

The Obedience of Faith

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Date: 21 July 2024

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning. My name is Matthew Capone, and I'm the pastor here at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church. And it's my joy to bring God's word to you today. A special welcome if you're new or visiting with us. We're glad that you're here. And we're glad that you're here not because we're trying to fill seats, but because we're following Jesus together as one community. And as we follow Jesus together, we become convinced that there's no one so good. They don't need God's grace, and no one so bad that they can't have it, which is why we come back week after week to hear what God has to say to us in his word. We're continuing this morning our series in the book of Romans. And you'll remember that the book of Romans is a letter written by the apostle Paul. He writes it in the 50s AD, and it is called Romans for a very simple reason, which is that it is written to the churches in the city of Rome. This letter is fundamentally about the gospel.

It's about the good news of Jesus' death and his resurrection. And Paul's hope, as he writes it, is that these churches would be established in the gospel. That's what he tells us just a few verses later in chapter 1, verse 11. And there are many applications that we're going to see throughout the 16 chapters in this book. And Paul, though, is especially concerned throughout with the mission and the unity of the church. In fact, we're going to see both of those here this morning. And so there's many spokes in the book of Romans. They always and constantly return to the hub of the gospel.

As I've warned you or maybe comforted you with before, we will not always move this slowly through the book. We are doing that at the introduction because it is, in fact, so dense and so thick.

And in this week, we're going to return to the same themes we saw in verse 1, especially Paul telling us how he's a servant of Jesus Christ. And we'll see that our good and God's glory are tied together. Our focus this morning is on verse 5, but I have all five verses. 1 through 5 is our reading simply so we see it in context. And I invite you now to turn with me to Romans chapter 1.

You can turn in your worship guide. You can turn on your phone. You can turn in your Bible. No matter where you turn, remember that this is God's Word. And God tells us that His Word is more precious than gold, even the finest gold, and it's sweeter than honey, even honey that comes straight from the honeycomb. And so that's why we read now Romans chapter 1, starting at verse 1.

[2 : 4 2] Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures, concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh, and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by His resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, 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. I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's Word. Our Father in heaven, we do thank you again for coming and speaking to us, speaking us through your Word on ways that we can understand. We thank you for its power. You tell us in Hebrews chapter 1 that your Word holds the world together. You tell us in Genesis chapter 1 that your

Word created the world out of nothing. And so we ask that that very same power would be at work this morning, that you would use this Word to be at work in our hearts, in our minds, in our lives, that you'd use it to soften our hearts, to clear our minds, that we would see Jesus like we've never seen Him before. We would see Him in His glory, in His power, in His majesty, in His holiness, in His mercy, in His grace, in His love. And we thank you that we don't have to worry this morning about whether we've earned those things or deserve them. And we know that we don't and we haven't.

And so we simply ask them in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen. During my time now for a few years as a pastor, I have come to learn and discover that people have very strong views on the idea of a mission statement. Now, whether it comes to vision or value, some people consider these things to be essential. Other people consider these things to be silly and maybe a little bit of a waste of time. When I was in seminary, we took this class on leadership and we came to the part where we were talking about mission and vision as a church.

And one of my very best friends, who was quite bold, raised his hand and he said, you know, I'm not so sure we really need any of this stuff. I mean, my vision for the church is hell's a real place.

People are going there. Jesus saves sinners. That's all we need to say. And there was sort of this nodding, you know, from seminary students in the room thinking, man, do we really have to think about all of these complicated things? In March of 2020, at the beginning of COVID, Stanley McChrystal, the famous retired four-star Army general, was interviewed on crisis leadership. And he said, for a team, it's important to answer one question, which is this, what does success look like?

[5 : 51] This was a follow-up to something that same month he had shot out on Twitter. He said, leaders need to continue to reiterate what winning looks like to your organization.

So whether you believe in mission statements, whether you think vision and values matter, hopefully we can agree that this is an important question. What does success look like? What are we aiming at? Thankfully, in his introduction here, the Apostle Paul provides us with that answer, his answer to that question. As he begins his magnum opus, he tells us what is success for him as an apostle.

In fact, he reviews that very fact at the very beginning of this verse. He tells us, through whom we have received grace and apostleship. He's reminding us of the job that he has been given, and it's a reminder because he told us the very same thing in verse 1. Remember our first sermon in Romans, he says, I was called to be an apostle. We discuss the fact that apostles were the 12 men who were handpicked by Jesus Christ. That's why he says here, through whom we have received grace and apostleship.

In other words, Jesus chose us. He handpicked us. He selected us to be the 12 who would establish the teaching of the church. And you'll remember that these 12 apostles play a unique role in establishing the church. And hopefully, you also remember that there are no more apostles. And there are no more apostles for two simple reasons. Reason one, we now have the 66 books of the Bible, the teaching, the doctrine of the church has been established. Reason two, the apostles were handpicked by Jesus Christ and learned directly from him. I don't remember where I read this, but recently someone pointed out that if you meet someone and they claim to be an apostle, the first question you can ask them is this, are you over 2,000 years old? And if they're not, they don't fit the criteria, right? They were not there to walk with Jesus. Paul also tells us that he received grace, which reminds us of his words in verse 1, that he was set apart, that God had chosen him for this specific task despite his hostility to

God and the gospel. And so we're reminded at the beginning again of what we learned at the very beginning, which is that Paul is speaking with God's authority in this letter. He is not telling us one way to think about God's revelation. No, Paul is telling us the way to think about God's revelation.

[8 : 38] He is speaking as one sent and commissioned by Jesus Christ. Since Paul is clear in his calling, he is also able to be clear with us about what success looks like. And that's what we go on to see in the next phrase. Paul reviews his calling, and then he goes on and says, hey, this is what my win is.

My win is to bring about the obedience of faith. Now, there's been pages and pages spilled over what exactly Paul means by the obedience of faith here. And what he means are two things. There's two elements at play in this phrase. The first is that faith itself is an act of obedience. Faith itself is an act of obedience.

And so success for Paul means to bring people to repent of their sins and to believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior. Now, Paul says this elsewhere when he preaches in the city of Athens in Acts chapter 17, verse 30, he says this, The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent.

What is the obedience of faith? It's obeying God's command to repent. The very next verse in that sermon, Paul goes on to say, and that's because a day of judgment is coming, and you know it's coming because Jesus rose from the dead.

And so success for Paul means that the world would know this, that the world would know that Jesus rose from the dead, that a day of judgment is coming, and that because of it, they would repent and believe.

[10 : 32] I've been telling you for the last couple weeks that Jesus himself teaches the same things that Paul does, and we can say that as well here. John chapter 6, Jesus is talking to these crowds, and they ask him this important question.

They say, what must we do to be doing the works of God? Jesus answered them, this is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.

The obedience of faith is the obedience of believing in Jesus Christ. Now there's a second element at play here as well.

Obedience of faith is not simply the act of faith. It is not simply or merely believing in Christ. It's also clear that faith leads to obedience. It expresses itself in obedience.

We might say that those who recognize Jesus as their Lord will, of course, live in obedience to his commands. And so this idea, this concept of Jesus as our Lord or our King, sums up both of these ideas as faith, of faith.

[11 : 42] The obedience of faith, that is. If Christ is our King or our Lord, we have to recognize him as such, right? We have to obey him in repenting. And there's a call to obedience.

There's a real and actual living in his kingdom. You'll see this on page 8 of your worship guide, a summary of these two ideas. The obedience of faith is therefore a trusting submission to Jesus the Lord.

That's an important concept there. Jesus the Lord or the King. Not Jesus simply or merely the teacher of good ideas, the one who tells you what to do. No, the ruler and reign are over all of the earth.

Bowing the knee to him at the start, initial faith, and going on to bowing the knee to him thereafter, continuing faith. The obedience of faith is an initial and an ongoing surrender.

What does success look like for Paul? Success looks like men and women recognizing Jesus Christ as their King and living in his kingdom.

[13 : 00] That is Paul's mission. I've also been telling you that as we look at these first seven verses, we're going to see some of the main themes of Romans bubble up.

And one of them is this, is that obedience is tied up with, it flows from faith in Christ. And so that's going to come out even in the structure of the book.

The beginning of Romans, we're going to hear all of this doctrine explained to us. And we might think of that as the initial faith, the belief. And then as we get to the end, especially as we turn to chapter 12, we're going to have all the application.

Paul's going to tell us, hey, and now this is how you live. You see Jesus as King, you recognize him as Lord and Savior, and that flows out into a life of faith and obedience.

Very simple. That's what success looks like. Success to Paul looks like the obedience of faith. It shouldn't surprise us that Paul is simply repeating what he learned from Jesus.

[14 : 05] Paul's statement, his mission, sounds surprisingly similar to Jesus' statement. Matthew chapter 28. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.

What Paul teaches, Jesus taught first. Success is bringing people to recognize and serve Jesus as King.

Remember last week we talked about this very same thing, and I quoted to you this from C.S. Lewis. I must keep alive in myself the desire for my true country, which I shall not find till after death.

I must never let it get snowed under or turned aside. I must make it the main object of life to press on to that other country and help others do the same.

What is Paul's mission? What does Paul's win look like? It looks like pressing on to that other country, helping others do the same.

[15 : 25] Looks like bringing people to the obedience of faith. Now, if you're a cynic, you may be thinking, man, obedience is in fact not very sexy.

Why is it that I should care about obedience? This sounds like duty and mere drudgery. Well, thankfully, Paul doesn't simply tell us his mission, doesn't tell us just what success looks like.

He also tells us why it is that this, in fact, matters so much. We have another phrase here. He tells us he's doing this. The purpose, the why behind his mission is very simple.

It is for the sake of his name. Why is he bringing about the obedience of faith? So that God would be honored and glorified.

That's the why. That's the motivation that Paul can return to over and over again. This will also sound a little bit like review because it is. Remember, in verse 1, we talked about Paul's phrase that he is a servant of Jesus Christ.

[16 : 35] And what is a servant if not someone who seeks the glory of his master? What is a servant if not someone who wants to see his master's name famous, lifted up, exalted?

Two weeks ago, we talked about the fact that when it comes to being a servant, all of us have to serve someone. And we have three different options. We can serve someone else.

We all know trusting another human is not a good idea. We can serve ourselves, which sounds tempting, but in fact does not end very well. Or we can serve Jesus Christ, the one who actually loves us more than we love ourselves.

And I'm going to invite you to turn with me to page 5 of your worship guide. I read you a different quote two weeks ago from a different author explaining why it is that God wants what's best for us better than what we want for ourselves.

Here's someone else saying the same thing. Experience proves that without a reliable guide, we can't know what makes us truly happy. This is why desirable pursuits often disappoint us.

[17 : 50] God alone reveals what will satisfy us. The beautiful irony is that in glorifying God, we actually find true happiness.

Why is it that God's glory should motivate us and press us forward? There are many reasons. One of them is this.

God's glory is our good. God's glory is our good. Remember, we have the many spokes going back to the one hub of the gospel.

Jesus is the only one who gave up his life for us. Jesus is the only one who died for us. And so he's the only one that's safe for us to give ourselves to fully and completely.

It's not safe, ultimately, to be the servant of another person. And it's certainly not safe to be the servant of ourselves. No, it is safe and only safe to serve Jesus Christ.

[19 : 08] In other words, as and when we seek God's glory, that is also how we discover and find our good.

And so Paul doesn't just tell us our mission. He tells us why it matters. We care about obedience because our good cannot be separated from God's glory.

And it is in God's glory that we discover our good. Because he's the rightful and true king of the world. He's the only good and faithful king.

So we trust him more than we trust ourselves. How can you have the very best things in this world?

You have them by pursuing obedience for the sake of Jesus' name. To bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations.

[20 : 26] And so the point for us is this. Our ways, if we're left to ourselves, lead to death. God's ways lead to life. God's definition of success leads to flourishing.

Our definition of success leads to oppression. God's way of spending our money brings joy. Our way of spending our money brings disappointment.

God's design for our bodies and our sexuality brings dignity. Our ways bring great shame. God's ways of thinking about race and culture bring unity and celebration.

Our ways of thinking about them bring destruction. If you give me just one more quote, you look on the back of your worship guide, you'll find this. Your flourishing is intimately connected with the God in whose image you have been created.

The first people were fundamentally God-centered and happy. They experienced joy in their work, their rest, and relationships. In the fall, humans became self-centered and unhappy.

[21 : 43] Do you want to experience joy in your work, your rest, and your relationships? And your life must be God-centered.

You must pursue the obedience of faith for the sake of his name. Isaiah 55 reminds us his ways are higher than our ways, his thoughts higher than our thoughts.

Paul doesn't just tell us the mission.

God-centered. The first book of God-centered, the first book of God-centered, God comes to Abraham and he says, this is where you're headed. You are going to be a blessing to all the nations.

And surprise, surprise, Paul says the same thing here. One of the main themes of Romans is that the gospel is for everyone.

[23 : 22] The gospel is for every tribe, every tongue, and every nation. There's many applications we could draw out of that.

Remember, I've been telling you for the last several weeks that while Paul has many applications, he is especially concerned for the mission and the unity of the church.

And so here at the very beginning, he wants to make sure that these Christians in Rome know the gospel isn't for some people, some nations, some cities. No, it's for all people, all cities, all nations.

How is it that they're able to have unity among their differences as they come together of different cultures and ethnicities? It's for this reason. That God is reconciling different peoples together into himself.

And again, Paul teaches second what Jesus said first. What does Jesus say?

[24 : 22] Matthew chapter 28, Go therefore and make disciples of all nations. Now, many of you have heard this. Not as many people have heard what Jesus says a few chapters earlier, Matthew chapter 24.

And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations. And then the end will come.

What is Jesus saying? Jesus tells us in another place that he, according to his human nature, doesn't know the time or the hour of the end of the world.

And yet here he tells us we know one thing. It will not come until every single nation has heard the good news of the gospel. We don't know the time or the day.

We do know this. God's word will go out throughout the whole earth. Habakkuk 2 tells us this. That the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

[25 : 33] And so as he starts his letter, Paul is reminding these people, look. You have great unity. You have one mission together.

And you have it because God has called everyone to take part. That's why as a church, we talk about fervent witness and gospel hub. We want to be a people who are characterized by fervent witness.

That we are representing the obedience of faith to the world around us. And we know that our members are going to end up being sent all over the world. And so as a gospel hub, we want to equip them to do the best job they can in faithfulness to Jesus Christ.

Why? Because he is the only one who loves us more than we love ourselves. He's the only one who's worth our ultimate praise and service and devotion.

Paul explains this in his letter to the Corinthians, his second letter. He says, For the love of Christ controls us. Because we have concluded this, that one has died for all, therefore all have died.

[26 : 49] And he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves, but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

The love of Christ controls us. President John F. Kennedy, one of his main legacies before he was assassinated, was setting the United States on the trajectory of a mission to the moon.

And he was famous for his communication skill in that project, that he made the mission so incredibly clear that everyone understood what direction our nation was pointed on.

There was in fact one and only one goal. It was so clear, there's a famous quote from a janitor who was working to help those involved in this project, and he said this, Brothers and sisters, no matter what you do in life, no matter what place God has given you, no matter the works that he's prepared beforehand, your mission is this, the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among the nations.

Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, we do thank you that you've spoken to us clearly in your word, that you haven't left us to wonder what direction we should point our lives in, but instead you've made it clear that our good and your glory are tied up together.

[28 : 40] And so we ask that you would remind us of that again, that you would drive it deep into our hearts, that you protect us from the distractions and the lies that would pull us away to many other things, but that instead we would focus on one thing, the work of God, which is to believe in your son and the one who sent him.

We ask all these things in his mighty name. Amen. Amen.