

Rebuilding the Foundations - Romans
Part 2
“The Source and Scope of the Gospel”
Romans 1:1-6
Pastor Charles Price

This morning. I am going to read from Romans 1. If you don't have a Bible, of course, you can listen to what I read, but if you have one, I recommend you bring it with you every week and can see what it is that we are saying from the text itself. Let me read Romans 1:1-6. "Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God. The gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures, regarding his Son who as to his human nature was a descendant of David. And who's who the spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God, by his resurrection, from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord. Through him and for his name's sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith. And you also are among those who are called to belong to Jesus Christ."

That's as far as we're going to read. There are probably eight major religions in the world and each of those major religions have numerous branches and sects and cults that are related to them. For instance, within Christendom, there are hundreds of cults as well as many, many different denominations. Islam has its cults as well and divisions. So does, uh, Buddhism. So does Judaism. And the big question we have to ask at some stage in our life is how do we know which of these, if any of them, is true?

Are any of them true? Are they perhaps all simply a delusion that for our own convenience, because we need to believe in something bigger than ourselves and this provides opportunity to

do so, but ultimately we're all being deluded by these many different representations of God and how we are to know him. And does it matter if any of them are true. I mean, if you're satisfied in a religious system, does it matter if it's true or not. Well, that's the issue we want to look at this morning because we began last week to look into this book of Romans and Paul introduced himself. Initially, we talked about that. He is a servant, he's an apostle. He is set apart for the gospel of God. We talked about that last week, but having given his own credentials, the credentials of the man who's writing this, he then gives the credentials of the message that he has to offer and proclaim.

Romans is the most definitive statement of the gospel in the entire New Testament. And then these opening verses he gives us three important things about his message. First of all, he tells us the source of the gospel, where it comes from. We have to know that, where does this come from? Is this somebody's imagination? Or what is it? Then it gives us the substance of the gospel. What is it actually about? Then he gives us the scope of the gospel. Who is it actually for? Is this something which I can enjoy in my small corner, but it's nothing to do with somebody else in their small corner. Or does this have a universal application? As we will see, Paul says that it does!, You see the first question we have to ask about anything, about any message is, is it credible? Does it carry an authority?

Is it true? Now in Romans 1:2, Paul talks about the source of this gospel. Where does it come from? When he says he speaks of it as the gospel, he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures regarding his son. Now, listen, the gospel did not begin with Jesus Christ. Paul says this message has its roots in history and prophecy long before Jesus Christ was ever

born. You see Christ did not arrive on the scene as a surprise. He is not the founder of Christianity as sometimes he has been called rather he is the fulfiller of Christianity because long before he was born, there were promises and prophecies made about Christ. And either these promises and prophecies were going to be true or they're going to be false. That's why the prophets of the old Testament are as important as the apostles of the New Testament in understanding the gospel message.

Paul says, when he wrote to the Ephesians that the church has built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets, we need to understand both. And I want to just take a few moments this morning to talk about one example in which the old Testament looks forward to Christ. There are many ways in which it does, but one of the ways in which it does is through prophecies, explicit prophecies made in advance, circulated in advance before Christ was ever born. In fact, these are remarkable evidence of his authenticity. I am told that there are 333 different prophecies about Jesus Christ in the old Testament scriptures. I don't know if that's the exact number. I haven't counted them, but they have to do with every detail of his life. And I'm told this, according to Peter Stoner, who's a mathematician, that the chances of just 48 of those prophecies coming true in one person is 1 to 10 to the power of 253.

If you're not sure what that means. That means one with 253 zeros after it, that is a number equal to the number of electrons in the universe, not atoms. The number of electrons in the universe. That's just 48. If 48 were true of the 333 that were given in advance, but these prophecies were very explicit. For instance, 800 years before Christ was born it named the town of his birth Bethlehem. 700 years before he was born it spoke of the nature of his birth. A Virgin will

conceive and give birth to a son and his name will be Emmanuel, which means God with us, that was written and in circulation for 700 years before Christ was ever born. It named the hometown in which he would live, not Bethlehem, that was where he was born. He then lived in Nazareth and the book of Isaiah 700 years in advance speaks of him being a Nazarene up in the Northern part of Israel.

His death is described with detail long before crucifixion was ever devised as a form of capital punishment by the Phoenicians, and then later adopted by the Romans. But before that had ever begun there are details of his death by crucifixion. It speaks of his resurrection from the dead hundreds of years before it ever happens. And these prophecies are a powerful evidence of the authenticity and the truthfulness of Jesus Christ. You see, we have a better reason for believing that Jesus Christ was born and lived and died than the Bible said that he did. And the better reason is that the Bible said that he would, long before he ever did. That's a pretty impressive reason don't you think? I mean, if you pick up today's newspaper and you read yesterday's news. You're not surprised by that, you expect to do that. But if you pick up today's newspaper and you read next week's news and next week, it happens exactly as you read this week, you probably want to meet the editor wouldn't you? The remarkable thing about the old Testament scriptures is that they are writing 400 years in advance, 500 years in advance, 600 years in advance, 700, 800. There are prophecies 2000 years in advance with detail. And every single one of them came to fruition, dead on time, in the right place. And we may believe in the historicity of Jesus Christ and the validity of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, not just because the New Testament tells us so, but because the Old Testament in advance tells us so, with incredible detail. And Paul is saying here, that the message I'm going to give to you didn't begin with Christ.

It's not something that's evolving here. It's something that goes way back into the scriptures of the Old Testament. The only scriptures Paul ever had were the Old Testament, the only scriptures he ever preached from. The only scriptures Jesus ever preached from were the Old Testament. Not because they didn't like the New Testament, they hadn't got it, but the Old Testament told them enough and its roots go right back into history and into these prophetic details that Paul refers to here. When he says, it's a gospel promised beforehand through the prophets in the Holy Scriptures, but not only does it go back to proceed Christ in time, it goes back beyond time. At the end of verse one Paul speaks of it as the gospel of God, it has its origin, not just in the history of Israel. It predates that, not just in the history of the human race, but it goes back outside of time.

And we're told in the book of Ephesians that God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world. In other words, God wasn't taken by surprise when the human race fell into the mess in which we find it now and has been. God wasn't taken by surprise and said, we need to come up with plan B here, something's gone wrong. He knew in advance. He prepared in advance and he revealed in advance his solution. And Paul's argument here is that the gospel stands above every human philosophy. Every human reasoning. This is not about personal opinion. This is not about human speculation. This has its roots in prophetic statement, that were they not true would have been exposed as such that because they were fulfilled with such detail have revealed themselves as authentic, as true as trustworthy. You see, if the gospel is not objectively true, that is if there is not some historical facts that stand outside of your own personal thoughts or feelings about it, if

it's not objectively true, then belief in Christ becomes little more than a personal preference or a personal opinion.

And if it's just a personal preference is of no more validity than the other religious system or any other message that you'll hear. But if it's true, objectively, then we'd better understand it, because this is not subject to whether I like it or don't or believe it or don't. This is subject to whether it is true. Whether I like it, or whether I don't. So Paul speaks of the source of the gospel, it comes from scripture. And then secondly, he talks about the substance of the gospel. What actually is it about? He says in Romans 1:3, he says it's regarding his son. Down in Romans 1:9 in the same chapter, Paul says that 'God whom I serve with my whole heart in preaching , the gospel of his Son is my witness' now says, Paul, this is regarding his son. This is the gospel of his son. This is not in the first place doctrine. It is not in the first place theory. It is not in the first place Religion. It is not in the first place philosophy. It is in the first place about a person. And that person he says is Jesus Christ. God's son. That's why we don't preach Christianity. Preaching Christianity becomes boring after a while. We preach Christ, a person. You see Paul writing to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 2:2, told them that when he came to them earlier, "I resolved to know nothing while I was with you, except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came with one message." It was about a person who he is, what he did, who Jesus Christ is and what he did in dying in crucifixion. That was my message, said Paul. I mean, we must never sidetrack from this central issue because Christianity will never be understood until you realize it centers on the person of Jesus Christ himself.

That's one of the things what separates him from every other religious leader. Jesus said, 'I am the way' he didn't say, I'll show you the way. I am the way! He said, I am the truth. Not I'll teach you the truth. I am the truth. He said, I am the life. Not I'll show you how to find life. I am the life. He said, 'I am the light'. He didn't say, I'll switch it on for you. I am the light of the world. He said, I am the bread. He didn't say, I'll feed you the bread. I am the bread. He didn't say, I'll give you shepherds. I am the good shepherd and everything Jesus taught was about himself. That's why his invitation was this. Come to me, not go to my teaching. Come to me. In fact, there are two invitations, two essential invitations in the gospel of Jesus Christ. The first does this, come to me and then what do you do? The second thing, abide in me. That is you live in me in union with me in relationship with me.

Now, if the gospel is about Jesus Christ about his person, it requires that he has to be alive to make it work. Which of course is why his resurrection is so crucial. That right now this morning, Jesus Christ is alive and willing to share that life with you by coming to indwell you by his Holy Spirit. You see this sets the Christian gospel apart from every other religious structure and system that there is. It is about his Son says, Paul, well, what is so special about Christ? Well, there are two things he points out here first in Romans 1:3, let me read to you verse three, "Regarding his Son who is to his human nature was a descendant of David." The first thing he refers to there is his human nature. He was a descendant of David. He had parents and grandparents and great-grandparents, I mean, you can trace it back to a line in Israel, to David who was their earlier king.

He speaks there of the humanity of Christ. And then in Romans 1:4, the next verse, he says, "and through the spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God." There he speaks of the deity of Christ. And if we're to understand Jesus Christ and know what it is that he can do for you and for me today, we have to understand his humanity and also his deity. As far as his humanity is concerned, Jesus Christ was born as a real human being. He was a fetus in his mother's womb. He was born by the ordinary means they had to cut his umbilical cord. He had to learn to eat and to crawl and to walk and to talk. He had brothers and sisters. He had parents and grandparents, he ate, he drank, he slept, he grew, he got weary. He endured pain and he died.

All these are human activities and he was every bit human. But he was also God. Now I know there's a mystery to this of course, if we were to be able to reduce God to human understanding, he wouldn't be a very big God, because our human understanding has its limitations. And he's an infinite God, but he was also God. Now some have claimed that Jesus never actually claimed to be God, it was his followers who made that claim later and developed it. But I would dispute that Jesus may not have used the words, 'I am God', but in many of the things he said, he made himself very clear. Let me just show you four things in John 8, in one conversation that Jesus had with some of the Jewish people. And I just want to point out to you four things that he said, which any ordinary human being would and could never say.

In John 8:23. Let me read this verse to you. "Jesus continued, "You are from below, I am from above. You are of this world. I am not of this world." Let's pause for a moment. He said, where are you from, down here? Well, I'm not from down here. You're from this world. I'm not from this world. I mean, supposing I was to meet you as a stranger. I know many of you, but suppose

when I met you as a stranger, a stranger here this morning and I came to you at the end of the service and I said, 'hi, who are you?' And you tell me your name, and I said, 'where are you from?' You say 'I'm from Toronto.' I said, 'yeah, but where did you come from originally?' 'So I was born here.' 'Oh, I see. You mean you're from, uh, you've only ever lived in Toronto.' You say, 'yeah.' 'You're from down here are you?'. You, you say, 'what do you mean?' 'Well, you've always lived on this planet.' 'Well of course I have.'

And you say, 'why, what about you?' I say, 'no, I'm not from this world.' 'What do you mean?' 'Well you may be from this world. I understand that you'd been born and lived in Toronto, but no, I'm not from this world. I'm from another world.' What do you think of me if I said that to you? Well, if that wasn't enough, in John 8:42 in the same chapter, John 8, the same conversation in verse 42, Jesus said, "if God were your father, you would love me for, I have come from God and now am here. I have not come on my own, but He sent me." Supposing I was to come to you at the end of this meeting and having said to you are you from Toronto, I say, 'Now before you were born, did you discuss with your father where you were going to be born?'

You probably say, 'well, of course not.' 'You mean your father didn't tell you where he's going to have you be born?' Well no, I didn't have any conversation with my father before I was born.' 'Really?' And he said to me, 'well, why do you say that?' And I say, 'because I did you see, I was talking to my father one day and he said, I'd like you to be born. So I said, really? And he said, 'yes, I'd like you to be born of a human woman. You see, I'm not from this world. As I just told you. And he told me, 'he'd be born of a human woman.' I mean, if I told you that at the end of this service what would you think of me?

And if that isn't enough in John 8:51, one of the same chapters, Jesus said to them, verse 51. "I tell you the truth. If anyone keeps my word, he will never see death." In other words, you do what I tell you, do what I tell you and I promise you something you'll never die. You can walk in front of a truck. You won't die. If you do what I tell you. I mean, if I said that to you at the end of this service, having told you, 'I'm not from this world anyway, my father told me to be born.' And I say, 'and by the way you do everything I tell you, I promise you from now on you won't die.' Would you trust me? Would you go for a walk on the 401 after lunch just to check it out?

And then he said in John 8:58, ""I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born," Abraham of course, was the father of the Jewish race, "before Abraham was born. I am." Well, you probably would think he needed his grammar correcting to start with. Past tense before Abraham, I am present tense, but of course he was making a claim there to be equal with his Father, with God. Because the name of one, the names of God in the old Testament is the name Jehovah, which comes from 'I am'. If I said to you at the end of this service, oh, you live down here in Toronto. You say you'd been born here. That's all you've ever been. And you, you came without realizing you were coming. Your father didn't tell you anything you just arrived and you do what I tell you. You'll never die. And by the way, where did this country come from anywhere? And you say, well, back in 1492 Columbus sailed the ocean blue. And that's where it all began. So, oh, Columbus, you know about Columbus? Sure you say I know about Columbus. Well, let me tell you something. If all Christopher Columbus ever sailed the ocean blue, I was already here. What would you think of me?

You are from below, I'm from above. I'm not here on my own initiative. My father told me to be born. You do what I tell you. You'll never die. And before Christopher Columbus was ever here, I was already here. What do you think of me if I told you that? You'd think I was crazy? How many would think I was crazy? Put your hand up. If I said this to you, you'd say this guy is crazy. Okay. How many would think this guy is just, just a dirty liar? Just put your hands up. Do you know something, that's exactly what you would think of Jesus. That's exactly what you think of it. Let's understand why people have problems with Jesus, because he said things that humanly was so outlandish and so ridiculous.

Well, of course anybody can, um, make those kinds of claims. The big question is, are they true? Or are they false? Because they are one or the other. And if the claims are false, they're false for one of two reasons they're either false because he knew they were false. He was deliberately deceiving the people, he was deliberately lying. In other words, we'd say he was a bad man. Or if he didn't know they were false it's because when he was in his carpenters shop, one day a piece of wood hit him on the head and woooo.. Suddenly he'd got all these funny ideas, but he was a mental case. I'm going to have to say he was a madman. If these claims are false, it's for one of two reasons, he's either bad or mad. Or the alternative is, it is true. It's either false or true. And if it's true, there's only one conclusion. He is God! Now you have no options with Jesus, but those three, he was mad bad or God. Don't say Jesus was a good man. Good men don't say the kinds of things Jesus said. Good men don't tell you before you were born I was talking to my father before I was born. And I come from another world. If that's the only explanation he was good, of course, but that's the only explanation for him, it is totally inadequate. Well just suppose he was a bad man. Supposing he has deliberately set out to deceive the people of his day if he did so he

became of course the biggest confidence trickster in history. Today around the world, there are almost 2 billion, just about one third of the world's population who claim in some measure to be Christian. I know there's a lot of nominalism there, but they claim some allegiance to Jesus Christ. Our basic understandings of right and wrong, of good and bad, our sense of ethics derive from the teaching of Jesus. And if we had to say he himself was so totally crooked as to be a liar of the order in which he would have been, will be an incredible thing.

Supposing he was mad? I mean, it can happen. People can suffer delusions about themselves. In London, in England, there's a place called Hyde park corner where anybody can stand up and speak. And on a Sunday afternoon, there's whole crowds of people that I've walked through that area a number of times, and there are people claiming all kinds of weird things. You meet people claiming to be Julius Caesar or Jesus Christ or Elvis or whoever they happen to fancy. Some might be just having fun, but some are deluded. And the thing about those who are deluded, people listen to them for the entertainment value. One thing which is conspicuously absent, is any disciple, any followers. Among the things that characterized Jesus was his authority. The fact that he met people, such as the account of him calling six of his disciples and to each of those six, Peter, Andrew, James, John, Philip, and Matthew, he said, 'follow me.' Matthew was at his tax collector's booth. It says, and he got up and followed him. He said to Peter and Andrew at their boat with James and John 'follow me.' They left that boat and they followed him. Phillip in Bethsaida, 'follow me!' He left his town and followed Jesus. Now you try that sometime go down the street and just say to somebody on the street, 'follow me' and keep walking. See what happens. I doubt very much that follow you. And if they did out of curiosity for a little entertainment, this is a weirdo. Let's see what it's all about. You can be pretty sure at the end of

the day, they'll go home again. But with Jesus, they never went home. They stayed with him. They died most of them for him. Ultimately as martyrs. You see, there was something about Jesus that carried authority, and no one has ever become, oh, rather should I say the Christian Church, the Christian Church in the last 2000 years has grown, progressed, there are more Christians than there ever were. No one's blown the whistle and said, Hey, this thing's a fraud and carried any authenticity in doing so. You see every time you write the date, you acknowledge, the birth of Jesus Christ. Every time you write the date. Are we saying this is a madman, that the man who split history into BC and AD. The man who divides history was a madman?

He's not bad and he's not mad. The only conclusion we can come to is that he is God. How'd, you know, if he was God? Well, one of the reasons would be that you'd expect that what he said would come true. One of the things he told his disciples on a number of occasions, they didn't believe it, but he told them I am going to Jerusalem. I am going to die. Suffer at the hands of wicked men. I'm going to die and on the third day, I'm going to be raised again to life. Well, that was some statement to make. I'm going to die, but in three days, don't panic, I'll be back. The disciples didn't take him seriously, they didn't believe it. When he was crucified, they ran away in fear. They had no expectation of the resurrection. Probably you wouldn't either. If somebody were to say to you, 'I'm going to die but I'll be back.'

You see, anybody can make those kinds of statements. I can announce to you this morning that I am going to die this coming Friday, but don't worry. Don't panic. I'll be back next Sunday morning. I can make the statement today. The real crux comes next Friday. Well, dying would be

easy. I could drive my car into a wall. I could slip my throat, drink some poison, put a bullet between my eyes and lots of ways I could die on Friday, but coming back next Sunday morning will be difficult. And yet Jesus made these very claims, in advance. Do you know what happened? On the third day he was back.

If Jesus Christ was a bad man or a mad man, he would've been written out of the pages of history within a few short years. His disillusioned followers would have gone home and said we were conned for three years, but we've got over it now. And Paul says here in Romans 1:4, "he speaks of who through the spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God, by his resurrection, from the dead." Now he's not saying that Jesus became the Son of God by his resurrection. Of course he was eternally the Son of God. But he was, he says he was declared with power to be the Son of God, by his resurrection, from the dead. It's his resurrection from the dead, which declares and affirms who he is, the Son of God.

And that's why he can say this gospel is not about the teaching of Jesus. It's about the person of Jesus, because this Jesus is alive. We're going to see in the book of Romans, that it's the living Christ, that gives the energy and the power and the substance to the Christian life. He's not simply our model, we're trying to copy him. Or our teacher, we're trying to sit cross-legged at his feet and then try and obey him. He's the very life, the very power of the Christian life, because of his resurrection from the dead. So the source of the gospel says, Paul is the scriptures. It's in history, already declared in advance. The substance of the gospel is his son. It's a person, not a philosophy, not a religion. It's about a person and our relationship with that person.

And the third thing he talks about is the scope of the gospel. When he says in Romans 1:5, "through him and for his name's sake, we receive grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith." Now it says Paul, "this is my commission to call people from all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith." Now, of course, the church in Rome was predominantly Gentile. We don't know for sure how the church began in Rome, but we do know that there were Jewish people from Rome in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, when Peter preached and 3000 were converted, they were there for the Pentecost celebration, which was a date in the Jewish calendar. And there may have been some of those that may have been amongst those who became Christians and went back to Rome, we don't know how it began. But we do know this, Rome was predominantly Gentile.

There was a strong Jewish population there, but predominately Gentile. But Paul says whether you are Jew or Gentile is beside the point. The gospel is to call all people from all sectors to obedience. That's why we in this church are committed to world mission, not because it's an emphasis that we've adopted or a peculiarity of ours, but because it is totally biblical. And to know the heart of God is to know a heart for the world and a concern for the world. You see, world missions is not an option for the church to choose, it is a mandate for the church to obey.

And we cannot have the mind of Christ and still hold prejudices towards certain sectors of the population, whether it's on the grounds of nationality or race or color or class or cast or profession or skill or status or education. We're free from all of that, because we know there's one unifying force and factor in the world is people's reconciliation to God. We're involved in the business of calling 'all people' says Paul, 'to obedience that comes from faith.' We're going to

call them. That involves deliberate activity on our part to be involved in calling and inviting and talking. But to bring them to that obedience, it's not just you come to Christ for your own convenience, but we come to Christ recognizing he is Lord. And he comes to occupy the place of Lordship, kingship, mastery in our lives.

That's why Jesus, when he gave the final great commission to his disciples at the end of Matthew's gospel, he told them "go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I've commanded you." (Matthew 28:19-20) Public commission is teaching to obedience. Not because this is some restriction that is then placed on us. But because this liberates us to be the people we're created to be because the God who sends his Spirit to live in us and who directs our lives is a God who knows exactly what it is that liberates us to be the human beings we were created to be. And so Paul says, I've introduced myself to you. I'm a servant, I'm an apostle, I'm set apart for the gospel. That's my credibility. Let me introduce my message to you. And my message has credibility too. I didn't think it up. It comes from the Scriptures. It centers on the Son, the person of Jesus. The substance is Christ and its scope, its range applies to the whole world.

That's why we can speak with confidence this morning that there's not one person in this building. There's not one person listening on television right now to whom this does not apply. This is for you because God sent his Son as the only means whereby human beings might be reconciled to a God from whom we are estranged by nature. I wish there was opportunity every morning to explain how to become a Christian in detail but there isn't. I'd love to show you how you could enjoy this personal relationship with Christ that the gospel is about. But of course, it's

very simple really, Jesus said, you have to become as a little child, not childish, but childlike. And one of the first things a child learns to do is reach out with empty hand and take. You, come to God and say, God, I recognize my need. I realize I need to know you, but there's a barrier between us and I recognize that as my sin. I confess it, I acknowledge it. And I thank you that you died to pay for that sin. Please forgive me and come by your Holy Spirit to live within me. And he will. That's the beginning.

Most of you of course know Christ, but if you don't, you need to. And if you do, you need to be confident that this message that we hold, this message in which you're building your life is not one of numerous options. This is truth, revealed by God to us, in advance, in detail, that humanly would be impossible to fulfill. But Christ fulfilled it all. It showed the authenticity of this gospel. He's alive this morning by his Holy Spirit, able to enter your life. And if you're a Christian to have full sway in your lives that you live in obedience to him.

That's the message says Paul, he's going to expand it in the rest of the book, we're going to look at it of course in more detail. This is where it comes from. This is what it's about. This is who it's for. You included in this? You bet you are. Have you experienced this? Well that's your response, as God speaks to you.

Let's pray together. Father, we're grateful this morning. We can open this book, your word with confidence. It's not human speculation about God. It is. God's authoritative revelation about humanity. You tell us the truth about ourselves and we recognize the emptiness of our hearts and lives apart from you because your purpose is we be reconciled to you and I pray, Lord Jesus,

amongst many here this morning, there'll be a fresh understanding of that. Those of us who know you and love you might be reaffirmed in our confidence in the gospel and those of us who maybe don't know you will come to know you. So, without reserve, open our hearts to you and invite you to come and live within us and impart to us all the wisdom and strengths and power that you give to a forgiven sinner. Make this real for us we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.