

News for the New Year

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[0 : 0 0] Can I wish you a belated happy new year? I think this is the first time I've been able to be up here at 5pm. I can't believe though it's already 2022. And after the last two years it would be nice to have some good news this year. Hands up if you're hoping for some good news this year.

Only half of you, the rest are hoping for bad news. Alright, well I'm not hanging around you folk. But some good news like, you know, Ash Barty winning the Australian Open last weekend, that was pretty good news.

Alyssa Chu was even there at the event. Not jealous much. But I wonder what sort of good news you're hoping to hear this new year.

For those KFC fans, perhaps it's hearing that their whole menu is back. After the drastic move to reduce it during January.

Or more seriously, with Russia still poised at the Ukraine border, perhaps it's hearing that they have decided to turn back. That would be good news, wouldn't it? Or perhaps hearing that COVID has been cured and is no more.

[1 : 1 1] That would be good news, wouldn't it? What sort of good news are you hoping to hear this new year? Well, I want to suggest that the gospel is still the best good news that we can hear.

The word gospel just means news, particularly in the Old Testament. It could mean good news or bad news. It's used both ways in the Old Testament. In the new, it's predominantly used as good news.

But why is it still the best news worth hearing this year? Why should we concern ourselves with it yet again? And why is it worth pushing on with while COVID is continuing?

Well, four reasons from our passage tonight. You will need a Bible, especially since the preacher forgets that 5pm puts the Bible on the screen and doesn't put it on the screen for you.

So, I don't have it on my slides. So, hopefully you can look on with someone. But the first reason is it's divine news. So, have a look at verses 1 to 2. Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God.

[2 : 2 6] The gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures. We'll come back to Paul in a moment. But notice, verse 1, it is the gospel of God.

Thank you, Eric. He's heard it before. So, he, you know. Yeah, it's God's gospel. That is, it belongs to him. It is from him. He is the source of this news.

We all have our preferred news source, whether it's ABC or News.com, The Age or The Australian. And we tend to tune in to those sources we trust, you know, listen more to those sources that carry more weight for us.

Well, how much more so when the source is God himself? Does not that mean his news we ought to listen to above all other news?

And notice, verse 2, this gospel has been promised long ago through the prophets in the Old Testament. So, this gospel is not some last-minute news, which, you know, you're not sure is real or not because it's yet to be verified.

[3 : 30] Like some breaking news from CNN, Mark II named Minister of the Year 2021. Now, it could be real, couldn't it? I'm sure it is.

But either way, God's news is not some last-minute news that we're not sure of. No, no, it's been carefully planned and promised in the Old Testament.

And so, this is divine news because it's news from God, promised by God through the prophets of God. And that alone makes it news worth hearing again this new year.

But secondly, it's also personal news. And it's personal in two ways. Firstly, it's about a person. So, continuing on in our passage, verse 3, it's regarding or about his son, who as to his earthly life was a descendant of David.

You see, this news is about a person, not any old person. It's centered on God's own son, who also is the king.

[4 : 40] And that's what it means to be a descendant from King David. It means you're one of God's chosen kings, who are supposed to save God's people from their enemies and help God's people live God's way.

The problem with all the Davidic kings, all the kings in David's line, was they died. There was other problems as well, but that was a pretty big one. And so, what makes God's own son, the king from David's line?

Well, it's that he rose, verse 4. And who, through the spirit of holiness, was appointed or declared the son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Now, just to clarify a couple of things, the words his son in verse 3 referred to the divine son, the second person of the Trinity, which we're familiar with.

But in verse 4, the phrase son of God, we naturally think it's the same thing, but actually, for the Jews, it was another title for the king or the Christ, the Messiah. Because every king from David's line down was known as a son of God, due to some promises God made to David back in 2 Samuel 7.

[6 : 00] And so, what Paul is writing here, though, is that the divine son has now been declared to be the Davidic king, the son of God.

Because he didn't stay dead like all the other kings in David's line, he rose. His resurrection declares him to be the son of God in power, the king.

Which is why Paul ends verse 4 with, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Jesus Christ, our Lord.

This is who the gospel is about. The person of Jesus Christ, the king, the Lord. But also notice, the end of verse 4, it doesn't just say, Lord, it says, our Lord.

And so, this news is personal, not just because it's about the person of Jesus, the Lord, but also because it's personal for us. He is our Lord.

[7 : 02] See, if Jesus is the king, then he has a claim over our lives. Doesn't he? This news is personal for us.

It has implications for us. For all people, in fact. For it means everyone is to believe in and obey Jesus.

Because he is the king. Which is why Paul's job is to call all people to believe and obey Jesus.

Verse 5. Through him, through Christ, we receive grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith for his namesake.

At Through Christ, on the road to Damascus, actually, Paul was called and given the job to be an apostle, specifically to the Gentiles, who, as you know, are non-Jews.

[8 : 04] So, I think everyone here, is anyone here a Jew? You do too. There you go. So, apart from Mr. Willett, we're all Gentiles. You're half Gentile, half Jew.

And Paul's job was specifically to call all Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith. Which means calling them, firstly, to have faith, doesn't it? To believe that Jesus really did die.

To save us from our enemies, not of Philistines or Assyrians, but sin and death. And that he really did rise from the dead, declaring that he is Lord.

Paul's job is to call people to believe in Jesus as the king who saves. And to believe so much so that they will live out their faith in obedience.

Which, by the by, is actually for our good, isn't it? I think even non-Christians know that without even realizing it. I was watching a movie a couple of weeks ago, and one of the characters said, if only people would just live by the golden rule.

[9 : 12] Have you heard of the golden rule? Do to others as you would have them do to you. But who said that? It's a Sunday school answer. Jesus. Jesus said that.

Yet even non-Christians, I don't know it's from Jesus, but even non-Christians know that to obey his teaching, without realizing it's his teaching, is actually for our good. And yet that's not the reason Paul actually gives in verse 5, for why we're to obey.

What is it? It's for his namesake. To honor Jesus. You see, we rightly want people to believe so that they can be saved and have eternal life.

We rightly want people to obey because we know it's for their good. But we often forget, I think, that we should also believe and obey for Jesus' sake.

As we sung in our first song, All glory be to me. I think one person, I've got one person awake.

[10 : 19] You know, all glory be to Christ. You see, if Jesus is the king who saves, then he deserves to be honored by everyone.

He deserves all people's obedience. He deserves all people's allegiance. He deserves all people's adherence. This is personal news.

And news about the person of Jesus, the king who saves. But it also affects every person. Because every person ought to believe and obey, whether they realize it or not.

Divine news. Secondly, personal news. And thirdly, strengthening news. I'm going to read a chunk now, from 7 to 15. It's a slightly topical talk, even though I want to still unpack the passage.

But I'm going to read a chunk, and then I'll just quickly unpack these verses to get to the point. So verse 7. He says, To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be his holy people, grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

[11 : 27] First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the known world. God, whom I serve in my spirit, in preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness, how constantly I remember you in my prayers at all times.

And I pray that now, at last, by God's will, the way may be open for me to come to you. I long to see you, so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong.

That is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith. I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that I planned many times to come to you, but I've been prevented from doing so until now, in order that I might have a harvest among you, just as I've had among the other Gentiles.

I'm obligated both to the Greeks and the non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish. That is why I'm so eager to preach the gospel also to you, who are in Rome.

Paul is eager to preach the gospel to these people who are in Rome, but did you notice these people already know it? They're already Christians.

[12 : 43] Verse 6, they already belong to Jesus. At verse 7, they are already loved by God and called to be his holy people. Verse 8, their faith is being reported all over the known world.

And yet, verse 10, Paul still prays that he can see them. Because, verse 11, he wants to impart some spiritual gift to make them strong, which is not some magical protein shake or Red Bull or anything like that.

It's verse 12, some mutual encouragement from each other's common faith. That's what will strengthen them to bear fruit for God. And in this way, verse 13, Paul would reap a harvest amongst them as he strengthens them to bear fruit for God.

After all, this is his job as an apostle to the Gentiles. So, verse 14, he's obligated to all Gentiles, whether they are Greek or non-Greek, and we have both at our church.

I have a tooler in my Bible study group. Can't get much more Greek than tooler. He's obligated to all Gentiles, whether wise or foolish. We have both wise and...

[13 : 55] No, we just have wise at our church. But the point is, he wants to strengthen all these Gentiles, verse 15, by preaching the gospel to them, even though they're already Christians.

And so, how's this going to work? Is he just going to keep saying, Jesus Christ, our Lord, Jesus Christ, our Lord, over and over again until it sinks in? Is that how it's going to work? Well, no.

He's actually going to unpack the gospel and help them to grow in their understanding of it, as well as their appreciation for it. Let me see if I can illustrate.

Here is the gospel, which means news or good news. And in its simplest form, in verse 4, it is Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Hopefully, you've got good eyesight. But we can unpack that more, can't we? Who died on the cross for our sins, which we are all guilty of, who rose proving he is Lord, and defeated sin and death, which means we can be saved from sin and death, by forgiving us instead, and giving us life eternal.

[15 : 25] You're all wondering how long this is going to go for, with acceptance into God's family, if we have faith in him, all because of God's love, grace, and mercy.

I'm pretty sure we could add some more, too. But, you see, the gospel can be unpacked to different aspects of it, and you can actually spend time understanding each of those aspects more clearly.

That's, in fact, what Paul does in the first 11 chapters of Romans. He unpacks different parts of the gospel. Chapters 1 and 3 are basically just doing the third one down, helping us realize we're all guilty of sin, both Jew and Gentile.

Chapter 4 is about faith alone, and so on. This is what he's going to do in Rome. He's going to unpack the gospel to help them to understand it more clearly, because he knows the Spirit doesn't just use the gospel to save non-Christians.

The Spirit also uses the gospel to strengthen us as Christians. And so it points at the rest of the letter. Paul reminds them of different parts, different aspects of the gospel to strengthen them to live Christianly.

[16 : 34] So, for example, in Romans chapter 12, he appeals to God's mercy, which is at the bottom there in the gospel, to encourage them, strengthen them, to offer their bodies as living sacrifices, to live Christianly.

Or in chapter 15, he says, accept one another. Why? Well, the gospel, just as Christ accepted you.

Paul is going to unpack it and help them to understand it more clearly, so that they might be strengthened to live Christianly. And I take it he'll also spend time to help them appreciate it more deeply, because it takes time to ponder and really appreciate how profound these truths are, doesn't it?

Especially because we've heard them so many times. Yeah, yeah, gospel. Yeah, got it. Yeah, got it. It takes time to pause and reflect and let it sink in. So, for example, if you need strength to love others, then hear afresh God's love for you in the gospel.

Take time to ponder just how deep the Father's love for us is. That no matter what you've done in your life, God still loves you.

[17 : 51] Which is a pretty extraordinary thought in and of itself. Or think of that person in your life, that most annoying person, whether a neighbor or a colleague or a politician, dare I say, and ponder how much would you have to love that person to die for them, to take a bullet for them.

How much would I have to love to die for? And then realize that amount of love is only a drop in the ocean compared to God's love for you.

That's pretty extraordinary, isn't it? But it takes time to ponder and to think through those things. And the more we understand the gospel clearly, the more we appreciate it deeply, the more we'll be strengthened to live Christianly.

That's how it works. Which means we need to do all we can this year to help ourselves and others keep hearing the gospel.

Whether it's tuning into the online services or joining a growth group, if you can, or whether it's just reading the Bible yourself.

[19 : 05] Why not read through the rest of Romans? We're going to have done the first passage tonight. From now to Easter, read through the rest of Romans. Or whether it's helping others to hear it by serving at church in some way.

You know, like welcoming people so they feel happy to be here and hear this good news as we unpack different aspects from the rest of the Bible. Or whether it's teaching it to kids or youth or sharing some aspect of it with people in conversation after church.

Or simply praying. Not simply. I don't mean simply as in prayers down here. No, no. Everyone can pray. Which is really important and vital for ministry.

But whatever it is, we're to do all we can in our situation to help ourselves and each other keep hearing this good news this new year. And that also means coming to church when you can.

Because it is harder to be mutually encouraged by one another's common faith in the gospel if we don't meet with one another. Now let me just pause for a moment and say a few things related to COVID.

[20 : 20] COVID does cause complications, doesn't it? So we as leaders need to keep doing what we can to provide a safe environment for you and we will be doing that of course.

But you also need to be sensible and loving. You know, getting a booster or if you have symptoms, staying away. Or if it's really vulnerable for you or it's dangerous.

I don't know your situation. You need to work it out for yourself. But we're not to use COVID as a cop-out. Now like one sunny day, oh, we'll go to the beach instead.

You know, after all, it's outside. So it's safer. We won't bother coming back for 5pm, which is inside. So it's dangerous. Really? Is that the real reason?

We're to be wise, not foolish. COVID is still around. We're to be faithful, not fearful. Vaccines do make a difference. And we're to be loving, not lazy.

[21 : 17] Doing what we can in our situation. To help ourselves and others here. And so to help you decide, let me give you a biblical principle that actually comes up in Romans chapter 14, where Paul writes that everything that does not come from faith is sin.

Here it's the context of what people believe is right when it comes to what food to eat. A modern day example might be whether you can drink alcohol or not, that sort of thing. But that's the context of Romans 14.

And Paul is saying that our conscience matters. What we believe, have faith, pleases God, counts. It matters. And so why not ask yourself, when it comes to COVID and coming to church, do I believe my choice to come or stay away pleases God?

Do I have faith that it's pleasing to God? Whether it's because it's loving to others or loving to the family or whatever it is. There's a question that you can genuinely ask yourself to help you decide whether to come or stay away.

And that decision may change month to month, depending on your situation and what's happening in the world and the like. But there's just one principle you can apply to help you decide what to do.

[22 : 35] But enough of that. The point here is that this news is strengthening news. But finally, and more briefly, it's saving news.

Verse 16. It says, Paul is unashamed because this news is the way God saves.

It's his power to change hearts and to help people have eternal life. Because in this news, in this gospel, the righteousness of God is revealed.

In other words, this news tells people, reveals to people how to be right with God, which is by faith in Jesus.

But the point here is this is saving news. This is the way God saves. And so again, we're to do all we can to help others outside the church hear this news this new year.

[23 : 55] That they might be saved. Whether it's sharing it yourself with non-Christian friends or family or giving money to support missionaries who share it. CMS has just dropped off a couple of weeks ago these little money boxes.

I've got one here. I don't like carrying around loose chains. It's really annoying. But what a great use for loose chains. Or even, not just five set pieces, gold coins too.

But what a great thing to do. That's a great thing to use. And there's a whole stack of them out there. They come out flat packed, kind of IKEA style. But you pop it out and if I can make it, you can make it.

So, but that's a great way to help people hear the gospel, isn't it? Giving money to help missionaries do it. Or whether it's by serving in an outreach ministry like ESL or J Kids or the like.

Or committing to pray for a particular person. We're to do all we can given our situation and to help others outside the church hear this news for it is saving news.

[24 : 57] Well, I saw this headline says, homicide victims rarely talk to police. It's a slow release joke. Homicide victims can never talk to police because they're not alive.

Yeah? I'm not sure this is news worth hearing. What about this one? China may be using sea to hide its submarines. Where else would you put a submarine? I'm not sure that's news worth hearing either.

But let me tell you the gospel is news worth hearing. Even if you already know it. For it is divine news, it's personal news, it's strengthening news and it's saving news.

So, let's pray we might do what we can to help ourselves and others hear it this new year. Let's pray. Our gracious heavenly father, we thank you so much for the news about the Lord Jesus who saves.

Help us, we pray, to do all we can to help ourselves and others hear it this year. Not just for their sake or our sake, but ultimately for Jesus' name's sake.

[26 : 09] We pray it in his name. Amen.