
Scripture (John 4:4-24)

Introduction

- Michigan pastor Rob Bell and the recent firestorm about his new book “Love Wins”
 - Bell’s thesis: since sending an overwhelming majority of people to hell because they don’t believe in Jesus Christ would say something bad about God’s character, Bell says love and Christ’s sacrifice must mean that all will go to heaven and none will ultimately be lost. What’s key notable about his problematic doctrine is that it stands on his view of the character of God.
 - As I reflected on this, I was reminded of a recent Facebook message exchange with Samantha in Spain as she was dealing with some pretty tough questions about her faith from some of her classmates abroad. Here’s what she said:

I have been having a few conversations with some students on this trip about the evidence of God and "proof" and the validation of Christianity... and I find my answers are based mostly on my emotions. Not because I have never been exposed to the truth, But I'm afraid I have heard and have been comfortable with the fact that I believe and that's enough. What should I say? I really want to be fully equipped the next time this happens because it has happened more than once.

- Samantha is on to something, I believe this describes where many of us are. This is a problem, I am convinced, at Living Faith. That many of those in our fellowship have the same doctrinal vulnerabilities described in Sam’s statement, an emotional and relational understanding of the gospel only.
 - Some may not care. They know what they believe, if not fully clear on why it’s believable, and feel like this is something that those who are interested in these matters (Randall, Tony Longazel and Moore, Fred, etc.) can look into and the rest of us don’t need to know them. God knows our heart, so what’s the big deal? But it’s a big deal!
 - For example
 - Ephesians 4:14-15

- Colossians 2:8
- 2 Timothy 1:13-14
- Which builds on 1 Timothy 4:16-17
- My Epiphany
 - I worry a lot about what I hear sometimes said among us, I believe we flirt loosely with doctrine and set ourselves and our children especially for a huge collapse of faith, I think of Paul's statement in 2 Timothy 2:15-17. Some can have their faith "destroyed" as a consequence of bad teaching because bad doctrine gives no real assurance and cannot be defended in the face of tough circumstances.
 - Well, my epiphany was that, then if I feel this way then if God has me as the lead pastor then I am called, along with the other teaching leaders in the church, especially the ministers who preach with me, to confront this directly, knowing the truth of 1 Timothy 4:16-17, already mentioned, and the principle of Philippians 1:9-11
 - Your souls are my responsibility, along with those others who are or will be on the pastoral team here. We have accountability before God to stir you to growth, equip you for works of service, and ultimately to "present [you] perfect in Christ. [And] to this end [we] labor..."
- So, here's my response
 - Life and Doctrine for forging doctrinal unity among the preachers and teachers
 - Disciples Life (only two groups are meeting, but this is foundational teaching)
 - Bible Study focus on Genesis and the initiation of God's redemptive program for his creation and his people
 - New men's chop time on Thursday's
 - Randall's excellent series on 1 Thessalonians, and new series which will certainly be emerging
 - And now, this series on Romans which starts today, which I believe is the tip of the spear for us in pursuing a sound and complete understanding of the gospel, and its

effect. If it pleases the Lord, we're going to look extensively at four broad themes over the next year or so:

- Justification by Faith
 - Union with Christ
 - The People of God
 - Living Out the Gospel
- I'm going to ask you to labor with me, put in to this effort, I'm going to help you with this (with study notes, etc.), but be BSF-like with this one. (Explain BSF approach)

So, why the book of Romans:

- First of all, because Paul was eager to proclaim the gospel to this church, whom he did not know personally, and so he wanted to lay out for them a complete understanding of the gospel, its breadth and depth. Romans is the most complete statement about the gospel in the Bible, in fact I once said to a brother here at the church who regretted he had so little time to study the vast scope of scripture, why don't you just really focus on learning Romans!
- Secondly, Paul was trying to lay the foundation for unity among Jews and Gentiles in this letter, and so it should become for us a way to all think the same about God and the gospel, which is what the Lord wants of us (1 Cor. 1:10, Eph. 1:13)
- Thirdly, if the gospel is our mission then we ought to know it well! It's bigger, broader and deeper than we tend to think, so we need to know it as fully as God has revealed it to us.
- Lastly, the power for transformation and the source of all our encouragement lies within the gospel: what you need in your life is the gospel planted in your thinking, seated in heart, and seen in your living. Your assurance in suffering, in difficulties, in thinking about wayward children, in worrying about job prospects, in searching for a spouse, are all thoroughly covered by the gospel of Jesus Christ and its far reach into every aspect of our lives.
- As I mentioned on Facebook, my prayer is to be personally deeply affected by this series, and that each of you will be profoundly impacted, and that our church will experience a far-

reaching transformation that will make us into radical disciples of Jesus, living for the cause of the gospel. If Paul's introduction in his letter is any indication, that's where we are headed...

I. Me and the Gospel

Look at verse 1, where Paul lays down 3 key elements of his identity and his life's purpose, which extends to us:

- *Paul, a **servant** of Christ Jesus...*
 - He has a master!
 - The Greek here, *doulos*, is stronger than servant, it really means slave or bondservant
 - This is the beginning of thinking right about the gospel and getting to a healthy mindset about who we are:
 - Saints, we no longer belong to ourselves, we are no longer the focus of our living, we have been bought with a price, we don't pursue worldly pleasures or success, as our primary motive, securing our rights is not our responsibility
 - One of the key aspects of being a slave, is that their labors don't enrich themselves, but instead they are intended enrich their masters.
 - But even more so, masters not only benefit from the slaves' labor, but the master has ownership of the slave's very life! If the master wants the slave to work in the field, that's where he works, if he wants him to work in the kitchen, the slave had better learn to cook, if he wants to sell the slave, the slave had better gather up his things...there is no consent or conversation, the master has the freedom to with the slave what he wants
 - Paul says, he is a slave of Christ Jesus, and so are we! But, this is good news because

- We used to be slaves to sin, and it's destructiveness...it was killing us...and now we are freed from it, and have become slaves of righteousness! Christ purchased us from sin and made us his slave.
- And this really gives us status and protection by his sovereign grace!
- Here's the other thing we see in v.1, Paul is **called** and so are we
 - I love how Paul addresses this in Galatians 1:1
 - Sent not from men or by man
 - But by Jesus Christ and God the Father
 - This says everything about the necessity and priority of the work
 - Of course, Paul was powerfully called by God
 - We are called
 - Called to be saints (holy ones) in v.7
 - Peter in 1:9 of his epistle: *we are a people belonging to God, that [we] may declare the praises of him who has called us out of darkness into his wonderful light.*
 - This is our calling to declare the praises of God, and this not primarily with our voices but mainly with our lives
 - This is our calling as a church, that we might be a light and a city on the hill, so that men will see our good deeds (our living) and praise our Father in heaven.
- And then Paul says, he is set apart for the gospel, and so are we...
 - Set apart means, removed from the common and given to a special purpose
 - Set apart money for retirement (401K), you will be penalized if you try to use it for something else
 - You are set apart for your spouse in special and unique ways, if you do those things you do with your spouse with someone else, you will be an adulterer, it is not allowed

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- Paul was repurposed by God for the gospel...we are repurposed by God, in being his witness and ambassadors, to represent him to all those who see us and will hear us
 - We are (3 S-words)
 - Slaves of Christ
 - Sent by Christ
 - Set apart for the gospel of Christ
 - This is our identity in Jesus Christ! And all this centers on what Christ does, we do none of it
 - He purchases us from sin
 - He sends
 - He sets apart
 - This is grace to the uttermost, and hope we see that one S-word is completely and thoroughly absent from this list: SELF! There is no room for selfishness, self-centeredness, self-obsession or even self-pity

2. The Gospel's Legacy

Look also at v.2: *the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures...*

- Connects the gospel to all that God said and did as seen in the OT, the gospel was seen then, if not always understood, and God has not simply evented something not previously considered
- God is beginning a new work in the new covenant, but it is also a continuation, an enhancement and an expansion of that work!
 - This expansion is seen in two key ways
 - Two weeks ago we talked about how God gives us a **new heart when we are born again from above**, so that we are able to live out his standards: remove the heart of stone and put in a heart of flesh. We looked at several

passages in I John that gives the believer assurance because this work has been done in us and we can see its fruit. This is new.

- The other thing he does in this expansion of his redemptive program is expands it beyond Israel and Jews, 5b: *we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles...*
 - God had been working with I people in a special way, now he is working with all peoples in a special way
 - I am struck by the fact that though the Lord could have raised up a Gentile for this powerful work, but instead he was pleased to use a Jew for the salvation of the Gentiles, which I think is instructive for us: we must intentionally minister cross-culturally! You've heard this before: we want to be a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-generational church. We don't want to be known as a black church because there is no black gospel. There is only the gospel of Jesus Christ, and we need to strive to reach all within a missionary mindset as to how we reach them!
- But, I want to get back to the idea of the gospel being a continuation of the old work, and restate something I shared last week: we don't have the license to make up our own gospel, saints, we need to ensure that what we are proclaiming is anchored in the faith given by God through his prophets and apostles. This is key because...
 - We are told in Jude 3 to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints
 - In Galatians 1:7-8 Paul explains that some try to *pervert the gospel*, and then he says something earth shattering: *if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one preached to [by Paul], let him be eternally condemned!* In other words...
- Our gospel must be rooted in the Bible's witness of it, and not our loose, testimony-time, or even simply gospel tract attestation of it: we need it to be squared with God's word in all aspects and aligned with the tradition of the church going back to the NT.

3. The Gospel is Centered on Jesus

- Lastly
- Regarding his Son, v.3
 - Human nature: son of David, he is Israel's messianic king
 - By the Spirit of holiness...declared [or appointed in an inaugural sense] with power to be the Son of God. His resurrection establishes him manifestly as the Son of God
 - All rights and privileges...
 - No competing claims
 - His resurrection is uniquely powerful and establishes him beyond question, as God's appointed king over his creation and his people, he will rule and reign accordingly!
- And so,
 - **He is our Lord, v.4**
 - And our ministry is through him and for his name's sake
 - In 2 Cor. 4:4, Paul references the "gospel of the glory of Christ"
 - He goes on to say then in 2 Cor. 4:5-6, read this...
 - Our gospel is about Jesus...we are **called to belong to Jesus, v.6**, all that we do and are is for Jesus, as we just saw, the knowledge of the glory of God is in the face of Jesus, may we never try to make the gospel ultimately about us, it is not the value that God saw in us, except for the value that he sees in us within us, he loves us deeply and yet as an extension of his love for his Son, which does not minimize us it elevates us and secures that love since if God had to love us only for us that would be a very difficult love indeed, but since he loves us with the love for his Son, that love is anchored in an eternity of intimate love and faithfulness. Look at Ephesians 1:4-6 and note the centeredness of Christ in grace...

Conclusion

We want Christ, then to take his rightful rule in our lives and in our thinking, shifting self out and allowing Christ to reign in our hearts and for the gospel to be seen in our lives, so that we may show “the obedience that comes from faith” or the obedience of faith.

- Not
 - Obedience that follows faith...
 - Or obedience that is faith
- But, obedience that comes with faith...this is at the heart of the gospel
- Journey with me on this great exploration of the gospel, we saw often reduce the gospel to a few summary verses, and it's true that Romans 10:9 is the gospel, that Ephesians 2:8-9 is the gospel, but the gospel is more, says more, does more: it saves us and transform us, remember our mission: evangelism and transformation, mission statement...
- Let's dive into this gospel together and come up out of it new people and a new church