

The Gospel and the Gospelized

Romans 1:1-6

Call: Ps 27:11; Ps 119:23-24 (adapted)

Scripture: Matt 28:18-20 (NIV)

I. Introduction

A. Introduction

Good morning! After a week off, we enter back into Romans this morning, a study I'm calling "The Gospel For All Seasons." Two weeks ago we kicked off Romans by setting a foundation for reading the book. We spent a lot of time understanding Paul, the author of Romans, and his story, since everything he writes flows out of his story, particularly the Damascus Road experience, where he is converted, called and commissioned. From that point on, Paul became the most influential figure in Christianity, besides Jesus of course. He ends up authoring almost half of the New Testament where he contextualizes, integrates and provides implications of the Gospel.

B. Plan Today

Today we begin exploring that Gospel and what it means to be Gospelized. So, what is the Gospel that Jesus brings into being? How would you answer that question? Earlier this year, I led a Life Together class where we spent the entire 6 weeks answering this question. It is perhaps the second most important question we could ever ask. As I have said many times, the *most* important question is "Who is Jesus?" But, "What is the Gospel?" is a very important question too. We say that the church is brought into being by the Gospel. We say that the church is called to believe and live the Gospel. We say that the church is called to bear witness to the Gospel.

So, what is it? What is the Gospel? Today, we begin answering that question from Romans. I invite you into our text today, Romans 1, beginning in verse 1.

II. The Gospel (v 1-4)

1 Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God— 2 the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures 3 regarding his Son, who as to his earthly life was a descendant of David, 4 and who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord. (NIV)

A. Introduction

Two weeks ago, we walked through Paul's introduction of himself in verse 1.

- He is a servant, a *doulos*, of Christ Jesus. He no longer belongs to himself. He belongs to his master Jesus.
- He is an apostle, sent by Jesus himself.
- And, his mission is the Gospel of God. He's been set apart for this Gospel.

B. What is the Gospel?

These initial verses tend to get overlooked when studying Romans because people want to get to the good stuff, the meat of Romans. And, yet, notice how Paul can't get very far before he is overcome with Jesus and the Gospel, verses 2-4. I tend to think this *is* the good stuff! Many scholars actually think these verses were an early hymn or creed. Let's begin exploring the Gospel.

C. Euaggelion

First of all, I believe it's helpful to understand what lies behind this word "Gospel." The word Gospel comes from the Greek word euaggelion. Euaggelion: "Eu" in Greek means "good" or "well." And, "aggelion" means "message" or "word." So, euaggelion is a good message or a good word. We typically say Good News. This is where we get the word "evangel" from, a good word. And, to "evangelize" is to speak a good word. To be an evangelical is to be a person of good words or "good news." That's who we are, people of good news. We're in the good news business.

Now, in these opening verses, Paul shares a couple key aspects of the Gospel.

1. **The Gospel is from God (v 1).** Verse 1, the Gospel is from God. This is God's Good News for the world. In other words, humanity could not have dreamt up this news. You couldn't have come up with it. I couldn't have come up with it. No one could have come up with the Gospel. God came up with it. God thought it up, planned it out, set it in motion and will complete it. It's God's good news.

And, in verse 2, Paul even says that God set this plan in motion so long ago that the prophets promised it in what we call the Old Testament. As we will see throughout Romans, the Gospel of God will "conform to all of Israel's prophetic hopes" (Bird, 21). The Gospel Paul will present will be a continuation and fulfillment of the story of Israel, with the climax being "*Jesus Christ our Lord,*" which brings us to the next key aspect of the Gospel in these opening verses.

2. **The Gospel is centered in and on a person (v 3-4).** In verses 3-4, we find that the Gospel is all about a person. Paul says this person is the "*Son of God, who is a descendent of David, who is Jesus Christ our Lord.*" In the simplest terms, the Gospel is a person and an event. The Gospel is about Jesus and His event, the entirety of the Jesus event. We sometimes associate the Gospel with only the crucifixion and resurrection, but the Gospel much bigger than that! It also includes Jesus' conception, his birth, his early years, his baptism, his temptation, etc. etc. etc. The Gospel is all of it, all of Jesus and His event. It's simply huge!

But, the main point Paul is making here is that we cannot talk about the Gospel without naming the name of Jesus, the resurrected, ascended and reigning one. "*Jesus Christ our Lord*" is the center of the Gospel. This is why our core mission here at PBCC is "Knowing Jesus (having a relationship with Jesus), and making him known."

A few years ago, there was one denomination who said you could talk about the Gospel without the name of Jesus. There was a lot of God talk, but no Jesus talk. Well, there simply is no Gospel until we get to Jesus talk. If we put Jesus into the background in any way, we've lost the Gospel.

Notice that this Gospel stands in stark contrast to the 1st century Roman culture, where the Gospel, the good news, was attached to politics. In the 1st century, the Caesar was the center of all Good News. He was considered the savior of the world, the one who brought peace, Pax Romana, to the world. He was Lord. "Kaiser Kurios," Caesar is Lord. And, so, any first century reader would read these first comments by Paul and see a massive conflict. At that time, there was only one God and Lord in life, and it was Caesar. Not anymore, says Paul.

But, notice also that Paul's Gospel stands in stark contrast to 21st century Bay Area culture. I was recently referred a book called *Work Pray Code*, by Carolyn Chen. It's very interesting. In it, she shows how the tech companies in the Bay Area are selling their own Gospel to us. The tech companies are promising meaning, belonging, transformation, even transcendence through work! Many of you have probably heard this mindset, where your colleagues are comparing their work experience in the same terms as a church experience, even calling the corporation their "faith community." In turn, the tech companies have taken up, as Chen says, "pastoral and spiritual care as a way of making their employees more productive" (Chen, loc 80). HR directors understand their job now is to "nurture the souls" of the employees. Meditation rooms are now as common as ping-pong tables. And, of course this makes sense because in surveys across our nation, "when asked what brings their lives meaning, Americans point to their jobs as frequently as they do their [faith]." As Chen says, "No longer do people sell their souls at work. Rather, work is where they are finding their souls."

The Gospel, the Good News, is centered in and on the person of "*Jesus Christ our Lord.*" Caesar is not the good news, neither is Google or Apple or any other company. Jesus Christ our Lord is Lord, and that's the core of the Gospel.

D. Transition

But, there's more. Paul goes on to describe more aspects of the Gospel in verses 5-6.

III. The Gospelized (v 5-6)

5 Through him we received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith for his name's sake. 6 And you also are among those Gentiles who are called to belong to Jesus Christ. (NIV)

A. Introduction

In these verses, Paul returns to sharing more details of his calling. He and his coworkers have been sent by Jesus to share the Gospel, so that more people will belong to Jesus Christ. That is to say that they become the “Gospelized.”

B. The Gospelized

The Gospel is not only facts and the implications of those facts. The Gospel also includes its embodiment in a new humanity, a gospelized humanity. Throughout Romans, Paul will define who the people of God are. Fundamentally, they are no longer those attached to the law. They are those attached to Jesus. The people of God are those who belong to Jesus Christ. They are the Gospelized.

The Gospel comes alive in people as they are transformed by the “*Spirit of Holiness*,” the Holy Spirit. All that good news that Jamie shared earlier are a result of the Gospel coming alive in people: Abrahamic Alliance, baptisms, mission trips, kids club and shape and race. All are a result of the Gospel breathing in the lives of people.

C. Grace

And, as Paul points out in verse 5, all of it is a result of God’s “*grace*.” We spent a lot of time on grace last time, but I don’t think we can ever spend too much time on it. Paul, a murderer of Christians, experienced the transforming grace of God on the Damascus Road. As I said last time and will continue to say, grace means you can start over again. Paul got a new start.

Last Tuesday, a small group of the Gospelized from PBCC went down to the maximum security prison in Soledad to do baptisms there for the first time ever. If you’re not familiar with this ministry, Leong Tan has led Bible Studies at this prison for the last nine years. And, he currently has about a dozen people on his team. But, we never did baptisms before. So, we’ve been praying a lot. For a long time, the idea of a baptism was met with much resistance, until the Lord broke through, and they allowed us to do one this week. If you remember, this was supposed to happen a month ago, but the prison went into lockdown before we could do it. Anyway, last Tuesday, we baptized nine inmates. Nine violent criminals confessed publicly that they were Jesus followers. Every one of them shared their story before getting baptized. And, for everyone, God called them out of gang violence into a relationship with him. Through God’s great grace, He gave them new starts. Amazing grace how sweet the sound. A PBCCer also got baptized with them, Jeff Wurtz.

And, you know what I will remember from this experience? Well, many things. But, one special thing is this. Each one would come up to the front of the room, and I would have them turn around and look at all of the other inmates (and our team). And, I would say, “Here is your family. They love you.” And, do you know what they began doing? They began doing the heart sign to each other and giggling. That’s what middle-school girls! (I can say that because I used to be a middle school pastor.) And, here, we have hardened, violent criminals who have been transformed by Jesus Christ, now exuding a child-like faith. Only God’s grace through the

Gospel can do that! Those nine inmates are part of the Gospelized, thanks be to God! God is so good.

D. The Who

Back to our text. Through God's grace, who are Paul and his coworkers sent for? Answer: The Gentiles. The word for "Gentiles" simply means nations. Paul has been sent to the nations. He was a patriotic Jew, but through the Damascus road, he had been set free to love the nations and take the Gospel to the nations. As I also said in my introduction, Rome was a diverse city, and very tribalistic. The different groups in the city simply hated each other. It was a divided culture, similar to our own. And Paul's message to take the Gospel to the nations, and to unify under Jesus, would have stood in stark contrast to Jewish life at that time.

John Stott makes the point that if we are the Gospelized, we also will be committed to taking the Gospel to the nations. We too, in his words, will be "liberated from all pride of race, nation, tribe, caste and class, and acknowledge that God's gospel is for everybody, without exception and without distinction" (Stott, 52).

Now, the uniqueness of our situation in the Bay Area is that the nations have come here. They're on our doorstep, and so we don't have to go around the world with the Gospel. All we have to do is step out our front door, and go to work, or to school, or shopping, or play sports, or run the Race to Restore with IJM and the nations are there! Or, in my case, I literally only need to step out my front door and talk to my neighbors, and I'm talking to the nations. It's a great privilege to have the nations at our doorstep. And, the question is whether we will take advantage of it or not. We'll talk more about this as we walk through Romans.

E. The Goal

So, what is Paul's ultimate goal for the nations? Verse 5, "*to call all the Nations to the obedience that comes from faith*" (Rom 1:5).

F. Faith

Now, faith for Paul can be defined as total allegiance to Jesus, an allegiance which embraces trust, faithfulness and loyalty as a way of life in Jesus Christ. A way of life, not intellectual knowledge, a way of life. Pledging allegiance to Jesus means abandoning all other allegiances. At that time, as I already pointed out, instead of pledging allegiance to Caesar, who thought he was Lord and Savior, Paul's goal is to have the nations pledge allegiance to Jesus, which results in obedience to Him.

It's as if Paul is saying here, "I have good news for you. The world has a new Lord and a new Savior, who is the true King and the true Son of God! And, this king is a different kind of Lord with a very different set of values. In fact, this king will show you a new way of being human. Actually, He will show you what it actually means to be human. So, follow His way of life, Paul says. Follow His way of living life. Have faith in Him demonstrated by obedience, '*an obedience that comes from [that] faith.*'"

G. The Obedience That Comes From Faith

Surely it is significant that Paul will close this magnificent letter of Romans with this same phrase. And, in chapter 6, in the middle of the letter, Paul returns to obedience. Obedience to Jesus is front and center in Paul's mind. Once again, we so often think of Romans as the great theological treatise of justification by faith. But, it is much more than that! It is also the great letter of the obedience of faith, an obedience which necessarily springs from allegiance to Jesus. Paul is very much concerned with how to live the life of faith. He's a pastor, and he wants everyone to live and breathe the Gospel, to be the Gospelized. As Michael Gorman says, "The Gospel is not just something to accept; it is something to obey. It's not just something to believe; it's something to become," (Gorman, 11). To become the Gospelized.

In our world, we so easily separate belief and behavior. We speak of being born again with no changes in lifestyle. We've grown accustomed to hearing of people getting their ticket to heaven, then going back to their old way of life. That is not Romans, or any other book in the New Testament.

It was interesting to hear the stories of those inmates. Each one pleaded with Jesus in front of us that He, Jesus, would keep them from going back to their old ways of life. For them, there is a very distinct difference between their old way of life and their new way of life. There has to be! There's a new Lord in town who loves and cares and transforms, and they've lived the transformation! They desperately need our prayers.

H. Obedience

What is the appropriate response to the Gospel of God? Obedience. What does it look like to belong to Jesus Christ? Obedience. What is a defining mark of the Gospelized? Obedience. The obedience that springs from allegiance to, and faith in Jesus Christ. And, it just so happens that God has programmed us, his image-bearers, to find fulfillment in life through obedience to Jesus.

Now I think what's in Paul's mind here as he's writing these verses is the Great Commission at the end of Matthew, what we read for our scripture reading. Jesus says, *"Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age"* (Matt 28:18-20). Notice He does not say teaching everything He has commanded. He says, *"teaching obedience to everything He has commanded."* As we go, as the Gospelized, we obey, and we teach others to obey. As Bonhoeffer said, "Only the believers obey and only the obedient believe" (Bonhoeffer, 63). Faith is not simply saying something is true. That's not faith for Paul. Faith is living as if it were true. Allegiance to Jesus necessarily means a lifestyle change. How could it not? We move from obeying some other Lord, usually ourselves, "Lord Shawn" in my case, doing what is right in my own eyes, to obeying the Lord Jesus Christ and doing what is right in His eyes. That's the movement of the obedience of faith.

I. Keys to Obedience

So, how do we do this practically? How do we be the Gospelized in this world? How do we live the “*obedience that comes from faith in Jesus Christ our Lord*”? Here are a few key ideas:

1. **Know the Gospel of God:** You’re the Gospelized, so know the full Gospel. Spend time to get to know the full Jesus event, not just a few tidbits. As Michael Bird says, “Take the cheesy wrapping paper off the Gospel, delete the Gospel twitters, and feel your way through the fabric of Scripture’s testimony to the Gospel” (Bird, 31). Get to know the good news, the huge news, the staggering and shocking news of a good God who has not given up on you, or this world.
2. **Abide in Jesus:** You’re the Gospelized, so abide in Jesus, to use language from John. He is Lord and Savior after all. So, to be the Gospelized is to stay attached to the life-giving vine that is Jesus. He is the vine, we are the branches. Stay attached to Him Jesus for apart from Him the Gospelized can do nothing! That is to say, we cannot obey without clinging to Him, abiding in Him, remaining in Him. So abide, make time to develop the relationship, and be ruthless in removing all that hinders that relationship.
3. **Stay Aware of the Holy Spirit:** You’re the Gospelized and have the Holy Spirit of the Living God inside of you. Stay aware of Him. The Spirit empowers you to obey, and empowers you to want to obey. So, stay aware of the Spirit, checking in with Him as you walk through your day, discerning where He is working around you and in you. He is the Spirit of Holiness, who will lead you to become holy through obedience.
4. **Stay Engaged with Other Gospelizeds:** You’re the Gospelized, within a family of other Gospelizeds. Stay engaged! It’s impossible to be a lone ranger Christian. In fact, there is no such thing. Besides, in a solitary life, we simply do what is right in our own eyes. I kept telling the inmates – this is their family because on their own, they will slip back into old habits. We simply must stay engaged with other Gospelized people, who can help us with “*the obedience that comes from faith.*”
5. **Recognize the Call:** Lastly, you’re the Gospelized, and recognize the call. The decision to obey is a moment-by-moment, day-by-day activity, usually in the humdrum details of ordinary life. The decision to obey is *not* what makes the front page.
 - Will I click that webpage?
 - Will I balance my finances with integrity?
 - Will I do my job ethically?
 - Will I share my money?
 - Will I share my time?
 - Will I tell the whole truth about this particular activity in my life?
 - Will I reach out to that person feeling unloved?
 - And so on.

Every day, humble, courageous decisions within the boring details of normal life. That’s when obedience happens. And the truth of the matter is this - the way of obedience *is* a life of joy, because it’s what you’re made for!

IV. Conclusion

So, these opening verses of Romans, what I call the good stuff, give us a picture of the Apostle Paul and begin painting a picture of the Gospel and the Gospelized. These verses are a clear call to the Gospelized to pay attention to Paul, an apostle, as he delivers this authoritative message, *The Gospel for all Seasons* of life. May we allow this magnificent book the authority to speak into our lives, such that it would lead us to obedience to Jesus, and conformity into His image. Amen.

Benediction

Now receive this benediction which comes from the end of Romans:

Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith — to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen. (Rom 16:25-27)

Resources

Bird, Michael, *Romans (The Story of God Bible Commentary Book 6)*

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich, *The Cost of Discipleship*

Chen, Carolyn, *Work, Pray, Code*

Gorman, Michael J, *Romans: A Theological and Pastoral Commentary*

Stott, John, *Romans: God's Good News for the World*

Thielman, Frank, *Romans (Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the NT)*