

A Forest of Truth

The Gospel Truth – Part IV

Romans 1:4

Introduction

Our text for today is Romans, chapter 1, verse 4. Speaking of Jesus Christ, it reads,

who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord.

G. Campbell Morgan wrote, two generations ago,

Jesus Christ was the God-Man. Not God indwelling man – all Christians are indwelt by God. And not man who has become God. Of such there have been none except in the myths of pagan religions; but God and man, combining in one personality two natures; a perpetual mystery, baffling the possibility of explanation.

I agree. Having agreed that it is impossible to explain, I will, nevertheless, now spend thirty minutes trying to explain it.

I will do it because truth is still truth, whether or not it is fully understood. In fact, truth that is not believed does not become any less the truth. Just as believing in something that is not true does not make it true.

There are people who believe Elvis Presley is still alive. In fact, there are weekly reports of sightings.

There are people who sincerely believe that the earth is flat. There is actually a “Flat Earth Society”. Their belief that the earth is flat, however, in no way affects the truth of the earth’s shape.

Then there is also the age old question, “If a tree falls in the forest and no one is there to hear it, does it make a noise?”

The answer is “Yes,” because the laws, or truths, of creation do not need an audience in order to be the truth.

The more difficult question is one that I read recently, “If a man says something in the forest and his wife isn’t there to hear him, is he still wrong?”

Let me see, our text says nothing about trees. However, it does deliver a forest of truth; deep Christological truth; truth about the nature and person of Christ our divine redeemer – too deep to fully grasp, yet too wonderful to not try.

Let us begin at Paul’s opening sentences in Romans, chapter 1, verse 1 through 3. I will amplify its translation to reveal some of the things we have already learned.

Paul, a devoted slave of Christ Jesus, appointed by God an apostle, set apart and surrendered with total passion for the sake of the gospel, the source of which is God, and this gospel, which is not new, but was promised long before by the prophets in the inspired scripture, as they delivered the good news that God’s Son was born a direct descendant and legal heir to the throne of David according to the flesh.

Jesus Christ The Subject of the Gospel

These verses reveal several things about the subject of the gospel, who is none other than Jesus Christ.

Jesus is the legitimate heir to the throne of David

1. Jesus is the legitimate heir to the throne of David.

We have discovered, in a previous discussion, the importance of Christ's genealogy; that is, in order to claim the throne as Israel's Messiah, He had to fulfill the prophecy of descending from the tribe of Judah, as a direct descendant of David. Both Mary and His adoptive father, Joseph, were descendants of David – Mary through Nathan, Solomon's older brother, and Joseph through Solomon – thus, their lines converged and granted Jesus, by law and by royal blood, the right to fulfill the human condition of the Messiah.

But, He is not only the legitimate heir to the throne of David.

Jesus is the second person of the Godhead

2. Jesus is the second person of the Godhead.

Notice two different verbs, which are used for Jesus Christ, in verses 3 and 4 of Romans, chapter 1. Verse 3 says of Jesus,

concerning His Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh

Verse 4 says,

who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord

The two verbs, "born" and "declared," speak of Christ's two natures. He was:

- born – refers to His human nature,
- declared – refers to His divine nature.

Jesus Christ has always been the Son of God, but there was a point in time when He was born, a child, into the human race.

The biblical record of Christ's life does not hesitate to combine the twin truths of His humanity and His deity in the same passages. Let me give several examples.

In the gospel of Mark, chapters 3 and 4, the Lord had been busy all day with ministry. This was the day that He had pronounced judgement on unbelief. This was the same day that His family had come to

take Him away, because they thought He had lost his mind. This was the first day that He had begun to speak in parables. This had been an exhausting day. And, at the end of the day, Jesus and His disciples got into a boat to go to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. He fell fast asleep on a cushion. Jesus, the man, was worn out and slept as someone totally weak from fatigue. Then, a storm came up that was so terrific the disciples thought they would capsize and drown. They had to wake Jesus, as He was so tired that He was sleeping right through it. Is there anything more human than that? When His disciples awakened Him, Jesus stood and rebuked the wind and the waves. These elements instantly obeyed and grew calm. Humanity and deity are within the same lines of scripture.

In Matthew, chapter 17, Peter received his tax bill. Jesus told him to go drop a hook in the water, and that the first fish he caught would have a shekel in its mouth. That was just enough to pay the taxes for both Peter and Jesus. What a system!

Wouldn't you love to pay your taxes by going fishing? You have your fishing rod and tackle box, and your wife says, "And where might you be going?"

You can say, "I'm going to take care of our taxes."

Jesus was saying, "Peter, we need to pay our taxes."

What a human thing to have to do.

However, in order to pay the taxes, the Lord said, "Go get your fishing pole and you'll find our tax money in the mouth of the first fish you catch."

What a divine way of coming up with the money!

So, how do we know that Jesus was truly divine?

One way is that He has been given significant names.

In Matthew's gospel, chapter 1, verse 23b, Jesus is named,

"... Immanuel," which . . . means, "God with us."

In other words, God has come to live with us!

John, chapter 1, verse 1, speaks of Jesus, when it says,

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

Jesus Himself claimed to be deity. In John, chapter 14, He claimed to have been one with God

the Father. In John, chapter 8, verse 58, He claimed to have been in existence from eternity, when He told the infuriated leaders of Israel,

. . . Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am.

“Ego eimi,” the Greek for “I am,” was an incredibly significant choice of words. It was so significant that the leaders attempted to stone Him to death for saying them. Why?

Turn back to the book of Exodus to that moment when Moses met with God. In chapter 3, verses 13 and 14a,

. . . Moses said to God, . . . “Now [the sons of Israel] may say to me, ‘What is His name?’ What shall I say to them?” God said to Moses, “I Am Who I Am” . . .

In the Septuagint, the Greek words are “Ego eimi”. In the Hebrew Bible, the consonants from that same verb form the name “Yahweh”. So, God is saying, “Tell them My name is Yahweh,” or “My name is ‘I am’.”

In John, chapter 8, verse 58, Jesus is saying, “Before Abraham, the father of this entire nation, existed, I existed.”

If you translate His words back into Hebrew, then you find that He said nothing less than, “My name is Yahweh.”

That is why they tried to stone Him. And rightly so, because either Jesus Christ was truly God, or He was a lying, deceiving, dishonorable, blasphemous Jewish man.

Just before the crucifixion, when the mob of men arrived at the Garden of Gethsemane to arrest Jesus, John, chapter 18, records that the soldiers came, accompanied by the chief priests, religious leaders, and Judas. Jesus walked toward them and said, in verse 4b,

. . . Whom do you seek?

Verses 5 and 6 tell us,

They answered Him, “Jesus the Nazarene.” He said to them, “I am [ego eimi] He” . . . So, when He said to them, “I am He,” they drew back and fell to the ground.

You need to understand that this is more than simply identifying that He is the One they are looking for. He used the title of Yahweh, the eternally existent God. And, they all fell down before Him. One breath of omnipotence, one word of His sovereignty, one expression of His eternal godhood slammed them flat on the ground!

It is as if Jesus Christ pulled back the curtain on His deity for one brief second, and that entire crowd did what everyone will do in the presence of almighty God – fall prostrate before Him. He was not arrested by them and forced up the hill of Golgotha, He led them there.

He answers the Old Testament questions, in Proverbs, chapter 30, verse 4, fully,

Who has ascended into heaven and descended? Who has gathered the wind in His fists? Who has wrapped the waters in His garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is His name or His son’s name? . . .

Paul gives the full answer in the verse 4 of Romans, chapter 1. This eternally existent One, who has been declared the powerful Son of God, has a name. In the latter part of verse 4, Paul tells us that His name is,

. . . Jesus Christ our Lord

By the way, did you notice the reference to all three members of the Trinity in the first few verses of Romans, chapter 1? In verses 1 and 2, there is an obvious reference to God the Father. In verse 3, there is a reference to God the Son. And, in verse 4, there is a reference to the Holy Spirit.

The Trinity is not “1 person + 1 + 1 = 3 gods,” but “1 person x 1 x 1 = 1 God”. I stand in the shadow of Daniel Webster, who was once chided by an agnostic because he believed in the Trinity of the Godhead. He answered, “I do not even pretend to fully understand the arithmetic of heaven.”

Jesus has been given significant names that reveal His purpose

3. Now, in Romans, chapter 1, verse 4, we discover four significant names or designations for the second person of the Godhead that reveal His purpose.

Jesus is called the “Son of God”

- The first name is Son of God, which is a name that discloses His eternal co-existence with God the Father.

The term “Son,” has nothing to do with Him being created. This term relates to His essence and His nature, not that He was a little boy who grew up in heaven. In fact, the term “begotten,” literally refers to His unique status.

So, John, chapter 3, verse 16, could be translated, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His [one and] only . . . Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life."

Jesus is called "Jesus"

- The second name is Jesus, which is a name that announces His redemptive purpose for mankind.

You may remember the promise of the angel that came to Joseph and told him that Mary would bear a son. The angel told Joseph, as recorded in Matthew, chapter 1, verse 21b,

. . . you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.

The name "Jesus" was the Greek counterpart of the Hebrew name "Joshua". They both meant, "deliverer; savior". Luke made it clear, in chapter 19, verse 10b, that Jesus came,

. . . to seek and to save that which was lost.

It is interesting that, in Matthew's account of the trial of Christ, in chapter 27, verse 17b, Pilate refers to Jesus as,

. . . Jesus who is called the Christ

Why did Pilate make that designation? Jesus was a common name, like Steve, or Bob, or John, and many little Jewish boys were called Jesus. It was the Old Testament name "Yeshua," or Joshua. It was the hope of the parents that their little boy would grow up and be a deliverer; a strong godly man.

Does this name suggest that Jesus was a mere mortal who achieved special status from God and, by His obedience, climbed the ladder to become deity?

Aryanism taught this in the third century, and it has been taught in a myriad of forms since. In this generation, Aryanism has been repackaged in Mormonism. Mormonism basically teaches that Jesus was created by God, like everyone else, and is a procreated child of God, but because of Jesus' faithfulness to the will of God, He became worthy of deified status.

However, in the book of Philippians, we discover that Jesus Christ was equal to God the Father before his birth; He was co-equal with God the Father, not after a life of faithfulness, but before He ever walked on planet earth.

Four-fold condescension of Christ

In Philippians, chapter 2, we read that Jesus condescended in at least four ways.

He condescended to no longer (while on earth) live like God

- First, He condescended to no longer (while on earth) live like God.

In Philippians, chapter 2, verse 6, we read,

who [Jesus Christ], although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped

The implication is that He had equality with God the Father, but He did not cling to it or hang on to it. Instead, according to verse 7, He,

. . . emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant . . .

God became a servant. Imagine leaving the splendor of eternity, as well as the service and worship of the angelic hosts in order to live the life of a human being.

In other words, Jesus Christ had all the rights, honors, and privileges of Godhood. According to verse 6, He had equal rights with the Father, and yet, we read that He did not grasp them. He literally, gave up His favored position with God the Father and the Spirit.

He condescended to no longer act like God

- Secondly, He condescended to no longer act like God.

Can you imagine the all-powerful God in the clothes of an ordinary man? He was truly able, at any moment, to leap tall buildings, fly through the air, and perform other superhuman feats! Jesus could have smashed His way through history. If anyone had mistreated Him, He could have turned them into French fries. He also could have manipulated everything to His own liking, from the way things worked to the weatherman's report, "I do not think I want rain today," or "It's a little too warm this afternoon," or "Let's delay winter another month."

Think about it, why would He work and sweat over a carpenter's workbench, with a hammer and saw, when He could have simply snapped His fingers, and "voila," the job is finished. I would have! And just think of what He could have done for the family carpentry business!

That is the point! Jesus condescended in that He gave up the right to act like the omnipotent God that He was. He was willing to grow to manhood in a miserable little town named Nazareth. He was willing to be an unknown carpenter, without any halo around his head or Superman suit underneath His robe. He was so ordinary that, when He announced who He was, even His half brothers and sisters did not believe Him, “Not a chance! Him?! God?!”

Once again, do not miss the truth that the Bible explains in verse 7 of Philippians, chapter 2.

... [He] emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant . . .

In the first century, a bondservant never really owned anything, he was totally dependent on those whom he served. So, was Jesus really a bondservant? How did He measure up to that title? Consider the facts that Jesus borrowed:

- a place to be born,
- a place to sleep, as He did not own a house,
- a boat to cross the Sea of Galilee,
- an animal to ride into Jerusalem upon,
- a room in which to eat with His disciples,
- a tomb in which to be buried.

He borrowed everything!!

He was the only person to walk the face of the earth with the right to have anything He wanted. Yet, He never took advantage of nor claimed that special privilege. He gave up the right to act like God.

He condescended to no longer look like God

- Thirdly, He condescended to no longer look like God.

The last part of verse 7 reads,

... being made in the likeness of men.

Before His incarnation, Christ was clothed with the glory of divine splendor and was invisible to the human eye, as was the Father and the Holy Spirit. However, He took on flesh and He looked like any human male of Jewish descent!

Now, if you were God and could actually select the way you would look, just imagine! You could actually pick the size of your biceps, the size of your nose, your hair color, etc. You would be a heartthrob! All of the ladies would choose to look like a super model or Miss America. All of the men

would choose to look just like your pastor . . . of worship!

So, what did Jesus choose to look like? Remember, being pre-existent creator God, Jesus could choose the exact way He wanted to look as a man. What did He choose to look like? The only detailed, physical description of Jesus Christ is found in Isaiah. In chapter 53, verses 2 and 3b, Isaiah wrote of the coming Messiah and actually described Him.

For He [the Messiah] grew up before Him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of parched ground; He has no stately form or majesty that we should look upon Him, nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him . . . He was despised and we did not esteem Him.

We did not think He was anything at all significant. He did not turn any heads. He was not considered distinguished. God chose to look, not just like any ordinary male of Jewish descent, but physically unattractive!

He condescended to no longer be treated like God

- Fourthly, He condescended to no longer be treated like God.

Continue in Philippians, chapter 2, to verse 8, to read,

Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Paul seems to highlight the cruelty of the cross in this verse. He says, “He became obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”

Why? So that He could fulfill, as it were, the meaning of His name. Jesus means, “deliverer, rescuer, and savior”. His arms were stretched out on that cross as if to symbolize to all of humanity the invitation of the gospel – that whosoever will, may come!

Now, back in Romans, chapter 1, there is another name for this Son of God.

Jesus is called “Christ”

- The third name for Jesus, found in Paul’s introduction of the gospel truth, is Christ, which is a name that reflects His Messianic anointing for Israel. In fact, “Christ” means “anointing”.

We know, from history, that there were numerous false messiahs who had tried to claim the throne of David, as well as Israel's loyalty.

One false messiah was a man named Theudas, who garnered a following through his teaching and preaching. He once told the Jews that he had the power to part the waters of the Jordan River. He went to the Jordan River, with all of his followers, and, after giving a sermon, took his rod, hit the water, and commanded it to part. Nothing happened, however. He hit the water again and still, nothing happened. After a few more tries, the people left. And Theudas, in disgrace, went into exile and disappeared.

Simon the magician, who was mentioned in chapter 8 of the book of Acts, tried to buy the power of the Holy Spirit from Peter. Historical tradition records that he, later in life, believed he did have supernatural power and was himself, the Messiah. He went to the pinnacle of the same temple where Jesus had been taken during his temptation. He jumped while quoting Psalm, chapter 91, verses 11a and 12b, "For He will give His angels charge concerning you . . . lest you strike your foot against a stone."

That was the last verse he ever quoted.

Have the Jewish people stopped looking and hoping? No!

A few years ago, a rabbi, named Schneerson, was being hailed by many as the true Messiah. He was said to have healed the sick and to have made many predictions about the future that supposedly came true. His followers said that Moses was the first redeemer and that Rabbi Schneerson was the last. Even after this ninety-one year old rabbi suffered a stroke, became paralyzed on one side and unable to speak, The Friends of Israel ministry estimated that nearly 300,000 Jews believed he was the Messiah. He has since died and his tomb is visited regularly by faithful Jews who believe he will rise again from the dead.

Is it any wonder then, that after Paul declares Jesus Christ to be a human being of flesh and blood, who was born a rightful heir to the Messianic throne, he delivers the next part of the gospel, which sets Jesus Christ apart from any other claimant to the throne?

Did you notice the uniqueness in Romans, chapter 1, verse 4? Look at that verse again.

who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead . . .

No one visits Jesus' tomb and wishes it were empty. No one throws flowers on His tombstone and hopes that, one day, the decayed dust of Christ's body will somehow resurrect. In fact, all that the unbelievers in the first century, and since, had to do was produce the body of Jesus, and Christianity would have crumbled into dust and ashes.

They never produced the body, however. So, in verse 4, we read that the gospel of God came on the heels of this declaration that the Son of God is all-powerful, which was demonstrated by His resurrection from the dead.

The gospel truth then, is good news. It has to do with a living Messiah; a living, reigning Son of God, who conquered death and hell.

Jesus is called "Lord"

- The last name for Jesus is Lord, which is a name that declares His exalted supremacy for eternity.

Paul wrote to the Corinthian believers in I Corinthians, chapter 12, verse 3b,

. . . no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit.

If you have never accepted Jesus as the Christ; that is, as your redeemer Messiah, you are not able to acknowledge Him as sovereign Lord.

Three names are used throughout the Epistles, the *Lord Jesus Christ*. When combined, that name delivers the gospel truth that Jesus was both human and divine; He was both fully man and fully God; He is both Messiah and supreme Lord.

Is it important that He be both God and man? If Jesus had not been a man, then:

- He was a liar, for He could not be a son of David and occupy the throne of Israel.
- He could not identify with us nor could He truly be touched with the feelings of our infirmities.
- He could not have experienced death and separation from God the Father.

However, if Jesus were not God, then:

- He, again, was a liar, for He claimed to be "Yahweh" in the flesh.
- He could not have paid the penalty for the sin of the whole world and thus, satisfied the eternal penalty of sin and guilt.

- He could not have overcome Satan and the world, but would have been at the mercy of sin and Satan, as is every man.
- He could not intercede on our behalf, for how could He ever hear the prayers of millions of people everywhere in the world at the same time and intercede on their behalf, unless He were omniscient, omnipresent God?

- He deceived us in promising to create heaven for us and to take us there one day, to live forever.

The good news of the gospel truth, as delivered by the apostle Paul in Romans, chapter 1, verse 4, is that Jesus Christ was a man, the son of David, and, at the same time, He was God, exalted in resurrection power and reigning as sovereign Lord.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 10/15/2000 by Stephen Davey.

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