



# Paul

## On a Mission from God

### Week 3

### Paul's Good News

*The cross is the signature of the one who is risen.*

Ernst Käsemann

Michael Gorman's book, *Apostle of the Crucified Lord*, has been very helpful in the development of this class.

## Paul's mission field





## The “Gospel of Christ” – crucified and risen

- ❖ This is not Good News *from* Jesus Christ, it is Good News *about* Jesus Christ.
  - It is only the resurrection that makes this Good News for anyone. This is the message of Easter Monday.
  - The fundamental question is this: What does Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection mean for everyone – Gentile and Jew alike? What does it mean for us?!
- ❖ Though it is the resurrection that showed what had really happened and validated what Jesus claimed about the Father and himself, Paul’s Gospel centered on the cross. It was there that God’s victory was won.
  - The stories of Jesus and the stories of God are to be interpreted through the lens of the cross. The resurrection makes this perspective both *possible* and *necessary*.

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## The Story of God’s Faithfulness

- ❖ The Good News that Paul brings is a story of God’s faithfulness and salvation – grounded in both God’s covenant relationship with Israel and in God’s promise of a world put right.
  - See Isaiah 52:7-10 for a great proclamation of what God promised to do and now has done through Jesus Christ – albeit in new and unexpected ways.
  - God is the great covenant-maker and the great covenant-keeper. Jesus’ faithfulness demonstrates God’s faithfulness to his promises. Paul’s letter to the Romans is largely a narrative defense of God’s faithfulness and, hence, his righteousness.
- ❖ In this, Jesus is both crucified Messiah and the living, exalted Lord whose resurrection by God was his vindication.
  - This master story is graphically portrayed in Philippians 2:6-11.

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## Creeds and Hymns

- ❖ The Good News that Paul brings is not Paul's creation. Even though Paul's earliest letters were written within 20 years of Jesus' death and resurrection, Paul uses passages and phrases from early Christian "hymns" and "creeds."
- ❖ Philippians 2:6-7 is one of the best examples. Paul could have composed, but most scholars think he did not. This is why it is printed as poetry, not prose, in your Bible. Romans 1:3-4, 3:24-25; I Corinthians 15:3-8 are other examples.
- ❖ What story is told by Philippians 2:6-7?

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## Good News for Pagans

- ❖ For Paul, taking the Gospel to the Gentiles (non-Jews) and pagans (non-Jews and non-Christians) is not an innovation. It is merely the fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham and reiterated by prophet after prophet – as in Isaiah 52:10.
- ❖ Paul speaks to people in their own language. Not much point talking about a crucified Messiah to people who have no clue about Judaism.
  - Paul's speech to the "deep-thinkers" in Athens is the best example of Paul at work among the pagans (see Acts 17).
- ❖ But it is still a *Jewish* message for a *pagan* world.
  - Paul's claim that there was one and only one God was a Jewish claim that was in stark contrast to the beliefs of nearly everyone else.

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## A “Theopolitical” Gospel

- ❖ This Jewish message for a *pagan* world is both theological and political.
  - “Good News/Gospel/*evangelion*” is a term used in the Jewish community (such as from Isaiah 40-66) and in the Roman empire.
  - An inscription from 9BC: “Caesar [Augustus] through his appearance [*ephiphanein*] has exceeded the hope of all former good news [*evangelia*] surpassing not only the benefactors who came before him, but also leaving no hope that anyone in the future would surpass him, since for the world the birthday of the god was the beginning of his good news [*evangelia*].”
- ❖ Paul’s vocabulary is “theopolitical” – the confrontation is inevitable. Acts ends with Paul preaching God’s Good News in Rome under the nose of Caesar.
  - *kyrios* (Lord -- YHWH v. emperor); *pistis* (faith -- covenant faithfulness v. loyalty between Rome and its citizens); *parousia* (coming/going -- presence of God v. an imperial arrival)

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## God’s Victory

- ❖ It is a “theopolitical” struggle between Jesus and Caesar. Whose kingdom is it? Remember that by the time of Paul, the cult of Caesar was throughout the empire.
- ❖ Caesar doesn’t know it, but Caesar has already lost. God’s victory over sin and death, over Caesar, over all that is not God’s – was won on the cross. Jesus’ resurrection points us toward his vindication and exaltation. Look again at Philippians 2:10-11. To whom are all knees bowing?
  - The fight is not over, but the victory has been won.
- ❖ Who or what is Caesar in our world? With whom or what do our first loyalties lie? For a disciple, it can’t be anywhere but with Jesus.

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## What do we gain from this Good News?

- ❖ Justification/Righteousness (Romans 3:21-31; Galatians 2:15-21)
  - To be in a right covenant relationship with the righteous God right now. Remember that this often appears in your translations as “justify” and “justification.” For Paul, this is *covenant* language and *law-court* language.
- ❖ Reconciliation and peace (Romans 5:1-11; 2 Cor. 5:18-21)
  - The enmity between God and his people has been overcome. Christ is our mediator and peace.
- ❖ Forgiveness (1 Cor 5:7; 15:3, 17; 2 Cor. 5:18-19)
  - Sins require atonement as a means of forgiveness. Christ is our sacrifice.
- ❖ Redemption (liberation) (Romans 6:12-13; 1 Cor. 6:19-20)
  - Humans are in bondage to sin, its slaves. Christ has liberated us from this slavery so that we might be “slaves” of God.

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## More benefits of the Good News!!

- ❖ Present “resurrection” (Romans 6:1-14, esp. verses 11 & 13)
  - We participate in Christ’s resurrection and are raised to new life.
- ❖ Incorporation into the people of God (Gal. 6:16; 1 Cor. 3:9-17; 12:1-31)
  - Believers constitute the people of God, the body of Christ, Israel, the temple of the Holy Spirit. All that marks out the people of God is faith in Jesus Christ – a specific commitment to Jesus.
- ❖ The gift of the Spirit (Romans 5:1-5; 8:1-27)
  - The Spirit, the personal presence of God, is given to all believers. The Spirit enables us to know God’s love and to live a life of faith.
- ❖ The certainty of God’s love (Romans 5:6-8; 8:28-39; Galatians 2:20)
  - The gift of Jesus Christ is the proof of God’s love for us. Jesus is the demonstration of the divine *agape*.

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## **Still more on what we gain!!**

- ❖ **Sanctification** (Romans 12:1; 1 Cor. 1:30; 1 Thess. 3:13; 4:1-8)
  - Christ enables us to embody the sanctified (holy) lifestyle appropriate for God's covenant people.
- ❖ **Deliverance from wrath** (1 Thess. 1:10; 5:9; Romans 5:6-11)
  - As a Jew, Paul believed that would be a day of judgment on which the unbelievers and disobedient would face the divine wrath. Christ spares us from that wrath.
- ❖ **Salvation** (Romans 1:16; 8:18-25; 1 Cor 15:1-2; Philippians 3:20-21)
  - Deliverance from sin, death, and all other enemies. It includes bodily resurrection, glorification, and eternal life.
- ❖ **Bodily resurrection and eternal life** (Romans 6:20-28; 8:18-25; 1 Cor. 15; Philippians 3:11, 21)
  - Human life is "embodied" life on both sides of the grave
- ❖ **Glorification** (Romans 5:1-2; 2 Cor. 3:12-4:6; Philippians 3:12-21)
  - In Christ, we begin the process of transformation into the likeness of Christ – the image of God. This is our goal.

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## **What do we not find in this list of benefits?**

- ❖ **Most of the things that people often think they are coming to church to find!!**
  - There is nothing here about our marriages, children, jobs, finances. Nothing about our pleasures or recreation. Nothing about our "happiness." Nothing about having our perceived needs met.
- ❖ **Paul would say that the culprit here is sin, twisting our understanding and desires, blinding us to the truth about who we really are, who God intends us to be, and why.**
  - The world tells one story about who we are and who we could be. *The DaVinci Code* is a lightning rod for this story. It is enormously attractive in our postmodern culture. Hence, the astonishing success of a very average thriller.
  - Paul tells a different story, a competing story. Paul tells this story not because we desire to hear it (we don't) but because he believes it is the true story of creation and, hence, humanity.

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