

You learned in school the first thing in a letter is to address the person you're writing to. Dear so and so is the usual way to start. Then you tell them whatever it is that made you write the letter. Finally you sign your name at the end. Letters written in the ancient world were slightly different. They started with the signature of who was writing the letter. Then they said who the letter was for. That's how Paul's letter to the Romans was written.

We all know that during this season, especially now in the last few days before school lets out and families take vacations, it can be especially hard to remember what's it all for. Like setting out to write a letter but before you get to the reason you're writing something distracts you. We set out thinking about one thing at Christmas only to get distracted with many other things. Paul put his name at the top of his letter. But before he even got to the recipients he was distracted. Five verses of distraction focused on love and appreciation for the gospel. Paul wasn't going to forget, he wasn't going to be distracted, and he wasn't going to miss it.

On this last Sunday of preparation before we reach Christmas we need clarity about what's about to happen. Paul wants there to be no doubt in our minds going into these important days. We're going to talk about the gospel. The gospel centers in only one place. Be lifted up with Paul in the second lesson as we...

**Behold the Son of God
True Man and true God
The one who brings grace and peace**

I hope you caught it while the gospel was read just before. Many people simply skip all those names in the genealogy of Christ. But that list of names serves a very important purpose. It's the record **"of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham."** Did you catch it? Read down to verse six and there is King David listed. Skip ahead to verse sixteen and there is Jesus. So Jesus through both his mother and step father was the true son of David.

When Paul takes up writing to the Romans he's pointing a big spotlight at the one he wants to talk about. The gospel centers in one person, a human being born of a mother like you and me. **"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."** Jesus, born in a manger in the natural way from the Virgin Mary, was from the lineage of David and was a human being. He is true Man.

But Paul adds another characteristic about Jesus that is important to not miss. Fast forward in Jesus' life to the end. His death happened just like every other human being. But something was different about this death. **"And who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord."** Jesus received the title Son of God. It's a clear title designating him holy and perfect. It removes all doubt. He was without sin. The most recognizable sign was his coming back to life. He is true God.

Believing that Jesus is a true human being is not so much a problem. Every nativity set I've ever seen has had a baby Jesus. He has arms and legs and looks very human. So that's it though, right? He looks like the natural son of Mary and Joseph, a son of David, but nothing more. He's just a baby. But this can't be all we're waiting for. We would expect God to send a powerful king or a strong ruler. The idea that God came as a baby seems made up.

Don't doubt and don't dismiss what you see this week. That baby is more than what you see on the surface. He's **"Jesus Christ our Lord"**. He's Jesus, the personal name given to him by Mary and Joseph but spoken by the angels from God. A human name which means "he saves". Christ is the word for the office he holds. He's the Messiah. That name is a powerful reminder of all that this son of God would do during his life. It would all culminate in his resurrection from the dead. Lord is a reference to the true God of the Old Testament. This unites Jesus with that true God saying Jesus was true God. He's also the Lord that saves his people. Finally added is that this Lord Jesus Christ is ours. He came for you and for me.

Commercials are always trying to get us to come in and try the newest whatever, or see the greatest whatever. They make it seem so special that you just have to come in and behold it for yourself. Just a few days from now we'll behold something even more amazing. It will be more than just what we see physically. Our eyes will behold a baby, but he's more. He's the son of Man and the son of God. He's true Man and true God. His coming is all about his work for us. Paul mentions the gift that comes from the work of Christ. Jesus brings grace and peace.

The man writing this letter was no stranger to persecution. Paul was just used to giving it out. People like the Romans were used to hearing Paul say things like "You're under arrest." It may have sounded strange for the Romans to hear him encouraging them **"Grace and peace to you..."** Something had changed for Paul and it centered in the gospel of God.

Grace is the undeserved love of God for human beings. It isn't natural for sinners to be loved by God. All too clear are the things we've done against God. We are his enemy. But that's what makes grace, grace. God chose to love the unlovable because of Jesus who brings grace. Grace makes us what we couldn't make ourselves. Paul wouldn't have chosen to be an apostle, grace gave him that gift. We would never choose to love God, grace gave us that gift.

Peace is a by-product of grace. In warring countries there is no peace. When Rome took over the entire world including Israel it meant the two were enemies. Israel looked for any way to get out from under Rome's control. There was no peace. There's no peace in our relationship with God either. We're under God's commands but we wish we weren't. We look for ways out. In our sinful nature we're God's enemies. It would've remained that way too, if not for the Son of God restoring the peace.

When Christ arrived on the earth in the tiny baby he gave God's grace a face. One word summarizes what happened at that Christmas, Immanuel. There in one word we find ourselves and God. Immanuel means, God with us. Paul states it, **"Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ."** The sacrificial servant and Lord of all gave up everything for us to receive his grace and peace. God loves us and finds joy in us not because of us, but because of him. Jesus, who brings grace; the love of God for sinners that will never change. Jesus, who brings peace; a restoration of the relationship with God based on his actions on the cross.

Paul's scope of ministry sent him to all non-Jews. His goal was to bring people to the obedience which is faith. And his one way to do it, the name of Jesus. You may not be brave like Paul, outspoken like him, or have as strong of faith, but you can still do what he did. Your scope can be limited to the people who you encounter each day. Your goal is no less than to lead people to faith. And you too only have one way to do it and that's through Jesus. Share God's grace and peace with people. You know it. You know that baby, you know what he did, and you know what it means to you. Grace and peace are real because Christ Jesus brought both.

As we close out the Advent season and prepare once again to behold the Son of God born in the manger we look to the skies where Jesus has promised to come again. The true Man and true God who brought grace and peace is with us. Listen to the miracle described in the poems of the preschoolers, kindergarteners, and 1st graders from Friday's children's Christmas program, **"When you look up at the tree, we see what God gave you and me; in the garden we see man fall, but Jesus came to save us all! With a manger for his bed our king of kings laid down his head. No palace for our king that day, this humble child will light the way. The angels came from heaven above, to share the news of the Father's love; this tiny child of lowly birth, brings peace and joy to all the earth! The stars that fill the sky at night, remind us of that star so bright; the wise men saw it and followed to see, the Savior born for you and me."**