

News for the New Year

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[0 : 00] It would be great to hear some good news, even news like Ash Barty winning last night. How good was that? Down 5-1, back to 7-5, what was it?

No, it was tiebreaker, 7-6, yeah, that's right. But I wonder what sort of news you're hoping to hear yourselves this new year. Some of you may have heard that recently with COVID supply chain issues, KFC was running out of chicken.

And so there's a headline on the next slide that said they had to limit their menu items. Perhaps for you, if you love KFC or chicken, it's the news that it's all back in stock. Perhaps that's good news for you.

Or more seriously, with Russia poised on the Ukraine border, perhaps it's the news that they've decided to turn around and go home. That would be good news, wouldn't it? Or perhaps even it's hearing the news that COVID has been cured.

That's it, eradicated. I mean, that would be news worth hearing this year, wouldn't it? What news would be worth hearing for you this new year? Well, I want to suggest this morning that the gospel is still the best news worth hearing this new year.

[1 : 14] The word gospel itself means, in the Old Testament, it means news. It could have been good news or bad news, actually. In the New Testament, it predominantly means good news, as young Josh Callen said before.

But why is it still the best news worth hearing this year? Why should we concern ourselves with it as a church and as individuals yet again? And why should we push on with it despite COVID continuing this year?

I will honestly suggest four reasons, which are on your outline on the back of the reading. And the first one is because it's divine news, which is point one. But have a look at verse one and two on the reading.

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God. The gospel, the news he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures.

Now, we'll come back to Paul in a moment. But here, did you notice it's called the gospel of God? It's God's gospel, God's news. It belongs to him and it is from him.

[2 : 29] He is the source of this news. We all have our preferred news source, don't we? Whether it's ABC or Sky News, The Age or The Australian. And we tend to tune into those sources we trust.

Although, listen to those sources that carry more weight for us. Well, how much more so when the source is God himself? Ought he not be the most trustworthy source we have?

Ought not he carry the most weight for us? And notice in verse two, this gospel has been promised long ago through the prophets in the Old Testament.

And so this gospel is not some last minute news, which you're not sure is real or not. I like this old piece of TV news. It's a bit hard to see. It's a TV screen.

It's a President Obama and it says breaking news down the bottom. And it says, President Obama, I'm going to get something to eat. For real, that's the headline. That's breaking news.

[3 : 31] And you're kind of thinking, is that for real? Or is that just someone having a game? Either way, God's news is not some last minute breaking news.

You're not sure is real or not. No, no. It's been carefully planned and promised long ago. And so this is divine news.

News from God, promised by God through the prophets of God. That alone makes it news that we ought to hear above any other news this year.

Doesn't it? So it's divine news. But point two, it's also personal news. And it's personal in two ways. At first, it's about a person.

So verse three. This gospel, he promised beforehand regarding or about his son. Who as to his earthly life was a descendant of David.

[4 : 30] You see, this news is about a person. And not any old person is centered on God's son. Who is also the king.

And that's what it means in the rest of verse three. To be a descendant of David. 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 was all those kings from David's line.

Ended up dying. Didn't they? So what makes God's son the king from David's line? Well, it's that he rose.

Verse four. And through the spirit of holiness was appointed or declared. The son of God in power. How?

[5 : 25] By his resurrection from the dead. Jesus Christ our Lord. And now just to explain a couple of things.

In verse three where it says his son. It's talking about the divine son. Which is how we normally understand it. But in verse four. The phrase son of God is actually a title.

That even the human kings from David's line had. But here in verse four. It says Jesus is appointed to be the son of God in power.

In other words, he's declared to be the king in David's line. How? Well, because unlike every other king in David's line, he didn't stay dead. He rose.

He's declared or appointed to be the son of God in power by his resurrection. You see, Jesus is the king. Which is why Paul ends verse four by saying, Jesus Christ our Lord.

[6 : 30] The king. This is who the gospel is about. The person of Jesus Christ the Lord. But notice that also in verse four, it says he is our Lord.

And so this news is personal, not just because it's about the person of King Jesus, but also because it has implications for every person in this room and online and in the world.

You see, if Jesus is the king, if he is our Lord, then he has a claim over our lives. Doesn't he? This news is personal for us.

For all people. For if he is king, then all people are to believe and obey him as Lord. Which is why Paul's job is to call all people to believe and obey him, Jesus.

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

[7 : 43] You see, through Christ on the Damascus road, actually, he called Paul and gave him the job of being an apostle. An apostle is someone who is sent with a particular task.

And he is sent specifically to the Gentiles, it says. A Gentile is someone who's not a Jew. So that's all of us here, I think. And his job was to call all Gentiles, verse five, to the obedience that comes from faith.

Which means he firstly needs to call them to have faith. Doesn't he? In Jesus. To believe that Jesus really did die to save us from our enemies of sin and death.

And to make us right with God, with life eternal instead. And to believe that he really did rise from the dead, declaring he is Lord.

Paul's job is to call all people to believe in Jesus, the King who saves. And to believe so much so that you then live it out in your life.

[8 : 49] In obedience to that King who saves. And in fact, obeying Jesus is actually for our good. And people in the world kind of do it without even realizing it's from Jesus.

I don't know about you, but I've heard people quote, and I've even seen it in movies. They say, oh yeah, I live by the golden rule. You know, do to others as you would have them do to you. Who said that?

Jesus did. And so to obey him, like that rule, is actually for our good. People in the world know it's good. They just forget it's from Jesus.

But while our obedience to Jesus is for our good, that's actually not the reason Paul gives in verse five, is it? You see the end of verse five? The obedience that comes from faith for his name's sake.

In other words, we're to obey to honor Jesus. You see, we rightly want people to believe so that they can be saved and have life eternal.

[9 : 55] We rightly want people to obey because we know it's for their good and our good. But we often forget people should also believe and obey for Jesus' sake, not just our sake.

And that people might honor him as he deserves. For he is the king who died for all. And so he deserves all people's obedience.

He deserves all people's allegiance. He deserves all people's adherence. This is personal news. News about the person of Jesus, the king who saves.

But also news that affects every person. Because all ought to believe and obey. But thirdly, it's also strengthening news.

Have a look at verse seven to 15. I'm going to read a big chunk here. So verse seven to 15, Paul writes, Now 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 : 05] 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 plan 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 am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both 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 them who are in Rome.

[12 : 14] But did you notice those in Rome he's writing to are already Christians? Do you notice that? Verse 6, they already belong to Jesus.

Or verse 7, they are already loved by God and called his holy people. Or verse 8, their faith is already being reported all over the known world.

And yet, verse 10, he still prays he can visit them. So verse 11, he can give them some spiritual gift to make them strong. Not some magical protein shake or double espresso, but verse 12, some mutual encouragement from their common faith.

That's what will strengthen them to bear fruit as Christians. And in that way, verse 13, Paul would reap a harvest among them. In other words, help them to bear fruit for God.

After all, he is the apostle to the Gentiles, isn't he? This is his job. And so verse 14, he's obligated to all Gentiles, whether Greek or non-Greek.

[13 : 21] We have both at our church, Greeks and non-Greeks. Hello, Tula, if you're listening online. And he's obligated to all Gentiles, whether wise or foolish.

We have both wise... 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.

That's how he'll give mutual encouragement and strengthen their faith, even though they're already Christian. So how does that work? Is he just going to keep saying, Jesus is Lord, Jesus is Lord, Jesus...

over and over again? Is that what he's going to do to strengthen their faith? Well, no. Rather, he's going to unpack the gospel to help them grow in their understanding and their appreciation of it. You see, the gospel can be as simple as verse 4, Jesus Christ our Lord. But if we unpack it... I forgot to put this in here, so just imagine me.

[14 : 25] I'm now unpacking the gospel. So we can start off with that phrase, as simple in verse 4 as, Jesus Christ our Lord.

But you can unpack it as well, because we know Jesus Christ our Lord is the one who died for our sins.

And what's more, we know that we are all guilty of sin. And then Jesus rose, proving his Lord.

We heard that just a moment ago. And he defeated sin and death, which means we can be saved from our sins and be forgiven instead.

You're all wondering how long this is going to go for. And we can be given eternal life, accepted into God's family, if we have faith or belief, trust in him, and all because of God's love, grace and mercy.

[15 : 54] And what Paul does in the first 11 chapters of Romans, he actually unpacks those things and helps them to understand them more, to appreciate them more.

For example, he talks about in chapter 4 about how it's faith alone. Second last one down there. And he unpacks that for them.

Or in chapter 5, he talks about how great God's love for us is. And this is what he does, because he knows the Spirit doesn't just use the gospel news to save non-Christians.

The Spirit also uses the gospel news to strengthen us as Christians. And so it points in the rest of the letter, Paul reminds them of different parts of the gospel to strengthen them to live as Christians. So on the next slide, in Romans chapter 12, he says, in view of God's mercy, that's this one down here. Now he points to part of the gospel and says, in view of God's mercy, let that strengthen you to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice.

[16 : 56] Or in chapter 15, on the next slide, he says, accept one another just as, here's that part of the gospel, Christ Jesus accepted you into his family.

You see, when he visits them, he'll be able to unpack the gospel for them and take time to help them not just understand each part more, but to appreciate it more.

Because it takes time to ponder and really appreciate just how profound each part of the gospel news is. And so, for example, if you need strength to love others in your life, then hear afresh of God's love in this gospel news.

And then take time to ponder it. Don't just brush over it, but ponder just how deep God's love for us is. That no matter what you've done in life, God still loves you.

That's pretty cool. And if you've been a pretty good person in life and that sort of doesn't do much for you, then think of that most annoying person you know, whether a neighbor, a colleague, a politician, and ponder how much you would have to love them to die for them.

[18 : 18] How much would you have to love them to die for them? Or, to give one of your loved ones to die for them? Can you imagine that? Giving one of your family members to die for that person?

And then realize that that love is nothing compared to God's love for you. If you're struggling to love others, then hear afresh God's love for you in the gospel and take time to ponder it because it will strengthen you to love others.

That's how it works. Which means we're to do all we can this year to keep hearing this gospel, pondering it, and helping others do the same.

Whether that's by tuning in to our online services or joining a Bible group, if you can. We're hoping to have a list up of Bible groups next week. Or whether it's reading the Bible for yourselves.

In fact, why don't you take this time from now to Easter to read through the rest of Romans? We've already done the first passage. You've already started. You're underway. And if you need help or aren't sure of a bit, then please let me know or contact Vijay as well.

[19 : 39] Or whether it's helping others to hear it by serving at church in some way. You know, like welcoming people so they're happy to be here and here. Or teaching it to people like with Kids Church or ESL, as we heard from Estelle.

Or sharing some aspect with it with people in conversation after church. Or whether it's simply praying for people because that's all you can do. That's okay.

Prayer is important. Or even just turning up and sitting in the pew. Because when hardly anyone's here, is the vibe good or does it feel like a dud? So you can have a ministry off the pew even.

That's encouraging. We're to do all we can to keep hearing and helping others to hear this news this year. And that means coming to church when you can.

After all, Paul longs to see them in verse 11 and 12 because he knows it's harder to mutually encourage them if he's not meeting together with them.

[20 : 45] And at this point, I need to kind of take a couple minutes to talk about COVID because COVID does complicate things, doesn't it? So we as leaders need to keep doing what we can to provide a safe environment for you.

That's why we've got the windows open and the cooling on at the same time, which you don't normally do. It's why we'll probably continue to have some vaccinated-only services, particularly for the vulnerable, like the 745 Doncastle, the 830 St. John's.

But you also need to be sensible about your own situation and loving of others, like getting a booster. Or if you have symptoms, then yes, stay away. Or if you're vulnerable or live with

vulnerable, then perhaps staying away longer if it's still dangerous.

But we're not to use COVID as an excuse for fear or laziness. I like saying on a sunny day, look, we're going to go to the beach instead of church after all the beaches outside so it's safer.

Yes, I can justify it now. Or I'll go to my extended family, get together for a few hours, but I'll keep clear of my church family for one hour, even though they've both been out in society.

[21 : 57] Or I'm vaxxed and boosted, but I'm still never leaving my house, even though you did during flu season and perhaps even without the flu vax. We're to be wise, not foolish for our situation, COVID is still around.

We're also to be faithful, not fearful. Vaccines do make a difference. And we're to be loving, not lazy, doing what we can to help others hear the gospel. And so as I've always done, let me give you one principle to help you decide.

It's from Romans itself later on in the chapter, so on the next slide, Romans chapter 14, it says, everything that does not come from faith is sin. And what it's saying here in this context is whatever you believe is the right thing that pleases God is what you should be doing.

And in this context, it was about eating certain foods and that sort of thing. But the principle can be applied to coming to church during COVID. So ask yourself, do I believe my choice to come or not come is pleasing to God?

Is it, am I doing it because it's loving and it's safe and sensible or am I using it as an excuse to justify what I really want to do? Is my choice pleasing to God?

[23 : 06] There's one principle you can apply and it might change from month to month depending on the situation. It's really between you and God. Either way, the point here is to come back on track that this news is strengthening news.

And so we're to do all we can this year to keep hearing it and help others inside the church to hear it too. And finally, it's also saving news. Point four and more briefly verse 16 and 17.

He says, For I am not ashamed of the gospel because there's a 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. Paul is unashamed of the gospel because he knows it's God's power, God's means to make Christians, to help people believe.

For this news reveals the righteousness of God, that is, how to be made right with God by having faith, belief in Jesus. Just as God foreshadowed in the prophets like our first reading from Habakkuk, the righteous, those who are right with God will live by faith.

[24 : 21] But the point here is this is saving news. This is the way God saves. This is his power to change hearts. It's not about having great music or morning teas as nice and as helpful as they are.

It's this gospel, this news. For the spirit works through this news not only to strengthen us but to save others. And so again we're to do all we can this year to help those outside the church hear this news.

whether it's by sharing it yourself with non-Christian family or friends or whether it's giving money to support missionaries who share it. CMS has these little money boxes actually.

There's some at the front door they arrived this week. You pop it out from here and then you fold it to make a little money box which is on the screen. And what a great use of loose change which we hate carrying around these days anyway so pop it in the box.

Help your kids to do that. What a great way of encouraging them to be gospel minded and to support this news going out that others might be saved. Or whether it's by serving in the outreach ministry like ESL or J Kids or continue to pray for a particular person we're to do all we can to help those outside the church hear this news this year because it's saving news.

[25 : 42] Let me finish. I saw a news headline on the next slide that says homicide victims rarely talk to the police. Sadly they didn't think about that one.

Or this next one China may be using sea to hide its submarines. There is some news that is not worth hearing but the gospel is news that is for it's divine news it's personal news it's strengthening news and it's saving news.

So let's do all we can to help us and others hear it this year. Let's pray. Our gracious heavenly father we do thank you for the good news or the gospel which tells us about what you've done in Jesus.

and father we pray that you would help us given our situation and stage of life to do all we can to help us and others hear this news for it is your news divine news it is personal news for us about Jesus it is strengthening news and it is saving news help us in this we pray in Jesus name Amen