

## COURAGEOUS FAITH

Romans 1:2-12

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During the past four months, we have witnessed, up close and personal, the courageous faith of several followers of Jesus Christ who call Calvary Crossroads their home. I do not remember such challenging times for so many who cover the age groups of middle school to senior citizens. Without much trouble, I can immediately count more than twenty individuals. I will not list them for fear of leaving one out; but for each, their individual ordeals have been challenging, life-changing events that require courageous faith. Family members and friends have remarked, “How do they do it?” Where does their strength come from? Upon what is it based? This morning, we will see not all, but much of what makes the foundation upon which their courageous faith stands.

The first seventeen verses of **Romans** are an introduction to the book. They cover the three major themes dealt with throughout the book. In **verses 1-5**, we learn about the men of the Gospel, Paul and Jesus Christ. Last week we looked at the lesser of the two men, the Apostle Paul, who was a called, set-apart servant of Jesus. He was one of the chief messengers of the Gospel from the beginning of the church. But the focus of this first section is rightfully on the greater of the two men, Jesus Christ, upon whom the Gospel finds its foundation. In a moment we will be looking at Him. But to just look ahead at the next two parts of this introduction, we have in **verses 6-15** the mission of the Gospel. And finally, in **verses 16-17**, we learn about the message of the Gospel.

Let’s begin our study by reading this first section of the introduction which deals with the men of the Gospel.

**<sup>1</sup>Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, <sup>2</sup>which He [God] promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy scriptures, <sup>3</sup>concerning His Son,**

**who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh, <sup>4</sup>who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord, <sup>5</sup>through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the gentiles for His name's sake.**

Beginning with **verse 2**, Paul tells us that God had promised beforehand that there would be some good news, the Gospel, coming to the Jews. In these verses we learn through whom the promises of the Gospel came, but most importantly, upon whose life the Gospel stands, Jesus Christ. From the outset of this letter, Paul makes it very clear that his master Jesus Christ is unique. There has never been nor will ever be a human being like Jesus Christ. He was sent on a mission by God to come to this world to fulfill a function that no other person could. I want to highlight three things from these verses about the person of Jesus Christ, the central figure upon which the Gospel is founded and upon which this whole book is built. In other words, if what Paul writes in these verses about Jesus is not true, then everything else in the following pages of his letter to the **Romans** is pure vanity, or as important to the world as what is left over after a soap bubble bursts in the air.

First, Paul tells us that Jesus and his coming as the Messiah of Israel were **“promised beforehand.”** The term promise means more than prophecy. Whereas a prophecy could be just an advanced announcement about something that would happen, a promise commits Almighty God to make good on the prophecy. In addition, the fact that Jesus Christ's coming, death, and resurrection were predicted ahead of time emphasizes the reality that Jesus was no accident, that there is no life that can compare to his, and that He alone is the promised Messiah of Israel. Our faith in Jesus Christ comes to us through the anticipation and prediction of centuries of teaching and preaching before He ever arrived. As a result, there is no other person to come who could or has fulfilled God's promise of a Messiah. That fact that Jesus did

fulfill all of the promises of his first coming authenticates that indeed, He is the Messiah of the Jews, the Savior of the world.

We also see from **verses 3 and 4** that Jesus is unique in two other ways. First, the text says that Jesus was a descendant of David. The Greek word used here for “**descendant**” is much more earthy or biological; it says Jesus comes from the very sperm of David, emphasizing Christ's intense humanity. He is fully man. In other words, Jesus was not playacting at being human. Although He was without sin, He had to face down all of the temptations and injustices that every human being faces without ever sinning or wronging anyone or losing it!

Jesus was not only promised beforehand and fully human, but according to **verse 4**, Jesus was also “**declared to be fully God**” as well. Notice that Paul deliberately says that Jesus was “**declared**” the Son of God, not made the Son of God. You can make someone human, but you can’t make God, for God is ever existent, eternal, with no beginning or end.

Jesus, being one with God, existed before He was born or put on flesh, like you would put on a suit of clothes. We read in **John 1:1** that Jesus is “**the Word.**” John tells us, “**In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.**” Then **verse 14** explains, “**And the Word became flesh.**” Please note that John says that Jesus “**became flesh,**” and not that He was created in the flesh as if not having existed before. Some cults, along with Islam, refuse to recognize Jesus as God, saying He was created. But Jesus was never created. Jesus existed before creation and is equal with God. The Apostle Paul verifies this in **Philippians 2:5-9**:

**<sup>5</sup>Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,**  
**<sup>6</sup>who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard**  
**equality with God a thing to be grasped, <sup>7</sup>but emptied Himself,**  
**taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of**  
**men. <sup>8</sup>Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by**

**becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. <sup>9</sup>For this reason also, God highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name.**

Jesus has always existed as God as part of the Godhead (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit).

Back in John's gospel, he continues about Christ saying, "**He dwelt among us, and we saw His glory.**" The "**glory**" that John and the other disciples observed as eyewitnesses refers to the god-like characteristics of Jesus. Cross reference **Exodus 33:22, Deuteronomy 5:22, Isaiah 60:1, and 1John 1:1-2.** John then adds that they actually saw this "**glory, glory as of the only begotten.**" Once again, Muslims and some cults point to this expression, "**only begotten**" and say, "See, Jesus was born not as God but as a son." However, "**only begotten**" does not mean that there was a time when Jesus was not, and then the Father brought Him into being. The Greek term used here for "**only begotten**" is one word. It literally means "one of a kind," or in this case, "the only one of its kind." It has nothing to do with being born. Furthermore, nothing in this verse mentions Jesus as being born as a son.

The point of this expression is to speak to the nature of or the kind of something. In other words, although human, Jesus was not like any other human being, not even like Adam and Eve before they sinned. He was unique in that he was fully God while fully human. He was never made or created as other human beings.

The verse in John's gospel closes with an explanation of Christ's uniqueness when it adds, "**From the Father, full of grace and truth.**" "**Grace**" in this context refers to graciousness (goodness, Hebrew *hesed*), and "**truth**" means integrity (truthfulness). These words further explain what the other disciples literally saw when they observed Jesus. They saw God's attributes in Jesus. Furthermore, back in **Romans 1:4**, the expression that Jesus was declared the "**Son of God**" is an unmistakable reference to His deity.

Paul bases Christ's deity upon three historical facts. Christ's deity was revealed in the expression, "**with power.**" This is a reference to the miracles

that he performed while on earth, which were all displays of remarkable power, sometimes before thousands of people at a time and at other times by only a handful. Furthermore, the very types of miracles Jesus performed were the specific miracles prophesied in the Old Testament as being the testimonial work of the coming Messiah--raising the dead, healing the blind, and causing the lame to walk.

The second fact upon which Jesus Christ's deity is revealed is a very specific historic fact of power, his Resurrection from the dead. No one else in history has performed this upon themselves.

By the way, when we specify a scientific fact, we refer to something that can be tested and retested, again and again. When we specify an historic fact, we speak of logical and incontrovertible testimony of eye witnesses to an event, whether friend and foe. The historical facts and references to the resurrection of Jesus Christs are found not only in the Bible by eye witnesses, but in other Jewish and Roman historical sources written during the era. If you are interested in researching the historical evidence of Christ's resurrection, there are several excellent works that present the case for the resurrection of Jesus Christ. *Jesus Among Other Gods*, by Ravi Zacharias; *The Case For Christ: A Journalist's Personal Investigation of the Evidence for Jesus*, by Lee Strobel are just two of them.

The historical evidence reveals that Jesus did die. He did not and could not have faked his death. In addition, the evidence reveals that His body was not stolen by friend or foe. The empty tomb and his visual sightings after his execution, at times by more than five hundred people at once, leads to only one conclusion: Jesus died and resurrected himself from the dead.

The third fact revealing Christ's deity is the "**spirit of holiness.**" The term "**holiness**" used elsewhere in scripture refers to purity, or being without sin or guile. As it concerns Jesus, Paul means this and more. He is pointing to Jesus as being set apart or unique from all other human beings, who are sinful and filled with guile.

I agree with the conclusion that Ray Stedman comes to in his interpretation of this term as it is used here. He says that it speaks of Jesus as being the only human example to ever live who "had it all together," or in a word, Jesus was "whole" like God, without flaw.

Because Adam and Eve, before the fall, had the ability to sin within their nature, after the fall, they demonstrated that ability when they chose to sin. I don't believe that Jesus, being fully God, could or would choose to sin. Being fully God, no evil existed in Him. As fully human, he would still have to choose not to sin, but by his nature, being fully God, Jesus would never choose to sin. Because of this, Jesus had an attraction about Himself that no other normal moral man had. And thus people like Nicodemus were drawn to Him. Jesus possessed something that they longed for, **“a spirit of holiness.”**

The exciting thing is that this holiness also points to wholeness that Jesus wants to offer every person who will commit their lives to Him. He wants to bring back to our lives everything the human race lost as a result of the Fall, and more! He wants to resurrect our lives so that they have life, meaning, purpose, and direction. Jesus transforms us from the inside out. It begins when we trust Jesus Christ and are born again, or what theologians call regenerated. We are given a new spirit. Then, as a result of studying God's Word and learning the truth about the implications of Christ's finished work on the cross, as **Romans 12:1-2** refer to, God's Word begins to change or transform our minds, and we think and react differently. This transforming work continues and will one day be finished when we go to be with Jesus. The completion of Christ's transforming work will come when we are with Jesus in our glorified eternal bodies that will house our new spirits and souls.

Hence, the gospel of Jesus Christ, whose object is to transform lives, eventually transforms the whole person, body, soul, and spirit. He saves completely; He rescues completely; He delivers completely. Paul declared in **Philippians 1:5**, **“For I am confident of this very thing, that he who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.”** Like Jesus, we will be not just holy, but we will be completely whole.

Notice the contrast between these two facts about Jesus Christ: When someone points to Jesus' humanity, it draws our attention to Christ's humiliation. When someone points to Jesus' deity, it draws our attention to His deserved exaltation. The importance of Jesus' humanity is that it enables us to understand that He is intimately acquainted with all that we feel and experience. He is able to empathize with our hurts, rejections, pains, and our inability to cope with harsh events that often come uninvited to our lives. When they do, Jesus weeps with us. He feels and understands our pain.

The writer of **Hebrews 4:14-16** puts it this way:

**<sup>14</sup>Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. <sup>15</sup>For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. <sup>16</sup>Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.**

It is important that we all know that when we go to Jesus about our hurts, problems, confusions, and feelings of being mistreated, He not only hears us, but can sympathize with our weakness and respond to our needs. In fact, one of the names describing how God operates is the name Ishmael in **Genesis 16:11**. This name is used to describe that our God not only hears our cries, but He always responds to them. In other words, God doesn't just sit back and listen to our prayer requests with folded arms as a picture of disinterest, but rather He answers, responds, and gives heed to our affliction.

Here is another reason that it is important to realize that Jesus was not only fully human but fully God. To be fully human and able to completely understand our condition as well as to weep with us or to empathize with us when we hurt is good, but not good enough. Jesus has to be able to do something about it. Because He is fully God, Jesus is also adequate to deal with all of our problems. With the same power that enabled him to rise from the dead--unlimited resurrection power, He can deal with our problems. It is with this power that Jesus enables us to live new lives as new creatures in Christ. The Apostle Paul had experienced that power and is a personal testimony to it.

The bottom line is that Jesus is interested in more than your just getting saved and someday spending eternity with him in heaven. He cares so much about you today, in the here and now, that He desires to direct and transform your life. Jesus is the only one who can transform the slanderous bitter tongue into one that speaks kindness. He can transform lazy thieves who steal from their employers or others into hard workers. He can transform those trapped and imprisoned with various addictions and enslavements to sin into free persons ready to enjoy a more meaningful life.

In **Romans**, Paul teaches us the secrets of enjoying Christ's transforming of our lives. One of the secrets to Christ transforming our lives, Paul will tell us in **Romans 12:1**, is our willingness to submit to His directing our lives, including sticking closely to Him when he allows hardship to come. The secret to be willing to accept the blessings with the hardship comes to the degree to which you believe that Jesus is good, and that no evil dwells in Him, and that He truly loves you and has your best interests in mind, even when you face hardship.

I asked Sue, one of the members of our congregation, for permission to share something that she wrote to me concerning a difficulty that she and her husband are going through. She responded, "Any encouragement to have faith in our amazing God's love and guidance in our trials in this life should be shared. Please do."

Here's what her email said:

Thank you, Bob and Becky for your thoughts and prayers. I continue to try to not waste my energy on fixing or changing things that I have no control over and just completely trust the Lord and seek His will. I am trying to be upright in my faith that **Psalm 112:4** talks about and seek the light in this darkness, trying not to be afraid and trusting the Lord as **verse 7** says. As long as I focus on Jesus I feel peace.

This is the power and enablement of Jesus Christ. When someone gets to know Jesus, submits their life to Him, and is convinced He is good and looks out for their best, they can find comfort in the midst of trials. It doesn't mean life is easy. But in this case, it means that with resurrection power, He enables us to move forward.

The next theme, in **Romans 1:6-12**, reveals that God cares about people. He wants them to understand the Gospel, which is the solution to the ruin of humanity. In this next section, Paul speaks to the mission of God's people, to the reaching out to those who either do not have or have not heard the truth about Christ, or who may have and have heard the truth but don't fully understand it.

Let's pick up our reading at **verse 6**, where Paul addresses the Roman Christians. **“Among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ, <sup>7</sup>to all who are beloved of God in Rome, called as saints; Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”**

Quickly, Paul points out five things that are true of the believers at Rome and all believers. First, he says that, like himself, these Roman Christians as all Christians are **“called.”** As God did with the Apostle, God called all Christians to come to Jesus. How this calling takes place in the individual's life will be explained later by Paul in this letter. For now, He simply reminds us of our calling, because when the whole world is trying to trash you and show you that you are not of any importance, God is saying, “Don't believe it! I, the living and almighty God, head over heaven and earth, specifically called you, and that makes you important, regardless of the state in which you found yourself when you put your trust in Jesus.”

Second, Paul says that we are **“beloved”** or loved of God. Paul always starts his letters reminding us that that which motivates His action toward us is His love.

Third, Paul tells us that we are **“saints.”** We are literally “set apart ones” for a purpose. We are different from other human beings who do not have a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. This term means that we have been made holy and set apart for a specific purpose for God. The one

responsible for making us holy and blameless is not us; our holiness is based upon Christ's finished work on the cross on the behalf of those who put their trust in him. How we can be forever blameless, Paul will tell us later in this book.

As proof to us saints that God loves us, He gives us his “**grace.**” The concept of grace is broad, but when Paul attaches to it the term “**peace,**” he is highlighting God's work of forgiveness through Christ. It is so complete a forgiveness that God has put an end to the spiritual war between the sinner and Himself. As a result, we are at peace with God. Once we trust Jesus, we never again have to be afraid of His rejecting or hating us again. That in turn brings peace to our inner man. The degree to which we know that we stand accepted and approved of by God will be the degree of peace we experience in life.

As a result of a person's manifested peace, Paul points to something else that characterized the believers at Rome in **verse 8**. “**First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world.**” Their faith startled their world. It was not their new building nor the numbers that came to their churches nor their different programs, but their lived-out faith. Others saw characteristics of peaceableness, being less combative, argumentative, or condemning, and the Christians living courageously under hardship. Patti Woodward, another member here, has walked with her beloved husband for the past four months after he suffered a major debilitating stroke. Their courageous love has impressed others around them. And she will tell you, it's all about Jesus' enabling her to do this.

Paul was so impressed by the reports that he was hearing about the Christians in Rome that he says, in **verse 9**, “**For God, whom I serve in my spirit in the preaching of the gospel of His Son, is my witness as to how unceasingly I make mention of you, always in my prayers making request, if perhaps now at last by the will of God I may succeed in coming to you.**”

Paul was so impressed by their genuine commitment to Christ that he talked to others about them, prayed for them, and couldn't wait to meet them and join together in personal face to face fellowship over Christ. He continues, “<sup>11</sup>**For I long to see you in order that I may impart some spiritual gift to you,**

**that you may be established; <sup>12</sup>that is that I may be encouraged together with you while among you, each of us by the other's faith, both yours and mine."**

The expression "**impart**" really means "share with you." Paul wants to share with them his gift of teaching and understanding the Gospel. In return, he expects them to share with him their spiritual gifts and the specifics of how Jesus has made a difference in their lives, so that both they and he would be encouraged by each other's faith.

Paul not only had a passion to serve others, but he also had the humility to recognize he needed them and needed to receive some things from them as well. A healthy fellowship of Christians is made up of believers, both leaders and followers, who demonstrate humility in that they need each other. We do that by being transparent and vulnerable, sharing both victories and failures, serving each other through spiritual gifts, and by demonstrating our commitment to privately and publically pray for one another.

Courageous faith is founded upon the historic evidence that Jesus cares and has the power to rescue and enable those who trust Him.

Courageous faith is nurtured by the supportive community of Christ's followers. God did not design us to live in isolation, but with one another. Another message from Sue, who wrote about God's power to help her through the tough times, illustrates this. She wrote again to say:

Would you please let the amazing army of giant slaying prayer warriors at church know that I feel they have become Jesus to me in the way they care, love, support, and pray for us daily. I know I am blessed to have been led to a church that obeys and lives God's Word by encouraging and praying for one another the way Calvary Crossroads saints do. Thank you from my heart for remembering us the way you do.

