

Meeting Jesus: The gospel of God (Evening Service)

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Date: 11 March 2018

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[0 : 00] So we've been doing this series called Meet Jesus. This is the last week. First half of the Meet Jesus series, we looked at what happens when people meet Christ. Great things, fantastic things, and troubling things.

Second half of the series, to coincide with this program we've been running called CCQ, we've been looking at how can we help introduce people to this Jesus. Now tonight we're looking at Romans 1-7, which is all about the beauty and clarity of the gospel.

And that's important because if we want to introduce people to Christ, we need to have clarity on this gospel. So that's why we're looking at Romans 1-7. But first, just Romans. Romans in general.

What do we say about it? Goodness. I mean, Romans is a masterpiece. An absolute masterpiece. It's the longest of Paul's writings. It's the most sort of sustained explanation or exposition of the gospel, of the heart of Christianity.

And in Romans are literally words that change the world. Martin Luther, the great reformer, he said the most pivotal moment of his life was not the nailing of the 95 Theses to the door at Wittenberg.

[1 : 11] He says the most pivotal moment of his life happens in a tower. He had his study in this big sort of castle tower thing. And he was studying Romans chapter 1, and he was converted.

And he was a monk already. And you might think, well, being a monk, surely you're fairly sort of invested in Christianity already, right? Well, apparently not.

He, at the point of his conversion, pre-conversion, he believed that his salvation rested on him pleasing God and performing a lot of things, like doing a lot of stuff.

Like basically his salvation depended on his own efforts. So anyway, so he's studying the first chapter of Romans, gets to, I think, verse 17, and is converted.

Converted into the gospel of grace. And then from there, now there's 95 Theses on the door, and the world literally changed. So all that to say, this is a really, really important book, and we're just going to dip our toe in the first seven verses.

[2 : 21] So let's get into it. So you see there, it's helpful probably to have it open. You see there, because I'll be jumping around a little bit. You see there that Paul, he introduces himself at the start of the letter, verse 1, as you'd expect. Paul, servant of Christ, as you'd expect, and he introduces himself.

But the surprise is this. Before, did you see this? Before he says hello to his friends in Rome, before he sort of says, hey.

So it's not like Paul, servant of Christ, greetings to all you folks in Rome. How's it going? Can't wait to see you.

Before he says any of that kind of carry on, he starts talking about the gospel. Paul talks about the gospel before he says hello.

And in these very dense kind of verses here, he talks about three things. He talks about the source of the gospel, the content of the gospel, and the point of the gospel.

[3 : 21] So the source of the gospel, the content of the gospel, and the point of the gospel. So that's the sermon right there. First, the source of the gospel.

Well, verse 1 says it all. The source of the gospel is described as the gospel of God. So God is the source. And in fact, it says that God promised this a long time ago in verse 2.

He promised it way back in the Hebrew Scriptures through his prophets. And it's very important that we understand that for a couple of reasons. One, firstly, the gospel has always been God's plan.

That's important. The gospel has always been God's plan. This means the gospel is not a new religion. Christianity, as we practice it, it's not a new thing that God came up with 2,000 years.

He wasn't sick of Israel. He didn't, you know, get all the angels together in heaven, you know, 2,100 years ago and say, Listen, these people of mine, I can't even, they are, listen, I, don't get me started.

[4 : 32] It's not working. I gave them very clear directions. Ten. Ten. They can't pull it off. I gave them a place to live.

Has anyone got any new ideas? That is not what happened. Deep in the Old Testament, God's plan was always the gospel.

And you see it played out. The whole story of the Bible is moving in one direction. God spoke through the prophets. It's recorded in the Scriptures. God gave promises. Lots of promises that are fulfilled in the New Testament.

So Jesus coming and dying and rising was not a last ditch effort because nothing else was working. It was always the plan. So the source of the gospel is God.

It's his idea. We didn't come up with it. You know, any plan of salvation that we would have come up with would have put us at the center of it.

[5 : 32] And of course it would have been a disaster. Now the gospel is his plan. His ingenious plan. And as a side note, it does mean this.

We don't have to take responsibility for people's reactions to it. This is a side issue, but I think it's worth mentioning. When we explain the gospel to people, I think it takes the pressure off a wee bit. People say, your ideas are crazy.

Your ideas are ludicrous. You can say, wow, it's not really my ideas. I didn't come up with it. I think it takes the pressure off a little bit. When people are offended by what we believe, it's actually not our ideas.

So the source of the gospel, it's God. Next, the content of the gospel. Verse 3. Romans 1 makes it so simple. Verse 3. Concerning his son.

The gospel of God. God is the source. Concerning his son. It's very clear, isn't it? The gospel is about Jesus Christ. You don't sort of notice it at first, but if you actually look through those seven verses, you see that every verse mentions Christ, except for one, except for verse 2.

[6 : 43] Jesus is the content of the gospel. And why is this so important? Because it sort of crashes into the way many people think about the Christian faith. Let me explain.

The Greek word for gospel is, and I've always had trouble saying this Greek word, oué galion. I'm looking at a Greek scholar right now.

Oué galion. He's looking blankly at me. Something like that. Ou part.

It's two words. The ou part means good. That anglia part, right? It means news. It means herald. Like spokesman. Back in the days, herald, there's no news networks, obviously, or print news.

So how did the news get distributed? This network of heralds, right? So there's a war going on. People want to find out what's going on. So let's say, you know, the Jewish people win a war. You know, they just sort of send all these heralds out.

[7 : 42] Or the Romans, they send all these heralds out. And they go to all the towns, and they go, victory over the Philistines. Or whatever the news was. The gospel is an announcement about Jesus Christ.

It's an announcement of Jesus. It's good news. That's what it literally means, good news. And this is very important.

I was explaining this to a guy yesterday over dinner when he asked me about televangelists. And Aaron's hot tip.

If people sort of throw the televangelist thing, look at all those corrupt Christians on TV. It's a wonderful opportunity to talk about your faith. Because I couldn't explain to him how terrible televangelists were.

And how corrupt a lot of these guys were. Without telling him about the truth of the gospel. So I said, a lot of what they do is fraud. Let me tell you what the real thing looks like.

[8 : 46] So you can see how this thing is fraudulent. And this is basically what I'm telling you right now. This is what I explained to him. The gospel means something has been done for you.

That's the news. So it's not good advice. It's good news. Something has been done for you. And this is what distinguishes the gospel from every other religion. Which says, do this and you'll be okay.

Salvation and other faiths looks like fulfilling criteria. And this is what many people think the Christian faith is all about. Be a good person. God will let you into heaven.

In the meantime, you can ask him for a few favors. No, that's not the gospel of the Bible. The gospel, the genius of the gospel is this. It's primarily good news. It's about something that has been done for you.

About something that has already happened. And what has happened has got something to do with Jesus. Which is why this passage says it concerns Jesus. And what Jesus did.

[9 : 43] And Paul unpacks it partly, in part, in verses 3 and 4. So we're on to verses 3 and 4 now. They're very, very dense passages. And he's trying to encapsulate what Jesus is and what he's about.

So verse 3 and 4. Jesus, who 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.

Very, very dense. Okay. Okay, so there's a lot in there. What does it mean? All right. He was descended from David according to the flesh. What does that mean? So scholarly stuff I read said this.

It said, it's saying it means something like this. That Jesus became the seed of David. Jesus became the seed of David.

So David, as if you don't know, David was super famous Old Testament king. He was like this Messiah type figure in the Old Testament way back in the days. Defeated enemies.

[10 : 44] Brought peace. But was ultimately sort of a bit of a failure. Still the most successful and sort of famous of the Old Testament kings. So Jesus was born into this royal line.

So it's sort of saying that Jesus is this royal figure. That Jesus is a king. And the way he became part of that royal line was through a change of existence in Mary's womb.

Like I know. I'm just telling you what the Bible says. Jesus became the seed of David. So I know it's completely wild stuff, right? Here's what it's trying to say.

Jesus didn't come into existence in Mary's womb. He always existed. Rather, Jesus changed his existence to become human in the line of David.

In this royal line. Why? Why? Well, whatever Jesus had to do, he had to be a human in order to accomplish it.

[11 : 51] So any idea that Jesus is just a great teacher for us to emulate is just nonsense, isn't it? God didn't choose a great man to do really cool things and achieve God-like status.

And we're supposed to, you know, he's supposed to motivate us and we're supposed to find the divine inside all of us. No, no, that's nonsense. Look. Jesus chose his son to become human.

Jesus somehow changed in the womb of Mary so he could be born a human in the line of Israel's kings. And why did Jesus need to do that? Why did he need to become human?

Because only humans can die. Because humans can die. And this goes partway to explaining verse 4. He was declared to be son of God in power.

Try and hold those things together. Son of God in power. According to the spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord. So Jesus died in weakness and humiliation and that was the plan.

[12 : 46] It was always the intention. He took our weakness and humiliation on himself, but he rose in power. He was resurrected and now is Lord of all. So this is broad strokes content of the gospel Paul's trying to explain to us.

Jesus became a human. The promised Messiah in the line of David died a humiliating death but was resurrected. And now we call him Lord.

So the source of the gospel is God. The content of the gospel is the work of Jesus. Lastly, the point of the gospel. What's the point of it all? This is 5 to 7.

Through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among the nations, including you, who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.

And to all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be a saint. Remember those. Loved by God and called to be a saint. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. There's a million things to say here.

[13 : 53] I'll just say a couple of things. The point of the gospel is that people may know this grace that Paul talks about. And the whole introduction to Romans is soaked in this idea.

You'll see what I mean in a second here. See, at the start of the letter, Paul couches everything he says with grace. Here's what I mean. Did you notice? Paul begins this great letter of Romans by identifying himself, which, you know, makes sense.

But not in terms of his accomplishments. It's always in terms of what God has done for him. I am a servant of Christ, he says.

An apostle. An apostle. I mean, it sounds very fancy, calling yourself an apostle. But do you see? He describes himself as being called to that. It's not his idea. He was called to that.

So, again, it's what Christ did to him. Christ called him into that role. He's got this amazing story, right? He was a persecutor of the church. And Jesus broke into his life. Called him.

[15 : 00] Verse 5. His apostleship is all for Christ's sake and not his. You see where I'm getting at here. The emphasis is always on what God has done. Not what he did. That's grace.

This doesn't mean that what we do is unimportant. It's crucial what we do and how we respond to it. It's why our response to God's grace is called the obedience of faith. There is an appropriate response to all this.

But Paul consistently puts the emphasis on what God has done first. We see it again right at the end. Verses 6 and 7. As Paul finally describes who he's writing to.

Eventually, after talking about the gospel. He's finally talking about who he's writing to. It's not this perfunctory thing. He uses these two beautiful words to describe the people he's writing to.

He describes them as called and loved. The Christians in Rome. Paul names their chief identity markers.

[15 : 56] It's not to all you guys in Rome have heard great things about you. Keep on going. It's no. He describes them in terms of what has happened to them. What has God done for them?

God has called them. And he has loved them. And this is what makes us Christians, isn't it? This is the main thing we should know about ourselves.

When we think about who we are, what our life is about, our main identity markers should be this. Nothing is more important than knowing this.

That we are loved. And we are called. I hope you know this. Let me finish up here.

We are called. What does that mean? What we are, if you're a Christian here, what we are is the work of someone else.

[17 : 01] You're in church today. You've got Christian buddies. You pray. You feel like you can talk to Jesus. You feel like God talks to you. You love his word. You want to pray. Look, folks, that's the work of somebody else.

That's the reason you want to do that stuff. It's not your idea. God invaded your life. He grabbed a hold of you. And he called you into a relationship with him. And not begrudgingly. It's not like if you've ever been a boss and advertised for a job and only one person applies.

It's like, oh, I have to take this person. No, it's not that. You are called and loved. You are loved. I don't feel like I get to say that enough. You are loved.

That's who you are. That's the point of the gospel. So what's your homework? I don't know. I just think maybe just dwell on that, on those two things.

Learn who you are. Get that deep in your heart. And just live out of the wonder of that. Amen.