

God Has a Gospel

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- [0 : 00] Let's pray together as we stand. Father, we have just heard in your word that you have a gospel to proclaim.
- And that you have proclaimed that gospel. And in the creed we just confessed that we believe in the Holy Spirit. And we ask that by your Holy Spirit you would now proclaim your gospel.
- And will you open our hearts to hear your good news. And will you give us faith to trust you. And to trust your Son Jesus Christ our Lord in whose name we pray.
- Amen. Well good morning everyone. We are this morning beginning a series in Paul's letter to the Romans.
- And I have to confess that as I have prepared for the series. And as I've prepared for this morning.
- [1 : 10] There's been a kind of mixture of real excitement and anticipation on the one hand.
- And on the other hand some fear and trepidation. And the reason is there is something about the book of Romans.
- That is just absolutely magnificent. Full of majesty. Glorious and powerful. And when you stand before this book.
- And as you read it. And as you begin to consider what it says to us. At some point you just kind of stop speaking before it.
- And you find yourself in a kind of breathless wonder. In my mind it's kind of like the first time you ever see the Grand Canyon. I don't know if you've ever seen the Grand Canyon in person.
- [2 : 13] But you know all your life you grow up. You hear about the. You know everybody talks about the Grand Canyon. About how wonderful it is. And if you're like me you hear people talk about it.
- And you know I never said this out loud. But in your mind you're kind of thinking. It kind of sounds like a hole in the ground. You know it kind of sounds like a big ditch.
- But then you see it for the first time. I don't know if you remember the first time you saw it. If you have. You see it for the first time. And the Grand Canyon just opens up before you.
- And all of a sudden you realize why they call it Grand. And you realize that you struggle to find words to quite describe it. The phrase you know the word beautiful doesn't quite cut it.
- It's not so much that it's beautiful. It's more you want to say something more like it. It displays beauty itself. It's just awe inspiring. And because you don't have quite words to describe it.
- [3 : 14] You just you shut your mouth. And you realize. Calling it a hole in the ground. And a ditch is just a blasphemy. It's just a blasphemy.
- Now that's what Romans is like. You come to it. And there's just something powerful about this book. There's something majestic about this book. And if you look down through the years and history of the last 2,000 years since it was written.

You can just see a trail of power following this book. This letter. You can see people like St. Augustine.

Martin Luther. John Wesley. I wish we had time to tell those stories. But each of these men are architects of Western civilization.

And in each case. They would say that before Romans broke over their lives. They were just absolutely nothing. But after they encountered Romans.

[4 : 20] There was a momentous shift that happened in their lives. This is a book that has changed the lives of the architects of world history.

There's something about this book. And the thing is. It's not just that. It's not just that this book has changed the lives of great men and women.

The thing that really gets my attention is that it has changed the lives of countless millions of ordinary people. Whose names we will never hear.

Millions and millions and millions of ordinary folks. Not just the great people. But ordinary folks have been transformed by an encounter with this text. There is something powerful about the book of Romans.

And I want to know why. So two questions this morning. As we start. First of all. Very simply. What accounts for the power of this letter?

[5 : 22] Why is Romans so powerful? And the second question. Is for us. How is it going to change us as we begin to read it? Okay.

So first of all. Why is Romans so powerful? The first clue is in verse one. So it's the second reading. Verse one. You can look at it. Either in the. In the Bibles. Or in the. In the service sheet.

It reads. Paul. A servant of Christ Jesus. Called to be an apostle. And set apart for the gospel of God. Now I want you to focus in on that last phrase there.

The gospel. Of God. Because this is the first clue. That's the first clue. Of why it is that Romans is so powerful. The letter to the Romans. Is all about.

God's gospel. God's gospel. God's gospel. God's gospel. God's gospel. God's gospel. God's gospel. Now I realize. The word gospel is a pretty churchy word. It just means good news. It means a proclamation.

[6 : 22] Of news. That should cause our hearts to rejoice. So in the ancient world. When war was over. Somebody would run into the middle of town.

And proclaim a gospel. They would run into the middle of town. And they would say. Peace. War is over. Whatever. And people would rejoice. And there would be a big party.

And those sorts of things. Romans. Romans. Is all about. Good news. A proclamation of good news. But it's of God.

Which is very important. It's good news. That originates. Not. In us. Not in humanity. It originates. It originates. In God.

And God. Addresses us. Through this gospel. It's very important. That we get this. The message of Romans. Is. Doesn't originate. In the mind. And the brilliance.

[7 : 15] Of a guy called. Paul of Tarsus. It originates. From God. And it is addressed. To us. Now I. I emphasize that.

Partially because. This is something. That is absolutely. Critical. To anyone. Whose life. Has actually been transformed. By the book of Romans. I mentioned.

Augustine. Martin Luther. John Wesley. If. We had time to go back. And tell all their stories. You would see. A similar theme. In all three of them. All three of them.

Before they encountered. The book of Romans. Were self-improvement junkies. You read. The biography. Of St. Augustine. And. He was desperate.

He. He. Went to all. The main philosophies. Of his day. Kind of tasted them out. For a little while. Trying to make sense. Of the world around him. And. And particularly. Trying to bring order.

[8 : 12] To his own soul. To his own life. And the similar thing. Happened. Martin Luther. And. John Wesley. Both of them. exerted.

Just a. Herculean. Herculean. Effort. In. Religious moralism. Trying to. Trying to. Trying to. Become good people. They. They exerted. An enormous amount.

Of effort. Pursuing that. But all three of them. Pursuing. These different philosophies. Pursuing. Goodness. Through moral effort. All three of them.

Came to a similar conclusion. And the similar conclusion. That all three of them. Came to. Is that. They found something. Very very weak. In these. Human.

Self-improvement. Strategies. There was just something. Really weak about them. They didn't have any real. Transformative. Power. And what all of them.

[9 : 06] Realized. Is that. The problems. They needed. To resolve. Were deeper. Than their own capacity. To address them. And that's why.

In each of their lives. They increasingly. Came to realize. That they needed. Something more. Than just another. Clever. Life. Improvement. Philosophy. They needed. Something better. Than just.

You know. Some. Brilliant. Strategy. For. Behaving. Well. They needed. They needed. Something.

That originated. Not within. The sphere. Of humanity. They needed. Something. That originated. Outside. Themselves. They needed. Something. They needed. A gospel. That came.

From somebody. Stronger. Than they were. With greater. Resources. Than they had. They needed. A gospel. From God. God. Now. This is one of the themes.

[9 : 59] That comes up in the Old Testament. Look at verse 2. Paul says. The gospel of God. Which God promised. Beforehand. Through his prophets.

In the Holy Scriptures. Now. Paul's talking about the Old Testament there. And one of the themes. That comes up. Through the Old Testament. Is. That.

Humanity's problems. Are deeper. Than our own capacity. To address them. And through the prophets. Written down. In the pages. Of the Old Testament.

God made a promise. And it is a remarkable promise. And it's a promise. That we must always keep. Right before our faces. And the promise is. That God. Is going to step in.

To solve. What we cannot solve. By our own ability. The promise. The promise of the Old Testament. Is that God himself. Is one day. Is going to step.

[10 : 54] Into human history. And free. Humanity. From all the things. That we cannot. Free ourselves from. And so right here. As.

Paul begins. His letter to the Romans. He wants us to see. And he wants the Romans. To see. That God said. God. You know. Paul saying. God used the Old Testament. To promise.

That one day. He would show up. And do for you. What you cannot do. For yourself. And now. Romans. St. John's. Through this letter. God is saying.

It has all been fulfilled. I've kept my promise. Now is the time. When I am stepping in. To do for you. What you could never do. For yourself. Now.

Do you know why. The book of Romans. Is so powerful. The reason. The book of Romans. Is so powerful. Is that it is not. Just another. In a long list. Of human self-improvement projects.

[11 : 52] It is God's plan. From outside us. To address. Our deepest. Deepest. Problems. Our deepest. Captivity. And that's why. Augustine. And Martin Luther.

And John Wesley. And countless. Millions. Of other. Ordinary people. Have found. Within the pages. Of this book. Such. Untold. Power. Power. And the power.

Comes because. God speaks. Through this book. And when God speaks. Things happen. One of the temptations.

For us. As we begin. Looking at this book. This letter. One of the temptations. Is for us. To relate to this book. Just like we. Typically relate. To other books. Quite often.

Appropriately. We read a book. And we kind of. You know. We chew on the fat. And we spit out the bones. We. We sift through it. And we pluck out bits. That we don't like. We throw them away. And we.

[12 : 50] Retain the bits. That. We kind of agree with. And we enjoy. And things like that. And typically. For most books. That's exactly the right thing to do. If we do that.

With this book. With this letter. As we read it together. We will rob ourselves. Of its power. For. This is not. Paul's.

Gospel. This is not. Made up from. By humans. This is God's gospel. And through it. He will speak to us.

And therefore. Our task. As we come to it. Is to allow God. To speak to us. And one of the ways. You'll know. That you're allowing God. To speak into your life.

Through the pages of this book. Is that. It's going to say things. That you don't expect it to say. Some of.

[13 : 43] Some of us here. Have read Romans. A thousand times. And some of us here. Have never read it at all. But it doesn't matter. This book.

And you need to expect this. This book. Is going to surprise you. This letter. Is going. To alarm you. This book. Is going to offend you. At times. And.

Quite often. It will be right at the moment. Where it surprises. Alarms. And offends you. That. That will be the moment. Where God is most. Particularly. Speaking. Right into your life. So.

The task. For us. Friends. Is to be a people. Who listen. And who listen. Humbly. Okay. The first reason. Why. The book of Romans. Is so remarkably powerful. Is that it is.

It is God's address. To us. In it. We will hear the gospel. God's proclamation. Of freedom. To us. But the second reason. Is.

[14 : 42] That it is all about his son. Look at verse three. Verse three. He's continuing to talk about the gospel. And he says. The gospel of God. 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. All right. This. This letter. Was originally written. To the church. That met in the city of Rome. And within the church.

At Rome. There were. There were two key groups. There were. Those of Jewish descent. And there were those. Of Gentile descent. The Gentile Romans. Both of those groups.

Were absolutely floored. When those verses. Were read out. Let me tell you why. First of all. The Jewish. Group.

- [15 : 42] The Jews. Of course. Had been reading the Old Testament. All their lives. And the Jews. Were expecting. Based on their reading. Of the Old Testament. That one day. God would send them.
- A king. A descendant. Of David. The Messiah. In Greek. The word is Christ. That God would send. A Messiah. A Christ. A king. Who would.
- Save the Jewish people. From their enemies. And in particular. Because they were. Under Roman tyranny. They expected. This king. To defeat Rome. And in addition.
- To that. They were also. Expecting that one day. Perhaps far beyond. The coming of the Messiah. One day. Far in the future. God. Would.
- Break the power. Of evil. Over the world. And. The key way. You would know. That God. Had broken the power. Of evil. Over this world. Is. He was going to. Reverse death. And so.
- [16 : 36] In Jewish expectation. They were expecting. That one day. They would see. The resurrection. Of the dead. They would see. Dead people. Back to life. And restored. To perfect health.
- And they knew. That when that day came. That would be the sign. That evil. And the power of evil. Had been overturned. And broken. Now you can see. What Paul's saying here.
- In verses three and four. Paul is saying. Friends. Both of those events. Have happened. And they happened. At the same time. Jesus is the descendant.
- Of David. He's the Jewish Messiah. He is the Christ. But Paul's saying. He's. He's done something. Far more. Far. Far more.
- Than just liberate you. From Rome. He's died. And then he's risen. Again. Which means. He has defeated death. He has defeated evil. Now that announcement.
- [17 : 32] Would have just. Floored the Jews. But it also. Floored the Romans. Why did it. Floor the Romans. Look at.
- The end of verse four. You see that little phrase. Jesus Christ. Our Lord. That would have. Floored the Romans. Why would that little phrase. Have floored them. It's because.
- Paul's saying. Jesus. And not Caesar. Is now running the world. Let me explain that. The basic creed. Within. The Roman Empire.
- Was. That. Caesar. Is Lord. Every Roman. Was expected. To be able to confess. Caesar. Is. Lord. And what they meant by that.
- Was. That. It was a confession. That. They recognized. Caesar's. Authority. Over the entire world. And so.
- [18 : 26] What Paul is saying. Is terribly seditious. He's saying. That the moment. Jesus. Rose from the dead. Jesus proved. That now.
- He. Is the final authority. Over everything. Paul's saying. Friends. You think. That the buck stops. With Caesar. You're wrong. The buck stops.
- With Jesus. He is the Jewish. Messiah. And he is the world's. True Lord. And every knee. Even Caesar's knee. Will bow before him. But it even.
- I mean. It even gets better. Um. This letter. Was written. Probably. Right at the beginning. Of Nero's reign. And you think about it.
- The Romans. Do all. About. Powerful. Lords. They knew all about them. And they knew. The pattern. That just repeated. Again and again. They knew. That one Caesar.
- [19 : 22] After another. Gained power. By corruption. And cruelty. And then. Once they had power. Used their power. To lord it. Over their subjects. But the remarkable thing.

Is that Jesus. Here is the opposite. Jesus. Became the Lord. Of all. Not by. Not by corruption. And cruelty. Not by becoming.

Complicit. With evil. He became the Lord. Over all. By triumphing. Over evil. In his resurrection. And now. That he has. All power. That there is.

In the universe. He is using it. Not to lord it. Over his subjects. But for their benefit. To save them. From all the things. That they couldn't. Save themselves from.

Okay. Are you beginning. To be. Are you beginning. To see. Why it is. That this book. Is so. Unimaginably. Powerful. It's powerful.

[20 : 23] Because. Because Jesus. Is powerful. It's powerful. Because. Jesus. Is the Lord. Of all. And. And this.

Letter. This letter. Is a. Sector. In his hand. It is a. Tool. In his hand. That he uses. As the Lord. Of all. To come. And to snap.

The chains. That hold us. He comes. And he breaks. The power. Using this text. He breaks. The power. Of our sin. And our guilt. And our rebellion.

And our hostility. Towards other people. And ultimately. He uses it. To break the power. Of death. Over our lives. He uses it. To set us free. That's what he was doing. At the church.

In Rome. That's what he has been doing. All through history. And that is what he wants to do. In this church. Now it's going to take.

[21 : 17] The entire book of Romans. To explain what all that means. But. The key thing. Is for us to see right now. That the power. In this book. Is ultimately. The power. Wielded.

By the Lord of all. Jesus Christ. Risen from the dead. Okay. So. The first question is. Why is Romans so powerful? And the answer is. That it is a gospel. From God.

About his son. The second question then. How is it going to change us? And it's going to change us. In all sorts of ways. But. I want to point out three things.

As we read through this book. We're going to see. First of all. The relevance. Of the gospel. The second thing we're going to see. Is that God. Is going to transform us through it.

And the third thing. Is we're going to gain. A new motivation. Relevance. Transformation. Motivation. First of all. Relevance. You need to know.

[22 : 12] That it takes courage. To read this book. The reason I say. It takes courage. To read this book. Is that. This is a book that. It's not so much.

That we read it. It's more like. It reads us. What do I mean by that? Let me change the. The metaphor.

God. God uses. The book of Romans. The book of Romans. Like a master doctor. A master physician. To diagnose us. And one of the things he's going to do.

Is he's going to come to each of us. And he is going to cut us open. He's going to cut us open. And he is going to peer inside us. And as he peers inside us.

He's going to make us aware. Of deep. Seated diseases. That we had no idea we had. And what we're going to discover. Is that the deep.

[23 : 08] Diseases. That we didn't know we had. Are actually of greater danger to us. Than we ever dreamed. And it takes courage. To be diagnosed. But at the same time.

God. Like a master physician. Is going to come. And he's going to. He's going to give us a prescription. And when you're sick. And you go to the doctor. Particularly when you're really sick. And you go to the doctor.

And it gives you a prescription. That prescription. Is the most relevant thing. In your life. Particularly when you're in pain. And that's what Romans. Is going to be to us.

We're going to see. That it is the most relevant text. We've ever read. Because it diagnoses us. And it prescribes what we need. The second thing is.

That Jesus is going to use this book. To transform you. Look at verse five. Very briefly. Paul says that the. The goal of his ministry. Is to bring about.

[24 : 05] In a very interesting phrase. The obedience of faith. Now. We were just talking about. How the gospel. Is fundamentally. The fact that Jesus Christ.

Is Lord over all. And the reason. Paul is telling us. That Jesus Christ. Is Lord over all. Is for. Is to provoke us. Is to respond. And to respond.

By saying. By looking at Jesus. The risen Lord over all. And saying. Okay. Okay.

Jesus. I'm placing my faith in you. You are the Lord of all. I'm not. I'm putting my faith in you. I am accepting you. As the Lord.

I am trusting you. As the Lord of all. I acknowledge that you. Are the Lord over all. And. I renounce. All autonomy. That I have held on to.

[25 : 00] Over my life. There is no more autonomy. I give myself. In complete. Allegiance. To you. And as that happens.

As Jesus. Brings us. To our knees. Before him. At that very same moment. Through the spirit. Of holiness. Again. Verse four. Through the spirit.

Of holiness. He is going to. Erupt. Into our life. And he is going to. First of all. Liberate us. From all the things. That hold us captive. And condemn us. And at the same time.

He is going to be. Reshaping us. So that we resemble him. More and more. Jesus. As we hear the gospel. Is going to bring us. To our knees. And through the spirit. Of holiness.

The Holy Spirit himself. He is going to make us. Resemble him. He is going to transform you. So get ready for that. And the last thing is.

[25 : 58] Romans is going to give us. A new motivation. In verse five. Paul says. That everything he does. Is that Jesus name. Might be glorified. And honored. Among all nations.

And as we walk through Romans. And as we see. Jesus presented before us. You are going to see his power. You are going to see his lordship. You are going to see his power. To set people free.

And in particular. To set you free. It is going to change you. And it is going to change you. At the level of your desires. It is going to change. What you want. What you are going to begin to desire.

Is that Jesus Christ. Would be honored. In your life. You are going to want Jesus. To be honored. In your life. You are going to want Jesus. To be honored. In your family's life.

You are going to want Jesus. To be honored. In your friends life. Who have no knowledge. About Jesus at all. You are going to begin. To want Jesus. To be honored. In this city.

[26 : 57] And the reason is. You will see what Jesus. Has done in you. And you will want Jesus. To do that. In everybody else. This book. Is going to give you. A new motivation.

For discipleship. And it is going to give you. A new motivation. For evangelism. So get ready for that. Friends.

I said at the beginning. That there is just something. Majestic about this. About this wonderful letter. And the real majesty. The thing that makes us.

You know. Stand in front of this text. Like we are standing. In front of the Grand Canyon. The real majesty of it. Is the majesty of Jesus himself. That is the reason.

It has changed so many people's lives. And so the call. To you. To me. This morning. Is for us. To take our place. In the line.

[27 : 50] Of millions of people. Who have read this book. And been utterly transformed. Through it. It is God's word to us. And therefore. We are going to read it humbly. And it is God's word.

About his son. Who is Lord over all. And therefore. We will read it. Ready to bow the knee. In faith. And give our allegiance to him. And as we do that.

Friends. It is going to transform. Let's pray. Father.

We thank you so much. That you have proclaimed. A gospel. Over this world. We thank you. That you have not let us. And left us. Simply to our own devices.

And resources. But you have broken in. And proclaimed. That there is good news. And you have showed us. The good news. In the face of Jesus Christ. Grant us to see him.

[28 : 46] As we read this text. And be transformed. By the spirit of holiness. Amen.