

What do you believe? I know that's kind of a big question. Pretty broad. But imagine if a person sat down beside you on a park bench or on an airplane or in a coffee shop and asked you that question. What do you believe? How would you answer? Where would you begin? What belief abides in the deepest part of you and is so singular that it defines who you are and what you are about? What message resides at your core? What is it that shapes your identity? If someone asked you what you believe, would your answer be primarily about politics? About culture? About money? About relationships? About fulfillment? What do you believe?

Now you might consider it unlikely that you would ever find yourself in a situation like I described – someone sitting down next to you and asking you what you believe – but it

doesn't necessarily have to happen that way for you to articulate what you believe, and it certainly doesn't require someone asking for you to consider what you might say or what you should say. The Apostle Paul was given countless opportunities to give his answer to that question. Sometimes he was asked, but more often he just created opportunities to share. Sometimes it was verbally; often it was written down. But if you look at the record we have of what Paul said and what he wrote, it's essentially the same core message every time. It's described as the **message of the gospel**, or the good news. And in the first chapter of the NT book of Romans – Paul's letter to the church, the Christians, in Rome – he declares it right at the start, in his opening words, his greeting to them. After introducing himself by name and as one who is a servant or slave of Christ, one who is sent out as His ambassador

or spokesperson, and one who is set apart to carry a particular message, he offers a short, compact, but incredibly full and rich statement in which he affirms three features of the gospel: its continuity, its content, and its consequence. So with that in mind, I would invite you this morning to take a Bible and turn with me to the NT book of Romans, to chapter 1. And as I read vv.2-7, I want you to listen for those three elements, those three features: the consistency of the gospel (its continuity, when it originated, where it began), the content of the gospel (what and who it is about), and the consequence of the gospel (what effect does it have on those who hear it and what does it call them to). So follow along as I read [READ ROMANS 1:2-7].

Paul begins by establishing **the consistency** of the gospel message, its continuity throughout time and history. He says that the gospel of God – for which and to which he was set apart – was promised beforehand through God’s prophets in the holy Scriptures. And even though it’s just a few words in a single verse, it’s a huge point. It’s a big deal. He’s saying to these Christians in Rome – some of whom were Jews, but most of whom were Gentiles – that the announcement he was set apart by God to deliver is not a new or novel message. It did not originate with him. It didn’t even originate with the earthly life and ministry of Jesus. It’s WAY older than that. It is an ancient and abiding message. It is THE message of the whole Bible, not just the NT. It isn’t a break from the OT. It isn’t in opposition to the OT. I think some people assume that the God of the Old Testament and therefore the message of the OT is

fundamentally different from what we see in the NT. That the OT is about judgment and wrath and anger and rules and punishment, and the NT is about grace and mercy and love and forgiveness. But that's a misunderstanding of both the OT and the NT. The message of the gospel – the message Paul preached – is not in conflict with the OT; it is the continuation and consummation (fulfillment) of it.

And the evidence of that is that the gospel was pre-announced by God's spokesmen in the OT. Now you've got a ton of passages in the prophets (in Isaiah and Ezekiel and Joel) that are these broad, general statements that God one day will restore the fortunes of His people, that He will dwell among them, and that He will pour out his Spirit on them. And those may be the kinds of passages Paul had in mind here. But there are other

passages that get a lot more specific regarding the details of exactly what God will do. You've got Genesis 3:15, where, after Adam and Eve disobey God and sin and death enter the world, in addition to the curse, God makes a promise to the serpent, Satan: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." Theologians call this verse the "protoevangelium," the first gospel. It says that, one day, the offspring of a woman will come and crush God's enemy. Who is the offspring of a woman who will defeat Satan? Jesus. The gospel is right there, just three chapters into the OT. You've got Genesis 12:2-3 where God tells Abraham, "I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him

who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” God will bless all the families of the earth through Abraham and his offspring. Who is a descendant of Abraham who will bring God’s blessing to all the families of the earth? Jesus. It’s the gospel. You’ve got Isaiah 9 that you hear at Christmas: “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.” Who is the child, the son, the Wonderful Counselor, etc.? Jesus. It’s the gospel. You’ve got

Jeremiah 23:5-6, "Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land." Who is the righteous Branch that comes from David whose reign is characterized by wisdom and justice and righteousness? Jesus. It's the gospel. You've got God's promise to David in 1 Chronicles 17 that "I will raise up your offspring after you, one of your own sons, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for me, and I will establish his throne forever. I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son...I will confirm him in my house and in my kingdom forever, and his throne shall be established forever." Who is the one who is David's offspring who will reign on an eternal throne over an everlasting kingdom? Jesus. It's the gospel. And then



there are other passages in the Psalms and in the prophets that give remarkably detailed depictions of Christ's crucifixion and His resurrection hundreds of years in advance. All this to drive home Paul's point to the Romans: the WHOLE BIBLE speaks of the coming, the living, the dying, the rising, and the reigning of Christ, AND the salvation and glorious future He will provide for His people. The message is continuous. God's gospel was promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures. That's the consistency of the gospel.

Paul moves then to **the content** of the gospel, the WHAT and WHO of the gospel. He says that the message is "concerning His Son." The central subject of the message of the gospel is the Son of God, God the Son, the second person of the Trinity. The Father planned out our salvation

from eternity past, the HS regenerates His people according to that divine plan, but the good news of the gospel centers on the person and work of Jesus, who has existed from all eternity as God's unique, beloved Son.

This eternally existent son, Paul tells us, descended from David according to the flesh. The eternal One stepped into time and history. The divine One took on true humanity.

The heavenly One came to earth as a physical, biological, and legal descendant of King David. He came through a royal lineage as the promised Messiah to fulfill God's word to David that I read a few minutes ago, the promise of David's offspring reigning as King over an eternal kingdom on an everlasting throne. Now let me be extremely clear, and this is important. Jesus has always existed, and He has always existed as God. When He came to earth,

taking on true humanity – we call it the incarnation – He didn't stop being God. He didn't lose or diminish or lay aside His deity. What He did was to humbly condescend and take on a second nature, a nature He had never had before, a human nature. He had always been the Son of God. When He comes to earth as a descendant of David, He becomes, for the first time, the Son-of-God-in-flesh. It's a new stage, a new period in redemptive history. For the first time, the Son of God knows the weakness and frailty of humanity in addition to all the attributes of His divinity.

But that isn't all there is to know. His incarnation as a descendant of David is only part of the story. It's critical, but not final. There's more! In addition to descending from David according to the flesh, Paul says Jesus was declared to be (or appointed as, installed as) the Son-of-

God-in-power according to the Spirit of holiness by His resurrection from the dead. \*\*So even though in His incarnation and earthly ministry He humbled Himself and took on all the weakness and frailty and limitations of humanity, even to the point of physical death on a Roman cross, God raised Jesus from the dead – truly, physically, bodily brought Him out of the grave alive – by the power of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:11 speaks of the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead) to enthrone Him with a new designation – Son-of-God-in-power – and inaugurate a new age, a new kingdom with Jesus in a new position of power and authority to reign as the exalted Lord of glory. Let me say that again so you get it all [REPEAT]. That's the gospel. The one who has always been the Son of God becomes Son-of-God-in-flesh in His incarnation and then is appointed Son-of-God-in-power through His resurrection

from the dead. He dies on the cross in weakness as a perfect man for the sins of imperfect men, and then He is raised in power as Lord and King to reign as the Son of God. It's the turning point of all human history. Everything before the resurrection moved toward it, and everything after the resurrection rests on it and is understood by it. It's the sign that God has begun to fulfill all His promises to Israel in the OT. Israel and her kings had been called "Sons of God," but Jesus comes as the true Israel and the true King. He is God's true Son.

And so Paul, kind of as an exclamation point on his proclamation of the gospel, declares that the one who was descended from David according to the flesh and declared to be the Son of God according to the Spirit of holiness by His resurrection from the dead is "Jesus Christ our Lord."

That's His full title, His official designation. Jesus, His human name, means "the Lord saves," and emphasizes His work of salvation. Christ, or Messiah, designates Him as the promised anointed King, Mediator, Ruler, and Deliverer. And Lord connects Him to the OT God of Israel, YHWH, showing that He is the sovereign master who rules all things with absolute authority. He is Jesus Christ our Lord. And the message is about Him. He is the what and the who of the gospel.

Finally, having established the consistency of the gospel and the content of the gospel, Paul moves to **the consequences** of the gospel, its effect. Paul says that this eternal, incarnated, crucified, risen, and reigning King graciously commissioned him as an apostle, an ambassador, a representative. It wasn't something Paul

asked for or worked for or deserved. It was something he received as a gift. He was appointed by God, not just to receive saving grace, but to carry the message of the gospel as God's spokesperson. If you know the story of Paul's conversion from Judaism to Christianity, you know that those two things happened at once. Jesus appeared to Paul, calling him to believe and calling him to be a missionary all at the same time. And both were displays of grace: the unmerited, unearned favor and goodwill and blessing of God toward us by which we receive every good thing – pardon from sin, peace with God, joy, deliverance from God's wrath, adoption into His family, eternal life, the privilege of serving Him, all of it. It was by and through the gospel that Paul received his gracious calling as an apostle.

And the purpose of this calling, this commission, was to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of His name among the nations. That phrase, “obedience of faith,” refers to two things: first, the act of obedience that IS believing (you are obeying the gospel when you simply believe it, place your faith and trust in it), and second, the obedient conduct that follows belief. So the first goal of Paul’s preaching of the gospel (really ANY preaching of the gospel) is to bring your hearers to faith in Christ. That they would hear the message of the eternal Son of God who took on humanity and came to earth as the Son-of-God-in-flesh to live and die for our sin as a perfect man and who was raised to life and appointed Son-of-God-in-power to reign as Lord and King, and that they would believe it. As a result of hearing that news, that they would trust in the person and work of Jesus Christ and submit to



Him as Lord. But the further goal of preaching the gospel is that those who believed in Jesus and professed Him as Lord would then live and walk in light of what they have believed. That their lives would be lives of ongoing, continual, consistent obedience to the word and will and commands of God, not performed in their own strength to earn favor with God, but done out of love and humility because God has already granted them His gracious favor. The proclamation of the gospel produces the obedience of faith.

Paul then explains that this purpose is fulfilled for the sake of Christ's name. He proclaims the gospel, people hear and believe it, and they continually walk in obedience for the sake, for the glory, for the reputation of Christ alone.

Paul doesn't preach for his own fame and glory. He

doesn't even preach primarily for the benefit of those who will hear and believe, although that's a definite consequence. He preaches and they believe and obey to shine a spotlight on Christ's greatness. He gets all the glory.

And it's for the sake of His name among the nations. So the OT uses these two designations. When it's talking about Israel, the Jews, it speaks of "the nation." When it's talking about Gentiles, unrighteous pagans, it speaks of the nations. Because Paul is specifically commissioned as an apostle to the Gentiles, outsiders, foreigners, he's being intentional here. While the gospel was first established and declared in the OT Hebrew Scriptures for direct revelation to the Jews, it was expanded and extended to the nations, to the world, to ALL. Paul is

erasing the old lines of who is included in the people of God and drawing new ones. It's no longer based on ethnicity or your physical lineage; it's based on your relationship to Christ and whether or not you are in Him by faith. ANYONE from ANYWHERE who believes and obeys is included. And that includes, of course, those in Rome. The gospel is broad, reaching the nations, the world; but it's also specific, impacting and applying to local congregations like the established bodies of believers who were gathering throughout Rome. What is true of any believer anywhere, Jew or Gentile, is true of them. And Paul uses the same ideas to describe these Christians as he had to describe himself. In v.1 he says he is a slave of Christ Jesus, belonging to Him. That he is called or summoned as an apostle. And that he is set apart for the gospel. Likewise, these Roman brothers and sisters are

called (not just invited, but summoned and drawn effectually to Jesus) to belong to Him (as His servants, slaves) and are saints (those set apart from sin and the world for God's purposes). And not only that, but they are loved by God. They are treasured and valued and cherished as precious objects of His intimate, tender affection. That's another designation formerly reserved for Israel, now extended to ANYONE who will believe. Those called to belong to Christ, loved by God, called to be saints receive His gracious favor and experience His peace and wholeness and well-being.

Paul is writing to these believers in first century Rome so that they will understand that the ancient message has been fulfilled in time and history through the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ, and is to be proclaimed

and believed by all peoples for the sake of His name. So why are we reading it? What would Paul want us to understand? The same thing. We are invited to hear this age-old message that has not changed: the eternal Son of God took on humanity and came to earth as the Son-of-God-in-flesh to live and die for our sin as a perfect man and was raised to life and appointed Son-of-God-in-power to reign as Lord and King. But we're not just invited to hear it. We are commanded to understand it. You should be able to grasp the facts of this message, to articulate it. And not only that, we're called to believe it, to be convinced and convicted of its truthfulness and place our hope in it that it might bear fruit in us, that we might know the consequences Paul speaks of. And then, as a final step, we are commanded to proclaim it. For Paul, hearing and believing the gospel stirred in him the unmistakable and

unavoidable need to share it. And if you truly know the gospel, and if you truly believe the gospel, it should stir your heart in the same way. There should be an irresistible need to think about the gospel, to read about the gospel, to sing about the gospel, and to speak about the gospel, among those who know it and those who need to. You have heard this morning the abiding message of the gospel. Will you resolve to understand it more deeply? Will you strive to believe it more fully? And will you commit to proclaim it more joyfully, more faithfully, more urgently?