

2. The Book of Romans 1:2-4

Paul's Letter to the Romans
A message by Pastor Phil Ballmaier
(1-11-23)

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We have begun a study in what is considered by many to be the greatest book in the Bible—the Book of Romans. As we said last time, many Christians shy away from studying this book because they feel it is too deep for them and that they're not smart enough to really understand it and therefore get anything meaningful out of it.

While it's true that the most brilliant theologians have never fully plumbed the depths of this book—that doesn't mean we have to approach it that way.

The Bible is a miracle Book in that children can read it and interact with its truth on their level—while the greatest intellects that have ever lived can read it, study it and interact with the truths set forth in this incredible book on their level as well! I'd like to keep our study in Romans somewhere in the middle.

As we said last time, the theme of the Book of Romans is: '**Justification by Faith**', or "**The Righteousness of God**"—or as Paul states in 1:1—"**The Gospel of God.**"

Simply put, the Book of Romans answers the question—

➤ *"How can a guilty sinner be made just in the eyes of a holy, righteous God and get to heaven?"*

As we said last time, Paul didn't establish the church at Rome—just who did remains a mystery. So, Paul finds himself writing to a church he didn't start and had not yet visited—so he spends the first 17 verses introducing himself to them.

I. Introduction—Romans 1:1-17

- **Opening salutation—v. 1-7**

Romans 1:1 (NKJV)

¹ Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God

So, as Paul introduces himself to the Christians living in Roman—he tells them in verse 1 that he is: '**a bondservant of Jesus Christ**' (a voluntary slave); that he was '**called (by Jesus) to be an apostle**' (one sent forth with a commission); and that he has been '**separated to the gospel of God.**'

"**Gospel**" means "*good news*"—but then Paul quickly adds—"of God"—the gospel is good news from God!

The Greek word for 'gospel' is *euangelion*. Euangelion was a common term used for the announcement of any good news—especially if it pertained to the emperor. So, if a new son was born to the emperor—heralds would be dispatched throughout the empire announcing the good news.

Paul picked up on that and using this idea (something citizens of the Roman empire were used to) and announced,

"I have good news—but not from the emperor, I have good news that comes directly from God!"

'The Gospel of God' is really the whole theme of the Book of Romans.

What makes the Gospel such '*good news*' is because we (fallen mankind) are such *bad* people. Yet man refuses to acknowledge his own depravity—even when it rears its ugly head to prove itself—choosing rather to hold on to what many believe to be the '*innate goodness of man*' instead of coming to terms with and admitting the '*inherent evil of fallen man*'—let me illustrate.

The last time we started to study the Book of Romans was in April of 1999—just after the Columbine High School shooting.

Two twelfth-grade students did the shooting—their names were Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold who murdered 12 students and one teacher that day while injuring 23 others before killing themselves. After the shooting, one of the students in Littleton, Colorado where the high school is located, who knew the 2 shooters said this about her friends, "*My friends were good people who made bad choices.*"

REALLY?!—But that's how the world chooses to look at itself often times in the face of its own evil actions—"*People may make some mistakes at times and do some bad things—but they're basically good people inside.*"

In fact, so many people feel this way that they can't understand why God lets bad things happen to good people such as they.

Many have concluded that God must not exist—because if He was real, a good and loving God wouldn't let all these bad things happen to good people like us.

Rabbi Harold Kushner in his best-selling book on the topic "*When Bad Things Happen to Good People*" takes a different approach and answers that question by saying, "*God does exist and is basically a good God—but is not strong enough to stop bad things from happening to good people.*"

But you see, Rabbi Kushner built the whole premise of his book on a faulty assumption—that there are good people in the world for bad things to happen to!—

Romans 3:10–12 (NKJV)

¹⁰ As it is written: "*There is none righteous, no, not one;* ¹¹ *There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God.* ¹² *They have all turned aside; They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one.*"

If more people realized and accepted what God says about fallen mankind, and not what we think of ourselves (Jeremiah 17:9)—we'd be a lot more inclined to realize just how good God's 'Good News' really is!

Jesus said, "*The healthy don't seek out a doctor, only those who realize they're sick!*"

In response to this bad news—people often will say, "*But I'm a good person!*"

When someone tells me that about themselves, I respond—“*Who told you, you were a good person? God didn’t say that about you. Jesus said, ‘There is none good but God.’*” (Explain goodness in the eyes of God as moral perfection)

That’s why Paul, in an effort to give people God’s good news—first has to emphasize the bad news! He does this in the very first section of Romans, Chapters 1:18-3:20—where he proves that everyone apart from Jesus Christ is guilty in the eyes of God.

That would include the *atheist* as well as the *moralist* and even the *religionist*—there is no one good in God’s eyes apart from Christ—not a single person!

That’s why we’ve entitled that section ‘**Condemnation**’—because Paul wants to first prove that the whole world apart from Christ is condemned (pronounced guilty by God and condemned to spend eternity in hell) and needs God’s righteousness for salvation. (John 3:17-18)

You see, until a person is ready to accept the bad news about themselves—
they are not ready to receive the Good News from God!

So, in the very first sentence of Paul’s opening salutation,
he gives the theme of this epistle—“**The Gospel of God.**”

It is “*The Gospel of God*” because it originates with God—it is not an invention of man.

When man wants to approach God, he invents *religion* whereby he can earn his salvation thru good deeds and religious works. **Religion is man’s attempts to stand on his self-righteous ‘tippy-toes’ and reach up to touch God—whereas Christianity is God coming down to touch man.**

The word ‘gospel’ appears 6 times in the first 17 verses of Paul’s salutation and introduction—I think it’s obvious he’s excited about God’s good news! In fact, he’s so excited about it he can’t wait 16 chapters to present it fully—so he sums it up in the first 7 verses.

You might say that the first 7 verses are the ‘seed’ of the gospel—and in the next 16 chapters we’ll see it grow to ‘full bloom!’

So, verses 1-7 present the Good News of God encapsulated—let’s read the first 2 verses:

Romans 1:1–2 (NKJV)

¹ Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God
² which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures.

The Gospel is not a new message—it was promised in the Old Testament, beginning in Genesis 3:15—

Genesis 3:15 (NKJV)

¹⁵ And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed [*i.e., ‘the virgin birth’*]; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel.”

Theologians have called Genesis 3:15 the *proto-evangelium* (*pro-to-e-van-gel-eeum*), which is Latin for: “*The first announcement of the Gospel*”.

The Prophet Isaiah certainly preached the gospel in passages such as Isaiah 1:18, and Chapters 53 and 55.

As one writer put it:

“The salvation we enjoy today was promised by the prophets, though they did not fully understand all that they were preaching and writing (1 Peter 1:10–12).”

Romans 1:1–2 (NKJV)

¹ Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called *to be* an apostle, separated to the gospel of God

² **which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures.**

Hebrews 1:1 (NKJV)

¹ God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets.

You see, the good news (gospel) spoken of in the New Testament—is really just the fulfillment of the promises made by God through the prophets in the Old Testament.

The prophets were simply ‘*spokesmen*’ for God—in fact, anyone in the Bible who was inspired by God to speak His word on His behalf was considered a *prophet*.

Paul said in Hebrews 1:1 that God spoke thru these prophets at ‘*various times*’ (throughout the Old Testament period which technically ended with the ministry of John the Baptist—Luke 16:16)—and in ‘*different ways*’ (audible voice, visions, dreams, angels, and prophets).

Much of what God said thru these prophets had to do with the promise of God’s good news—

1 Peter 1:10–12 (NLT)

¹⁰ This salvation was something even the prophets wanted to know more about when they prophesied about this gracious salvation prepared for you. ¹¹ They wondered what time or situation the Spirit of Christ within them was talking about when he told them in advance about Christ’s suffering and his great glory afterward. ¹² They were told that their messages were not for themselves, but for you. And now this Good News has been announced to you by those who preached in the power of the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. It is all so wonderful that even the angels are eagerly watching these things happen.

But by far the greatest *revelation* was the incarnation—and that’s exactly what Hebrews 1:1-2 is saying—

Hebrews 1:1-2 (NKJV)

¹ God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, ² has in these last days spoken to us by His Son...

For centuries God revealed Himself to man in revelatory ‘bits and pieces’—what the theologians call the ‘*progressive revelation of God*’—but then John opens his gospel with these words:

John 1:1–3, 14 (NKJV)

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... 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.

Of course, this was the fulfillment of many Old Testament prophesies (333 of Jesus’ First Coming)—including:

Deuteronomy 18:18 (NKJV)

¹⁸ I will raise up for them a Prophet [*the Prophet Jesus*] like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him.

Romans 1:1–4 (NKJV)

¹ Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called *to be* an apostle, separated to the gospel of God ² which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, ³ **concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, ⁴ and declared *to be* the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.**

One commentator had this to say about this statement by Paul:

“Paul identified Him as a man, a Jew, and the Son of God. He was born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:18–25) into the family of David, which gave Him the right to David’s throne.

He died for the sins of the world, and then was raised from the dead. It is this miraculous event of substitutionary death and victorious resurrection that constitutes the Gospel; and it was this Gospel that Paul preached.

*When we say that Jesus is **the Son of God**, we mean that He is a Son like no one else is. God has many sons. All believers are His sons (Galatians 4:5–7). Even angels are spoken of as sons (Job 1:6; 2:1). But Jesus is God’s Son in a unique sense. When our Lord spoke of God as His Father, the Jews rightly understood Him to be claiming equality with God (John 5:18).”*

Here in verses 3 and 4 of Romans 1—you have the foundational ‘pillars’ upon which the Gospel is built:

1. **The Incarnation—v.3**
2. **The Resurrection—v.4**

**The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the single greatest event
in the history of the world—
and the cornerstone of the Christian faith.**

It is so foundational to Christianity that anyone who denies it cannot be a genuine Christian.

Without the resurrection there would be no Christian faith—

1 Corinthians 15:14–20 (NLT)

¹⁴ And if Christ has not been raised, then all our preaching is useless, and your faith is useless. ¹⁵ And we apostles would all be lying about God—for we have said that God raised Christ from the grave. But that can’t be true if there is no resurrection of the dead. ¹⁶ And if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised. ¹⁷ And if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is useless and you are still guilty of your sins. ¹⁸ In that case, all who have died believing in Christ are lost! ¹⁹ And if our hope in Christ is only for this life, we are more to be pitied than anyone in the world. ²⁰ **But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead. He is the first of a great harvest of all who have died.**

All but 4 of the major world religions are based on philosophical and ethical principles.

Of the 4 that are based on personalities only Christianity claims an empty tomb due to the resurrection of its founder.

- 1) *Abraham, the father of Judaism died about 1900 BC, but the Jews never claimed he rose from the dead.*
- 2) *The original accounts of Buddha's life and death never claimed any resurrection from the dead for him.*
- 3) *Mohammed died on June 8, 632 A.D. at the age of 61 in Medina where his tomb is visited each year by thousands of devout Muslims—but neither the Koran nor the Hadith ever claimed that Mohammed rose from the dead.*

Only the tomb of Jesus is empty—because only Jesus is risen!

- Jesus Christ is the center of the gospel message—without Him there could be no ‘good news’.
- He wasn’t just another teacher sent from God to teach us spiritual truth—as so many skeptics believe about Him.
- If Jesus was only one of many religious teachers in history—then His words carry no more weight than the teachings of other religious leaders like Buddha, Confucius, or Mohammed.
- Yet, Jesus never allowed Himself to be lumped in with any other religious teacher.

Jesus constantly set Himself apart from the other religious leaders of history with statements like:

"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." (John 14:6)—in other words, Christianity is built, not on principles—but on a Person.

You can remove Mohammed from Islam, Buddha from Buddhism, Confucius from Confucianism and nothing would change, because those religions aren’t built on their leaders—on their teachings, but not on them personally. But remove Christ from Christianity and it ceases to exist because Christianity is inextricably linked to and built upon the Person and work of Jesus Christ!

Only Jesus, the sinless Son of God could have paid the price for our sins and rescue us from coming judgment.

What separates Jesus Christ from all the other religious leaders and teachers throughout history is that—they were just men claiming to have a way to God—whereas Jesus is God the Son, who said He is The WAY, the only way to God the Father in heaven.

Acts 4:12 (NLT)

¹² There is salvation in no one else! God has given no other name under heaven by which we must be saved."

Listen, that is why Satan constantly tries to substitute a ‘*different Jesus*’ for the real Savior, and a ‘*different gospel*’ for the true good news—

2 Corinthians 11:3–4 (NLT)

³ But I fear that somehow your pure and undivided devotion to Christ will be corrupted, just as Eve was deceived by the cunning ways of the serpent. ⁴ You happily put up with whatever anyone tells you, even if they preach a different Jesus than the one we preach, or a different kind of Spirit than the one you received, or a different kind of gospel than the one you believed.

Galatians 1:6–9 (NLT)

⁶ I am shocked that you are turning away so soon from God, who called you to himself through the loving mercy of Christ. You are following a different way that pretends to be the Good News ⁷ but is not the Good News at all. You are being fooled by those who deliberately twist the truth concerning Christ. ⁸ Let God’s curse fall on anyone, including us or even an angel from heaven, who preaches a different kind of Good News than the one we preached to you. ⁹ I say again what we have said before: If anyone preaches any other Good News than the one you welcomed, let that person be cursed.

“Let God’s curse fall on anyone, including us or even an angel from heaven, who preaches a different kind of Good News than the one we preached to you.” (verse 8)

(Listen: On talk about the angel Moroni who gave Joseph Smith Jr. the ‘gospel’ of Mormonism)

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