

3rd Midweek Lenten Vespers
Wednesday, February 28, 2024

QUESNEL

“The Gospel of God . . . Concerning His Son” (Romans 1:1-7)

During this Lent, and on through Easter Day, we’re doing a series of sermons based on texts from St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans. “Readings in Romans: Righteousness Revealed” is our theme, and tonight we come to the fifth of sixteen messages in this series. So far we’ve had texts from Romans 6, Romans 5, Romans 10, and Romans 4, but tonight we finally get around to going where the epistle begins, in Romans 1.

This is St. Paul’s formal introduction to his letter, and it follows the familiar format for an epistle: the name of the writer, Paul; something about him and his office as apostle; a little hint of what is going to be the theme of his letter; the name of the recipients, the church to whom he is writing, and something about them; and then Paul’s standard apostolic greeting, “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” So far, so good.

But because this format for opening an epistle is so familiar, we might be tempted to breeze right past it. Let’s not do that. There are some nuggets of gold lying right here at our feet, as we walk in the door and enter this epistle. For here Paul says he has been set apart for “The Gospel of God . . . Concerning His Son.” It’s all about God’s Son, Christ Jesus! The gospel is all about him. Paul’s apostolic office is all about God’s Son. And so are you, the saints of God, those called to belong to Christ Jesus. You too are all about God’s Son.

The gospel of God, concerning his Son. Paul has not yet been to Rome when he writes this epistle. So he’s going to lay out for them the gospel as he preaches it, to make sure they know the basics of the Christian faith. And Paul makes clear, right at the outset, that this gospel, this good news, this message of salvation, is focused and centered on the person and work of God’s own Son, Jesus Christ. Without Christ, there is nothing to preach and nothing to believe.

It is the person and the work of Christ that is paramount. Who Jesus is, and what he has done for us—this is the heart and core of the Christian faith. Get it

wrong, gloss over it or take it for granted, and the whole thing goes to pieces. Get it right, put the spotlight and the emphasis on the person and work of God's Son, Jesus Christ, and what that means for us, and then you have a gospel worth preaching and believing, because it's the only gospel there is.

Paul says he was set apart for the gospel of God, and then he tells us what it is: "the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord."

This gospel of God concerning his Son, God promised it beforehand. It didn't appear out of the blue. Long ago in the prophets, that is, in the Holy Scriptures, the Hebrew Scriptures, what we call the Old Testament, God told his people what was coming—or should I say, who was coming: a divinely appointed deliverer, sent to rescue humanity from the curse of sin and death, and to restore all of creation to the beauty and good order God designed for it. God promised this beforehand "through his prophets in the holy Scriptures." God promised that he would send the seed of the woman, to crush the serpent's head. He promised to send the offspring of Abraham, to bring blessing to all the families of the earth. The Lord God promised to send the Son of David, to usher in an everlasting kingdom, the kingdom of heaven here on earth.

And that is where Paul goes next: "the gospel of God . . . concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh." Now stop right there. God's own Son, that is, the Son of God from eternity, "descended from David according to the flesh." Is not this a wonder? How can this be? How can he be both the eternal Son of God and the historical son of David, born in the flesh? But he is!

You know, Jesus once asked the Pharisees a question, "What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?" They said, "The son of David." But Jesus then asked them, quoting Psalm 110, "How is it then that David, in the Spirit, calls him Lord, saying, 'The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet'? If then David calls him Lord, how is he his son?"

You see, Jesus was getting at the mystery of his own person. As the Messiah, he is the physical descendant of King David. But David himself calls him “Lord,” acknowledging that the Messiah is greater than he, and in fact sits at the right hand of God Almighty with full divine authority! Son of David, yet also David’s Lord! This is a conundrum, is it not, to our human reason. But this is the mystery of the person of Christ. True God and true man, in one person. God come in the flesh.

And not just any flesh, but specifically, flesh of the line of David, in order to be the great end-time King. King David of old was told that out of his line would come the Christ, the Messiah. 2 Samuel 7: “I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.”

The prophets of the Old Testament reminded the people of this promise as a hope to hold on to during dark days. Jeremiah spoke of it: “I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king. . . . I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David.”

And it was this promise that the angel Gabriel told the virgin Mary was about to be fulfilled: “You will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”

And so the gospel of God concerning his Son is all about Christ Jesus, “descended from David according to the flesh,” which is to say, the great end-time deliverer, come to usher in the everlasting kingdom of blessing and glory.

But Paul has even more to say about God’s Son. “Descended from David according to the flesh,” yes. And “declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead.” And this gets at how the Son of God come in the flesh as the long-promised Davidic Messiah—how he would usher in this everlasting kingdom of blessing. In his earthly ministry, Jesus Christ was indeed the divine Son of God, but that exalted identity was hidden in humility. His divine majesty was hidden in lowliness. His power was hidden in weakness. His glory was hidden in shame.

And this was for a purpose. Christ came as a servant. He came to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. By going to the cross, willingly, to suffer and die for our sake, the Son of God fulfilled the will of his Father to rescue sinful humanity. Christ bore our sins in our body—that is why he had to come in the flesh. And because he is the holy Son of God, his shedding of blood for our sins has infinite value, to cover all the sins of the whole world. That is why our Savior had to be both true God and true man in one person. The person and the work of Christ are inseparable. Only as true God could he save us. Only as true man could he die for us. The gospel of God concerning his Son is all about the person and work of Christ, for us.

A suffering Saviour, God in the flesh, his glory hidden in shame, dying on a cross, to save us from our sins and be our righteousness. Then by his rising from the dead in glory on Easter Day, Christ Jesus is “declared to be the Son of God in power.” Now it’s out in the open: Jesus Christ is Lord. Now the full good news is ready to be preached. It’s all about God’s Son, Christ Jesus, promised in the Scriptures, descended from David, risen from the dead.

Paul came preaching this message. It’s what he was set apart for, called to be an apostle. Paul was all about the gospel, all about Christ. And that’s what every preacher since Paul is all about, too. Every preacher, if he is faithful to his office, is all about bringing the gospel to you, to your ears, so you too can believe. Through Christ, Paul says, “we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ,”

The gospel of God, concerning his Son, coming through set-apart called preachers, to you, for you. That’s how it goes. So that you too will join in “the obedience of faith.” That means “the obedience that consists of faith.” “Obedience,” in the sense of “hearkening to the voice of God when he calls to you.” Listen, God is calling! Calling you with the sweet voice of the gospel. Calling you to forgiveness, faith, and new life. Calling you to eternal life. You, dear friends, are “called to belong to Jesus Christ.” You are “loved by God and called to be saints,” that is, God’s holy ones, set apart to belong to him now and for eternity.

The gospel of God, concerning his Son. All the blessings of the gospel come in the name of your Saviour, God’s Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. It’s all about Jesus! And it’s all for you.