

The Paradoxical Gospel

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Preacher: David Engelhardt

[0 : 0 0] I'm going to sit down. Can I sit? Is that all right? Who's going to stop me? Who's going to come up here and just hold me up? Nobody? We have a couple of guests this morning, and so I want to introduce them.

My brother-in-law Lee and his wife Julie are here from South Carolina. Charleston, Charleston, King's Church Charleston. King's Church Charleston was really based upon our relationship with these guys, and they're going great. We're going to launch here and pray for a building.

We're hunting for a building for King's Church Charleston right now. And so please keep that in your prayers. Where's Travis at? Is Travis around here? Travis is not a guest. There you are, Travis.

There's some humans in the back. I don't know if we knew more chairs back there, but find out. Manny, you okay? You want to stand? It's going to be that wild. You're going to be jumping up and down probably. You don't even want to sit. You want to stand.

Good. And then we have our friends in Metaxas here this morning, and I just want to plug your book real quick because I don't know if I've done it. And Eric's book, A Letter to the American Church, is selling insanely well, and it's because it's so important. It's because it's so prophetic.

[1 : 0 6] It's not because he's a great writer, although he is. It's because it's a prophetic book for the time we're in right now. And maybe we'll have you share about it soon, at some point soon, whenever we get a break in your calendar. That'd be great.

Other than that, let's jump into Romans. Who's excited to be in Romans this morning? I think it's round two for the worship team. Lord, we just thank you for your word again.

Romans, man, Lord, reveal the gospel to us like we haven't known before. In Jesus' name. Martin Luther said this, Romans is worthy not only that every Christian should know it word for word by heart, but occupy himself with it every day.

As the daily bread of the soul, it can never be read or pondered too much. And the more it is dealt with, the more precious it becomes and the better it tastes. I find this, that people that spend a lot of times in Romans have a freedom in their salvation.

There's a freedom in knowing that Jesus is taking care of you. And Jesus is the fountain and foundation of your salvation. If not for him, it doesn't happen. And he actually is the one who grabs a hold of your heart.

[2 : 1 1] And he is the one who saves you. And Romans is the gospel. Romans is about Jesus saving us. We spent the last two years with these kings, David and Samuel and Saul and these guys.

And it was good. We were talking about truth and order and justice, God's way, morality, all things that are fundamental and important for the believer. But the most fundamental thing is the gospel. The most central thing is the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It says here in verse 1, Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus called to be an apostle set apart for the gospel of God.

This thing that he was set apart for, the thing that he was particularly called to do was to bring the gospel. He was called to bring the gospel to the world.

And Paul is in a sense archetypal for us as believers that he was a dirty rascal. And he was called by Jesus and transformed by Jesus and given a brand new name.

[3 : 15] I like this part. It says called to be an apostle. And I wonder in the current church state, how many people are in positions of leadership that were never called.

You know, I just wonder how many people are just good at what they do. And so they climbed the ladder, but they were never called. And it says this, Paul, you know, servant of the Lord Jesus Christ, an apostle who was called by God.

And I think for, you know, for many of us, when we come into an atmosphere where you can sense the presence of the Holy Spirit and you hear the truth of God's word preached, you should feel the calling of God.

You should feel the pull of heaven on your destiny, changing the very trajectory of your life. And Bethany and I, you know, we were eight years ago, we were fasting and praying about moving to New York City.

I felt this internal call from God, like move to New York City, plant a church, be a lawyer. And everyone was like, well, that sounds really weird. And so when we moved, you know, we're like trying to figure out moving here.

[4 : 24] And I just, I remember the day I was, you know, we were a bunch of days into this fast. And somebody commented on my Instagram this morning, on one of my fasting pictures.

They're like, you look like 40 pounds lighter here. Now you're fat. And I was like, thank you. Thank you. That's just what I need to hear on a Sunday morning. Thank you. I appreciate that. Appreciate you analyzing my BMI.

That's really helpful. Right before I stand up in front of a bunch of people. Great. Wonderful. I'm going to wear a turtleneck. Bethany and I were fasting and praying.

And then, you know, we're just like, God, you need to confirm the calling. It needs to be not just a great idea. I had this idea when I was a kid that I wanted to be a fireman.

Great. You know, big deal. You need the calling of God on your life. You need to be called to God. And even wherever you're at in your life, whether it's ministry or you're a teacher or you like, believers are supposed to be led by the calling of God.

[5 : 27] And we have fundamentals. We have certain fundamentals that we have as kind of the big guardrails of our life. Absolutely. But inside of that system of highways, we should be being, we should be pulled by the call of God.

And this is what Paul is doing here. He's saying the call of God, as I'm about to go into Romans and talk to you about all this stuff, but the directive of my life is established by the call of God.

Bethany and I are fasting and praying. And I'm like, God, please give me \$5,000 tomorrow because I'm poor and I need money. And then the next day, many of you know the story. We got a call from a family member that said, hey, we know you wanted to start a law practice.

Here's five grand. And then Bethany said, that was too little. We should have asked for double that. And I was like, you know, atta girl. And then they called back. And the next day, and they said, we changed our mind. We feel like we're supposed to give you \$10,000.

And then like we have this internal sense of God, but then we have this external stamp of God's approval. And it's like, yes, it's the calling of God. And it's going to be hard. And it doesn't mean it's going to be like just a water slide.

[6 : 32] But it's the calling of God, and you can't reject it. Like you can do no other once you recognize the calling of God. And that's how Paul is entering into here this book of Romans.

He says, this Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for God. You know, in America in 2022, and I don't know if it's just like an American trait that we don't like to be servants of anyone.

Like we're not going to be the servants of King George or ain't nobody, you know. Like we have this national ethos of rebellion. That's kind of part of our DNA as a nation. Like we're getting rid of your systems.

We're doing our own whole thing. And there's something about the American people. It's like we don't want to be anyone's servant. We don't want to be anybody's slave. That word in the Greek can be translated either. And it's like we don't even want to be anybody's employee.

I was thinking about the Twitter explosion. And by the grace of God, Donald Trump is back on Twitter. But on the Twitter explosion, I was seeing like these employees like mocking Elon Musk.

[7 : 41] And I was like, are you out of your mind? And you're going to get fired. And they all got fired. And then they were upset about it. And I was like, what are you upset for? And they're like, we're Americans. We want to hate our boss and still be employed.

We're rebels. Don't you understand? But we don't want to be servants or slaves of anyone at all. And Paul, in his calling by Christ Jesus, in his calling, he's saying, I am a servant first and foremost.

I am a slave of Christ. And I have an express calling inside of that. But fundamentally, I do what he tells me to do. Matthew 23, 11, 11 says this. The greatest among you will be your servant.

For those who exalt themselves will be humbled. And those who humble themselves will be exalted. The person that serves the most people is exalted.

It's the rule of the universe. Think about it oftentimes with Amazon. How many people use Amazon here? I think everybody, right?

[8 : 45] We all use Amazon because it helps our life. And guess what happens to the owner of Amazon? He gets to be rich. Even if he has horrible political ideas, he gets to be rich still. Even if he's going to donate all his money to horrible causes, he's going to be rich still.

Because he's helping all of us. And the more people you serve, the more you get exalted. And Paul is serving Jesus, the master, who came to be a servant.

He's following his lead. And so even his declarative statement that I'm a servant, he's saying, I'm being like Jesus. I'm following his pattern. And I was with, I was on a plane with a couple of famous people.

And the guy next to me wasn't famous at all. He was an employee of a former president of the United States. And he had like this, I said to the first service, he had this sense of gravitas about him.

Like, I'm the man. And I'm connected to the right people. And I'm in all of the inside conversations that you plebeians can never hear. You know, it's like, I know what's going to happen.

[9 : 51] I know about the, I know about world economics. I know about global stuff because I'm in all the cool meetings. And I have all the financial security I need because I'm like, business is hitched to this guy's business.

And I'm just like, I don't care if you've never heard of me. I don't care if you never hear of me. I don't care if I'm famous or not famous. I'm hitched to the right employee, employer.

He's a servant of a guy. And I just thought, I was thinking about that this morning as I was prepping this message. And I was thinking, how many Christians decide I'm not going to be a servant of Christ? I'm not going to be a slave of Christ.

I'll just figure it out on my own. And there's not only not a sense of gravitas about them, not only are they not on the inside conversations with God, there's an incredible sense of insecurity.

Like, I have to run the ship myself. Like, I'm in charge of the whole show. When you're the slave of a master, he takes care of everything. When he's a good master, it's a good situation.

[10 : 48] And Paul is saying, if you are like me, you'd be a servant of Christ. It changes everything. It changes your identity. Your identity is not in you. Your identity is in your employer.

Your identity is in your master. It's good. Like, all these, in New York, we have this, we're like grinding for the stage and for fame and for all this stuff.

You know, we work in finance and we want to be recognized by our bosses or whatever it is. And you can live without that pressure if you have the right master. You can live without that desperation if you're the right servant.

Amen? That word servant of the Lord is very rarely used in the scripture in the Old Testament. It's a term of very high esteem.

We see it only used of Moses and David in the Old Testament. Joshua chapter 14, verse 7. Joshua says this. I was 40 years old when Moses, the servant of the Lord, sent me from Kadesh Barnea to explore the land.

[11 : 52] And then he says, I did what the servant of the Lord told me to do. And it was just a bounty. Psalm 18, verse 1. It says, a psalm of David, the servant of the Lord who addressed the words of the song of the Lord on the day when the Lord delivered him from the hand of his enemies and from the hand of Saul.

Chapter 18, verse 1. I love you, O Lord, my strength. When you're the servant of God as your master, he rescues you. He saves you.

You don't have to figure it all out on your own. Amen? Amen? I love the song, You Gotta Serve Somebody by Bob Dylan. Who knows this song?

You guys do. Because it's like, this is what it is. It's like, you know, Kanye came out with Jesus as Lord. It's like that album, but with Bob Dylan in the 70s. Like, that's kind of what it is. And the lyrical content is so much better, you know?

And, you know, I'm not, no Kanye comments. I'll get arrested. But if you haven't heard that album, please do. But he just says, it may be the devil and it may be the Lord, but you've got to serve somebody.

[12 : 56] And we go through our lives serving ourselves. And we think we're serving ourselves, but ultimately we're serving the enemy. Because that was his whole intention from the garden on, right? He's like, hey, serve yourself this apple slice.

It's not an apple. We don't know what kind of fruit it is, but you get the point. Serve yourself and it's going to be awesome. And it's ultimately serving the dictates of the devil. And it brings death and hell and destruction and chaos into our lives.

Because we're serving someone. Jesus said, you can only serve one master. Amen? Okay. Karl Barth said, oh, let me hit this point real quick. So this whole thing where Paul is talking about servanthood or being a slave is about obedience.

It's about action. It's about my life, what I do with it, my calling, my behavior toward others because of the directive of the master.

And so it says, the commentaries say this is one of the primary themes of the book of Romans. It's faith, belief, trusting Jesus as our Savior and our actions that are necessarily connected to that.

[14 : 10] Karl Barth says that obedience and faith is like thunder and lightning. That lightning strikes and the sound of the thunder is right upon it.

The closer you are to the lightning, the louder the thunder is. The more that faith is alive and living inside of you, the more you're obedient to Christ.

And the opposite of that is true. The less that you have real and genuine faith, the less obedient you are. The less you truly believe that there's a heaven and actually there's a hell.

You know what I mean? Like if I'm just like, I like the Jesus idea, it's cool. I mean, hopefully like I said a prayer, hopefully this, like we figure this out at the end. Like you're not going to obey.

You're going to do whatever you want. But if you believe in faith that this is real and God came in the flesh and came down to earth and died for us for our eternal destinies, your behavior must necessarily change.

[15 : 09] Bonhoeffer says, I'm not going to read the whole quote, but he says it a similar way. He says, basically, like if we just believe the faith side, he says we call that cheap grace, which is another word for damnation.

And he says, if we rely just on works, he says the second half stands alone. The believer exposed to the danger of salvation through works is another word for damnation. We can't find our belief system on, or we can't find our salvation upon what we do, our works, because we don't save ourselves.

It's Jesus who saves us. But then once he saves us, he brings us into this family. And in the family, there's rules. And this is one of the paradoxes of the book of Romans.

And Romans is all about paradoxes. It's about Paul, who is an evil bad guy, who is paradoxically brought into the kingdom to declare the beauty of God's goodness and gospel to the world.

It's about the paradox of believing and acting. It's about the paradox of a Jewish church and a Gentile church working together and being unified in Christ.

[16 : 25] It's about the paradox of the spirit of Jesus living inside of the church. It's one of the reasons that we believe in the Holy Spirit, that we rely on the Holy Spirit, that we ask him to interact with us.

Paul's going to say later in Ephesians, in the fifth chapter, he's going to say the union of the spirit of Christ inside of the believer, pulsing and living is one of the most phenomenal and mysterious things that we have.

And it's paradoxical. How can Jesus, who's in heaven, his spirit, how can it indwell us? It's one of these things that Paul is going to join together in the person of Christ. Is this good?

Okay, so this is the story. This book was written in 57 AD. And in 49 AD, Claudius had kicked out all the Jews out of Rome.

There was an argument about an individual named Christus, and we know that's Christ. But in the writings of Claudius, it says, this is the reason I'm kicking all the Jews out of Rome, because they keep fighting with each other about this guy Christus.

[17 : 27] I don't really know what this is about. Get him out of here. And so the Roman church that started primarily as a Jewish church with some Gentile believers, in this transition in 49 AD, all the Jews are kicked out, and it's a holy Gentile church.

And over the next seven years, it's growing significantly. The grace of God is on them. It's awesome. They have momentum. But what happens about five years in, so about, this is written in 57 AD, so about 55 AD, the Jewish believers start to come back to the church.

And over the next two years, they're coming back to the church. This is how Paul is able to identify individual believers later in the book and say, hey, say hi to this guy for me. Say hi to this guy.

Because he knows these Jewish believers that are integrating back into the church. But there's all kinds of problems, because the Jewish people are bringing back these customs and these beliefs, certain foods they won't eat, certain systems that work for their culture that aren't about the kingdom of heaven, and aren't about Jesus as the all-sufficient sacrifice for us.

And the Gentile believers, they have some things they do, and some of them are offensive. And Paul's going to teach these two disparate communities to come together in the person of Christ as our Lord and Savior, as the hero of the universe.

[18 : 50] No culture is the hero. I want to shoot myself in the head every time I hear about, like, some new cultural day. It's like, oh, new cultural day. Yay, new cultural.

I was on a ministry page today, and it was like, the Asian voices. And I'm like, what about just the Jesus voices? Like, what if I don't care what your background is or your culture is? From a kingdom perspective, it's Jesus that unifies us.

It's Jesus that sanctifies us. And it's Jesus that directs our behavior. Like, you want to be super into sauerkraut? Fine. Like, I hate sauerkraut.

You want to have sauerkraut day, and I'm supposed to feel, you know, a certain feeling for you? Okay, well, like, do that at your house. Yes. The church is about Jesus being king. Not playing dress up here.

We're playing dress down and put on Christ. Let's put that on the Instagram. Okay. Okay, so, so, so this is one, these are the things we're going to hit as we go through this.

[19 : 54] Paul is reestablishing the primary doctrine of the gospel. One, that's the first thing he's doing. Two, he's expounding upon the union of Christ and his people. Three, he's answering who are now the people of God.

And four, he's directing the reconciliation between the Hebrew Christians and the Gentile Christians. He's taking these two disparate things on each level, and he's putting them together.

They're finding their place in Christ. And so, back to verse one. Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle set apart for the gospel of God.

So, that word apostle, that means sent one, and he is affirmed by the church, and he's sent by the church to plant churches. And that's really what an apostle does in the first century.

They plant churches, and they oversee churches. And we see that in a lot of Paul's writings, church that he was with or he planted. He's coming back and saying, hey, you have some things. I need to correct some things here.

[20 : 54] And they're sent out to oversee, to plant, to bring up, and to redirect, really. And so, he's an apostle. He's a sent one. He's a part of the Jerusalem Council.

We see that in Acts chapter 15. He's locked down with the other disciples, the major leaders of the first century church. So, Paul, if you don't know this, and if you're new to the community, Paul had a name before this.

His name was Saul. And I said this is archetypical of the Christian journey, that when we meet Christ, he gives us a whole new identity. We don't keep our old identity.

We don't keep our old ways. We don't keep our own name in that sense. But God reorders our entire life, top to bottom, even to the most fundamental thing is what we're named.

And God does this to this guy named Saul. And Saul is a murderous, potentially rich, super smart valedictorian.

[21 : 55] A guy that we mostly would not like, right? Especially the murder part. Acts chapter 9, verses 1 through 4. Meanwhile, Saul, which is Paul's previous name, Saul was breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples.

He went to the high priest, and he asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus. That's why he's on the road to Damascus. He's going to go to the synagogues, which are the churches of that time, so that if he found any there who belonged to the way, which is the way of Christ, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.

As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say, Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?

And he said, who are you, my Lord? And Jesus responds, I'm Jesus Christ, whom you are persecuting. See, if you remember, Paul doesn't actually persecute Jesus himself. Paul just partook in Acts chapter 7 in stoning Stephen to death.

And because he's persecuting the church, he's persecuting Christ himself. Could it be when we have governmental mandates and dictates against the church, they're against Christ himself?

[23 : 14] Could it be that we've forgotten this truth? That Paul, who is persecuting the church, Jesus said, you're persecuting me. This is my body.

This is the body of Christ. This is the expression of Christ on the earth. And she should be protected. Which is why we believe in engaging in the public sphere.

To protect the body of Christ. So that we can exercise our religious liberty. So we can do what Jesus has asked us to do. Amen?

Amen? And so Paul sees this incredibly bright light. This is cool. It says in both Acts chapter 22 and chapter 26, it says that Paul got knocked down.

Now, Caravaggio has this painting of Paul and the horse and all this kind of stuff. There's no horse on the road. It actually says in Acts 9 that his compatriots were standing around him.

[24 : 12] But here it says in 22 and 26, it was noon when the light shone around him brighter than the sun shining around me. That even in the full daylight, the light of Jesus, the power of Jesus was so bright it diminished the sun itself.

And that blast of Jesus' light, that blast of the person of Jesus into the life of Paul blinded him. And so the way he saw, the things that he was pursuing, all of that stuff was immediately, he was blind.

And Jesus regenerated his sight inside of Christ. He realized he'd been chasing the wrong things. And I was just thinking, you know, about bad guys. Because Saul is a bad guy.

You know, it says in verse 9, like he's breathing murderous threats. He wants to murder the Christians. And God chose him to be a light to all the Gentiles.

And I think about how many people in our day and age that are literally breathing murderous threats against the Christians, that God wants to knock down blind and then give them their sight back.

[25 : 18] I think part of the problem is that pastors don't want to knock anyone down anymore. They just want to give people kisses on the cheek. And sometimes Jesus knocks people down and that actually gives them a reorientation to the world.

And Jesus is like, bro, you're murdering. You're attacking my body. And Paul becomes this transformed zealot for Jesus.

Verse 2, it says this, And so this is important because Paul is going to show that Jesus had promised these things from the beginning.

That the Father had been planning this entire thing. We're not some flash in the pan. This is not some new cult. You're not like the cool guys and we're throwing out all the rest. This is a part of God's strategic plan for the whole world.

Isaiah 55, 3, 6 through 9, We all like sheep have gone astray. Each of us have turned on our own way and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

[26 : 20] He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth. He was led like a lamb to the slaughter and as sheep before its shearers is silent. So he did not open his mouth.

God had planned Jesus' sacrifice for us since the beginning. Verse 8, By oppression and judgment he was taken away, yet who of his generation protested?

He was cut off from the land of the living. For the transgression of my people he was punished. This is the gospel. This is the prophecy of the gospel. Before it ever came into the world, before Jesus ever in the flesh took a step, God was saying, This has been my plan for redemption for all people.

Verse 9, He was assigned a grave with the wicked and with the rich in his death. Though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth. The prophecy is so specific here in verse 9.

Look at this. It says, He was assigned a grave with the wicked. He was set between the wicked in the cross, and with rich men in his death. He was laid in the tomb of a rich man, Joseph of Arimathea.

[27 : 28] The prophecy is fulfilled to the very specific point. And what Paul is saying is that this has been a part of God's express and specific plan, and actually moves through the soil of Judaism, and the promise that God had given those people.

And now we get to be the beneficiaries of it. And this conflict that was happening between Gentiles and Jews, where the Gentiles were like, Well, just get rid of this whole thing. This means nothing. Paul's like, No, it does mean something.

It's powerful. And then the Jews were like, This means everything. Paul's like, No, it doesn't mean everything. Jesus means everything. And he's going to do that through this book. Verse 3, Concerning his son who was descended from David according to the flesh, for 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.

This is another one of those paradoxes. And in this paradox, Paul is saying he came in the flesh. He was a part of this lineage of faith that came through the Jewish people. Like, this is not something just to toss out.

It's not like office rubbish. This is important stuff. But also, he's God. And he's above all that. And he was seated at the right hand of the Father. And he became, this word became actually is, the scholars say it means declared.

[28 : 48] And that after Jesus died and was resurrected, he was declared the savior of the world, the ruler of the universe, the son of God. And Douglas Moo, a scholar, says this.

It says, this means that what Jesus did, the act gave him the new power to dispense salvation to all those who would believe in him.

And when I read that, I was struck with that phrase, that Jesus can dispense power to all those who believe, the power of salvation.

And I don't know about you, but oftentimes I live a life where I'm like, am I doing it right? Am I doing it right? Am I doing it right? Am I doing it right? Am I doing it right? Am I doing it right? And there's some okay with that.

There's some probably OCD as well in that. But it's not me who dispenses the power of salvation. That's a problem. And we just read Bonhoeffer says, if it's you that dispenses the power of salvation, that's a road to damnation.

[29 : 49] Romans 1.16, for I am not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes.

Worship team, you can come up. I want to share this last scripture here. Verse 7. It says this, to all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints, grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

All those, we can just read it like this, to all those in New York City who are loved by God and are called to be saints. I love that word because that word called, it means that they're not saints yet.

And in some sense, we're saved already, but in another sense, we're being saved. And in the ultimate sense, we will be saved and we will be joined with God and we will have run our race.

And it's in that similar sense that we are called to be saints. That initially there was this sainthood that was almost like granted to us through Christ. And we're walking out this destiny where we're saying, God, I want to fulfill all that you've given me.

[31 : 12] And then there's an ultimate sense that the Lord Father wants to say to each one of us, well done, my good and faithful servant. And this is this last part that really shows the heart of God.

It says, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Every single Pauline epistle begins with this phrase. They call it the prescript.

And Paul starts his prescript every time to the believer, to those who love Jesus and are called according to his purpose.

He says, grace to you and peace to you. I'm a believer and I need to hear that. I need to hear the first thing that God's saying to me when he approaches me is grace to you and peace to you.

Like we're going to get to the stuff. We're going to like work out the hitch in your step. We're going to figure out those issues. We're going to get those in line. But first of all, to the saint, the future saint, grace to you and peace to you.

[32 : 23] And as we study this book, as we study the Holy Spirit speaking through Paul, my desire is that we would be filled with the grace of God and the peace of God.

that we would, like inside of us, more of us would want to hold on to Christ for his sufficiency, for his salvation, for his grace and peace.

So Lord, we thank you this morning that you sent your son Jesus to save us from our sin, to save us from a broken world.

To show us how to see rightly. Release to the saints this morning, God, grace and peace for the journey.

In Jesus' name, amen. Just stand with me, church.