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A1416 – April 20, 2014 – Romans 1:1-7
The Gospel Of Jesus Christ

There will be no particular lesson on the resurrection this Sunday though it has an important place in verse 4 of our passage. My reasoning is that everyone here who comes to church once a year has heard virtually the same message every year so why not hear some other message. We don't teach the same lesson every week. There's a great diversity in the lessons that are taught here and if you come for a year or two you'll have more diversity of learning than you got in your college education. We're currently studying the Book of Romans. We introduced the book last week and gave the historical background. We'll likely be here for a couple of years. It's Paul's magnum opus, his greatest work.

We said this epistle is "excelled by no portion of God's word in the weight and excellence of its matter,"ⁱ "a theological education in itself."ⁱⁱ Considered by many to be a doctrinal treatise on the gospel. It is a systematic presentation and defense of the gospel according to God's righteousness which has been met in Jesus Christ. It was written by Paul, on the human side, under divine inspiration. It rightly stands at the head of his thirteen NT epistles, not only because it is the longest of his epistles but because it is the door through which one enters into the great hall of Christianity. No other book casts so much light on the gospel of God's grace. As such it answers the great questions of every man lost and a fallen sinner in the world: "What is wrong with me?" "What is wrong with the world?" The answer is that each man is sinful by nature and therefore the whole world stands condemned before God. The next question is, "How can I get right with God so that I am no longer condemned with the world?" The answer is through faith in Jesus Christ. He is the only One who satisfied God. Through faith in Him I am justified and He is satisfied with me. The next question then is, "How do I live a life that pleases God?" The answer is to live by the Spirit. The next logical question is,

“What is my future?” The answer is the resurrection unto life in the kingdom. The book also answers the next question a Jew would ask, “If such great promises are sure how can I know they are sure when it appears that God’s promises to Israel failed?” The answer is that God’s promises to Israel have not failed. Rather, after God has completed His promises to the Gentiles He will turn once more to Israel and fulfill His promises to that nation. Apparently then, the structure of history is such that when all is said and done both Jews and Gentiles will have enjoyed the mercies of God. Paul wrote the book to establish the believers in Rome in these great truths.

We begin our exposition in 1:1 with Paul’s salutation. This is the longest salutation in all of Paul’s epistles. It’s a single sentence composed of 126 words extending from verse 1 to 7. Like all of Paul’s salutations it follows the customary formula for ancient salutations including the identity of the author, the identity of the recipients and a word of greeting. Paul usually digresses from the customary formula by revealing in germ form the main subject of the letter. In verse 1 he identifies himself as the author, in verses 6 and 7 he identifies the recipients as the saints at Rome and greets them with grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. In verses 2-5 he reveals the main subject of the letter which is the gospel. In essence Paul says that the gospel was revealed in the OT, that it pointed to God’s Son who was raised from the dead, who then gave Paul his apostleship in order to bring Gentiles to faith.

Starting in verse 1 the author identifies himself as **Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God.** **Paul** was his Gentile name. **Saul** was his Jewish name. Jews often had a Gentile name as well as a Jewish name. They used their Gentile names around Gentiles and their Jewish name among Jews. When Saul was a member of the strict fraternity of Pharisaic Jews he remained separated from Gentiles and had no need for a Gentile name. However, after coming to believe in Jesus as the Messiah he and Peter agreed that his ministry would be to the Gentiles while Peter’s would be to the Jews. In light of this direction of his ministry Saul took to himself the Gentile name Paul. This is not natural since the Greek form of Saul is not Paul but *Saulos*. Why then did Saul choose Paul as his Gentile name? Perhaps because of the meaning of the name Paul. Paul means “little” and Paul wanted to reflect the idea that he

was the least of all the apostles and not fit to be called an apostle because he had persecuted the church of God.

Next Paul reveals three things about himself. First, he identifies himself as a **bond-servant of Christ Jesus**. Some have translated this “slave” but “slave” misses the import of this word. The background of a **bond-servant** is found in Exodus 21:2-6. In this passage if a Jew went to the marketplace and purchased a slave the slave would be the indentured servant of his master for six years. The master had the responsibility of caring and providing for him. In the seventh year the law required him to set the slave free. However, if the slave came to love his master then he could choose to serve him for life. To do this the slave would go with his master to the judges and they would put his ear against the door and nail an awl into his ear. Then the slave would be a bond-servant, meaning a willing servant, one who desires to serve his master all the days of his life. With this imagery in the background Paul is saying that he recognizes that he was a slave to sin and Christ purchased him out of the slave market of sin to live a new life. Paul now willingly serves his new Master Christ Jesus. This is what it means to be a bond-servant. It means that all “his time, his strength, his talents, even life itself, no longer belonged to Paul but to Jesus Christ.”ⁱⁱⁱ He loved to call himself a bond-servant, he called himself this many times in his epistles. He put it even before his apostleship. It is a greater thing to be a bond-servant than it is to be an apostle. You can be a bond-servant too, if you have been purchased out of the slave market of sin by Jesus Christ through faith then you can choose to willingly serve Him.

Second, Paul identifies himself as an apostle. He says, **called as an apostle**. An **apostle** was “one sent in the authority of the sender.” In the ancient world king’s often sent messengers. How one treated the messenger was how one treated the king because the messenger came in the authority of the king. It was as if the messenger was the king himself. Paul was an apostle of Christ Jesus. He came in the authority of Christ Jesus. How one treated Paul was how one treated Christ Jesus. Paul was not a self-made apostle as men in modern days. There is only one way you could be an apostle, you had to be chosen by Christ to be an apostle. In John 6:70 Jesus said, “Did I Myself not choose you, the twelve, and yet one of you is a devil?” Christ chose the twelve. The one referred to as “a devil,” Judas, turned aside from his office of apostle. Therefore in Acts 1:15-26 Peter considered it necessary to replace Judas. The

requirements he sets forth for consideration are that the man had accompanied them from the time Jesus called them beginning with the baptism of John until His ascension. When they put forth two men, Joseph called Barsabbas and Matthias, they prayed to the Lord who knows the hearts of all men and said, “show which one of these two You have chosen to occupy this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside.” When they drew lots for them the lot fell to Matthias and he was added to the eleven apostles.” The drawing of lots was a proper method for determining the will of God prior to the day of Pentecost in Acts 2. The fact that they prayed that the Lord would reveal which of the two He had chosen shows that even Matthias’ apostleship was by the Lord’s choice. Paul too was called by the Lord’s choice to be an apostle. However, to be one of the twelve apostles one had to have been with Jesus beginning with John’s baptism until His ascension. Paul did not meet this criteria so he was not of the twelve. However, he did meet the criteria of seeing the resurrected Lord. Paul asks in 1 Cor 9:1, Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen the Lord?” And 1 Cor 15:8, “and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also. 9For I am the least of the apostles, and not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. 10But by the grace of God I am what I am...” So Paul did see the Lord and it was then that he was called as an apostle. Our minds are drawn to the Damascus Road when Paul saw the resurrected Lord. It was then that he became an apostle. He was not one of the twelve but he was like the twelve in that he was chosen by the Lord for this ministry. But notice how those modern self-proclaimed apostles are so unlike Paul who considered the station of a bond-servant more highly than even that of an apostle. Would that more today would claim to be bond-servants and less apostles. Paul was a humble servant but also spoke with authority.

Third, Paul identifies himself as **set apart for the gospel of God**. One **set apart** was “separated for a purpose.” Paul had been a Pharisee, which literally means “separate.” At that time he had kept himself separate from Pharisees of lesser rank because they would defile him. And certainly he steered clear of Samaritans and Gentiles. Now however he was the apostle to the Gentiles. His separation was totally different. Instead of being separated from people he considered unclean, he was separated to taking the gospel to them so that they could truly be washed in the blood of the Lamb and become clean.

Paul then was these three things; a **bond-servant**, an **apostle**, and **set apart for the gospel**. The second and third things, apostleship and being set apart for the gospel, relate to Paul's specific calling and mission. They are unique to Paul. You cannot be an apostle by succession. You must have been with Christ during His earthly ministry or seen Him in His resurrection body. This has not happened since the 1st century so there have been no apostles since the 1st century. It may be your mission to be **set apart for the gospel**. I think this relates to Paul's apostleship but there are those with the gift of evangelist whose mission it is to proclaim the gospel. You may have such a gift. The first, however, is available to all believers. If you have been purchased out of the slave market of sin by your new Master Jesus Christ, you may willingly serve Him all the days of your life. If you chose to be so you are a **bond-servant**.

Having mentioned **the gospel of God** Paul decides to expound on this gospel in germ form since it is the main subject of his letter. First, the meaning of the word **gospel** is "good news." Here he says it is the "good news" **of God** meaning that it comes from God. Second, he reveals how long this gospel has been around and how God revealed it to us in verse 2. This is not a new gospel but one **which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures**. Some people are concerned that we are believing the most recent gospel, a gospel that is up to date. We are not believing a recent gospel. We are believing an ancient gospel. Even the Lamb of God was slain before the foundation of the world! So then the gospel we are believing pre-dates time itself. It is not therefore a new thing. It has forever been in the mind of God as that which would rescue man in time from his fallen condition in Adam. So we are not believing the most recent gospel fad. All recent gospels are false gospels. The only true gospel is the ancient one. If you want to remain popular by keeping up with current trends in the gospel you will not find it here. There is but one gospel of God. It has been around for a long, long time. It does not need to be updated with time because it speaks to all men in all times. With all the talk of change there is one thing that never needs to be changed, it is the good news of God. It never needs to be changed because it cannot be improved upon. It also remains relevant, continuing to speak to the most pressing needs of man, solving our sinful condition before a holy God. So join me in considering this ancient gospel that does not progress but is most sure and stable.

Paul says in verse 2 that God **promised** this good news **beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scripture**. Read the OT and Paul insists you will find this gospel. Isaiah said, “All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way;” that is the bad news of your condition before God, you are ruined by sin. But the rest of the verse says, “But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him.” That is the good news of what Jesus Christ has done for you; he has put your sin on Him. Jeremiah said, “The heart is more deceitful than all else And is desperately sick; Who can understand it?” That is the bad news of how wicked your nature is. In the same context he says “Save me and I will be saved.” That is the good news of salvation! Paul insists that we could quote OT prophet after OT prophet through whom God spoke the good news. Paul himself in Romans quotes the OT sixty-one times and makes numerous allusions. So this news is not new news in the modern sense, it is old news, as old as the OT prophets; but there has been no need to update it. It still speaks to all men in all times and answers to their deepest need.

In verse 3 Paul says this old gospel is **concerning His Son**. It may seem to go without saying that the gospel is about Jesus Christ, but in our day with all the talk of gospel there is very little talk of Jesus Christ. There is talk about sacraments and whether you had the right kind of faith or whether you have the right kind of works but there is little talk about the one who did all the work, Jesus Christ, the sole object of our faith! He is the one whom the gospel is all about. The gospel is not about these other things. The gospel is about Jesus Christ! “Anything not centered on Him is not the gospel of God.”^{iv}

Concerning Him, Paul refers to Him as **God’s Son**. This comes first in the order of four descriptions of Jesus Christ. The four are all in the proper sequence, starting before time and coming into time. First, before time He is **God’s Son**. Literally the Greek says “the Son of Him.” **Him** is a pronoun replacing the noun God from verse 2. So it is saying that Jesus is “the Son of God.” Son of God speaks of His eternal nature and divine essence. Jesus Christ is the Son of God from all eternity. This is the doctrine of eternal sonship. This doctrine says that Jesus did not become the Son of God at a point in time but He ever was the Son of God. Jesus did not become the Son of God at His birth, His baptism, His resurrection or His ascension; He always has been and always will be the Son of God. This means that Jesus as the Son of God is part of the divine essence. If someone tells you Jesus

became the son of God at His birth that person is telling you that God has undergone an essential change in His essence. Hopefully they will have a change of mind because that cannot be. God is the same yesterday, today and forever. So Jesus is the Son of God yesterday, today and forever.

Second, the Son of God from all eternity is also the Son of Man. In time we are told that He **was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh.** This speaks of the incarnation of the Son of Man. The incarnation means “in” “flesh” and is the doctrine that explains how God came “in the flesh.” The Gospels explain that He was born of a woman who was a **descendant of David.** Her name was Mary and she was a descendant of David’s son Nathan. At the time she was a virgin, having never been married, but she was betrothed to Joseph, a man who was also in David’s line though through a different son of David, named Solomon. Solomon was the kingly line. This is the line through which came the throne rights. Joseph was of this line. He found her to be with child and supposed fornication so he was going to put her away privately so as not to destroy her reputation. But an angel revealed to him that the Holy Spirit had conceived the child in her womb so he should not be afraid to marry her. So then, it was through the virgin Mary that the Son of God was conceived and born so as to be a true **descendent of David according to the flesh.** Being virgin conceived he was a true human being without any sin, imputed, inherent or otherwise. Paul explains it with these words later in Romans, saying, God sent “His own son in the likeness of sinful flesh.” Likeness is the key word, he was not in sinful flesh but only in the likeness of it, he looked just like a human and was a true human, but without sin. The rest of the verse explains why, to be “an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh.” Had it not been that He was the Son of Man come in true human flesh then He could not die for our sin.

So we have two affirmations about Jesus so far; first, he is the eternal Son of God, second, he is the human descendant of David. You see, He is both God and man in one person without confusion, mixture or separation. They were to call Him Immanuel, which translated means “God with us.” Jesus Christ is a totally unique individual, both God and man, and yet that is only half the story Paul shows us!

Third, in verse 4, he was **declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus**

Christ our Lord. Now I would say that **Spirit** is not to be capitalized in this verse. Some translations capitalize it to make it the Holy Spirit but I think that Paul could have said Holy Spirit if he wanted to but chose not to because that was not his point. His point with that expression **according to the spirit of holiness** is to refer to the basis upon which Jesus Christ was raised and vindicated the Son of God. *Kata* with the accusative always refers to the standard or basis. Literally there's no article either so it should be translated, "according to a spirit of holiness," not "the spirit of holiness." What Paul is saying is that Jesus Christ had a human spirit that was holy, that is, it was set apart from sin, and therefore death had no hold on Him. If He had any sin He would not have been raised from the dead. But since He was it shows that He had no sin. Now the resurrection is the end of all discussion. It shows that it's not about a person's religious beliefs, it's not about a person's sincerity, it's not about a person's good works, it's about Jesus Christ raised from the dead. What are you going to do with that? There has already been a resurrected individual walking in this world. He walked around for forty days and ate with men and talked with men. This was not a thing that happened in a corner. This was public knowledge. It was well-known to everyone and nobody had an explanation and they were afraid! You are responsible to have some response to this. Who do you say Jesus Christ is? God is declaring to all men everywhere that they believe in Jesus Christ, risen from the dead because all judgment had been given to Him and He is soon coming to judge the living and the dead. Where do you stand? What do you do with resurrection?

Now you might mistakenly think that verse 4 is saying that Jesus became the **Son of God** at the **resurrection** because it says **declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection**. Yet if you were to take that interpretation it would conflict with the earlier statement that He was eternally the Son of God. It is not saying that Jesus became the Son of God at the resurrection, it is rather saying that the fact that He ever was the Son of God was "vindicated, shown, or demonstrated." The resurrection demonstrated once for all that Jesus was who He claimed to be from all eternity, the **Son of God**, and it demonstrated it with power. That's what I mean, the resurrection is the end of all discussion. The resurrection is a powerful proof that He is indeed **the Son of God**. If this is so then religion is a vanity. This isn't about religion; this is about truth. Believe in the truth of the risen Christ, the Son of God who died for our sins.

We have seen three things about Jesus Christ so far; His deity, He is eternally the Son of God, His humanity, he is the Son of Man; His vindication as to whom He claimed to be, by resurrection. Now we come to the fourth thing, in verse 5. Here we see His authority to distribute grace and apostleship. Apostleship could only be conferred by Christ. He is the sender of the apostles who are His messengers. We said earlier that the apostles came in the authority of the sender. The risen Christ is the sender. The apostles came in His authority. Paul says they received **grace**. This **grace** is the privilege of being an apostle of Jesus Christ. What a privilege it was to be an apostle. Not many men enjoyed that privilege. That privilege has three aspects. First, its purpose, **to bring about the obedience of faith**. Rarely are obedience and faith connected with respect to salvation. But in John 3:36 we are told, “He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.” And in Acts 6:7 “a great number of priests were becoming obedient to the faith.” There is one sense in which faith is obedience, it is obeying what God said we must do to be saved. An example is where Paul said to the Philippian jailer and his family, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved.” When they obeyed him and believed, they were saved. Paul’s purpose as an apostle was to bring this obedience to the faith about through the preaching of the gospel of God centering on God’s Son. Second, the sphere, **among all the Gentiles**. Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles. Peter to the Jews. It was decided this way because Paul was having success among the Gentiles and Peter among the Jews. Paul’s commission in Acts 9 was that he would first of all, bear Christ’s “name before the Gentiles.” The fact Paul says **all** points to the universal scope of this gospel. It is to go to all nations, all tongues, all people groups, for there is no other name under heaven by which men may be saved. Third, the motive, **for His name’s sake**. This is the chief motive. It is for Him because of what He has done for us. His name refers to all that He is and has done. His name is **Jesus** and this name sums up who He is and what He has done. The name means “the Lord saves.” He is the Lord, that is God and He saves, that is what He does. Everything now should be done for His sake because of who He is and what He has done.

Finally, in verse 6, after discussing in germ form the subject matter of the letter, Paul turns back to the Romans themselves and says three things to them. First, he says they are among the called. **Among whom you also are**

the called of Jesus Christ. The believers from Rome were some among all those in the inhabited earth who had been called by Jesus Christ through the preaching of the gospel so that they belong to Him. Jews from Rome first heard it in Jerusalem when they had traveled there for the day of Pentecost a quarter of a century earlier. As Peter preached the message Christ called them and they heard and responded by the obedience of faith, becoming His possessions. The Church had grown to include Gentiles too whom as the message was preached were called by Christ and heard and responded with faith, becoming His possessions. The Church is Jews and Gentiles in one body, all called of Christ. You too, like the Romans, if you have heard the gospel and had faith, were called by Jesus Christ and belong to Him. And if you are hearing today and He is calling to you then when you have faith you will belong to Him. It is a wonderful thing to be among the called of Jesus Christ. Second, in verse 7, he says they are beloved of God. **To all who are beloved of God in Rome.** Jesus Christ is the Beloved. All of those who have faith in Him are therefore beloved because of their association with Him. This is another wonderful thing, to be the beloved of God. Third, he says they are **saints, saints** by calling. The word **saints** means “set apart” or “holy ones.” They are set apart by the calling of the gospel of God concerning Christ. While “saint” is not a term of behavior but position, it certainly urges us to live consistent with our position. If we are called saints we should live saintly. Does the world expect anything of a sinner? No. Does it expect anything of a saint? Yes it does. If we are called saints but fail to live saintly lives the world will mock us. Fortunately God does not say to saints that trying harder is the way to become saintly, but rather, reckon yourselves dead to sin and realize who you are in Jesus Christ, then that saintly life will happen naturally of His grace. So if you are a believer then you are among the called, beloved of God and called saints.

Lastly Paul gives his customary greeting; **grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.** **Grace** is that which results in **peace.** Grace comes through Jesus Christ and His salvation, resulting in peace with God. As Paul says later in 5:1, “we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” From one comes the other and so the two cannot be separated. Do you have peace with God? The grace of God is available to you.

In conclusion, Paul has wrapped up his sentence of 126 words, beginning with his humble name Paul, and his humble service as a willing bond-servant

of Christ Jesus, he crescendos to his call as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God. This gospel is not new but old, promised beforehand by God through His prophets in OT Scripture, culminating in one Person and one Person only who is the Son of God, the Son of David, vindicated by resurrection and conferring upon Paul the grace of apostleship. The purpose of his apostleship was to bring men to the obedience of faith, the sphere all the nations of the world, the motive for His name's sake. Decrescendo'ing Paul returns to the believers at Rome who are among the called, the beloved of God, called saints. Attached is a greeting of grace and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Dr Beet says, "Paul's opening sentence is a crystal arch spanning the gulf between the Jew of Tarsus and the Christians at Rome. Paul begins by giving his name; he rises to the dignity of his office, and then to the Gospel he proclaims. From the Gospel he ascends to its great Subject Matter, to Him Who is the Son of David and Son of God. From this summit of his arch he passes on to his apostleship again, and to the nations for whose good he received it. Among these nations he finds the Christians at Rome...The gulf is spanned. Across the waters of national separation Paul has flung an arch whose firmly knit segments are living truths, and whose Keystone is the Incarnate Son of God."

ⁱ William S. Plumer, *Commentary on Romans*, p 29.

ⁱⁱ Rene Lopez, *Romans Unlocked*, p 26.

ⁱⁱⁱ Loose quotation from Alva McClain, *The Gospel of God's Grace*, p 35.

^{iv} *Ibid.*, McClain, *The Gospel of God's Grace*, p 38.

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