

The Gospel of God

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Date: 12 April 2015

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[0 : 0 0] Well, it'd be great if you could keep your Bibles open at the Book of Romans. We're going to be spending the next few weeks going through chapters 1 to 8, I'm hoping to get to, this year.

If you were at 10 o'clock church four years ago, we looked at Romans, but I've reworked them since, and it's good to come back to this book in particular, because it's all about the Gospel.

So with that in mind, how about I pray for us, and then we'll get into it. Father, we do thank you for your Word, the Bible. We thank you that it points us to the truth of your Son, the Lord Jesus.

And Father, we pray now that you would help me to speak clearly and faithfully, and that you would help us all to listen attentively, but more than that, to live in light of what we hear from your Word.

We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, there is some news in life that changes everything, like the news about Luke Shambrook, who had been found alive last week.

[1 : 0 5] How did you hear about that? That was last Tuesday. I've got a news clip, so let's see if you can press the picture. Good evening. After four days of heartache, prayers were answered at Lake Eildon today 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.

How many months are you? How many months are you? 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.

[2 : 0 2] 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. When they heard the news that he was alive, days of heartache changed to pure joy.

You see, some news 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 to the way we even act.

And it's interesting that when they reported this news about Luke, many of the news outlets, not just Channel 9, used the word miracle. And interestingly, this miracle took place over last weekend, the Easter weekend.

The very weekend we remember not just the death of Jesus, but the resurrection of Jesus, that Jesus too is alive. I don't know what you make of that.

[3 : 12] But I do know that the book of Romans, which we are starting today, is above all else, a book or a letter about the gospel of Jesus. The word gospel means news.

It is about the news of Jesus, who was once dead, but now is alive. And this news changes everything. In fact, this letter of Romans, perhaps more than any other letter of the Bible, has changed everything.

For example, it was a letter that converted the great Bishop Augustine of Hippo. So on the next slide, I think Aidan is him looking rather somber, perhaps before he was converted. And in turn, Augustine significantly influenced the early church, significantly, and with it our history.

On the next slide is Martin Luther. He was converted by reflecting on the passage that we're looking at today, verse 17 in particular. And it in turn sparked, or he in turn, once becoming converted, sparked the great reformation of the 1600s, which changed everything for the church.

In fact, without the reformation, there would be no Anglican church. We wouldn't be here today. But this letter of Romans has only had such an impact in history because it is all about the gospel, the good news of Jesus, which changes everything.

[4 : 34] In fact, Paul both starts and ends the letter of Romans by talking about the gospel with similar phrases. And in between the bookends of this letter, he unpacks the gospel in a systematic fashion, such that it's unlike any other letter in the Bible.

You see, the letter of Romans has impacted people in history only because it is all about the gospel, the news of Jesus. And this news changes everything.

Indeed, this is why Paul writes this letter to the church in Rome, which is why it's called Romans. And although Paul knew many people at this church, he did not start the church.

But he had longed to visit them as part of his job as an apostle to the Gentiles. Gentiles are non-Jews. Yet he'd been hindered from visiting them thus far. And now there are some issues at the church.

And so he writes to them to begin his ministry among them and to encourage them to please God. But he writes to them with the gospel because it's the gospel that changes lives, you see.

[5 : 36] But he starts off in chapter one by reminding them that this is not any old news. It is God's news, God's gospel. Point one, verse one. Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God.

The gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures. Paul says here that he is the servant or literally he says a slave. That's what the word literally is of Christ Jesus.

And we'll come back to this slave idea later. But notice how he kind of lists his credentials, doesn't he? Probably because he didn't start the church. So he's got to kind of show he has some sort of authority to talk to them and write to them and so on.

And he adds the fact that he's been called. He's been set apart to preach the gospel. That's his job. That's God's calling for his life. And that he is an apostle of Christ Jesus.

As many of you know, an apostle means someone who is sent. But they are sent with the authority of the person who sent them. It's kind of like when I ask one of my children to go outside and ask the other two kids to come in for lunch or dinner.

[6 : 46] Of course, instead of going outside to get the other two in, they just stand next to me and scream, Dad says you've got to come in for dinner. And I think I could have done that too. But you see, they are like an apostle.

I sent them, except they didn't go. But they carried my authority, Dad says. So also with Paul.

He's an apostle sent by Christ, carries Christ's authority. So they should really listen to him. But they should also listen to him because the gospel he's been called to preach is not his. It's God's.

A gospel means, as I said, news, significant news, which could be either good or bad news, depending on who you were. But the point here is that this news is not from Paul, but from God. And verse 2, more than that, says that this gospel was promised long time ago in the Old Testament through the prophets.

It's not some random last-minute, last-ditch effort of God's to put things right. It's been part of God's plan all along. And who is this news about, this gospel?

[7 : 49] Well, verse 3 and 4 tells us. It's regarding, verse 3, God's 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.

God's gospel is all about God's Son, verse 3. And in verse 3, we're told that God's Son became a man, human. But not just any man, a descendant of King David.

Now, this is important because God promised that the King, the Christ, King, Christ, Messiah, they all mean the same thing. The anointed King would come from David's family tree, from David's line, be a descendant of David.

I remember as a child, I had to do a project at school about our own family tree, and I came home and asked my mum if there was anything special about our family. And she said, nope, we're boring.

But then we did find out that one of my ancestors was a convict in England, who jumped ship and changed his surname from Thomas to Price.

[8 : 57] So I could have been Andrew Thomas, descended from a convict. Now that I say that out loud, it's not all that good, is it? But the point here is, we're all descended from someone. Sometimes it means nothing, but in Jesus' case, it means everything.

For Jesus was descended from King David. He was adopted into David's family tree by Joseph, who was from King David's family. And this means that Jesus could be God's promised king in David's line.

Of course, Jesus proves he is God's promised king by raising or rising from the dead. That's what verse 4 is about. But to really understand verse 4, we need to remember that in the Bible, the title Son of God often refers to God's promised king.

There's lots of titles that mean king, right? God's promised king from David's line. And see, on the next slide is a verse or a promise that God made to King David. It's from 2 Samuel 7.

God says to David, In other words, The Son of God referred to all the kings since King David.

[10 : 30] That was in King David's line. It was another way of saying the promised king. And once we realise this, then verses 3 and 4 actually make more sense. Paul is saying that Jesus was a descendant of David according to his human life, which means he might be God's promised king.

But then in verse 4, he clinches it. He says, Jesus is declared to be the Son of God in power, according to the Spirit who raised him from the dead. And so that means Jesus definitely is God's promised king, you see.

That's why Paul ends verse 4 by saying, Jesus Christ, King, our Lord. Do you see? This is what the gospel is about.

This is who the gospel is about. It is about God's Son, who is Jesus, the King, our Lord. The one who died for us to pay for our sins, but then rose from the dead.

And if Jesus is the risen king, if he is the Lord, then that changes everything. For it means all people must trust and obey him as their Lord.

[11 : 36] For that is who he is. And that is exactly what Paul goes on to say in verses 5 and 6. He says, Through him we receive grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith for his, Jesus' name's sake.

And you also are among those Gentiles who are called to belong to Jesus Christ, he says. You see, if I asked you, Why preach the gospel?

What would you say? Would it be because God tells us to? Would it be because it's a loving thing to do? Would it be to see people saved from judgment?

They are all good and right reasons. But if you ask Paul, in Romans, he says he preaches the gospel for Jesus' sake.

For his name's sake. That people might honour Jesus for who he is. That people might trust and obey Jesus as Lord, you see. You see, we are so human-centred that we sometimes forget that we should not just want people to be saved from judgment, but also want Christ to be honoured as Lord, King.

[12 : 52] So, for example, I pray that my auntie, I mentioned a few weeks ago, might come to know Jesus so that she might be saved. But I forget to add, so that Christ might also be honoured.

We're so human-centred, aren't we? That's why Paul preaches the gospel. Of course he loves people. Of course he wants people to be saved. He says that elsewhere, but here he also wants to see Jesus honoured as the risen Lord he is.

And that's why Paul has received the grace of apostleship. To call people to the obedience of faith. That is, to believe Jesus is Lord and to live like it.

To obey him. To honour him for his namesake. And that includes those in Rome who belong to Christ Jesus. And so Paul is eager to preach the gospel to those in Rome, he says.

To remind them of who Jesus is. And who they are. And so it brings us to point two in verse eight. He says, First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you.

[13 : 53] Because your faith is being reported all over the known world. A 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. For I long to see you. So that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong.

For I long to see you. 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 as well. Just as I have had among the other Gentiles. For I am obligated both to Greeks and to non-Greeks.

Both to the wise and to the foolish. That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are in Rome. Paul says as an apostle to the Gentiles.

[14 : 56] That is to non-Jews. He is eager to preach the gospel to the Christians in Rome as well. Since many of them are Gentiles. And he wants to do this to encourage them.

To help them be strong. To reap a harvest among them. To do ministry among them. And see them grow as Christians. In fact, if his purpose statement is read out in chapter 15, verses 15 to 16.

But I will let you look up that later. His purpose in writing the book of Romans, I think. Is to encourage Christians and Rome to grow.

To be strong. And that's the kind of language he uses here. And he's going to do this by preaching the gospel to them. But hang on a second. Aren't they already Christians?

Don't they already know the gospel? The news that Jesus Christ is Lord? So how is preaching the gospel going to encourage them to grow as Christians? I mean, is Paul just going to go around and saying, Jesus Christ our Lord.

[16:00] Jesus Christ our Lord. Jesus Christ our Lord. Is that what he's going to do? Of course not. Rather, we need to remember that we can unpack or unfold what the gospel is. And we can explain it more fully.

So I've got a, I don't know how this is going to work. I've got a visual aid. Well, let's see how it goes. All right. So we can start off with this. It's like this, right? You can start off by saying, this is the gospel.

Jesus Christ our Lord. But then you can unfold it or unpack it to mean, Jesus Christ our Lord risen from the dead. But then you can unpack it even further. Jesus Christ our Lord risen from the dead because he died for our sins.

And then you can unpack it further and further and further. I'm not tall enough.

It's still the gospel, right? Jesus Christ our Lord risen from the dead because he died for our sins to pay the punishment we deserve since we all turned away from God and rightly deserve judgment.

[17:03] That's the gospel. And so what Paul is going to do is he's going to preach that gospel. It's not just that one sentence. He's going to unfold it or unpack it. Does that work? Do you get what I mean?

Yeah. Okay. Good. Thanks for the encouragement. Good. I haven't got to the arrow yet. Okay. Find my space. And Paul basically unpacks or unfolds the gospel from chapters 1 to 11 in the book of Romans.

And then in chapters 12 to 15, he'll also show them what it means to live out this gospel, to live with Jesus Christ as Lord, which is what the arrow means. It leads to something.

It has implications for how we live. This is how Paul is going to encourage them, how he's going to reap a harvest among them as one of their apostles by sharing his faith in this gospel.

Not just the one sentence, but unfolding what it means and how it ought to shape their lives. That's why he's eager to preach to them, because it is the gospel which will change their lives.

[18:09] You see, if we are struggling to love one another as the Roman Christians were actually, then we had to remember God's love for us in the gospel. God who loved us, that he gave his only son.

And let that motivate us to love one another. If we are finding it hard to forgive one another, as the Roman Christians were, then we had to consider how God forgave us in Christ, in the gospel.

And let that drive us to forgive. If we need motivation to live thankful and obedient lives to Christ, as the Roman Christians needed, then we are to behold the enormity of God's amazing grace in the gospel.

And let that drive us to no longer live for ourselves, but for Jesus, who died for us. In other words, it's the gospel that grips us and motivates us and changes us.

And that's why Paul is eager to preach the gospel to those in Rome, even though they know it. I mean, it's why we preach the gospel to you every week here, even though you know it.

[19 : 08] Because it's the gospel that encourages us and changes us. You see, we are to never graduate from the gospel. Rather, we are to unfold it, grow deeper in understanding it and live more and more in light of it.

But never move on from it. Because it is the news that changes everything. Which brings us to our final point, point three, verse 16. Four, says Paul, 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 from our Habakkuk reading, the righteous will live by faith. Paul says he is not ashamed of the gospel, because it is God's power to save us.

It is God's power to change everything about our relationship with him. You see, over the coming chapters, Paul will unfold for us how we are all in deep trouble without Jesus.

[20 : 17] He will explain how we have all ignored God, that there is no one righteous, not even one. That we have all at some point turned away from God.

And deep down, I suspect we all know that's true of ourselves. Whether we've ignored God, or whether we've lived contrary to the way God wants us to live.

We've just finished the school holidays, and we've tried to do some exciting things with the kids. Give them a few treats and so on. And last night at the dinner table, all they could do was whinge about what they hadn't received these holidays.

Complain about what they didn't get. They nearly got something else then. You see, that was really insulting. After all we'd done.

And so, you know, they did cop my wrath a bit, actually. And they missed out on their final ice cream for the holidays. But you see, we've done the same to God.

[21 : 15] How many times have we ignored what God has given us and whinged about what he hasn't given us? Or how many times have we blamed him for something that is actually the result of living in a fallen world?

Or how many times have we got annoyed at others instead of living God's way, which says, Be patient. Guilty. Me. There is no one righteous.

Not even one. Of course, most people in society who know this, know they haven't lived perfectly and still believe in heaven. They will try and do good things to try and compensate, to make up for it, to try and redeem themselves.

The Jews tried even harder to follow God's law, to earn their way into God's kingdom. In fact, even our kids last night tried to be good to earn their ice cream back. Didn't work.

Can't work. Not with God. We can never do enough to make ourselves right with God. Our hearts are too far gone. Without Jesus, our hearts are black and corrupt, spiritually defected, if you like.

[22 : 21] In fact, the nine o'clock service this morning, I heard some elderly ladies going to the toilets and the light was off. And one of them said, I'll keep the light off because you won't see all the defects.

And the other lady said, you mean of the room or us? You all got more wrinkles than I do. It made me think, when it comes to God, we've all got spiritual wrinkles.

Actually, more than that. Spiritual corruption. Blackness. We can't make up for that. It means we're at odds with God instead. Rather than being right with God, we are his enemies.

We're at odds. And no matter what we do, we can't make up for it. And so we are left facing his anger and headed for hell. That's the reality.

But this news about Jesus, his gospel message can change all that. It can change us from being at odds with God to being right with God. And from facing his anger to finding forgiveness.

[23 : 26] From headed to hell to the certain hope of heaven. From being his enemies to being his precious and loved children. It changes all that.

For this news reveals a way to be made righteous or right with God. As verse 17 says, in the gospel, a righteousness is revealed.

For God's gospel is about God's son, who was not only raised to life as king, but first died for our sins. As Paul will unfold over the coming weeks, this news is that Jesus took God's anger in our place.

Jesus died the death we deserve. He suffered hell for us. So that we can be forgiven and made right with God. That's what righteousness means.

Being made right with God. You see, this news changes everything about who we are before God. Just like the news of Luke Shambrook changed everything for his parents. But it only changes everything if we believe the news is true.

[24 : 28] If we have faith, as verse 17 puts it. So imagine Luke Shambrook's mother did not believe the news that her son was alive and found. Imagine, I mean, it's hard to imagine, but just imagine for a moment, she did not believe this news that the police told her.

Imagine she refused to believe, and so she did not turn up to see her son. She stayed at home and decided to pack her bags and start afresh in another town. Imagine she did that.

She would miss out on the joy of seeing her son if she didn't believe, wouldn't she? And if we don't believe this news about Jesus, then we will miss out on being made right with God and the joy of seeing heaven.

So the question I need to ask at this point is, do you believe this news about Jesus? Are you still trying to redeem yourself like so many people do?

We can't. We'll never be perfect, no matter what we do. Rather, we can only be made right with God by believing this news about Jesus, that he has done enough to make us right, that he has died the death we deserve so that we could find forgiveness.

[25 : 38] And so again, do you believe this news? For those of us who have or do believe, it not only changes everything about a relationship with God, but it also changes everything about how we now live, does it not?

For now we can have contentment in this life and hope for the next. We're going to change our view of the gospel. We are not to be ashamed of it, as Paul was not ashamed.

We're not to be embarrassed by the gospel message. We're even be willing to suffer for it. Some people in my year at Bible college were in Indonesia doing Bible translation, despite having suffered dengue fever.

They're back at the moment because the father still hasn't recovered from it and it can be life-threatening, from what I understand. Yet this is what they want to do. Why? Because they know this news changes everything.

And so they want more people to hear it. I know another person who makes time to spend with some of the school mums from her children's school. Why? Well, so that she can build relationships and share this news with them.

[26 : 46] These two examples seem very different. You know, missionaries in Indonesia talking to school mum, but they're all about the same thing. Sharing the news in whatever way they can because this news changes everything.

And so do we believe this? And if we do, then we won't be ashamed or embarrassed by it and we'll look for opportunities that come our way. Even pray for opportunities to come our way.

That people might hear of Jesus. That they might know we go to church and follow Jesus. And that Jesus is not just a swear word or even at all a swear word for us. For us who believe, it will also change everything about how we live.

And here I want to come back to verse one to finish. Verse one, Paul literally calls himself a slave of Christ. The word servant is literally slave. Paul regards himself as Christ's slave, someone who belongs to Jesus and humbly serves Jesus.

But it's not just Paul who belongs to Jesus like this. There's a sense in which all Christians are slaves of Christ to live for him as our master. So verse five, we are called to the obedience of faith.

[27 : 57] Verse six, we belong to Jesus. Did you notice? He is our master. We are his slaves. Verse seven, we are called to be his holy people. Verse 17, we are to live by faith.

And not just believe the news that Jesus is true and then forget about Jesus. No, no, to continue to believe that Jesus is Lord and live like it. But we are to do all this remembering verse seven, that we are incredibly loved by God.

And so we are to serve our Lord, not with the concept of slavery that is from the movies, but with Paul's concept, that we are incredibly loved by God. And so joyfully serve Christ.

That means joyfully making his agenda, our agenda. It means joyfully putting him above all others, even our own family's desires or even our desires. For Jesus is Lord King.

Let me close with a story. I'm not sure if I've told you this one before. Please forgive me if I have, but it's a story about a guy called Michael Hargraves, who always wanted to do PE teaching at university that I went to.

[29 : 06] In his first year, he heard this news about Jesus and he became a Christian and it changed everything for him. He now knew he was right with God. He was certain of heaven, but it also meant that Jesus was now his boss, his Lord.

And so he wanted to live for Jesus. The problem was, there was a strong culture of getting drunk and sleeping around in his course at uni, PE course.

Now he could have changed universities, but he was a new Christian and he wanted to keep going to the Christian group to learn and grow. And so he decided to give up what he always wanted to do and do something different.

He ended up doing environmental science. He gave up what he really wanted to do because Jesus was his Lord. Jesus was more important. But he did it joyfully.

I can remember being almost surprised that he was so willing to change everything to please Jesus. But you see, he'd understood God's amazing grace towards him. He had reflected on God's great love for him, love which in the words of our next hymn is so amazing, so divine.

[30 : 15] It does demand our souls, our lives, our all. And Mick joyfully gave it. May we do likewise. Let's pray.

Our gracious Heavenly Father, we do thank you for the gospel of our Lord Jesus. We thank you that it is great news for us who believe, that it changes everything about our relationship with you, gives us hope and meaning in life, but it also changes everything about how we are to live, no longer living for ourselves, but for Jesus who died for us and was raised again as Lord.

help us to do this, we pray, for Jesus' sake. Amen.