

THE CHRIST-CENTRED FOCUS OF THE GOSPEL

ROMANS 1:2–4

INTRODUCTION

As Paul sat down to write his letter to the Romans, he followed something of the **normal letter-writing conventions** of the day.

As was typical for letters of that period, Paul introduced himself as the author first.

However, as much as Paul **followed the normal practices** of the time, **he also wasn't afraid to alter them** to suit his purposes.

The typical Greek letter began simply with a one-sentence identification of the authors and recipients, and a greeting.

We find an example of this simple format in **Acts 15:23**—

The apostles and the brothers who are elders, to the brothers in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia who are from the Gentiles, greetings.

Paul obviously **expands the opening of his letters substantially**, and **Romans has the distinction** of having the longest opening.

In fact, its remarkable not only among Paul's letters, but even **among all the surviving letters of the time**, as **one author** claims—

“No other known ancient letter from the Graeco-Roman or traditionally Jewish environment contains such an extensive letter opening”¹

Paul clearly has a purpose in mind as he opens his epistle in this way.

As we learnt last week, neither Paul nor any of his close associates had planted the church in Rome, so he must have felt the need to **establish his credentials as an apostle and to summarise his gospel message.**²

As we considered the transformation of Paul’s life by the gospel in our study of **verse 1**, we concluded that Paul was the greatest apostle, even the greatest of Christ’s followers.

However, we were also reminded that the transformation of Paul’s life and ministry compel us not to focus on the greatness of the man, but on the greatness of his God.

Paul’s gospel-transformed life and ministry **compel us to focus on God** and the display of His glory in His work of saving sinners.

Today, then, as we progress from studying Paul’s credentials to studying his gospel message, we will find that **his message, too, is focussed on God.**

¹ Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, ed. Ned B. Stonehouse et al., Second Edition, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018).

² John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Romans: God’s Good News for the World*, The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 46.

Indeed, **Paul's letter certainly focuses on God**, as we heard this previous Sunday from commentator **Leon Morris** who wrote—

*“Romans is ultimately a book about God: how **He** acted to bring salvation, how **His** justice is preserved, how **His** purposes are worked out in history, how **He** can be served by **His** people.”³*

That makes perfect sense when we remember that **the theme of Romans is the gospel** and, as Paul himself says, **the focus of the gospel** is not on man but on God.

That's what he means when he writes in **verse 1** that it is, **“the gospel of God.”**

What does Paul mean by **“the gospel of God”**?

He is **cleverly using the grammar** of the Greek language to refer to, *“all aspects... in which the Gospel is in any way related to God.”*⁴

In other words, when Paul refers for the first time in his epistle **to the great theme of the letter** as **“the gospel of God,”** the most important thing he is communicating is that **the gospel is about God and His work of saving sinners.**

God is the focus of the gospel.

³ Cited in Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, 41.

⁴ Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, 41 (fn22).

So then, not only do Paul's **transformed life and apostolic ministry** **compel us to focus on God**, but so too does his message of the gospel.

As we will come to see through our study today, though, Paul **becomes even more specific** as he introduces **Jesus Christ as the central focus of the gospel**.

The gospel message that Paul proclaimed has a **Christ-centred focus**.

To say that differently, **at the heart of the gospel** which is about God and His saving work, is the **good news message of the person and work** of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

This is evident from the outline of the gospel we we learnt two weeks ago.

The gospel confronts us with bad news before proclaiming to us the good news.

The bad news is very bad news for us for two reasons:

(1) because of who God is and (2) because of who we are.⁵

God is the holy Creator who owns us and He cannot simply overlook sin because of His righteous character.

This becomes bad news for us when we consider that we are **sinners who rebel against Him**, refusing to worship Him or obey Him and therefore **stand condemned** under the wrath of the holy God.

⁵ Cf. Naselli, *Romans*, 24.

But the good news of the gospel is very good news for us for two reasons: (1) because of what Jesus did and (2) because of what will happen if we trust Jesus.

This is what Jesus did—He lived, died, and rose again for sinners.

This is **God's solution to our greatest problem**—we are condemned because of who God is as holy and righteous and because of who we are as guilty sinners.

So God the Father sent Jesus His Son to **die in the place of sinners, as a substitute for sinners.**

The good news is very good news for us **not only because** of what Jesus did; it is good news for us **because of what will happen** if we trust Jesus.

God saves sinners who **turn and trust Jesus.**

The gospel calls for a response from us in the form of **turning**—that is, repenting from our sin—**and trusting**—that is, placing our faith in the promises of God and the work of Jesus Christ.

As we remember that outline of the gospel message, we can **understand why the heart of the gospel** is the **person and work of Christ.**

That is why Paul introduces **Christ as the central message of the gospel.**

The gospel message that Paul proclaimed is **centred on Christ.**

Throughout church history, this has remained the confession of all God's faithful people.

One of the earliest creeds we have from church history is the **Apostles' Creed**.

At the centre of the confession is its most substantial statement of faith, as it declares—

*I believe in Jesus Christ, his only-begotten Son, our Lord;
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary;
suffered under Pontius Pilate;
was crucified, dead, and buried;
the third day he rose again from the dead;
he ascended into heaven,
and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty;
from there he shall come to judge the living and the dead.*⁶

This central focus has been preserved throughout the ages, but perhaps one of its greatest champions was **Charles Spurgeon**, who wrote in **Lectures to My Students**—

*“This is the sum; my brethren, preach CHRIST, always and evermore. He is the whole gospel. His person, offices, and work must be our one great, all-comprehending theme.”*⁷

⁶ Chad Van Dixhoorn ed., *Creeds, Confessions, and Catechisms: A Reader's Edition* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022), 13.

⁷ Charles H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2022).

In a sermon entitled, “**The Gospel of the Glory of Christ**,” he stated—

“Mark this: the less you make of Christ, the less gospel you have to trust in. If you get rid of Christ from your creed, you have at the same time destroyed all its good news. The more gospel we would preach, the more of Christ we must proclaim. If you lift up Christ, you lift up the gospel.”⁸

PROPOSITION

That brings us then to the study of our text today—

Romans 1:2–4.

Here, Paul offers us **three perspectives on the person of Jesus**, the Son of God, that **together highlight the Christ-centred focus of the gospel**:

1. The Old Testament promise of the Son (2)
2. The earthly existence of the Son (3)
3. The spiritual exaltation of the Son (4)

As Paul thus **highlights Christ as the central focus of the gospel**, he also reminds us that **Christ must be the central focus of our faith and worship**.

⁸ C. H. Spurgeon, “The Gospel of the Glory of Christ,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 35 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1889), 174–175.

1. THE OLD TESTAMENT PROMISE OF THE SON (2)

As much as what Paul will **highlight Christ as the central focus of the gospel**, he is also careful to explain that the good news of God and His saving work is not new, but is **deeply rooted in the OT and its Messianic expectation**.

We see that as **verse 2** picks up Paul's reference to **"the gospel of God,"** from **verse 1**, and then continues to describe it—

which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures

Here we see Paul affirm that the gospel he preaches is a **fulfilment of what was promised in the OT Scriptures**.⁹

Paul recognises the **continuity between the message** of salvation found in the OT and that proclaimed in the NT.

Critically, Paul never thinks of his gospel message as contradicting the OT.

In fact, he understands it to fulfil the OT in a way that **surpasses the expectations of both Jews and gentiles**.¹⁰

This becomes an important subject that Paul will elaborate on in the letter.

⁹ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, ed. Robert W. Yarbrough and Joshua W. Jipp, Second Edition, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic: A Division of Baker Publishing Group, 2018), 41–42.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 42.

As **Doug Moo** states—

*“Throughout the letter he is at pains to demonstrate that the good news about Jesus Christ is rooted firmly in the soil of the Old Testament.”*¹¹

Indeed, we find Paul’s **clear statement of that conviction** right here in **verse 2**.

Paul says initially that the gospel was “**promised beforehand**” by God.

The faithfulness of God is **another key element** that Paul will develop further in this epistle, alongside the fulfilment of the OT promises in the gospel.

As Paul will argue, the fulfilment of OT prophecies in Christ is a **demonstration of God’s faithfulness**.

While that idea runs throughout the epistle, Paul takes great pains to defend that idea in **chapters 9–11** where he states that **Israel’s present rejection of Jesus** their Messiah does not mean that God has been unfaithful, as he says in **Romans 9:6**

It is not as though the word of God has failed.

Paul seems to have more than the subject of God’s faithfulness in mind here in **verse 2** though, because he specifies that the gospel was “**promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures.**”

¹¹ Douglas J. Moo, *Romans*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000), 36.

In other words, Paul is directing our attention specifically to **God's faithfulness in fulfilling OT prophecies**, and as **verse 3** indicates, those prophecies which were "**concerning His Son.**"

Paul is referring to more than the general characteristic of faithfulness by which God worked with His people in the OT.

He is offering the perspective that the gospel **finds its roots in the OT Messianic expectation** announced by the prophets, and then declaring **God's faithfulness in fulfilling the promise** of the Messiah by sending His Son.

The fulfilment of the OT promise of the Son **highlights the Christ-centred focus of the gospel.**

Now, we must surely ask, where is the gospel promised in the OT; where is the Messianic expectation found in the prophets?

To begin with, we must understand that Paul is most likely using the reference to "**prophets**" in the **most general sense.**

The author to the Hebrews does the same when he writes in **Hebrews 1:1** of, "**God, having spoken long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways.**"

So Paul probably means to **include men like Moses and David**, in addition to those we would ordinarily classify as holding the formal office of "prophet."

If so, then Peter shares Paul's perspective since in **Acts 2:30-31** he refers to David as a prophet—

³⁰ **And so, because [David] was a prophet and knew that God had sworn to him with an oath to set one of the fruit of his body on his throne,**

³¹ **he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that He was neither forsaken to Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption.**

So then, Paul is indicating here in **verse 2** that the **gospel is part of God's unchanging purpose** to save His people.

As Paul indicates in **verse 3**, however, the central focus of these saving purposes promised in the OT was the Messiah, whom we now know to be Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

The prophecies that **most clearly fix Israel's hope** on the promised Messiah are perhaps those found in Isaiah's **so-called "Servant songs."**

They offer God's people the hopeful expectation of a Saviour in the form of a **Messianic Servant**, as we first see in **Isaiah 42:1**

"Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold; My chosen one in whom My soul is well-pleased. I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the nations."

Of course, we are most familiar with the **fourth servant song** that we find in **Isaiah 53**.

That magnificent prophecy of **Christ's atoning death on behalf of His people** is even set up in the preceding verses with **"gospel language"** as we find in **Isaiah 52:7**—

How lovely on the mountains are the feet of him who proclaims good news, who announces peace and proclaims good news of good things, who announces salvation, and says to Zion, "Your God reigns!"

With all that said though, Paul probably **doesn't have any particular OT passages in mind** when he refers to the gospel being promised beforehand in the OT.

He is referring to the **general principal of the gospel and Messianic expectation** found in the OT.

As he refers to the OT promise of the gospel, **he highlights both God's faithfulness** to fulfil that promise, and the **Christ-centred focus** of that promise.

At the same time, Paul's reference to the **OT roots** of the gospel would surely have **encouraged his Jewish readers.**

Furthermore, Paul assures both Jewish and gentile Christians of the **faithfulness of God** in His saving purposes for His people.

As Paul preached on his first missionary journey, in **Acts 13:32-33**—

³² We proclaim to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers,

³³ that God has fulfilled this promise to our children in that He raised up Jesus, as it is also written in the second Psalm, 'You are My Son; today I have begotten You.'

Since God has now fulfilled what He promised, it is plain that **God can be trusted and the gospel accepted.**

There is one more question that we must address, through, as we consider Paul's statement in **verse 3** that the gospel, even as it is found in God's OT promises, is "**concerning His Son.**"

We have seen that the OT promised the Messiah, the person whom God would send to save His people, but Paul says that **the expectation centred not just on a human saviour** but on the **divine Son of God** to fulfil those prophecies.

So was the divinity of the Messiah clearly revealed in the OT or was it mysteriously hidden and later revealed in the incarnation and NT message?

While **OT references to the Messiah's divine nature are few**, the careful student of Scripture should have been **expecting God Himself** to be the only one able to fulfil all that was promised about the Messiah.

The clearest indication of the Messiah's divinity is found in **Psalm 110:1** which prophesies—

Yahweh says to my Lord: "Sit at My right hand Until I put Your enemies as a footstool for Your feet."

Jesus Himself quotes this Psalm to prove the expectation of His divinity as the Son of God, as we read in

Matthew 22:41-45—

⁴¹ **Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question,**

⁴² **saying, "What do you think about the Christ, whose son is He?" They said to Him, "The son of David."**

43 **He said to them, “Then how does David in the Spirit call Him ‘Lord,’ saying,**

44 **‘The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at My right hand, Until I put Your enemies beneath Your feet”’?**

45 **Therefore, if David calls Him ‘Lord,’ how is He his son?”**

As **one author** remarks with reference to **Psalm 110**—

“We have no principle reason for which David could not see at Yahweh’s right hand a better future for His kingdom and the whole world in his Son, who is also the Lord. The result... is a revelation of the Messiah as both human and divine.

David declared it, Jesus affirmed it, and He expected us to acknowledge it.”¹²

Studied carefully, then, **Psalm 110** provides us with evidence of an **incarnational Messianic hope**—that is, the promise that **God’s Messiah would be God’s own Son.**

In the words of **the earlier author**, *“Psalm 110 demands a divine Christ.”¹³*

As Paul states, the gospel promised in the OT **concerns the Son.**

This perspective of the Old Testament promise of the Son highlights that **even in the roots of the gospel found in the OT** Messianic expectation, **Christ is the central focus of the gospel.**

¹² R. C. Ortlund, Jr., ‘The Deity of Christ and the Old Testament’, in C. W. Morgan and R. A. Peterson, eds., *The Deity of Christ*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 49.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 48–49.

2. THE EARTHLY EXISTENCE OF THE SON (3)

Paul offers a **second perspective** on the Son which highlights **Christ as the central focus of the gospel**.

In **verse 3**, Paul explains that the earthy existence of the Son points to **His central role in salvation** and the good news of that salvation—the gospel:

concerning His Son, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh

As we have already established, Paul indicates at the beginning of this verse that **the focus of the gospel is a person**—God’s Son.

Paul makes a deliberate choice in referring to Jesus here not with the title “Messiah,” but with the title, “Son of God.”

As **one author** commented, “*The title focuses on Jesus’ uniquely intimate relationship to God.*”¹⁴

Here Paul is referring to Jesus, then, as God’s Son in the sense that we most commonly understand it—a title referring to His **divine nature as the second Person of the Trinity**.

Therefore, for Paul **to say on the one hand** that the gospel is about God, **and on the other** that the central focus of the gospel is Jesus Christ is **no contradiction**.

¹⁴ Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, 42.

Paul continues, though, to refer to Jesus not only as the Son of God, but also as the Son of David.

This connects the gospel to the Messiah of Jewish expectation.

In so doing, Paul both continues the theme of the gospel's **close connection to traditional Jewish expectations** and **becomes more specific** about the gospel's content.¹⁵

It's critically important for us to understand that when Paul says that the Son "**was born of the seed of David**" **he is not suggesting** that Jesus came into existence in the incarnation.

The incarnation is the "*taking on of a fully human nature by the fully divine Son of God.*"¹⁶

In other words, Jesus the Son of God has **existed eternally in His divine nature**, but took on a human nature when He was born as a descendant of David, through Mary.

Interestingly, Paul doesn't use the **usual term for "born,"** but chooses a more general term which means **"to become."**

Moo points out the **significance** when he writes—

*"Perhaps Paul uses the more general term to suggest that more than a simple 'birth' was entailed in the 'becoming' of the Son; a change in existence also took place."*¹⁷

¹⁵ Frank Thielman, *Romans*, ed. Clinton E. Arnold, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), 60.

¹⁶ Gregg R. Allison, "Incarnation," in *The Baker Compact Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books: A Division of Baker Publishing Group, 2016), 111.

¹⁷ Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, 44.

Quite simply, Paul uses language that hints at the **significance of the incarnation** event in the unfolding of God's plan of redemption.

In the fulfilment of God's OT promises, Jesus added a human nature to His eternal divine nature and **thereby forever altered human history**.

Paul had more in mind, though, than the incarnation as he clearly points to Jesus' **fulfilment of the Messianic expectation** of the **Son of David**.

We find the promise that the Messiah would be a descendant of Davidic in a number of prophecies, such as **Jeremiah 23:5-6**

⁵ **"Behold, the days are coming," declares Yahweh, "When I will raise up for David a righteous Branch; And He will reign as king and prosper And do justice and righteousness in the land.**

⁶ **In His days Judah will be saved, And Israel will dwell securely; And this is His name by which He will be called, "Yahweh our righteousness."**

Matthew opens his gospel account in **Matthew 1:1** by providing the genealogy of **"Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham."**

Paul incorporated this into his preaching too, as we see him declaring in **Acts 13:23**—

From the seed of this man [David], according to promise, God has brought to Israel a Saviour, Jesus

So we should understand that Jesus as the Son of David **fulfilled the promises made** in the OT regarding a future ruler from David's line.¹⁸

Already we can see that this **perspective highlights the Christ-centred focus** of the gospel.

Paul elaborates on the perspective further, though, by adding the phrase, “**according to the flesh.**”

Paul uses the theologically-rich term “**flesh**” which translates the **Greek term σάρξ**.

By using this term, Paul means, at a minimum, that Jesus was the Son of David as far as **human nature, or perhaps physical descent**, is concerned.¹⁹

Initially this might seem to be an **unnecessarily obvious** statement since all that is implied by his earlier statement that Jesus was “**born of the seed of David.**”

However, by looking down at **verse 4**, you'll notice that Paul is **setting up a contrast** with a parallel phrase.

There Paul will contrast Jesus as the Son of David “**according to the flesh**” with Jesus as the Son of God “**according to the Spirit of holiness.**”

¹⁸ Schreiner, *Romans*, 44.

¹⁹ Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), 44.

The theological significance of the term “**flesh**” then becomes apparent.

As **Moo** points out, Paul uses the term to refer “*essentially to human existence, with emphasis on the transitory, weak, frail nature of that existence.*”²⁰

So then, here we find a **perspective** on the **earthly existence of Jesus, the Son.**

The contrast and its importance will become more apparent when we look at **verse 4** in detail.

Paul’s contrast suggests that we **have not arrived at a full understanding of Jesus** if we look at Him **only from the perspective** of His earthly existence.

We must **complete the picture** by looking at Jesus from the next perspective of the spiritual exaltation of the Son.

For now though, we have **established three details** of the earthly existence of the Son that highlight Christ as the core focus of the gospel.

The earthly existence of the Son:

1. Was inaugurated by His incarnation
2. Was characterised by the flesh
3. Highlights the gospel’s focus on Jesus as the Son of David

²⁰ Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, 45.

3. THE SPIRITUAL EXALTATION OF THE SON (4)

Paul offers a third perspective on the Son which, **even more than the other two perspectives**, highlights Christ as the central focus of the gospel.

In **verse 4**, Paul **contrasts** the earthly existence of the Son with His spiritual exaltation, **detailing the superiority of His role** as the exalted Son of God over the role of the earthly Son of David.

This exaltation is the **most convincing perspective** Paul offers on the Son as it explains that His power to save makes Him the central focus of the gospel:

who was designated as the Son of God in power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord

At the crescendo of Paul's efforts to highlight the Christ-centred focus of the gospel, we find this declaration that the Son of God "**was designated as the Son of God in power.**"

That fact that Paul was already referred to Jesus as God's Son **should immediately raise the question** of what he means when he states that Jesus was given a title at His resurrection that **has been His from all eternity.**

So let's carefully consider this phrase in order to **understand Paul's intention here.**

To begin with, the word translated in the LSB as “**designated**” is important.

The Greek word means to “**appoint, designate, [or] declare,**”²¹ and we see all three options reflected in various English translations.

While commentators contend among themselves as to which word most accurately captures the nuance of Paul’s meaning, it is actually very simple.

Paul is stating that with the resurrection, Jesus was **marked out for a particular role.**²²

Paul is using the word—appointed, designated, or declared—to communicate **not a new nature,** but a new role for the Son.

The resurrection, as we’ll understand more fully, qualified Him to attain **an entirely new exalted status** along with this **new role.**

However, this does not mean that Jesus *became* Son of God at the time of his resurrection—He always was God’s Son.²³

The key, then, is to take note of the **prepositional phrase, “in power.”**

²¹ BDAG, ὀρίζω.

²² Thielman, *Romans*, 62.

²³ Moo, *Romans*, NIVAC, 36–37.

By this Paul means that Jesus was **“invested with power.”**²⁴

We should then understand Christ’s new role to which He was appointed to be that of the **“Son-of-God-in-power,”** **as one hyphenated concept.**²⁵

That is, Paul is contrasting Christ’s **apparent weakness and poverty** during the period of His earthly existence with His present **exaltation in power** after His resurrection.

So then, in **verses 3–4**, Paul is **not depicting two natures** of Christ, but **two roles or two stages** in His existence.²⁶

The contrast is between Jesus’s **humiliation** in taking on **“flesh”** and His **exaltation** as the One with all power.²⁷

To say it another way, the transition **from verse 3–4** is not a transition from a human messiah to a divine Son of God.

Rather it is a transition from the Son as the Davidic Messiah, in **verse 3**, to the Son as both the Davidic Messiah and the powerful Son of God in **verse 4**.

What we still need to clarify then, in order to completely understand Paul’s statement, is **why he chose the title** “Son-of-God-in-power” to communicate this.

²⁴ C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, International Critical Commentary (London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 62.

²⁵ Ibid., 62.

²⁶ Moo, *Romans*, NIVAC, 37.

²⁷ John D Harvey, *Romans*, ed. Andreas J Köstenberger and Robert W. Yarbrough, Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament (B&H, 2017), 10.

The answer lies, almost certainly, in **one of the OT Messianic prophecies** that Christ fulfils.

Paul's statement is set against the backdrop of **Psalm 2**, in which David describes **God's relationship with His Messianic King** whom He has appointed to rule over both Israel and all the gentile nations of the world.

The key verse in **Psalm 2**, as far as Paul's statement is concerned, is **verse 7** in which the Messianic King recalls what God said to Him—

“I will surely tell of the decree of Yahweh: He said to Me, ‘You are My Son, Today I have begotten You.’”

While the Psalm is clearly Messianic, the author to the Hebrews assures us in **Hebrews 1:5** that **Psalm 2:7** is referring to Christ.

David, as the prophetic psalmist, describes Yahweh's decree to His chosen Messianic King.

It is a decree that **establishes His exalted position as Son** in relation to Yahweh and expresses His **privileged relationship**.

It's helpful to know that the Psalm is set in the **context of a coronation ceremony** for the Messianic King.

Therefore, the reference to **“today”** is most likely a reference to all that was **announced and publicly declared** by Yahweh when the **King was enthroned**.

So what Paul is referring to, then, is the **OT background** of **Psalm 2** and **Christ's transition to a new and exalted role** as the Messianic King who reigns with **greater power and privilege** than ever before.

It was an exaltation to a **new role or new status** as the powerful Messianic King who enjoys the privileged relationship of Sonship with Yahweh.

This exaltation happened, as Paul describes it, **either by means of, or at the time of**, the resurrection.

That is what he means by the phrase, **“by the resurrection from the dead.”**

The resurrection qualified Him to attain an entirely new status.²⁸

So upon Christ's resurrection, **He was enthroned as the Messianic King**, receiving the even greater exaltation of being declared to be Yahweh's Son.

With Christ's new role, or new status, He also **inaugurates a new era in redemptive history** as His gospel of salvation is revealed to both Jew and gentile.

As **Doug Moo** puts it—

*“In Christ the new era of redemptive history has begun, and in this new stage of God's plan Jesus reigns as Son of God, powerfully active to bring salvation to all who believe (1:16).”*²⁹

²⁸ Moo, *Romans*, NIVAC, 36.

²⁹ Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, 48.

As **Hebrews 7:25** put is, Christ's exalted position gives Him the power to save His people—

Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.

This role of exalted Saviour was **invested with the power to save** because of the resurrection, as **one author** explains—

“Jesus’ resurrection, concluding and validating the messianic work of redemption, gave him new power to dispense salvation to all those who would believe in him.”³⁰

Paul explains this power through the contrast he set up earlier.

Christ's earthly existence was **“according to the flesh,”** while His exaltation is **“according to the Spirit of holiness.”**

Paul is referring now to the Holy Spirit, though it appears to us to be an **unusual way to do so.**

The construction, **“the Spirit of holiness,”** closely conforms to the way in which it **would be said in Hebrew,** and since Paul has been referring to the OT roots of the gospel, it makes sense that he would **refer to the Holy Spirit in a more Jewish manner.**

The point he's making, however, is **nevertheless clear.**

As Christ inaugurates a new era in redemption history, it is **characterised by the Holy Spirit** who is poured out by Jesus to minister to those whom God saves.

³⁰ Moo, *Romans*, NIVAC, 37.

When the Holy Spirit is poured out by the exalted Son, it is **clear evidence of His power and majesty**, and so the ministry of the Holy Spirit testifies to Christ having been designated as **the Son-of-God-in-power**.

As **F. F. Bruce** states—

*“The outpouring and ministry of the Spirit attest the enthronement of Jesus as ‘Son of God in power’.”*³¹

Therefore, Christ’s exaltation is **“according to the Holy Spirit”**—it is a **spiritual exhalation** that highlights Christ as the **central focus of the gospel**.

Finally, Paul ends **verse 4** by introducing **a new title** for the Son—**Jesus Christ our Lord**.

Paul uses it in parallel to Jesus as the divine Son of God in **verse 3**, but the title of **“Lord”** most naturally applies to His spiritual exaltation.

Paul’s efforts to **highlight the Christ-centred focus of the gospel** seem remarkably **similar to Peter’s statement** in **Acts 2:36** in which he also refers to Jesus’ exaltation—

“Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified.”

Of course, Paul himself is going to give the **most articulate explanation** of how Jesus’ title or name **“Lord”** expresses His exaltation, as we see in **Philippians 2:9-11**—

³¹ F. F. Bruce, *Romans: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 6, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 79.

⁹ **God... highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name,**
¹⁰ **so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth,**
¹¹ **and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.**

This preeminent name is not “**Jesus**,” but the name that belongs to Jesus—the name, “**Lord**” because it not only refers to Him as the Master of all, but **expresses his equality with God.**

Christ is Lord—He is Yahweh, He is the sovereign Master of all creation, which is precisely what Paul means in **Romans 1:4.**

As **Doug Moo** agrees—

“For Paul, ‘Lord,’ expressing both Jesus’ cosmic majesty and his status as master of the believer, is the single best title to express the true significance of Jesus.”³²

So then, what is Paul’s point as he highlights the central focus of the gospel through the perspective of the spiritual exaltation of the Son?

As Paul has explained, though Christ was born as the offspring of David, He has been **exalted by God to reign over all.**

³² Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, 48–49.

Against the backdrop of **Psalm 2**, **He is the Lord of all nations**, whose exaltation has **inaugurated a new era in redemption history** in which He is powerfully saving God's chosen people as He pours out the Holy Spirit.

This third perspective on Jesus allows us to arrived at **a full understanding of Him** as we look at Him from the perspective of His spiritual exaltation.

Corresponding to what we learnt earlier, there are **three details of the spiritual exaltation** of the Son that highlight Christ as the core focus of the gospel.

The spiritual exaltation of the Son:

1. Was inaugurated by His resurrection
2. Is characterised by the Holy Spirit
3. Highlights the gospel's focus on Jesus as the powerful Son of God and sovereign Lord

CONCLUSION

As we conclude, we've seen that Paul's summary of his gospel message is **by no means theologically "light."**

Through a **condensed explanation of the person of Christ**, Paul has offered **three perspectives that highlight** the Christ-centred focus of the gospel:

1. The Old Testament promise of the Son (2)
2. The earthly existence of the Son (3)
3. The spiritual exaltation of the Son (4)

In particular, we learnt that **Christ's resurrection inaugurated a powerful and exalted stage** in His Messianic existence and in the history of redemption.

The Son of God now **reigns in heaven as both Lord and Christ**.

His exaltation **allows Him to powerfully save** His people from their sin, notably through the **outpouring of the Holy Spirit**.

So as Paul highlighted, **Christ is the central focus of the gospel**.

He should also, therefore, be the **central focus of your faith and worship**.

BENEDICTION

*Now the God who is from everlasting to everlasting,
who has loved you with an everlasting love
and gives you everlasting life,
now support you with the everlasting arms
in these days and all the days until Jesus comes.
Amen.³³*

³³ Dale Ralph Davis, *Grace Be with You: Benedictions from Dale Ralph Davis*, New Edition (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2019), 22.

Romans 1:1-4 LSB

1:1
b
c
d
1:2
b
c
1:3
b
c
1:4
b
c
d

Paul,
 a slave of Christ Jesus,
 called as an apostle,
 having been set apart for the gospel of God,
 which He promised beforehand
 through His prophets
 in the holy Scriptures,
 concerning His Son,
 who was born of the seed of David
 according to the flesh,
 who was designated as the Son of God in power
 according to the Spirit of holiness,
 by the resurrection from the dead,
 Jesus Christ our Lord

Specifies the letter's author
 Describes 1a
 Describes "gospel" in 1d
 Agents of 2a
 Location of 2a
 Reference of 2a
 Describes 3a
 Standard of 3b
 Describes 3a
 Basis of 4a
 Means of 4a
 Appositional restatement of "Son" in 3a