



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Romans 1:1-7

Romans

“The Historical Jesus”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] We're in our second lesson in this series in Romans, and we're going to look at Romans 1:1-7. Paul writes, “Paul, upon serving of Christ Jesus, called as 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 born of a descendent of David, according to the flesh, who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead according to the Spirit of Holiness Jesus Christ our Lord through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among the gentiles for his name's sake, among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ. To all who are beloved of God in Rome called the saints, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” May the Lord bless this reading of his word. Let's bow in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we do look to you for blessing this morning. We thank you for the privilege of being here, for the privilege of sitting together and reading your inherent word together, and we thank you for it because, as we have read, we're reminded that we are called as saints, called to be saints by you so that our life as Christians is all the work of our all sovereign God, and we thank you for that. We thank you that you have brought us into your family, that you have called us out of darkness into light, that you brought us to this place where we can open the scriptures and study them together and be built up in the faith. This is how we are built up in the faith. This is how we grow and advance in the knowledge of the things of God and advance in maturity. It is through a disciplined, diligent, consistent study of your word and so we pray that you put within us a spirit of discipline, of desire for these things, a hunger for your truth and build us up in the faith and do so this morning. Give us a profitable time together.

We've read the scriptures and yet there is meaning to everything we've read. Open our minds to that meaning and apply that to us. May the spirit of God do that. May he make us receptive. May he enable us to put aside the details of life, the concerns of life – and there are so many things that go on in our lives, our busy lives, Father, that can begin to dominate our thinking. Remove all of that, Father, so that we might think with a single mind on the things of your word and then may the spirit of God apply these things unique to each one of us.

We are individuals with a variety of experiences in life. We each go through different difficulties. We're in different places, and yet you know all of our experiences and all of our needs far better than we do. You've planned it all out from the beginning, and we pray that you would make the proper applications to each of us, so that we might be built up in the faith and go out from this place well abled and well equipped to present the gospel to others and be a testimony wherever we are. We look to you to bless to that end and bless us in the physical things of life as well.

Father, we are dependent upon you for everything that we have, for our spiritual life, for our material life, and as I mention so often but is so often the case, Father, we become negligent of that fact. We forget that fact. We are so used to you providing for us daily, not just daily but moment by moment every moment of our existence is a provision of yours, and it is so faithful so consistent that we tend to take it all for granted and yet there's nothing. Nothing that should be taken for granted. Remind us of that, Father, and help us be appreciative of what you have done, and we pray that you would continue to provide.

Some of us have more keenly felt needs than others. Some are sick. Some are recovering from surgeries. We pray for them. We pray that you would give encouragement and healing and pray that you'd make all of us aware of our dependence upon you and be grateful for what you've given and what you do. Pray for ourselves not only in this hour but this evening when we gather again in this place to remember our Lord, remember his death for us and, as we take the Lord's Supper, remember that we are dependent upon you for life every moment, spiritual life at every moment. And we look forward to the day when you will send your son back into this world, and he will come in glory and triumph and then every tear will be wiped away from our eyes.

May we live for that day not live for the moment, not be time servers but live for eternity. Help us to do that by our time together this morning and bless our time with the

singing of our next hymn. We pray that you'd prepare our hearts for our time of study together. We pray these things in Christ name. Amen.

[Message] Nearly ten years ago, *U.S. News and World Report* published an article entitled *Who Was Jesus* which it called the question of the ages. It may be. There is certainly no more important question a person can ask and answer, and over the ages, many answers have been given to it, almost all of them very wrong.

In the 19th Century, due to rationalism, a movement occurred known as the quest for the historical Jesus which separated between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith. The Christ of faith was an invention of the Church. He is the person of the gospels who did miracles and claim to be God. The real Jesus, the Jesus of history was just a man.

They couldn't prove that, and the quest died from failure. But, in recent years, the Jesus Seminar has done much the same thing. It received a lot of publicity back in the 1990s. It involves some academics who meet to decide which of the words and deeds of Jesus they consider to be genuine, and so, based on anti-supernatural, rationalistic presuppositions, these men rule out all scripture that doesn't fit their materialistic world view, and they reconstruct a Jesus who is merely mortal. That's the liberals' answer to the question who is Jesus.

He's just a man, shrouded in myth, the Christ of the cults, the Mormon Jesus, the Jesus of Christian Science is another answer, and he is very much a man of myth. There are many Jesuses in the world. So the question who is Jesus is an important one and one that Jesus himself asked his disciples in Matthew 16:13. "Who do people say that the son of man is?"

Well, they said a lot of things. Some said that he was John the Baptist. Some said that he was one of the prophets, but it was Peter who answered the question when he said, "You are the Christ, the son of the Living God." And all the apostles agreed the Jesus of Peter is the Jesus of Paul and the Jesus of history, the only real Jesus there is.

If you want to know who Jesus Christ is then listen to those who knew him. Paul met him face to face on the Damascus Road. He spoke with him. He asked him, "Who are you, Lord?" And he answered him. He said, "I am Jesus." So who is Jesus? He is the Lord, very God of very God.

And in the first seven verses of the Book of Romans, Paul states that. They have been called the monumental introduction of the epistle and with good reason. They are all about Christ. Jesus is mentioned in the seven verses, either by name or pronoun or title

eight times. Now it begins in a conventional way in the style of ancient correspondence with three elements, the name of the writer, the name or names of the person or persons to whom he was writing and a greeting.

We have an example of this type of correspondence in the Book of Acts in Acts 23 where the commander of the Roman garrison at Jerusalem wrote a letter to the Roman governor of Judea. Paul was in his possession. He had been arrested, and the commander was transferring Paul from Jerusalem down to Caesarea, and he wrote a letter.

And the letter begins, “Claudius Lysias to his excellency Governor Felix, greetings.” Three elements to that introduction and Paul’s introduction has those three elements, but it quickly fills up with the subject of the epistle, Jesus Christ and what would have been conventional becomes monumental.

Paul could do that because, as he says, he was an apostle, and one of the qualifications of an apostle was to have been an eyewitness of the historical Jesus, to have seen him during his earthly ministry or to have seen him after his resurrection, and Paul did that. So we have that in these first verses, a description of the real Jesus.

Paul gives that in the context of explaining the gospel that he preached. He said he was set apart for the gospel of God, but the gospel is about Christ, and so, to explain the gospel, Paul must explain him. But he makes it clear, from the very beginning, that the gospel that he preached and the Christ that he proclaimed is not of his own invention. It is the gospel of God not of man. His message is not the product of human speculations like some Greek philosophy. It’s not a theological novelty invented by the apostle. This is revelation from God, and it is ancient revelation, the prophets of old, the Old Testament preached this gospel, he tell us in verse two.

So, from the very beginning and the very beginning, Genesis 3:15, the promise of a redeemer to come was given. That is the first promise, the first prophesy of the savior given to mankind, and the prophets, from that point on, developed that. That’s really what the Old Testament is and very much that way is an expansion upon that great promise given at the very beginning of the Word of God at the very beginning of human history in Genesis 3:15. We see this reach its peak, its apex in Isaiah 53. There, the redeemer to come is identified as a servant, the servant who would suffer for his people, who would bear their inequities, be pierced through for our transgressions and justify the many. That’s the gospel, and that’s the redeemer.

The gospel is not a method of self-improvement, of pulling oneself up in order to meet God’s standards and, in some way, in that way, gain his approval and gain his acceptance. In fact, just the opposite of that. It is all about a redeemer who would pull us up, a man who would come as a servant, suffer and die in order to save his people from their sins.

It is an ancient message. In fact, to understand the Old Testament, we must first understand Christ. You cannot read the Old Testament, and you cannot understand the Old Testament if you don’t know who Jesus Christ is and you don’t see him on the pages of that text. Jesus himself said that about himself. In John 5:39, he was speaking to the religious leaders of his day, and he said of the scriptures that, “They testify about me.” Commenting on this versus – on our verses Romans 1:2, Luther wrote, “Here, the door is thrown open wide for the understanding of Holy Scripture. That is that everything must be understood in relation to Christ.”

It’s all about Christ. Move even a step away from Christ, Calvin said, and you withdraw from the gospel. That’s Paul’s view. His gospel is Jesus Christ and so he now explains him. He answers the question who is Jesus by describing him as both God and man in verse three and then developing that in the rest of the chapter.

He is God’s son and he is David’s descendent. That’s what the gospel of God is about. It is, he says, “Concerning his son who was born of a descendent of David according to the flesh.” In other words, Jesus Christ is the God man, and because the forgiveness of sins and eternal life are due to him and what he has done on the cross, Paul is very clear about Christ’s identity from the outset of this letter.

If he were not who Paul says that he is, if the real Jesus, the Jesus of history were not the God man then the gospel would be nothing but an empty promise. There’d be no truth to it. We can illustrate that point from the payment of a debt. If a man owned an impossible debt and another step forward to assume the responsibility for it, it would be necessary for the bank to know that that man was good for the debt, good for the promise. It would be a meaningless gesture, on his part, if he were no better off financially, if he were just as bankrupt as the debtor.

But if he is rich, beyond all human debt, then his offer has meaning, and it’s the same with the gospel. Christ can be the savior only if he is sufficient for our debt, and he is because he is both God and man. His sacrifice for sinners is more than sufficient for our need. He is, first of all, God’s son. That speaks of his deity. He is not the father. He is the

son, but as God’s son, he is like the father in every way. He is coeternal. He is coequal with the father. Everything that can be said about God the Father can be said about God the Son.

In fact, we know God the Father by looking at God the Son. That is the testimony of the apostles. That’s the testimony of the Lord himself. Go back to the gospel of John in chapter 10:30, Jesus said, “I and the father are one.”

When Thomas met Jesus after the resurrection, he made that great confession of faith. Now this was a skeptic, you remember. Called him Doubting Thomas because, when he heard reports of the resurrection, heard it from a number of different people, from the women and from the disciples themselves, he would not believe it. He was a skeptic.

Sometimes think that the people of the ancient world were very gullible, very credulous. They believed in miracles. They believed in myths. They believed in all kinds of things. They believe everything. That’s not the case. We’re probably more credulous in our day or at least as credulous as they were. People today believe all kinds of things.

The first century, they weren’t very skeptical. The myths had played out. Nobody really believed those anymore. The philosophers were cynics. They were all very skeptical about things, and Thomas was that way, too. He heard about a resurrection, and he said, “They don’t happen. Resurrections just don’t happen, and I don’t believe it. In fact, for me to believe that I have to see him face to face. I’d have to touch him. Put my finger in the marks in his hands and in his side.”

And so the Lord Jesus appeared to him, and that’s just what Thomas did, we assume, but after seeing Christ, he then makes that great confession, “My Lord and my God.” Well, the Lord’s response to that is very significant. They didn’t correct Thomas. They didn’t say, “Thomas, you blaspheme. It’s only one who is God.” No. He received his confession as true, and he stated that everyone down through history, who doesn’t have the advantage of having seen him and touch him as Thomas did, everyone will be blessed. Why?

Why would he do that? Why would he say that? Why would he receive such a confession? Because Jesus Christ is God. He is the second person of the trinity, and he is therefore well able to pay all our debts in full. But, in addition to deity, he has humanity. The eternal Son of God became a man. At a point in time, he entered human history, as we all do, through a woman. He was born of the Virgin Mary by a mysterious conception of the Holy Spirit. We don’t understand how that happened. In fact, when the angel speaks of that in the Book of Luke, speaks of it as an overshadowing. The Holy Spirit will overshadow

her. So it's a mysterious event, the conception of Christ in the womb of the Virgin Mary, but that is how he came into this world, and from Mary, he took a human nature. And, now, he is and forever will be God and man in one person.

The unusual nature of his birth is signaled by Paul by his choice of words. He doesn't say that Jesus was born of a descendent of David. Now your translation, my translation puts it that way. That's how it's translated in the text, but, literally, Paul wrote that he became a descendent of David. He means he was born, but he puts it in such a way that he signals it was an unusual birth, a unique birth. He became which is not the normal word for being born. No one would say that. No one would say I became in December of 1948, something like that. We say I was born in a certain year on a certain day.

So Paul chose an unusual word, a word which is very suggestive. It suggests a transition from one state to another. At the same time, it implies that something came into existence that had not previously existing. So, both, a transition and a coming into being are expressed in this word that he has chosen.

The Son of God always existed, was never a time that he was not. He was in the beginning with God, John wrote in John 1:2. In fact, verses 1 and 2 make that very clear. In the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God. He was in the beginning with God, and what John is saying is you go back to the beginning of time, go back to the very beginning when there was nothing and when everything that is first came into being and the word, Jesus Christ, was with God, was, for all eternity, with God. Go back beyond the beginning, and he was there.

And so he wasn't born into existence but he did make a transition into a new manner of existence, and that was as a man. He became in his human nature. Paul uses the same language in Galatians 4:4 where he writes, “When the fullness of time came, God sent forth his son born of a woman, born under the law.” First he was sent and then he was born. He was the son when he was sent, so he always existed and then, at a point in time, in the fullness of time, the right time, he was born, but, again, the word that Paul uses there is the word that he uses in our text, became.

So, as a man, he was made. As the son, he was sent which suggests that he came on mission by becoming a man, and he became a true man. He wasn't a man in appearance only. There were heretics that came on the scene, early in the church, called Docetists. The heresy was Docetism, and what they said was he wasn't really a man. He didn't have a

physical body. A heavenly being can't have a physical body. That was a contradiction in their thinking. The Greeks despised the material.

You remember the speech or the sermon that Paul gave on Mars Hill in Acts 17. The Greeks listened to him with some interest until he talked about the resurrection, the dead coming back bodily, and they dismissed it. They scoffed at it because what they wanted was to be released of the body. The body was evil. The idea of existing eternally with a body was a contradiction in their way of thinking, and these people, who came on the scene, who had that same kind of mentality, said, no, he didn't have a body. He couldn't have a body. He only appeared to have a body.

I don't know if Paul is addressing that here or if, under the influence of the spirit of God, this was anticipating that heresy, but Paul makes it very clear that he was a genuine man. He was born according to the flesh, meaning he was a real man. He had a true body and a reasonable soul, a true human nature, and he was born into a very significant family, the most distinguished family of Israel. He was a descendent of David which means he is the Kind of Israel.

Now, you see what Paul is doing here is he is showing us that everything about Christ is tied to history, to places, to people. This is a real person who really came as he is described here and here. Significantly, he says, he's a descendent of David.

Now both of these titles, son of David and son of God were recognized as messianic titles. In Psalm 2:7, we read, “God says to the one who would rule the world with a rod of iron, ‘You are my son.’” So the messiah they knew would be the son of God and he had proclaimed, he had prophesied that the messiah would be born of the house of David. So he is the son of God. He's the son of David, and the gospels all agree. Both Matthew and Luke trace Jesus' descent from David through Joseph who was not his natural father but was his legal father and, by that fact, gave Jesus the right to the title of king.

So the eternal son of God had a temporal beginning as the son of David and is the one in whom is fulfilled all of the promises given to Israel and through Israel to the world. It's not a novel idea of Paul's, goes back to the Old Testament, the promise given was of a savior and king who would be God and man, and, again, we go back to the Book of Isaiah where we see this expressed so fully and clearly, the promise in 9:6 which is the text we're so familiar with at Christmastime is the promise of a child who would be born to the Jewish people, who had unique names, wonderful counselor, mighty God, eternal Father, Prince of Peace. Those are all divine titles. He is mighty God. He is the eternal Father.

Can it be any clearer than that that the one, who is being described here, is divine, is deity, is God and yet he's a child, a man. That's Christ. God and man. In fact, theologians have an expression, a term that they use to describe this. He is a theanthropic person, a combination of God and man, God theos, man, Anthropos. He is God and man in one person and a glorious person.

And yet, there is implied, in all of this, a descent, that is condescension. God became a man. That is a humbling of himself. He came from heaven down to earth. He is God, but he took on the weakness of the flesh, though without sin.

Now we see this condescension on his part all through the gospels. We see his humanity. He became tired. He became hungry, became thirsty. At the same time, they'll see his deity shining through all that. It's like a cloud that fills the sky and things become dark but then the rays of the sun shine through it, and in the same way, we see Christ in his humanity, in his weakness and yet there are times when the deity of Christ comes shining through.

We see that, for example, in Mark chapter 4, well known even in his life, at the end of a long and exhausting day, the Lord got in a boat and the disciples set out across the Sea of Galilee. They were going to find some rest on the other side. He laid down in the back, and he fell asleep. That is his humanity. He was completely exhausted then a storm arose that threatened to sink the boat. The disciples work the Lord in a panic. Jesus stood up. He rebuked the wind and the waves, and the sea suddenly became calm. And in amazement, in fear, the disciples said, “Who is this that even the wind and the waves obey him?”

That is his deity, and that is the question of the ages. Who is this? Who is Jesus? And the answer is he is the son of God, both God and man, the savior and the only person who could save sinners. No other sacrifice would do except the one made by him.

That's because, first, he had to be a man to be a sacrifice for men. A human person can only be a sacrifice or a substitute for human beings. Bulls and goats can't do that. The author of Hebrews makes that clear in chapter 10:4. They cannot remove sin, cannot take away sin. Animal sacrifices can picture the final sacrifice. They can be an illustration of that, and they were. Morning and evening, those animals were sacrificed at the altar of the temple. In the high holy days, they were sacrificed. Blood ran very freely to make the point, in a very dramatic, very clear, very tangible way, that, without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sins, and yet, the shedding of the blood of those victims could not take away

that sin. An animal cannot be a substitute for people. A human being must substitute for men, but that's not enough.

Even if a man could present himself without any sin, a faultless individual, he's only one person, and he can only be the substitute for one other person. In order for a death to remove sin, it must be an infinite death, a death of infinite value in order to save a multitude of people from a multitude of sins and remove the infinite weight of their guilt. That sacrifice, that offering must be of infinite value, and that requires a person with an eternal spirit. It requires a person with an infinite nature, a divine nature which gives the sacrifice infinite value, only Christ could do that because he is God and man, and his deity gives infinite value to his humanity and his offering.

Now that is the implication of Paul's description of Christ in these first verses. He is showing that Christ is good for our debt. He could pay it, and he did. The gospel is not an empty promise. The gospel is good news, but the good news of the gospel is not simply that Christ died for sinners. Doesn't end with his death.

He triumphed over the grave and the resurrection which is the seal of victory. It is the proof that God accepted his sacrifice. Verse 5, “Who was declared the Son of God by the resurrection from the dead according to the Spirit of Holiness.”

The resurrection was a declaration of victory. It is the proof that God has accepted his son's sacrifice on our behalf. If Christ had not been raised from the dead, we would not know that. In fact, Paul tells us in First Corinthians 15 that, if Christ does not raise from the dead, then we are without hope because it means that God did not accept his offering for us and no atonement has been made, and we're still on our sins, and we're lost forever.

The resurrection is the proof that God did accept his son's sacrifice for us. It's the declaration of victory who was declared the son of God, Paul says. Paul probably means something a little different from that. The word that is translated here, declared, means appointed or a word like that in other uses of the New Testament, and it probably has that meaning here.

Paul isn't saying that God appointed Christ to be the son of God. He was always the son of God, but at the resurrection, God appointed him to be the son of God with power. Christ was born into this world the son of God but not the son of God with power. Now, he had power, but his deity and his power were veiled in his flesh and his human nature with all of its weakness, and that's what was seen, and Isaiah, again, describes him as being that kind of person, that kind of servant, that kind of savior. He was as a root out of parched grounds.

There’s nothing attractive about a root. The tree may be lovely. It may be a gorgeous tree, but if its root is coming out of the ground, well, you don’t admire the root. There’s absolutely nothing beautiful about a root, particularly one that comes out of dry ground.

He says he’s without majesty. Well, people would not be attracted to him because of his physical appearance, because of his form. His form was not that of a king. It was that of a servant. Now there were glimpses of his majesty and his deity but not until the resurrection was it that he, in his humanity, was glorified.

So, in contrast with his birth, according to the flesh, as he says in verse three, and being the son of God in apparent weakness, he became the son of God in power at the resurrection. He is, Paul writes, Jesus Christ our Lord. No longer a servant, now the sovereign, now the glorified man, the God man.

That is the meaning of Paul’s statement that he makes next according to the Spirit of Holiness. That is often explained. It’s either referenced to the Holy Spirit, raising Christ from the dead or the Lord’s divine nature. Probably neither is correct. The Bible does speak of the spirit raising Christ but the Father as the one who did that, and it probably is not a reference to Christ divine nature since his deity wasn’t raised from the dead nor was he appointed Son of God according to his deity as we have been saying. He is eternally the son of God.

Most likely, Paul is describing the Lord’s human nature or his human spirit that governed his human life which is holy in contrast to the rest of humanity. It was completely devoted to God without sin, and he was glorified and vindicated in his sinless, human nature at the resurrection when he was exalted as king and invested with power and glory as Lord.

So the resurrection was, as one writer put it, the turning point for Christ. Before it, he existed as the son of God in weakness and humility. Through the resurrection, he became the son of God in power. He’s been exalted above all authorities and powers. Paul tell us, in Philippians 2, he is seated at the Father’s right hand, and, as Paul goes on to say in that chapter in verse 10, someday, every knee will bow to him. That is the Jesus of history, the real Jesus, the historical Jesus. He is God. Existed before history began and entered history as a man and he is the Lord of history, the savior of men.

All that we are, all that we have comes from him. Paul confesses that in verse 5. All that he was was from Christ through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the gentiles for his name’s sake.

Paul was an apostle through no merit of his own. He hadn't sought out apostleship. He didn't deserve apostleship. He was an apostle because of the sovereign grace of God in Jesus Christ, and he chose him to be an apostle in order to bring about the obedience of faith which means the obedience which consists in faith.

Faith is an act of obedience. It is an obedience of the heart, of the mind. It is commitment to Christ, and men are called to believe. All men are under the obligation to believe. We are to obey through faith, and Paul was called to preach among the gentiles, so that they would believe and be saved. The scope of the gospel and the breadth of Christ's work of salvation is seen in that expression all the gentiles. It's also for the Jews. The gospel is.

But Paul was called to be the apostle to the gentiles. That was his field of ministry. That's what he's describing here, but Paul preached to all kinds of people, Jews and gentiles, men and women, slave and free, all kinds of people because Christ is the savior of all kinds of people. He's the savior of the world.

Now he preached Christ in order to see people saved. That's not the only reason. He did it, he said, for his name's sake, meaning for the glory of Christ's name. That was the goal of Paul's preaching. That was the reason of Paul's preaching. He had a heart for the lost. He had a great concern for the salvation of Jew and gentile alike. He had to have that because Christ has a heart for the lost. He came into the world to seek and to save that which was lost. Christ is the good shepherd who describes himself as the one who leaves the sheep, leaves the 99 to go out and find the one lost sheep.

And so Paul, too, was a soul winner. He had the mind of Christ, and he crossed land and sea in order to preach the gospel and call men and women out of darkness and into the light of God. But above all things, above all things, Paul was jealous for God's glory. That's why he preached. That's the main reason he preached.

So the Book of Romans and Paul's explanation of the gospel is moving toward in his climatic statement at the end of chapter 11, what we read at the very beginning in the kind of summation of his theology. He writes, "For from him and through him and to him are all things to him be glory forever. Amen."

Now it's hard for us to understand that or maybe I should say hard for us to appreciate that because we are so man centered in our thinking. The glory of God is the chief end of man. It is the highest goal of our existence. Man is not the measure of all things as the Greek philosopher said. God is. His glory is. That is what justifies everything.

We may not understand why certain things happen in this world, but we can know this, that they are ultimately for the glory of God, and that will explain everything, and it is that glory of God that motivated Paul to work so tirelessly, so faithfully and to not compromise the truth. Glorifying God.

I think it is true that great works of God, great revivals – and we all want to see revival – the great works of God, great revivals occur when men recover the truths that glorify God and salvation. That’s when the spirit of God moves mightily over a land.

I’ve been reading about those revivals in the 18th Century, been reading a biography of the George Whitfield, the great English evangelist of that time, and through his ministry, a revival occurred in one area of Scotland. Many people turned to the Lord. Many people repented of their sin, of their, as they called it, carelessness and indifference towards spiritual things.

What is described is not their terrible sins, their gross immorality, no. It was their carelessness. It was their indifference towards spiritual things. Some of the ministers in Glasgow were wanting to know if this was genuine or not. So they went out and examined the situation to know if this was really a work of God or just emotionalism, and they found it to be genuine.

One of them wrote that the change among the people happened not so much from fear of punishment as from a sense of the dishonor done to God. I find that very unusual. We think of people turning for fear of burning. Now that’s reason to turn, and I don’t dismiss that. That’s a good reason to reassess one’s position. Know that hell awaits sinners for eternity unless they repent and turn to Jesus Christ but that’s not what was the motive behind their decision, their change. It was the sense that they had dishonored God because they realized what is most important of all is glorifying God, and they had not been doing that in their lives.

What would our lives be like if we understood that, if we lived not to satisfy ourselves? And I’m not talking about satisfying ourselves through obvious kind of sin but just living selfish lives, living to ourselves. If we understood that to be wrong and we understood the glory of God and lived to glorify God and honor Jesus Christ, that would be about a change in our lives, a lot more than our lives. We would be people who are completely different. We’d be full of energy. We’d be full of activity. We’d be full of purity. We’d be doing things the right way and doing things selflessly.

How do we gain that kind of motivation, that attitude? How do we have that? Well, I think we have it by having a true and a great vision of God, the one that the prophets and the apostles had, the one that Paul has given us here in these first verses of the Book of Romans. Paul preached to God alone by the glory. That’s how he and the apostles lived, and God did a great work in their day in the early church, many Jews were saved and many gentiles were saved out of paganism. The Romans were an example.

Paul writes, “Among whom you also are the call of Jesus Christ.” And what he means by that is, from among the gentiles, you are the call of Christ.” Probably he means, by that call to Christ, it’s not Christ who does the calling generally. It’s the father who has seen to be the one who calls us, but they were the called of Christ. The Church of Rome was largely a gentile church, hadn’t begun that way. We don’t know who established the church. It wasn’t Peter. It wasn’t Paul. Paul had never been to Rome, not when he wrote the letter to the Romans.

Most likely, it was Jews who had been in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. They had heard Peter preach. They had believed. They had returned home with the gospel. They spoke of Christ in the synagogues, and a small Jewish church began in the capital.

But, over the years, gentiles heard the gospel, and by the time Paul wrote to the church, it was largely made up of gentiles. However it happened, though, it was all of grace. It was all of God because Paul calls them the called of Jesus Christ, and he develops that calling in verse seven when he finally greets the Christians in Rome whom he describes as being beloved of God and called as saints. Those two go together. Because they are loved by God, they have been called by God.

The British commentator, C.E.B. Cranfield, make the observation that it is significant that Paul mentions not their love of God but that which is fundamental, God’s love for them, God’s choice of them. God loved them and so he chose them. This is God’s electing love, the love that Paul will later say that God had for Jacob but not for Esau. This is the reason that we, who are Christians, belong to Christ.

It’s not because we had a flash of insight at some point in our life and we said, yes, I believe that Jesus is the son of God. I believe that he is the savior. I understand these things, and I’m going to believe in him, and it’s not because God looked down upon us and saw all this goodness within us and all this love within us and he couldn’t help but love us. Not at all.

It's because, from all eternity, God loved us with an unconditional love. He loved us. He loves us. He will always love us. That's the love of God. Now and you say why does God love us and why would God elect us, and the answer's very simple.

He loves us because he does. That's the answer that Moses gave to Israel when he explained God's election of them in Deuteronomy 7:7-8. He loves you because he loves you. We can't go any deeper than that. We can't explain his love because there's nothing in us, but we know that he loves us. And we can rest in that, and we can rejoice in that and what greater comfort is there than knowing that you are beloved of God and chosen by him?

You are if you are a believer in Jesus Christ. The evidence of election is faith in Christ. God's election is his choosing people unconditionally. By choosing them to be saved through faith in Christ, you cannot separate faith from election.

And who is Christ? Paul has made that very clear. He is the son of God and the son of David. He is the God man. He is the one who offered up himself on the cross for the salvation of sinners, and all who believe in him are saved. God loves the lost. He invites them to come to him, to believe in his son, whoever they may be.

The moment you do that, you receive the forgiveness of sins and life everlasting. That's the gospel. It's not do great things. It's simply recognize that you are a sinner, recognize that Jesus is the savior, believe in him and receive from him the forgiveness of sins and life everlasting at the moment. The moment you believe you're saved, that's God's grace. May God help you to do that and help all of us, who have done that, to rejoice in what we have in him and to live lives to his honor and glory. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank you for your goodness and your grace. I thank you for this text of scripture, this monumental introduction. It is that. Tells us of who your son is, and in looking at him, we see you, and we learn about grace. We learn about the forgiveness of sin that is in your son. We learn how you treat sinners, provide a sacrifice for them. You save them through your son and bring them to yourself through faith.

So, Father, we pray that for ourselves. We pray that, if there is anyone here this morning who does not know Christ, has not believed in him, that you may move upon their hearts, enable them to see their loss condition and to believe in Jesus Christ, and we pray that all of us would gain a greater glimpse of him, of his glory and seek to live lives to his glory in all that we do, and we pray this in his name. Amen