

God Has a Gospel

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- [0 : 0 0] Bow our heads and pray. Father, every time we turn to your word, we are dealing with life and death issues.
- We pray again this morning that you would show us your glory, that you would make us a united and missionary people, humbled under your word, ready for the obedience of faith.
- And we pray this for the sake of the great name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. Please sit. Well, I begin a graduated return to work this week, and it is slow and gradual.
- And I've written a short letter, should you struggle with insomnia, explaining something of what's going on, and I think you can get it at the back door on the way out as you go.
- And before I begin in God's word, I just want to say thank you to you as a congregation, and particularly to the leaders, to the staff and the trustees, for your care and support over this last year, and for carrying the extra weight.
- [1 : 1 6] And I want to say thank you too to my two boys and to Bron. I was going to say something smushy, but I just publicly want to say thank you to them.
- So now let's turn to the Book of Romans. Today, for the next months, we begin a series and work our way through the Book of Romans.
- And I have been very excited to this. Does that matter? Let me use this one, mate.
- Just amuse yourselves for a while. There you go. I thought it was great to interview with our new worker and to give her the first test, the falling microphone.
- I thought that was terrific. Romans. Well now, this has been my own meditation over the last year, the Book of Romans. And you know that it is the biggest of the letters that the Apostle Paul wrote with the biggest thoughts about God's grace, because the grace and the glory of God are so big.
- [2 : 5 0] It's a masterpiece, really. And one of the commentators who's written thousands of pages on Romans says at the beginning, anyone who claims to understand it is mistaken, which I find just a little bit daunting, but we're going to go on anyway.
- Now, there are a number of ways we could come into the Book of Romans together. We could come in in Chapter 7, where the Apostle Paul says, and he asks that question of anguish, wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from this body of death?
- And I could quite easily talk to you for quite a long time on that topic. Or we could come in in Chapter 12, where Paul says, love one another, outdo one another in showing honour, keep your spiritual fervour.
- It's literally, keep your spiritual life at the boiling point. But the Christian life of transformation, frankly, God doesn't like cool Christians.
- And the Book of Romans raises our spiritual temperature. But probably the best way into Romans is that little text in Chapter 11, where the Apostle Paul says, oh, the depth and the riches and the wisdom and knowledge of God, how unsearchable his judgments and his paths beyond finding out.

[4 : 15] If this is your first time looking at the Book of Romans, I think it's good for you to have fair warning. It can be quite disorienting. Because it is so radically God-centred.

And it constantly challenges what we think is important to what we think is even relevant. And as it puts God at the centre, it means I have to move over. And today we're going to look at the first seven verses.

And I notice it's printed in the bulletin, but it would be great if you would open your Bible because the translation in the RSV is just a little better than the one that we used there.

So it's on page 142 near the back. Romans Chapter 1.

We're just going to look at the first seven verses. And I've called this God has a Gospel because the whole letter is really a magisterial exposition of the Gospel.

[5 : 25] But before he even says, Dear Romans, hi, he gives us seven verses about the Gospel. The Gospel is the first word in Romans.

And we want to ask three things about this passage. Where does the Gospel come from? What's it about? And what's the point? So firstly, where does this Gospel come from?

What's the source of the Gospel? And verse 1, Paul says that he is set apart for the Gospel of God. It is God's Gospel.

It's not a human invention. It belongs to God. If we got all the most noble souls who've ever lived, all the greatest spiritual teachers, the most brilliant intellects, and we gave them 10 million years to come up with a Gospel, they would never come close to the Gospel of God.

It is God's. He made it up, and therefore he must reveal it, or else we cannot know it, which is both humbling and hopeful. And this word Gospel comes from the Old Testament.

[6 : 34] Jesus picked it up in his own ministry. It is a message. It's an announcement. And it comes from deep back in the Old Testament where it announces that God is going to come and dwell with his people and fulfil his promises.

Listen to these words that we read every year around Christmas time. Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of the Gospel.

Lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of the Gospel. Lift it up. Fear not. Say to the cities of Judah, this is from Isaiah.

Behold your God. Behold the Lord God comes with might. His arm rules for him. His reward is with him and his recompense before him.

He will feed his flock like a shepherd. He will gather the lambs in his arms. He'll carry them in his bosom and gently lead those that are with young.

[7 : 36] That's the Gospel in the Old Testament. It's the announcement of the day when God will come and he will bind up the brokenhearted. He will give liberty to the captive and where we will return to him and he will return to us and everlasting joy will be in our hearts and on our heads.

Because God has a Gospel. And this is the way of God with us. He announces what he will do and then he does it. It's very important. The Christian Gospel is not a set of moral rules.

It's not a set of mystical experiences. It is the announcement of what God has done and what he will do. And we'll see this in two weeks' time when we come to 116.

That the Gospel is a dynamic power in the world because it has the power of God to save. So I hope you pray when you come to church and when you go to your small groups, when you look at the book of Romans, we should pray that God would give us a higher and a deeper expectation that his power is going to be at work among us.

But it's one thing to say that God has a Gospel. The question is how do we know it's God's? And that's the point of verse 2. The Gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures.

[8 : 57] Christianity is not a new religion. It's not that God got sick and tired of Israel and one day he got up and got a few angels around himself in heaven.

He said, look, this thing with the people of Israel, it's just not working. They've made a bit of a mess. Anyone got any better ideas for a plan B?

Now, Paul says, all the actions and all the words of God in the Old Testament are promise of Jesus Christ and the Gospel.

And that means, of course, the Old Testament is not complete without the New Testament and the New Testament is not complete without the Old. It means that the Old Testament is not just Jewish scriptures.

It's part of the Christian scriptures because the message of the Old Testament is God promising what he's going to do through Jesus Christ. This is very important. Do you know, there are more than 50 direct quotations of the Old Testament just in the book of Romans and dozens and dozens and dozens of allusions.

[10 : 11] When the Apostle Paul quotes an Old Testament text, it's not like he's trying to find a sort of a quote to make himself look smart, a good Shakespeare quote with a Latin ending.

He's trying to explain what Jesus means. And I know we are impatient people and we like our food fast and we like our spiritual food even faster. But when it comes to an Old Testament quote in a New Testament book, what we need to do is actually look at the quote and have a look at its context in the Old Testament and see what it says about Christ.

This year, one of the strange habits I've developed is reading crime fiction, detective novels.

This is a confession. And I've discovered there are other people in the congregation who do as well and we swap books. But just imagine I bought a new crime, a crime novel and I tore it in half and I gave one half to my friend, I would say the second half, and I kept the first half for myself.

Well, that is a little bit like Christians reading just one Testament. If you just read the Old Testament, you've really got no idea who done it. And if you just read the New Testament, you don't understand what it means.

[11 : 31] And Paul is giving us here the highest possible view of the Bible. He says, God made his promises through his prophets in the holy writings.

If you take up your Bible and mine has a spine cover and you look at the spine, it should have Holy Bible on it. If you've got a... Mine's been duct taped.

But inside, the Holy Bible. Do you know why it's called the Holy Bible? It's because these words are God's words written.

God spoke through his holy prophets in the Holy Scriptures. And this is the source of the gospel, God himself. Secondly, what's the content of the gospel?

What's the core? What's it all about? What's the big deal? Verse 3, The gospel concerning his son. All the substance and core of the gospel are fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

[12 : 40] Gospel is not a vague message to inspire us when we feel low. We mustn't confuse it with the spiritual messages our culture so loves.

One I saw the other day, and some of you have seen this too, says, You are the universe choosing its future. I'm not even sure what that means, but I want to tell you that's not the gospel.

The gospel is the person of Jesus Christ. And it's so important to Paul that he changes the subject. The subject goes from being God, the Father, to God, the Son, from verses 3 to 6.

And he tells us that God's gospel is a two-point gospel. There are two parallel things about Jesus Christ, both of which show us the depth of God's love for us.

And incidentally, it's why he calls the Romans beloved in verse 7. The first thing about Jesus in verse 3 is that he was descended from David according to the flesh.

[13 : 44] Now David is the royal figure in the Old Testament to whom God promised the Messiah's Son, the King who would come with rule and justice and equity and peace that we sang about in the first hymn.

And on that day, the land would drip with honey and the land, righteousness, would flow like a river. And his kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom and he will reign forever.

But the word descended translates two words and they're not the usual word for being born because Jesus' birth was highly unusual.

Literally, it reads, Jesus became seed of David. He became descended of David. In other words, there was a change of existence for Jesus.

When he was born of Mary, when he was incarnate in Mary, he didn't start his existence then. He existed for all eternity. This is the incarnation.

[14 : 46] And he was descended from David. He became descended from David according to the flesh, according to the soft tissue of our bodies. That's the first point. God's fulfilling his promise of the Messiah.

The second point in verse 4 about Jesus is that he was designated Son of God in power according to the spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead.

This is a highly compressed statement. On the day of the resurrection, Jesus became the Son of God in power.

He was always the Son of God, but when he came and was born to Mary, he gave away what was rightfully his and he became the Son of God in weakness, ready to die, ready to suffer.

But when God raised him from the dead, he designated or he appointed him or he crowned him Son of God with power. It's a change of status for Jesus from the Son of God of weakness to the Son of God in power.

[15 : 58] In other words, the day of resurrection is the day of the enthronement of Jesus Christ and on that day, God gave to Jesus his own name, the name of Lord, so that now, from the day of resurrection until the end of history, Jesus Christ is Lord of all and every living creature should bow and confess him Lord to the glory of God.

Now, you may be asking in your mind, how? How does the resurrection of Jesus from the dead actually make him Lord?

How is this the turning point and heart of the gospel? I mean, if you think about it, the Greeks in those days did not want bodily resurrection. When you died, you went to the shadowy place of the underworld and to come back into this body of death was nasty.

No Greeks wanted to do that. And the Jewish hope was not of one man being raised, but was when the world ends and God brings Messiah, there will be a general resurrection of the righteous, of all God's people at once.

The amazing thing is that what has happened in Jesus is that God has brought that future day of resurrection, he's brought it back into the present.

[17 : 21] The last day of history, the end of all things is present in Jesus Christ and in that resurrection, God decisively demonstrated power over death in the one man, Jesus Christ.

That's why it's such big news. And I made a discovery this week. In verse 4, the word dead says by his resurrection from the dead.

The word dead is plural. It literally reads by his resurrection out from among the dead ones, out from among the dead bodies.

In other words, there is one man, Jesus, who has been raised from out from among all the dead. And that means that God has chosen to break open the door of death and to bring the new day of resurrection in one resurrection of Jesus Christ, which guarantees the resurrection of those other bodies.

Because the resurrection of Jesus from the dead ones guarantees the resurrection for the dead ones. this is where God confronts the reign of death and sin.

[18 : 35] And he overthrows it in Jesus by his grace and power. That's why the resurrection is the dawn of new life and new hope. It's the coming of the spirit and righteousness.

And brothers and sisters, if you're honest with yourself, this is our deepest longing. It's life. Life. Capital L. The other day I was in a store and there were two people either side of me who were talking about America's Got Talent and this 10-year-old girl who's got a heavenly voice.

Her name is Jackie Ivanko or something. And one of the people said, you know, for the two minutes before I die, I would just love to hear her voice.

It just makes me feel so much like going to heaven or something like that. And it only occurred to me an hour later to say something, which is when the best ideas usually occur to you.

But when I'm dying, I want to hear someone read to me Romans 1.4, that Jesus Christ has been designated Son of God in power by his resurrection from out of the dead ones.

[19 : 46] And I think it explains why Paul says this happened according to the spirit of holiness. You ever notice that? He doesn't say Holy Spirit.

He says spirit of holiness. And the reason is because death is a spiritually filthy thing. Death came into the world through Satan's lies and through sin.

And sin reigned through death. And when Jesus was here on earth in his ministry and he cast out demons, they're usually called unclean demons. And it's why the Bible absolutely forbids believers to have anything to do with trying to contact the dead with riddle boards and seances and witchcraft and occult practices.

But the bodily resurrection of Jesus was not a spiritually dirty thing. It was according to the spirit of holiness. The resurrection of Jesus was the purest, cleanest, holiest thing that's ever happened in our world.

And it brings the power of cleansing in it. It breaks the power of death and sin. And it means that Satan and death are now defeated.

[21 : 04] And the underworld has to give up its dead because there is a new rule and a new ruler even Jesus Christ our Lord. So when we come to chapter 7 and Paul asks that question that we should be asking who can deliver us from this body of death we already know the answer.

In the resurrection of Jesus Christ from out of the dead ones God has fulfilled his promise to reverse the curse of death and one day he will finally swallow death up by life and our dry bones will live again.

That's why the gospel isn't just a dry doctrinal teaching. The gospel is announcing something that's actually happened. Something which profoundly affects every single one of us.

The gospel says there is a new Lord. It's not sin it's not the difficult things it's not Satan they've been dethroned. Jesus Christ who's seated at the right hand of God in power and glory he's done what no amount of money could do and no amount of our ethical goodness could do he's opened the door of the kingdom of heaven to share his glory with us forever to bring us into himself forever so that we will live in him and he in us and that's why he finishes verse 4 Jesus Christ our Lord that's the gospel.

And thirdly and very briefly what's the goal of the gospel? Well I can only just read the next two verses and make a couple of comments. Verse 5 Through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name that is Jesus name among all the nations including yourselves who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.

[23 : 03] The gospel comes from God it's centered on the person of Jesus Christ and now you know who it's for? For every living person. If Jesus Christ is the son Messiah promised by God in the Old Testament if he really has died for our sins and been raised and appointed Lord of all things the whole world must be called urgently to the obedience of faith.

God that's what we're doing here. Not just for their sake but for the glory of his name.

The gospel is not the offer of a different religious option. It's a command. It's a summons from our creator God to bow to our Lord Jesus Christ to see him as the most beautiful the greatest treasure to place our faith in him and to have new life and new hope.

I think the current pope is right about this and I'm sure he'll be greatly relieved to hear me say that. He's currently in England and his message is this that our western culture has and particularly the political institutions want to radically privatize faith.

They want to push believers into a place of privacy. He said this week quote there are some who now seek to exclude religious belief from public discourse or privatize it even to paint it as a threat to equality and liberty.

[24 : 41] But you see if Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead if God has appointed him Lord of life and death you can't have a private Christian faith. This declaration can't be a private thing.

If all authority in heaven and on earth have been given to Jesus Christ the thing we need to do is to make disciples to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name in all the nations.

And the obedience of faith could mean the obedience that comes from faith but I think it's more likely the obedience which is faith. Because in the gospel God says Jesus is Lord and he calls us to worship him as God and he announces Jesus as the light of the world and the bread of life and he calls us to place our faith in him.

When we place our faith in him it is our first act of obedience. That's how we start the Christian life. That's how we go on growing in Jesus Christ. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the preaching of Christ and we obey the gospel as we trust him.

If you confess Jesus as Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead you will be saved. And obedience here I don't think is doing great works for God.

[26 : 03] It's simply renouncing every Lord. It's hearing God's call and it's grasping Christ who died for us and walking in newness of life. Let me finish.

Do you not find it striking that this is the way the Apostle Paul starts Romans? He leads off with the gospel, the good news of the gospel of God.

I think a lot of us have the view that Romans begins with a grim and dire expose of our depravity and sinfulness and that it's only the reality of our human predicament that can make sense of the gospel.

Brothers and sisters the opposite is true. The first word of Christianity is the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ, of new life, of sins forgiven, of death defeated, because it is only the reality of God's gospel that can make sense of our human predicament.

if the spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies through his spirit who dwells in you.

[27 : 23] This is God's gospel. Let's pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.