

Jesus is the King

Rom 1:1–7

As an adult I've been hanging around churches for quite some time. I've spent time in Anglican Churches, Uniting Churches and Baptist Churches. I've been to charismatic churches and asthmatic churches and most other church in between.

Everyone seems to have their own idea about church. We pick and choose and leave and pick and choose to our hearts are content. And I notice that church doctrine is a very fluid thing. Pentecostal, Charismatic, Reformed, conservative, evangelical, catholic—the descriptions and theological positions abound.

And with these stripes come many different confessions of faith—the Anglican 39 Articles, the Presbyterian WCF, the Augsburg Confession, the Apostle's Creed, the Nicene Creed and so it goes on.

What does a biblically-based church look like? What distinguishes a good church from a not-so-good church? How do we make our meetings consistently meaningful? How ought we be thinking about ourselves as a group of people meeting every Sunday and often in between?

Answers to these questions require careful thought. Perhaps we can ask the Apostle Paul. "Paul, what do you say? Who do you want us to be? How do you want us to behave? Can you explain the gospel to us? Can you unravel how it ought to shape our lives"?

Paul's well qualified to answer these questions. By the time he wrote his letter to the Romans, he was an experienced missionary church-planter with 25 years or more of pastoral experience. Paul had finished his three missionary journeys recorded in Acts. He had done a lot, seen a lot, he was a man hardened by many gospel battles.

So Paul knew how people "tick" and he knew how churches "tick".

Paul has the heart and head of an experienced pastor ... well equipped to deal with situation in Rome.

The reasons for Romans. Now all the letters in the NT were written for a reason. They were written to do something, to change something, to encourage something in the church to happen or not happen. Paul's letter to the Romans was written for a reason. He was eager to get to Rome as he says in Rom 15.23,

"I have been longing for many years to visit you. I plan to do so when I go to Spain. I hope to see you while passing through and that you will assist me on my journey there, after I have enjoyed your company for a while. Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem".

Paul's plan is to gain the support of the Roman Church as he sets out for a mission to Spain. Paul wants them to become his mission partners. The first reason Paul wrote his letter to the Romans is arouse an eagerness for gospel ministry.

We also learn from the letter that Paul has another concern. At numerous times through his letter he addresses the relationship between Jews and Gentiles sharing the same patch of church. Paul writes to heal tensions between them.

In his explanation of the gospel in chapters 1–4, Paul concludes that both Jew and Gentile sin and fall short of the glory of God. Each group equally need a Saviour. In chapter 12, Paul is keen to see the body of Christ working together in harmony. Then the distinctions between the “strong” and the “weak” in chapter 14 were written to ensure that Jew and Gentile are gentle with one another as brothers and sisters in Christ.

So Paul wrote Romans for two key reasons:

He wanted the church in Rome to be enthusiastic about mission. He wanted them to support him as he prepared to take the gospel to Spain.

And Paul wanted a church with simmering with tensions between Jew and Gentile to live in harmony with one another.

So as we read Romans we need to ask,

How will this letter challenge us to be a church eager to see the gospel proclaimed to our world?

How will this letter help us avoid division by teaching us how to live together in love?

Romans is an intensely practical letter. Mission and Christian unity are its key concerns. We are to be healthy inwardly and healthy outwardly. And as we shall see, Paul lays the foundation for church health on a careful explanation of the gospel. For only a church that clearly understands the gospel will enjoy Christian unity and be enthusiastic about mission.

In the providence of God this letter is for us. Evangelism and mission—unity and harmony converging to produce a healthy church. In the words of one commentator, Christopher Ash (slide),

“Only a church deeply soaked in the gospel will live in harmony; only a church which has been thoroughly taught the gospel will reach out with zeal”.

Romans was written to produce gospel-eager churches. It was written to produce churches bound together by love. Romans affirms that clear, detailed gospel teaching opens the way for real, practical gospel living. Romans is held together by logical propositions as Paul reasons the truth of the gospel. As so it does take some work to understand its parts.

As Cranfield says in his introduction to Romans, “There can be few documents, if any, which have had more study concentrated on them than the Epistle to the Romans”.

Be comforted, though, Romans is no harder for us to understand than it was for the first recipients in about 55 A.D.

The letter is worthy of our study. For unless we are deeply soaked in the gospel we will compromise our Christ-like-ness and fail to be the church that God has called us to be. God calls us to evangelism and he calls us to be bound together in love.

As Christopher Ash says (slide):

There is no such thing as a church that just exists for evangelism, or a church that just focuses on building itself up in love. For only a church that lives in harmony under Christ can reach out effectively with zeal. Unless its members understand their status under grace they will be divided

with rivalries and party spirit, always at one another's throats or biting behind one another's backs.
And evangelism will disappear off the agenda.

We're going to be working through Romans in four blocks—probably two this year and two next year. We'll begin with the introduction in Rom 1.1–15 and move into the first block which we shall call, “Coming Under Grace”, Rom 1.16–4.25.

It would be great if you could follow the series with me and you'll see on our website (and I'll put references in our next sermon outline) some suggested reading.

Let's turn to Rom 1.1–7 (the first sentence in Romans).

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God—the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures regarding his Son, who as to his earthly life was a descendant of David, 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. Through him we received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith for his name's sake. And you also are among those Gentiles who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.

To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be his holy people: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

An appropriate greeting. Paul begins his letter with the usual “From Paul, to the Romans” format. But he also slips in a business card-like introduction of himself. He is a servant of Christ, an apostle set apart for the gospel of God—set apart to proclaim the good news of Jesus.

Paul writes with the authority of God himself. His gospel is not another man-made idea. Christ himself called him on the road to Damascus and called him to be an apostle to the Gentiles and to suffer for his name.

In other letters Paul uses other business card-like introductions (slide). To the churches in Corinth and Ephesus he insists that he is an apostle “by the will of God”. The content of these letters requires that he affirms his authority as an apostle because this will be called into question. But to other churches, such as the Thessalonians, Paul feels no need to qualify himself at all.

Then to the Romans, whom he is encouraging to mission-minded, Paul says that he is “set apart for the gospel of God”.

Paul's business card to the Romans has stamped in big letters, “missionary”. Paul is set apart to proclaim the good news about Jesus which has its origin in God.

The gospel is God's. Verse 1, “the gospel of God”. The gospel has its origin in God. The gospel which must be clearly taught has its source with God the Father. This is the most fundamental assertion in Christianity. We are not making it up. What we know about God and ourselves is revealed from God.

When Janette crafts a wooden chair out in the shed it's totally her creation. There's lots of groaning and sweating and thinking and sometimes alterations. In the end, she takes responsibility for the final product. The chair comes from her, it's a result of her craftsmanship and the buck stops with her.

The buck stops with God. It is his gospel. It is his creation. It is not a human invention worked up in a back shed behind closed doors.

The gospel has its origin in God the Father. Not even the Lord Jesus has the liberty to change its content. Our Father is its author and he alone is able to state its content. Since it is God's gospel, we don't have to take the responsibility for the way people react to it. Our task is to pass the message on. But of course we take responsibility for the way we tell people but we are not responsible for its content.

So when people argue with us and attack us they ultimately must take their objections to God.

The gospel is God's and **the gospel is not new**. That's our next point: the gospel is not new. Verse 2 says, "The gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures". The gospel Paul preaches, God's gospel, is not new.

Paul says in Ephesians that before the creation of the world God had worked out that we would be saved by faith in his Son (Eph 1.4). And since Abraham that plan was progressively revealed through the OT to find its climax in the person of the Lord Jesus.

In the Gospels, Jesus is recognised as the perfect fulfilment of all that God had foretold through the prophets about his Messiah. The aged Simeon, quoting from Isaiah 42:6 and 49:6, describes the child Jesus as "a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for the glory to your people Israel" (Luke 2:29-32).

In his sermon on the Day of Pentecost, Peter claims that Jesus is the fulfilment of God's promise in Psalm 132.11 and that David was really speaking about Jesus in Psalm 16.8-11.

The gospel is God's, the gospel is not new, and **the gospel is all about Jesus** (in case you've missed that point). Look at verse 3, its "regarding his Son". It cannot be clearer! The gospel is not about us. It's not about our ideas and our preferences and our philosophies and theories. The gospel is about God's Son. It's about Jesus.

If I am not speaking about Jesus then I am not speaking God's gospel. When Jesus was preaching God's gospel he was speaking about the Kingdom of God in which he and he alone is King.

The gospel is not preaching Calvinism or Presbyterianism. The gospel is not preaching a particular slant on creation or the end-times. We are not preaching the gospel when we focus on popular needs and especially prosperity.

The gospel is about Jesus and we are told five things about him in verses 2 and 3 (slide). He is God's Son, he is a descendant or a seed of David, he was appointed the Son of God in power, he was resurrected from the dead, and then he is described as our Lord.

Jesus is God's Son who is a descendant of David. The one who was born in Bethlehem is Lord of heaven and earth. As a man his life belongs to history. Jesus lived an extraordinary life and died and rose and is now seated at the right hand of the Father in heaven.

And he will come to judge the living and the dead.

When you feel weary and wonder whether or not the Christian life is worth living ... remember that Jesus did really live. He did die on the cross and rise again. He did ascend into heaven. As John Chapman says, “There is no other life to live than the Christian life unless I ignore the facts. So I press on with it”.

The gospel is also about the powerful Son of God. We already know that Jesus is a king, being born a “son of David”. But now we are told that he is indeed the King—the one appointed to be the Son of God in power. Jesus is the promised Messiah who rules over God’s world forever. He is the “Alpha and the Omega, who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty” (Rev 1.8)

This brings us to the heart of the gospel message, verse 4, “Jesus Christ our Lord”.

God the Father has declared his Son, Jesus Christ, to be Lord of heaven and earth. And that’s the “nuts and bolts of it”. The gospel is the declaration that Jesus is the Lord of heaven and earth. And he is Lord by virtue of his death and by virtue of his resurrection.

The gospel in three words, “Jesus is Lord”.

Augustine said, “Jesus Christ is not valued at all until He is valued above all”. The Dutch theologian, Abraham Kuyper, once wrote, “There is not one square inch of the entire creation about which Jesus Christ does not cry out, This is mine! This belongs to me”!

And the great hymn writer, Isaac Watts, penned these words,

*Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.*

Our studies from Romans are studies about the lordship of Christ. He is the head of the church who calls his people to be his ambassadors, to be eager for his gospel, and to be a people united together in love.

As the Apostle Peter writes, “To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen”.