

Called of Jesus Christ

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Date: 13 February 2009

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[0 : 00] Let's turn for a little this evening to chapter 1 in the letter to the Romans.

I want to spend a little time dealing with this introduction that Paul gives us here. If you're familiar, as I'm sure most of you are, with his writing, you'll know that this is amongst one of the longest introductions that Paul gives.

You'll probably know also that he had never visited Rome, but it clearly has expressed intention to do so at the earliest possible time.

And perhaps you wonder what kind of a place Rome was in the time of Paul. I say that because sometimes we may think that our journey as believers through this life is particularly difficult.

We might think that there are temptations and stumbling blocks that never existed in the time of Paul and the time of the writers of the New Testament.

[1 : 23] In reality, the nature of sin is such that temptation and stumbling blocks remain the same. They may take on different guises through time, but they nevertheless remain the same.

Paul himself was a man that, as he tells us in this letter to the church at Rome, he himself was a man that wrestled enormously with the problem of sin, to the extent that he describes himself as a wretched man.

And they asked that astonishing question, who can deliver me from this body of sin? And of course we, I hope, know what the answer was, and it's still the answer today.

They say the answer is through Jesus Christ, our Lord. And as we look at this, we see that in the time of Paul, Rome was a city probably of about a million people.

It was very, to use a buzzword of today, very cosmopolitan, all kinds of people residing there, all kinds of creeds, religions, so-called faiths, all of them residing within this great city of Rome.

[2 : 41] Plenty temples, plenty gods, a real multi-faith society. And it's against that kind of background that Paul writes to this church.

And it's against that kind of background I want to explore just a little this evening the way in which he speaks about being called. Now he uses the term, you'll see it there in verse 1, called to be an apostle.

And then if you keep your Bibles open, you'll see that he also uses it again in verse 6, called to belong to Jesus Christ.

Perhaps there's a sense in which we would call that the effectual calling of God. Now if you're not familiar with that term, you go and get a shorter catechism and learn what effectual calling is.

It'll stand you in great stead to understand the way God works. And then he uses it yet again in verse 7, where he talks about being called to be saints.

[3 : 44] Called to be saints. And I think that as we look at these three pictures of calling, I want us first of all to start with the middle one, and that's the calling of verse 6.

And I say that because there's a sense in which, as I said already, this is the call of God that works effectively in the life of the individual.

The call of God that worked effectually and effectively in the life of Saul of Tarshish. You'll remember that he was a man who was totally opposed to faith in God and belief in the resurrection of Jesus.

You'll remember that he himself makes a confession that he was indeed exceedingly mad against the Christians who brought forth the teaching of one God, one Savior, and a resurrected Jesus.

And it's something that I think is so important to the apostle, that God's plan and purpose is worked out in his own life.

[4 : 56] And as he sees it worked out in his own life, so he applies that principle and sees it working out likewise in the lives of others.

None in the same pattern. There might be shades of similarity in God's workings, but by and large they often turn out to be very different in the experiences of individuals.

And if you want to develop this thought further and you want to do a bit of theological study, you should read through chapter 8 of this book because there Paul produces certain terminology that tells us about the way in which God works.

He talks about God's foreknowledge in chapter 8 and verse 29. He talks about God's predestining purposes. He talks about being first born and then called and then justified and glorified.

So he has a clear understanding in his mind and in his heart of the way in which God works. And I think for you and for me as we come towards what we call tonight a service of preparation, I often ask myself and ask my own people, what are we preparing for?

[6 : 13] We're actually preparing to remember the death of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. That is the purpose for which we gather and for us to focus upon the way in which God draws us out of these so many different situations to be his own.

To be called, to be set apart. And as he says there in verse 7 about the Christians at Rome, and it applies to every Christian today who are loved by God.

Who are loved by God. So there are so many different things that can be drawn out of this whole picture of God's calling of his own people.

And I want us, as I say, to think about these for a little. And especially to think about it in the sense of that we are called to belong to him.

We are not our own. We are called with a price. We are bought with a price. Verse 6 again. Called to belong to Jesus Christ.

[7 : 22] And as I say, this is something that should encourage us as we go onwards in the life of faith.

This is something that should thrill us at the thought of a God who has such a clear and intimate interest in us.

And that has called us to belong to him. In other words, he has called us so that we are his possessions. We are his by adoption.

We are his according to his foreknowledge. According to his plan of predestination. According to all these elements, we belong to the living God.

And this is, of course, also not just the sense of Christ calling, but it is, in another sense, the work of God's spirit in calling us.

[8 : 22] The spirit making known to us in the sense of operating in the mind of the individual. The mind being affected by this call of God. You remember the mindset that Paul had.

We described it a moment ago. You perhaps think of the mindset you had yourself towards Christianity, towards religion, towards these churchgoers, towards these holy people, as you maybe call them in a very disparaging term.

And yet, here is the difference that now occupies your whole being. A mindset that thinks in a different light.

A mind that has been affected by the work of God's spirit upon heart and soul and life. A mind that begins to understand and begins to adapt and absorb all that it rejected in the past.

And if you see these elements in your life, and if you see these as encouragements as you prepare yourself for the Lord's Supper, then it is that encouragement that draws you to be part of the kingdom of God in the most intimate of senses, where you come and sit at his table as one of his own people, as one born again, not of things corruptible, but of the spirit of God.

[9 : 52] So here he is saying, he says, you are called to belong to Christ. This affects the mind. It affects the heart. That heart of stone is replaced by a heart of flesh.

That desire is for the heart that is so deceitful, as the proverb of old said, the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.

Who can know it? We know that he does, by the power of his spirit, create in us a clean heart. He again removes these elements that were such an obstacle to us.

The darkness that prevails there is dispelled and dismissed by the light of this glorious gospel. That light that shines through, and how powerful that light that it can work in such a way.

And of course, not only the mind and heart, but the will of man is also renewed. Remember what we sang there in Psalm 110. What is the psalmist saying?

[10:56] He says, You make a people. In other words, it's the God word activity. As the confession tells us, we come freely, but we're made willing by his power.

And that's what the psalmist is saying. He says, You make a people willing in a day of your power. And as that call of God comes, so the will of man is turned around, and his whole bent is towards looking to God and loving God in Christ and wanting to serve as they have not done before. You remember again, you look at this man, this writer here. What happens to him one day? So, the book of Acts tells us, yet breathing out threatenings, gulps, with his documents, his mind, his heart, his will, bent on the destruction of believers.

Ah, but God in a moment, through his spirit operating, brings a different principle to bear upon the life of the apostle.

Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? Who are you, Lord? And there's this extraordinary dialogue that prevails between Paul and the living God.

[12:38] And what happens? his will to create havoc is broken. And he comes and becomes as was told.

He was one who came and in a sense perhaps the very first evidence that something dramatic and absolutely astonishing has happened as behold he prays.

The mind and the heart and the will are turned towards the living God. It is his work. As a believer, you readily acknowledge this evening that you are a believer because of his work, because of his calling you and calling you to belong to Jesus Christ.

What a privilege is yours tonight if you're a Christian. And you know if you're not a Christian tonight, what a loss. What a loss if you lose your soul.

Those of you who are believers, this is your great privilege tonight as you look towards the Lord's day, you're able to say he did this in my life.

[14:10] This is my experience. And this is the way I see his hand dealing with me, calling me out of darkness into his own marvelous light.

Sometimes we wonder at God's plan. Sometimes we wonder at his purposes. But you know his plan is always the best.

And he works his own way for his own glory. And the plan for your life was the plan laid out.

And this if you excuse the expression sometimes blows my little mind away. That it was so planned before the world ever was.

You see our little minds are so governed by the littleness of them. We need to look to God to enlighten our minds and to fill us with a sense of awe of God.

[15:31] A sense of what it is to be set apart as the apostle describes his own situation. And a call to be holy, to belong to him.

You see his time and not only his time but his way. That's the wonder of this calling.

Some perhaps ever so gently gradually ushered into the kingdom. I wonder perhaps if that's your experience now. You think well I wish there was something more emphatic.

I wish there was something more dramatic. Something that I can really hold up as being awesome. Don't think that way.

God's way is always best. You think of what the cross means to you. Not whether you're ushered in gently or dramatically as the saying goes some are awakened by the terror of the law.

[16:43] Some are awakened by something as simple as the kiss of our mother on the face of our waking child. some are awakened by the summons to judgment but all are awakened each and every one.

You risk your spiritual contentment in the wonder of the fact that you are called and that his continued interest in you is evident in your experience.

And the calling is such that where he begins it he never lets go. Never!

Now the problem so often is this. We doubt the never. We call into question the never. As another said you know if you've lost sight of your Lord who's moved?

You've lost sight of the Lord this last while. Things are not as they should be. Is it that the Lord has lost an interest in you? I think it's the other way.

[17:59] I think it's because your own mind and will and heart has been deflected from the centrality of Christ to other things.

Let me say this too. I mean this might sound as if we can spend 24-7. I'm old enough to realize that that's not possible.

But you know and I say this to myself and I say to any of you here. I can find and we can find so much time for so many things. And that's what draws us away from our nearness to Christ. You know here is something that ought to strengthen us as we look towards the Lord's Supper. Strengthened by the fact that he is there for me and he is there for you.

He worked a work in you that makes him own you now and that you are possessed of Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour.

[19 : 15] You who are called to belong to Jesus Christ. Pause for a moment again and think of that word.

Those of you who belong to Jesus Christ. Who has authority over your life this evening? As a Christian the answer ought to be Christ.

And in a sense the answer is Christ. But the consciousness of that that's another matter. The awareness of that that's something else.

what kind of a place was Rome? It wasn't an easy place I'm sure to be a Christian. What kind of a place is your island here?

Well you say it's not an easy place to be a Christian. What kind of a place is Tain? Not an easy place to be a Christian. Don't be surprised that that is the case.

[20 : 25] We're not called into cozy little clusters if you excuse the expression. We're called into a world that crucified your Savior and your Lord.

We're called into a world that cries out give us Barabbas. Don't be surprised. And that's the way it so often will be until you're presented faultless before his own throne.

Before we move on just let me say these one or two things. You know here is your encouragement in preparation for the Lord's Supper. You know as an individual that this work that has taken place in your life would only be possible through the intervention of the Trinity.

God sends his son. The son fulfills the work demands of the law. The son goes back to heaven and the spirit comes and he will reprove the world of sin and of righteousness.

You are where you are tonight as a believer because you have been called to belong to Jesus Christ. And just let me just elaborate again or underline again what we said a moment ago.

[21 : 56] The wonder of this taking place before the world ever was. I have a particular fondness for chapter one of Jeremiah.

Maybe some of you would think well it's not one that sticks out for me but you go home and read it tonight. The first part of it is special. There's a marvelous dialogue where between Jeremiah and his God and it's what God says to him that is so helpful for us.

Before you were formed in the womb God says to Jeremiah I knew you. Do you see the uniqueness of this belonging?

How distinct and unique it is things? And why would we not then want to come to his table on his day?

Something else too before we move on. How do you think in all the struggles that perhaps you have as a Christian? I hope it doesn't sound as if I think you're all struggling every day.

[23 : 08] I don't think that. Not meaning that at all. But what I am saying and I know the reality of it is that often there are struggles. But let me just say this by way of encouragement to you.

How do you think you've succeeded in these struggles? Is it because you're strong by nature? You're physically and mentally strong? No?

Oh, you might think that. But that's depending on self. And that's deflecting from the glory of God who gives the glory to yourself.

And that must never be. You must look to Christ. And you have managed the journey thus far through God's grace and through the strength he gives you.

And that's true in all our failures, in all our brokenness, in all our heartaches. And all of that he takes us through because he has called us to belong to him.

[24 : 21] You come to his table on his day thinking, I was appointed as one of his children before the world ever was.

You come to his table saying, I share the same calling as Paul, as Abraham, as Moses, as Rahab, the same God, the same purpose, to bring a people saved by grace to himself.

let me just outline, often say I'm wary when there's no clock in the church. Oh, I see one, there is one over there.

I couldn't see it. Second thing, just briefly, I want us to see that while Paul is talking in verse one about called to be an apostle, now the apostolic era, as we know, is finished.

But, you know, is it not the sense in which he writes this, that he's saying, yes, I was an apostle called, but the principles that apply in particular areas of this calling are important.

[25 : 46] For example, and this is one of the key ideas, set apart. You know, as a Christian, called, you are set apart.

And, yes, I'm taking it in a sensitive context. But, you're still nevertheless set apart. You are a person who belongs to him.

And, you're set apart as a servant of the living God. And, notice the way he defines this gospel of God.

And, he's pulling on his knowledge of the Old Testament here. Set apart, he says, this gospel promised beforehand through the prophets in the Holy Scriptures concerning his son descended from David.

Yet, you know, what a contrast between the son and David. David was rich, David was powerful. He had everything at his disposal.

[26 : 53] And, the son comes and he has nowhere to lay his head. he's a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. He's a man wounded and bruised.

The chastisement of our pieces laid upon him. By his stripes, by his stripes, we are healed. Ah, the wonder of how that must have affected this little Jew on the road with this little warrant to destroy the Christians.

How that knowledge that was so vibrantly flowing through his mind must have taken on a different hue. And, that glorious thought entered his mind and heart that Isaiah 53 was true and concerned the Messiah set apart to be a servant.

Set apart because of the Holy Scriptures concerning his son descended from David declared to be the son of God in power according to the spirit of holiness.

Ah, yes, Paul called. Ah, yes, stand here in the building this evening called. Called to be set apart.

[28 : 15] Called to be a servant. Called to be in operation for Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

That again gives you the opportunity, the opening to come to his table on his day and remember what he has done for you.

And then just finally and briefly, called he says. And you notice how his heart goes out to these believers in Rome. To all those in Rome.

You wonder, why were there Christians in Rome? How were there Christians in such a godless environment? Well, the common view is quite simply this.

And on the day of Pentecost, because there were so many people gathered from so many different parts of the world at that time, when the Spirit of God breathed upon these souls, some of them, we believe were set apart at that point and returned to Rome and brought this glorious gospel to a pagan society.

[29 : 38] And you know what challenges us, does it not? In our own comfort zones so often, that we ourselves are set apart. We belong to him and we are also to bring this gospel to a society that so often rejects him, to all those who are loved by God and called to be his saints.

saints. I often think that the word saint doesn't fit neatly with me and I'm sure you think that yourself sometimes too.

Doesn't fit neatly with you. Saints belongs to people like Paul and Peter and John. But you know, Paul again and again begins his letters and that's how he describes those people to whom he writes.

He calls them saints. He calls them a people set apart, a people who belong to him, even to the fragmented and disoriented church of Collins.

He calls them saints. And you are one of his tonight. if you are one of his tonight, then you are a saint. As I say, perhaps the title doesn't sit very neatly with you.

[31 : 08] That's the way it is. And that's the reality of it all. And so he says to all those who are loved by God, he says, you are called to be saints.

What a privilege then is yours this evening in the sense of your calling. You're called to be a saint and you're called to belong to God.

You're called to belong and you're called to be loved. What love is manifested and how much this love is only possible because of the cross and how the calling is only possible because of the cross.

the cross. That's why we have to remember his death until he returns. So you be encouraged. You come to his table on his day and you remember that you cannot be separated from this love of God that is in Christ Jesus the Lord.

[32 : 19] It is a theological impossibility because he will present all of his own perfect before his throne with exceeding joy. You are called.

You are called. You are set apart. You are called and loved and you are called and you belong.

Great is the privilege that belongs to you under grace.

May he bless his word. Let's pray. May we never lose sight of our calling.

May we never lose sight of the wonder of what you have done for us. May we never lose sight of the way in which you have done it for us.

May we be thrilled in our souls to think that we belong, to think that we are loved.

[33 : 24] Lord, we ask that you would encourage your people in all their different situations tonight. Come near to them by the power of your spirit.

In your name we pray asking for forgiveness of sin. Amen.