

Mystery Revealed

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[0 : 00] Let's bow our heads and pray as we stand. Our Father, we gather together today and we worship you as the one who made the heavens and the earth and the mountains and the seas and all that is in them.

And that you are the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who revealed yourself to Moses in the law, prophets, as our everlasting home.

We pray as we come to this last little passage in the book of Romans that you would be our, yourself would be our teacher, that your word would be our rule and guide and that your greater glory must be our supreme concern.

In Jesus' name, Amen. Amen. Please sit down. Well, if you would open your Bibles to the end of Romans 16, page 951, that all I've read to us just a moment ago.

I prayed that prayer at the end because that was the prayer that John Stott used to pray before he preached. And as you know, John went to be with his Lord this week.

[1 : 26] Many of you knew him, knew him well. And I wanted to make mention of him just to say that there will be a memorial service this coming Friday, August 5th, 7.30 at Good Shepherd Church.

And that detail is going to go up on our website. I would like this morning to regale you with stories about John Stott. But I have something better to do, to look at this little passage.

And so let's look at it together. Romans 16. I'm not going to make comments about 21 to 22. Most of the characters in that list crop up in the New Testament elsewhere.

You can chase them down. And I don't want to say anything about the rest of chapter 16 except, isn't it remarkable that Christianity is about Jesus and people?

Jesus and people. And it's just full of people here. I'm not going to say anything about that. So let's look at verses 25 to 27. And the most obvious things that stand out are this.

[2 : 37] The first is that it's praise to God. You see verse 25 now, to him, verse 27, to the only wise God. It's not to you.

It's not to me. It's to God, which is as it should be. Because in the end, our lives are lived before anything else and above everything else to God.

And there's something devastatingly wonderful and very typical about Romans in this. The whole point is, it's not about you. Despite all the voices saying, it is all about you, the Bible says, yes, we're very important.

But the true significance of our lives is as we live to God. And one of the ways in which you can tell, we've been listening, Romans has started to grip your heart, is that the centre of your gravity and your thinking and your feeling and your affections is not you, but God.

So, praise to God. The second thing about this little last section is that it's very big. I mean, as he sings praise to God, the Apostle takes in all the world, all the nations.

[3 : 55] He goes back before the beginning of creation, forward to eternity to come, and gathers them all together.

And the reason Paul does this is to locate us in the plan of God. We haven't just woken up and found ourselves in a spaceship spinning through the universe.

We're made by the eternal God. We're made for the eternal God, the one who created the heavens and the earth. The one who will recreate the heavens and the earth. The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In this book of Romans, what he has done is he's brought us into his story, into his narrative. Our own narrative is his. So, between those two ends of the passage, I wonder if you noticed there was one word that recurred three times.

It's the little word, according to. See verse 25? According to my gospel. Verse 25. According to the revelation. And then down in verse 26.

[5 : 10] According to the command of the eternal God. Here are three things God does. God strengthens. God reveals.

And God commands. And I think this is why the book finishes in such an upbeat and positive note. Let's just meditate for a few minutes on each of those. Firstly, God strengthens by his gospel.

See verse 25. Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ.

He ends his letter where he began it. God strengthening us through his gospel. You remember chapter 1? You remember back then? It's a long time ago.

Gospel is the power of God for salvation. This word strengthen is a lovely word. It's a word of power. And it assumes that each of us are weak and unstable.

[6 : 15] And facing things that are too big for us. And it's a very lovely thing because all the strength and power of God that we've seen in Romans. Now comes together here in these last few words.

To do what? To support us. To make us firm. To strengthen us. To secure us. And how does he do that? He says according to my gospel.

Literally which is the preaching of Jesus Christ. If you're new to the church. Gospel is the New Testament word. For the big message.

The good news. That God reigns over all things. And that he has come in the person of his son Jesus Christ. Who's lived for us. And has died for us.

And has risen from the dead. That is coming to judge the living and the dead. And to take us to be with him. In God's presence. And it's good news.

[7 : 14] Because it's about Jesus Christ. And everything that God gives us in him. Forgiveness. One through his death. Victory over death. And evil through his resurrection.

Eternal life through his teaching. The gift of the Holy Spirit. Assuring us that we are children of God. And that nothing can separate us from his love. It's the gospel the world needs so desperately.

Now just before I continue. Am I a little bit loud? You okay? Sorry. Just listening to the sound of my own voice.

This is a little off-putting for me. I'm sorry. Now all this is just to say. The gospel. In the end. Is not fundamentally.

About you. Or me. It's about Jesus Christ. And what he does. In fact. You can tell. A counterfeit gospel. A false gospel.

[8 : 13] When it's centered on you. And you can't preach or teach. You can't believe this apostolic gospel. Apart from.

Believing and teaching. Jesus Christ. And what a lot of people try and do. Is they try and lift Jesus Christ. Out of this gospel. And plunk him down. Into some other form of.

Religious world view. And as soon as you do that. You find. You have not got the real Jesus. You haven't got a Jesus. Who can save. Or forgive. Or judge.

He's not the son of God. He's a Jesus. Of someone's inventing. There is no true Jesus. Apart from this gospel. And he will not be harnessed.

To anything else. Any other cause. Despite our best attempts. You can't harness him. To an evolutionary spirituality. You can't harness him.

[9 : 09] To a social cause. To a particular emotional feeling. To mystical experiences. You can't even. Harness him. To orthodox. Correct theology.

Jesus comes to us. Through the preaching. Of the gospel. Are you committed to this? Is this the way you see it? The big surprise.

I think about this. First. God strengthening us. According to the gospel. Is that this is written. To Christians. Christians. This is written to the group. Paul described in chapter 15.

As full of goodness. Able to instruct one another. How does God continue. Ongoingly. To strengthen Christians. Who've been at it.

For 30, 40, 50 years. Through the gospel. The gospel. The gospel is not given by God. Just to make us Christian. But to keep us as Christian.

[10 : 07] We're not just converted through the gospel. And then we move on to other stuff. To grow. The way God strengthens us. Every step of our pilgrimage to heaven. Wherever we go.

Wherever the church is. Through the preaching of the gospel. We've been looking at Romans. Since September. And I cannot tell you.

What a privilege. It's been to. Share part of the preaching of this. I've preached through Romans. A number of times. In my past. But. As I've come to it this time.

I hope you felt. As I do. That. God is speaking to us. Afresh. And we've come to see. His adoption. And his power. And his wonder.

And it hasn't been comfortable. And it hasn't necessarily been easy. But because it is Jesus Christ. Who's at the heart of the gospel. I think. One sign.

[11 : 00] That we're grasping it. Is that we want to know more. And to hear more. And to have more of him. And it begins to energize.

And strengthen us. In the face of suffering. It's an amazing kindness. Isn't it? That God has given to us. That his son. And his power. Are available to us.

In this gospel. And I think. It ought to make us. Expectant. And confident. I don't mean. Overconfident. You know.

You probably have people. In your lives. Who are overconfident. And I don't mean that at all. But when we. When we gather together here. To hear God's word. And to celebrate the Lord's supper.

Or when we gather in small groups. Or. When we move. In the fall. Are we expecting. Are we confident. That God is going to act. Well here it is.

[11 : 57] Him who is able to strengthen you. According to my gospel. And the preaching of Jesus Christ. That's the first thing. Secondly. God reveals. By his gospel. So.

The second according. Begins in verse 25. According to the revelation. Of the mystery. That was kept secret. For long ages. Literally. Times eternal.

But has now been disclosed. And made known. Through the prophetic writings. To all nations. You notice the language. Of revealing. Disclosing. And making known.

Again and again and again. Romans has taught us. That unless God reveals himself. To us. We will. We wouldn't have a clue. What he thinks. Or what he was really like.

And what God has done. For us in Jesus Christ. And the gospel of justification. By faith and adoption. Is so counterintuitive. You could never make it up.

[13 : 00] I mean. For God to create a world. When he had no need to do so. To reveal himself. As a holy and righteous judge. Holding us accountable.

And yet. To become one of us. And to allow his own son. To be held accountable. For the evil that's in us. And then to hold out.

To us. His son. Bloody. Bruised. Dying on a cross. Then raised. Royal. And returning. Offering us new life. Fresh start.

Clean record. Offering us the very righteousness. Of Christ. Not by works. Not by what we do. But simply by receiving. With the open hands of faith.

Giving his Holy Spirit. Pouring his Holy Spirit. Directly into our hearts. So that we experience. The love of God. And then calling us. To suffer with Jesus Christ. So that we'll be glorified.

[13 : 54] With him. Would you make up a religion. Like that? It's the wisdom. Of the only wise God. And it was hidden. Before time began.

God's purpose. Before the creation of the world. For the world. And for his son. Has now. Been disclosed. Now. Because the coming of Jesus. Reveals the full wisdom.

Of all that was there. In the Old Testament. That God's plan. Is not just to bless. One nation. Israel. But to bless.

Every person. To open the kingdom of heaven. To every man. Woman. And child. It's wonderful. It's now revealed. Jesus.

Not just the key to life. He's the key to the Old Testament. And since he came. We do not read the Old Testament. The same way. What is there. In shadows. In prophecy. Now shines clearly.

[14 : 51] In the face of Jesus Christ. The son of righteousness. Don't misunderstand me. Friends. That doesn't mean. We know everything. And it doesn't mean.

We know anything. Fully. God does. But it does mean. That we can be confident. And certain. Of whatever he reveals. To us. In his word. And when we hear.

The preaching of the gospel. We recognize. That our works. And our righteousness. Are pathetic. And laughable. As that lovely prayer.

Says. Before we come to communion. We ask God. Not to. Not to look at our righteousness. I can see. Cramner writing that.

And laughing. God holds out. The righteousness of Jesus. To us. To be held by faith. Received by faith. And as we hear the gospel.

[15 : 45] He speaks to us. And reveals to us. Himself. His love. His goodness. And he enters our hearts. By his holy spirit. Enabling us.

To experience. His fatherly love. He strengthens us. By that spirit. In the understanding. That we are children of God. Reconciled. Saved. But I must move on.

So God strengthens us. By the gospel. God reveals himself. By the gospel. And finally. God commands. By the gospel. I hope you didn't mind.

This morning. Reading the full ten commandments. Actually. I don't care if you minded. I thought it was important to do. We have eight o'clock service. Next service is not pushing us. And I think it's important.

From time to time. To read the full commandments. Actually. But if you disagree with me. Or if you have a problem with it. You can talk to Dr. Packer later. Thirdly.

[16 : 42] God commands. You notice that the nature of the gospel. It's very similar to the Old Testament revelation. Verse 26. Halfway through.

According to the command of the eternal God. To bring about the obedience of faith. Now we know that the gospel is not advice.

It's news about what God has done. But it is not like any kind of news. Because it's the revelation of God.

And when God reveals himself to us. It's not to satisfy intellectual curiosity. It's so that we would be humbled. And saved. By bowing before Jesus Christ.

And confessing him. As Lord. And it's part of the very nature. Of God's revelation. To give command. Do you remember. On the Mount of Transfiguration.

[17 : 39] When Jesus was transfigured. A God spoke audibly from heaven. He said. This is my son. Remember what he said next. Listen to him. When Jesus rose from the dead.

All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. Go make disciples. Jesus said. You believe in God. Believe also in me.

It's a command. You see. And then in Acts 16. When you remember the story of the Philippian jailer. When Paul and Silas and the others. Through an earthquake had been rescued.

The Philippian jailer. Says. What must I do to be saved? The answer is the command. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. And you'll be saved. You see.

Unbelief. Is not primarily an intellectual or academic issue. At root. It's a spiritual issue. Disobedience. And rebellion. Now.

[18 : 40] I don't know if you've been with us since the beginning of Romans. But you remember back in chapter 1. That despite our rosy view of ourselves. The apostle says. The truth is. The fact is.

That we suppress. The truth. About God. He says. I quote. 25. We exchanged. The truth.

About God. For. The lie. And worshipped. And served the creature. Rather than the creator. Who is blessed forever. The lie.

Is the same lie. That Satan told. Adam and Eve. In the garden. You can't really trust God. He doesn't have your best interest at heart. Trust yourself. I mean. You're in a much better position.

To judge what's right for you. Go ahead. Express yourself. You're not going to die. The moment we turn away from the glory of God. Our spiritual sight fails us.

[19 : 36] And our hearts grow narrow and cold. And we become ashamed. And self-protective. It's what the American comedian Stephen Colbert calls truthiness.

A truthiness is believing something to be true because you want it to be true despite all the facts. That's our approach to spiritual things. In chapter 2 verse 8 of Romans Paul says those who reject God he describes them as those who do not obey the truth.

And in chapter 10 Christians are those who obey the gospel. That's what the obedience of faith is. When we hear the gospel preached God says this is my son.

Believe in him. He commands us to believe in his son. And as we place our faith and trust in Jesus Christ we are obeying his commandment. Now I wish I had time to go into this a little more.

I know you're a very patient congregation. And more of our trainee preachers preach at this congregation than any other. And so there's more grace extended from you as a congregation to the younger preachers who tend to go longer.

[20 : 51] But let me ask your indulgence. I'll go just a minute or two longer on this. I just want to point out to you how this story of God, this gospel narrative which we are now part of is so very different than the West Coast narrative.

The Vancouver narrative. In fact I'd have to say that the gospel narrative challenges the happy West Coast belief that we are all good people. That we live in the best city, in the best country in the world.

That we're tolerant, compassionate, inclusive and carbon aware. That there's more goodness than bad. And each of us has a right to get out there and express ourselves and be applauded.

And it is very similar to the narrative that the Norwegians have. They have actually a higher standard of living than we do.

And after the shocking shootings of more than a week ago the Norwegian Prime Minister has reiterated Norwegian's commitments to tolerance, diversity and inclusivity.

[22 : 00] And what was the first thing the shooter's lawyer said when he appeared before the media? Remember? He is clearly insane, he said. He's different.

He's not like us. He is evil. We are good. He is evil. Evil is not here in us. It's out there in him. If you think about it just for a moment the problem is that's exactly the same narrative the shooter believes.

Evil is not in me. It's out there. And I don't think that reaction of the lawyer is much different than the first reactions to our recent riots in downtown Vancouver.

Do you remember? The very first blame was a small criminal element of professional anarchists who probably came from across the border.

But those who've been charged in the end they're all honour students athletes from good homes. See the narrative of God says to us there's only one human being who's righteous the man Jesus Christ.

[23 : 13] And everything God is doing to bring about a new creation is built on him. We don't have any power to remake ourselves to create new people out of ourselves. There's one person who's died in our place.

There's one person who's risen. There's one person who's been appointed Lord. There's only one person to whom all of creation will bend the knee the man Christ Jesus. And that is why this gospel is for all nations.

All nations. The gospel is not just for Christians. It's for all nations. For atheists, for Hindus, for Buddhists for Muslims, for every man, woman and child.

That is why Paul wrote his letter. He so articulates the gospel that the church in Rome will come to partner with him in spreading the gospel to Spain.

He wants them to be so gripped by the grace of God in the gospel that they will become a launching site for the mission to the West. Not distracted by all sorts of things. But working together in the name of Jesus.

[24 : 19] I finish with this. We move buildings in a few weeks as a congregation. You'll hear more about that and there's some Q&A; forms at the door.

Will God continue to strengthen us, to reveal himself to us and to guide us and command us? It depends largely upon the place Jesus Christ and his gospel has in our thinking and in our praying and in our planning and in our imagining.

These last words of Romans says that God strengthens us in the gospel, that he reveals himself in the gospel, that he commands us in the gospel. What is it that's going to keep us to the end?

What is it that may change St. John's into a launch site for mission? It's the gospel. It's not our power and our ability.

It's the power of God in the gospel. It's not our wisdom or experience. It's the wisdom of the eternal God in the gospel. Has God been with us till now?

[25 : 32] Now, there's a presumption to say that he'll continue with us. I don't believe so if these words are true. Because in the end, it's Jesus himself who we depend on to bring glory to God.

Glory to God through Jesus Christ forever. And his grace is not just grace for yesterday or grace for today. It's his grace forever.

Because through Jesus Christ, he is our father, not just for this life, but through death and for eternity. Because nothing can separate us from God's love in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Let's just bow our heads and pray for a moment. we bow before you.

Our Lord and God, you are above all praise. And we give you thanks for your kindness to us in so many ways.

[26 : 41] and we pray that your Holy Spirit would be a work in our hearts, pouring your love there, enabling us to understand this different, strange narrative story that we belong to.

And enabling us to identify more closely with the Lord Jesus Christ. And we pray that whatever we do and wherever we are, that you would strengthen us and reveal yourself to us and direct us to bring glory to you through Jesus Christ, we pray.

Amen.