

Experiencing the Gospel of the Kingdom

Scripture: *Romans 8:1-39.*

Exegetical Big Idea: We experience the gospel of the Kingdom in our lives through first, a change in our spiritual *profile*, second, the outworking in our lives of God's ultimate *purpose* for Christians, and third, God's *provision* of all our material and spiritual needs.

Introduction

Last Sunday we began a series of three sermons on the theme of *The Gospel of the Kingdom*. The topic of our first sermon last Sunday was *Explaining the Gospel of the Kingdom*. In that sermon we looked at what the gospel is, what the Kingdom is, and how we personalize in our lives the gospel of the Kingdom.

This morning the topic of our second sermon is *Experiencing the Gospel of the Kingdom*. In this second sermon our main text is from portions of **Romans 8**. In the book of Romans the Apostle Paul gives us the clearest presentation of the Gospel that we have in the entire Bible. In the first part of the epistle, from **chapters 1 to 7**, Paul spells out the heart of the *good news* that we call the *gospel* by reminding us that while *we were yet sinners Christ died for us*. In the second part of the epistle, from **chapters 9 to 16**, Paul then explains the practical ways in which this good news translates into our daily lives.

In **chapter 8**, which is in the exact middle of the epistle, Paul connects everything he has written in the first part of the epistle with everything else he is going to say in the second part of the epistle. This makes **chapter 8** a very pivotal chapter in the epistle.

In this chapter Paul helps us to discover how we experience the Gospel of the Kingdom in three ways. First, he helps us to see that when we personalize the gospel of the Kingdom in our lives we experience it through a tangible change in our spiritual **profile**. Second, that we experience it through the outworking in our lives of God's primary **purpose** for Christians. Third, that we experience it through God's **provision** of all of our spiritual and material needs.

These **3P's** give us a good understanding of how we experience the Gospel of the Kingdom in our every day Christian lives.

Read Passage.

I. Profile (Verses 1-16)

- 1) From **verses 1 to 16** Paul explains that our first tangible experience of the gospel of the Kingdom in our daily lives is a change in our spiritual profile that is reflected in our changed response to sin.
- 2) In **verses 1 and 2** Paul declares that the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus sets us free from the law of sin and death. So, what is a law? A law is a rule or a principle that has binding force or effect without exception.

The law of gravity, for example, refers to the invisible force that ensures that any object with a mass of a certain weight, without exception, is pulled to the ground. That being the case, we can ask, how then does an airplane, given its enormous weight, defy the law of gravity and stay up in the air for so long? The answer, of course, is that the law of aerodynamics by which the airplane operates, enables the airplane to overcome the law of gravity. The law of gravity is still there with all its power, but the law of aerodynamics is a greater law that sets the airplane free from the law of gravity. So, in this same way, what Paul is saying here is that although the law of sin and death is still there with all its power, when we personalize in our lives the gospel of the Kingdom, a new law called the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus sets us free from the law of sin and death.

- 3) The law of sin of death goes back to the Garden of Eden. In **Gen. 2:17** God told Adam that in the day that he ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he would surely die. As we saw in our sermon last week, Adam chose to disobey God; he ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and he introduced sin and death into the human race. *Death*, here, refers to both a spiritual separation from God, as well as the separation of our souls from our bodies when we die physically. Again, as we saw in last week's sermon, because, spiritually speaking, we were all in our first parents, Adam and Eve, disobeyed God, every human being is born subject to the law of sin and death. This remains true until we are *born again spiritually* by personalizing the gospel of the Kingdom in our lives. That is when we are in-dwelt by the Holy Spirit who now transmits into us the very life of Christ Jesus, so that now, at work in our lives, is the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus that sets us free from the law of sin and death.
- 4) This is why Paul declares in these first two verses that there is now *no condemnation* for those *who are in Christ Jesus*. Paul uses this expression, *in Christ Jesus*, more than one hundred times throughout his epistles. In the second half **verse 9**, for example, Paul declares that if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ. Here, Paul gives us the Bible's definition of who is; a Christian is as a person who is spiritually *in Christ Jesus* because he or she has placed their faith in Christ and the Holy Spirit now transmits into them the very life of Christ. *Tea bag in water analogy*. In this same way, a Christian is a Christ-infused person, a Christ-ian, a Christ person.
- 5) Because we are thus spiritually united with Christ, our old life is finished; we simply have no further desire to go back to our old life of sin. Our new life of Christ in us gives us our new aversion to sin, and our new desire for holiness; our entire spiritual profile changes. This is what Paul means when he says in **verse 5** that: *Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires*.
- 6) It is not that we cannot sin again as Christians; we can, of course, but we simply do not want to do so anymore. As with an airplane that defies the law of gravity through the law of aerodynamics, in the same way, although sin is still there, we now have the power of the life of Christ in us to resist it.

Because we are now spiritually united with Christ, we are now free from the *penalty* of sin, we are daily getting free from the *power* of sin, and we know that one day when Christ returns, and we receive our glorified bodies, we will be totally free from the *presence* of sin. This is why in **verses 33** and **34** Paul reminds us that Satan simply cannot succeed in bringing a charge against us before God, because God, who is the Divine Judge, is the one who has chosen us and justified us on the basis of what Christ, our defense lawyer, has done for us on the cross! God justified us with His eyes wide open, knowing the worst things about us before, and after our salvation, and His decision to justify us is a final decision that no one can change! **1 John 1:9-2:1-3** confirms this by assuring us that, because of Christ's work for us on the cross, if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us from every kind of wrong.

- 7) So, as a summary of our first point, we can say that our first tangible experience of the gospel of the Kingdom is our changed response of aversion to sin and a corresponding new desire for God's holiness that comes from the fact that we are now in Christ. This change in our spiritual **profile** is our **first P** from this chapter.

II. Purpose (Verses 28 to 30 & 17 to 26)

- 1) From **verses 28** to **30**, Paul explains that our new spiritual profile now makes possible in our lives our second experience of the gospel of the Kingdom, which is the outworking of God's purpose of bringing us to spiritual maturity in Christ.
- 2) Paul begins in **verse 28** by reminding us that Christians are *those who love God* because they have responded to His *call*, and have therefore been *justified* and are therefore sure of being *glorified*. The word, *justified*, means God has pronounced us as being righteous because of our faith in the work of Christ on the cross on our behalf. The word *glorified* means to be made spiritually mature and perfect.
- 3) The word *mature* or *maturity* means to become fully grown and developed. This is what every parent wants for their children and, according to Paul in these verses, this is also what God wants for us as His children - our full spiritual maturity in Christ. This is the purpose Paul is referring to in **verse 28** when he writes that Christians *have been called according to God's purpose*. From **verses 28** to **30** Paul then explains how God brings us to spiritual maturity in Christ. Unfortunately, many Christians read these verses by disconnecting **verse 28** from **verses 29** and **30** and they end up misunderstanding **verse 28** to mean that when we face difficulties, things will somehow work out well in some general, good, abstract sense. This is the wrong understanding of **verse 28** because the word *for* at the beginning of **verse 29** means *because*, and it connects the meaning of **verse 28** to what Paul says next in **verses 29** and **30**.
- 4) So, when you read these verses correctly, you will see that Paul is not saying that things somehow work together for good by themselves for Christians! Instead, Paul is saying that God makes all things work out for the good of conforming us to the likeness or image of Christ. He is saying that *the good* that God is always working for us in all the good and bad things that happen to us is a change in our character so that our character becomes more and more like the character of Christ.

- 5) This is what Paul means when he says in **verse 29**, *so that Jesus might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters*. Brothers and sisters resemble one another because they share the same genes obtained from their parents. Their likeness comes from within; it is not mere external imitation. We are being made to resemble Jesus Christ from within because the same Holy Spirit who was in Christ, is in us, like the same genes that siblings share. This is why in **verse 17** Paul refers to Christians as *co-heirs* with Christ. We are co-heirs with Christ because it is the very life of Christ transmitted into us by the Holy Spirit at our new birth that grows and becomes manifest progressively in us, until the very likeness of Christ begins to be reproduced in our lives as we become more patient, more loving, kinder, and gentler people. In **Gal. 5:22-23** Paul refers to this character of Christ that we are being conformed to as *the fruit of the Spirit* and he explains that God accomplishes this character change in us, as, and when, we allow the Holy Spirit, to guide our decisions, our attitudes, our circumstances, our responses to adversity, and all our relationships.

- 6) Paul then goes on to remind us that, as co-heirs with Christ, as part of the process of God bringing us to maturity in Christ, we will experience some of the suffering in our lives that Christ suffered during His earthly life, because these sufferings guarantee us that one day we shall also share in Christ's glory. This means that our suffering is never the last word in our Christian lives. The last word is the maturity in Christ that God is working in our lives now, and our final glorification in heaven one day. This is why Paul goes on to write in **verse 18** that *our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us*. This is also why in **verses 26** and **27** Paul tells us that whenever we feel overwhelmed by our hardships and suffering, if we find that we do not even know how we should pray, instead of thinking that God has abandoned us, we should rely on the Holy Spirit to *intercede for us in accordance with God's will*.

- 7) *Return to airplane illustration*. So, if we can truly grasp what Paul is saying here I believe that when things become rough and tough for us as Christians, as they often do, we will experience less fear and anxiety than we actually experience, because we will be reminded that God is working even in those tough situations and circumstances to conform us to the image of Christ. This should assure us that as Christians we are not at the mercy of fate, and our Christian lives are neither a random mess, nor just a game of chance in which good or bad things just happen to us without purpose, because God is carefully working in all the good and bad things that happen to us to accomplish His **purpose** of bringing us to spiritual maturity in Christ. This **second P**, then, is our second regular experience of the gospel of the Kingdom in our lives.

III. Provision (Verses 31-37)

- 1) From **verses 31** to **37**, Paul helps us to see that our third experience of the gospel of the Kingdom in our lives is God's provision of all of our spiritual and material needs, which he refers to as *all things* in **verse 32**.

- 2) In the same way that parents provide everything that their children need to ensure that they become fully grown and mature, Paul's *all things* here includes all the beneficial spiritual and material things that God can think of for us as He works in our lives to bring us to spiritual maturity in Christ. This means that Paul's *all things* in this verse corresponds to the *all these things* of Christ Jesus in **Matt. 6:33** where He promised that our Father in heaven will provide all our material needs if we seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness.
- 3) In **verse 31** Paul draws from **Isaiah 50:8-9** to remind us that God's provision for us includes His protection. Paul declares here that because *God is for us* no one can prevail against us. This expression, *God is for us*, refers to God's covenant commitment to uphold and to protect us when people and circumstances are threatening our safety or our peace of mind. This phrase *God is for us* reminds us that whenever we are in any kind of trouble we should assess the forces that are massed against us in the form of ill-health, or financial problems, or difficult people, or disappointing situations, and say to ourselves: *But God is for me!*
- 4) Having said that, we should then look at the problems we are facing and ask ourselves how those problems or people compare with the power of God who is for us. So, when after saying *if God is for us*, Paul then goes on to say, *who can be against us*, Paul is saying: Take a realistic look at whatever opposition you are facing and compare that to the power of God and His covenant commitment to you!
- 5) In **verse 35** Paul goes on to ask: *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?* From **verses 37 to 39** Paul then quotes from **Psalms 44:22** to present a list seventeen different kinds of problems and disasters we can face in this life and he concludes with the glorious statement that in all these things *we are more than conquerors!* By this phrase Paul is confirming to us that none of the troubles and difficulties he lists in these verses can come to us unless they have passed the test of God's love for us.
- 6) Paul's assurance in these verses leave us no excuse for the kinds of imagined fears that we often allow to torture ourselves and cause us to doubt God's ability to adequately provide for us and to protect us.
- 7) So, to summarize our **third P**, we can say that our tangible daily experience of the gospel of the Kingdom in our lives is this assurance of God's **provision** of all of our spiritual and material needs.

Conclusion

I hope these **3P's** give you a fair understanding of how we experience the Gospel of the Kingdom in our lives. Paul began in **verse 1** of this great chapter of **Romans 8** with *no condemnation*, and ended in **verse 39** with *no separation*. This is a very triumphant assurance of our experience of the gospel of the Kingdom in our daily lives as Christians. In **verse 32** Paul reminds us that these **3P's** rest on the gospel foundation that God did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us. In other words:

First, it is because Christ went to the cross to lose His life for us that we can have His life in us that changes our spiritual **profile** to those who are averse to sin.

Second, this is why God is bringing to maturity in Christ as His ultimate **purpose** for us.

Third, it is because Christ went to the cross to lose everything for us that we can be assured of God's adequate **provision** of all of our spiritual and material needs.

And, finally, it is because, on the cross, Christ willingly gave up His heavenly Father's protection, that we are always assured of God's reliable material and spiritual protection for us.

Next week we will conclude this series of three sermons by looking at how we express to others, the gospel of the Kingdom.

Let us pray!

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