

The Centre and Message of the Gospel

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[0 : 0 0] Well, friends, just while you remain standing, I'll pray for us. Father, we pray that you might speak to us through your word. You might speak to us about your son.

You might challenge us and be at work amongst us by your spirit. And, Father, we pray that as a result of this, you would change our lives, particularly our lives together.

And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Please sit down, friends. Now, friends, this morning I want to introduce this Bible talk with a word of explanation and with a word of warning.

The word of explanation first. I've been here now 14 months and I've spent most of those 14 months, well, really most of it, trying just to get to know what happens here and get on top of the activities of this place.

And then I've spent time, of course, getting to know you. And I'm still getting to know some of you, but I've got to know a lot of you now and I've had a feel for this congregation. But over the last two or three months, I've turned my thoughts and my mind to thinking about our future.

[1 : 1 2] And as I've done this, I thought the best place to start thinking long term about where we're going as a church is to start with what God thinks we ought to be doing, with what God wants.

And the best place to start finding out what God wants for us is by prayerfully searching the scriptures. And so for the last two months, I have been reading through the whole of the New Testament. And as I've done that, I have been asking four major questions.

Now, you'd think I'd have done this before, but I never have. I've done this exercise where I have asked four questions and some sub-questions to it. And these are the four questions that I have asked.

What is the gospel and what does gospel ministry look like? What is the church and what is the church all about? What is a shepherd or pastor of God's people and what is their role?

And what is worship and what does it look like? Four questions. I've never done that from first principles before. A strange thing to admit, but true.

[2 : 1 3] And I have made some incredible discoveries. And those discoveries are shaping my thinking as I think about our future together. They're shaping how I think strategically about our long-term future and about what I think God wants for us.

And I've concluded that the most important question of those four questions is the first one. That is, what is the gospel and what does gospel ministry look like?

We are going today and in the next six talks after this to look more at that question. We are going to examine what the gospel is and we are going to try and understand the big picture of what God is doing in his world through the gospel.

And I want these talks, and this is the most important thing to say at this moment, I want these talks to be the foundation for our thinking about ourselves and the task we have as God's people before God.

So there's the word of explanation. Now for the word of warning. The word of warning is that this first Bible talk on this topic is pretty packed with content.

[3 : 2 2] I need to tell you that before we start, we have some solid work to do this morning. And I want you to stick with me. Stay with me because these are very important things. This is very important stuff.

I want it to shape our life together. I want it to transform our minds, our hearts, our life. So with that in mind, we ought to ask God to help us, shouldn't we?

So let's pray together. Our Father in God, please help us this morning to pay close attention to your word. Please help us to understand what you are doing in your world.

Please shape us by your word. Please be at work among us by your spirit. Please use these sermons to point us toward your son and use them to transform our life together. And we pray this for the sake of your glory and in the name of Jesus, your son. Amen. Now friends, since this series of talks is about the gospel, well, we need to grapple with what the term actually means.

[4 : 27] So, and since this term is critical for our passage today, we need to do even more work on that. So as a way of introducing the term gospel, I want to tell you two stories. The first story comes from the Greek-speaking world of the first century BC.

And it was a time when the Roman world was torn apart by war. And during that time, an inscription was written. We have an inscription that was found between Ephesus and Miletus on the west coast of Roman Asia.

It is dated, or it's not dated this way, but its date can be recorded to 29 BC. And it records the birth of the Emperor Augustus.

Now, in order to understand this inscription, you need to know that a Roman emperor was viewed as divine. That is, he was thought to be a god. And so the words of the inscription read like this. The birthday of the God marked for the world the beginning of the gospel through his coming. That's how it would read in Greek.

[5 : 31] I've left the word gospel in there. So let me read it again. The birthday of the God marked for the world the beginning of the gospel through his coming. You see, friends, in the Greek-speaking world, the word gospel meant glad tidings, good news.

It was the word you used at an emperor's birth, at his coming of age, at his enthronement, and even at some of the speeches that he made and decrees that he gave. Such events, you see, gave people hope.

The event of the birth of an emperor heralded the possible fulfillment of the long-hoped-for desires of the world for happiness and peace. It raised the possibility that there might be a new start coming.

At the end of war, the creating of order, the birthday of the emperor, you see, was good news for the ancient world. Declaring the birth was a declaration of a gospel, of a great and glorious news filled with the possibility of good things.

So that's how the Greek-speaking world of Roman politics used the term gospel. It meant glad tidings, good news. Now let me tell you how the Old Testament used the word.

[6 : 44] You see, the New Testament writers used the Greek language, and their thought and their thought world was shaped by the Old Testament and the Bible that the New Testament authors predominantly use was a Greek version of the Old Testament.

And when they used the word gospel, their way of thinking was not only formed by the way Greek speakers used the word, but it was also formed by how the Greek writers of the Old Testament used the term as well, that is of the translation of the Old Testament.

So with that in mind, let me tell you a little bit how their Bible used the term gospel. Now the first time, the first thing to say is that the term gospel in the New Testament is largely a masculine form. In the Old Testament Greek, they used the feminine form of the word gospel. That's of little consequence. They also used the verbal form of the word gospel.

And to show you how it's used, I want to tell you a story from David's life. So King David, it comes from 2 Samuel chapters 16 to 19. King David had a number of sons and at the time of these chapters, the eldest living son is a man called Absalom.

[8 : 03] And David greatly loved Absalom. He was a handsome young man and he was a man who was loved by David.

But Absalom was a bit of a scoundrel and he staged a palace coup and he caused David to flee from his palace and from the city of Jerusalem.

And then he raped David's concubines on the rooftop of David's palace and Absalom and his men are waging war against David's men at this point in chapters 16 to 19.

And in the thick of battle, Absalom is cornered and he's killed. And David's commander-in-chief is a man called Joab. And Joab orders that the news of the death of Absalom should be taken back from the battlefield to David who is waiting away from the battlefield.

It is, of course, good news for the supporters of David. And it indicates that a coup has been ended, the kingdom can be returned to David, David can go back to his capital city of Jerusalem and

there's a young man in the crowd who's very keen to be the first one to bring the news to David. [9 : 15] And so he pleads with David, with Joab in 2 Samuel 18 verse 19 and these are the words he uses. He says, Please, let me go and tell the king the good news of what the Lord has delivered, that the Lord has delivered him from his enemies.

Now let me put it to you using the term gospel, the way the Greek version of the Old Testament puts it. The young man says to Joab, Please, let me go and gospel the king that the Lord has delivered him from his enemies.

Anyway, the end is that these two runners, two runners take the news, the watchman on David's side sees the runners coming with the news. They are particularly heartened by the fact that it comes at the hand of a young man called Ahimehaz who's known to be a good young fellow and the watchman says, This is a good man.

He comes with good gospel. Can you hear what the word means? It comes with good, good news. With good, good tidings, it comes at the hand of a good man.

Anyway, eventually the news is received by David and for the kingdom and its subjects it is indeed very good news. However, it is not so for David.

[10 : 36] He has lost his beloved son. He is bereft and in the Hebrew it's just incredible. He retreats from the news place, the place where the news has been received and he goes into an inner chamber and he says, My son, my son, Absalom, Absalom, my son, my son, and he just goes on and on in a lament.

He goes into deep mourning. It is clear that for him the news that has come from the battlefield is not good news. It is very bad news because it tells the death of his son, his beloved one.

Friends, I tell you this story because it tells us a little bit about what the word gospel and its verbal forms meant and its noun forms meant in the Old Testament. Just as in the rest of the Greek speaking world, the word had connotations of good news, of glad tidings.

But this story adds another element that otherwise we would not know. It tells us that what is good news for some can be bad news for others. But there's one more thing to add and that is that this word group is used in one more important place in the Greek version of the Old Testament.

It is used in the second half of the book of Isaiah which tells the story of God's servant and it is used to refer to the good news of God's redemption that comes through the servant of the Lord and this servant we are told will preach good news.

[12 : 04] He will proclaim the favourable year of the Lord. He will announce that God has redeemed his Jerusalem and it's there in our first reading from Isaiah 52.

I wonder if you heard it. It goes like this. How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of the herald who proclaims peace, who brings news of the gospel, who proclaims salvation, who says to Zion, your God reigns.

Friends, let's see if we can put all of this together. The first thing to say is that our versions of the Bible are both helpful and unhelpful when they translate the Greek word for gospel.

Some of our versions of the Bible simply translate the Greek word for gospel with the term good news. Well that's helpful, isn't it? Because it tells us the default meaning for this word gospel, euangelion, is good news.

At another level it's not really that helpful, is it? Because the good news of the gospel can also be bad news for people who don't receive it rightly. You see, there's a whole world out there for whom the gospel is bad news because they've rejected the gospel.

[13 : 18] Does that make sense? So that's very important to understand. Now, other translations opt for something different. Every time the word euangelion occurs, they replace it with the word gospel.

And that's helpful because it says this term is a technical term. However, it's not helpful in another way because it doesn't convey that the default translation of this word is good news, glad tidings, and some other versions like the Holman just mix and match.

Anyway, the word is important and it is so important in Romans 1. And since the word is important for Romans 1 and for our series of Bible talks, I thought I should give you some background to it. So, with that done, we can turn to Romans 1. Sorry it's taken us so long to get there. You can be encouraged by the fact that it's not going to take us that long to get through Romans 1. So, let's have a look at it together.

Romans 1, verse 1. And I want you to look at, by the way, there is an outline there if you'd like to follow it. Look at what Paul tells us about himself. First, he says, he is a slave.

[14:23] Now, let me tell you, in the Roman world that Paul lived in, the position of being a slave was not an exalted one. And using a term of honour, using a term such as slave of yourself, was not a way of lifting yourself up, exalting yourself.

In Paul's world, the position of a slave was a lowly one. But for Paul, he was not only shaped by the Greek world, but shaped by the Old Testament. And in the Old Testament, the title of slave can have lots of honour and significant importance.

After all, you see, Moses was a slave of God. Joshua was a slave of God. David was a slave of God. And the prophets were all called slaves or servants of God.

They were slaves of the Lord, Yahweh. And look at whose slave Paul is in these verses. It's there in verse 1. Do you see it? He is a slave of Christ Jesus.

Very interesting the way he puts it, isn't it? He puts Christ first. He is a slave of the Messiah, the Lord Jesus. Verse 3 says, this Messiah is also the Lord.

[15:33] So he is a slave of Messiah, Jesus, the Lord. This is his identity. He's saying, I'm actually a man of importance. I'm only important, though, because of whose slave I am.

And I'm a slave of this Messiah, Jesus, the Lord. And then he goes on to say, I've been given a role. He says, I'm God's apostle. I've been singled out for the gospel, the good news.

So friends, this is Paul. This is who's writing this letter. This is his identity. This is his job. Let's see what he has to say about this gospel that he's been singled out for. So notice the very thing, first thing he says about the gospel.

The gospel is whose gospel? God's gospel. That is, it is the gospel of God. God is its origin. God is its source.

God is its goal. It is from him. It is for him. This is God's gospel. That's the first thing about the gospel. God's gospel. Second thing is in verse 2.

[16:37] Look at it there. The gospel, you see, Paul is saying in verse 2 is not new. It is a very ancient promise of the eternal God. It is the gospel that God promised long ago through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures.

The God of the Old Testament, you see, is the same as the God of the New Testament. And the gospel of the New Testament is the gospel of the God of the Old Testament.

There is continuity between the two. Whatever it is that God is doing in his world in the gospel, it is exactly what he's been doing throughout history. The gospel is no innovation.

It's not as though there's a plan A in the Old Testament and that got stuffed up somehow. And so we have a plan B in the New, which is all about the gospel. No, there is one ancient plan and promise of God.

It has been there from eternity. One gospel of one God predicted by the prophets in the Old Testament, fulfilled and proclaimed by Paul, the apostle, in the New.

[17:36] And it's fulfillment in the New. It's found in Jesus Christ. Look at verse 3. Look at how it's put. God's ancient promise is this concerning his son. Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Friends, the center of God's eternal gospel plan formed from before the beginning of creation is a person. And it is the person of Jesus.

Now, in the original Greek, there's an amazing series of parallel statements and I've put them and hopefully we'll be able to get them on the data projector for you to see. The original language looks like this.

Let's see how we go. It's done. Okay, have a look. What these verses tell us is that there are two stages in the existence of Jesus.

Stage one is the old eon, the old age perspective on Jesus. And this Jesus was born of the seed of David according to the flesh.

[18:38] Jesus Christ. Okay, born of the seed of David according to the flesh. Jesus Christ. But when you look at him from the new test, the new age or eon or perspective, you can see something different.

You see, this in his first perspective, he did the work of the Davidic Messiah. He was Jesus, the Christ. But then came the resurrection after his death and through the work of the Holy Spirit, he entered another stage of existence, an alternative existence.

And in that existence, he can be seen differently. He was appointed the Son of God in power and a new era in history began. And in that era, who is he?

He is Jesus, our Lord, Jesus, our reigning King. But let's move on to verse two. And you've got it there in front of you. Paul returns to his role again.

And his role in God's plan is clear. By God's grace, he has been made an apostle. He has been sent by God, the great God behind this plan, and he's been sent through Jesus and his goal is to bring about the obedience of the faith among the nations on behalf of his name.

[19 : 51] And I think the Holman's got it right here. This is not the obedience amongst the Gentiles. This is the obedience of faith among all nations. I think he's geared at all nations Jew and Gentile alike.

This is God's goal. Friends, the Bible begins with a focus on the whole world. Do you remember that? So Genesis 1 to 11 is about all of humanity, isn't it? God creates Adam and Eve, all of humanity.

And you follow that story through. And how does the Bible end? Well, it ends with all of humanity again, doesn't it? That's how the Bible begins, how the Bible ends.

And Abraham and his descendants who don't appear until Genesis 12 are the means by which God will accomplish that goal of blessing the whole world.

God's goal has always been and will always be all nations. Not just one nation, but all nations. But I want you to notice something else.

[20 : 51] Did you notice those words, the obedience of the faith or the obedience of faith? God's goal is not just your personal faith in Jesus.

God's goal for all nations of the world is that they do what Adam and Eve and Israel did not do. It is that all nations of the world are characterized by an obedience which springs from faith in Jesus.

God's goal in his world is obedience, changed lifestyle, changed actions and all of this should reflect the faith and all of us should reflect our faith in Jesus in obedience.

Friends, if you call Jesus your Lord, then you are committed to doing what Jesus commands. Faith and obedience are two sides of the one coin.

Faith in Jesus demands issues in obedience to Jesus. Faith in Jesus involves obedience to Jesus and obedience in Jesus to Jesus demonstrates that you have faith in him.

[22 : 00] There's one more thing though. Look at verse 5 again. Did you notice who all of this is for? On whose behalf is all of this?

Well, it's an obedience of faith among all the nations. Can you see it there? On behalf of his name. It has its source in Jesus Christ our Lord and it is for the sake of the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Friends, we began with God as the source of this gospel and we finish with Paul saying that Jesus Christ his Lord is the one to whom all glory and benefit must go and in the middle you'll notice we have the work of the Holy Spirit don't we?

the gospel is thoroughly wrapped up with a Trinitarian God Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Now let's just stop and reflect on what we've found.

I wonder if you've observed something about what Paul has said about the gospel. For example, did you notice how little there is about me oh and I should say and about you in here as well?

[23 : 10] You see there's no doubt that the gospel is good news for us as individuals no doubt about that at all. There can be no mistaking that is good news because it tells us how we can be forgiven for our sins.

There can be no and it's surely and certainly about our personal and spiritual transformation but friends that's not what's at the heart of the gospel. No friends the heart of the gospel has been laid out in these verses and the heart of the gospel is about God the King.

It is about God's plan fashioned from all eternity. It is about God's great son who is at the center of two eons or ages in God's saving history.

It is about God's great new and obedient humanity forged from every nation on earth. It is about God. That's what the gospel is about.

It is about God's great kingly rule. It is about God's great king Jesus Christ our Lord. Now before we wrap this up and draw together its implications I want to show you one more magic thing.

[24 : 24] I want you to think about I've told you I think the gospel is at the heart of this passage but I want to tell you the gospel is at the heart of this whole book of Romans and I know this because Paul begins with the gospel and ends with the gospel.

He has two bookends that hold everything in between in place. Let me show them to you. I'm going to put them up on the data projector again. See how we go. Done.

I want you to notice the first six verses of Romans and the last three verses of Romans. I want you to notice that both focus on the gospel of God. Romans 1 verses 1 to 6 calls it the gospel of God. Romans 16 says according to my gospel. Then it has Jesus at the center of it. Romans 1 says it's concerning his son. And Romans 16 says it's the proclamation of Jesus Christ.

Both say it's revealed in the Old Testament. Romans 1 says promised long ago through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures. And Romans 16 says now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings.

[25 : 29] But both say it's sourced from God. Romans 1 says the gospel of God. Romans 16 says it's according to the command of the eternal God.

Both tell us Paul's role in the service of the gospel. Chapter 1 he's singled out for the God's gospel. And he's so part of it that he calls it my gospel in chapter 16.

Then the object of the gospel is God. Sorry it's the obedience of the faith. And exactly the same words are used both in Romans 1 and Romans 16. The obedience of faith among all nations.

And finally its ultimate goal is not just our obedience but the glory of God. On behalf of his name Romans 1. To the only wise God through Jesus Christ to him be glory forever.

That's where the gospel is going. The glory of God. Can you see it? It's just marvelous isn't it?

Friends God his son the apostle to the Gentiles the apostle to all nations are of one mind in this.

[26 : 34] And that mind is shaped by the gospel. It is centered on the gospel. And that center of and the center of that gospel is Jesus Christ.

Friends I want us to be a church like this because God wants us to be like that. Everything I want us to do as we face our future as a church I want to be centered on the gospel.

I want us to be a church set apart for this gospel. Now let me tell you if we did this it would have significant ramifications.

It would mean that we were countercultural. It would mean that we would be choosing not to be trendy but to be godly. It would mean ensuring that the gospel saturates every part of our corporate and personal existence.

It would mean changing our personal faith, our personal lives, our marriages, our personal relationships, our preaching curriculum, our music, the choices in what we sing, the way we use our money, the way we use our buildings and our property, the way we appoint our staff, the sort of staff we appoint, the training we give our leaders, the way we rear our children, the stuff that we teach them in Sunday school, the way we run our meetings together.

[27 : 56] Friends, I want us to be a gospel-centered church and I'd like us to start explicitly using the term. You can store this one away.

I want it to occur in our language all the time. I want us to start using the term gospel- centered because that's what we should be. You see, we are a gospel- centered church full of gospel-centered people.

This is what we should be by God. We are on a gospel centered mission. We are under the oversight of a gospel-centered father. We are filled and fueled by a gospel centered spirit. We are centered on a crucified and risen son, the Lord Jesus Christ, who is at the center of the gospel. The gospel concerning his son is what God has been centered on from all eternity. And I want us to explicitly and openly and corporately allow this gospel to shape all of our existence. And with that challenge, I want to finish today.

[29 : 11] Not a lot of application, but a lot of things to think about today. And I've worked you hard. Most of you are still with me, so that's great. Thank you. Over the next five or six Bible talks, I'm going to develop this theme some more.

We're going to continue to look at what the gospel is. And we are going to continue to see what God is on about in this gospel. And my hope, my prayer, is that we'll find ourselves excited and fueled by what God has done, is doing, and will do through the gospel of his son.

And I'm going to pray, and I hope you'll join me in praying, that he'll do great things through his gospel among us, for our Lord's name's sake, and for the sake of God's glory.

So let's pray along those lines. Father, please fill our hearts with excitement about what you have done what you are doing and what you will do through the gospel of your son.

Father, we pray that you'll do great things through the proclamation and the living of the gospel among us. And Father, we pray that you'll do it for the Lord Jesus' name's sake, and for the sake of your own glory.

[30 : 43] We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. magnet! Amen. Amen. 58■mania