

Romans 1:1-8

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[0 : 00] So, do you have a piece of paper in front of you today?

This is repeated over our heads here, Romans chapter 1. Here are some, yet again, in our culture it's such a common thing, words to be read.

But, just by way of introduction, words, words read, reading, may be defined variously, as we all know.

How about just off the top of one's head, so to speak, persistence in attention. And persistence in attention, sort of reading, therefore, is like a science, a way of knowing, really.

There are various ways of knowing, aren't there, because different objects of inquiry demand different unique approaches. The Bible, containing the words that are in front of us today, what an object we have here, are received in the church.

[1 : 07] By the believer, as God's presence, really. Again, what an object, if you believe that, what an object of inquiry.

As a gift from God. That's what's there on that overhead. A gift from God, which in principle, we hear in the scriptures, God expects us, and we will know this to be true, when they're received properly, they'll be received in joy.

There's a gift of joy in front of us today. So belief is here called to attention, to persistent attention. Hear, listen, O my people, and I will speak.

You hear that in the scriptures, don't you? And today we obey the apostle himself, who says to Timothy, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine, so that we might persist in attention, therefore, to God's presence.

His speaking presence is in front of us today. Very strange, isn't it? Just a little footnote here. Again, this is by way of introduction.

[2 : 26] We may safely, and without more ado, put aside the bluster of deconstructionists. They're called blusters, a word that Nicholas Walterstorff uses of them.

They deny presence and claim that we're really just trapped in interpretation. A lot of people, even a lot of Christian teachers and preachers who are in, quote, the liberal tradition, without telling you that they're now giving you some post-modernist deconstruction doctrine, in fact, do.

They say, here's my interpretation. What's yours? There's millions of them. We're lost. We're trapped in a house of interpretation. But what is present is the interpreted, which we are called upon by our God to seek out.

There is presence, therefore. That's why Walter Storff, as a Christian who's also a professional philosophy, very wisely just calls it bluster. It really doesn't add up to anything. Our conviction of God's presence here stands, therefore.

It cannot be assumed as impossible just a priori. Philosophical footnote ended. There you have it. Paul's letter to the Romans, as well, as readers of Scripture, we want to attempt to be somewhat thorough.

[3 : 52] This is more about the object that we're intending to here today. Again, Paul's letter to the Romans is part of the canon, isn't it? Part of Holy Scripture.

So what? Well, that means that obedient reading of Scripture is always, this is my phrase, and in the discussion time you can tell me if this can be fine-tuned or bettered, I'm sure it may be.

The reading of Scripture is always more than Paul, but never less than Paul. And the same for the Gospels, each, all, and several.

The same for John, for James, for Peter, and all of them. Always more than each separately, but never less than them. I was thinking about this this morning, just in passing, when we said at the 730 communion service, as we always do when we use the prayer book, the words of comfort that

precede our reception of the sacrament.

Hear the comfortable words of Jesus our Savior. Hear the comfortable words of Paul. Hear the comfortable words of John. There's variation in Scripture. Good reading, divine reading, as it was known in the Middle Ages, therefore involves waking, a waking for more.

[5 : 08] And the variousness of the Scripture serves this, invites this even. You'll recall that Peter, the second Peter, the epistle, calls Paul our beloved brother.

I think that should always be remembered. Another part of the canon talks about Paul, calls him beloved. Christians should, I think, learn to love Paul, even if you find him difficult.

He is our beloved brother. And adds, doesn't it, second Peter, that his writings contain some things difficult to understand, says second, second epistle of Peter, things which the ungodly twist.

Isn't that why in second Timothy, we hear Paul writing to Timothy, consider what I say, and the Lord give you understanding in all things.

So Paul prays to a colleague in the Gospel, that he might seek the Lord in understanding what he says to him.

[6 : 15] So just before we look at Romans chapter 1, the first eight verses, with that word ringing in our ears, consider what I say, and the Lord give you understanding in all things.

May I pray that for us as a prayer. So let's pray. Lord, help us to consider what your apostle says today.

Our beloved brother Paul. Help us again to consider what he says. And Lord, give us understanding in all of these things.

We ask it in Christ's name. Amen. Paul, you have this in front of you. Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures.

The gospel concerning his son, who was descended from David according to the flesh, and designated son of God in power according to the spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord.

[7 : 19] Through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith. For the sake of his name among all the nations, including yourselves, who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.

To all God's beloved in Rome who are called to be saints. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul begins his magisterial letter to the Romans. Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ. Or, we could gloss this a bit.

Paul, living a life characterized by obedience. This reads, if we gloss it that way, reads servants as one who does what he is told.

Is that how you read it? I think I do, largely. I take it as such that that is present. Paul, a servant. One who does what he is told.

[8 : 21] But, who knows? Perhaps it is a minor note here, in fact. Paul, a servant. Maybe it should be read, or maybe it resonates with something like, a servant like David.

You know, kingly David. A servant as ambassador. Possessing attention demanding authority. Emphasis here falls on the servant of.

The servant of Jesus Christ. I come to you with great authority. Which is there? Is there a minor note, major note there? I don't know. I think both are there.

This is how Paul wants to be known. A servant of Jesus Christ.

What do we know of Paul? Taking a step back here. Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ. For instance, the presence in Paul, the nature, if present, of what we call an introspective conscience, is discussed by Paulinus.

[9 : 28] To the point. To go right to the point of this discussion. What the inquiry really comes down to is this. And it's an historical inquiry at this point.

Was Luther a profound and accurate reader of the heart of Paul's writings? Or is there a significant distortion in Luther's reading of Paul, which has had a major impact on how we read Paul?

Was it in fact generated by Luther's particular late medieval setting? Paul has shaped the world because, hasn't he?

Because he shaped Augustine. He shaped Pascal and the Jansenists. Luther, of course, was mightily shaped by Paul. Dostoevsky, the great novelist.

And of late, if you don't know this, some very strange post-modernist writings, like Alain Badiou, I think he pronounced his name, and Slavoj Zizek.

[10:28] These are post-modernists, anything but Christian writers, who use Pauline themes explicitly all the time. Did Paul really know the torment of a conscience under judgment?

Did he? I think he did, but it's questioned in the literature. I think, again, he did. But I think he knew, as the Reformed tradition certainly discerns, that mere conviction regarding sin produces great discomfort, but it's not infallibly a saving work of the Spirit.

It's not indicate a saving work of the Spirit. Paul knows the perversity of the human heart, doesn't he? Though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, he says, I gain nothing.

Paul knew that a person could be deeply committed to something, but it adds up to nothing. That's interesting stuff about Paul. Paul, this man, these words we're going to analyze now, he's, of course, Paul the Pharisee.

There's Paul the Pharisee, and in the 16th century, Luther the monk. Paul finding God as a justifier of the ungodly, which he explicitly talks about in Romans, and Luther reading, and as he attends carefully to this theme, seeing heaven's gates opening, and finding in Paul's letter to the Romans the stuff of joy.

[11:54] Paul found joy in Jesus Christ, didn't he? That's what we can say for sure. And that's the key to reading Paul.

So keep in mind that we don't know, we know lots about Paul, and yet we don't know lots about Paul in some ways. He's part of the canon. Paul says that he's called to be an apostle, or to choose to be an apostle, is a complete misapprehension.

No one steps forward and says, I will be an apostle. Paul says, no, I am called to be an apostle. He puts himself in the passive here.

I have been called to be an apostle. I'm a servant of Jesus Christ, know me that way. And I'm called by God to be an apostle. Called by another.

By definition, one is called by another. Called reappears in Romans, doesn't it? Of course, even here. Called to be saints.

[12:59] We're in the same boat as Paul here, aren't we? You didn't decide to be a saint. You were called to be one. But Olaf next week is going to make all that perfectly clear for us.

That theme again, those God knew he called in Romans 8. Again, Paul never forgets this theme of being called. To be a Christian is to find yourself believing things.

Do you agree with this? To be a Christian is to find yourself believing things you never expected to believe. In that sense, to that extent, our faith is alienating.

We are alienated from ourselves. And we're supposed to be. Grace turns things around. Changes us. In that sense again, our faith is alienating.

We believe what Paul teaches. Do you agree with this? We believe what Paul teaches because we are so called to believe what he teaches.

[14:05] Whether or not you like what Paul teaches isn't to the point, right? We're all agreed on that. What Paul teaches, we are to believe. He was called to be an apostle.

We are called to be saints. We are called to believe what this apostle teaches. Paul was alienated in the world by the gospel, wasn't he?

Paul, a faithful Jew. We know that about Paul. Intense. He was a Pharisee. We know he was brilliant. We surmise on strong evidence that he was young when he became a Christian.

He had the world before him. And then he becomes a traveling itinerant person without hold, alienated from his own people, often suffering and held in contempt.

Why? Because he had been called into Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ, for Paul, was his new world.

[15:10] And we can expect, and the apostle teaches this, to be alienated from whom we were as called to be saints and believing things you never expected to believe and probably living a life in some measure in suffering because you responded to the call.

Paul believes Jesus Christ put you into and is a new world. And more of this, call it to be an apostle. An apostle is someone, correct me if I'm wrong, taught what to teach.

The church teaches what the apostles taught, what they teach. When this surfaces quite explicitly in Paul's writing, I find it always very surprising.

He doesn't stop and spell this out. Remember when he was instructing the difficult, I was going to say the cyperous Corinthians, but I'm not sure you should say that word before 10 o'clock in the

morning.

The difficult Corinthians, when he was talking to them about the Lord's Supper, he says, I received from the Lord. When he teaches them about the Lord's Supper, he says, I received from the Lord. [16:29] Paul teaches what he received. 1 Corinthians 15 again makes that very clear, doesn't it? Set apart for the gospel, he says here, doesn't he? This is obvious enough.

No one, we're told in Scripture, can serve two masses. Paul says, I'm set apart for the gospel. I'm a man under authority. And the centurion, who said that to the amazed Jesus, remember he said, no soldier on duty may also serve a civilian authority.

And Paul says exactly that to Timothy. Had the centurion moment in the gospel memory shaped a military metaphor into common use?

I don't know. But Paul says, set apart in service to the gift of a new world who is Jesus Christ. And now we get to the heart of this passage. Usually Paul will now say in his letters, doesn't he, grace and peace to all of you at Philippi, grace and peace to you at Colossae, at Thessalonica, etc. but not here in his letter to the Romans. Here, we have indeed a pracy of the gospel. And as such, it gives us the essential, an essential set of sound words to hold on to, to remember as we live in the gospel which Paul now announces.

[18:01] Set apart, Paul says here, for the gospel of God. Now Paul will define for us in the simplest terms the gospel.

Here again is an overture. Things mentioned now will return later in Paul's letter to the Romans. Romans may be read as a series of short theological essays and as such with great profit, I'm sure, but it's also fundamentally a kind of symphony of meaning.

And it should be read at the end of the day as a whole. This gospel of God, this good news. What does Paul say here about the gospel at its heart?

Starting at verse 3. He says there, have a look at it, promised by God through the prophets, through his prophets, in the holy scriptures.

Just stop and think about that. Paul says to the Roman church, the gospel, promised by God through the prophets, in the holy scriptures.

[19:20] I just love the proverb. I should have looked up the reference, but in the authorized version it reads, a word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver.

I love that. Have you ever had someone just say a word to you that was just the right thing, what you needed to hear, that comforted you, that strengthened you, that instructed you crucially?

A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver. Jesus arrives, the word of the Father, Jesus arrives in the world, and he arrives in a setting, a setting prepared.

Israel, we might call it theological Israel written, is a promise waiting to be filled. Think of the story of Israel as a promise waiting to be fulfilled.

This is elemental, non-negotiable Israel faith. which is, of course, our faith. God said to Abraham, through you, I will bless the nations.

[20:32] Through you, I will bless the world. Romans 4, Abraham is called by Paul, as he writes to Gentiles and to Jews, Abraham, our father.

Paul is very much aware of this as he writes to a group of believers in Rome, of all places. pagan, a Gentile Roman.

Paul had not been to see these believers, but he knows they confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. It's as if Paul is saying to them, this promise, before your very eyes, is being fulfilled.

Through you, God said to Abraham, I will bless the nations. Christians. Now there's a group of believers in Rome, Jew and Gentile, confessing that Jesus Christ, Israel's Messiah, is Lord.

We here together today, Paul would say, are proof that God is fulfilling the gospel message to the world. You are the proof of the gospel. The promise was, of course, rich and varied and took different forms.

[21:46] It is present, says this, Tracy, through the prophets. Through the prophets. This gospel promise. What is Paul thinking about here?

In the discussion time, you can fill this in for me. What is Paul thinking about as he talks about the gospel came to us through the prophets? Was he thinking about Isaiah and the suffering servant sequence?

It may have been. Or is he thinking of pictures or visions of Israel being justified before the Father? The kind of picture you find in Zechariah 3, implied in Psalm 2, spoken about in Psalm 16.

Paul thinks that the prophets preached the gospel. at least he thinks of Abraham and David. We'll talk about this a bit two weeks from today. Paul says explicitly that Abraham and David are preachers of the gospel in chapter 4. The gospel is faith.

[22 : 59] Abraham, the sublime man of faith. The gospel is forgiveness. forgiveness. David is almost a paradigm picture of the vicious sinner who is surprised by forgiveness.

These two preach the gospel, Paul says, in Romans. And here he announces it. The gospel, again, promised by God through the prophets in the Holy Scriptures.

In the Holy Scriptures defines both by God and through the prophets.

God is always active in the world, making promises, sending out preachers, and he always accompanies it with Scripture. He makes sure it's remembered in a divine manner.

To call writings holy, correct me if I'm wrong, I find that quite strange the more I think about it, quite wondrous. The Holy Scriptures.

[24 : 07] It has come to almost seem like a passing traditional compliment. But surely that's wrong. If not, what do we make of this description of Scripture as holy?

If the Scriptures are holy, they are in a measure as well, I take it. set apart. Perhaps set apart for holy remembering.

I don't know. I'd like to hear that discussed in our discussion time today. The Scriptures are set apart for holy remembering.

They're not just like any other book. Our reading of them should be kind of unique. church. This is extremely important in our time, it seems to me.

This emphasis on the gospel comes to us through the prophets, in the scriptures, promised by God.

[25 : 08] After all, in our time, there are many Jesuses out there. There's a plethora of Jesuses.

The other day, I just sort of walked into a bookstore and it just hit me again.

A whole slew of books about Jesus. In prominent, secular, I take it they're selling well, these books in these bookstores. There's a Gnostic Jesus.

A Jesus completely indifferent to historical questions. A Jesus who probably didn't exist and whose followers received all their great ideas from Egyptian sources.

A Jesus who very much existed and ended up with a merry friend in the south of France. These scholars should get together, get their act together. A drug cult Jesus used to be very famous in the world.

A Jesus who didn't die on the cross and was resuscitated, etc, etc, etc. There's a slew of Jesuses up there. But Paul, the apostle, really instructs us here.

[26 : 20] The witness of the apostles is that the only Jesus to be known is this Jesus. He was promised by God through prophets and remembered better anticipated in the Holy Scripture.

Is that the Jesus that you really believe in? We could ask ourselves that today. This is the apostles telling us they knew that other Jesuses wrote there in their time.

Paul says to the church at Rome, the gospel I'm telling you, this gospel concerning the Son of God, Jesus, was promised by God, it was done through prophets, and it's written in the scriptures.

This is the Jesus that we believe in, according to the prophets. That's the Jesus that we should always listen for. The gospel, we could dare to say, didn't start with Jesus.

It's in the Israel setting. These other Jesuses that are prominent today, the apostles know nothing about that Jesus. Concerning, our passage continues, concerning, up in verse 3, concerning his Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

[27 : 45] Uniquely, just to unfold this passage just a little bit more, uniquely, Jesus claims knowledge of his Father. No one knows the Father, but the Son, says Matthew, the Jesus in Matthew's gospel, chapter 11.

No one knows the Father, but the Son. And then he says, and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. And then again, in Romans chapter 8, it is the Spirit of Christ which teaches us to say, Abba, Father.

It is interesting, better, it is a delight, more to be desired than gold, to read across the canon that we referred to earlier. Matthew's Jesus says that, says this, no one knows the Father but the Son.

Matthew, you'll recall in his birth narrative, quotes the prophet, out of Egypt, have I called my Son. So again, Jesus is always in the Israel story, isn't he?

The gospel is about, concerns this Father, this Son. The apostles tell us over and over again, our fellowship, truly we hear, truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son, Jesus Christ.

[29 : 12] 1 John, 1 3. There's reading across the canon. Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son, Jesus Christ.

This is the only Jesus that we know of, the only Jesus the church received. Now we hear Paul continuing here, in verse 3, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh. The gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh. All of us are born, and so was Jesus, Paul says.

He is both identical to us, identical to you, and he is infinitely other than us. He is, according to the scriptures, our elder brother, and he is, in fact, God forever more.

God, this is the Jesus of the apostles. This is worth pondering, isn't it, descended from David. In a certain sense, he descended into our nature.

[30 : 26] Later on in Romans, Paul talks about Jesus becoming of our nature. He descended into our nature. He is a person, separate and distinct, and he is at the same time our nature.

And because he shares our nature, which nature means what we necessarily are, what he endured intentionally and obediently may be shared with others.

This the apostle teaches, especially in this letter to the Romans, doesn't he? He teaches this not for metaphysical entertainment, but as part of the gospel mystery.

You recall Paul in this letter famously says, as in Adam all die, in Christ all will be made alive.

According to the apostle, this God may do.

Amazing stuff in Romans. The praise he continues at verse four, and declared to be the son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by the resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord.

[31 : 45] What words those are? Designated son of God and power according to the spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead. At this point, this praise he obviously goes to the heart of things, doesn't it?

It tells here the essential truth of the essential truths. If it didn't before, I don't know how it is with you now as you read this, if you've been reading it over and over again, I hope you have.

If it didn't sound like it before, now it does sound to my ears decidedly creedal. This sounds creedal, doesn't it? These are a set of words that Paul uses, often one would think.

These are the sound words spoken of in the pastoral epistles. Comment about the resurrection, I don't know how you found it this past Easter, but comment about the resurrection is sometimes at least, you find it so rather banal.

It reminds us of spring, we're told. The resurrection, great. In Romans, Paul asserts that we are destined to be participant, if you can imagine, in this event.

[33 : 05] And via baptism, a subject that he makes much of in this epistle, at least that one point, via baptism, we are participants in the death which preceded the resurrection.

How radically should we read all of this? Talk about reading. As radically as possible, I would take it.

Or we should read this, perhaps, better as God reading us. It's as if Paul would have us think into this doctrine and come to conclusions that are very strange.

All previous identities that you've had in the world are being annihilated now by God. God. No longer I but Christ is Paul's strong, pungent language which we've grown too accustomed to.

No longer I but Christ. Even being male or female, to touch upon something that came up last week, how about I'm a capitalist or I'm a socialist, I'm an American, I'm a Russian, I'm a Canadian, all these identities begin to disappear in Christ, our new world.

[34 : 30] Our faithful response to this event to which we are called is our new identity, will be our new world. This is radical stuff indeed if we read it that strongly and surely we can read it that strongly.

Paul calls this the obedience of faith. all these commitments that we have in life, they may be honored, commitments to my maleness, my femaleness, my beliefs about economic questions, my nationality, my beliefs about anything, they all have a certain kind of, they may be honored in a moment, but they're all called temporal, they're all announced to be passing away by the gospel, because God is creating a new world, by resurrecting his son, Jesus Christ, out of death.

Again, Paul calls this in this praise seat, obedience of faith to which we are called. There's a new world coming, Paul announces it in this praise seat.

Verse 5 and 6, look at them again. Through whom, Jesus Christ our Lord, receives this, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, including yourselves who are called to belong to Jesus Christ. Maybe after the resurrection motif of this praise seat, this seems a bit of a letdown, does it to you? Now this is the resurrection, now we talk about what's going around the world.

[36 : 18] Of course it isn't really. Part of the gospel's meaning, according to Paul, in Romans especially, part of the gospel's very meaning, and Paul would say this is according to the scriptures, is that when Israel's Messiah arrives and does his work, the Gentiles are destined to come to the light.

This is part of the very meaning of it. If this wasn't happening, Paul would say Jesus isn't the Messiah. One of the reasons we know Jesus is Israel's Messiah is because the gospel is going out to the Gentiles.

The faith of Israel always had, and it is in much tension with other things in this faith, a universal expectation. Have you noticed it?

Excuse me, when you read the Old Testament. this set-apart people were the vehicle for universal blessing. We've already heard it.

Through you I will bless the nations, God said to Abraham, our father. Do you know in the Psalter it has, there are words like, sing to the Lord a new song.

[37 : 34] Sing to the Lord all the earth. Sing to the Lord, praise his name. proclaim his salvation day after day.

And then, the psalmist says, declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all people. Psalm 96, verses 1 and 2.

Those are amazing words for a particular people in Palestine to be using in their worship. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all people.

You may remember that Matthew's gospel begins a record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David. And then it ends, the gospel of Matthew ends with Jesus saying, go and make disciples of all nations.

The praesi of Romans, I wish I could find this reference, I'd like to know where it is. But the praesi, this praesi of the letter to Paul to the Romans has been called a praesi, it would be a wonderful praesi of Matthew's gospel.

[38 : 51] Again, never less than Paul as we read across the scriptures, but more than Paul.

There's always more. There it is. part of the trouble of the modern church, like we say so, maybe I'm wrong about this, is that it is impatient, it shows itself impatient.

Persistence in attention to the New Testament, to Paul in particular, is not all that common. Maybe it's more common than I realize, but I think sometimes it's not all that common.

In some circles, of course, one Corinthians 13 is read at weddings. And for the rest, Paul is known roughly by rumor by some people.

I've seen this in print, and I think it catches a lot of Paul's reputation. Here's, someone wrote once about, well, here's the kind of thing that that Paul was all about.

Paul would say things like, dear of Fiskins, this is from Paul. I hear you are having fun. Please stop. Yours, Paul.

[40 : 11] Here's the reputation of Paul. That surely is what people, even in some church circles, but I wouldn't dream of mentioning them by name, that's what people want to believe about Paul.

Paul is rare, for sure. I think we can say that. Paul is rare. Our beloved brother Paul, some of the things he wrote are difficult to understand, which is the ungodly twist to their own destruction.

I think we can safely say, therefore, that Paul is rare, even by reputation in the New Testament, in a sense. Paul is rare. Few are like him. He takes God with complete seriousness.

That's what I think I learned about things from Paul. He takes God with complete seriousness. Some of the rhetoric, some of the rhetoric of Soren Kierkegaard helps me to get at Paul, to understand his letters.

God's presence is a presence of infinite seriousness. That's Kierkegaard here. I think that captures Paul. There's an infinite seriousness to taking God seriously.

[41 : 32] We are not creatures of anything less than this God. Paul sees the gospel as this God that we are to take with infinite seriousness because he is infinitely serious.

I can use that phrase again and again. This God has in the mystery of the gospel justified himself. God must justify.

I think this is what Paul understands more deeply than any other writer in the New Testament. Or Paul was called upon to be the apostle to work this through for the church for all time by the Spirit's grace.

God must justify within the mystery of his own holiness sustaining people, sustaining creatures like ourselves from anything other than mere fierce rejection.

judgment. What form that takes this fierce rejection in judgment is and will be God's concern.

[42 : 46] We're just told that God will do judgment. But this God, Paul wants to say, that he begins to introduce in this profound pracy it seems to me, this God finds a way to justify, has found a way to justify the ungodly, you and I.

This God, this love, Paul adores. Let's say that again. This God that Paul wants to talk about, this love that he has to justify the ungodly, Paul simply adores.

And under the Spirit's inspiration, he seeks to intelligently present this love to us. That's what Paul introduces in this great pracy, this letter to the Romans.

Paul would always say, it's a work always to the glory of this God's grace and nothing else. It isn't really Paul's gospel.

It's the gospel that was given to him by God's grace. Paul, in the letter to the Romans, is the chief, for the church now and for all time, is the chief expounder of what God has done, what his love has done, and how we may patiently attend to it and find out something about this God that we believe in.

[44 : 23] This pracy undoubtedly was thoughtfully constructed. It's always present in the New Testament in strange ways.

In his second letter to Timothy, the second chapter, Paul says to Timothy, remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David.

Isn't that amazing? These aren't little incidental things about Jesus. Jesus, these are the crucial things that you must know about Jesus. He has been raised from the dead, and he was descended from David.

He is the mystery of Israel, taken up into the mystery of salvation. And now, you Gentiles, you Gentiles at Rome, you Gentiles in Vancouver, are called to be saints, called to pay persistent attention, intelligent, persistent attention, to this message.

That's why Paul had never been to Rome again. He was probably going to use Rome as a base for further missionary activity, so he decides with these people, before he visits them, going to with sober-minded thoroughness, tell you the big story.

[45 : 50] here it is. Please pay persistent, intelligent attention to this gospel. Be a good, godly reader, and your soul will benefit now and forever.

So Paul, I think this praise, I've so inadequately looked at it. It's so rich. These are sound words to hold on to, so that when you go into a soul-threatening bookstore in Vancouver, where Jesuses are being presented that will turn your soul away from God forever, they're being presented.

This praise will tell you, here is Jesus, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is the gospel.

There is no other gospel. Beware of them. This is it. Raised from the dead, descended from David. I'm going to say a prayer and then we need to discuss this praise.

Lord, thank you for the holy scriptures. We confess that we are so inadequate in their presence. We pray that the power of your presence in them will make us the kind of people you want us to be.

[47 : 16] Thank you, Lord, for your patience with us. Help us to be patient and kind people with one another as we attend to the infinitely serious and happy, joyful things of the gospel of Christ.

And in his name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

I talked about this pracy about a month ago at faith in the marketplace and they took me aside and said that's not a bad interesting passage.

Look at that again. Maybe we'll get it right next time. I hope this time I got it right. I'm just aware when you parse this out it's just so overwhelming so much there.

it's like a trumpet blast it's beautiful the opening Sheila I'm interested in what you said about the mission that the Jews had before, I mean historically before Jesus came and I think we have some

evidence of that in the Old Testament where people really did want to spread the faith that they had and I don't know what happened to that proselytizing spirit because certainly it didn't seem to be around when Jesus was in the same time and it certainly has not been around with any of my Jewish friends who kind of have become much more huddled together in a protective way about the faith rather than reaching out to them so what went wrong between the mission that God has answered and the way we see them in the New Testament and in present time well why that's a good question my guess is

[49 : 17] I don't I mean I should have made more of it just in passing I talked about there's a universal witness that's quite shocking in the Hebrew scriptures but it's in tension with other things that are very very encircling very very central what Google what's the other word something that keeps Israel apart her food laws her circle there was much in the faith of Israel that that almost said to Gentiles we have something for you but not yet that was the the real deepest import of it I think I think there was some minor missionary work amongst Jews yes and there were God fears as a result Gentile God fears but it never had we Christians think no it couldn't it was waiting for Jesus it was waiting for the fulfillment then it was going to explode into the world as it has I thought about that so much a few weeks ago when Don Lewis was talking to us about millions of

Christians in Korea where'd they come from from the Apostles doctrine that's drawing if I be lifted up I'll draw all men to me Koreans and Vancouverites it's just Paul is just saying it has to work so I hear your question I think it's because Israel's faith had both tensions sing to the Lord all the nations why the nations would say when the gospel came the message was because you've been saved by a sin bearing savior he died for the sins of the whole world therefore come to him it was time in Ephesians Paul makes it clear doesn't he that he's amazed still amazed that to the Gentiles now goes the gospel who would have thought those people David with respect to the holy scriptures to me in my simplistic way I see it this way Jim Packer I think has put it wonderfully that scriptures are the word

God's words written God is holy ergo his words are holy and therefore we better pay attention that man should write a book oh I wanted to write a footnote to what you said before in answer to Sheila's question just as a matter of history if we have a little imagination perhaps we can understand this Israel in the first by the end of the first century the first Christian century had been overtaken by a profound defensiveness because first of all Christian evangelists apostles Christian people were proclaiming a new order of reality through Christ and for whatever reason Jewish people the majority of Jewish people one has to say weren't weren't buying it excuse the language and secondly Christians have been saying ever since the Christian faith began that Jesus had predicted judgment on Israel for unbelief judgment on Jerusalem for unbelief for rejecting him and it actually happened in AD 70 when the Romans came and flattened the city and that left the continuing Jewish community with as I said a tremendous sense of defensiveness they believed they had good reason for not embracing Christ well we have our own thoughts about that but on that basis the question that they asked themselves and you could understand it was the question how are we going to keep ourselves together how are we going to maintain our own identity as you know seed of

Abram descended we ourselves descended from David and so forth well the rabbis at that time this is how the books put it the rabbis constructed what we call Judaism that is to say they put together Old Testament faith without Christ and that's where the Jewish community all over the world has been ever since the end of the first century I mean that's just history any historian will tell you yes that's how it's been and if we understand what traumas can do to people's minds and their emotions too well we can understand it it's part of the reality of the

[55 : 00] Israel to which Christians when we have opportunity we stretch out our hand and we try to persuade folk that they were wrong to reject Jesus and it's it's asking them to abandon their national identity really when we ask them to do that their national identity as it's crystallized over the last 1900 years now that's that's just pure history pure sociology but it's part of the story and I think it needs to be told as we think about the spiritual realities in this situation that's all it's only a footnote it isn't intended I need to start a discussion let's discuss the things that Harvey is asking us to discuss well here's a footnote to this to the to the whole discussion too that again for purposes of discussion would you agree with generalizations about the letter to the

Romans in particular that all of you that huge tract this document is so involved so rich huge tracts of it have been colonized to use a Tom Wright metaphor and have produced entire rich theological

traditions there's the Roman church uses Paul in a sense especially Roman so did the Lutheran so did the Calvinist but right it's still a book that has a lot more in it that has yet been really taken in by the church and that one issue perhaps if you think that's true the church has not mastered the Paul's letter to the Romans yet on that reading we think we have but we haven't on that reading and that we have not yet fully taken in what Paul really wants to tell us in 9, 10, and 11 to put it bluntly we don't Paul thinks it's a mystery that the majority of Jews did not receive

Jesus Paul regards that as part of the mystery of the gospel those traditions that I would personally identify with and have spent my life being fed by still I take it on this view have to be humble because we don't know all of what the apostles mean to tell us about church Israel eschatology we don't know yet we can be humble on that view very humble about Israel's unbelief Paul thought it was a mystery somehow he was perplexed by it there was still more there the church has more to learn about this which is might sound Paulianish but in some circles they would find that they would resent that and maybe write this over they would resent it they'd say no no our reading here Paul is thorough and full stop we want to hear nothing more from you if you think that way is there more to be received from Paul's letter to the

Romans about this issue than the church has yet received what a topic someone else can tell about Romans 9 10 11 something for instance Will what are you a question about by the time the temple was pulled down from another percentage of the Jewish nation had heard the gospel and what are the actual numbers of Christians that were out there I have no idea I don't know where they get numbers from but one commentator says with some confidence that this Paul said to the Romans Paul by ways was dead by the time the Romans destroyed the temple of course imagine that this is footnote to footnotes he wrote to the Corinthians that you are the temple a Pharisee writing to Gentiles in Corinth that's some miracles happened in that man's mind what was this commentary says oh yeah this goes to Christians and he says about a hundred of them they're being in Rome I don't know where he gets that number maybe five hundred I'd say maybe a thousand but he says oh about a hundred they're living by the Tiber Nero's up on a hill I don't know if he writes this for dramatic effect but it sounds like real I don't know how many it's pure guesswork maybe 30 of them or there may have been 2,000 of them Nero's the servant may have been a member of a church or something for all we know but I don't know but I get the impression Will that every reflective Jew in the diaspora over the course of those decades the 30s 40s 50s would have heard something about Jesus the synagogue was shaken by it so I would my guess is loss how do we verify if it's just guesswork because I mean the calling of Christians is 5,000 that were represented there that's right so they're in

[60 : 34] Palestine but do we no one knows do we not take it literally oh yeah oh no he's talking about the number of Christians in the church at Rome at Rome oh yeah there's there's a few thousands around Jerusalem in suburbs but this commentaire thinks a hundred but I don't know where did you get this nothing that's fine to be the word exclusive strikes me through this whole thing it's an in-house letter to those who have already been saved in other words if you read something like this and assume that you can take on the blessings that are mentioned when you really haven't been called the word called there it's mentioned in two places where the proletariat is concerned and not the apostles including yourselves who are called to belong to Christ and to all God's beloved in Rome who are called to be saints so this is in-house isn't it it's exclusive isn't it doesn't it doesn't it doesn't include everybody does it does it I don't get the I think it has universal it could it has universal I agree those commentators go this far no Paul is thinking the big picture here he's announcing to the church at Rome Nero is not Lord Jesus is Lord it has a political import it's universal it's for everybody Nero is not Lord Jesus is Lord you are not citizens of the Roman Empire now you are citizens of the kingdom you are called out we are the new world so it's universal it's for everyone we are it's for everyone isn't it now I don't think Paul wants anyone to be excluded from the good news he doesn't want anyone to be excluded but you can't include the whole church in this oh sure it is oh you mean this isn't for us it's it's for those that are already saved oh yeah Paul knows he's preaching to the conversion when he preached he knows he's writing to those who have been called to be saints that's true and the key of course Jesus Christ our Lord the Lordship of Christ is what divides what makes this group exclusive and not inclusive of everyone who is the word gospel the word gospel was a common word in antiquity very common word the Caesars used it to announce good news I've decided to invade Britain and I'm raising your taxes gospel this is the news the good news and so they're using a well known word when calling it gospel and the word

Lord would catch the ears of the Romans like who are these Christians they're dangerous even the thief on the cross managed lordship didn't he remember me when you come into your kingdom remember me other words he recognized was able to recognize a saving lordship in Christ even in that simple minute lordship is so key in all of this isn't it thank you that's good anything else has anybody else paid attention to this prologue this overture just came home to me just last six months or so that it's how beautiful it is I find it beautiful it's potent there's something there's triumph here something doxological it's something wonderful Paul won't say this is really good news you wouldn't believe the news I have the gospel is such a happy thing this God has saved the world who would have thought that he could do it this way he's overwhelmed it's a great passage to go back to when we have our down moments it's a great reflection among all the nations I think it goes to Bills Point now everyone may hear about what Israel's God has done don't make a mistake to think that I think I'm better than able against God I just saying that so much of the epistles are read wrongly by people that include themselves in the blessings and these are the people we must reach these are the people we must talk to we really haven't experienced the [66 : 42] Lordship which saves I loved your introduction the way you describe how you read the scripture and what it should mean to it and this is worth memorizing so next week we will you think I'm not serious this is worth memorizing thank you Harvey so next week Olaf will the word saints is something to be pondered isn't it he's going to do I guess a word study of sorts of course he will he's a professor applause applause applause applause applause applause applause applause applause applause applause applause applause acc dor■ applause■ applause applause