

The Gospel of God

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[0 : 00] There are many things in life where staying focused is critical, like studying for your exams or doing your homework. Often it's so easy to get distracted, and sometimes it's the difference between success and failure.

I just did that just the other day, not with my homework or my exams, I have none, but in relation to cooking some chicken ribs. The batter on it was crisping nicely in the oven.

I had a lovely sweet chili glaze over it. And I thought, two more minutes, and it will be perfect. And then, I lost focus.

I think I tried to do something on my mobile phone, and the next thing I knew, four minutes had passed. And the chicken ribs were burnt. You can ask my two daughters, Emma and Lauren, how they were.

But two minutes, that's all it took, of lost focus. And it was failure. Well, as we begin our series in Romans tonight, Paul begins with the bold assertion that as Christians and as a church, we need to keep our focus on the gospel.

[1 : 18] It's the thing we cannot lose sight of as a church that we keep proclaiming and teaching, and which keeps shaping how we live. Now, the word gospel is a common one in the Roman world.

It simply means good or great news. Often, there's an imperial announcement, a message to be broadcast across the empire. And so, when the gospel arrived at your city, you paid attention to it. It's rather like the pandemic press conferences we have nowadays, where the chief medical officer or the prime minister appears on TV. They have a gospel to proclaim about social easings, changes to job keeper or job seeker.

Whatever it is, everyone pays attention. And that's how the word should come across to us here in Romans. As Paul begins in verse 1, he speaks of the gospel of God.

That is God's great announcement. So, look with me, where it says, Paul, a servant or slave of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, that is anointed messenger, and set apart for the gospel of God.

[2 : 31] The gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures regarding his son. Who, as to his earthly life, was a descendant of David, and who, through the spirit of holiness, was appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead?

Jesus Christ, our Lord. Through him, we receive grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith for his name's sake.

And you also are among those Gentiles who are called to belong to Jesus Christ. 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.

Paul here has made a bold declaration. First, this gospel wasn't coming from an emperor, but from God. Paul has been set apart to declare it.

But guess where the origins of it was? Not in Rome, the epicenter of power in the empire, but in Israel, an insignificant outpost of it.

[3 : 37] It's like turning on the TV tomorrow and discovering that they found a vaccine for COVID-19. But it's not in a medical research center in New York or London or even here in Melbourne, but say in Groot Island, in far north, northern Australia.

That's where one of our link missionaries, the Vincums, come from. Imagine, that's the sort of development or news that Paul is announcing. And writing to the church in Rome, Paul's words would have had even greater impact.

In addition, we also see that in verse 6, many of those who are reading his letters were Gentiles, so they were not used to the Old Testament, to what was coming out from the Jews.

But here's Paul's first point for the day in your outlines. The gospel of God is promised beforehand in this sacred book of the Jews, the Old Testament, the Holy Scriptures.

And Paul says it's credible because it's been consistently promised over a long period, even though it's only now being revealed. The full extent of it is being made known.

[4 : 53] And so that's why we had our reading from Genesis 12, where we see how God promised to bless Abraham, the father of the Jews. But crucially, did you see right down at the bottom of that slide, he also promised to bless all the nations through him, all his offspring.

And this offspring is Jesus, who Paul says in verse 4 is a descendant of David. As to his earthly life, a descendant of David. Again, this is another promise that can be found in Holy Scripture.

So this time in 2 Samuel chapter 7, on the next slide, where God says to David, When your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom.

He's the one who will build a house for my name. And here's it, I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. But of course, Jesus wasn't just human.

He was God's son. His earthly life is from David, yes, but through the spirit of holiness, he's appointed the son of God. Now this appointment doesn't mean he wasn't divine beforehand.

[6 : 05] Rather, it means that it's at his resurrection that Jesus is publicly declared to be God's anointed king. That's why it's called the gospel, the big announcement.

Here yet is another allusion to another Old Testament prophecy, this time from Psalm chapter 2, which is on your next slide. And there God declares, I've installed my king on Zion, my holy mountain.

I will proclaim the Lord's decree. He said to me, You are my son. Today I have become your father.

Ask me and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth, your possession.

And so again, we see that God has the whole world in mind. For God's son will be given the nations as his inheritance. And so as we read, whereas in verse 4, Paul says Jesus Christ is our Lord, meaning I think he's the king of the Jews, Paul's Jewish Lord, as it were, in verse 5, all Gentiles are now called to obedience to him.

In verse 6, to belong to Christ, and being loved by God, verse 7, to be called his holy people. And so the gospel isn't simply just for the Jews, even though it's promised in the Old Testament, but for the whole world.

[7 : 26] And this compels Paul to preach the gospel to the Gentiles, which we now see from verse 8. So point 2, Paul's passion to preach the gospel to and for the world.

First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the 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 plan many times to come to you, but have been prevented from doing so until now, in order that I might have a harvest among you, just as I have had among the other Gentiles.

I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish. That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel, also to you who are in Rome. You can't miss the vibe, can you?

[8 : 34] He is eager to preach the gospel. He is thankful to hear of their faith reported all over the world. He has a passion for the gospel, doesn't he? Serving in the spirit to preach it.

He is constantly praying for the church in Rome, even summoning God as his witness. And so he is longing to go to them to preach the gospel. Even though, actually, this church in Rome, he has not actually met beforehand.

But he wants to go there because he longs to preach the gospel to them in person. Now, you may ask, don't they already have the gospel? I mean, they have shown faith in it.

Why does Paul then still need to go and preach the gospel? Well, because Paul wants to keep preaching the gospel to them because the gospel is a gift that keeps giving.

He longs to impart more of its blessing or gift to make them strong, he says in verse 11, and to be mutually encouraged in faith, he says in verse 12.

[9 : 42] And so as Christians, we mustn't see the gospel as something we believe once and then we move on from. No, the gospel continues to shape our lives from the beginning of our faith to the end.

I had a friend this week post something on Facebook. It was actually taken from the aptly named website, Gospel in Life. It's actually a ministry resource from Tim Keller, who some of you know actually is battling cancer at the moment.

So it's rather appropriate that he's sharing these things. Now, you may not be able to see what she posted. It's not big enough, but it's a quote. And so I'll read it. And this is what it says.

When I think about my justification, that is God making me right before him, then I wouldn't dwell on my past or guilt. When I think about my sanctification, the work of God making me more holy, then I realize I can change.

When I think about my adoption, then I realize God loves me like a father loves his child. When I think about my future resurrection, I'm not afraid of aging or dying.

[10 : 54] When I think about how much he loves me in Jesus Christ, then I have confidence. All these things, justification, sanctification, adoption, resurrection, these are all blessings that flow out of the Gospel.

But these are things that we keep enjoying throughout our lives, not just at the time that we believe. And so the Gospel is not a set and forget thing, not a believe and then move on to other things idea. Rather, we're called to keep living in light of the Gospel, to keep coming back to the Gospel and responding to it in our lives with faith and obedience. That's why Paul says in verse 5, obedience, God is calling the Gentiles to obedience that comes from faith.

And so the Gospel never loses its relevance to our lives. Further, I think Paul also wants to preach the Gospel in Rome because he wants to see more people come to faith in that city.

Just as it's happened elsewhere among the other Gentiles, Paul now says in verse 13 that he desires a similar harvest in Rome as well. Now Paul goes on to acknowledge that he's been prevented from going to Rome until now, and he prays and he longs for God to open a way.

[12 : 16] Now we don't begrudge him that desire, but I have to say that on reflection, it's probably turned out to be a blessing that he's been prevented, and maybe that was part of God's plan.

Because who knows if Paul would have written this very letter at all if he had made it to Rome earlier. You see, at the time, churches didn't have the New Testament.

The Old Testament was all they had. And the role of the apostles and evangelists was to go from city to city to teach them from the Old Testament to show, just as Paul is doing here, how the Gospel and Jesus is revealed in the Holy Scriptures.

And so, being prevented from going to Rome for now, this was Paul's aim for this letter, to explain from the Old Testament what he would have done if he had been with them face to face.

But of course, now that he's written this letter, the Church throughout the ages has benefited from it, hasn't it? Well, let me now then turn to the last point in the outline.

[13 : 18] Because the Gospel, this divine announcement or proclamation, is not like your run-of-the-mill Gospels the Emperor might issue. I've already alluded to it, but this Gospel is only of saving benefit if we believe in it.

That is, it's news that we need to do something with. Whether you're a Jew or a Gentile, Paul says, the Gospel is the power of God to save all who believe, but only if you believe.

And so we come to these very famous verses in verse 16 and 17. For I am not ashamed of the Gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes, first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.

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.

Now, if you're young, and you have a good memory, then let me encourage you to memorize these verses. Make it a jingle, like you normally do at HTY.

[14 : 32] Now, what's the reason for that? Because these two verses, I think as Sandra has alluded to, are arguably one of the most pivotal ones in church history. And also for the lives of countless Christians throughout the ages.

They have led to light bulb sort of aha moments that have transformed the faith of many a Christian. You might even be one of those. But in terms of the church, as Sandra said, the entire Reformation, no less, was kick-started.

When Martin Luther stumbled upon these very verses, and really understood it. Likewise, John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist Church, was converted in London through these same verses. And so we may ask, what makes these verses so powerful? Well, in the coming weeks, Paul will unpack them, but these two verses are his summary thesis, if you like.

And so let's look a bit closely as to what they say, and see just how amazing they are. First, Paul declares that he's unashamed of the gospel.

[15:38] Paul, of course, at one time mocked the gospel. So he knows firsthand how to make believers ashamed of it. At one time, the gospel appeared to him to be weak, to be foolish, because it called for obedience to a man who died in the most humiliating of ways, through crucifixion.

Now, how can that be the answer for humanity? He would have thought. Even now, to believe the gospel is to embrace that humiliation, isn't it?

Or humility, to then live a life of humility and selflessness, living for God and not for the world. So, in many ways, we can understand how this is something that is not something to, you know, write home about, to be able to boast on TV about.

And yet, Paul now swears by it. Now, friends, you may not know this, but I have a thing or two about manuka honey. That's that special honey, many of you would know, that comes from New Zealand. It's almost like an elixir of life, isn't it? Okay, not quite. But I tend to treat it like a bit of a cure-all. Whatever the ailment I have, I think, just have a spoonful of that and it will do wonders.

[17:00] And yes, it does wonders. You should try it. And sometimes I've even wondered whether it might actually work for COVID-19. Okay, maybe I shouldn't go that far, otherwise you start thinking I'm President Trump.

But, yeah, so please don't go out and buy manuka honey and create a run on it. Alright, it's not proven. But, I guess, what I'm trying to say is that that's what happens when people swear by something, isn't it?

They put their faith and their trust in it. They don't look to anything else. And so it is with Paul and the Gospel. It's not just that he's not embarrassed by it.

No, he swears by it. It's a cure-all for him. Why? Because he says it's the power of God bringing salvation to all or to everyone who believes.

nothing else will do the job of bringing salvation is what he says. And although we don't sort of call it as such, that's the thing we all want, don't we?

[18:04] Salvation. Right now, we all want to be saved from COVID-19, hence the search for the vaccine. I think they've raised like, I don't know, billions of dollars to go into research in that.

But we can add to that list, can't we? To look for a cure for cancer, a solution for climate change, an end to injustice. The list keeps growing, doesn't it? And yet, we don't seem to be able to find the solution or the cure for many of these things to save us, do we?

Well, Paul says here that what the world really needs is the gospel. Only the gospel will do because ultimately the thing we need saving from isn't suffering or climate change or any of these threats in the world.

No, what we need saving from, Paul says, is God's judgment against us. We need the righteousness of God to acquit us from our sin.

And the gospel tells us that this is only possible through faith in Jesus. Only in Him can we be made right before God. Now, how all this works and what Jesus does that makes it work, well, Paul will explain all this in the coming chapters.

[19:24] But for now, what Paul emphasizes with these two verses is the importance of faith. Only those who believe and put their trust in Jesus will find salvation.

And that was what was so earth-shattering for Luther and Wesley. You see, they were being crushed by the weight of their own guilt. They had tried to find righteousness through doing good works, through looking at their own character and refining it.

But that crushing weight was finally only lifted when they realized that none of these things but faith in Jesus alone that saved them. In Romans, they learned that righteousness is found not by looking inwards or within themselves, but away toward Jesus and His work on the cross.

They needed to recognize that they had nothing to offer. They had to come empty-handed so that they can grab fully onto Jesus. Or as the hymn of that old favorite hymn, Rock of Ages, go, Nothing in my hand I bring Only to the cross I cling.

And it almost seems too good or simple to be true. You mean just believe in Jesus and God forgives us? Well, yes. And time and time again, including in my own life, when people get this light bulb moment, it frees them from their own mental and moral prison.

[20 : 58] That is the moment when we experience true freedom and peace and joy to be found in faith in Jesus. And the weird irony about us is that the very thing that convicts us before God, our pride, is often the very thing that stops us from recognizing that it is only through faith.

Not us, that we are powerless, that we actually have to humble ourselves and put our faith in Jesus in order to be saved. That is why it is so simple and yet on the other hand so hard because it requires humility.

It requires recognizing our own pride. And I guess that is something that keeps tempting us as well, even after we become Christians. We may believe at first faith in Jesus but then Paul says that it is actually righteousness by faith from first to last.

That is, we have to keep putting our faith in Jesus. Keep trusting in Him. That is why we need the Gospel throughout our life.

We need to keep our focus on it because we need to remind ourselves that it is never about us. It is never about the good we may do as Christians and we ought to be doing good. God is pleased with those good works but that is not the thing that saves us but only faith in Jesus.

[22 : 18] And so as a church, as your pastor, we need to keep proclaiming the Gospel, don't we? To ourselves but also to the world. We can't be tempted to preach about Jesus and the Gospel and then add other things to it because that would take away from Jesus, wouldn't it?

The righteous, as Paul says, will live by faith and faith alone. So let me end with an appeal to those of you who might still be searching.

If that's you, then I invite you to keep coming, keep tuning in over the next few weeks but for tonight, the one thing you need to know is that the Gospel is the key to all of it.

Salvation is found only by faith in Jesus. and so the most precious thing we can offer you is actually the Gospel. Yes, as friends, as a church, we can listen to your problems, we can try and help solve them, help you practically but ultimately what you need to hear most of all is the Gospel.

God announcing His Son Jesus as Lord and Savior and you putting your faith in Him as the only one that can save you.

[23 : 30] Coming to Him empty-handed, so that you can hold on fully to Jesus by faith. Let's pray. Father, thank you that in the Gospel you promised to send your Son Jesus to die for us so that all who believe in Him may be saved.

Help us to have a deep conviction of the power of the Gospel and to be passionate to see it proclaimed here in Doncaster, in Blackburn and across the world. Help us to support all those who do but also to play our part in sharing it with others.

Teach us to live by it so that we may be strengthened in faith for your glory. We pray this in His mighty name. In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen.