

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

717 North Stapley Drive, Mesa, AZ 85203 Phone: (480) 833-7500

Website: www.churchredeemeraz.org

Series: Special Messages
Text: Romans 1: 1 - 4
Date: April 24, 2011 (am)

Pastor/Teacher
Gary L. W. Johnson

The Christ That Paul Preached

May 21, 2011 is less than a month away. That's the date, as many of you know, that the Rapture is supposed to take place according to Harold Camping of Family Radio fame. This is not the first time that Camping has made such a bold prediction. Back in 1994 he did the same. Instead of being red-faced with embarrassment he persisted in his error. Here is a bit of history on Camping. Harold Egbert Camping was born July 19, 1921 in Boulder, CO. His family later relocated to the Bay Area in California and became members of the Alameda Bible Fellowship (CRC). After World War II, Camping founded his own construction company, later to sell the company and join in a collaborative effort to purchase Family Stations, Inc.—a California religious based broadcasting network. Following a series of business deals and a mounting multi-million dollar surplus, Camping was able to expand Family Radio throughout the United States, also buying time on foreign stations around the world, translating his teaching into over thirty foreign languages. In 1961 Camping started the Open Forum, a weeknight call-in program devoted to answering questions about the Bible. Camping soon gained a Reformed voice over radio that was widely influential in the Christian world. Reformed believers, excited that the doctrines of grace and hymns could actually be heard on a radio station, sent in thousands of dollars to support the efforts of Camping. Many people who had never heard of Calvinism and the Reformed doctrines were brought to faith in Christ through the teachings of Family Radio. Camping was also involved in the Alameda CRC as an elder and later an adult Sunday school teacher. On a given Sunday morning, Camping's Sunday school class drew almost half of the attendees of the Alameda CRC. The problems began, however, sometime before 1988 when Camping began to advance the idea that one could know from the Bible when Christ would return. When challenged the "no man knows the day nor the hour", Camping was known for responding, "yes, but we can know the month and year." [1] In 1992 Camping self-published his controversial book "1994?", in which he suggested the possibility that Christ would return sometime between September 15th and 27th of that year, dates corresponding to the Feast of Tabernacles. [2] Camping would soon, unashamedly, predict September 6, 1994 as the date of Christ's return. When Camping's first prediction failed, claiming miscalculation, he then began to reinvent his scheme with the idea that God ended the church age. "Sometime earlier" wrote Camping, "God was finished using the churches to represent the kingdom of God." [3] In his book "We Are Almost There!" we find that Camping chose the date of May 21, 1988 for the end of the church age. [4] Why this particular date? In an obscure time scheme combined with strange mathematical formulas, Camping was able to secure this date as the end of the church age. The common answer heard over the Open Forum was that around thirty-five years ago God began to open the true believer's understanding to know the entire timeline of history—a justification based on an obscure interpretation of Ecclesiastes 8:5, and other detailed and often confusing studies in numerology. What Harold Camping conveniently chose not to reveal is that May of 1988, reputedly, was the month the Alameda CRC *began* censuring Camping from teaching the adult Sunday school class. [5] Though, according to bulletin records, the official announcement of the reorganization of the Sunday school class without Camping as the teacher was made public in the Sunday bulletin on June 5, 1988, the controversy climaxed in the weeks prior to this date, on or around the May 21 date. After a summer of conflict, church visitors were sent to assess the situation and turmoil in the congregation, and supported the Consistory's decision to deny Camping the privilege of teaching. The official date the elders took over the adult Sunday school class was September 11, 1988. The whole controversy that spanned Camping's censure and departure from the church roughly from May to September, 1988. Drawing a preliminary conclusion, is it really a coincidence that the period Camping's teaching controversy broke open in the church coincides with the "month and year", if not he exact date, that Camping would later declare the church age ended? Is it not the least bit suspect that Camping would later declare that the Holy Spirit was removed from the church beginning on May 21, 1988, the very same period Camping himself was removed from teaching "in" the church? And is it not alarming that Camping now "outside" of the church would declare, soon after his own departure, that anyone still identified with any church is now under the judgment of God? In legal terms, I think it's safe to say we have motive.¹ Like so many other cult leaders, Camping's bizarre method of biblical interpretation leads him into a host of other errors. He now rejects the orthodox Christian doctrine of eternal punishment and instead embraces annihilationism. He adds to this his unique take on the Person of Christ. Using Revelation 13:8 and Romans 1:4. Camping teaches that Jesus as the Christ, died before the foundation of the earth, and then became the Son of God upon His resurrection, the cross then is just a "representation" of what He did in eternity past! The cross does not pay for sin, as that was done prior to the Incarnation! James White, who has written a very helpful book² exposing Camping as a false teacher, rightfully declares that this incredibly absurd belief, which overthrows every possible part of the Bible's teaching on the cross, the incarnation, atonement, etc., is just another example of the fact that once you are cut loose from the foundation of Scripture, there is no end of the silliness you can end up promoting. Try to follow a portion of what Camping was presenting less than a week ago on his program. "He is declared to be the Son because he had risen from the dead. At the time that John 3:16 is being written, he had not gone to the grave as we read later on in the gospels, but it is pointing to the fact that before to foundation of the world God's whole plan of

salvation was worked out and he not only named those who he planned to save but he paid for their sins and when he rose from the grave and how he did this is something we cannot understand of course at all anymore than how can we understand that he is Father, Son and Holy Spirit when there is only one God. We are in the presence of his glorious majesty who is infinite in every aspect of his being and is from eternity past. So we just read what it says about him and say oh yes that is what happened. And when he rose from the dead after he had made payment then he is called the Son of God. He's the firstborn from the dead..." As I listened to this I thought to myself, "He sounds like a modalist. He does not sound like he is any longer a Trinitarian. He shows no understanding of the relationship of the Father, Son, and Spirit." More on that in a moment. Clearly Camping has no meaningful knowledge of the meaning of the Greek term (*prototokos*), as he thinks it must mean that Jesus is resurrected *before He is even incarnated!* How anyone can believe this kind of teaching is difficult to believe (then again, they followed Joseph Smith, too). He goes on. "But in order to be called a Son he had to have a beginning, and that beginning is when he rose from the grave after he made payment for our sins. He was not in eternity past the Son of God. He became the Son of God after He made payment for our sins. That was before His creation." Again I am thinking to myself, "This guy has abandoned the Trinity. He's gone modalistic in defense of this 'two deaths' theory he's come up with." I did not have to wail long to get my confirmation, for a caller asked Camping about how no man knows the day or the hour, neither the Son, nor the angels, etc. Camping actually has the temerity to suggest that the "Son" here might be...Satan! The absurdity of such a suggestion takes your breath away. But then he suggests that if this is actually Jesus, then it has to be "experiential knowledge." And that is when we are treated to the following. "Then it could not refer to Christ, because Christ is God. In that sense He has no knowledge as read in Acts, where it says that it's not...that's early in the church age...to know times and seasons, which the Father has put in his own power, and Christ always is identified as the Father. Remember in Isaiah he's spoken of as everlasting Father. So Christ in his knowledge of this whole business of payment for sin, he is the Father. He has full knowledge. As far as experiencing it, he experienced it as Christ, but not as the Son, until he demonstrated at the time of the cross how he suffered before the foundation of the world in making payment for our sins." If that isn't full blown modalism, I don't know what is. A plain confusion of the divine persons, a Unitarian presentation of one Person being manifested in different modes. In fact, has Camping come up with a new spin on an ancient heresy? Because he seems to distinguish between the pre-existent Christ who is the Father, and who then becomes the Son at the resurrection! Maybe we have a quadernity! Who knows? What is certain is that the elastic has broken. Camping's name will be remembered by future generations alongside Joseph Smith, Mary Baker Eddy, Ellen G. White, and Charles Taze Russell, a clear example of an American-born cult leader.³ The Gospel is at the heart of Romans. I need, however, to qualify the focal point of the Gospel according to Romans. Paul's main theme is *not* primarily human salvation, but the work of God vindicating His purposes and glorifying Himself in the cross of Christ. Within this grand perspective, God's work of saving sinners is revealed. Romans, as Leon Morris has observed, 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 worshipped and served by His people.⁴

I. PAUL'S CREDENTIALS AS AN AUTHORITATIVE TEACHER OF THE GOSPEL

As an apostle, Paul was given direct authority by Christ to communicate the Gospel. He had been *set apart* (*APHORISMENOS*, separated for a specific purpose) for preaching this Gospel. This explains the nature of his calling (cf. Galatians 1:15 and Jeremiah 1:5).

II. PAUL'S DESCRIPTION OF THIS GOSPEL

The Gospel was promised by God throughout the pages of the Old Testament. The Scriptures of the old covenant foretold of Christ's coming, of His mighty works, and His sufferings and death and resurrection (cf. Acts 3:18, 21; 4:25; I Corinthians 15:3; I Peter 1:11). The word for *Gospel*, *EUANGELION*, is used again and again in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, (abbreviated as LXX), especially in Isaiah (cf. 40:9; 52:7; 60:6; 61:1).

III. PAUL'S DECLARATION THE CONTENTS OF THE GOSPEL

The Gospel is concerned with the Person and work of Christ. "Nowhere else," wrote Warfield, "do we get a more direct description of specifically the Christ that Paul preached."⁵

A. Christ is Lord.

Note how the Apostle designates himself as the *servant of the Christ Jesus*. The word "servant" (or slave) is patterned on the Old Testament phrase "servant of the Lord" (cf. Joshua 14:7; II Kings 18:12; Nehemiah 1:6). It indicates total devotion to one's master. "Indicative of Paul's high Christology is his replacement of Yahweh with *CHRISTO IESOUS* as the master whom he serves."⁶ Paul's estimate of Christ is further illustrated by the way he couples *the Lord Jesus Christ* with *God our Father* as the source of grace and peace (verse 7). "This is normal with Paul. God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ are not to him two objects of worship, two sources of blessing, but one object of worship, one source of blessing. Does he not tell us plainly that we who have one God the Father and one Lord Jesus Christ yet know perfectly well that there is no God but one (I Corinthians 8:4, 6)?"⁷

B. Who is Jesus Christ?

"No doubt, most of you have seen the covers of Time, Newsweek and U.S. News & World Report. Over the past few years all three devoted cover stories to the claims of the New Testament that Jesus rose from the dead. As was to be expected, they gave great credibility to the findings of the *Jesus Seminar*,⁸ particularly to one of their leading scholars, John Dominic Crossan. This ex-Catholic priest dismisses with a wave of his hand the historical

Christian belief in the resurrection of Christ and claims this to have been impossible because the body of Jesus was probably eaten by dogs!

1. HE IS THE SON OF GOD.

It is the eternal Son that Paul served as Lord. Notice that this was critically important to Paul's preaching and central to the Gospel. Who is this remarkable Person?

2. HE IS THE PROMISED MESSIAH.

He who always was the eternal Son of God now *became* flesh, and dwelt among us (I John 1:1 - 4). More specifically, He was of the house of David, thus He is the promised Messiah (cf. II Timothy 2:8).

NOTE: How are we to understand verses 3 and 4? Did Christ cease to be *of the seed of David* when he rose from the dead? Did His resurrection make Him the Son of God? "Paul is not here distinguishing times and contrasting two successive modes of our Lord's being. He is distinguishing elements in the constitution of our Lord's person, by virtue of which He is at one and the same time both the Messiah and the Son of God. He became of the seed of David with respect to the flesh, and by the resurrection of the dead was mightily proven to be also the Son of God with respect to the Spirit of holiness."⁹

CONCLUSION: The old Scot commentator, Robert Haldane, summed it up this way: "Jesus Christ was made or became the Son of David; but He did not become, but was declared, defined, or demonstrated to be *the Son of God*. That Jesus Christ is not called in this place the Son of God with reference to His incarnation or resurrection merely, is evident from the fact that His nature as the Son of God is here distinguished from His descent from David. This expression, the Son of God, definitely imports Deity, as applied to Jesus Christ. It as properly denotes participation of the Divine nature, as the contrasted expression, Son of Man, denotes participation of the human nature. As Jesus Christ is called the Son of Man in the proper sense to assert His humanity, so, when in contrast with this He is called the Son of God, the phrase must be understood in its proper sense as asserting His Deity. The words, indeed, are capable of a figurative application, of which there are many examples in Scripture. But one part of the contrast is not to be taken as literal, and the other as figurative; and if the fact of a phrase being capable of figurative acceptation incapacitates it from expressing its proper meaning, or renders its meaning inexplicably uncertain, no word or phrase could ever be definite. A word or phrase is never to be taken in a figurative sense, where its proper sense is suitable; for language would be unintelligible if it might be arbitrarily explained away as figurative. This appellation, Son of God, was indeed frequently ascribed to pious men; but if this circumstance disqualified the phrase from bearing a literal and definite meaning, there is not a word or phrase in language that is capable of a definite meaning in its proper signification."¹⁰ The Jesus that Paul preached was fully God and fully man. He *became* a man in order to accomplish the will of His Father, to bring many sons into glory (Hebrews 2:10). The Jesus that Paul preached was not subordinate to God; He was God and Paul knows no difference in dignity between his God and his Lord. His is the *only* Jesus that Paul proclaimed.

ENDNOTES

¹ <http://christopherjgordon.blogspot.com/2011/03/judgment-day-may-21-2011-harold-campi...>

² J. White, *Dangerous Airwaves: Harold Camping Refuted and Christ's Church Defended* (Bethany, 2007).

³ <http://www.aomin.org/aoblog/index.php?itemid+3403>.

⁴ L. Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Eerdmans, 1988), p. 20ff. Morris notes an all too familiar mind set among Christians of our day who, regrettably, treat the Bible as a self-help manual for solving their problems. "But many students seem not to have noticed Paul's preoccupation with God. The thought of God dominates this epistle. The word *God* occurs 153 times in Romans, an average of once every 46 words", p.20.

⁵ *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield II* (rpt. Baker, 1981), p. 236.

⁶ Douglas Moo, *The Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary Romans 18* (Moody, 1991), p. 35.

⁷ Warfield, op. cit., p. 238.

⁸ Cf. my inaugural issue of *The Pastor's Perspective* (March 1993) for a critical assessment of the Jesus Seminar.

⁹ Warfield, op. cit., p. 246.SS.

¹⁰ R. Haldane, *An Exposition of Romans* (rpt. MacDonald, 1973), p. 22.