

The Good Message

Romans 1:1-17

Rev. Jeff Chapman ~ July 12, 2026 ~ Faith Presbyterian Church

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¹Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God—the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures ²regarding his Son, who as to his earthly life was a descendant of David, ³and who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord. ⁴Through him we received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith for his name's sake. ⁵And you also are among those Gentiles who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.

⁷To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be his holy people: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

⁸First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world. ⁹God, whom I serve in my spirit in preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you ¹⁰in my prayers at all times; and I pray that now at last by God's will the way may be opened for me to come to you.

¹¹I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong—¹²that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith. ¹³I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that I planned many times to come to you (but have been prevented from doing so until now) in order that I might have a harvest among you, just as I have had among the other Gentiles.

¹⁴I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish. ¹⁵That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are in Rome.

¹⁶For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.

¹⁷For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first

to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.” (Romans 1:1-17, NRSV)

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What is the most important letter ever written in human history? There are several good candidates. Historians point to Henry VIII's letter to his mistress, Anne Boelyn, a letter which directly led to the English Reformation and changed the structure of an entire nation. Or the letter Albert Einstein wrote in 1939 to President Roosevelt warning that the Nazis might have the capability of building an atomic bomb. That single letter catalyzed the Manhattan Project and fundamentally changed global geopolitics. Or consider Dr. Martin Luther King's letter from his cell in the Birmingham jail, words which fueled a revolution of civil rights. Others could be listed.

I'd like to argue this morning that towering even above these monumental examples is the letter written by the Apostle Paul in about 57 AD to a small community of Christians in Rome. We know it as the Book of Romans, and it is arguably the greatest letter ever written.

To be clear, *all scripture* is God's Word – sacred, inspired, brimming with truth, powerfully transformative. But if you were forced to choose which parts of the Bible were most profitable, Paul's letter to the Romans would be in that conversation. Martin Luther called Romans “the chief part of the New Testament...truly the purest gospel...the daily bread of the soul.” John Calvin declared, “If we have gained a true understanding of Romans, we have an open door to all the most profound treasures of Scripture.” More recently, J.I. Packer put it this way, “All roads in the Bible lead to Romans, and all views afforded by the Bible are seen most clearly from Romans, and when the message of Romans gets into a person's heart there is no telling what may happen.”¹ It's impossible to measure the impact this letter has had, not only on the church, but on the whole of human history and civilization.

¹ Cited by Andrew David Naselli, “Why Romans is the Greatest Letter Ever Written,” *Crossway*, August 16, 2022. Read online at

<https://www.crossway.org/articles/why-romans-is-the-greatest-letter-ever-written/>

If you want to understand the meaning and power of the Christian gospel, Romans might just be the best place for you to go. That's what Romans is about, the gospel. In fact, the word "gospel" shows up in the very first verse, and the verses that follow give a succinct summary of its meaning. "Gospel" is the English translation of the Greek word *euaggelion*. It's where we get the word "evangelism." The word literally means "good message." If you look closely, you can see the word "angel" in there, a word that literally means "messenger."² This was originally a secular term in Paul's day, used in the Roman world to refer to royal proclamations that brought good news, things like a military victory or the birth of a new emperor. But then Christians hijacked the word and began using it to refer to a heavenly royal proclamation, a whole different sort of good news.

Good news, of course, is news that is meant to be shared. Whether it's the birth of a child, the engagement of a young couple, a scan that shows all the cancer is gone, or the discovery of a fantastic new Mexican food restaurant, such news is not meant to be kept private. In fact, if you are in the possession of good news, especially life-changing good news, good news that has the potential to be good news for others, and you *don't* share that good news, one of three things must be true. Either you don't really understand how good this news is. Or, you don't believe that this good news applies to others, either because they won't receive it, or because it isn't meant for them in the first place. Or, you simply don't care about other people who would surely benefit from hearing the good news you have to share.

Paul is more than willing to share the good news he has received. He knows it is good news – the best news ever! He believes it is good news for the whole world. And because he loves the whole world, he wants the whole world to at least have the chance to hear this message for themselves. The letter to the Romans, along with all his other writing and preaching, are the result. And we are going to spend the next several months carefully listening to what Paul has to say – or, more accurately, what Christ has to say through Paul – about this good news.

In this opening section of his letter, which is our focus today, Paul answers three questions:

1. Why should we listen to Paul about the gospel?

2. What is the Christian gospel?
3. Why should we be compelled to share it with others?

Let's take those one at a time this morning, beginning with why we should even listen to Paul in the first place.

Paul was originally a Jewish Rabbi who at one time belonged to a very influential Jewish sect called the Pharisees. The word literally means "the separated ones." These men, who show up all the time in the life of Jesus, were passionate about the Jewish Torah (i.e. the Law) and the traditions of Israel. When he came on the scene Jesus became a terrible threat to them, in part because he exposed their hypocrisy. Paul, known back then by his Jewish name Saul, hated the fact that even after Jesus' death his followers persisted and the church began to grow. So at one point he committed his life to persecuting followers of Jesus, even to death. But everything changed one day on the road to Damascus as he was on his way to arrest more Christians in that city and put them in jail. On that road he had a life-changing encounter with the risen Jesus.³

The first verse of Romans summarizes the new direction his life took after that encounter: **"Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God."**⁴ He now goes by Paul, his Roman name which means "humble" or "small." It's a name he chose partly because of his calling to the Gentiles, and partly because he is no longer a self-important persecutor of Jesus, but a lowly servant of Jesus. A more accurate word would be slave, which is what the word translated here "servant" literally means. Paul is now completely at his new master's disposal, willing to do whatever his master wants him to do. And what Jesus wants him to do is to be an apostle, one of the original eye-witnesses to the risen Christ sent to share the good message of Christ with the world.⁵ As an apostle, he was given foundational authority to proclaim the gospel, establish the church, and write the sacred scriptures of the New Testament. His specific calling, again, was to share the gospel with the Gentile world, those outside of Israel who were now meant to be recipients alongside the Jews of this good message. All this means that we should pay careful attention to what Paul has to say here.

² <https://biblehub.com/greek/2098.htm>

³ Read about this in Acts 9

⁴ Unless otherwise noted, this and all scripture citations are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

⁵ Elsewhere Paul makes clear that this calling to be an apostle was set ever before his birth, and suggests that God had been using circumstances in

his life, even his disobedience, to prepare him for this unique calling. See Galatians 1:15 – **"But when God, who set me apart from my mother's womb and called me by his grace, was pleased..."** This ought to make us wonder how the Lord has been shaping us in our lives for a mission/purpose. He has, you know! See Ephesians 2:10

So what is it that he has to say? What is the essence of the message we call the Christian gospel? That's the second question, and Paul answers it as succinctly as he can in verses 2-6. In his commentary on this passage, New Testament scholar, John Stott, identifies six points Paul makes here.⁶ It's a wonderful summary.

First, *the origin of the gospel is God*. In verse 1 Paul says this is **"the gospel of God."**⁷ In other words, this message was not invented by Paul or, for that matter, by any of the first Christians. It was instead revealed to them and then entrusted to them by God. Reed Jolley, a friend of mine who teaches an overview of the Bible in our Angaza Bible School in Kenya, always has his students memorize this thesis: "The Bible is a book about God. Jesus is the main character. It all points to the glory of God." That first part is the first thing we must say about the gospel. It is not a matter of human speculation, or one more religion to add to the rest. The gospel is not only about God, but *from* God. Any "gospel" that suggests otherwise is a false gospel. Paul is only a messenger of that which has been revealed to him from heaven.

Second, and related to the first, *the gospel was first revealed in the Old Testament*. Paul writes in verse 2 that God promised the gospel **"beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures."** By "Holy Scriptures" Paul of course means the Old Testament. When Reed reminds us in Kenya that the main character in the Bible is Jesus, he's not just talking about the New Testament. I try to remind you as often as I can that we simply cannot understand the New Testament apart from the Old, or Jesus apart from Israel.⁸ Last week I tried to show you how Jesus is the true and better Moses, and the true and better Passover Lamb. He's also the true and better Adam, true and better Abraham, the true and better David, the true and better temple, the true and better prophet, priest and king. I could give you countless more examples. Go back and read, for instance, Isaiah's prophesy in Isaiah 40-66. So much of it points to Christ, often overtly.⁹ When Jesus announces the inauguration of his ministry in the synagogue in Nazareth, he uses a portion of Isaiah 61 to do so.¹⁰ The Old Testament is just as much about the gospel as is the New Testament.

Third, and coming not surprisingly after point 2, *the gospel is all about Jesus*. Paul makes clear in verse 3 that everything revealed by God in the Holy Scriptures about the gospel is **"regarding his Son, who as to his earthly life was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus our Lord."** This good message is about Jesus, and all about Jesus. Specifically it's about who Jesus was and is. Paul reminds us here that Jesus is a direct descendant of David. This is Paul's way of affirming the Old Testament prophesy which stated that when the Messiah came he would come from the line of King David, Israel's greatest king.¹¹ It also affirms that when the Messiah came he would come as one of us, born just like the rest of us with a body just like the rest of us. Part of the good news is that God, through Christ, became one of us.

But Jesus, of course, was not only human. Though born like the rest of us, he was not conceived like the rest of us. As Paul points out, Jesus, as the fulfillment and substance of the gospel was confirmed by the Holy Spirit, not only at his conception in the womb of a virgin, but at his baptism when the Spirit descended upon him, and most powerfully at his resurrection when the grave could not hold him because he was not only human, but divine.¹² Paul does not mean here that Jesus at one point became divine through the resurrection, but that at his resurrection Christ was restored to his former state of glory, a state he had set aside when he came to live in weakness and lowliness. Again, the substance of the gospel is Jesus, specifically that he, the eternal and divine Son of God, became one of us, died as one of us, and was raised as one of us.

In verse 5 Paul then tells us the effects of all this, which is point 4: *the gospel offers grace for everybody*. Paul writes, **"Through him we received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles..."** This particular aspect of the gospel will be repeated over and over throughout the letter. Put simply, through the life, death and resurrection of Christ, the long-awaited Messiah, the Son of God become human, the grace of God, his forgiveness and mercy, have been made available. And not just to *some* people, but to *all* people, to all who would receive it. Sin, death and evil have

⁶ John Stott, *The Message of Romans* (InterVarsity Press, 1994), 48-54.

⁷ Emphasis mine

⁸ New Testament scholar, N.T. Wright, puts it this way, "You can't understand Jesus without understanding the story of Israel, the story that he believed was coming to its climax in his own life and work." Source unknown.

⁹ See especially Isaiah 40:9, 52:7, 60:6, 61:1.

¹⁰ See Luke 4:16-30. The crowd there, by the way, understands exactly what Jesus is doing and in response they try to throw him off a cliff for blasphemy!

¹¹ This promise is most famously given in 2 Samuel 7:12-16, but then reiterated many times in places like Psalm 89:3-4, Psalm 132:11, Jeremiah 23:5, Micah 5:2. Of course, Jesus was born in Bethlehem, the city of David. And both Matthew and Luke painstakingly give the genealogy of Jesus to show, in part, that Mary and Joseph, and then Jesus, were direct descendants of David.

¹² Author and pastor, Tim Keller, famous says, "If Jesus rose from the dead, then you have to accept all that he said; if he didn't rise from the dead, then why worry about any of what he said? The issue on which everything hangs is not whether or not you like his teaching, but whether or not he rose from the dead." Source unknown.

been conquered, all the enemies of God which kept us from God. The way is now clear for all people to come, through Christ, back to God and to the life God desires to share with us.

This leads to point 5, which is that *the gospel demands a response*. All people have been called, yes, but called **“to the obedience that comes from faith.”** As Paul will hammer home in the rest of the letter, salvation is a free gift from God through Christ, pure grace. There is nothing we can do to save ourselves. But God will not force this gift on us; though salvation is not achieved, it still must be received. At some point we must place our faith in Jesus, and this faith is not just an intellectual assent to the truth about Jesus, but a personal trust that says to him, as Paul said to him, “I am your servant. I trust you with my life. You are my master and I am completely at your disposal.” That’s obedience.

Finally, point 6 is that *the gospel is all for God’s glory*. In Paul’s words at the end of verse 5, it’s all **“for his name’s sake.”** The grammar here makes clear that this is the climax. The first question of the Westminster Catechism is the most famous question: “What is the chief end of humankind?” The answer: “Our chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.” I know people struggle with this, that God would create us with the main purpose of glorifying him. If my main goal was to get everybody else to glorify me, I would be, at best, friendless, and at worst, locked up. But I’m not God, which means that if everybody glorified me it would be terribly destructive for both me and everybody else.

It’s different with God. God knows that if we glorify him, acknowledge him as the center of all that is and the absolute focus of our worship and devotion, that only then will we thrive. A branch that tells a vine to make it the center of that branch’s life does so in order that the branch may live and thrive. When the gospel, and all of life, climax in the glory of God, the world thrives. So once again paraphrasing my friend, Reed: “The gospel from God. It’s all about Jesus. It’s all for his glory.”¹³

To review, the origin of the gospel is God. It was first revealed in the Old Testament. It’s all about Jesus. It offers grace *for* everybody, but also demands a response *from* everybody. And it’s all for God’s glory. That is probably as clear a summary of the good message Paul has to share as you’ll find anywhere. And what he

summarizes in these few verses at the opening of his letter, he will spend the next 16 chapters unpacking. But before he does, he wants to answer one more question: Why should we share the gospel?

As a reminder, Paul is writing this letter to the early church in Rome, a church he has yet to visit. He decides to write because he has heard that the congregation is divided, mostly along Jewish and Gentile lines. The aim of this letter is therefore to help restore unity. Nothing brings unity like the gospel, so that is naturally his focus. He cares about this congregation, and makes that clear in the affection he pours out in verses 7-13. He thanks God for these people, gushes about how he constantly remembers them in his prayers, declares that he longs to come and visit them in person, and above all reveals his desire to see a harvest produced in and through them. So he is sharing the heart of the gospel not only to unify and restore the church, but so that once unified and restored, they might also share the gospel with others. That leads him to end his introduction by giving the three reasons that he shares the gospel which, he infers, should also be the three reasons all Christians share the gospel, from Rome on down to us.¹⁴ Briefly, when it comes to sharing the gospel, Paul is motivated because he is obligated, he is eager, and he is unashamed.

First, in verse 14 Paul says, **“I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish.”** Basically, that’s everybody. The word translated “obligated” literally means “in debt.”¹⁵ John Stott points out that there are two ways to be in debt. If I borrow \$1,000 from you, I am now in debt \$1,000 to you. That’s the first way. But the second way is if you give me \$1,000 with the expressed intention that I turn around and give it to somebody else you’ve designated to receive it. In that case I’m not a borrower, but a trustee, entrusted with something that is not mine. But I’m still in debt, in debt to you until I pass on the \$1,000 you entrusted to me.

This is how Paul understand the gospel. It is a priceless gift that was given to him not only so that he might enjoy its benefits, but also so that he might pass it on for the benefit of others. He writes elsewhere in 1st Corinthians 4:1, **“This, then, is how you ought to regard us: as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the mysteries God has revealed.”**¹⁶ If you discover a life-saving cure for cancer that leaves you cancer free, are you not in debt to then share with

¹³ John Stott adds, “The highest of all missionary motives is neither obedience to the Great Commission (important as that is), nor love for sinners who are alienated and perishing (strong as that incentive is, especially when we contemplate the wrath of God), but rather zeal – burning and passionate zeal – for the glory of Jesus Christ.” (53)

¹⁴ John Stott was also very helpful here, especially pages 58-65.

¹⁵ <https://biblehub.com/greek/3781.htm>

¹⁶ New International Version (NIV). See also Galatians 2:7 – **“On the contrary, they recognized that I had been entrusted with the task of preaching the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been to the circumcised.”**

others a cure that was also meant for them? Of course you are! But have you ever thought about the gospel this way? God did not reveal this good news to you just for your own benefit. It's good news that includes others, which means it is meant for sharing with others. We are simply not at liberty to keep it to ourselves.

Paul then adds to eagerness to obligation when he writes, in verse 15, **“That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are in Rome.”**

The word here isn't just about excitement. It's also about readiness. I have a friend who is an “evangelist” for green energy, especially solar power. She's not overly pushy about it, for which I'm grateful, but if you are around her and happen to say something like, “You know, we're thinking about whether solar panels on our roof would be a good idea.”, she doesn't have to think through what she should say next. Buckle up because you are going to hear what she considers to be the good message about solar power.

Biblical scholars define this sort of eagerness as “an inner disposition that stands prepared before any external prompting.”¹⁷ My friend is ready to share the good news of solar power even before she meets somebody who seems ready to hear the good news. So should we be ready to share the good news of the gospel even before we meet somebody who seems ready to receive it. The grace of God should have so transformed and enlivened us that we almost can't wait for the opportunity to share it with others, which is exactly how good news works when it's good news for others. And like I said at the outset, if you are in the possession of good news meant for everybody and you *don't* share it with others, either you don't believe it's truly good news, or you don't believe it's good news meant for others, or you simply don't care about others.

But Paul is not only obligated and eager to share the gospel, he is also unashamed to do so. The fact that he declares this in verse 16 suggests that embarrassment over the gospel is a real possibility. And it is, which is why even Jesus warned us not to be ashamed of him or his message.¹⁸ The reality is that many in this world hated Jesus, which means many in this world will equally hate his followers and messengers. So when we identify publicly with Jesus and his message, it's inevitable that some will oppose us, ridicule us, even persecute us. When this makes us ashamed of the gospel, what has happened is that we have placed a greater value on what others think of us, which is a self-centered posture, instead of placing value on the ultimate destiny and well-being of others which is

dependent on them hearing and receiving the gospel, which is an other-centered posture.

This isn't a denial of the fact that there are many counterproductive and even abusive ways to share the gospel, especially when it comes to people who don't even want to hear it. Of course there are, and Paul will address that later in the letter. Even Jesus kept the message to himself around people who, as he put it, had no ears to hear. But when the time is right for us to share the gospel, we must share it, even if others mock us for doing so. Why? Paul is clear. The gospel is **“the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes.”**

What is the greatest miracle ever performed by God? Creation of the universe out of nothing? That's up there on the list. The incarnation, the Son of God becoming human, is in the conversation. The resurrection is arguably at the top of the list. But I would suggest that right up there as well is the miracle God does every single time a person receives in faith the message of the gospel and trusts Jesus with his or her life. Here is the miracle of a person transformed from sin to righteousness, from wrath to belovedness, from death to life! If you have trusted Jesus, this miracle has occurred in your life, and as of now you have only just tasted the implications. One day you will die and be resurrected - body, mind, and spirit! - to eternal life and find that everything about you - body, mind and spirit! - will have been renewed and restored to stunning perfection. Forget water to wine, or a dead man raised to only die again later on, the miracle of the gospel bringing the power of God to save and restore a lost human being is far greater.

This is why, by the way, Sunday after Sunday all you are ever going to hear from this pulpit is this good message of Jesus Christ. Tragically, it's not hard these days to find churches where it's a message of politics that dominates, or a message of social justice, or well-meaning talks about improving your life - six steps to a better marriage, more satisfying work-life, more enriching friendships, even better financial success. Yes, the gospel speaks to these and every other area of life, but it must be always where we begin. My task as a preacher week after week is to proclaim the gospel. I'm obligated to do so, and I do so eagerly and without shame. And it's really no different for you in your life. We have a lot of messages to share with people, but this is the most crucial of all, because it has the power to do the miraculous in people, even people you might

¹⁷ <https://biblehub.com/greek/4289.htm>

¹⁸ Mark 8:38 - “If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels.”

imagine could never be changed. If it could transform a guy like Paul, it can transform anybody!

There is so much more that could be said about these opening verses in Romans. I hope I've given you enough to whet your appetite for what is to come. All of it is good news, even the parts, beginning with next week, that don't at first sound like good news. May we have not only ears to hear, but also hearts and lives humbly willing to be changed by what it is we hear.

Amen.



The Next Step

A resource for Life Groups and/or personal application

1. Read the passage from Romans 1:1-17 again. Paul is setting the stage here for what will follow in the rest of the letter. What stands out to you from his introduction?
2. If you knew nothing else beforehand about Paul, what would you learn here about him? Focus on verse 1. What is a servant of Christ? What is an apostle? What does it mean to be set apart? And are any of these things also true of you?
3. Now focus on verses 2-6. This is Paul's succinct summary of the Christian gospel, given before he gives the much longer version in the chapters that follow. What stands out to you? What is confusing? What do we learn here about the gospel?
4. Jeff mentioned six aspects of the gospel which are highlighted here: its origins are in God; it was first revealed in the Old Testament; it's all about Jesus; it offers grace for everybody; it demands a response; and it is all for God's glory. Which one of these aspects of the gospel did you most need to learn or remember? Which aspect is most confusing or hard to understand?
5. If the gospel is good news, and good news is meant to be shared, why are often so reluctant to share the gospel with those who don't yet know the good news God has for them?
6. When Paul writes about why he shares the gospel, he makes clear that he is obligated, eager, and unashamed to do so. Do you feel the same? Why or why not?

7. Look closely at verse 16. Paul says that he is unashamed of the gospel because it has power to save everyone? Why does he give this reason to explain why he is unashamed? Where does the power come from?
8. When was the first time in your life that you first understood the good news of the gospel? What was your response?

Table to Table: A Question for kids and adults to answer together.



When was the last time you shared good news with other people? How did that make you feel? Why do we share the good news about Jesus with other people? What is that good news?