

Life Changing Questions?

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[0 : 00] Romans chapter 1.

Romans chapter 1. Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised before and through his prophets and the holy scriptures, concerning his son who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the son of God in power according to the spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Three points. What's so special about Paul and why should anyone bother listening to somebody who died nearly 2,000 years ago?

What's so distinctive about the gospel, this gospel that he defines here, this message, surely a 2,000 year old message, indeed I would say a message that's a lot older than that.

Why should anyone believe in that kind of message? What's so special about it? And if at the heart of that message is God's son, what's so unique about Jesus?

[1 : 27] Why is it if he is so, so unique that we really don't proclaim him and we're ashamed of him, especially when so many people are talking about other important celebrities?

What's so unique about Jesus? So what's so special about Paul? What's so distinctive about the gospel? What's so unique about Jesus? If you answer these questions, if you know the right answers, they cannot but change your life.

They are life-changing questions. If you know, for example, what's so special about somebody like Paul, as somebody, one of many people that the Lord used to write down Scripture and proclaim the gospel, if you understand that, then really your life is already changing.

If you understand the gospel that was at the heart of Paul's life, if you really grasp what this good news is, this message, then your life again cannot but change.

If you really understand the gospel, the good news, then your life must change. And then at the very heart of that gospel comes a person whom we call Jesus, who is the Christ, who has been made Lord.

[2 : 57] And I like to think of him as Lord, comma, Jesus Christ. Because in Rome, there was another emperor who called himself Lord, comma, Caesar.

But your Lord, comma, is Jesus Christ. And if you understand who he is, then your life, and your future, and your eternity, are totally changed.

What's so special about Paul? Who do you actually listen to? Listen to this.

Here's somebody who is very, very important in the world. Very important. Sometimes I believe in God, sometimes I don't. I think it's 50-50 maybe.

But ever since I've had cancer, I've been thinking about it more. And I find myself believing a bit more. I kind, maybe it's like, because I want to believe in an afterlife.

[4 : 05] Then when you die, it doesn't just all disappear. Sounds sort of good. You think, maybe God's using cancer to bring somebody to see what life's about.

And then he says, he paused just for a second. Yeah. But then sometimes I think it's just like an on-off switch.

Click, and you're gone. And he said, that's why I don't like putting on-off switches on Apple devices.

Of course, this was written and said by Steve Jobs, who began the whole Mac world. He says, I saw my life as an arc.

That it would end, and compared to that, nothing mattered. You're born alone, he said. You're going to die alone. And does anything else really matter?

[5 : 06] I mean, what is it exactly that you have to lose, Steve? He was saying to himself. There's nothing. No one wants to die, he says.

This is once he was told he had cancer. No one wants to die. Even people who want to go to heaven don't want to die to get there. And yet death is the destination we all share.

No one has ever escaped it. How true. And that is as it should be because death is very likely the single best invention of life.

It's this life's change agent. It clears out the old to make way for the new. Right now, he says, the new is you.

But someday, not too long from now, you will gradually become old and be cleared away. Sorry to be so dramatic, he says, but it's quite true.

[6 : 15] Many people who read Steve Jobs' testimony, it made them think because here's a guy who's got cancer and he thought through the whole issue of life and death and so on and he thought through it rather deeply and surprisingly publicly.

He didn't keep his thoughts to himself. Some people, when they address the whole cancer issue or some terminal disease, they go away, they hide, they don't want to face people.

Steve Jobs wasn't like that. He was out and open, willing to be interviewed, willing to share. And yet, what he shared though it had a profound influence upon many people, I wouldn't want anyone in my family or in Livingston Free Church to go by what Steve Jobs said there.

That is like Buddhism gone rampant. There's nothing. The aim is really just not to exist. Let the off button come and that's it.

It's all over. I don't believe that. And I'll tell you, the Apostle Paul certainly did not believe that.

[7 : 33] He was very, very different. He focused on issues to do with life and definitely focused upon death. And he knew that the whole of life had meaning and therefore his death was but a stepping stone to being with Christ.

Christ. Let's leave Steve Jobs then and ask what's so special about Paul. He's never been in Rome but he's writing this letter to the Romans and he introduces himself and he says, Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God.

What's the first thing he says about himself? He says, my name is Paul, yes, but I'm a servant. And of course the word servant is also the word slave.

Okay? In Rome at that time there was something like 40% of the population were made up of slaves. So when Paul said, I am a slave, I am a servant, nobody would bother.

In fact, people were proud to be servants, proud to be slaves. Who was their master? It was the emperor, the Roman emperor. And if they lived as servants and slaves and then they died, do you know what they said to their families?

[9 : 00] They would say, please, on my tombstone, write that I was a slave of the Roman emperor and in the name of the emperor. They were so proud of being slaves, servants of the Roman king.

Paul, however, he is writing to the Romans but he says, I am a servant of Christ Jesus. He is very open to being a slave.

In other words, he doesn't map out his own life for himself. See, when you're a servant, you open your ears to listen to others and say, what do you want me to do?

That's what it means to live under somebody's authority, somebody else is the master of your life. And in this case, Jesus Christ was the master of Paul's life.

And he said, I am his servant. I don't have a will of my own that I'm going to fulfill. I'm going to do what the Lord Jesus Christ wants me to do.

[10 : 09] Now, when I read about somebody who describes himself as a servant of Jesus Christ, it makes me want to listen to what that person says, what that person writes, what that person preaches.

Because he's given his life over to Jesus Christ, open to his will. When he's writing to the Galatians, he says, I'm not into men pleasing.

I'm not into men pleasing. I want to please Jesus Christ. I want to please God. If you want men pleasers, there are loads of them in the celebrity world just now.

And they will tell you what people want to hear. They will tell you good news about yourself. But really, do you want to listen to people that the thing that really matters to them is whether their ratings will go up and down on social media if they say this or if they don't say this.

If they jump on a bandwagon and say something about the latest death or the latest gender trend or whatever, and if they say the right thing, their ratings go up and people listen to them and they're pleased with themselves.

[11 : 34] But you see, Paul wasn't like that. He received a message from Jesus Christ and he was ready to serve him at huge cost to himself.

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus. Do you want to become a Christian? Or do you want to remain in total control of your own life?

You can't have it both ways. You can't serve two masters. You have to choose who you will serve, whether God or something.

What is going to be your choice? And don't say to me, well, I'll make that choice when I leave high school. Or I'll make that choice when I get married.

Or I'll make that choice when I get a good job. or I'll make that choice when I'm retired. The choice is today. Choose you this day whom you will serve.

[12 : 43] That's what Joshua said to all the people. You have to choose. Ah, but you might say, surely it's God that has to choose me before I choose him.

Well, you're right. If you're saying that, you're a budding theologian. But don't blame God because what God says to you is choose me.

And you either choose him or reject him. Paul, on the Damascus road, he fell to his knees under huge weight, the weight of light.

He saw the light of God's glory and it brought him to fall on his knees. He saw Jesus and then eventually said to Jesus, what do you wish me to do?

You know this, even though there are loads of things you don't understand about the gospel or about the Bible, if you were to pray to the Lord tonight and say, what do you want me to do?

[14 : 01] That could be the beginning of the most marvelous change in your life. But he's not just a servant. He also says here, Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus called to be an apostle.

See, when somebody becomes a Christian, they're automatically given a work to do. so they're not just servants, they're servants with a certain task.

Paul's specific task was to be an apostle. And an apostle is somebody that is sent. So, Christ Jesus had something to say to others, but he wouldn't say it directly, he would send Paul to say it.

He's an apostle. He's somebody who has a message that he understands from God, and then he goes out to share that message with others.

He is an apostle. On the same day that Paul became a Christian, he also became an apostle.

[15 : 12] his life changed forever. From that moment, what Paul wrote, what Paul said, had authority.

Now, you might think it's strange, isn't it? Maybe Paul should have gone to theological college for at least three years to be taught before he became an apostle.

See, God doesn't work like that. This apostolic office, this apostle task, is hugely special. It only existed back at that time in the church before the New Testament was completed.

And Paul was one of those people, as soon as he was converted, he was told that he was going to be an apostle.

somebody sent us an ambassador with a message to share, define, proclaim, and preach. And that's what he did.

[16 : 24] Do you remember where Paul was going when he became a Christian? He was going to Damascus. He was stopped on the road, but then when he went on to Damascus as a Christian, what did he do?

He began to talk, he began to preach, and he began to preach with authority. He was a changed person called to be an apostle.

I'm not an apostle. Jonathan's not an apostle. Nigel's not an apostle. None of the elders are apostles. Paul and several others were apostles, apostles.

But all of us go out with the apostolic gospel. All of us go out with a message that had been defined and proclaimed by Paul in that first century.

Why should I listen to Paul? I should listen to him because he's Christ's servant. He's not a man pleaser. Why should I listen to Paul?

[17 : 31] Because he has God-given authority and what he says stands forever. The Bible doesn't change from year to year.

Man's laws alter. What was right ten years ago is wrong today. What was wrong ten years ago is right today.

An apostle doesn't see it like that. The message does not change. he has to proclaim it as an ambassador. Why else should I listen to Paul?

He says he set apart for the gospel of God. Set apart for it. If there's a circle, Paul is inside that circle.

If Paul has a message to declare it's the gospel message and that is his primary task. He used to make tents.

[18 : 37] He loved making tents. I'm sure he made the fanciest of tents and he used to sell the tents that he had made in order to get money to live. And even after he became a Christian he still continued to make tents.

So that's why we talk about tent making ministries. your minister gets paid by the free church but there are other congregations and they can't afford that.

And sometimes the persons preaching there have other work tent making sort of thing and then they're able to sustain their own ministries. But you see Paul was set apart for the gospel.

His primary task was not to make tents. It was to give his life use every opportunity to define the gospel proclaim the gospel not only among Jews but everywhere in the world.

Where did Paul like to go with the gospel message? Unlike me Paul said right where has Jesus never been mentioned?

[19 : 54] Where is Jesus Christ never been preached? Where is that virgin territory where nobody knows about Jesus? That's where I want you to send me Lord.

And he asks God to put him there as an ambassador. And then when he would enter into these places he would just find somewhere to preach.

very often it was a synagogue and he would be there among Jews who didn't believe in Christ and he would preach Christ to them. Sometimes he would be among Greek speaking people and they didn't know anything perhaps much about the Bible but he would preach Christ to them as well.

he would go fearlessly in one way trembling in another way but he would devote himself to preaching the gospel.

That was his number one priority. See when Paul said to the Philippians was it for me to live is Christ.

[21 : 06] What did he mean by that? Did he mean by that for me to live is to have fellowship with Christ here on earth?

To have sweet communion with them among God's people? I'm sure he included that but I think for him it was for me to live is to share Christ proclaim Christ preach Christ and him crucified.

he looked for opportunities he prayed for opportunities Lord open the door so that I can preach and there he is in prison in prison for two years and what does he do?

He preaches to his guards he preaches to those whom he is chained to he just can't stop preaching we heard from Nigel over the last number of weeks this runaway slave somehow comes into contact with Paul in prison in prison Onesimus and what does he do with Onesimus does he scold him for being a bad slave bad servant no he shares the gospel of Christ with him and what happens Onesimus becomes a Christian and Onesimus would look back and say am glad not only that Paul is a servant of Christ not only that Paul is an apostle of Jesus Christ but he set apart for the gospel because I wouldn't have heard the gospel were it not for Paul who could possibly say that about you when it comes to the day of judgment is there anybody who will stand at the throne of

God and be able to say I wouldn't have known the gospel were it not for her or for him it will there be people who will only get to know Christ because you are set apart for the gospel it's your number one priority maybe not in a pulpit maybe not in a theological college maybe in the nursing ward maybe in the IT community maybe in the social work community maybe in the banking circles maybe in the academic community wherever it is number one priority for me to live it shouldn't just be Paul who says that you and I should be saying it what's so special about

[24 : 10] Paul yes you listen to him because he's an apostle and a servant and he's set apart for the gospel out of all the human beings on earth apart from Jesus Christ Paul is the one who has had most influence in my life and in my ministry Paul is the one I want to be like I want to be mature like him I want to understand Christ like him and I don't for a moment imagine Paul saying oh no no no my understanding of Christ is all for me and my greatness you're puny down there no Paul says I want you to imitate me I want you to be like me why should we listen to him what's so special about him he's a servant of Christ he's an apostle and he's set apart for the gospel notice since we've started talking about the gospel what is so distinctive about this gospel the word gospel just means of course as you all know it just means good news good news the evangel good news like coronavirus doesn't come into

West Lothian it could be a good news would be that my loved one who's seriously unwell would be somehow helped through the doctors it could be that my family that is breaking up that would somehow be made whole again it could be any of these for some people good news is very much about them I know nothing I suppose about Christina Aguilera I'm not even sure if I'm pronouncing her name right but I know words of a song she wrote you are beautiful no matter what they say words can't bring you down you are beautiful no matter what they say one thing is for sure that's not biblically true human beings just aren't beautiful human beings are not good there's none that does good not not one says

God through two Psalms 14 and 53 twice said there is none that does good and he picks it up again in this letter to the Romans none the good news is not about ourselves and that somehow we are going to manage on our own that we're beautiful and deep inside we're somehow amazingly beautiful no do you do you know what the good news is it's not good news that begins here it's good news that begins up there God is good news God is good news the gospel the good news the message is about God so if you tell me that you often share the gospel with people then what

I will be saying to you okay you share the gospel with people how much do you say about God because I don't think you can actually share the gospel without speaking about God okay gospel is not about church it's not even essentially about Bible it's not even about what we do when we come together for worship gospel is about God himself it's good news about God what is the good news about God is that he hasn't given up on us what's the good news about God is he saw us going to sin reject him and then he said and he willed I will not let them go and he intervenes through Jesus Christ to rescue them from sin and restore a universe to himself the good news the gospel is essentially about

God if you haven't understood God you really haven't understood the gospel so when we say for example well we're preaching the gospel and the first thing we do when we're preaching the gospel is talk about man's sin and talk about man's cravings and talk about this woman's need for this and that and the other or this set of addictions or these broken homes and that somehow as we deal with those things we awaken in them and need so they'll cry out to God for mercy that's not preaching the gospel the way Paul preached the gospel when he went out he just spoke about God he actually just talked about God you know sharing the gospel is not difficult work it just means being honest about

[30 : 40] God talking about what he means to you because of what he has done in and through his son Jesus Christ it's good news about God and especially about God's son you notice that he set apart for the gospel of God it's God's gospel which he promised before and through his prophets and the holy scriptures concerning his son so what's so distinctive about the gospel it's about God as we think about that let's move on to the third point what's so unique about Jesus because he's at the center of this gospel about God three things I want to say about Jesus three things I want to say first of all he was promised in the scriptures secondly he became flesh so that he could die and thirdly he has become

Lord after his death and resurrection three things about Jesus first of all he was promised beforehand through the prophets in the holy scriptures Jesus doesn't come unannounced Jesus was spoken about beforehand if I was in a class I'd be very tempted to ask you where is the first promise concerning the coming of Jesus in the Bible and I would expect somebody in the class to say Genesis 3:15 somebody born from the woman will one day crush the head of Satan and that person we know now to be Jesus but it wasn't just what was spoken long ago in the Garden of Eden Moses spoke about

Jesus Isaiah spoke about Jesus Jeremiah spoke about Jesus Hosea spoke about Jesus Micah spoke about Jesus Joel spoke about Jesus Daniel spoke about Jesus you see it wasn't just one prophet who prophesied the coming of Jesus or the gospel the good news about what God was going to do through Jesus lots and lots and lots of prophets did that that's why it's in the plural which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scripture notice God didn't just say that somebody would come he promised that this person would come and he promised not just through one prophet but through many people so when you think about

Jesus think that God promised him to this world in the scriptures the second thing about Jesus he was descended from David according to the flesh between the old testament and the new testament there were people who kept on writing strange stories and one of the strange stories that when God would send this saviour he would somehow just arrive in the world directly from heaven he wouldn't need to be born that's not the way God worked Mary conceived in her womb and Jesus was a fetus in her womb as he comes into the world he is born of

Mary the wife of Joseph the son of David he becomes flesh flesh the word becomes flesh what kind of flesh does Jesus have is he somehow superhuman super special his skin isn't like our skin he doesn't sweat like we sweat he doesn't shake like we shake we know that he shook and sweated and trembled we knew that he felt pain we know the kind of human being he was he was just like us in everything everything says Hebrews apart from sin apart from sin of course he was from a royal line which means that he was son of

[36 : 03] David he comes into this world as king and it's no surprise you see at the time when he was born or thereabouts kings from the east special people high up people come to worship him on the night he was born do you know that every angel probably in heaven came to earth to sing of his arrival because he was king in the son of David this day is born to you a savior but he's flesh he's just a little baby and you think how could God do anything with his little baby what's the good news got to do with a baby and then the baby grows and for the first 12 years we know virtually nothing about him except that he was good and then we know that he was in the temple at the age of 12 and he loved being at the temple he loved being about his father's things and then later on when he was around the age of 30 he becomes very public he joins with the people who were baptized by John the Baptist and he becomes

Jesus who goes around doing miracles giving amazing teaching and three years later he's on the cross where he dies so there's the king on the cross and he dies his limp body is taken from the cross carried by Joseph and Nicodemus into a tomb and he's laid there in the tomb cold as a corpse would be cold he was wrapped up in clothes like every other human being would be wrapped up in in the tomb that's where Jesus ends up after all this coming into the world in the royal line of king

David he ends up being there dead and you think what's the good news there you know according to the flesh he's descended from David and he he does all these amazing miracles gives all this amazing teaching and then he ends up dead on Golgotha and buried in a tomb in Jerusalem but then comes the next thing he was declared to be the son of God in power according to the spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead see Jesus was willing to die and you will never stop loving Jesus enough because he was willing to die in your room instead but it wasn't just that though he was willing to rise again from the grave

God the father raised him out of the tomb God the father made him alive but he was willing to be made alive I have power to lay down my life he says and I have power to take it up again and he rose out of the tomb walked out through the rock that was on the tomb and there Jesus is now resurrected death reversed but then what happens he ascends to heaven he enters glory for the first time as a human being his flesh is in heaven heaven and then six weeks later he has this amazing final ascension to heaven which is so slow that everybody could see him go slowly up into the presence of God and once he's in heaven always remember the dust of the earth is now in heaven but where is he in heaven we're told that he is at the right hand of God he's ruling over the whole of the universe and what does he do once he has this power made a lord of the universe all authority in heaven and on earth what does he do with his power ten days after that final ascension to heaven he does something that changed the church and changed the world forever he poured out his holy spirit upon the church and that would help the church to do something it had never done before and that is share the gospel with every nation on the globe for all of time in the first century and through all the centuries till the coming of

Jesus see the holy spirit is the one that was poured out upon the church why because he is now son of God in power don't misunderstand me he was God the son before he came into the world he was God the son when he was on the cross and he is God the son on the throne of the universe but that's not what we're talking about when we're talking about son of God in power we're talking about God the son and the son of Mary the son of David is the one who's on the throne of the universe is not just God the son it's God the son in human nature there's a human being

[43 : 37] God the son who is now also a human being he's ruling over the whole universe dominion over all the creatures so that people can be brought into God's kingdom and he pours out the spirit of God so that that will happen when Jesus poured out the spirit of God on the church on the day of Pentecost how many people became Christians 3,000 people one sermon preached by Peter 3,000 people became Christians and they had no idea it was going to happen few weeks later 2,000 more became

Christians then people talked about the whole world being turned upside down as people come to worship King Jesus see what has happened is that Jesus said I when I am lifted up I will draw all people to myself I'm going to do that by ascending and taking the throne of the universe given by my father and I'm going to pour out the holy spirit upon the church and through that church empowered by the spirit I'm going to draw people to myself and no one who comes to me will I cast out that's what's happening right now in the world that's what's happening not just on

Lord's days it's happening people are being brought to Jesus that's what's so unique about Jesus not only that he was promised in the Bible long ago it's not only that he became flesh son of David in the line of David so he could die but that he is now crowned as Lord comma Jesus Christ pours out the spirit so that a whole universe can be brought back to God boys and girls I really want you to believe this I want you to bow before him and say I want to be part of this I want Jesus to be the one who would die for my sins and I want to be his servant I want to be his messenger

I want to live for him and even if I have to I want to die for him I want the whole generation of people to be here once I and others are gone it really is important that you people young people especially pay attention to this gospel there's nothing more important that you could do and go to God and say what do you want me to do nothing more important let's pray heavenly father please we pray speak to us and speak through us may it be lord that we would just see how special it is that you sent people to write the bible that you sent people to preach good news about you and that you sent

Jesus Christ who would become this amazing centre of the universe lord we would pray that you would open our eyes that we might see him at the centre of your plans lord we pray that you would open our mouths that we might just speak about you and share you with people help us lord we would pray and take away take away our sins and leave us weak lord if that's what you want but help us lord to in your strength just to share the gospel while we have time we ask it for your glory for your glory amen let's let's now sing psalm 89 verses 6 to 11 psalm 89 verses 6 to 11 that's on page 344 and the tune is in new in for who in heaven with the lord may once himself compare who is like god among the sons of those that mighty are great fear in meeting of the saints is due unto the lord and he of all about him should with reverence be adored oh thou that art the lord of hosts what lord and mightiness is like to thee who campers round art with thy faithfulness and so on psalm 89 344