

PAUL, GOD, AND THE GOSPEL (PART 2)
ROMANS 1:2-4

A few years ago I saw a book in the bookstore and was curious about the title and book, *Jesus, Life Coach*, so I looked it up online and found this description from the editors:

There was a time when only athletes had coaches. Now, everyone from CEOs to at-risk youth are being “coached.” The International Coaching Federation — which began with only a handful of people — now boasts membership of over 5,000, and currently more than 150,000 people call themselves “Life Coaches.” The benefits of coaching have been well documented, but having the right coach is critical.

Jesus had only three years to train the twelve disciples, yet in that time he managed to turn this ragamuffin group into “lean, clean marketing machines.” Divided into four critical sections — Focus, Balance, Productivity, and Fulfillment — *Jesus, Life Coach* presents a faith-based coaching program with Jesus as the model. Delving into the principles Jesus used to transform those around him, the book offers proven strategies and countless applications for modern-day coaches.

This is just one more book and resource that is so incredibly confused about who Jesus is, what He came to do and how we are to know and understand Him.

It is widely acknowledged that the book of Romans is not overtly Christological — there are few sections that speak directly to His person and work, and yet because the book is about the gospel of God, the book is also inherently about Christ. And as Paul offers greetings to his readers, he immediately introduces the gospel and the main person of the gospel, Jesus Christ. In what is perhaps the most Christological section of the book, Paul tells us that —

GOD’S ETERNAL GOSPEL IS ABOUT JESUS CHRIST AND ACCOMPLISHED BY JESUS CHRIST.

In a *church* culture (never mind the world culture) where there is so much confusion about the gospel and Christ, we must understand these truths clearly. As we think about ministry and evangelism (which we will talk about at our potluck lunch), we must believe and speak rightly about the five component truths of the gospel that Paul identifies.

- 1. The Gospel of God About Jesus is UNCHANGING (v. 2)**
- 2. The Gospel of God is About the MAN Jesus (v. 3)**
- 3. The Gospel of God is About the DIVINE Jesus (v. 4a)**
- 4. The Gospel of God is About the RESURRECTED Jesus (v. 4b)**
- 5. The Gospel of God is About the LORD Jesus (v. 4c)**

1. The Gospel of God About Jesus is UNCHANGING (v. 2)

- As we come to this verse remember that it is near the beginning of one long sentence (vv. 1-7); verse two is a parenthetical thought about the origin of *the gospel of God* (v. 1) and verse three will pick up Paul's understanding about that *gospel* by telling us what the gospel is about (*concerning...*).
- Remember also that Paul is writing to the Romans because he is wanting to go on a missionary journey to Spain (15:24ff), and he wants the Roman church to support that venture financially and to be the base of his new westward venture (because the areas in the east largely had established churches). And to affirm that he is trustworthy for their investment, this book is about the gospel he preaches and will preach in Spain. And he wastes no time getting to his understanding of the gospel, beginning even at the end of verse 1 — it's *the gospel of God*.
 - ✓ That is, it is the gospel that comes from God; He is the One who made it available and the One who orchestrated it so that it was provided (more on that in vv. 3-4).
 - ✓ And, the *gospel of God* is also *about* God — the gospel is designed to take us back to God —

“Christ did not die to forgive sinners who go on treasuring anything above seeing and savoring God. And people who would be happy in heaven if Christ were not there, will not be there. The gospel is not a way to get people to heaven; it is a way to get people to God. It's a way of overcoming every obstacle to everlasting joy in God. If we don't want God above all things, we have not been converted by the gospel.” [Piper, God is the Gospel, 47.]

- What is the origin of this gospel of God? From where did it come? Verse two tells us —
 - ✓ *He* (God) *promised beforehand* — That is, before Christ came, God made a promise about the coming of the Christ to redeem mankind. This is a reminder that the gospel was not an afterthought of God; it was not a Plan B response when Adam sinned and Plan A failed. It was always God's plan and purpose to provide the gospel (in fact the promise was first made within the Trinity, before time began — Titus 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:9; Rom. 16:25). So before there was mankind or creation or sin or death, God promised the Son a redeemed people who would eternally praise Him. And then that promise was revealed by God —
 - ✓ *through His prophets in (the) holy Scriptures* — Paul doesn't mean just the prophetic books — Isa. – Mal.; he means at least all prophecies revealed in the OT (including men like Moses, Acts 3:21-22, and David, Acts 2:30). But it probably also means all of the OT writings (Heb. 1:1; 1 Pt. 1:10-12). “In Paul's perspective, all Scripture is completely prophetic.” [Luther]

- And we see this belief throughout the Roman letter (1:17; 4:3, 7, 8, 9, 16-17, 22; 9:25-26; 10:6-8, 11, 13; 11:26-27; 15:9-12). So Paul found the gospel in Genesis, Deuteronomy, Psalms, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Habbakuk, and others. All the (OT) Scriptures affirm the message of the gospel that Paul is preaching.
 - We should also be aware that this is the only place in the NT where the phrase *holy Scriptures* is used. It is Paul's way to emphasize the "set-apartness" of the Bible; it is distinguished from all other writings by its characteristic of holiness. The gospel promise is given in that pure, holy, and unique book. This is an affirmation of its truthfulness.
- This verse is an affirmation by Paul that the gospel is unchanging. There is not an OT gospel and a NT gospel. The gospel promised in the OT is the same gospel revealed in the NT. Salvation in the OT is the same as salvation in the NT (which is affirmed in part by Paul's first OT quotation, v. 17). The gospel Paul preaches (and the gospel we also preach) is the gospel that has always been taught and revealed by God. "The gospel is good news, but it is not new news." [S.L. Johnson]
 - When we declare the gospel we are declaring the same thing men have always declared; we stand not on our own promises and ideas, but we stand on the eternal promises and truth of God when we declare that all men everywhere must come to salvation in God through Jesus Christ.

2. The Gospel of God is About the MAN Jesus (v. 3)

- Now what is this gospel about? Fundamentally, it is *concerning His Son...*
 - ✓ Jesus is the content of the gospel. Now we said in verse 1 that the gospel is *about God*; now we are saying it's about Christ. Which is it? It's about both, because Christ is God. So for the gospel to be about God, it is not only about the Father, but it is about the entire Godhead. What Paul is particularly emphasizing here is that the gospel is accomplished by Christ's work. He is the one through whom we receive the gospel (v. 5 — *through whom we have received grace...*)
 - ✓ And when Paul talks about the *Son of God* (a term he rarely uses about Christ), it refers to the unique fellowship between the Father and Son; it is a term of relational intimacy — there is "real community" [Cranfield] between the members of the godhead.
- And while Jesus is the Son of God, enjoying fellowship with the Father, He also *was born a descendant of David*.
 - ✓ For Paul to say that Jesus is born from the line of David is to say that He is in the Messianic line and that He has a right to rule and reign over mankind (he will say He is *our Lord*, v. 4).
 - ✓ And as the Messiah, He has a right to rule over *all* mankind: Jews and Gentiles (15:9-12).

- ✓ And because Jesus was born ***according to the flesh*** that means that He understands what it means to be a human being — He knows the frailties and weakness of our bodies. He knows all our limitations. Christ had a genuine fleshly body that had all the inherent limitations of human existence — the necessity of food, sleep, and physical limitations of strength — none of which He had ever experienced as a member of the eternal Godhead. And He knows that power of temptation, *yet without sin* (Heb. 4:14-16).
- While Jesus is fully man in every way except that He had no sin nature or ability to sin, Paul reminds us in two ways that Jesus was a very different kind of man:
 - ✓ The word ***born*** is a very common NT word, but it is not the usual word to indicate lineage and birth. This word generally means “come” or “become.” It has the sense of appearing. It seems to me that Paul is doing what John does in 1 Jn. 3:5 — he is affirming the manhood of Jesus and yet not allowing us to say, “He is *only* a man — he was born of Mary and He was just like us, only a little better.” He has come into the world as a man, but as a unique and particular man.
 - ✓ The phrase ***according to the flesh*** is also redundant — if he is born into the Davidic line, it is understood that he was physically born. He couldn’t be David’s descendant without being physically born; so why does Paul say, “he was born according to the flesh?” Because in addition to affirming the humanity of Christ, he is also subtly affirming that there was another component to Christ’s nature. He was not *just* a man; he was more than a man.

3. The Gospel of God is About the DIVINE Jesus (v. 4a)

- There are some difficulties in understanding this verse, but as we go through the verse, don’t miss the primary point that Paul is making — Jesus is ***the Son of God***. He reigned with the Father from all eternity and was co-equal with God in all the rights and privileges of the godhead (Phil. 2:6; Col. 1:15ff). Though Christ took on humanity that did not diminish in any way His deity.
- Now Paul says that Jesus was ***declared the Son of God***. What does that mean?
 - ✓ The problem with this phrase is that the word ***declared*** is not translated that way anywhere else in the NT; it is always translated, “appointed” or “determined” (e.g., Acts 2:23; 17:26).
 - ✓ But the phrase ***who was appointed the Son of God*** seems to imply that He wasn’t God and then was made God or appointed as a member of the Godhead. So what does Paul mean?
 - ✓ First of all, notice that in verse 3, Paul has already called Jesus the Son, so it could not mean that God appointed the Son of God as the Son of God. That’s illogical.
 - ✓ The word ***appointed*** is the one from which we get “horizon.” It means to mark out the limit or boundary between the earth and the sky. The word is used similarly of Christ. The sonship of

Christ was clearly and precisely marked out in the incarnation, in a way that had not been revealed prior to the incarnation.

- ✓ Specifically, that appointment was marked out **with power** (lit., “in power”) **by the resurrection**, that is, after the resurrection, Christ assumed a power and authority that He did not have before.

“When he lived on earth, he was the Son of God as the seed of David (v. 3). Upon his resurrection, however, he was enthroned as the messianic king... While Jesus was on this earth, he was the Messiah and the Son of God, but his death and resurrection inaugurated a stage in his messianic existence that was not formerly his. Now he reigns in heaven as Lord and Christ.” [Schreiner, 43.]

- ✓ So what this refers to is Christ’s exalted position at the right hand of the Father. He is seated next to the Father, having accomplished all His priestly work to accomplish redemption (Eph. 1:20ff; Heb. 10:11ff). This has not changed His nature and character of God, but because of the incarnation, it has given Him a new role that He did not have in eternity past or prior to the incarnation.
- Now why has Paul (and why have we) taken so much time to think about the human and divine nature of Christ? Because there is no gospel without Christ being a man. And there is no gospel without Christ being God. He must be fully both at the same time. Anything less, and the gospel will not be accomplished. Bruce Ware is helpful here:

“We need a human substitute, to be sure. But we need a human whose payment for sin is of infinite value. Therefore, the only one who can save us from our sin is the sinless God-man — one who is fully man, as we are, but one who is fully God, so that his payment for our sin can satisfy the infinite demands of God’s justice against our sin.

“Therefore, Jesus had to be fully God as well as fully man. He had to be fully God for the payment he rendered to be of infinite value, satisfying fully the demands of an infinitely holy God against our sin. But he also had to be fully human in order for his death to be substitutionary, strictly speaking. He died in our place, dying the death we deserve to die, bearing in his body on the cross the sin we commit (1 Pet. 2:24), and to do this, Christ had to be a man. So although the infinite value of Christ’s payment for our sin attaches to his being fully God, the substitutionary nature of Christ’s death — that he took our place, bore our sin, and died the death we deserved to die — attaches most squarely to his being fully human. Once again, then, the atoning death of Christ was only efficacious because Jesus who died for our sin was a full and integral human being.” [The Man Christ Jesus, 112-13.]

- So we have a gospel that is about and accomplished by the eternal and human God-man, Jesus Christ. That’s what the gospel is about and that’s how we have a gospel. And more good news —

4. The Gospel of God is About the RESURRECTED Jesus (v. 4b)

- Paul says the *resurrection* of Christ was *according to the Spirit of holiness*.
 - ✓ Some suggest that “Spirit of holiness” should refer to the inward spirit of Christ, not the person, the Holy Spirit. But notice that in these verses we have the Father (vv. 1-2) and the Son (vv. 3-4) working in the gospel, and it makes most sense to see the third member of the Trinity working for the gospel here as well.
 - ✓ How is it that the resurrection was *according* to the Holy Spirit? He is simply referring to the Spirit’s role in bringing Christ to life when Christ was in the grave (8:11; 1 Pt. 3:18; Acts 2:24).
 - ✓ Through the Spirit’s work in the resurrection, a new role has been inaugurated for Christ — the role of “the Son-of-God-in-power” who rules and reigns as the resurrected and ascended Lord.
- It has been suggested by one commentator that, “...the resurrection is the turning point in the existence of the Son of God. Before that he was the Son of God in weakness and lowliness. Through the resurrection he becomes the Son of God in power.” [Nygren, quoted by Stott.]
- And even more, the resurrection of Christ is also our turning point; because He is resurrected and we are in Him, we too have been freed from the chains of sin and death (6:8-11). What we could never do on our own, because we are in Him and He has been resurrected, we have hope.
- Every Easter there are attacks on the resurrection of Christ and people both inside and outside the church diminish its importance — “Christ is adequate as an inspiring teacher; we don’t need the resurrection.” But, the resurrection of Christ is the source of our life. Without a resurrected Christ, there is no gospel and we are hopeless (1 Cor. 15:17-19).

5. The Gospel of God is About the LORD Jesus (v. 4c)

- So how do we put all this information about Christ together? Paul introduced God’s gospel in v. 1 and said that gospel was about (*concerning*) God’s Son (vv. 3-4). And now Paul names and identifies the Son specifically: He is *Jesus Christ our Lord*.
 - ✓ As an incarnated human, His name is *Jesus*.
 - ✓ As the God-anointed Messiah, His name is *Christ*.
 - ✓ As the resurrected and ascended Savior, He is *Lord*. Here the content of the gospel is fully and finally identified — the readers unmistakably understand that the gospel is about the sovereign lordship of Jesus Christ. He is the Master. “He who was born as the seed of David has been exalted by God to reign over all. He is the Lord of all nations...” [Schreiner]
 - ✓ He is the Master of all and He will be served (Phil. 2:9-11).

- This is the gospel.
 - ✓ Christ came as a man to take the place of men on the cross.
 - ✓ Christ came as God to endure and satisfy the infinite wrath of God against sin.
 - ✓ Christ came as Lord to rule over all men, including those who believe in Him.
 - ✓ There is no gospel apart from the humanity and deity and lordship of Christ.
- If you are not a Christian, this is the heart of what we believe:
 - ✓ We are all sinners who deserve the wrath of God. The Scriptures say that when we are born, we are “children of wrath” — from the moment of birth we are rightly destined for God’s judgment.
 - ✓ But Christ took that wrath for us so that we don’t have to die. He received our sin, and we received His righteousness.
 - ✓ To believe in Jesus Christ means to believe that you deserve eternal judgment from God but that you appeal to God to be merciful to you and spare you that judgment so that you can live as one who joyfully submits to the loving lordship and direction of Christ.
 - ✓ Like I said last week and at the beginning of this sermon, the gospel is to get us back to God. And the way back to God is through Christ, our Lord.
 - ✓ One last comment about what Paul says — notice he says, ***our Lord***. By that he means that he and most in the Roman church believed in Christ as Lord. But by that he also means that there are those who do not have Christ as their Lord, He is not *their* Lord. Don’t be among those who don’t believe. If you are not a Christian, please come to Him today and ask Him to save you.

CONCLUSION: A few years ago I entered the “spinning” phase of life. You know what that is — it’s when you think of something you need to do so you go to do that and when you arrive at your destination, perhaps another room in your home, you spin in circles trying to think of why you are in that room. You’ve become disoriented and confused about what you have come to do.

As I noted at the beginning of the message, there is much confusion about Christ. Don’t be confused about the gospel and don’t be confused about Christ. The gospel is given to us to rectify our problem with sin and death and to get us to fellowship and enjoyment of God. And Christ accomplishes and provides the gospel through His life and death.

This is the gospel that has saved us and this is the gospel that we have been given to declare to unbelievers. If you are a believer, learn this gospel and speak this gospel to those who don’t know it.