

Meeting Jesus: The gospel of God

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[0 : 00] Well if you would turn back to Romans chapter 1 on page 939, 939 Romans 1 the first seven verses and Garrison Keillor the storyteller used to say it's been a quiet week in my hometown and this week has been not very quiet. We've had CCQ finish on Tuesday evening.

We had the men's breakfast yesterday with Bishop Charlie Masters in our vestry meeting on Thursday night and if you missed out on the vestry meeting we're going to be communicating a bit of that in the weeks coming up.

We come to the fourth and last in our series on how other people meet Jesus through us and I last preached this passage in 2010.

It was the first week back at work after 13 months or so off work and I downloaded it and listened to the first 12 minutes or so you'll be pleased to know on Thursday.

And one of the weird things that happened during my year coming back to work, the staff kept telling me that my sermons were twice as long as they used to be and they were.

[1 : 20] And I typed the same number of words, I had the same sort of size of thoughts but the sermons were doubly long. Well I've now figured out why. Listening to the first 12 minutes of that sermon I spoke so slowly.

So I just want to say thank you for your kindness and patience with the slow pastor. But we'll try and go a little bit shorter today.

Although I could string it out as people might come at the end of the hour. Who knows? It's a wonderful passage. We come face to face with the gospel.

And it's vital for us to hear the gospel today because the gospel is not something you can master and then move on from. In fact if you think you've mastered the gospel you haven't begun to understand it.

Nor is it something just for the beginning of the Christian life. You know for people who are becoming Christians in a few months after that. Yeah through the gospel God does make us alive.

[2 : 24] But it's through the gospel that he keeps us in the Christian life and strengthens us more and more and more. And it's through the gospel of course that we remain steadfast until God brings us into his presence.

Martin Luther said the gospel cannot be preached and heard enough. Because it cannot be grasped well enough. And the key I think to personal spiritual renewal and the key always to revival amongst God's people is when God's people come to the place of saying I haven't really understood this gospel.

I need to discover it afresh. And this little passage is an Everest in the Bible. It's the gospel highly distilled. And it's one of the most thrilling passages because it shows us the gospel from two perspectives.

It shows the gospel from above from God's perspective and from below from our perspective. Now if you've lived in Vancouver any time you know that we have the great privilege in Vancouver of having weather inversions.

Where there are clouds and fog low down and if you go up to Grouse Mountain it's beautiful and shiny and clear. Where down the cool air is trapped down here on the ground and the warm air is above.

[3 : 44] And you know we move around in this fog and we can hear fog horns all night and we go up the mountains and it's so spectacularly shining we can see all the way to Russia.

Or maybe White Rock. This passage nicely divides in two halves. Verses 1 to 4 the gospel from above. And then verses 5 to 7 the gospel from our point of view.

So firstly then what does the gospel look like from God's point of view above? And it's very encouraging for us to see this. You know we have the privilege of entering into the mind of God. He is the author of the gospel and he's the guarantor of the gospel. But it's more than that. He's active in the gospel. The gospel is a dynamic power which transforms.

And the reason it's important to get this is because the strength and power of the gospel doesn't come from how strongly I believe it. Nor how clearly I understand it. Nor how brilliantly I can communicate it or you can communicate it.

[4 : 50] It's because it's God's gospel. And it takes Paul just one line to get to the gospel. You see at the start he says, Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God.

He's never been to Rome before and he's writing to the Christians. And if they're real Christians their chief concern will be the gospel. I'm not a free agent, he says. I'm at the disposal of Jesus Christ because of God's gospel.

This is the first thing he wants us to know. It is the gospel of God. And the word gospel comes from the Old Testament.

And whenever the word gospel is used, it's used for singing and dancing and cheering and putting our fears away and all things un-Anglican.

It's a shout of rejoicing that God has actually done something to change our real situation. He's broken through. He reigns. Lift it up and shout it out loud.

[5 : 52] And in the New Testament we learn that the gospel is a dynamic power let loose in the world. It's God saving activity through this thing, the gospel, because it comes out of the heart of God.

And when people say today, what is God doing in the world? Well, there's a lot that he's doing we don't understand. But this we know for sure. He's powerfully active in the gospel day by day by day. And God has made himself known in creation. We know this. He's made enough of himself known that we know that there is a God. But this is God's gospel in a different sense.

This thing, the gospel, has the power, is the power of God to save us. It has enough power to take careless, disobedient, spiritually blind people and to bring to us all the blessings of God's favor and grace because it is the gospel of God.

And it's not new, verse 2. It was promised beforehand through the holy prophets in the scriptures.

It's not plan B. God didn't look down at Adam and Eve in the garden and go, oh no, they've gone off the rails.

[7 : 05] He didn't look down at, name someone, Noah or Abraham and Sarah or Moses or Elijah and didn't go, oh, I need another plan. No, no. This was in God's heart before he created the world.

But it does mean that whenever we read the Old Testament, the primary character of the Old Testament is promise. So when we read about Noah or Elijah or Moses, it's all God preparing the world for the coming of his son.

It's the promise of Jesus Christ. And when he comes, the gospel comes. The fulfillment of all those plans from before creation. So from above, from God's point of view, verse 3 is the key.

Just look down, verse 3, the gospel concerning his son. This is the core of the power and the substance of the gospel.

A year ago, I was invited to speak to a missions team. The leaders asked me to come and speak about what the gospel was. And I didn't realize when I said yes to this, how controversial this topic was on the missions team.

[8 : 16] I only learned about it later. Which is, I do that. You know, you get invited somewhere to speak and they give you a topic and you only realize later that it's got you into deep water.

However, I left and here I am. I asked the team to just write down what they thought the gospel was in a sentence or two and share it around.

And these were the things they said. The gospel is God is love. The gospel is how I get rid of my guilt. The gospel is having a fresh start. The gospel is about human flourishing.

All of which are great. Many of which are implications of the gospel. But none of them are the gospel. Jesus Christ is the beginning and end of the gospel.

If you're not talking about Jesus Christ, you're not talking about the gospel. The whole gospel is included in him. It is concerning his son. And if you take one step away from Jesus, you take one step away from the gospel.

[9 : 15] All our faith and all our focus is to be on him. The gospel is profoundly and essentially Christ-centered. The gospel is not about your felt needs or mine.

And specifically, Paul says, the gospel tells us about two changes that Jesus himself went through, that he entered into fully, that he chose to go through and that God empowered him to do, which fulfilled all the promises of the Old Testament and makes our salvation possible.

First, he says, the first change is literally Jesus became descendant of David according to the flesh. The word descendant is not the usual word for being born.

It means a change from one state to another. Some years ago, I was a permanent resident here in Canada and I became a Canadian citizen. I had a change of status. That's what the word means.

Jesus became the son of David according to the flesh, which means that he existed before his incarnation. And the great change was somehow the son of God came from the father and took on human flesh in all its weakness and all its frailty and all that we know to be true.

[10 : 31] That was the first change. The second change in verse 4, He was declared to be the son of God in power according to the spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead.

So if the first change in Jesus' life and ministry was the incarnation where the eternal word of God became flesh for us, the second change was the resurrection, which from God's point of view is God's response to Jesus' death on the cross.

So there's a lot going on in the resurrection when God raised Jesus from the dead. But from God's point of view, what's really important is that in raising Jesus from the dead, he declares him, he appoints him, he anoints him, he establishes him as the son of God in power.

He always was the son of God. He was the son of God for eternity past. He was the son of God when he was here on earth, but he was the son of God in weakness, of course. But through the resurrection, God himself has finally, he's made the definitive and decisive judgment that settles everything forever, that Jesus Christ is the son of God in power.

And Jesus, you remember he said, all authority in heaven and earth has been given to me, and that has been raised from the dead. And God gave to him his own personal name, the father's own personal name of Lord, so that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God, the father.

[12 : 07] I mean, we tend to look at the resurrection as the defeat of death for me. And it is that, but it's not that in its first place. It was a very personal defeat of death for Jesus, because God took him out, as it says literally, he took him out from among the dead ones, and he declared to the universe on that day, this is my son, I have begotten him.

The day that God begot Jesus was the day of resurrection. And as I said, this is God's, it's his unanswerable solution to every doubt and debate.

It's his definitive determination of every question about Jesus. What it means is that Jesus did not suffer death for his own sins. If Jesus had committed any sins, he would still be in the tomb.

And he could not have been received into heaven. He wouldn't have been declared son of God in power. And if he had remained dead in the tomb, he could never be our savior, or he could never be our Lord.

He would just be another in a long line of religious teachers who spoke a lot about life after death, but couldn't back it up. But Jesus did come into the world, and he did live in the flesh, and he did die in the flesh, and he was raised again, which I think explains the sheer joy, this staggering joy at the end of verse four, in the last four words, if you look at them, Jesus Christ, our Lord, and in the original, our, is put at the end.

[13 : 42] Jesus Christ, the Lord of us. Paul can't get over the fact that Jesus, he knows he's Jesus Lord, he is Lord and Savior, but he's Lord and Savior of us.

Yesterday at the breakfast, Bishop Charlie spoke about the Bible writers being obsessed about Jesus. And I don't think there's a better obsession.

So when you look through the New Testament, on any issue, practical, theological, doesn't matter, the New Testament writers always go to the person of Jesus Christ, for the pattern, and for the power of our lives.

So, how do you deal with your spouse when you're disappointed? Or, how do you deal with someone who has hurt you badly, and you need to forgive them? How do you move from bitterness to forgiveness and joy?

Every time, it's Jesus Christ as the pattern and power. Walk in love as Christ loved us and gave himself for us. Or take money, you know, how we make it, how we use it, how we spend it, how we give it away.

[14 : 48] You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, says the apostle, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich. When Paul writes to the church in Corinth, what a naughty church it was, he deals with incest and sexual immorality.

He lays before them in 1 Corinthians 5, the fact that Jesus Christ is the lamb who was sacrificed for you. When Christians are mistreating the weak, when Christians are being divisive, when he wants to urge them to good works, he puts before them Jesus Christ died and risen.

Because from God's point of view, the gospel is concerning his son, who is Jesus Christ our Lord. And that brings us to the second point of view, where we move from the mountain down a bit into the fog.

What does the gospel look like from our point of view? Verses 5 to 7. And the question really is, what does it sound like? One of the things about the thick fog in Vancouver is particularly through the night, you can hear the old fog horn from the harbour.

And despite the fact that every large ship in the harbour has at least two forms of radar, in the fog you can still miss things like sailboats and other things in the water because you've got no visual line of reference.

[16 : 15] And this old technology blares out to give you reference points to hear and it works. And I looked it up. The executive director of the BC Coast Pilots calls it the sound of safety.

And he says, people who use it are very thankful. Now, one of the first acts that Jesus did after he rose from the dead is he poured out his Holy Spirit on his people to communicate the gospel.

And that's where he's going in verse 5. So in verse 5, he says, So how do we receive this great gospel, this blessing of God in Jesus Christ?

How does this powerful transformation make itself real in us? And the answer Paul has here is the obedience of faith. It's not the obedience that comes from faith, which we're very used to.

You know, we're used to having faith first and then obedience following after. That's not what this means. It is the obedience which is faith. It's the obedience which consists in faith.

[17 : 32] And the reason is because when we hear the gospel, we're not just hearing a foghorn. We're hearing a command from the voice of God. It's not just an inarticulate blast.

It's not saying, go away, watch out. It's salvation to us. It's saying, I've come for you, now come to me. In the gospel, God commands us to place our trust in Jesus Christ.

And when we believe him, we obey the gospel. To believe is to obey the gospel. To obey is to believe the gospel and bow before what God is revealing.

It's very important, you see, because the gospel is not just information that's communicated. In the gospel, God himself comes to us, offering us the person of Jesus Christ and all the blessings of God that are in him.

And he holds out this Jesus who has made flesh for us and was raised from the dead and appointed son of God in power. And he commands us to respond. Which means you can't be neutral after you've heard the gospel.

[18 : 41] Because the gospel is not advice. It's not even God's good opinion. It is a command to receive the son of God. And that means the chief act of disobedience is refusing to respond to his call.

If I do not respond to his call, I am in disobedience. which means unbelief is not neutral. To not believe is to refuse Jesus and reject God.

Last week, you remember, we heard the apostle Paul preaching to the Greek intellectuals on the top of the Mount Areopagus. And Paul finishes his sermon by saying, look, the times of ignorance God has overlooked.

But now he commands all people everywhere to repent because he's fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed.

And of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead. It's the same with Jesus.

The same passage where Jesus fed the 5,000 that we thought about in the children's focus.

[19 : 54] They come up to Jesus and they say to Jesus after it, what must we do to be doing the works of God? And Jesus answered them, this is the work of God.

How does it go on? That you believe in whom he has sent. We obey the command of God by believing in Jesus Christ who died and rose.

And if that was all there was to this, it would be enough. But there's more. And I think the last bit is kind of heart melting. Because there's something unique about God's command that reaches right into our hearts.

And it is not just command, it has the nature of personal call. He calls us by name. That's so important to Paul. He mentions it twice.

Once in verse 6 and once in verse 7. In verse 6 he calls the Roman readers you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ. When you hear the gospel being spoken as we're hearing it now, what happens is by the Holy Spirit God calls you to his son Jesus Christ.

[21 : 06] As we explain the gospel, the Holy Spirit he appeals and he beckons to us. and he speaks in the voice of Jesus. He says, come to me.

I came for you. I died for you. I gave my life for you. I've risen again. Come to me and you will live. You ever heard the voice of the Holy Spirit saying that to you?

Calling you by name? Because when you do, you must hear and respond. And when we do verse 7, he says, to those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints, you realize that it's all based on the love of God.

This love which is rock-like and secure and eternal and fresh every day. And everyone who believes in Jesus Christ is a saint.

Don't you know that? Doesn't mean you're sinless or perfect or become weirdly musty and strange and hold your hands in strange positions. You know, like this. A saint just means someone who's set apart by the Holy Spirit for Jesus.

[22 : 19] And as a result, we consecrate ourselves to him. It's an old word. We serve him as we serve others. As the Holy Spirit joins us to Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ is utterly consecrated to God the Father and so the closer we come to Jesus Christ, the more actually consecrated we are and that is the ongoing work of the gospel in us.

You might have been a Christian for a long time and you might have begun to think, I'm not really going to change. I struggle with the same old things over and over and over.

I think I'll just settle down and make peace with them. But you see, consecration and practical holiness doesn't come from getting up on Monday morning and make a great and renewed effort.

If it does, we're all in the soup. they come from the gospel. They come from a deeper understanding and a deeper believing and application of the gospel to our hearts.

We are saints because we are called and we are called because of the love of God. It's the love of God from the beginning to the end.

[23 : 27] It's the love of God through the gospel which empowers us and enables us in our obedience. true Christian obedience. It doesn't come from guilt.

It doesn't come from fear of punishment. It comes from knowing how deeply God loves us in Jesus Christ and the lengths he's willing to go to to save us.

I promise you this. Guilt is a terrific motivator short term. It's lousy long term. But the love of God short term may not work all that well but long term it works very powerfully.

This is our God. He sent his son to be slaughtered on a tree for us to raise him up above all things and to offer us life and goodness through him. So you know in morning prayer every Sunday when we do morning prayer on page 9 we've already done it once today.

After the Lord's Prayer we sing this response and it goes like this. The first response is Oh Lord show thy mercy upon us and grant us thy salvation That was very good.

[24 : 46] Thank you. Sorry to surprise you with that. That grant us thy salvation comes from Psalm 85 and you know every one of these responses has this deep and rich background.

and in Psalm 85 the psalmist says Restore us again Oh Lord of our salvation. Will you not revive us again that your people may rejoice in you show us your steadfast love oh God and grant us your salvation.

That's our prayer. It's to know the joy of our salvation that's in the gospel and for others to know it as well. But to be constantly amazed that Jesus Christ is not just Lord but he is the Lord of us.

He's our Lord. So let's pray. Thank you.