

Servants of the Gospel

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[0 : 0 0] Well, today we come to the last chapter and a half, actually, of Romans, though we didn't read chapter 16. I took pity on Annabelle with all those names, so I didn't make her do that.

And I started our series in Romans last year by talking about news that changes everything. You see, there is some news that changes lots in life, news like, I've got a job, or I've lost a job, or news like Kim, who found out she was having five babies in January this year.

Do you remember hearing that story? I think we got a slide of the bubs. Now, that changes everything, doesn't it? Mel? Mel, Delacruz, just one, is it?

Just one, all right, okay. Or take the news story I showed you when we started our series last year about Luke Shambrook. See if you remember this. When Luke Shambrook was found alive.

The unforgettable moment police found Luke Shambrook. For five gruelling days, the 11-year-old had wandered helplessly in this rugged bushland. As hope faded and bad weather closed in, a miracle.

[1 : 1 1] When you think about the timeline and how many days he'd been away and how many nights, four nights in this weather, it's been raining, it's been cold. It's the best outcome you can have.

It's sensational. Luke was hauled from the bush by the team of rescuers who'd refused to give up. Days of heartache for his parents turned to pure joy and relief.

Rescuers amazed he was responsive and in such good shape. He was very happy to see us, there's no doubt about that. And they were ecstatic to see him, a moment many will never forget. Too often we see tragedy, but it's been a hell of an ordeal for him, four days. But to be able to give his parents the news that he's well and he's alive and he's been found three kilometres from where we were missing four days ago is amazing.

His mum kissed her son and held him close. Remember that? It's an amazing story. When they heard the news, he said that he was alive, days of heartache turned or changed to pure joy.

[2 : 1 5] You see, some news really does change everything. From heartache to joy, from hopelessness to overwhelming thankfulness. There is some news that changes everything from the way we feel to the way we think and even act.

And this gospel message about Jesus that we've been looking at through this letter is news like that. In fact, the word gospel means news.

It's generally good news, but it's definitely news that changes everything from who we are to how we think and how we act. Now, why am I talking about this gospel news like I did at the start of our series, at the start of the letter, when we're supposed to be looking at the end of the letter?

Well, because here at the end of the letter, Paul really returns us to the start by talking about the gospel. You see, there are a number of themes that come up here at the end which were mentioned right at the start.

As on the next slide, I've listed a few of them and you can see the reference at the start and the first seven verses particularly and how they get repeated here in this last chapter and a half.

[3 : 2 2] But the main thread that runs throughout this last section is, indeed, the main theme of the whole letter is the gospel. That's what the letter of Romans has really been all about.

And that's how the letter started. And this is how the letter ends by talking about the gospel and servants of it, the news of Jesus who died for us and rose again. And we see this with the gospel work of Paul.

So point one on your outlines in verse 14 in your Bibles. He says, I myself am convinced, my brothers and sisters, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with knowledge and competent to instruct one another.

Yet I have written you quite boldly on some points to remind you of them again. Here Paul says that the Christians in Rome are full of knowledge.

That is, they know the gospel. They know how they ought to behave. And they are generally full of goodness as well. But as we saw last week, they need a reminders to accept one another and not judge.

[4 : 22] Or in chapter 11, the Gentiles need a reminding not to be arrogant towards the Jews, those Jews who didn't get the gospel. And the Jews need a reminding about God's plan for their fellow countrymen, that God had not yet finished with them.

And so Paul reminded them rather boldly at these points. But Paul did not start this church in Rome. So why does he believe he has the right to remind them boldly?

Well, he tells us in the rest of verse 15. He says, He says, You see, in God's grace or kindness, God not only saved Paul, but chose Paul to be a special minister to the Gentiles.

And so he has the right to write boldly to this church, which has Gentiles in it. But notice the gospel changed everything from Paul.

He went from a persecutor to a preacher. In fact, Paul's work is described like a priest offering a sacrifice, an acceptable sacrifice to God. Only for him, it was not animal sacrifices, but he was offering people as living sacrifices to God.

[5 : 48] If you remember chapter 12, the language from there. But it's not just Paul's life the gospel has changed. It's the lives of everyone who believes. You see, as Paul preached this good news, this gospel news, that Jesus died for our sins to give us who believe forgiveness, and that he rose again as Lord.

As he preached that news, people would believe in Jesus. And the Spirit, it says, would sanctify them, or literally make them holy and acceptable in God's sight.

In the words of chapter 12, verse 1, they became like a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God. And so this changed everything from who they are, their identity, to the way they live their life.

Occasionally you hear stories of people who become citizens of another country. Michelle's brother, my brother-in-law, married a Swede and became a Swedish citizen. And when he received the letter announcing or the news of his citizenship, it changed his identity.

He was now also Swedish. And this change in his identity meant a change in his life. And so he lived more like a Swede. He speaks Swedish.

[6 : 59] In fact, he even dreams in Swedish. He rides his bike in the snow like the rest of Sweden. He even eats a Swedish yogurt, which actually tastes off.

Apparently that's the thing to eat. And now he can vote in Sweden, whereas before he couldn't. You see, the news of his citizenship changed everything. His identity, who he was and how he lived.

Well, so too, this gospel news changes our identity and the way we are supposed to live. When we hear this gospel news about Jesus and believe in him, we achieve, we change from being unholy and unacceptable because of our sin.

From being unholy and acceptable to now being holy and acceptable to God in his sight. From being at odds with God to being right with God. And from facing his judgment to finding forgiveness. From headed to hell to headed for heaven. And that change in our identity ought to change also the way we live. From living for ourselves to living for the Lord Jesus.

[8 : 06] From living unholy lives to living holy lives. From living like the world to living like Jesus. From ignoring God to, as Paul puts it in verse 18, to obeying God.

We go from living with no certainty about heaven to having a certain hope of heaven. You see how the gospel really does change everything. For the better. Both our identity and our life.

And so it's no wonder that Paul rejoices in his work of preaching this gospel. You see verse 17.

Therefore I glory or boast in my service to God in Christ Jesus.

I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me. In leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done. By the power of signs and wonders through the power of the spirit of God.

And so from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum. I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ. It's always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known.

[9 : 09] So that I would not be building on someone else's work or foundation. Rather as it is written from our first reading. Those who are not told about him will see. And those who have not heard will understand.

And this is why I've often been hindered from coming to you in Rome. In verse 17 Paul literally boasts about his work or service.

Which he sees as a fulfillment of Isaiah 52. Our first reading. In other words he boasts about his job of preaching the gospel. It's as though he's saying he's got the best job in the world. I don't know if you remember on the next slide this campaign.

Do you remember this campaign? I think it was a while ago 2009 I think. Tourism campaign in Queensland where they offered a person. What they called the best job in the world. And so it was being a caretaker of Hamilton Island.

Where he could live and sort of work. For six months. And the package salary was \$150,000. No experience required. Not bad.

[10:14] Well at least for six months that the job would last for. But for Paul he actually thinks he's got a better job in the world. And it doesn't just last for six months.

But every month. Because he gets to proclaim the gospel that changes lives. That saves and changes people's lives. Though do notice it's not about what he has done.

But it's what Christ has done through him he says. You notice how he qualifies it. In verse 17 he says he glories or boasts in Christ Jesus. Or verse 18 he says that he won't speak of anything he has done.

But only what Christ has accomplished through him. He says Paul preached the gospel. He has seen God or Christ work through his preaching. To save people.

It's like what Paul said back in chapter 1. That the gospel is the power of God. God's power to save people who believe. As Paul preached this gospel.

[11:11] This news about Jesus. God worked and changed people. Paul saw it happen. He saw people saved from sin. And given peace and hope. He saw people changed to obey God more.

And so he thinks this is the best job in the world. This is why he has kept doing this job. From Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum. So on the next slide. Jerusalem is down in Israel. Which you can't see really. Well it's on the right hand side. And he kind of covered that whole area. Not just where the yellow line goes. But that whole area. All the way up to Illyricum. Which is kind of modern day Bosnia.

The red dots Rome. Which we'll come to in a moment. Okay. So he's preached all the way around that. And what's more he wants to keep doing this job. Especially verse 20. Where people have never heard of Jesus before.

All because he's convinced that this gospel changes everything. So the question for us is. Are we convinced of that? I mean we are obviously not poor.

[12:10] We're not chosen to be special ministers to the Gentiles. But are we convinced that the gospel saves souls. And changes lives. Do we believe it?

And if we are not Christians here. Then do we believe in the gospel? That is. Do we believe in Jesus? That he really did die for our sins. And rose again as Lord.

Do you trust in him with your life? That you might be forgiven. And given certainty of heaven. Do we believe in the gospel?

And do we believe that it changes lives? Because if we're not convinced of that. Then the rest of the letter will make absolutely no sense. But if we are convinced of this.

If we are so gripped by the gospel. Then we will do what we can to see this gospel. This good news proclaimed. Won't we? How? Well by speaking it.

[13:09] When opportunities arise. And now again we're not poor. And we're not the same as each other either. And so we won't all have the same kind of opportunities to speak this gospel.

But we will have some. And so we ought to take them. And what's more. We won't all have the same opportunities to speak the gospel. In all the same locations and so on.

But what we can all do. Is partner with those who do. Which brings us to point two in verse 23. We'll move a bit quicker from here. So he says.

But now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions. And since I've been longing for many years to visit you. I plan to do so when I go to Spain. I hope to see you while passing through. And to have you assist me. On my journey there. After I've enjoyed your company. For a while.

Here Paul says that. He's proclaimed the gospel in all those regions.

[14:06] That we just saw on the map. And so now he wishes to go somewhere new. Where people have not heard the gospel of Jesus. Like Spain. But he will visit them in Rome on the way.

And so if you just go back to that map Tina. You can kind of see there's Spain on the far left. And Rome's the red dot. And you can kind of see how he can take a little detour. On his way to Spain. Now he wants to see them.

So he can encourage them. We heard that back in chapter one. But he also wants to see them. So that verse 23. They can assist him. Or literally send him to Spain.

In other words. He wants them to financially support him. To partner with him. In his work of preaching the gospel. You see Christians in Rome. May not all be wired to preach like Paul. Indeed we'll see a mix of people in the Roman church. In chapter 16. But they can all partner with Paul. As he seeks to preach the gospel.

[15:04] Yet they will only do so. If they convince that the gospel changes everything. If they convince the preaching of this gospel is worth supporting. It's not just other preachers or missionaries.

Which Christians are to partner with. It's also other churches in need. So verse 25. Now however says Paul. I'm on my way to Jerusalem. In the service of the Lord's people there.

For the churches in Macedonia. And Archaea. Were pleased to make a financial contribution. For the poor. Among the Lord's people in Jerusalem. They were pleased to do it.

And indeed they owe it to them. For the Gentiles have shared in the Jews spiritual blessings. They owe it to the Jews. To share with them their material blessings. He says. So after I've completed this task.

And have made sure that they have received this contribution. I will go to Spain. And visit you on the way. I know that when I come to you. I will come in the full measure of the blessing of Christ. Here the church in Jerusalem.

[16:03] Which was mainly made up of Christian Jews. Is struggling. The poor there are in need of financial help. And so the Gentile churches of Macedonia and Archaea.

Are partnering with them. By sending money to help them. And Paul says they should do that. Not just because they are fellow Christians. But because the gospel came from the Jews.

And has spiritually benefited the Gentiles. Indeed it has given them eternal spiritual life. And so the Gentiles can certainly help them.

These Jews with earthly physical life. But the point here is. That this is another example of gospel partnership. First. By sending Paul to preach the gospel. Second.

By supporting other churches physical needs. Presumably. So that they can keep preaching the gospel. Doing gospel ministry. And thirdly. By praying for Paul's gospel ministry. See verse 30.

[16:58] It says. I urge you brothers and sisters. By our Lord Jesus Christ. And by the love of the spirit. To join me in my struggle. By praying to God for me. I pray that I may be kept safe.

From the unbelievers in Judea. And that the contribution I take to Jerusalem. May be favorably received. By the Lord's people there. So that I may come to you with joy. By God's will.

And in your company be refreshed. The God of peace be with you all. Amen. It seems that Paul is not sure. Of what awaits him in Jerusalem.

I mean there are still people out to get him. People who don't want him around. And he's not even sure. If the Jews would accept this. Financial gift from the Gentiles. Given their checkered history. And so he asks the Christians in Rome. To partner or join with him in prayer. Because Paul knows. God uses our prayers. To achieve his purposes.

[17:55] And so we have these three ways. We can demonstrate gospel partnership. By sending. Sharing. And praying. And we do this here at HCD. Don't we?

We financially support a church in Port Hedland. In North WA. We financially support other missionaries. Whether overseas people. Like Helen and Andrew in the Middle East.

People who are preparing to go overseas. Like the Davie family. Who are here today. Or Marty who works locally with AFES. At Melbourne Uni. And we pray.

And ought to keep praying. For all those involved in gospel work. And so it's quite appropriate. That we heard from Elspeth today. At the start of the service. Wasn't it? About their work in Thailand.

The coordinating missionaries.

And the spread of the gospel there. And in fact. There's an opportunity. This. Not just this service.

But other services. There's an opportunity after the service. To give financially to their work. There'll be just a little bucket out the door.

[18 : 51] For those who are able to do so. Now we do this as a church. We give 10% of our budget to missionaries. And we pray for them. But do we do this as individuals? I mean if you are not giving to a church.

Then you're certainly not giving to missionaries. That's the first step. But we can do it individually as well. And I know some of you do. Which is terrific. You do financially and prayerfully partner.

With people who preach the gospel. Like we see here. But we are all to do this. This is something that every Christian can do. See while not every Christian is poor.

Every Christian is. To partner with people like Paul. To send. To share. To pray. That this gospel news. Might continue to be heard.

And people's souls saved. Lives changed. For the better. We're to partner with them. Because gospel work is not meant to be a one man band.

[19 : 48] Rather gospel work is meant to be a family business. Which brings us to point 3 in chapter 16. Now we're not going to have much time to spend on this. And so I'm going to read through a big chunk of it.

From verse 1 to 24. Trying to pronounce the names. And as I do. I want you to notice three things. First. They're on the outline too. First. The mix of people.

The mix of people. That there are. There are men and women. Jew and Gentile. Rich and poor.

Second. The mix of ways they serve. Whether it's as a co-worker. A co-worker. Sorry. Who preaches the gospel.

Or friends who encourage. Or even a mother. Who is like a mother to Paul. And thirdly. That they serve together as family. And so you get this repeated phrase.

In Christ. Or in the Lord. And so. Have a look at those three things. And read it with me. So for verse 1. He says. I commend to you our sister Phoebe.

[20 : 43] A deacon or servant. Of the church in Centuria. I ask you to receive her. In the Lord. As she's the one who's actually bringing this letter. To them. And so they are to receive her.

In a way worthy of his people. And to give her any help. That she may need from you. Like food. Or a place to stay. For she has been a benefactor. Of many people. Including me.

Which suggests. She's a wealthy person. To financially support people. And probably has a house big enough. For the church in Centuria. To meet in. And then in verse 3. He says. Greet Priscilla and Aquila.

They're a Jewish husband and wife. My co-workers. In Christ Jesus. They risk their lives for me. Not only I. But all the churches of the Gentiles. Are grateful to them.

Greet also the church. That meets at their house. Greet my dear friend. Epinitus. A Gentile. A Gentile name. Who was the first convert to Christ. In the province of Asia.

[21 : 38] Greet Mary. Who worked very hard for you. Greet Andronicus. And Junia. Who are another husband and wife team. My fellow Jews. Who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding among the apostles.

And they were in Christ. Before I was. Greet Amphiletus. A Gentile. And my dear friend. In the Lord. Greet Urbanus.

Our co-worker. In Christ. And my dear friend. Starchis. Are both Gentiles. Greet Apellas. Whose fidelity to Christ. Has stood the test. Greet those.

Who belong to the household. Of Aristobulus. A Jewish name. Greet Herodian. My fellow Jew.

Greet those in the household. Of Narcissus. Who are in the Lord.

Greet Tryphena. And Tryphosa. Those women. Who work hard. In the Lord. Greet my dear friend.

Persis. Another woman. Who has worked very hard. In the Lord. Greet Rufus.

[22 : 34] Chosen in the Lord. And his mother. Who has been a mother. To me too. Greet. And Sychrentus. Phlegon. Hermes.

Petrobus. Hermas. And that. Other brothers and sisters. With them. Which probably refers. To another house church. Greet. Greet Phagelos. Judea. Nerissus.

And his sister. And Olympus. And all the Lord's people. Who are with them. Which probably refers to again. Another house church in Rome. Greet one another. With a holy kiss. Or in our culture.

A holy handshake perhaps. Or the churches of Christ. Send their greetings. And then it goes on.

You get the idea. Don't you? It's a long list. But did you get a sense.

Of how many people. Are involved. In this gospel business. And there's a mix of people. Isn't there? Serving in a mix. Of ways. But all working together. As family.

[23 : 29] In the Lord Jesus Christ. Have you ever. On the next slide. Ever seen this film. My big fat Greek wedding. Ever seen that one? Apparently number two. Is out at the movies. At the moment.

But in this film. There's this massive. Greek family. That's all involved. In the process. Hence the title. Of the movie. But gospel ministry. Is meant to be.

A bit like that. It's one big family. In the Lord. Made up of different people. Serving in different ways. And so can I say. I'm very encouraged.

By people who serve here. At HDD. There are so many of you. Serving in different ways. Which is terrific. And while we are. All different people. And we. Are all at different stages.

Of life. With different circumstances. Different abilities. We serve together. As family. In Christ. And it's brilliant. And if you are not serving.

[24 : 24] Then why not ask me. How you can. But I take it. The goal of this service. Is to build. The church. For God's glory. To both build the church. Up in maturity.

And out in number. For this is what Paul. Was doing. Indeed. This is what we see. The gospel does. In the closing verses. So it brings us up. To our final point. Point four. In verse 25.

He says. Now to him. Who is able to establish. Or strengthen you. In accordance. With my gospel. The message. I proclaim. About Jesus Christ.

In keeping. With the revelation. Of the mystery. Hidden for long. Ages past. But now revealed. And made known. Through the prophetic writings. By the command. Of the eternal God. So that. All the Gentiles.

Might come. To the obedience. That comes from faith. To the only wise God. Be glory. Forever. Through. Jesus Christ. Amen.

[25 : 20] So very. Very quickly. Then three things. First. In verse 25. The gospel is news. About. Jesus Christ. That is proclaimed. We are to live godly lives.

Yes. We are to build relationships. With people. Yes. But at some. Point. The gospel must be spoken. If people are to be saved. What's more.

When we speak the gospel. We must. Speak about. Jesus Christ. For this is who. The good news. Of the gospel is about. Verse 25. Now I know. That you know this. Right. But I need to remind you. Because there are churches. Who are confused. About this. And so they run. An outreach event. And the gospel. Is not spoken. Or I was at a clergy.

Conference. This week. Where church ministers. Were talking about. Doing gospel outreach. Or mission. But they had different ideas. About what that meant. And they couldn't. Or didn't want to try and agree.

[26 : 15] On a definition. And so for some of them. It was about running a soup kitchen. Which is a great thing to do. Don't get me wrong. It's a great thing to do. But unless it leads. To someone speaking. About Jesus.

Somehow. Or somewhere. It's not going to save people. Gospel ministry. Is the proclamation. Of Jesus Christ. Now we need to live. Godly lives.

Which make the gospel attractive. We need to build relationships. And love people. As well. But we are. But if we are convinced. The gospel changes everything.

Then we must also. Do what we can. To see it spoken. Proclaimed. At some point. A second thing to notice. Is that the gospel. Not only saves people.

But it establishes. Or literally strengthens. The church. Or at the end of verse 26. It brings.

Obedience. To God. You see. This is why in chapter 1. Paul was eager to preach the gospel.

[27 : 12] To those in Rome. Even though they were already. Christians. You see. The gospel is not just. For non-Christians. So that they can be saved. From judgment. Made right with God.

The gospel is also for us. Who are already Christians. To strengthen. And grow us. Which is why we keep. Speaking the gospel. Here at church. Week in. Week out.

You see. If we are struggling. To love one another. As the Jews and Gentiles. Were in Rome. Then we are to look at the gospel. Where we see God's love for us. That he loved us so much.

He gave his only son. That we might. In turn. Keep loving. If we are finding it hard. To accept. And forgive one another. As the Roman Christians. Were finding it hard to do. Then we are to look at the gospel.

And consider how God. Forgave. And accepted us. In Christ. And be moved. To do the same. If we need help. Being generous. To those in need. Whether physical need. Or spiritual need.

[28 : 05] Then we begin. To look at the gospel. And see God's generosity. To us in Christ. And let that move us. To in turn. Be generous. You see. The gospel. Not only saves.

Non-Christians. It strengthens us. Christians. As well. And we need to remember this. Because people are always looking. For something new. A new car. A new phone. A new whatever. People are always keen. To find out the latest. And even in churches. People are looking for something new. Something bigger. And better. Than the gospel. It's what keeps academics.

In theology. A job. It keeps them going. But as I've said before. We never graduate. From the gospel. Onto something bigger. And better. And that's all we need. Rather we grow deeper. In the gospel. In understanding it. Appreciating it. And living it. Out. The gospel. Not only saves people. From all nations. But it also strengthens us.

[28 : 59] In obedience to God. And finally. The gospel. Is for God's glory. Which is really what Paul is saying. He starts in verse 25. Now unto him. And he kind of gets sidetracked a bit.

And then ends in verse 27. To the only wise God. Be glory. Forever. How? Through. Jesus Christ. Through the gospel. About him. See the gospel work of Paul. Paul. The partnership. Of Christians. The gospel servants. With Paul. Are all ultimately. To bring. God. The glory.

He deserves. And so the question then is. Not only are we convinced. That the gospel saves. And changes lives. We've got to ask ourselves that.

Are we convinced. But also. Are we convinced. It brings God glory. Are we convinced of that. For if we are. Then we'll take the opportunities. We have to verbally proclaim it. Won't we. We will partner with those.

[29 : 54] Who do proclaim it. And we'll play our part. Serving the gospel. To build the church. For God's glory. Let's pray. Gracious heavenly father.

We do thank you. For this letter of Romans. Father. There's. So much. In it. So much. We haven't covered. Because of time. But we thank you.

So much. For the things. That have been clear. We thank you. We thank you. For the gospel. Of the Lord Jesus. How he came to earth. To die for us. So that we might be forgiven. And made right with you.

We thank you. For how that changes. Our identity. And how it ought to change. Our lives as well. And so far. We pray that you would help us. As a church. To keep being gospel centered.

And as individuals. To keep doing what we can. To see this gospel. Proclaimed. For the glory of your name. Amen.