
Christ the Son of God

Romans 1:1-7

Introduction What if I told you there was a place you could go where you could be anyone you wanted to be? For example, let's say you could have biceps that popped and abs that rippled. Or for the ladies perhaps the dress size you've always dreamed about wearing and hair that is always just right. Want to be single again? Want to forget you have four kids all under the age of seven? Want to be prosperous? How about young? Popular? Engaging? Aloof? Promiscuous? Rude? Adventurous? Violent? And if this or that characteristic or experience does not work out for you, no problem, change it. In fact, we can get really bizarre. Ever wish you had wings and could fly? How about a tail? Want to commandeer a giraffe? Attend a dance club without gravity? Become a priest in your own church? Would you like to try out being a ghost? *In this place, you can be anyone you want to be.*

This digital phenomena is called Second Life. It is one of several virtual realities that you can join via the Internet where you and tens of thousands of others simultaneously wander around and "do" life. Listen to some of the descriptions of Lindenworld (where your Second Life takes place) that can be found on the website:

Second Life is about personal expression and your avatar is the most personal expression of all. After all, an avatar is your persona in the virtual world...Despite offering almost infinite possibilities, the tool to personalize your avatar is very simple to use and allows you to change anything you like, from the tip of your nose to the tint of your skin. Don't worry if it's not perfect at first, you can change your look at any time.

Think this is just another overly popular first person 3-D game? You may want to think again. Second Life has a real economy. In fact, the "people" in Lindenworld support an economy that is spending at the rate of \$130 million dollars a year and is growing in the double digit range each month.¹ That's not fake or virtual money, that's real dollars. What are they spending it on? Virtual cars, virtual sunglasses, virtual property, virtual cover charges...in fact, you can even visit a "real" ATM in Second Life and trade your "paper dollars" for Linden dollars. If you made a few bucks in Lindenworld selling a virtual pet that you custom designed for a paying customer, you can cash that back out into paper dollars and go by some real dog food for a hungry Fido.

On October 23, at the time of writing this particular part of this manuscript \$590,000 real dollars had been spent in Second Life in the past 24 hours; 12,754 players were logged in (out of 1.1 million who hold a membership),² and Pontiac had just bought a whole virtual

¹http://today.reuters.com/news/articleinvesting.aspx?view=CN&storyID=2006-10-16T174527Z_01_N15302369_RTRIDST_0_MEDIA-SECONDLIFE-REUTERS-CORRECTED.XML&rpc=66&type=qcna (accessed 23 October 2006).

²<http://secondlife.com/> (accessed 23 October 2006)

island to promote their virtual product and will begin selling virtual cars that can be tested on a virtual track and bought, presumably, with not so virtual dollars. Reuters, the well respected news agency, opened a news bureau inside of Second Life this week. It is staffed by one full-time reporter. Consider these last few quotes from the website and intro video:

Second Life provides near unlimited freedom to its Residents. This world really is whatever you make it, and your experience is what you want out of it. If you want to hang out with your friends in a garden or nightclub, you can. If you want to go shopping or fight dragons, you can. If you want to start a business, create a game or build a skyscraper you can. It's up to you.

Life beyond reality...a land of infinite opportunity...an everchanging world rich with promise...transform your being, tempt fate without inhibition, court danger without fear, indulge every passion, from Linden Lab...Second Life...get one!

Identity

Now the point of this long description is not to lay a foundation for a rant against Second Life, virtual worlds, the Internet, computers, technology, or even to exalt the "olden days." The point of describing Second Life is to help us to begin to get our arms around contemporary trends in societal answers to the question, "Who am I?" Or in other words, I am wanting to move us toward thinking about the issue of *identity*.

In culture

At first glance, it would seem that identity, like so many other ideas in our culture has been "commodified," conveniently packaged for mass consumption by us, the often gullible consumers. Think about some of the major trends in what is being sold these days and see if they don't reflect Second Life's approach to identity. Customization... Flexibility... Availability... Transformation.

In our lives

In some ways, identity can simply be thought of as fulfilling a defined role and the more we adopt and own a certain role, the more identified we become with it. For example, when we teach children about firemen, they come to understand not that firemen arrest burglars, but that they put out fires. When we teach them about what it means to be an astronaut, they come to understand not that astronauts build houses, but that they navigate through space. Slowly but surely the child should learn that *who* you are determines *what* you do, *how* you behave, *where* you go, etc. Second Life alters this equation somewhat by allowing you to "be" whomever you would like to be and therefore allowing you to "do" whatever you want to do. Your "second life" is no longer tethered to the pole of your first life...you are free!

In the Bible

Or are you? While this discussion of identity is helpful in illuminating and exploring the topic, it remains up to this point at least one significant step away from how the Scriptures speak to this issue. The Bible is really much more simple and clear (and finally de-

terminative) in the answer to the “Who am I” question. You are either: of the light or of the darkness [1 John 1]; of the Spirit or of the flesh [Galatians 5]; new creation in Christ or old man in the flesh [2 Cor 5]. Every other hat you wear, every other role you associate with, is secondary to this most fundamental aspect of your identity. Given this truth, Second Life does not represent some “new, never seen before, cutting edge” way of constructing identity in our social consciousness. I would argue that it is simply a new *level of freedom*, available to those with a high speed connection, to be who they actually are. To put this more accurately, we are free to be ever more enslaved to the mastery of sin, which is no freedom at all. When we remove the constraints of a physical reality, the opportunities to live out our enslavement to sin are limited only by what our minds can imagine and our checkbooks can handle. It is one more venue where we live out our true identities, either *in Christ* as slaves to righteousness or *out of Christ* as slaves to sin (Romans 6).

Purpose and Program for *Christ and the Christian's Identity*

You see, the hard reality we all must learn is simply this, *you are not whoever you want to be*. Our ideas about ourselves, no matter how sophisticated and technologically advanced are often plain wrong. When an unbeliever asks the question, Who am I? The best answer to that question is that you are enemies of the cross of Christ bound for destruction³ and under the power of Satan.⁴ When a Christian asks the question, “Who am I?” there is also an answer. This answer is not in our self-fashioned ideas of cultural Christianity, nor is it in our family of origin, it is not in our job title or a virtual reality with an unlimited number of variables that we can control, it is not in a theoretical understanding of metaphysics, it is not in our hearts, in fact, it is not even in knowledge *about* this book (John 5:39). The answer to the question Who am I? is in a person, and that person is Jesus Christ. The sermon series I am introducing this morning is not about the danger of virtual worlds but about the glory of living in a spiritual reality. So between now and Christmas, we will, as a body of believers, consider together the connection between who Christ is to us and who we, therefore, are.

You see, the accountant knows he is to balance ledgers, the brick layer that he is to lay bricks, but do you, oh Christian, understand what your title requires of you? If no, fear not. The answer lies not within you but within the person of Christ. That is why over the next eight weeks we will on Sunday mornings consider the person of Christ and then on Sunday evenings consider the implications of *who Christ is for us* in the believer’s life. As such, our series will play out as follows:

Just a brief note for those of you who might be our guests this morning. Our normal pattern here at Clearcreek Chapel is to move systematically through large portions of Scripture, usually whole books,

AM	Christ the Son of God
PM	The Christian as a Son
AM	Christ our Righteousness
PM	The Christian as a Saint
AM	Christ, the Servant of God
PM	Thanksgiving Praise and Worship
AM	Christ, the Mighty Warrior
PM	The Christian as a Soldier
AM	Christ, Our Shepherd
PM	The Christian as a Sheep
AM	<i>Christmas Cantata</i>
PM	The Christian as a Sanctuary
AM	Christ, Our Immanuel
PM	<i>Cookies and Carols</i>
AM	Christ, the King

³ Philippians 3:18

⁴ Acts John 8:39ff

exegeting the text, paragraph by paragraph. Occasionally, however, we break from this pattern for a series such as this one. I hope that you will find our theme sufficient to draw the Sundays together in a coherent fashion as we will be moving among many passages.

Let us turn then to Romans 1 where we will begin our series by considering Christ the Son of God. Let's pray. [PRAY]

Christ the Son of God

Our text for this morning is Romans 1:1-7. Let's read it together now [READ Romans 1:1-7]. This morning we are going to consider Christ as the Son of God and this evening the Christian as a Son. So the question immediately before us is, "What can this passage tell us about who Christ is as Son?" Well the most obvious answer is in verse 4, we're told that Christ is the Son of God. But this passage also sets forth several descriptions of Christ that flow forth from the fact that he is the Son of God. We'll try to capture these descriptions under the following headings: Christ as Son of Promise, Son of Man, Son of God, and Son of Glory. First, however, let us spend just a short amount of time coming to understand the context for this passage more clearly.

As many of you know, Romans is a letter written by Paul to the church in Rome which is composed of both Jews and Gentiles. To a degree unmatched by any other of Paul's epistles, the Gospel is defined, explained, and defended in the course of this letter. And although Paul begins the letter with a short, but necessary, reference to himself, he quickly turns the attention of his reader to the *person* that exists at the core of the Gospel, Jesus Christ. Although Romans is quite clearly about the Gospel, without Christ there is no Gospel and the Gospel cannot be biblically explained apart from the Christ and his crosswork. Any evangelistic scheme or Gospel presentation which does not clearly place Christ at the center is not the Gospel of the Bible.

Paul's purpose (v.1)

As I mentioned, Paul does briefly introduce himself as was common with letter writing during this time. However, these words are not here simply because it was the thing to do. These words, like every word in our Bibles, are here for a reason. First, Paul establishes his authority and authenticity as a true apostle charged with the duty of proclaiming the good news. Not unlike our day, Rome was a place filled with competing voices, ideas, methods, approaches, and answers. Into this Paul comes and tells the Roman church, "I am the real deal and I have the true message." This is a little like when I was a child and my father would give me a message to take to my other brothers and sisters, and he would tell me, "You go tell your sister that I said..." You better believe that when I found my sister I spoke with all the authority I could muster – I knew who I had been sent by, I believed the truthfulness of the message, and I was confident in the power and authority of the one who sent me to carry out his plan. And so Paul quickly, but importantly, establishes his position as the mouthpiece of God.

Next, concerning the issue of identity, let me backpedal a bit. Note that in this first verse, Paul seems to be much more concerned with WHOSE he was than with WHO he was. That is, he is a servant of *Christ Jesus*, he was *called* to be an apostle, and

was *set apart* for the Gospel of God – every one of these activities he mentions were initiated by an authority external to and higher than Himself, namely, the triune God. *Who* he was, was determined by *whose* he was. Paul was clear about his role and purpose in life because he understood whose he was.

Son of Promise (vv. 2-3a)

Paul establishes his credibility and his authority to do what? Paul uses his apostolic authority to grab his audience's chin, so to say, and to direct their gaze at the "gospel of God" and its' centerpiece, the person of Christ. And Paul begins this directing of gaze with a look backward. (*deeds over doctrine, orthopraxy vs orthodoxy, etc.*).

Listen as I read from Genesis 3:15 where God confronts the serpent after Adam and Eve have sinned in the Garden: *I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring[a] and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.* The picture is veiled, the meaning is blurry, but the seed of the promise of a savior is there. This seed grows and matures across all of redemptive history as God continually reveals more of his sovereign plan to magnify his own glory by redeeming men and women through his son. We eventually arrive in 2 Corinthians 1:20-21 where Paul proclaims: *20For all the promises of God find their Yes in him [Christ]. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory. 21And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ...*

This "Gospel of God" which was promised beforehand "concerns [God's] son," Jesus Christ. *As a son, Jesus Christ is one who faithfully fulfills the will of his father* across all of the Old and New Testaments, right up until today. He is the means by which all of God's intentions toward us are made possible. We hope in God because he has given us promises, we believe in God because he has given us his son. Jesus Christ is the son of promise because all of God's promises are "Yes!" in him.

Son of Man (vv. 3b)

Not only was Christ promised beforehand, but he entered the world in flesh, God incarnate. He became the God-man so that he could rescue men. Galatians 4:4 reads: *4But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, 5to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.* But the emphasis here is not just on the incarnation, "according to the flesh," but on the fact that Christ "was descended from David..." and fulfilled God's promise that an eternal king would come through the line of this earthly forerunner. Listen as I read Jeremiah 23:5: *Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.* And Isaiah 11:10: *In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples--of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious.*

As a son, Jesus Christ is one who acts as the kingly representative of his father. It is likely that those in the church at Rome would have immediately understood Paul's reference to Christ being of the fleshly line of David as a declaration that Christ is the descendant king. And as king, he would reign in power, in might, in righteousness, con-

quering all the enemies of God. The angel Gabriel told Mary that her son ...will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever and of his kingdom there will be no end. (Luke 1:32).

Our view of God is so low and our view of this world and ourselves so high, that we have difficulty getting excited about this. Do you remember the crowds in Jerusalem who gathered to meet Jesus as he entered the city – just prior to his resurrection (the triumphal entry)? Although they had many things wrong, they did understand what it meant to be in the presence of majesty. They waved palm branches and cried out *Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!* (John 12:13). We can scream at music concerts, jump up and down on our sofas while watching sporting events, blather on for hours about my pictures from Alaska, but we can barely lift our voices on Sunday mornings in worship, we rack our brains to summons “sentences of praise” on Sunday evenings, while we can recite every play in the final 4 minutes of the OSU v. Michigan game for months afterward. Our sense of awe is often misallocated, all spent on temporal trifles while Jesus Christ, the King!, the earthly representative of God the Father rides by on a lowly donkey.

Son of God (vv. 3b -4)

So in these seven verses we have seen Christ as the son of promise, the son of man, and now, we see him as the son of God. We are told in verse 4 that Christ was *declared to be the son of God*. Certainly this happened very clearly at the *outset* of Christ’s ministry—when he was baptized by John the Baptist and the Holy Spirit descended like a dove from heaven and God spoke from heaven saying, *This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased*. (Matt 3:17). Later in Christ’s ministry John records that the Jews understood clearly what Christ’s claim of sonship meant – it meant making himself equal with God (John 5:18). We are told by Christ that whoever does not honor the son does not honor the father (John 5:23). Conversely it is also true that whoever honors the son honors the father. These days, there are many who would have us see it some other way subtly undermining the divinity of Jesus Christ. Here is the *Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to the United Nations General Assembly in New York* this past September:

He commands His creatures to enjoin one another to righteousness and virtue and not to sin and transgression. All Divine prophets from the Prophet Adam (peace be upon him) to the Prophet Moses (peace be upon him), to the Prophet Jesus Christ (peace be upon him), to the Prophet Mohammad (peace be upon him), have all called humanity to monotheism, justice, brotherhood, love and compassion. Is it not possible to build a better world based on monotheism, justice, love and respect for the rights of human beings, and thereby transform animosities into friendship?

In these days where religion often is identified as the cause of the world’s woes, and exclusive truth claims as intolerant, we must be careful to not succumb to plausible arguments as the one above. They are nothing short of heretical. Jesus Christ and he alone is the Son of God.

But Paul here is referring to a different point at the *end* of Christ’s earthly ministry, or you might say the consummation of it. If we begin at the end of verse 4 and work our

way toward the beginning of the verse we see first that the declaration of Christ to be the Son of God was finally established by His resurrection from the dead. This historical event set Christ apart as the divine Son of God. It is not simply, however, that he was brought back from the dead – we must look beyond this to fully understand the resurrection, for even Lazarus was raised from the dead and yet he is not called the Son of God. We must remember that he was raised in accomplishment of the Gospel of God. He died as the righteous for the unrighteous that we might be brought to God (1 Peter 3:18). His resurrection was in power. But what did this power accomplish? Paul in Ephesians 1 tells us that this power or great might was worked in Christ when he [God] raised him [Christ] from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all. Is it not glorious? Who else but the son of the living and sovereign God could have such things written about him? *As a son, Jesus Christ is one who, through the work of the Spirit in the resurrection, bears witness to the sovereign power of his father.*

Son of Glory (vv. 5-6)

Lastly, we will consider Christ as the Son of Glory. In verse 5 we find that both ability and authority have been given to the apostles by Christ. And who better? This is the Christ who died on behalf of sinners, overcame death, was seated at the right hand of God above all rulers and authorities. Many of us simply underestimate the power of the Gospel of God, the power of Christ, his son. We treat Christ like a flashlight – great on a very dark night when the power unexpectedly goes out, but not so helpful in the daytime when the power is up and the coffee maker gives me liquid strength, the car efficiently relocates me, and my job earns me an income sufficient to keep my worries at bay. We forget or treat glibly that the authority and ability of our Lord far, far, outshines anything we can conceive – he is the flashlight that makes the daytime look like darkness – the darkness flees in his presence. This will become most evident at this return. For believers this will be glorious and gladdening. For unbelievers it will be the most terrifying day of their lives. No coffee will supply energy enough to strengthen their legs on that day, no car will transport them to a more desirable location hidden from the Son, and no amount of money will purchase them freedom from the penalty of their sin.

The only hope is the obedience of faith and this comes to us through the ministry of the gospel, which is grace (Eph 2:8-9). It is by grace that faith is created in our hearts. In this faith we respond to the call of the gospel in obedience – it is a call which creates in us that which it commands. The believers in Rome have been called as a result of their being loved by God – they are called to be saints in verse 7 and called to belong to Jesus Christ in verse 6. Christ tells us in John 6 (:39-40) *For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.*

Do you realize that we have gone from verse 1 to verse 6 and Paul has yet to take a breath? There is not a single period in this sentence that runs through to the end of verse 7. This six-verse description of the gospel of God of which Christ is at the center (v.1) finds its reason for existence in the last phrase of verse 5, **for the sake of his name among all the nations. As a son, Jesus Christ is one whose name is worthy of all glory because he is co-equal with his glorious father (John 5:41, John 6:39-40).** In the face of Jesus Christ we see the glory of God (2 Cor. 4:6). When we pronounce in our hearts that Christ is Lord, we give glory to the Father (Phil. 2:11). The eternal glory of God is made manifest in Christ (1 Peter 5:10).

Conclusion (v. 7)

Paul concludes the introduction of his letter to the Romans by bidding them both grace and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. In this short portion of Scripture we can see the perfection, beauty, and necessity of the relationship between God the Father and God the Son.

- *As a Son of Promise, Christ is one who faithfully fulfills the will of his father.*
- *As a Son of Man: Christ is one who acts as the kingly representative of his father.*
- *As a Son of God: he is one who, through the work of the Spirit in the resurrection, bears witness to the sovereign power of his father.*
- *As a Son of Glory: he is one whose name is worthy of all glory because he is co-equal with a glorious God (John 5:41, John 6:39-40).*

As we wrap up, we can return to the issue of identity. This evening Dan will help us understand how the Sonship of the believer shapes and forms the Christians life and affections. What we can see this morning, however, is the relationship between the Father and the Son in the mystery of the Trinity and how it shapes the Son's ministry. Christ new what his business here on earth was because he knew his father: listen to the excerpts from John 5 and 6: **truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing (5:19)...I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me (5:30)...For I have come down from heaven not do my own will but the will of him who sent me (6:38)...As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me (6:57).** Christ's ministry was inexorably shaped by his identification with the father. This is just as the believer is shaped and formed by his or her identification with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, that is, in Christ we have a new status, a new assurance, and a new hope. Christ was able to fulfill his ministry on earth because he knew and understood his Father's will, plan, and love – in short, He glorified God on Earth (John 17:4).

A brief warning for us and we will be done. In this series one may find it tempting to think little of our morning sermons as we will generally focus on truths about and the characteristics of another, namely Christ. This may be to the exclusion at times of dwelling much on ourselves or spending a great deal of time in personal application. We, on the whole, are those who love to hear and talk about ourselves. We also tend toward liking 5-step solutions for being better people. We might be heard in our hearts saying, "I don't need all this theology about who Christ is, just give me the good stuff, tell me what I'm supposed to do!" (wwjd vs. who is Christ) In John 6 the morning following the night that Jesus walked on the waters of the sea of Galilee, the crowds are looking for Christ.

They are fresh with memories of Christ multiplying the loaves of bread and the fish. They catch up to Christ in Capernaum and they ask him, (v.25 ff) "Rabbi, when did you come here?" 26Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. 27Do not labor for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal." 28Then they said to him, "**What must we do, to be doing the works of God?**" 29Jesus answered them, "**This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.**" (cf. also Romans 10:14 ff.)