



Series: Paul's Christmas Gospel
Title: Part 1 – Jesus, Born to Fulfill¹
Text: Romans 1:1-4²
Date: November 29, 2009
Place: First Baptist Church, Olds, AB

Over the last number of years we've taken a look at the birth of Jesus Christ through the eyes of several Bible characters connected with the Christmas story. We've looked at Christmas through the eyes of Mary, Mary Ordinary. We've taken a Christmas journey with Joseph. We've listened to the angels speak of Jesus' birth. We've looked at the birth of Christ from the perspective of the shepherds, Zechariah and Elizabeth.

This Christmas season I want us to think about it from the perspective of a Bible character who wasn't in attendance that night in Bethlehem but whose life was dramatically shaped by the life of the baby born that night ... I want us to think about the Apostle Paul. This Christmas, we're going to spend **Christmas with Paul**.

If Paul were to come and spend Christmas with us, much of what we do at this time of year would be very unfamiliar to him. Many of our Christmas traditions have grown up in the centuries since the days of the apostles. Christmas trees and Christmas carols; Advent candles and Christmas gifts; Nativity scenes and Christmas cake ... there are many traditions that have grown up over the years around the celebration of the birth of Christ. Many of our traditions are good and wholesome; some are not. And just as every year we have to dig out our Christmas decorations from storage and decide which ones to display, every year believers in Jesus have to sort out the good and useful traditions from the distracting and unnecessary. Every year we're challenged as believers to keep Christ in Christmas. Every year we're tasked with finding ways to declare that Jesus is the reason for the season.

But perhaps the thing that would puzzle Paul more than anything else in our contemporary Christmas-keeping would be any attempt to celebrate the birth of Christ without also remembering his death and resurrection. You see, in Paul's mind, Easter and Christmas are really collapsed into one event. In the very last letter that Paul wrote, his Second Letter to Timothy, Paul, writing from prison and facing imminent death, wrote a series of short, punching exhortations to Timothy.

¹ Much of this message is drawn from John Piper's exposition of this passage. See John Piper, "God's Good News Concerning His Son," May 3, 1998. (www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByScripture/10/1036_Gods_Good_News_Concerning_His_Son/)

² Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission, All rights reserved.



These were his final words and they were declarations of what Paul believed to be crucial. He wrote to Timothy...

“Remember, Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel...” 2 Timothy 2:8

In a nutshell, that was Paul’s Gospel. The gospel is the message about Jesus Christ. And the two key truths that Paul unpacks from his preaching about Jesus are the foundation truths for both the Easter and Christmas seasons.

The resurrection of Christ from the dead is the foundation for Easter. At Easter, we celebrate that great deliverance from sin that Christ won for us through his death on the cross and his resurrection from the grave. And at Christmas, we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the fulfillment of God’s promise to send a Saviour for the world. That was the “gospel” the angels preached to the shepherds on the night of Jesus’ birth...

“Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” Luke 2:10-11

For Paul, Christmas is no less a Gospel season than Easter. In his mind, both seasons are bookends of one Gospel message: **God has come to save us through the death and resurrection of his Son, Jesus Christ!** This is **Paul’s Christmas Gospel.**

Over the Christmas season we’re going to look at several key passages in the writings of Paul that highlight the way in which he connects the birth of Jesus to the preaching of the Gospel. And what we’ll find at every stop along the way is that Christmas is a Gospel season. Next week we’ll stop at Galatians chapter 4 where Paul tells us that Jesus was born under the law to redeem those under the law. Our Advent Theatre presentation this morning highlighted Jesus’ fulfillment of the Law and next week we’ll look at how Paul connects Jesus’ birth to that great truth. Today, as we begin our Christmas journey with Paul, we’ll begin with one of his most important letters, his letter to the Romans and you might be surprised to find the Christmas Gospel right at the very beginning. The theme of fulfillment is also present this Scripture. Paul began his letter to the church in Rome with this Gospel declaration...

“¹ Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, ² which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, ³ concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh ⁴ 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” Romans 1:1-4



Let's look at how Paul unpacks his Christmas Gospel.

The first thing to notice is that Paul tells us that...

The Christmas Gospel is a story that was planned by God long before it happened

Paul was...

“set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures” Romans 1:1-2

Paul points to his own selection by God for the purpose of preaching the Gospel of Jesus. He was “set apart for the gospel of God.” Long before he was born, in fact, God had already set him apart. Paul wrote to the Galatians...

“when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles...” Galatians 1:15-16

God was so concerned about getting out the Gospel message that long before the angels declared it to the shepherds in Bethlehem, God had already selected Paul to be his Gospel messenger to the nations. God was not going to leave anything to chance! He planned everything with infinite care because the Gospel message was a message of great worth to God. It is his “pearl of great price.” It is the greatest gift we can ever receive from him. That is how precious the Gospel is to Him and that is how precious it was to Paul and that is how precious it should be to you and me.

Consider these three things from verse 2.

First...

The Gospel is the fulfillment of God's Old Testament promises.

The Gospel is not a new religion. It is the fulfillment of an old religion. The God of the Old Testament is the God of the New Testament. What he was preparing and promising then, he fulfilled in the coming of Jesus.

At Christmas we often dig deep into the Old Testament promises about the coming of Jesus. That is one of the things I enjoy most about the Advent tradition. Tonight, at the Carol Festival, we'll be reading passages from the Old Testament that speak about the coming of Jesus and also ones that speak about his coming again. These weeks of Advent give us an opportunity to see that our faith in Jesus isn't just a “New Testament” faith; it's a Bible faith that pulls together the Old and the New Testaments.



There are so many Old Testament promises of the Gospel but one that always takes my breath away is found in Isaiah's prophecy. Isaiah, writing as God's inspired spokesman, wrote of the coming promised-One...

“He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”

Isaiah 53:3-6

Isaiah's words so clearly portray the agony of Jesus in his death that one Old Testament scholar observed that it was as if Isaiah had written this standing at the foot of the cross of Jesus Christ. Through prophet after prophet, God announced the promise of the Gospel.

Second...

The Gospel tells us that God keeps his promises!

Hundreds of years go by. The Jews wonder if the Messiah will ever come. They go through horrendous suffering. Then God acts and the promise is fulfilled. That means that God can be trusted. It may look as if he had forgotten his promises. But he does not forget. So verse 2 is not only a statement about the content of the Gospel, but is also a reason for believing it. Christmas reminds us that God does not forget us! Christmas is like God's "rainbow of Gospel promise." In Genesis (9:13) it tells us that the rainbow is God's sign in the sky to us that he will never destroy the world by a flood. The child, born in a stable and lying in a manger, is God's reminder to us that he keeps his promises.

Thirdly...

The Gospel is recorded in a Book that can be trusted!

Notice the implication of verse two for our doctrine of Scripture. First there is a God; then there is a promise that God chooses to make; then there are prophets "through" whom God speaks; then there are the writings; and these writing are called "holy."

Why are they holy? Because it is God who speaks through them. Notice that Paul says that God made his promises "through his prophets," not "by his prophets." When Isaiah spoke, God spoke. When Jeremiah wrote, God spoke. That's why the cover's of our Bible's carry the title, "The Holy Bible." This book is God's holy voice to you and me.



And “holy” doesn’t only apply to the Old Testament prophets. Paul saw himself as an apostle of Jesus Christ, speaking and writing with authority on Christ’s behalf as a founder of the church. He understood that his work as an apostle was just as foundational to the church as the work of the prophets of old because, as he wrote to the Ephesians, the church is...

“built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone...” Ephesians 2:20

The Christmas Gospel was promised in holy writing inspired by God; and the Gospel is unfolded and preserved for us in holy writing inspired by God. This is what we believe and it makes a huge difference in the way we view truth and doctrine and preaching and worship and everything else in the world!

So the first thing Paul says about the Christmas Gospel is that it was planned and predicted long ago. It is the gospel “which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures.”

The **second** thing he says is that...

The Christmas Gospel is the story of God come to save us

“which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning his Son...” Romans 1:2-3

The Gospel of God has to do with the Son of God. We need to get two things clear about the Son of God immediately, or we could go far astray.

First...

The Son of God existed before he became a human being

Look at what Paul wrote later in this letter.

“For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh” Romans 8:3

God sent his Son to take on human flesh. So the Son existed as the Son of God before he became a man. That means that Christ is and was the unique Son of God from all eternity. (John 17:1-5)

Second...

Jesus Christ is himself God

Again, later in the letter Paul referred to Jesus as...



“the Christ who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.” Romans 9:5

The gospel is not about God arranging human affairs in a better way. It is about God penetrating human affairs from outside in the person of his Son who is the perfect image of the Father and who is himself God. (Colossians 2:9)

That is the truly wonderful thing about Christmas. It is the awe-inspiring, breath-taking, mind-expanding reality that the baby, lying in Mary’s lap, is the Creator-God of the universe! Emmanuel – God with us!

A few weeks ago, I watched the new computerized 3-D version of Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol*. I’ve always enjoyed the story whether by reading it, by watching the many movie versions of it or by seeing it performed on stage. It’s one of our culture’s abiding Christmas traditions. I think we can take the story at several levels. At one level, we can take it to be a challenge, as Paul wrote to the Philippians, **“Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.”** (Php 2:4) At that level it’s a useful and good tale.

But there’s another aspect to the story which is not as good and useful in my opinion. Let me ask you: essentially, isn’t Scrooge being challenged by Marley’s ghost to save himself? The story is driven by the idea that if Scrooge amends his ways and cares for others, he will not experience the eternal agony which his friend Jacob Marley must endure. At one level, Dickens’ tale is a story about salvation by self-effort and good works and that is not the message of the Christmas Gospel.

The Christmas Gospel is not that God has come to show us how we can save ourselves but that God himself has come to save us!

Paul tells us that the Christmas Gospel was planned by God, that it was carried out by God and **thirdly** he tells us that...

The Christmas Gospel is the story of God’s work in human history touching our deepest needs

Paul says of Jesus that he was...

“descended from David according to the flesh” Romans 1:3

First...

The Son of God became a man

Jesus was born just as any baby is born but he was not conceived as any child is conceived. His conception was a unique act of God’s Spirit in bringing life to Mary’s womb (Luke 1:35), but her labour and delivery were just the same as every woman’s experience. Jesus was, as Paul wrote in Galatians, “born of a



woman.” (Galatians 4:4) The work he had to do, the mission he was on to save us, required that he take on human nature, along with his divine nature. God did not choose a man and make him his son; he chose to make his eternal one-and-only Son a man.

God knows our lives. He’s lived among us as one of us! He knows our joys and griefs; our hunger and thirst; God knows! It is a tremendous comfort to know that when we pray and pour out our hearts, God listens with real compassion born of personal experience.

Second...

He was born in the line of King David

Why is that part of the Christmas Gospel? Why is that good news? The answer is that all the promises of the Old Testament depended on the coming of the Messiah, the anointed One, who would rule as king in the line of David. The prophecies and promises pointed to the Messiah as the one who would defeat the enemies of God’s people and bring righteousness and peace forever. He would be the Yes to all God’s promises.

Earlier this morning, the music team led us in the lighting of the First Candle of Advent and we read together two of those promises made to David’s line, one from the prophet Jeremiah (Jer. 23:5) and another from Isaiah (Isa. 11:1,6,9). Consider this promise, also from Jeremiah. The Lord, through Jeremiah, declared...

“Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David, and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will dwell securely. And this is the name by which it will be called: ‘The Lord is our righteousness.’” Jeremiah 33:14-17

Notice that name: “The Lord is our righteousness.” Remember that.

The Christmas Gospel is that now, after hundreds of years, God has acted to fulfill his plan and promise that a king would come in the line of David. God spoke through Isaiah and said...

“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.” Isaiah 9:6-7



The biggest problem we humans have is that we are at war with God because of our unrighteousness. We have no peace because we no righteousness. Our sin and rebellion make us God's enemies. God's Son entered into human life as a descendant of King David precisely to solve that problem; he became a man to reconcile us with God. How? By the gift of his righteousness. It's the gift of his righteousness that establishes peace between us and God forever. Paul said that in Jesus, God's righteousness had appeared in human history...

“the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified ... [made right with God, at peace with God] ... by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” Romans 3:22-24

You see, when we put our faith in Jesus Christ, we can truly say, “The Lord is OUR righteousness” – I can say, “The Lord is MY righteousness” -- and because of that we have peace with God forever! (Romans 5:1) That's the Christmas Gospel!

Finally, Paul tells us that...

The Christmas Gospel is the story of God's power at work in His Son and in us!

Paul declares that Jesus was the Son of David according to his human ancestry, but...

“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” Romans 1:4

Not only was the Christmas Gospel planned by God before it happened; not only was it carried out by God himself in the person of Jesus; not only did it touch our deepest needs for righteousness and peace but in verse 4 Paul says something that was both devastating and exhilarating.

Why do I say devastating? Most of the Jewish people of Paul's day expected that the Messiah would come with power and political force and would defeat their political enemies, the Roman Empire, the rulers of the world. But what Paul says in verse 4 implies that between verse 3 and 4 the Son of David died. He died! In the Christmas Gospel, the shadow of a cross is raised over the manger of Jesus. The child born in Bethlehem, the city of David, was born to die.

Many in Jesus' day didn't understand this. Those who thought he was the Messiah were confused and devastated by his death on the cross. Messiah's



don't die! They live and conquer and rule. They don't get arrested and beat up and mocked and crucified and leave their people destitute. You can hear the devastation in the words of two disciples who left Jerusalem on the day Jesus died...

“we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.” Luke 24:21

But God's Messiah didn't stay dead! When these two broken believers understood that Jesus was alive, they returned to Jerusalem and found all the believers, once devastated and despairing, now exhilarated and rejoicing! Jesus was alive!

Why is this good news for you and me? Later in his letter to the Romans Paul explains...

“If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.” Romans 8:11

When we put our faith in Jesus Christ, the same “Spirit of holiness” who raised Jesus from the dead comes to live within us. (Rom 8:9) And just as he gave new life to Jesus, he will give new life to you and me. It's a new life that begins the moment we come to faith in Jesus and it's a life that will continue on forever into eternity.

Paul's Christmas Gospel: **God has come to save us through the death and resurrection of his Son, Jesus Christ!**

This Christmas I invite us to spend the season with the Apostle Paul and...

“Remember, Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David”

- **Invitation to prayer ministry**
- **Final Song:** Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus
- **Benediction**