

Evergreen Presbyterian Church

Pastor Adam Parker

March 23rd, 2025 AM Service

Sermon Title: “The Gospel Concerning God’s Son”

Sermon Text: Romans 1:1b-6

Rom. 1:1 Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God,

Rom. 1:2 which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures,

Rom. 1:3 concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh

Rom. 1:4 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,

Rom. 1:5 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,

Rom. 1:6 including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ,

Rom. 1:7 ¶ 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.

Main Point: The Gospel was promised before the coming of Christ, and centers around God’s son, who is the source of all the grace that God’s people enjoy.

Outline:

1. The Gospel was Promised Beforehand (v. 2)
2. The Gospel Concerns God’s Son (v. 3-4)

3. The Gospel Delivers Grace and Holiness (v. 5)

Introduction

What is the Gospel *about*? I suspect there is a range of answers that any of us might give. Some of us might say, “Well the gospel is about sinners being saved by God’s grace.” Or we might say, “It’s about the world seeing how they can find peace with God.” Generally we think of the gospel as basically being about us. About mankind. About what the gospel GETS us.

And we think this because we rightly think of God as being fundamentally loving, and caring about us. Which is true. But if you look at the overall posture of Paul going into this letter and really throughout this letter, he has a different attitude altogether: he is focused on God.

Let me show you what I mean: there is this continual refrain of Paul in Romans where he keeps pointing out what the Gospel says about God, how the Gospel upholds the goodness of God, how the Gospel is the righteousness of God, how the Gospel is a window to the glory of God, how human beings are vessels for mercy to display the glory of God, how the gospel is from him and through him and to him, and how it promotes God’s own glory.

In other words, for Paul, the Gospel is not fundamentally about you and me and what we get from God. The Gospel is about God himself. The center of the gospel universe is God, not us. He is the sun that all of his works of redemption orbit around and find their purpose in. We are not at that center. We benefit from, but we are *not* what the Gospel is about, God is who the gospel is about.

That does *not* mean that we are unimportant or that we don’t factor into it. But even who trust in Jesus are vessels for his mercy to be poured into, so that God’s glory can be seen. But we’re not *who* the gospel is about, who it is centered around. Instead, God insists here through Paul that this is all really about him and what it says about him and what it reveals about him.

And so last week we just scratched the surface and talked about Paul, who was called by God as an apostle and servant. But now he leads off by telling us

about the gospel that he was set apart *for*. He begins to describe this glorious gospel (the good news) that his entire letter is focused on.

So today I want us to focus upon three things Paul wants us to know about this gospel. First, it was promised beforehand. Second, it concerns God's son. And third, the gospel delivers grace and holiness.

Paul is gearing us up to realize, as we read this letter, that the gospel he preaches is bigger than any sinner saved by grace, it is older than anything they know, and it accomplishes more than they could ever imagine, all to the glory of God.

1. The Gospel was Promised Beforehand (v. 2)

First today, Paul wants us to know that the Gospel was promised beforehand.

Another way you might put it is this: although the gospel is good news, it is not *new* news. And we will see it throughout this letter, that Paul really is at pains to get us to see the ancient pedigree of this message. All of chapter 4, for example, is going to be Paul showing us that the same gospel he is preaching to the Romans was at work in the life of Abraham, for example. In fact, Paul's use of Scripture throughout this letter is an important part of the demonstration of what Paul is up to. He is not an innovator. He is not a creative person. He is not coming up with something new.

This was a charge that Paul had to deal with, for example, in the Galatian church where Judaizers were arguing that what Paul preached was something he made up, and wasn't a part of redemptive history or the Scriptures. Because of that, these people said, "We still need Judaism, with its ceremonies and festivals and sacrifices, but only now we have Jesus included." They believed in the necessity of Jesus, but not the sufficiency of Jesus. Jesus had to be paired with something else in order to be saved.

And so with the Romans it doesn't appear he's responding to that. Instead, he's preaching like he always has, but what he's doing here is preventative work. The people in Rome will be protected from ever believing that Paul made

this up if he's showing, Day 1 from the Scriptures that God's Word has always believed and taught this message.

By the way, there will probably be times where you learn something from God's word and you don't think it's very important at the time. But later you'll realize God was preparing you for some kind of difficulty or adversity or suffering... or maybe some false doctrine that you'll be presented later with. But because you have so thoroughly heard the truth and listened so carefully you're prepared for errors when they come your way.

Maybe you didn't think you needed it at the time, perhaps, but just know that when you read God's word or hear it preached, God is preparing you for future adversity of one kind or another. So if you hear preaching and you think, "This isn't relevant for me," you should always add this extra word: "Yet." It's not relevant for me... yet. But if God is giving it to you, then it is useful and it will be useful. Perhaps he'll even be using this Romans series in that way in your life.

But that is okay. God is at work giving you things before you perhaps think you need them, and that's good.

But Paul says that the Gospel was promised beforehand. Paul and the Apostles are not originating some foreign doctrine that a Jew with his Torah in hand wouldn't also be able to know all about.

Specifically Paul talks about *how* it was promised beforehand. He says, "through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures." The prophets, who had already come were really just the conduits of this message. They spoke, and they spoke clearly, and it was God speaking through them. This is why, you may remember that after the resurrection of Christ, Jesus joined those disciples on the road to Emmaus and you perhaps remember how Luke tells us that Jesus gave them the most amazing sermon ever – a sermon Luke does not record for us. But he gives us a summary: "And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself."

So when Jesus wants to explain himself to someone he doesn't just say, "Hey. I'm Jesus. I don't need an argument." And of course he'd be in his rights to do that. But he instead appeals to the very Scriptures by which Israel was guided and lived, and which his listeners would have been acquainted with. He shines a light on what they already have and know.

And think of the scope of what Luke says. It says he went to Moses and *all* the prophets. And then the scope is even wider. He says he "interpreted to them in *all* the Scriptures the things concerning himself." We might think, "Oh, there are a few predictions of Jesus in the Bible. There are a few places that talk about him." But actually the truth is, *all* of the Scriptures speak of Christ.

I could make this whole sermon just about showing you how the gospel was proclaimed beforehand. And I promise you, I could do a 20-part series and still wouldn't have done the topic justice. The best thing to do is just preach the Old Testament and keep showing you Christ as you go along, and you will see him there. Every Old Testament sermon should touch on Christ. So I won't try to cram a 20-part series into this point, but let me give you a couple of examples.

Here's one: I remember as a brand new Christian reading Isaiah 53 for the first time, what an impact it had on me.

To read about the suffering servant, to see this one who suffered in his peoples' place, and by whose wounds we were healed.

Pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities.

The Lord laid on him the iniquities of us all.

Like a lamb led to the slaughter, he opened not his mouth.

They made him a grave with the wicked, and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence.

Just the entire passage for me landed like a ton of bricks. And it should.

Isaiah 53 was so obviously a prophecy speaking of Jesus. As someone coming in even as someone who was sort of skeptical I was bowled over by how closely Isaiah was describing Jesus, half a millennium before he was even

born. There is something tremendously faith-building about seeing Jesus spoken of in the Scriptures like that.

Galatians 3:8 is another passage that speaks of the idea of the gospel being preached beforehand. Listen to this: “And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, ‘In you shall all the nations be blessed.’” This is a quote that Paul includes from Genesis 12:3. And his point there is that the gospel of Christ, in its fundamental content and promises was (according to Paul) “preached...beforehand to Abraham.” This is pretty amazing. But the whole New Testament is like this, just constantly quoting from the Jewish scriptures so that everyone knows: we’re not innovators. We are the least creative people that you know. We’re crusty old timers here, really. This message is antique! It’s old, it is not new. It’s the good old news that’s always been there.

Listen to Calvin here: “Christ did not come to the earth unexpectedly, nor did he introduce a doctrine of a new kind that had not heard of before, [because] he, and his gospel... had been promised and expected from the beginning of the world.”

2. The Gospel Concerns God’s Son (v. 3-4)

Second, Paul says that the gospel concerns God’s Son.

Please please please, if there is one thing you pay attention to in this sermon that you hang onto throughout this whole sermon series I hope it is this point: the gospel is a message about Jesus before it is ever a message about you. It has application to you, it matters to you, it calls for a response from you, it is *for* you. But it is *about* Him. It is centered on Christ, and is focused on Christ.

Even if you struggle with some of the theological ideas Paul lays out, and even if you feel overwhelmed perhaps by some of the ideas in this sermon or in upcoming sermons, this is the one item that you should grab hold of like a life raft and ride all the way to the end of this series (and really the entirety of your time reading the Bible): you never go wrong when you look to Christ and cling to him and depend on him.

And Paul perhaps himself would be satisfied knowing that while you as his listener struggled with much of his letter, he would be very pleased to know that what you took away was that Jesus Christ is a great Savior and you know you should look to him.

I am going to continue to hammer this important idea, but here is what I want to say. From the beginning, Paul says, the gospel concerns Jesus. Jesus is a person. He is not a doctrine or an idea, he's a person. He is not a principle or a concept, he is a person. He is not a theological argument or a nebulous notion, he's a person.

And the gospel is about Jesus.

“Well Pastor, I've heard you preach and you actually talk a lot about doctrine and theology, so what gives? Have you been inconsistent this entire time?” Well let me be clearer on what I mean. Doctrine is *not* a problem. I don't want to sound like I'm taking some kind of a stand against doctrine or theology. After all, Paul tells Timothy for example, to preach sound doctrine. Doctrine is good. Doctrine is a tool, and it gives content to the gospel and tells us what it is that we believe about what we believe. Doctrine is a collection of propositional truths that God believed were so important that he told them to us in the Scriptures.

In fact, even when Paul says that the Gospel is about Jesus, he uses doctrinal terminology to describe the Jesus whom the gospel is about. He says, that it concerns “God's son...who was descended from David according to the flesh.” This truth that Jesus is God's son gives content to the Jesus we trust in. It increases our knowledge of who he is; it increases trust that he can save. It tells us not just that God saves, but that all three persons of the Trinity are at work to save us.

Ephesians 1:4 tells us that God the father planned our salvation from eternity.

Titus 3:5 tells us that God the Holy Spirit regenerates God's people according to the divine plan of salvation.

But it is the *second* person of the Trinity, God the Son who was incarnate, a descendant of David as was promised... lived a sinless life, died, and was resurrected for our salvation.

These are doctrinal truths, Paul assumes them, he loves them. They help him and they help us.

But here is what I'm getting to: it is Christ Himself whom the eyes of faith are meant to rest upon. The doctrines are sweet. They build our trust in Jesus. Learn them, teach them, teach sound doctrine as Paul says.

But I do think that there are people who fixate on the theology and do not love Jesus. It is possible to enjoy debates over the *ordo salutis* or on the history of Christology but not love the Christ who saves, whom that theology tells us about.

In the hands of an unbeliever, theology becomes something to hide behind while avoiding Christ himself. It can be that for us. There are many technical commentaries on books of the Bible written by unbelievers – people who do not love Christ, and whose lives have not been transformed by Jesus, and who openly admit they do not believe in him. But they could tell you all about the grammar of the text and the history of theological debates. They could tell you what other people think about Jesus, but could not answer the question Jesus asked his own disciples: “What about you? Whom do you say that I am?” Such people work in the comparative religion departments at major and ivy league universities. But they can be here in our pews as well. None of us are immune to the temptation to bring doctrine to the fore so that we can avoid the person of Jesus and his gospel.

Christian, for you, is it the gospel concerning God's son or not?

We must always be willing to challenge ourselves: do I love Jesus, or do I simply love the intellectual challenge of thinking about Jesus? Do I think about Jesus not as a way of drawing near to him, but do I possibly think about him as a way of avoiding him?

We must never lose sight of the Jesus *whom* those doctrines help us to take hold of.

Here is Calvin again, whom I'll probably be quoting a lot as we look at Paul's letter: "This is a principal passage in which we are taught that the whole gospel is bound up in Christ, so that if anybody moves a single foot away from Christ they withdraw themselves from the gospel."

3. The Gospel Delivers Grace and Holiness (v. 5)

Third, Paul tells us that the gospel delivers grace and holiness.

Look at verses 4 and 5 again. This is actually a wonderful application that Paul does here. As he begins this letter to the Romans here he is, opening up the beginnings of the gospel. He tells them who Jesus is, he tells them of the incarnation, the death and resurrection of our Lord.

And then in verse 5 he tells us about Jesus Christ, "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."

If I could summarize this, I would say, look at the two large ideas of what Paul says Jesus Christ gives to his people. Notice again, these things come "through Christ Jesus." It is our union with Jesus Christ which grants us the blessings that Jesus provides.

When we are united to Jesus Christ by faith, we receive incredible blessings that rightly are his, but which he shares with us as we are "in him." Here Paul mentions just two that he enjoys as an apostle. First, he mentions grace and apostleship. Specifically here he seems to be talking about the grace of even being called as an apostle in the first place. Even God calling Paul to be an apostle was an act of grace. And you might think it's just grace for Paul, but it's really grace for all of us.

We talked about what it means for us that Paul was an Apostle last week, but I want you to think of how it is by grace that God raises up messengers and

preachers and ministers in the church. It really is grace to you, not just to them.

Grace is God's undeserved favor that he shows to sinners. Paul sees the grace in his own calling. He knows he didn't deserve this. He knows it was God's sheer kindness to him that saved him. Paul never, ever believed that he deserved what he received from Christ. He never, ever believed that he deserved to even speak the name of Jesus, except that God reached out from his perfect kindness and grace to change him and draw him in and to adopt him as a son.

Christian, if you believe that you deserved to have him reach out and rescue you, you're not talking about grace anymore, you're talking about justice. Please never lose sight of the *grace* that Jesus Christ gives. When it comes to his people, he is exclusively in the grace business. He gives and gives and gives from rich stores of kindness that never run empty. And so of course Paul says, it was grace that made him an apostle... not just grace to him, but grace to you. Thank God that he saved Paul, and through him preached us this gospel that this letter will show us.

But Paul goes further. The second thing he says is that God showed grace to Paul... why? "to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations."

Paul says that's the goal, the target of sending Christ and rescuing Paul, and preaching this message for us... the goal is to bring about the obedience of faith. What is the obedience of faith? Well he's not talking about good works that bring about our salvation. He's not talking about moralism or being a better person so that God will love you. If you believe that God only loves you when you are good, then you will find as we go through Romans that you don't understand why Paul is so happy about the gospel, why it gives him so much joy. You won't know what makes it good news in the first place.

So the goal is the obedience "of faith"? What's that?

Well, in Romans 10:16 Paul makes this comment: "But not all obeyed the gospel." And there he means that not all have believed in Jesus Christ. So here

it is: to obey the gospel is to believe the gospel. And to disobey the gospel is to disbelieve the gospel.

Now, God does want obedience for you, but it is obedience that is “of” faith, not *to* faith. Obedience that rises from or flows from faith, that results from faith. Never ever reverse these things. Faith does not flow from obedience, it is something which in Christ results in obedience. It results in growing holiness. It results in a life of integrity. It results in a changed life. But obedience is a cart that always is pulled behind the horse of faith.

The obedience of faith, then, is something that all of this letter is aiming at, namely, that we would believe in the Lord Jesus, place our faith in him, and in doing so be united with the giver of life and Savior of sinners. But that there would indeed be obedience then that results from our union with Christ through faith. In Paul’s theology, all obedience, even when unstated, flows from faith. And if it doesn’t flow from faith, then it is not obedience; it’s just external performance, and is in fact just moralism and a betrayal of the gospel.

There is this amazing video that has made the rounds of a shepherd – I don’t know where this shepherd is – but the shepherd is pulling this sheep out of a massive gap in the ground. And after much work and struggle he pulls the sheep out. And you see this glorious moment where the sheep leaps up and in its excitement gallops off, jumping up and down, only to fall back into the same crack after going just a few yards.

Now, the video cuts off there. But if that shepherd is worth his salt, do you think the shepherd just left the sheep in the hole after he fell into it again? No, of course not. And the chief shepherd Jesus Christ loves his people too much to be satisfied for us to simply get a formal removal and then to leap right back into that miserable crack in the ground again without pulling us out.

If you are in Christ, then God has not saved you in order to leave you to simply go on living as though he doesn’t love you, hasn’t saved you, hasn’t pulled you out of the pit, hasn’t ever rescued you, as though everything is still the same as it always was. Paul will belabor throughout this letter, that God loves you too much to simply pass a bare legal verdict of “innocent” over you only to see you

jump back in the same hole as you were in before, and then just leave you there. And if and when you do jump in that hole again, he has given Christ because he *will* keep pulling you out over and over and over again because he loves you.

Now you may be listening to this and you may not be a Christian yet. If you are not yet in Christ, if you don't yet trust in Jesus Christ, please know that this gospel that Paul is talking about here is good news and a precious message, and that it is for you.

Without hesitation I will tell you what Paul told his own listeners that "if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (Rom. 10:9).

I am not telling you to clean your life up. That's putting the cart before the horse.

I am telling you what Paul is telling you: look to Jesus Christ resting in him and receiving him. I would plead with you to believe this message, and that if you do, to please tell someone. Tell a friend, a family member, an elder, talk to me, but please believe this good news. This is the good news you've been waiting for all your life, however old you are.

And if you're still skeptical or have questions, please ask someone. It is totally acceptable to have questions or to share doubts that you have. But I would ask that you come back again next week. Keep walking with us through this book. Because Paul will continue to open this book up so that we can see who Jesus is, why we need him, and how we can know peace with God through him.

Conclusion

Why has God done this? Why has he done this for you and for me? The Scriptures give us many reasons, including God's great love, and including that he keeps his promises. But here specifically, Paul tells us that God gives this grace to us "for the sake of his name." In other words, the aim of all these things was so that the church of God would be a people who have been redeemed and rescued, but we're also meant to be united to Christ through

faith and live “for the sake of his name.” If I could put it this way, Paul is saying, the reason God works in us is to promote the name of God and the greatness of his grace and glory. And when someone looks at a sinner, saved by grace, saved by God’s sheer uncompelled kindness, the response has to be, “what a Savior, what a Lord, what a rescuer!”

We know that God is love, and that he is a great Savior, and that he overcomes sin and sadness, that he wipes every tear from our eyes, that he grants peace to people... and we know it because he gave us the gospel concerning his Son.

He does these things, that he might be seen, that he might be rejoiced in, that he might be glorified. Because He’s the center of the universe. You see, we end as we began, don’t we?

The gospel is not ultimately about you or me. The gospel is a blessing to all people, but the gospel concerns Jesus Christ and is given for the sake of the glory of God, so that we would know his greatness, and that we would rejoice in his name.

Let’s pray to this glorious God right now.

Our God in heaven, you are a savior of sinners, and we know your glory, in part, by hearing your good news and seeing the great love with which you loved us. We praise you, our God, and we ask that we would be glad-hearted and eager to speak of you... eager to tell your good news to every person we know who needs to hear it. And would you be faithful to grant faith and hearing to the proclamation of your word. It’s in Jesus’ name that we pray. Amen.