

The wrath of God

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[0:00] And as Philip said, this is a fairly countercultural passage, isn't it? I did wonder, actually, when I was invited to come here and to speak on this particular passage, whether you'd all got around to try and work out what would be the trickiest, most countercultural, most challenging passage. But I'm told it's part of a series, so I will forgive you and I'll take you on your word with that one. But in all seriousness, I think it's really important that as a church we do wrestle with these passages. It would be very easy, wouldn't it, just to jump around the scriptures, picking the bits which we like the sound of, the bits which sound nice to our ears and to the ears of people who live around the church. But it's really important that we hear everything that God has said to us in the Bible, isn't it? And actually, as we come to look at this passage this morning, I think it's exactly what we need to hear as a church. I don't just mean here at Calvary, but as a church nationally, it's really important that we hear passages like this. So as we dive in, we're going to begin where we left off with the kids, looking at verse 16. It was great to hear the whole of the chapter read. That will really sound us in good stead as we look at it this morning.

But we're going to begin at verse 16. And it starts with this incredible confidence in the gospel. Just look with me there if you have a Bible open in front of you. Verse 16, Paul says these words, And as I was saying earlier to the children, there would have been plenty of reasons for Paul to feel timid about the gospel, even embarrassed about the gospel. This was the message that would have had him laughed out of town if he was amongst educated Jewish people. It was the message that could have got him stoned to death if he was amongst zealous Jewish people. And that happened, didn't it? He was chucked into prison. He was beaten up regularly because he believed in this gospel. But Paul here says, I'm not ashamed of that gospel. I'm proud of that gospel. When we were meeting to pray a little bit earlier today, Chris used the phrase, he owned that gospel. You know, if you were to cut him open, he would bleed that gospel. That message was so ingrained in who he was. It was foundational to him.

It was essential to him. That mattered to him more than anything. And so you have to ask the question, don't you? If he was going to be humiliated for following this gospel and preaching this gospel, if he actually put his life in danger for teaching this gospel, why was he proud of it? I mean, why Paul? Why not just give it a break and have an easy life? And I think the answer to that question is found in that verse I just read. Why is he not ashamed of the gospel? Why is he proud of the gospel? Because it's the power of God for salvation. It's the power of God for salvation.

In a world where everyone is looking for hope, everyone is looking to be saved, everyone's looking to be rescued. It's only in this message that we find God's salvation. It's only in this message that power is available. And so Paul realizes this, and it's as though he is willing to get his head kicked in on a weekly basis if he can share this message with people. Whatever it costs him, whatever the result is for him personally, this message is so good, he cannot stay quiet. And he explains that just a bit further, just one facet, one beautiful facet of what this gospel looks like. In verse 17, look along with me as we read it.

[3:37] For in the gospel, the righteousness of God is revealed. A righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written, the righteous will live by faith. One reason for Paul why this gospel is good news, because in this gospel, we receive the righteousness of Jesus.

And what does that mean?

We'll unpack this more as we look through this passage. But essentially, in our normal natural state, you and I are messy people. We are broken. We make mistakes. Sometimes we make conscious decisions that are terrible. And this leaves us in a hopeless position before God. But here, Paul says that we are justified. That's a theological word that describes what he's talking about here. Instead of standing before God with all of our mess and all of our filth and all of our mistakes and all of our foolishness, we can, through the gospel, stand before God with the glowing, beautiful, gleaming, radiant righteousness of Jesus. We can look to God as though we were his son and had lived the life that his son had lived.

It's as though we're standing in a courtroom. And although we should be told that we are guilty, we're declared to be innocent. That's what this gospel can achieve in the life of an individual. And more than that, this word righteousness is not just an individualistic kind of thing. I mean, you look at countless passages in the Old Testament, and it's almost synonymous with God's great saving power displayed in the world. Just to give you one example in Psalm 98, don't need to turn there, it's just one verse. It parallels salvation and righteousness. It says, the Lord has made his salvation known and revealed his righteousness to the nations. The whole world can see the incredible power of God at work saving people through this message. So Paul is not ashamed. And really, this is the theme of the whole book. When you read the rest of Romans, you see that it's, as someone mentioned in the prayer this morning, an exposition of the gospel, an unpacking of the good news. Which is interesting, isn't it? When you see how he begins. You know, if I was writing Romans, I wouldn't write it like this. And so it's a good thing that I didn't, because Paul was inspired by the Spirit to start in the way that he starts. And he begins with, look at verse 18, the wrath of God.

[5:59] Would any of us here, if we were trying to articulate the good news, start with the wrath of God? Would? I know I wouldn't. But Paul starts there, because I think he understands better than most of us in this room would, that it's in the contrast that the gospel is most gloriously seen. It's in relation to the bad news that we see just how good, how astonishing, how radiant the good news is.

And so Paul begins there, in the darkness, so that as the light pierces it, we realize just how wonderful it is. He starts with the wrath of God. And let's just read it as we go through. I like to kind of read through as we go. We've heard it before, but sometimes I'm forgetful. So reading it again is always useful. Verse 18 says this, the wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people who suppress the truth by their wickedness.

Since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities, his eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse. As I said already, Phil mentioned, this is a counter-cultural passage. We're going to look more this evening at some of the objections people might raise about this, and think about how we as Christians can respond rightly to people's objections. I counted at least four things in here that would put the cat amongst the pigeons with most people that we know. But the first one is here. Paul says, and he expands this as he goes through the next chapter and a half. He says here, or two and a half chapters, that every person lives presently now under the wrath of God. In our natural state, we all are facing the judgment that God is bringing. And that's a terrifying thought. It's an offensive thought to many people.

And it leaves you wondering what on earth could be so bad? What on earth could be so destructive that the human race, every one of us, naturally falls under the anger and the response, the angry response of God? And you might think, oh, it must be something that people do or don't do or something like that.

But Paul tells us that it goes so much deeper than we might imagine. I mean, what does he say there? What he says in this passage that we've just read, this few verses, 18 to 20, is that the deep problem goes right to the heart and right to the core of our thinking. He says all of us should be able to see, just from looking around, that there is some kind of God. This should be blatantly obvious. You know, take a walk along the sea and see how the sun pierces through the clouds and makes a beautiful sight to behold. Look at the complexity of your own body or the beauty of a flower or anything else, a mountain vista. And you should be without any doubt that there's someone divine

and powerful who made it and put it there. It should be blatantly obvious. So why don't people believe?

[9:08] Well, Paul says here, put simply, that they suppress that truth. It's as though they push the idea of God, the very idea of God, out of the room and close the door and bolt the door and barricade the door with ideologies and thoughts and theories and the busyness of life and the distractions of the modern age. And everything is piled up against that door so that even the thought of God is banished from the human mind. And Paul says everyone does it.

Everyone's guilty. Everyone's thinking has been twisted. And probably if each of us was honest, we could all think of times when we have thought like that. All of us can remember maybe a time in our life or perhaps right now when we know deep down that there is a God. Now can I say this passage isn't saying that by taking a kind of sunset walk along Brighton Beach, you can be saved. He's not saying that. What he's saying, as we'll see as it goes on, is that the only way to be saved is through Christ.

But he is saying that no one can plead ignorance. No one has an excuse. No one has a leg to stand on to say, oh God, well I didn't realize you were there. I didn't know there was a God. I didn't have a clue.

You should have made yourself more clear, God. No one can respond to God like that because of what's been made. And so all of us recognize this, I think, if we think long and hard and honestly and reflectively about our own experience. We all do that or we all have done that. Push God out of the door and barricade it so he can't get in. And so what happens next? Well, what happens next is not a surprise if you understand one thing about human beings. It's been noticed in the Bible and by others as well. The human beings are hardwired to worship. Human beings cannot not worship. And so look at what we have here in verse 21. What happens next? When God is pushed out of the picture, when the creator is removed from the equation, it says here in verse 21, for although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.

Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of God, sorry, of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal human beings and birds and animals and reptiles.

[11:33] You see, this hardwired, built into us, we can't do anything other than it, addiction to worship is noticed by a lot of people. You'll see it all the way through the Bible. You see how people worship in all kinds of different ways in the Bible, some good, some bad. But the person I want to quote here is an interesting source. I don't normally go to people like this for theological reflection, but he's an atheist postmodern novelist, a man called David Foster Wallace. Any of you read David Foster Wallace? He was popular probably in the late 90s, early 2000s, an American novelist. And when he was addressing some students at a university graduation in America, he said these words that certainly upset some of his friends. He says, because here's something else that's weird and true. Sorry, let me get it here. Here's something else that's weird but true. In the day-to-day trenches of adult life, there is actually no such thing as atheism. There is no such thing as not worshipping. Everybody worships. The only choice we get is what to worship. He was making a really important point here. And remember, this guy's an atheist, but I think he understands what it is to be an atheist probably better than a lot of people do. And he says, everybody worships. The only thing you can choose is what you worship and what you don't worship. And so with the scenario that Paul has described here, where God has been pushed out of the picture, where he's in the next room, barricaded in there, in our thinking, as it were.

What is left to do? If we're going to worship, then all that is left to worship is what has been created. If the creator has been ejected from the picture, all that is left is the creation. Or as Paul puts it here, if the immortal is in the other room, all that is left is the mortal. If God is out of the picture, then all we're left with is, well, what does Paul say? Images of human beings and birds and animals and

reptiles. And that makes you think, doesn't it, of all kinds of primitive religions. If you were to zip up to London and take a tour around the British Museum, you'd see statues from religious ceremonies with bulls and cats and things like that. And people would bow down and worship them.

And I think we have a tendency, particularly in places like sophisticated, liberal, enlightened, educated Brighton, to think that we've gone past this, that that's what they used to do centuries ago. But we're a little bit more sophisticated here than perhaps they are. You know, I think actually we're all just the same. Except maybe we're a little bit less self-aware than others have been in the past. You see, how many people, maybe you'd include yourself in this, worship mammon or money, live their lives around the acquisition of more money, the increasing of your bank balance. How many people will sacrifice everything at the altar of work and career progression? Family, leisure, health, everything will go as you give everything to your work. How many people will worship their family or a luxury home or holidays to Disneyland or whatever it might be? You know, created things which we worship in place of the creator. I think we're all just the same. This is just a modern, updated, 21st century way of bowing down to a statue of a cat and singing songs and giving sacrifices. We all worship created things rather than the creator. But you might respond to this. Maybe as a 21st century person, you recognize this is you. But maybe you'd say, well, hold on a second. Why does God care?

I mean, why does it even matter? You worship God in this building on a Sunday. I worship money or I really care about my career, about my family. Who cares? Why should it matter?

[15:15] And the answer to this question, I think, there's lots of things I want to say to that. Actually, we'll look at it a bit more this evening as we engage with some of these questions. But one of the things I would want to say is that God's call on a person's life to worship him isn't just egocentric.

It is compassionate. Actually, God calls us to worship because the very best thing we could do in life, the very best way we could spend our life and pour out our life is in adoration and worship and service of him. Interestingly, I want to take us back to the author that we just heard from, David Foster Wallace. He goes on after this quote. It's a bit longer, so I couldn't squeeze it on the screen without it being size three font or something. So I'm going to read it to you and just hear what he says here. Remember, this guy is an atheist, but what he recognizes about the power of worshipping things which aren't the creator. He says here, you only get to choose what you will worship. And he goes on in his address to these students. And the compelling reason for maybe choosing some sort of God or spiritual type thing to worship is that pretty much anything else you worship will eat you alive. If you worship money and things, if they are where you tap your real meaning in life, then you will never have enough. Never feel you have enough. It's the truth. Worship your own body and beauty and sexual allure and you will always feel ugly. And when time and age start showing, you will die a million deaths before they finally plant you. Worship power. You will feel weak and afraid and you will need ever more power over others to numb you to your own fear. Worship your intellect. Being seen as smart, you'll end up feeling stupid, a fraud, always on the verge of being found out. Man knew what it meant to be a human being, didn't he? And do you see that perceptive point that he makes right up at the top there? You worship anything other than the creator, it'll eat you alive. It'll destroy you.

The Bible talks about this kind of worship, worship of other things, as idolatry. Again, it's a Bible-y word, but it's the same thing that Foster Wallace is talking about here. It will destroy you.

And this actually brings us on to the next question I want to ask. It's something we kind of left hanging at the top. We never defined the wrath of God, did we? We talked a bit about it. We could tell that it was something to do with judgment or God's anger, his response, his right response to evil in the world. But what does it look like? I mean, did you notice there that he doesn't actually talk about something that's coming down the tracks later on? It's not a future thing. What tense, to use kind of grammatical language, does he talk about it there? And he says, the wrath of God is being revealed. It's happening now. It's present. In what way is God's anger, his right response to evil happening now? Well, that question is answered as we carry on. And bear in mind, I mean, you've read this already, the really controversial fireworks, cat amongst the pigeon stuff is coming, so brace yourselves. But verse 24, he says this, therefore, God gave them over. Just stop there for a second.

God gave them over. You know, I think, and other scholars would agree on this, that God's wrath right here, this present wrath, of course there is a future judgment that's coming. The Bible talks about that as well. But what is being discussed here in Romans 1 is some kind of present wrath, some kind of present anger of God. And what it seems to look like is God giving them over. God letting them have what they want. God taking his hand off the steering wheel of a person's life so that they embrace the trajectory that they've chosen. And just thinking about what we just read in that quote, if it's an obsession with money, a kind of focus on acquiring things that is never enough, that becomes self-destructive, God lets them take that course. If it's an obsession with your appearance and beauty and being liked and looking right and having the perfect Instagram account that you've curated with all pictures of you looking smiling and happy and beautiful in every photo, you will always feel ugly. And when people are called to God and God beckons them and they resist and they barricade him. What God does in his judgment, but also in mercy is he lets them have what they want.

[19:37] He gives them over. And we see that language again and again in this really difficult passage. He gave them over in verse 24 to the sinful desires of their hearts, to sexual impurity, to the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshipped and served created things rather than the creator who is to be praised. Amen.

Because of this, God gave them over, you hear that language again, gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. In the same way, men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men and received in themselves the due penalty for their error.

I think these few verses here are probably the most explosive and the most controversial verses in the entire New Testament, quite possibly. I wouldn't be surprised in a context like this, in a city like this, that these would certainly inflame a few discussions, wouldn't they?

And you have to ask the question, why does Paul turn to talk about homosexual practice here? I mean, is it that Paul just didn't like gay people and he's having a go at them here?

You know, probably lots of people, if they were to skim through Romans chapter 1, who were just walking along the streets here this morning, would probably come to that conclusion. God is just anti-gay. God is homophobic. They've heard something like that in the media and this just answers the question for them. Yeah, he is.

[21:12] And you know, as Christians, it would be very easy to try to just circumvent these kinds of passages, just avoid them, because they're too difficult. They cause us too much trouble.

And as a church, we don't want to be labelled as homophobic, do we? We sincerely don't want to be viewed like that by the rest of society. And so maybe just keeping quiet is the best way to be. But you know, I don't think I would be doing my job if I just skillfully avoided verses 24 and 25 and 26 and 27. If I did that, I'd be doing a disservice to what the text says.

And you'd be doing a disservice too if you just don't think about it and ignore it. So what is going on here? I should say, just quickly, before we go on, as Christians, I think we need to be careful that we show love in the way that we talk about these things, that we are compassionate, that we are welcoming, that we are full of grace, that we are as Christ-like as we can be in the way that we respond to passages like this.

Sometimes there have been churches, and to be honest, the preaching and the rhetoric has been fuelled more by homophobia than by a passion for God's purity and a love of people. And we need to make sure we don't fall into that trap in our attempts to handle God's word well.

[22:32] But we need to address it, don't we? What does this passage say? Why has Paul put this little section here? You know, he could have picked all kinds of examples. Why choose homosexuality to illustrate this?

Well, I think the reason is that Paul sees homosexuality as, I'm going to put it like this, a double illustration of the point that he's making. A double illustration. Let me explain what I mean by that. In the first sense, Paul is looking for an illustration of behavior or attitudes that flow from what we've already seen. You know, people have pushed God out of the picture. They've begun to worship other things, whether it be an ancient civilization's way of worship, or money, or career progression,

or beauty, or whatever it might be.

We worship created stuff rather than the creator who deserves our worship. So then the question is, why use this example? Well, it's as good as any other. That's the first thing. If you read the Bible and all the texts that the Bible has on homosexuality, the conclusion that you really have to come to is that homosexuality or homosexual practice isn't God's plan for human beings.

It's not God's plan for sex. And it is sinful. There are many other things which are sinful as well in the area of sex. You know, God talks a lot about adultery.

[23:46] He talks about other things that we would look at and say, well, that is not right. And Jesus makes it far more challenging and thinks about the thought life of a person. The way that we look at a person. The way that we might undress another person with our eyes.

There's all kinds of sin in the realm of sexual sin that Paul could have picked on. But this is a good example. But why this one? Well, as I said, I think it operates as a double illustration.

It's an example of the kind of sinful behavior that may result from putting God out of the picture and worshipping other gods. But it also illustrates the very nature of sin that Paul is describing here.

To quote someone else, a New Testament scholar called Simon Gavikol puts it like this. This is his summary of these three verses. He says, humanity should be oriented towards God but turns in on itself.

That's verse 25. Women should be oriented towards man but turns in on itself. Verse 26. Man should be oriented towards woman but turns in on itself.

[24:47] Do you see what's going on here? The kind of sin or the heart of sin that is described when a person pushes God out of the picture, the creator, and worships the created. When he pushes the immortal out of the picture and worships the mortal.

This sin of homosexual practice works in the same kind of way. It's an illustration. It's an analogy for what Paul has been talking about. And this isn't easy to accept.

But I think this is why Paul chooses this example over others. So, as human beings, we should worship that which is other than us. That which is holy. God who is creator. Not created things like ourselves.

And homosexuality is an orientation towards that which is the same rather than that which is other. So I don't think Paul is just in an arbitrary way picking on gay people or having a go at gay people. That's not what's going on in this passage. And if you think like that, then I don't think that's the way that Paul has constructed his argument. I think Paul has chosen this because it is an analogy of the deep root of sin that exists in every single person.

[25:50] It's one example among many. And actually, rather ironically, when there have been sermons that have been preached where preachers have stood up and used this as an opportunity to shout and abuse and be angry and have a go at gay people.

Whilst at the same time bolstering their own sense of self-righteousness, they've fallen into the very trap that Paul is trying to avoid here in this passage. They've made the same mistake that people in the church at Rome were making and that Paul is trying to correct.

You see here, the whole point of this section. Read, maybe if you've got the time this afternoon, chapters 1, 2, and 3. And you'll see the point Paul is making is that everyone is in the same boat. Every single one of us is under the wrath of God.

Every single one of us, whether we're a Jew, that would mean religious, or a Gentile, irreligious. Whether we have experience of Christianity and we've been a Christian for 40 or 50 years or whatever, or whether we've been a Christian for two weeks or we're not a Christian yet.

Whoever we are, we all come from the same place. The same place of rejecting God. And so no one has a leg to stand on. No one, complete ignorance. No one has an excuse. We're all in the same boat.

[26:54] And so when people have taken these verses and completely distorted them to say there's them and us, there's those out there and us in here, that we're all right and they're the problem.

When people have used language like that and rhetoric like that, they've completely misunderstood what Paul is trying to achieve here. And that, you know, is why it's so helpful that we have verses

28 and following.

Because I think there we find ourselves, whether we would describe ourselves as gay or straight or bi, or whatever language we would use to describe our sexuality, we'll find ourselves in these verses. Let's read them together.

Verse 28. Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind so that they do what ought not to be done.

They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed, depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant, and boastful.

[27:53] They invent ways of doing evil. They disobey their parents. They have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy, although they know God's righteous decree, that those who do such things deserve death.

They do not only continue to do these very things, but also approve of those who practice them. As Paul hammers home his point that we are all in the same terrifying situation, he illustrates it in this scattergun way.

They call it a vice list in New Testament theology, but it's scattergun. You know, here's a load of things that we might find. If a person gets rid of God and worships created things, this is what happens.

We gossip about people. We disobey our parents. We become greedy. We become angry. We become selfish people. And the list goes on and on and on. And who in this room doesn't find themselves in that list somewhere, at some time?

We might think that we're fairly good people, but all of us find this at work in us. Find these things. At times in our life, we've experienced these sorts of behaviors and attitudes because we're all in the same boat.

[29:03] So what are we to make of this? As a bunch of Christians on a Sunday morning in the 21st century here in Brighton, I think to understand what this passage says to us, let's take it back to the beginning.

You see, this is a condemning picture of the human race, isn't it? That all of us fall into this same boat. That it's not them and us, it's just us.

And every single one of us is under the wrath of God in our natural state. And so Paul says, as we started, I'm not ashamed of the gospel because it's the power of God to bring salvation to everyone who believes, whoever they are, to bring salvation to everyone who believes.

And the picture he uses makes so much more sense now, doesn't it? Do you remember when we talked about verse 17? Of the righteousness of God that is revealed that can be yours if you trust. That can be yours instead of what has just been described in the rest of chapter 1.

If the situation was your mind has become depraved, you've pushed God out of your life, you've spent your whole time and all your energy and thought and everything you have worshipping and serving created things, and the result is just the floodgates have opened up to behaviors and attitudes and things that you just don't like and you don't want to be and you know that you shouldn't be.

[30:23] If that is the picture of your life and my life and every other life in this city and in this world, then it's good news. It's good news that that can be exchanged for the perfect, glorious, radiant, beautiful life of Jesus.

That in the gospel there is power so that your life can be exchanged for his and he can take your sin and you can be forgiven and rescued, that you can be saved. And that good news isn't just for some, it's not just for the people who bothered to get up this morning and turn up at this room and sit in this church or another church around the town.

That news is for every single person that you'll bump into on the streets, that you'll sit next to on the bus, that you'll work next to at work. Every single person, that news is for them.

If they simply believe. It's all by grace. And as this book unfolds, as you look at it over the next few weeks, you'll find this is true again and again and again and again.

So please, don't fall into the trap that the Romans did. We often forget that this book was written to a church, don't we? Often we use these passages sort of evangelistically, but first of all, the first audience were a bunch of people just like you, Christians who knew the gospel.

[31:38] I assume that they understood these things, they knew these doctrines when they came to faith. So why does he remind them? Why does he remind a bunch of Christians these very basic truths?

Why are you doing a series for very basic truths of the Christian faith when most of you, many of you, have been Christians much of your lives? I think the answer is that we can easily fall into the same mistake that they had done.

There were the more religious and the less religious in Rome. And there was a real temptation to think that I was a bit more deserving of God's grace than them.

Or they're a bit more deserving of God's wrath than me. And so as you look around this church, and it's inevitable, isn't it? We often pass judgment on one another. Don't.

Don't for a second think that you are any better or any worse than anyone who's sitting next to you or across the church from you. We are all in the same boat. And if today you stand forgiven by God, it's only by the grace of God and what is yours in the gospel through Christ.

[32:46] And as you walk home this afternoon and you pass people in the streets, it can be so easy, can't it? To look down your nose at them, to think about the things they might do in their lives, the attitudes they might have, the views they might hold, and to think that they are somehow less than you or more deserving of God's judgment than you.

Well, Paul's aim, I think, in this part of the letter is to say, don't think like that for a second. Cut it out. Stop it. Because that is not the gospel. The gospel is that you and I and everyone are in the same boat, rescued by the same grace, through the same saviour.

So this gospel is good news. It's good news for you. It's good news for me. It's good news for all of Brighton if we only put our trust in him. So this morning, as we look at this difficult passage, we're not ashamed of this gospel.

Let's pray together, shall we? Father, thank you that as we look at these hard passages, there is so much in there that we can be encouraged by.

Lord, even as we look into the deep darkness of the human heart and the hopeless situation that all of us were facing at one point or another, even in the terror of that, we see the light of the gospel piercing through the darkness in the person of Christ.

[34:15] Thank you that in him we can be forgiven, that in him we can experience new life, that in him the portrait that we see of ourselves in that chapter can be exchanged for the beauty and the righteousness, the perfect life of Christ.

Father, thank you that that is the story of so many in this room, that the gospel has been good news to them and continues to be good news for them. Father, I pray for anyone this morning who doesn't recognise that story in their life.

Pray for anyone who doesn't know what it means to be forgiven, who isn't living a life that is being transformed by the Holy Spirit, by grace day by day, who isn't living in the hope of the new creation when Christ returns.

Well, thank you that you offer this wonderful message, this good news to them as you did to us.

Please, Father, work in each of our lives. Help us not to become like the people that Paul was writing to in Rome, who saw some sort of them and us, some two-tier Christianity, some more religious and less religious and accepted those boundaries and those barriers.

Lord, help us to see that every single one of us is without excuse, that every single one of us has been a sinner and if we're saved, we're saved by grace alone. Lord, change our hearts, I pray.

[35:41] Please warm our hearts and help us to see afresh the good news of the gospel for us and for all who believe. And Lord, we pray as we reflect on this, as this church reflects on it over a couple of weeks now, that you would make us people who are not ashamed because this is the very best news the world could ever hear.

We pray all this in Jesus' precious name. Amen. Amen. Well, we're going to sing a song as we close.