

FOR HIS NAME'S SAKE

Romans 1:1-7

Key Verse: 1:5

Through him we received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith for his name's sake.

As I read this passage, several questions came to my mind--questions I want to ask you and me. What would you say if someone asked you who you are? What is your spiritual identity? What is your relationship with Jesus? Would you just say you are a Christian, or would you say something more than that? As a Christian, do you have a calling to share the gospel of Jesus with others? If so, how and from whom did the calling come from? What is the purpose of your hard work for the Lord? I pray that the Holy Spirit may help us to honestly answer these questions as we study this passage.

I. PAUL, A SERVANT OF CHRIST JESUS (1)

Look at verse 1. *“Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God—”* St. Paul introduces himself as a servant of Christ Jesus. The original Greek word for “servant” here is *doulos* (δοῦλος) which means “slave.” In Paul’s time, there were many slaves in the Roman Empire. When the Roman army conquered other people, they made them slaves for their citizens. The slaves did all the work while the Roman citizens enjoyed their lives in comfort and luxury. The slaves had no life of their own. They belonged to their masters. They had to do what they were told. If they got old or sick, they were often abandoned like used furniture. No one wanted to be a slave. No one wanted to be called a slave. But St. Paul called himself a slave to Jesus. And he did this with a sense of pride and gratitude, not with shame. He was happy to call himself a servant of Jesus Christ. It shows how he viewed his personal relationship with Jesus. To him, Jesus was more than a friend. Paul wanted to surrender his entire self to Jesus. He wanted to obey Jesus absolutely. He wanted to acknowledge Jesus as his Lord and Master. He was not his own man with a huge ego. He was a servant of Christ Jesus.

Paul also called himself an “apostle.” An apostle literally means “one who is sent out with mission.” To the first century Christians, an apostle was one of the twelve disciples of Jesus. Paul was not one of the Twelve. He didn’t become a believer until after Jesus was crucified. But Paul considered himself an apostle, because he met the Risen Christ personally on the road to Damascus. There Jesus forgave all his sins and sent him out to be a missionary for the Gentiles.

Paul says that he was set apart for the gospel of God. In fact, the Holy Spirit said in Acts 13, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them” (Ac 13:3). From that time on, Paul dedicated his life fully to his missionary calling. He confessed in Galatians 1:15, “But when God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace....” Paul realized that it was God who had set him apart from birth to be an apostle to the Gentiles. His identity as a servant of Christ Jesus was not based on his

dramatic conversion alone, but on God's sovereignty over his life. Paul had a clear and absolute identity as an apostle of Christ Jesus. It was the basis of his spiritual authority and power.

At this point, let us ask ourselves this question: "What is my identity?" What would you say if someone asked, "Who are you? To whom do you belong?" Some people may say, "I belong to myself. I am my own. I am not a slave to anyone." The truth is that everyone is a slave to sin. Jesus says in John 8:34: "Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin." Spiritually speaking, everyone is a slave. We are either slaves to sin which is our natural state, or slaves to Jesus, meaning we belong to him. Paul had a clear identity as a servant of Christ. May God help each of us to have such clear identity!

II. THE GOSPEL OF GOD (2-4)

In verse 1, Paul says that he was called to be an apostle for the gospel of God. The word gospel literally means "good news." Msn. Deborah and I try to watch nightly news whenever we can to know what's going on in the world. Very rarely we hear good news. Horrible things happen everyday. The Islamic militant group ISIS posted their beheadings of two American reporters on social media. People are dying daily because of the political conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East. Natural and man-made disasters seem to happen more frequently as politicians in many countries bicker and fight for their selfish agenda. The Ebola outbreak claimed almost 2,000 lives and is threatening to kill many more. But the worst news for mankind is none of the above. It happened in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve disobeyed God and sin entered the world. Since then mankind has been under a curse. Many tragic things happening to us are only the symptoms of this curse. So there can be no good news unless this curse is lifted first. Paul says that he was set apart for the good news that saves us from this curse. Let think about this good news.

First, the gospel is from God. The gospel is the good news from God. It is not a man-made idea. And it is not something that happened by chance. Verse 2 reads: "... *the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures, ...*" God had promised this good news in the Old Testament. God designed this gospel. He promised this gospel. And when his time came, he kept the promise. The promise was to send a Savior to the world in order to save mankind from their sin and death. This gospel was first given in the Garden of Eden, right after Adam and Eve committed their sin. In pronouncing their punishment, God promised to send the woman's offspring to crush Satan's head who had tempted them to sin. Then God repeated the promise to his servant Abraham. God said to him, "...and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed..." (Ge 22:18). He also gave King David the same promise: "I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, ... and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he will be my son" (2Ki 7:12-14). The Prophet Isaiah prophesied that this Savior would come to suffer and die willingly in our place to save us from our sin and death. In summary, the gospel was promised by God many thousand years before he sent the Savior. This gospel is different from some fad philosophy or ideology that become popular one time and fade away after a while. The gospel is the good news

from the eternal God. It is authentic and trustworthy, because it is from God who always keeps his promises.

Second, the gospel regarding the Son of God. The gospel is news about Jesus. Look at verses 3-4. *“... regarding his Son, who as to his earthly life was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.”* The gospel of God is the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Jesus is the good news. The coming of Jesus into this world was the fulfillment of God’s long-awaited promise. The very first sermon Jesus delivered as he began his public ministry was this: “The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!” (Mk 1:15)

The essence of the Christian faith is that we sinners are saved by God’s grace when we believe in Jesus Christ who died on the cross and who was raised on the third day. Some people laugh at this, saying, “How can a guy who was executed some 2,000 years ago save me from all my sins?” Many people have no problem with giving Jesus a place in history as a great religious leader, as they do with Buddha and Mohamed. To them, Jesus is no more than a historical figure. But St. Paul says that Jesus is much more than a figure in the history books. Jesus is the Son of God who came to save sinners like us from eternal condemnation. In verses 3-4, Paul explains who Jesus is by teaching us two things about him—his earthly life and his divine nature. As a human being, Jesus was a **descendant of King David**. This is significant in that Jesus came to this world according to the promise of God. Jesus was born as the first son of Mary and Joseph. He was born in a stable and laid in a manger because his parents were poor. People ignored this tiny baby, but his birth changed history for mankind. An angel of God appeared in the night sky and said to the shepherds in the fields, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord” (Lk 2:10-11). The Apostle John was deeply moved by the love of God who sent his one and only Son to save us. He said: “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth” (Jn 1:14). As God had promised, he sent the Savior Jesus from the line of King David in order to save us from our sin and death.

Jesus the son of Mary was 100% human. But he was more than a human being. Let us look at verse 4 again. *“..., and who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.”* Jesus is **the Son of God**. Jesus is God. Yes, he was born as a helpless baby. He served sinners as a suffering servant. He healed the sick and drove out demons. He raised up 12 disciples to be shepherds for his people. Then he was arrested and crucified between the two criminals. It seemed that his beautiful life ended tragically. But it was not the end. Actually it was a beginning. On the third day, God raised him from the dead. His tomb was empty. His resurrection proved powerfully that he is the Son of God. This is important for us to know. God who raised Jesus from the dead can certainly save us from our sin and death. Our life will not end up in cemetery if we believe in Jesus. He defeated sin and death by dying on the cross in our place and by rising from the dead. Paul was deeply moved by the love of God shown in the resurrection of Jesus. He said

this in his letter to Corinthians: “But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain” (1Co 15:57-58). Now we can understand why St. Paul willingly put his life on the line in order to preach the gospel of God in a hostile environment.

III. WE RECEIVED GRACE AND APOSTHLESHIP (5-7)

Let us read our key verse (5) together. *“Through him we received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith for his name’s sake.”* Paul says that we received **grace**. What is grace? The Greek word for grace is *charis* (χάρις) which means gift or favor. Grace is a gift given to us when we don’t deserve it. Paul says we received this grace through Jesus. It is the grace of salvation from sin and death. Paul often talked about this grace. He said, “By the grace of God I am what I am.” Before he became a Christian, Paul was an ambitious young man in Jerusalem. He went to top Pharisee school and graduated with honors. His future looked bright. To advance his career, he decided to put down the Christian movement. This pleased the Jewish authorities. He arrested many Christians and put them in prison. He took charge of stoning Stephen to death. He thought he was doing God a favor by persecuting the church. But he was wrong. One day, he was traveling to Damascus, carrying a letter authorizing him to arrest more Christians there. The Risen Christ met him on the way. A bright light struck him and blinded him temporarily. He fell from his horse. Jesus told him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” Most importantly, Jesus forgave him all his sins. Saul was a changed man. Jesus called him to carry the gospel of salvation to Gentiles. It was a life-changing experience for Paul. He really knew the meaning of grace from the personal experience. This is what he said later. “For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me” (1Co 15:9-10). We also received the grace of salvation through Jesus. Our conversion experience may not be as dramatic as Paul’s, but we know that God granted us the gift of salvation when we didn’t do anything good to deserve it.

Look at verse 5 again. *“Through him we received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith for his name’s sake.”* Paul says that through Jesus we received grace and apostleship. Through Jesus, we received not only the grace of salvation but also the **apostleship**, that is, a mission to share the gospel with others. He put grace and apostleship together. The two are inseparable. The gospel of Jesus is such good news that when we receive his grace, we cannot keep it to ourselves. We must share it with others so that they may also receive the amazing grace from Jesus.

Some people may say that this apostleship was meant only for Paul. But notice what Paul says in verse 5. He said “we” received grace and apostleship. He didn’t say “I.” Who are we? Paul and the believers in Rome. In other words, all Christians. Some people are happy to receive the grace of salvation. They say, “Praise the Lord. I am

saved!” Then they go on to live a life that is not much different from their past one. They are satisfied with being a Sunday Christian. This does not please God. If we really know what Jesus did for us in order to save us, we can joyfully and willingly share the gospel with others. That is what Jesus did himself during his earthly ministry. He shared the word of God early in the morning, late at night, in the temple, at the lakeside, and on mountainside. St. Paul also preached the gospel of Jesus in season and out of season. And now we are called to follow the footsteps of Jesus and St. Paul.

Verse 5 also teaches us that our apostleship is to call all the Gentiles (unbelievers) to the **obedience** that comes from faith. A person’s true faith is manifested in his obedience to God’s word. A person is not a genuine believer just because he says, “Yeah, I believe in God.” People can say anything, but what they do shows what is really in their hearts. A person’s obedience proves his or her faith in Jesus. Obedience comes from faith. That’s why Jesus said to his disciples as he commissioned them, “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, ... teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Mt 28:19-20). We must prayerfully help our Bible students until they obey the word of God from their hearts.

Finally, Paul says that our apostleship is “**for his name’s sake**.” What does this mean? Before he met Christ, Paul lived for his own name’s sake, that is, for his own glory. He called himself Saul, the name of the first king of Israel. He wanted to be powerful and famous, like King Saul. But after he met Christ, he called himself Paul, meaning “small.” The ambitious young man was changed into a humble servant of Christ Jesus. His desire was to magnify the name of Jesus. He was like John the Baptist. Before his beheading, John was becoming very popular to the point some people even thought he was the Messiah. But John told them, “He (Jesus) must become greater; I must become less” (Jn 3:30).

This is the attitude we want to learn from Paul as we share the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. God has given us the grace of salvation through his Son. Remembering this grace, we can joyfully share the good news of Jesus with others, not to make our name, but for his name’s sake, that is, for the glory of our Lord Jesus, until we will meet him again in heaven.

In verses 6-7, St. Paul reminds the Christians in Rome that they are among those Gentiles who are called to belong to Jesus Christ. He also reminds them that they are loved by God and called to be his holy people. Finally, he greets them with the words: “Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.”

From today’s passage, we learned that we received grace and apostleship through our Lord Jesus. Jesus paid the price of our sin by dying on the cross. He was raised on the third day, opening for us the door to heaven. Remembering the grace of Jesus, let us faithfully share the good news of Jesus Christ with young people in our generation. May God help us to work hard for the sake of Jesus’ name until we see him in heaven!