

Romans 1:1-4

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[0:00] We pray the word, we recite the word, sing the word, we see the word in the ordinances, and we preach the word. Paul, in his final letter, wrote to his prodigy Timothy, in 2 Timothy chapter 3 and verse 16, you're probably familiar.

All scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness. That the man of God may be complete equipped for every good work. It has its very source as God. It is sufficient for the task of making us holy in Christ. And then I think, in this case, the chapter break doesn't serve us well because Paul goes on to say to Timothy, I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing in his kingdom.

Right? So there's a weighty thing that needs to be talked about. Verse 2, he says, preach the word. Be ready in season and out of season. Reprove, rebuke, and exhort with complete patience and teaching.

And then he tells Timothy why. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to soothe their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.

[1:34] So his response to this coming reality, the time is coming and is now here, I'm sure that Timothy experienced in his day as well, is to preach.

To continue to open up the word and to proclaim it. The spirit of God wields the word of God to bring about transformation in his people for the praise of his name.

And we don't see this most regularly in big and astounding ways, but in little, patient, steadfast ways. This happens prominently as we study God's word together.

Secondly, I am grateful to be in fellowship with believers who want the word preached and not necessarily preached by me.

The following are five reasons that I don't preach every single Sunday. It's by design. It's a strategy. And here they are in ascending order.

[2:39] That means that this gets more important as I go along. So least important to more important. Minor to major. First, it's simply good for me. I've been on sabbatical for the past five weeks, and it was good that I could take a time away and to do that.

It's good for my family. It's good for me to sit with them and sing with them and lead my boys in what it looks like to be churchmen. For them not to resent the church as the thing that always took daddy away.

Secondly, it's good for me just to have some time to catch up on other things. I've told you all before that usually the weeks that I don't preach are the busiest weeks because I feel like I have infinite time available to me, and I pack it very full to be in prayer and study, to counsel, to develop leaders, etc.

Third, it is good for us as a church to develop future leaders by giving other men the opportunity to preach.

Men have varying teaching gifts which are improved by practice. Public gospel preachers are both born and they are made.

[3:58] So it's good for us to give men opportunity to stretch their legs and to give it a try and to get helpful feedback. And it's much different to preach a sermon in front of a congregation than in a preaching class.

Number four, it is good for you to hear the gospel preached in other voices and from unique perspectives.

Things said differently. I'm going to get into a repetition of phrasing, and it's good for you to hear stuff afresh from someone else. You and I need to witness the manifold grace of God in the life of his people.

How is the gospel at work in us, not just in me? And fifth and finally, it is good for you to value the word of God preached, proclaimed, not necessarily a particular person doing so.

And this is so very countercultural. Many churches have become cults of personality. Praise God that I can go away for five weeks.

[5:09] Y'all kept coming. That's amazing. Maybe you came to hear Zach preach, and maybe you'll leave now that I'm back. I don't know. I hope not. But it's helpful for us to see Jesus Christ as the head of the church.

Pastors are only ever under-shepherds of the great shepherd. And it's good for us all, including myself. It's good for me to be away and see the Lord hold it together using the many efforts of y'all. So it's really good that I don't preach every Sunday. In fact, I have a constraining quota. I'm only supposed to preach half the Sundays that we're together.

And it's kept track of. Your elders ask me, it seems like it's been a little bit. How many weeks have you been preaching now? It's good for us to be okay with this.

And I hope you will join me this morning in enjoying God's manifold grace to our congregation as his word is preached every Sunday, not necessarily by me.

[6:20] Now, that said, we are going to try something new, a little bit different. But, although not a dramatic departure, we think as a general habit, the church is best served by verse-by-verse exposition.

So I mentioned we're starting the book of Romans this morning. But for the sake of continuity, typically what we would do is we would split it up amongst different guys that are preaching. But it has been suggested as a thing to try that when I'm preaching, I'll be preaching the book of Romans. And it was asked to me at that time, like, what would you want to preach? And I said, okay, Romans, that's what we want to preach. If I get to preach the whole book, I definitely want to preach the book of Romans.

But we will still take some breaks from Romans. And we'll have some verse-by-verse expositions of text in between my preaching in Romans. So that's where we're headed.

I wanted you to be both aware of what we'll be doing and why we'll be doing it. Now to Romans, which I argue is the greatest lever ever written.

[7:24] It is placed in our canon at the beginning of Paul's epistles. Some say because it's the longest, but I strongly disagree. I think because it is the most important.

Martin Luther wrote of the book of Romans, This epistle is really the chief part of the New Testament and is truly the purest gospel. It is worthy not only that every Christian should know it word for word by heart, but also that he should occupy himself with it every day as the daily bread of the soul.

We can never read it or ponder over it too much, for the more we deal with it, the more precious it becomes and the better it tastes. How phenomenal, right?

Martin Luther said, At the very center of our practice together, we ought to be memorizing and meditating on this letter. I will add that we will have keener minds to understand the rest of Scripture if we can get Romans right.

So we have both a significant and a delightful work ahead of us. Paul most probably wrote Romans from Corinth in A.D. 57.

[8:44] There's a little bit of dispute over this, but most have settled in on this, and that he intended it to precede a visit to the church located in Rome. It is his most fully formed theological work, but it should not be thought to be a complete summary of Paul's theological mind.

It is not Paul's systematic theology. He does not, for example, address in detail the doctrine of Christ, like he does in Colossians, or the church like he does in Ephesians, or the last days like he

does in 1 and 2 Thessalonians.

The thrust of the entirety of Paul's letter to the Romans is this. If you can get your mind into this, this is the thrust of it. This is where he's going.

Salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in the person and work of Jesus Christ alone. And I am looking forward to unpacking this with you in the coming months, which will likely turn into years. So all that said, let's begin with the first four verses of Romans chapter 1. Before I read them, let me remind you, beloved, this is God's word to us, written for his glory and our good.

[10:08] We would all do well to listen to it in order to believe its promises and to obey its commands. Romans 1, verses 1 through 4.

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for 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. In the beginning of the salutation of Paul's letter to Roman believers, he establishes the authority by which he writes.

And it is theologically rich. We'll skip a stone off of it this morning. This morning's outline will follow three points, which are available to you on your bulletin, should you like to take notes.

Number one, the authority of Paul. Number two, the authority of the Bible. And number three, the authority of Jesus Christ. Firstly, the authority of Paul we see in verse one.

[11:29] In Paul's introduction of himself as the writer of this letter, he gives to his readers three titles for himself. First, he calls himself a servant of Christ Jesus.

The word servant could also be translated bond servant. Mosaic law provided for an indentured servant to permanently become a bondservant of a master that he loved and respected.

A voluntary servanthood. The term signifies total ownership and total obedience. That is to say that Paul viewed himself as belonging completely to Christ Jesus and called to a complete obedience to Christ Jesus.

Not a pick and choose kind of faith. Paul is saying, I belong to him and therefore I serve at his whim. And note here that Paul, as he introduces himself in this letter, begins, he starts with humility.

Even as he is establishing his authority, he recognizes that it is a granted authority. Paul could have begun with his apostleship.

[12:53] Rather significant position that he held. He is authoring this letter toward the end of his third missionary journey. He could have begun with his mission credentials.

Credentials. Was no greater missionary than Paul in his day. He had traveled further and accomplished more. But he doesn't do either of these things.

He begins with his servant status. He begins with humility that all praise might belong to Christ.

He says, I am Paul. I am a servant of Christ Jesus. He goes on to say that he was called to be an apostle.

The word translated apostle simply means sent one. So in a sense, everyone who belongs to Christ is sent into the world, light in a dark place, city on a hill.

[13:54] That's not what Paul is referring to here. He's specifically referring to his calling that's only shared with 12 other men. The calling of apostle as a formal title.

Think capital A, apostle. And I will say without reservation, there was nobody else beyond Paul called to be an apostle in this way.

Paul did not volunteer for the role, but he was divinely appointed. And he founds the authority of his ministry on this calling.

Listen to what he says in Galatians chapter one. There in verse one, he introduces himself, Paul, an apostle, not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised him from the dead.

And then he says on in chapter one of Galatians verse 11 and 12, for I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

[15:07] This calling was not a feeling that Paul experienced, but it was an encounter with the risen Christ. This is unique and it is significant. We see a record of this in Acts chapter nine. We know that Paul has been commissioned to go and take captive those who are claiming the name of Christ to imprison them.

And in verse three of Acts nine says, now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him and falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?

And he said, who are you, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. He encountered the risen Christ.

Not only that, but Paul was also schooled by the risen Christ. I just read to you Galatians chapter one, verse 11 and 12. The gospel didn't come to him by man.

[16:12] He received it through a revelation of Christ. And then in Galatians 1, 15 and following, Paul says, but when he would set me apart before I was born and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his son to me in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone.

Now that's the ESV. That's the end of verse 16. I did not consult with anyone, but I prefer the translation of the New American Standard Bible in this case.

It says, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood. Verse 17, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia and returned again to Damascus. Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas. It's the Greek name for Peter and remained with him 15 days. And so it's understood that Paul is led away into a school with Christ. That Jesus spends these three years teaching him and he comes back to confirm the things that he has been taught. He comes and he spends time with Peter a little over two weeks, being sure that he's clear and he understands before he goes on this ministry.

[17:35] to the Gentiles. So he is an apostle, called to be an apostle. And thirdly, he says of himself that he is set apart for the gospel of God.

Paul was a servant and a sent one with a particular purpose. And it is very easy to be distracted with lots of purposes.

But Paul was clear that he was to be a proclaimer of the good news of Jesus Christ. The good news, he will spend the rest of this book extolling.

So on these three titles, Paul establishes his authority to speak and he ought to be listened to. Significant.

Don't miss what Paul is saying about who he is, who he has been made in Christ. This kind of writing is precious and we so often take it for granted.

[18:41] And I want to read to you at this point a short excerpt from the Pilgrim's Progress. I commend this to you all the time and then I also joke if you stick around long enough I'll read the entirety of it to you in bits and pieces but I think you'll appreciate it read linearly.

And there's a character in it named Christian. And in the middle of his conversion experience he's led to a house that is the interpreter's house.

And there are lessons there taught to him. So I want to pick up just a couple paragraphs here when Christian arrives at the house and he says, Sir, I am a man who has come from the city of destruction and I am going to Mount Zion.

I was told by the man who stands at the entrance gate to this way that if I called here the house of the interpreter! You would show me excellent things that would help me on my journey.

Then said the interpreter come in I will show you those things that will be profitable to you. So he commanded his servant to light the candle and then asked Christian to follow him to a private room that when the man's servant opened the door revealed a picture of a very grave person hanging on the wall.

[19:55] It was an empty room with a photo a painting perhaps on the wall of a serious person. This is what the man in the picture looked like.

He had eyes lifted up to heaven the best of books in his hand the law of truth written upon his lips the world behind his back.

He stood as if pleading with men and a crown of gold hung over his head. Then said Christian what does this mean? The man in this picture represents one of a thousand.

He can conceive children travail in birth with children and nurse them himself when they are born. And Bunyan was not gender confused just to be clear. You see him with his eyes lifted up to heaven the best of books in his hand and the law of truth written on his lips.

All this is to show you that his work is to know and unfold dark things to sinners. You see him pleading with men the world cast behind him and a crown hanging over his head to show you that by rejecting and despising the things of this present world for the love that he has for his master's service he is sure to have glory as his reward in the world to come.

[21:14] I have shown you this picture first because the man whom it represents is the only man authorized by the Lord of the place where you are going to be your guide in all the difficult places you will encounter on the way.

So pay attention to what I have shown you and keep this picture foremost in your mind so that if you meet with someone who doesn't resemble this picture's likeness but who pretends to lead you in the right way you will not follow him down to destruction.

And I say to you we know that we hold in our hands the inspired word of God but I just on that point want to commend Paul to you as that kind of man.

A man with his eyes fixed toward heaven the world behind looking to plead with us that we might believe the gospel. we should listen to him.

Second, let's talk a bit about the authority of the Bible. What did Paul think of the scriptures? He had a very high view of the scriptures of his day which is what we have as our Old Testament.

[22:30] Paul had been to the seminary of his time. He was trained as a Pharisee under the tutelage of a highly esteemed teacher of the law a man named Gamaliel.

He knew what the prophets of his Bible predicted about the Christ and he knew that the promises of the Old Testament had now been kept in the person and work of Jesus.

Shortly in this letter he will proclaim in verse 16 I am not ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.

Paul is going to root the assertions of this letter that we are saved by grace alone through faith alone in the person and work of Jesus Christ alone. He's going to root that in God's word.

We will see him time and time again quote the Old Testament as an appeal to see and savor. the gospel. It is astounding to me that Paul as an apostle carried along by the Spirit in the writing of these letters still so values the word of God already spoken that it gets brought into the text again and again and again This is the very purpose that he has been set apart for the proclamation of the gospel and he has great confidence to do so because of his belief in the authority of God and therefore the authority of his word.

[24:04] So he will proclaim it. He will speak boldly of the judgment of God and he will speak boldly of the grace of God. He will plumb the depths of God's sovereign purpose in salvation and he will call us to obedient faith all because he believes in the authority of a God who has given to us this gospel.

Paul was a man uniquely used of God in the history of the world. He was a man that by God's grace turned the world upside down as he was accused of.

He was a man of conviction conviction and we can see at least in part where that conviction came from came from his understanding his illuminated understanding of the scripture.

He knew that the gospel the word of God was powerful and it totally changed the trajectory of his life. He lived for it he died for it.

the power of the gospel. Charles Spurgeon once said this is on your bulletin if you'd like to follow along quote see what vitality the gospel has plunge her under the wave and she rises the pure for her washing thrust her in the fire and she comes out the more bright for her burning cut her in thunder and each piece shall make another church behead her and like the hydra of old she shall have a hundred heads for every one you cut away she cannot die she must live for she has the power of God within her and beloved we have all the more reason to be confident in this text because of the faithfulness of men like Paul carried along by the spirit help us to understand we have all the more reason to be bold in the gospel and bold in the entirety of God's word so we see

[26:19] Paul express his authority we see his expression of the authority of the scripture and also and most importantly the authority of Jesus Christ see the last two verses this gospel message the scripture declared was concerning God's 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 Paul begins speaking of Christ as the son of God which is a great statement of Jesus divinity he is himself God and this is an example on Paul's part of a fulfillment of the prophetic word you could see Psalm chapter 2 in verse 7 and it is very difficult for my mind not to draw a straight line from Romans chapter 1 verse 2 and 3 to Hebrews chapter 1 verse 1 and 2 where the author of

Hebrews who many say was Paul I think it was Apollos but that's neither here nor there writes long ago at many times and in many ways God spoke to our fathers by the prophets but in these last days he has spoken to us by his son whom he appointed the heir of all things through whom also he created the world so for Paul to begin speaking of Christ as the son of God has a massive significance packed into it which we don't have all the time we would like for this morning but we will spend the rest of this life and in the life to come for eternity figuring out all that that means Paul goes on to give an example of another fulfillment of the prophetic word concerning Jesus' humanity so his divinity and now his humanity an example

Jeremiah 23 in verse 5 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 so he is God's son and he is in the flesh descended from David he's hearkening back to these types of predictions of who the Christ would be Paul then says in verse 4 that his confidence in the authority of Jesus Christ his confidence that he is in fact the Messiah comes in power from the spirit of holiness through Jesus' resurrection just think about it Paul was a success in terms of the religion of his day he had prominence and he had esteem he was a high achiever top of his class kind of guy he had been educated in the best school he was being given important assignments he had a platform and he had a following what would cause a man like that to give up all of it everything

Paul encountered the living Christ he knew that all he had believed was realized in Jesus he knew that Jesus was the fulfillment of the promises of God because he was crucified and buried but rose from that grave three days later Paul encountered him spent time with him this risen Christ and it radically transformed him by the spirit here's Paul's words from Philippians chapter three he is making the case to the Philippian believers that we can't have confidence in our flesh in our works and he says beginning in verse three and following for we are the circumcision who worship by the spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh he says then though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also if anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh I have more circumcised on the eighth day of the people of Israel of the tribe of Benjamin a Hebrew of Hebrews as to the law a Pharisee as to zeal a persecutor of the church as to righteousness under law blameless top of his game then he says in verse seven but whatever gain I had I counted as loss for the sake of Christ indeed I counted everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord for his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish garbage in order that

[31:57] I may gain Christ radically encountered the power of the risen Christ Paul through the intervening work of God came to believe that all his effort to be made right before God was worthless apart from faith in Jesus Christ again we are saved justified made right before God by grace alone through faith alone in the person and work of Jesus Christ alone this is the good news of the gospel every world religion invites its adherents to climb a mountain that they might know the God or gods of that particular religion lays forth the philosophy and the rules by which adherents must obey our

God because of his great loving kindness and mercy in the accomplished work of his son and by the power of his spirit comes down the mountain to us and offers to carry us to the top to abide with him forever this is good news it is because of this accomplished work of Christ that he is called Lord

that he reigns now and forever more this is such good news it is news worth living for as Paul did it is news worth dying for as Paul did it is a news that he would have you hear and believe and give your whole self to beloved I am eager to talk with you each Lord's day given the opportunity Lord willing about this good news let's pray together