to be holy to Me, for I the Lord am holy; and I have set you apart from the peoples to be Mine.”

2 Corinthians 6:17, “‘Therefore, come out from their midst and be separate,’ says the Lord. ‘And do not touch what is unclean...’”

Positive: The devotion of all faculties and ambitions toward the fulfillment of the “set-apart end.”

Exodus 13:11-12, “Now it shall come about when the Lord brings you to the land of the Canaanite... that you shall devote to the Lord the first offspring of every womb, and the first offspring of every beast that you own...”

Numbers 15:20-21, “Of the first of your dough you shall lift up a cake as an offering; as the offering of the threshing floor, so you shall lift it up. From the first of your dough you shall give to the Lord an offering throughout your generations.”

Acts 13:2, “And while they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’”

The calling of the Kingdom involves both! Thus, Paul’s goals, life, future, happiness, and contentment were all set apart unto the gospel!

2 Timothy 2:4, “No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier.”

Galatians 1:15, “But when He who had set me apart, even from my mother’s womb, and called me through His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles... I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood... [rather, he went about Arabia preaching the gospel!]”

Paul had been COMMITTED by God from the very beginning to be a Messenger of the Gospel. You must see that this separation to the gospel goes beyond mere proclamation. To be “set apart for the gospel” is to be a “gospel man”...

- To live the gospel.
- To serve the gospel.
- To exalt the gospel.
- To exemplify the gospel every way and in everything you do.

We see this in Paul’s life...

- Where He Went was dictated by the Gospel, Acts 16:6-8.
- What He Ate was dictated by the Gospel, 1 Corinthians 8:13.
- His Relationships within the church was dictated by the Gospel, Galatians 2:14.

- His Freedom as a Roman citizen was dictated by the Gospel, Acts 16:28, 37.
- What he Rejoiced Over was dictated by the Gospel, Philippians 1:18.
- EVERYTHING he did was dictated by the Gospel...

1 Corinthians 9:19-23, "For though I am free from all *men*, I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the more. And to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law, though not being myself under the Law, that I might win those who are under the Law; to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, that I might win those who are without law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, that I may by all means save some. And I do all things for the sake of the gospel, that I may become a fellow partaker of it."

- This is the Commitment of EVERYONE who would be the Messenger of God!
- If we are to be the Faithful Servant of God, we must be "Gospel men."
- EVERYTHING we do must be dictated and driven by the Gospel!

Some of you may be saying, "This is only Paul. Only Paul was to be a 'gospel man.'" Yet, are not the commands given to all Christians indicative that each and everyone of us ought to be "gospel men?"

- Whatever we do is to be done, "heartily, as for the Lord rather than for man," Colossians 3:23.
- Our lives are to be devoted to disciplining ourselves "for the purpose of godliness," 1 Timothy 4:7b.
- In fact everything we do, even in the most mundane things of life like eating and drinking, is to be done "to the glory of God," 1 Corinthians 10:31.

Now this doesn't mean that...

- We quit our jobs.
- Sell our homes.
- Put the kids up for adoption.
- Divorce our spouses.
- And join a monastery!

Rather, it means that of all the things on this earth that might call for our attention, focus, and passion, for the Christian, the gospel must be it! And this means that we strive to be holy that we might at ALL times be useful to the master.

2 Timothy 2:21, "Therefore, if a man cleanses himself from these things, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work."

This will transform your view of your own moral purity. No longer are you seeking to be pure so that you can go to God and impress Him with your holiness. Rather, you are seeking to be pure that...

- God might use you for His glory!
- For the salvation and service of other people!

We endeavor by our life to adorn the gospel...

Titus 2:9-10, “Urge bondslaves to be subject to their own masters in everything... that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in every respect.”

Thus in everything we do and in every relationship we have we must seek to “beautify” the gospel by the way we live and conduct ourselves! We strive at all times to be ready to herald the Gospel.

1 Peter 3:15, “But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence.”

We look for the opportunity everywhere we go to “make disciples.”

Matthew 28:19: “Go therefore...”

Literally the passage says “as you go.” This is a present participle. Truly, it is as we go that we are to be making disciples (the only imperative in this verse). If you are going to be a Faithful Messenger of the gospel, you must recognize that God has committed you to the Gospel, to being “gospel men and women.”

Yet for this to occur, we ourselves must imbibe! Imagine a salesman who did not use the product he hailed as a miracle salve? What a joke and a sham. Indeed! Being a gospel man or woman involves first and foremost our own diving into the gospel!

What does this mean? It means...

- That we this day must give up on self: self trust... self will... self-appeasement and glory.
- And we must wholly rest and rely upon the God of all grace!
- The cross must not only be our message; it must be our life and glory!

And thus as ones who live daily in reliance upon the grace of Christ, we are driven so to serve the Lord in all we do!

- When the “the love of Christ controls us” we will be gospel men and women.

Let us pray toward that end!

About Bethel Presbyterian Church

The Bethel Presbyterian Church Ministry of the Word is published regularly. It is distributed via the internet.

VISIT US WHEN IN Broomfield, COLORADO

Feel free to visit Bethel Presbyterian Church when in Broomfield, Colorado. Bethel Presbyterian Church meets at Broomfield High School, Eagle (10th Street) and Main, Broomfield, Colorado. The telephone number of the church is 303-469-6912. The worship services are at 9:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. each Sunday. Bethel Presbyterian Church is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

All our sermons can be accessed via the World Wide Web. There is no recording for this sermon. The web address for all sermons at Bethel Presbyterian Church can be found out as follows:

<http://bethelpresbyterian.sermonaudio.com>

About the Preacher

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on August 30, 2009. Greg is the preacher at Bethel Presbyterian Church.