

Gospel From Faithfulness to Faith

Thomas Robinson, *Gospel of God's Grace for All of Us 2*, September 28, 2014

Romans 1:1-4, 8-17 (ESV adapted)

¹ Paul, a slave of Messiah Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God (God's proclamation of good news), ² which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, ³ concerning his Son, who was from David's seed according to the flesh ⁴ and was declared to be Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Messiah (anointed king) our Lord (LORD, emperor), ⁵ through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations (Gentiles)....

⁸ First, I thank my God through Jesus Messiah for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world. ⁹ For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you ¹⁰ always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you.

¹¹ For I long to see you, that I may share with you some spiritual gift of grace (*charisma*) in order that you may be strengthened –¹² that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine.

¹³ I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some harvest among you as well as among the rest of the Gentiles (nations).

¹⁴ I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. ¹⁵ So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel,
for it is God's power for salvation
to everyone who believes,
to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

¹⁷ For in it God's righteousness is revealed
from faithfulness into faith,
as it is written, "*The righteous from faith shall live.*" [Hab. 2:4]

Romans 15:24-25

²⁴ I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain, and to be helped on my journey there.

Galatians 2:20

²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by the faithfulness of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

I Thessalonians 1:4-5

⁴ For we know, brothers and sisters loved by God, that he has chosen you, ⁵ because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction.

Romans 3:3

³ What if some were unfaithful? Does their faithlessness nullify the faith/faithfulness (*pistis*) of God?

Habakkuk 2:1-4

¹ I will take my stand at my watchpost | and station myself on the tower, | and look out to see what he (God) will say to me, | and what I will answer concerning my complaint. | ² And the LORD (*Yahweh*) answered me: | "Write the vision; | make it plain on tablets, | so he may run who reads it. | ³ For still the vision awaits its appointed time; | it hastens to the end – it will not lie. | If it seems slow, wait for it; | it will surely come; it will not delay. | ⁴ Behold, his soul is puffed up; | it is not upright within him, | but the righteous shall live by his/my faith/faithfulness."

Paul's Longing for Rome and New People

Paul is beginning a letter to believers in the capital of the empire, hoping that they will help him traveling into new work in Spain. He has had long acquaintance with disciples from Rome (Aquila & Prisca, 16:3), and is aware of the challenging situation as Jewish believers have returned to Rome after years of forced absence (49-54 under Claudius).

He writes out of his experience that proclaiming Jesus (Gospel) in complex Greco-Roman cities created communities that couldn't have been imagined before: Jew/Pagan/slave/free.

It has power for transformation. Paul articulates the event, vision, theology, and practice of that Gospel. This is his own call and journey and the challenge of the church then/now.

This story may seem narrow, ethnic, problematic (Abraham, David, Israel, Jesus, crucified!), but it's really the story of God and his whole world and challenges both Israel and Caesar.

Gospel in Person and Proclamation

Rm 1:1-17 sets out the basic foundations of all that follows. The Gospel (euangelion) of God (v 1) is the announcement of events already in place and what they mean.

Last week: God's proclamation of good news: What God promised (known in scriptures from Abraham to prophets) he has now fulfilled. The promises were God's own commitments that also initiated covenants with people. Promises about his son: Israel, David's seed, the anointed king, Messiah, Jesus. What happened in Jesus showed he was not only son of God as David's seed, but was the very presence of God, "son of God in power," Yahweh visiting his people, marked by the defeat of sin and death in his resurrection by the Holy Spirit.

That's God's announcement in action. He has already done it: His promises fulfilled in Jesus.

Now, Paul says, I get to tell it. I'm eager, because I'm never shamed by it: God works in it.

It is God's power: God's action becomes our proclamation, story, faith, change of identity, trust, hope. God saves people by bringing them into the promises he made for the world. Our response is faith (pistis)/believing/trust/commitment of life. It is trusting in God's promises for his whole world fulfilled as God came for us in Jesus Messiah. Astonishingly, the Jews, the focus of the great story, are now fully joined by all people, God's creation.

In this whole set of events culminating in Jesus Messiah, God is revealing himself. He shows his righteousness (dikaios), his faithfulness to his promises, his profound love for all his people, his just indignation at all that corrupts destroys human life. In God's self-revelation, he sets the stamp of the transformed life, the salvation that he calls people to. The revelation, Paul says, is "out of faith/faithfulness (pistis), into faith/faithfulness (pistis)." It moves out of God's faithfulness (pistis) into our faith and faithfulness (pistis). From the faithful love embodied in Jesus to our response of trust and transformation.

Paul quotes the prophet Habakkuk, who struggled to understand how God could possibly be faithful when foreigners were conquering Israel. God gives him the vision of a long story slow, sure, moving to a great fulfillment. 'The righteous lives from faith.' God and human.

Our Trust in God's Faithfulness to His Promises

Paul's language is compressed and challenging. He expects us to think hard, experience God.

In English we struggle even to translate. Greek pistis/pisteuein – 'faith, faithfulness, belief, believe, trust, trustworthiness.' Greek dikaiois, etc. – 'righteous, righteousness, just, faithful, justify, justification.' Paul will unfold the interactions of these two deeply related concepts.

But the basic pattern: God acts in promise and faithful fulfillment. He has done this in Jesus Messiah, his death/resurrection. The Gospel calls us to trust and be shaped by that reality!