

Revealing Righteousness

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Date: 01 May 2022

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, good morning, everyone. It'd be great if you get out your Bibles and the St. Paul's app, if you've got that in front of you and you'll find an outline for today's message.
- Romans is perhaps the most written about book in the whole of the Bible. Its structure, its purpose, its content has been the subject of debate throughout church history.
- This book is both disarmingly simple and yet devastatingly profound and deep at the same time.
- Much of my framework of thinking as a Christian finds its foundation in this book as it does for so many Reformed evangelicals.
- Having said that, I have never preached through the book of Romans in nearly three decades of pastoral ministry. Now, for those of you who are currently questioning, yes, I am a Christian.
- [1 : 0 5] You may now be questioning whether I'm a pastor. But we are going to spend two terms in this book together.
- That's how crucial I think it is. One of the things I might just add by way of encouragement as well is that we have developed, we have formed a little preaching development group here that for some who have never preached before and some who are a bit more seasoned at it.
- And collectively, we're working through the book of Romans together. And so throughout this series, you will see some new faces from amongst our congregation up preaching from this book in the next two months.
- So I'm very much encouraged by that. And I hope that you would be too and be encouraging of them when they have their term to do so. So four points today in your app, the power of Romans, who is the gospel?
- What is the gospel and the power of the gospel? First of all, the power of Romans. Paul's letter to the Romans is one of the most powerful and influential pieces of literature ever written.
- [2 : 1 8] It has been the force behind some of the most significant transformations in history. Saint Augustine, the most brilliant theologian of the early centuries, possibly at the time, the smartest guy in the world at the time, came to conviction of sin and salvation after reading some verses from the 13th chapter of Romans.
- Martin Luther recovered the doctrine of salvation by faith from his study of Romans 1.17 and went on to lead the Protestant Reformation.
- He is the father of us sitting here today in a Protestant church. John Bunyan was so inspired as he studied the great things of Romans as he sat in Bedford jail that he wrote the immortal pilgrim's progress.
- It is regarded as one of the most significant works of theological fiction in English literature. It has been translated into more than 200 languages and has never been out of print since it was first written in 1678.

never been out of print. While listening to the reading of Luther's preface to the book of Romans, John Wesley said that he felt his heart strangely warmed in conversation and became the catalyst for the great evangelical revival of the 18th century.

[3 : 54] And then there's the great English pastor, John Stott, who had such an enormous impact on the church in the United Kingdom, the USA and Australia, and more profoundly, in fact, in the developing world in the last century.

And he wrote this about his love-hate relationship with Romans. Because of its joyful, painful, personal challenges, it was Paul's devastating exposure of universal human sin and guilt in Romans 1.18 to 3.20, which we will be looking at in the coming weeks, which rescued me from that kind of superficial evangelism which is preoccupied only with people's felt needs.

There is no doubt about the power of this book to bring radical change in life. The reason Romans has proved to be so life-changing and history-shaping is because fundamentally this book is about the gospel.

The gospel changes lives, including the author of Romans, the Apostle Paul. He was formerly known as Saul of Tarsus, a Jewish law-abiding Pharisee famous for his aggressive attempts to put an end to Christianity.

Until that was, the resurrected Jesus appeared to him on his way to persecute some more Christians. Saul of Tarsus became Paul, known from then on by his Greek name, Paul, as apostle to the Greek-speaking world, to the Gentiles.

[5 : 51] We see that in the very first verse, Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God.

The gospel, this gospel, which is the foundation of Romans, is what Paul's life is all about. In verse 14 and 15, he puts it like this.

He says, The word obligated there means a debt.

I've got a debt to pay. And it's a debt that must be paid to everyone. Notice that ultimately, because of the gospel, the debt that Paul has is a debt to God for his grace towards him.

And yet, it's a debt that he doesn't pay back to God in good works and religion and other. It's a debt that he says, I owe to people. I owe to humanity.

[7 : 00] And he's eager to pay this debt. He is a man who cannot rest until all hear the gospel.

The gospel that has so transformed his life, and as we have just sung about, set him free. Set him free so that he is now, describes himself in verse 1, as a doulos, as a slave of Christ.

Now, as a brief note here, side note, I received a summary of our NCLS data. You know that survey we did, you know, a month or more ago?

Probably longer than that now. I received some preliminary information back from that already. And it was a huge encouragement for me to read that 29% of those who filled out that survey self-describe as feeling at ease talking about their faith with others and looking for opportunities to do so.

You know what's so encouraging for me about that? Five years ago, 14% of us said that. 29% of us are now saying it.

[8 : 24] And even more so, 98% of us said, God is the most important reality of my life. That's encouraging as a pastor.

So, Paul was writing this letter to the Christian church in Rome around about AD 57. He was most likely writing it during his third missionary journey while he was in Corinth.

He was writing to a group of Christians that he had never met. But he wanted to meet them. And he wanted them to understand the gospel and to experience the gospel that they already knew and had experienced.

His goal for them was transformation. He describes it in verse 13 as a great harvest amongst them. He wants the Christians to be encouraged in Rome to apply the gospel into every area of their life so that no area is untouched.

He describes that as a harvest. And he wants the non-Christians to discover the freedom of the gospel for the first time. He describes that as a great harvest.

[9 : 49] So, secondly, who is the gospel? Now, the word gospel shows up more in the first 17 verses here than anywhere else in Romans.

In fact, the word gospel appears per phrase in these verses more so than anywhere else in the entire Bible. The word gospel means good herald or a herald of good news.

In the first century, if there's a far-flung battlefield, an emperor wins a great victory, secured peace and establishes authority, he would send a herald throughout the empire to proclaim the victory and the peace and the authority.

That is, fundamentally, what that means is the gospel is an announcement. The gospel is a declaration. The gospel, the Christian gospel, is not good advice on how to live life.

It is news. It is good news about what has been done already. See, the essence of the Christian message, the Christian faith, is good, joyful news.

[11 : 19] And that's the difference between Christian faith and every other philosophy and religion. Only Christianity is good news.

It's not advice about how to get connected with God. It's not about how you should live your life in order for God to relate to you. It's about something that has already been done.

Now, I reckon if we went out on the streets and asked the average person what they thought the essence of Christianity was, they'd be saying something like, well, you know, like, do what Jesus did, like, live like Jesus, or, you know, follow the golden rule.

Live the golden rule. Do to others as you'd have them do to you. That kind of captures Christianity, if you like. Now, let me just say, that's a great idea, by the way. You know, I'd encourage that completely.

Go and do to others as they would do to you. Imagine what good would come of that if we all leave that. I'm all for it. But that's not good news.

[12 : 28] It's not the heart of Christianity. What is it for you? What do you think is the heart of Christianity?

Is it mainly about what you need to do? Or is it mainly about what has been done outside of you, but for you? What we are told here is that Paul has been commissioned by God to be the herald of this news to the Gentile world.

This gospel is not Paul's. This is not his news. He hasn't thought it up. It is of God, as we are told in verse 1. Neither is the gospel a new idea.

We are told in verse 2 that God promised the gospel beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures. That is, the whole Bible is pointing forward to this announcement.

It's a build-up to this announcement. The scriptures are the platform on which the apostle Paul stands, so to speak, as God's herald to the Gentile world.

[13 : 46] And it's not until we get to verse 3 that we see that the gospel is not an idea per se, but a person.

It's a who. The gospel is a who, not a what. The content of the gospel is God's son. We never grasp the gospel.

We never experience the implications of the gospel until we understand fundamentally that it's not a message about our lives, about our dreams, about our hopes.

The gospel speaks about, and it does transform all of those things, but only because it's not about us.

It is a declaration about God's son. In verse 3, we are told this son was fully human. He was also the one who fulfilled the promises of Scripture as the descendant of David, king of Israel, about a millennium before the apostle Paul.

[15 : 08] God had promised to David that through his family, he would produce the ultimate, universal, and final king, the Christ, the Messiah, who will reign the universe, sit on the throne of heaven.

Verse 4 tells us that his son is not just human, but he's also divine. The son was declared with power to be the son of God by his resurrection from the dead.

That is simply saying that the empty tomb is the great declaration of who Jesus is, and that his resurrection declares his right to rule all things as the only one to conquer death.

But it's not until we get to the end of verse 4 that we get the name of the who. Jesus Christ, our Lord. That is who the gospel is.

The gospel is Jesus. So thirdly, what is the gospel? To get to the what of the gospel, we need to skip down to verse 17.

[16 : 25] For in the gospel, the righteousness of God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written, the righteous will live by faith. Now this is the verse that transformed the Roman Catholic German monk, Martin Luther.

He had been taught, as a Roman Catholic, he had been taught that God required him to live a righteous life in order to be saved.

He had grown, in fact, to hate God for requiring him to do that which he could not do. And, in his own words, for leaving him alone to do it, to achieve the thing that he could not achieve.

This is how he explains it himself in his introductory to the book of Romans. He says, He's talking about verse 17 here.

How to understand God's word. The expression, the righteousness of God, blocked the way. Because I took it to mean that righteousness whereby God is righteous and deals righteously in punishing the unrighteous.

[17 : 43] Although an impeccable monk, I stood before God as a sinner. Therefore, I did not love a righteous and an angry God, but rather hated and murmured against him.

Then I grumbled that the righteousness of God is that righteousness by which through faith and sheer mercy, God justifies us by faith.

Thereupon, I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise.

I broke through. The gospel is about Jesus Christ and the achievement of it is that in it, a righteousness of God is revealed.

Now, we get a pretty good handle on what the word righteousness means by simply asking ourselves, what does right mean?

[19 : 00] What does it mean to be right in your school? What does it mean to be in a right place or right relationship in your workplace?

What does it mean to be right in a right relationship with the government? What does it mean to be in a right relationship with another person? That is, the word righteousness is a positional word.

It means to have a good standing, to be in a right relationship with. That is, I'm accepted because there's no record of wrong against me.

I don't have debts and liabilities against my name. Verse 17 says that this right position before God comes from God.

That is, God has done something through his son that means that we have a right standing before him. This is what caused Luther to break through.

[20 : 10] In fact, this God regards us to such a degree that in verse 7, he boldly declares that these Christians in Rome are loved by God.

Loved by God. What is that? What is it that Martin Luther discovered and caused him, in his own words, to break through?

He discovered the gospel is more than just forgiveness. That's what he discovered. Forgiveness is one of the huge, enormous benefits of the gospel.

But it's not the only benefit of the gospel. Imagine a person has been in prison all of their life.

They're guilty of crimes. They're guilty of crimes. They're guilty of crimes. How does that person get a new life? How do they get a new life?

[21 : 21] You could say, well, they could break free from prison and then have the authorities continue to chase them. Much of a new life. That person needs a pardon is what they need.

They need a pardon. Imagine that happens. The governor of New South Wales gifts you with a pardon. And at that point, you walk out of prison and you have been released from prison.

Front doors are open. There you are. Wow. New life. No. No, no, no. Half a new life.

Not a complete new life. All that's happened is you're no longer in prison. What you need at that point is a rebuild life.

If all you get is to walk out of prison, you have got a long road ahead of you rebuilding your life. Long road. The salvation that the Christian gospel brings is not so much a pardon that gets you out of prison.

[22 : 31] It's a pardon that gets you out of prison. And when you walk out of prison, you get the Order of Australia dumped over you at the same time. You get chauffeur driven to your harborside mansion.

You get your bank accounts filled, your family, your celebration of the community, social life, invites. It's incomprehensible what you get.

That's the Christian gospel. It's like the richest person in Australia, not just paying off my debts, but swapping bank accounts with me.

That's the Christian gospel. Not just a pardon, but a new life. 2 Corinthians 5.21 captures it for us.

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

[23 : 37] He who was the righteousness of God became sin so that we who had sinned would become the righteousness of God. We've swapped places.

The sinless one took our sin on himself and received the just punishment for our sin so that we might be in God as if we've never sinned.

It's a legal declaration of right standing. We are covered, if you like, not just released from prison, but we are covered with all of Jesus' awards.

All of his assets, his friends, his family, all of his worth and his value, so to speak. We are covered with his glory.

All the honour that he deserves is on us. The immeasurable, holy, limitless, glorious God delights in us.

[24 : 40] In Jesus, God approves of you. And Luther discovered in verse 17. It had nothing to do with his religion. Nothing to do with his obedience.

It was outside of him and credited to him. And that man, because of that, like the Apostle Paul, gave everything that the world might know that.

The power of Romans ultimately is because it's the power of the gospel. We've touched on who the Christian gospel is and what it achieves, whose it's transformed.

And lastly, it's also important to get the grasp of the power to be transformed. Verse 16, he says, Now, this is not saying that the gospel brings the power of God or that the gospel results in the power of God.

It is saying that the gospel is the power of God for transformation. It is the power for transformation.

[26 : 06] That is, when we hear it, when we understand it, and when we grasp hold of it and push it down into our hearts to the degree that we get the gospel into our hearts and it shapes our lives to that degree that the power of God is actively working in our lives.

That's what it means.

And he writes of breaking through. He experienced the power of the gospel in his life. What might the power of God look like in your life?

Well, here's a couple of clues in terms of what the power might look like living in our lives at the moment. First of all, the first thing that happens when the power of God is working in your life through the gospel is that the gospel becomes offensive.

That's the first thing. That's unusual thing to say. It becomes offensive. You start wrestling with the gospel. Notice that connected to the power of God in the gospel in verse 16 is Paul's statement that he's not ashamed of it.

[27 : 53] That means that there are people ashamed, or another word for ashamed, in fact, in the original Greek is offended. I'm not offended of the gospel.

Everyone who hasn't experienced gospel transformation finds the gospel crazy.

It makes no sense. But it's, in fact, one of the necessary steps to experiencing the power of the gospel. It's offensive because it tells us that salvation is free and undeserving.

It tells us that we are such spiritual failures, and we're going to discover this in the next couple of weeks, so get ready for that.

That we are such spiritual failures that the only way to gain salvation is for it to become to us as a complete gift. You can't do anything for it.

[28 : 56] It also tells us that we are so wicked, so wicked. We're not just flawed. We are so wicked that only the death of the Son of God could possibly save us.

That's offensive to the modern self-expression and to the belief of the innate goodness of all people.

That's offensive. The gospel in its foundation declares people are not innately good, but they're innately evil. Which, frankly, in our world is much easier to prove than the innate goodness of people.

It's also offensive because it says that the so-called good people, whether they be good because of good works or good because of religion, cannot possibly be saved.

The nice person can never find their own way to God. It's also offensive because the gospel tells us salvation comes through suffering and serving, not through conquering and destroying.

- [30 : 14] That's offensive to the person who wants a life of comfort and ease. That is, this gospel is offensive to conservatives and to progressives, to the east and the west, to the male and the female, to the rich, the poor, the wise, the foolish, the young and old.

It's offensive to everyone. At one level, it will be offensive to you. And if you don't feel the offense of the gospel, you don't know what it claims.

If you've never felt the offense of the gospel, you don't know what it claims. And so, therefore, you can never experience its power in your life.

When you start to wrestle with the gospel, as I said last week with Charles Simeon in his life, when you wrestle with the gospel, it unsettles you, it disturbs you.

The second way, the second evidence that we are breaking through and the power of the gospel is at work in our lives is in verse 7. To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be his holy people.

- [31 : 38] The gospel declares that we are loved by God in Jesus Christ. Jesus has gone to death row for us. And if we are loved and we know that we are loved and we will know that we are loved with the power of the gospel is at work in us, we are called, we are invited, dare I say we are attracted to be his holy people.

His holy people. See, if we think that the gospel is just about sin management, dealing with my need for forgiveness, then we entirely miss that God's purpose in sending his son was to forgive people, to make them his so that he can build a new community, new humanity made in the image of his son.

A holy people. A people set apart for himself. A people set apart for himself. We never have the righteousness of God put on us in Jesus without holiness.

It never comes. You never get the righteousness of God in the gospel put on you in Jesus without holiness. That is, without it at the same time starting to develop holiness within you.

And so, again, I would make a bold statement and say that if holiness is not developing within you, then you have not received his righteousness upon you.

- [33 : 28] If holiness, if the spirit of God is not working in you and bringing transformation in your life, then you have not received his righteousness upon you.

If you are loved, you are called, and you are attracted into a life of holiness, a life of being shaped into the likeness of his son, Jesus Christ. More than that, you long for that.

You want to look like the one who has loved you. You want to please him. So think of it.

Think of how the righteousness of God in Jesus Christ has changed so many lives throughout history. It is possible, amazingly possible, because of this righteousness in the gospel, to stand sinless before God.

It is possible to know that you have life for all of eternity, apt to stand as I do now today and have absolute confidence of eternal life.

- [34 : 41] It is possible to be free from all the frustrations of trying to earn a right standing before God, the uncertainty, free from the pride of religion, to have purpose and a good name for yourself, to know for certain that you have a legacy.

It is possible, like Martin Luther and Bunyan and Wesley and Calvin and countless of other people, to break through.

To break through. And the sole requirement of that breakthrough is faith. Not effort. It's faith. Faith that the gospel is the power of God for everyone who believes.

And so let me pray. And may this be a prayer that you might echo for the next two terms as we go through this series.

Father, we know that a humble spirit is indispensable to you. You do not despise the humble in heart. And it's indispensable to learning.

[35 : 56] And we pray that as we consider the message of Romans in these coming two terms, so great, so history-changing, and yet sometimes so familiar to us, that through the study of this book, you will give us a spirit of humility.

We pray that the power of the gospel that has been exhibited in the lives of the Apostle Paul and Augustine and Luther and Calvin and Wesley and Bunyan and Stott and so many others, that power which comes from grasping the gospel and appropriating it in all areas of life by faith, may it be seen in us.

Give us, we pray, a continued spirit of humility. May we continue in prayer throughout this series that each one of us may break through.

And we pray it. We pray it in the glorious name of Jesus Christ, our Savior, the righteousness from God.

Amen.