

Deuteronomy, part 2

Romans 1:1-7

I remember once hearing a very gifted preacher say that the best part of his sermons was the title. I noted that he always had a clever and very meaningful title. I can't claim the same thing for myself. I'm just not that creative, and my sermon titles tend to be much more ordinary; descriptive, I hope, but still very plain. I want to emphasize my title this morning, however, because I really am trying to make an important point. We have spent two years studying the great book of Deuteronomy, the second giving of the law, an extended account of a series of sermons by Moses as the people of God were just about to enter the promised land of Canaan.

But I emphasized something throughout our study of that book, even as we ended last Sunday. Deuteronomy is a book of about Jesus. It shows us the way to Christ, it prepares that way. It foreshadows and predicts Jesus, as the prophet like unto Moses whom God promised to send to his people. Deuteronomy is, therefore, a book about the gospel. Just like the book of Romans, which we will begin to study today. The difference between the books is simply this—the book of Deuteronomy looks forward to Jesus in anticipation, and the book of Romans looks back on Jesus in explanation.

Romans also comes to us in a very different style that Deuteronomy, and as you have probably observed, I like to vary the types of books that I preach on. So from a particularly historical book, one from the Old Testament, we move to a distinctly theological book from the New Testament, a book that very clearly demonstrates the Apostle Paul's ordinary method of writing—namely that the first portion of the book is an exposition of what we are to believe as God's people, and the second

portion amounts to an extended application of that doctrine. What we are to believe is followed by how we are to live. And as we live out our lives as Christians, those two things must forever be joined together, inseparably connected so that the behavior of our lives is always determined by the faith that we believe, and that which we believe as doctrine is always put into practice in our everyday lives.

Thus, in the book of Deuteronomy, the style is what is often labeled biblical theology, that is, the study of God's revelation of truth as it is embodied in the outworking of the history of his covenant people. The style of Romans is often labeled systematic theology, which is the study of God's revelation of truth in terms of particular subjects or propositions that are revealed in something of a logical consistency and order. And that's where we come to with this book of Romans. Or, as I'm calling it, Deuteronomy, part 2.

What we see first, typically for one of Paul's books, is his own introduction. Paul is not just writing a personal and private letter to a group of friends gathered together in a church in Rome. He is writing as an apostle, someone sent by God for that very purpose. As an apostle, he writes with the authority of God, in the name of God. And as we understand it from other places in the New Testament, he writes under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit so that what he writes is the very word of God. Thus we begin with,

I. AN APOSTOLIC IDENTITY.

v.1-2

Notice, however, his emphasis. He doesn't begin with his title and office of authority as an apostle. He is not even really defending himself, as if he needed to prove his credentials as he

did when writing to the churches of Galatia. In that book, the emphasis is very different,

Gal. 1:1. “Paul, an apostle (not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead).”

No need to be so defensive here, his relationship with the Roman church was much more secure and personal with the Galatians. So he begins with a self-identification as a bond-servant. He doesn't claim the role of authority, but one of service. That is such a helpful encouragement and personal challenge. Rather than emphasize his place of rule and power, he demonstrates that such a ruler is,

A. A bondservant by nature.

So the leader is the servant. That's the life-changing pattern that Jesus himself established. Remember Jesus said of himself,

Mat. 20:24 “And when the ten heard it, they were greatly displeased with the two brothers. 25 But Jesus called them to Himself and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. 26 Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. 27 And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave— 28 just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

Bondservant could well be translated slave, bond slave. It is the word which describes a man in the literal bondage of belonging to another. A slave was the property of his owner, he owed absolute submission to his master. The master's ownership meant absolute authority. Paul was a slave. And that was his calling! That was his first and primary self-identification as he writes to the Romans.

There is much to be learned in that for us, especially for anyone who exercises authority today in the church. The ruler, the leader, is to be the servant. “Whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

There is more to Paul's identity here, specifically with reference to the fact that his position as an apostle was not something that chose for himself.

B. Called by God for a purpose.

v.1. “...called to be an apostle.”

This calling is what we often describe as an effectual call. In other words, the idea is not just an invitation. It wasn't just an offer that Paul received. It was a calling that was put into effect by God himself. God called to be an apostle. And we know exactly how that happened, if you remember Paul's own testimony recorded in,

Acts 26:12 “While thus occupied, as I journeyed to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, 13 at midday, O king, along the road I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and those who journeyed with me. 14 And when we all had fallen to the ground, I heard a voice speaking to me and saying in the Hebrew language, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’ 15 So I said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ And He said, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. 16 But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you. 17 I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, 18 to open their eyes, in order to turn them from

darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.”

That’s what it means to be called by God! Such calling is directly connected with the idea of being set apart, as we read in verse 1 also. Paul was,

C. Set apart for the gospel.

v.1. “...separated to the gospel of God.”

Paul has been marked off, designated by God, assigned by God, for the work of the gospel. Actually, Paul had come to realize that although he had previously been a persecutor of the church, he had actually been set apart from birth! That is the nature of God’s calling. And Paul understood that! His own words to the Galatians,

Gal. 1:15 ‘But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb and called me through His grace, 16 to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles.”

Such a marvelous sense of God’s work in his life, such a healthy sense of purpose and identity. God had called him and set him apart. He, therefore, was but a bondservant!

Notice then God’s purpose. Paul was set apart for the gospel! And so in this introduction to this great book, we have quite a helpful description and definition of the gospel.

II. A GOSPEL DEFINITION.

Look at,

v.2

Notice first of all something I emphasize often, something I have already stressed this morning.

A. The gospel was promised beforehand.

In other words, in the Old Testament. For example, in the book of Deuteronomy. The gospel was promised in the outworking of the history of God’s people Israel in the Old Testament. Their very existence as a nation was a demonstration of the plan and purpose of God in salvation. And so the promises of God to his people in the Old Testament were the promises of the gospel which would then be fulfilled when Jesus Christ came into this world as a human being.

Paul says that even more plainly in,

Gal. 3:7 “Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham. 8 And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, “In you all the nations shall be blessed.” 9 So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham.”

The promise of God to Abraham, the promise of God to Moses, the promise of God to David, they were all promises of the gospel. And actually, that promise of Jesus as the Messiah who would redeem the people of God was a promise God made all the way back in the Garden of Eden, after Adam and Eve sinned. The curse was the curse of death, and truly in Adam all mankind become mortal and corruptible. And we shall all die and return to the dust until Jesus return. But even as that curse was pronounced, the promise of the gospel was given.

Gen. 3:15 “And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel.”

The seed of the woman did, in fact, defeat and conquer the seed of the serpent. And that victory in its final and complete triumph will be revealed when Jesus comes back at the end of this age. All of that was promised and predicted throughout the Old Testament. The gospel was promised beforehand, according to verse 2, "through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures."

But what do we learn about that gospel? The easiest way to answer that question is this way, that the gospel focus on Jesus. But here in Romans, that is made even more specific. The gospel focuses upon Jesus both in his humanity and, as well, in his deity. The focus of the gospel is that Jesus is both man, fully and completely man. And God. Fully and completely God.

Notice how Paul is showing us that,

B. The gospel focuses on Jesus the man.
v.3

"According to the flesh", with reference to his humanity, he is the seed of David, the descendant of David. And, of course, he is. The gospel accounts in Matthew and Luke make that perfectly clear. According to human ancestry, Jesus is in the line of David. In other words, he is a man, a human being.

Luke 1:30 "Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. 31 And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS. 32 He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. 33 And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end."

This is the gospel, that in his flesh, Jesus suffered and died for our sins. A man, offering his life in place of his fellow human

beings. His human life, lived perfectly without any sin, offered as a sin offering for the rest of us. That is an essential part of the gospel, the humanity of Jesus.

And that is of great encouragement to us, made clear by the words of,

Heb. 2:14 "Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, 15 and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. 16 For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham. 17 Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. 18 For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted."

Therefore, we also read,

Heb. 4:15 "For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

Because Jesus was a man. But Jesus was also God. And so,

C. The gospel also focuses on Jesus the Son of God.

He was not just a man. He was not a man born by ordinary generation, nor did he inherit a sinful human nature. Instead, he was a man conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit in the womb of a woman who had not been with a man. And in his human flesh, he came to live with the fullness of his divine nature. The human and the divine inseparably joined together. So Jesus is

identified in verse 3 as “His Son Jesus Christ our Lord.” Jesus is the Son of God. The eternal son, not a creature whose life had a beginning. Rather, we know that,

John 1:1 “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. 4 In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.”

And then we read,

John 1:14 “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”

That is the gospel! Jesus is God, the eternal son of God, who became a man. And notice the language used in,

v.4. “...and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness...”

Jesus was declared to be the Son of God. Note that Jesus didn’t become the Son of God. As the son of God, he has no beginning. He was with God in the beginning! But he was declared, he was marked out and clearly identified as the son of God with power. And that’s the next Greek phrase.

In his human nature, he had great weakness, including a mortal body which was subject to death. And in the flesh, he died, the ultimate experience of human weakness. But there was no such weakness in his divine nature. He was declared to be the son of God with power!

And it was supernatural power! The power of the spirit of holiness. I don’t think that is a direct reference to the Holy Spirit, but rather to the divine nature of Jesus himself. He was the holy

one, the one set apart by God the father from all eternity to be the son, declared to be such by “the spirit of holiness.”

And then the reference to the resurrection.

v.4

D. The gospel is proven by the resurrection.

And so gospel preaching went something like this,

Acts 4:10 “...let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole. 11 This is the stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.’ 12 Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

We have something of a doctrinal summary of the gospel in,

1 Cor. 15:3 “For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.”

That’s the gospel, by its definition. But it is not a bare doctrine. This definition of the gospel doesn’t exist in the abstract, it is not just a theory or religious system to give us help and encouragement in our difficult human lives. No, this gospel, so focused on Jesus, gives to us as Christians our identity.

III. OUR IDENTITY AS BELIEVERS.

In other words, the gospel defines who we are as well. And of primary importance in that definition is the realization that as believers, we are...

A. Recipients of grace.

In other words, this religion we call Christianity is not a system of works salvation. This is not a merit-based identity. We don't perform successfully to an acceptable standard in order to be received and accepted by God as his children. Paul will have much to say about that in the rest of this book of Romans. But in this introduction, what becomes so abundantly clear is that our salvation is of grace not of works.

v.5. "Through Him we have received grace..."

Paul, of course, applies that first to himself, as an apostle. But extends the blessing to all who believe. The benediction at the end of verse 7 is so meaningful. It is the blessing of grace, the gift of God's grace. "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

We must never forget, and never fail to emphasize sufficiently, what is made so clear in all of Scripture.

Eph. 2:8 "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast."

And then, with that identity as recipients of grace, we are given a great task to perform. Namely that we would become,

B. Witnesses to the nations.

v.5

We are to bear witness to the gospel with our lives, with the "obedience to the faith." We are to be salt and light to this dark world, always prepared to give an answer for the hope that is in us. As Jesus himself said to his disciples so directly,

Mat. 28:18. "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations,

baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

That is our identity. Our calling.

Acts 1:8 "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

One more word about our calling. This idea of calling is not just a reference to our task, our functions, our job as believers. It defines our identity. That is who we are, the called. We are Christians because we are,

C. Called by God.

v.6

And even further,

v.7

Verse 6 is well translated. We are "the called." Our catechisms use the phrase effectual calling. Calling not simply as an invitation, but calling as the work of God that actually changes our hearts and minds. So effectual calling is God's work of changing our hearts--enlightening our minds and renewing our wills. God's work of effectual calling enables us to accept and receive Jesus Christ for salvation. And so, as Christians, we are the called, the called who belong to Jesus Christ.

With one final description of our identity, provided for our great encouragement. We are,

D. Beloved of God.

v.7

We are the objects of his love. And so Paul would write to this church of Rome, those whom he calls the beloved,

Rom. 5:5 “Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.”

Rom. 8:39 “Nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

1John 3:1 “Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!”

Let the definition of that identity be your great encouragement. We are objects, recipients of God’s saving grace. We are effectually called by him to be his children, chosen to be the object of his love. And therefore, you love and serve him with all of your heart. “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”