

Paul and his gospel

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[0 : 00] Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God, the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures regarding his son, who as to his earthly life was a descendant of David, and who through the spirit of holiness and appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Through him we received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith for his namesake, and you are also among those Gentiles who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.

To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be his holy people, grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul's longing to visit Rome. First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world.

God, whom I serve in my spirit in preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness, how constantly I remember you in my prayers at all times.

[1 : 20] And I pray that now, at last, by God's will, the way may be opened for me to come to you. I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong, that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith.

I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that I planned many times to come to you, but have been prevented from doing so until now, in order that I might have a harvest amongst you, just as I have had a had amongst the other Gentiles.

I am a debtor both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and to the foolish. That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are in Rome.

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes, first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. 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.

Amen. Good morning, St. Silas, and thanks, Stephen, for reading. If you could keep your Bibles open at Romans chapter 1 on page 1128, that would be a great help to me as we look at that together.

[2 : 51] And if you find it helpful, there's an outline inside the notice sheet to see where we're going with this. But let's ask for God's help as we turn to his word. Let's pray together. Let's pray together.

Let's pray together. Let's pray together. Lord, and loving Heavenly Father, speak to us, we pray. And where we are in need, provide for us.

Where we are drifting, restore us. Where we lack knowledge, enlighten us. Where we're in pain, comfort us. Where we've grown comfortable, challenge us.

Where our hearts are not right, reshape us. For our good, for our joy, and for the glory of Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Well, I caught this story in the news this week, you might have seen it, about manspreading.

And manspreading is the term that gets used of when men sit with their legs too far apart and they take up the seats next to them, especially in the cinema or on the train or something like that.

Manspreading.

[3 : 54] I didn't know it was a problem. Apparently it's a problem. And Anna, a Russian YouTuber, has been fighting back. Her video, which has gone viral, shows her and others walking down train carriages, finding manspreaders, and pouring diluted bleach onto their trousers.

Apparently not enough to harm them, but enough to stain the trousers. So this video has gone viral about the fight against manspreading. Now, I don't know what you think about manspreading.

This might be the first time you've ever heard about it. Or it might be a daily burden for you in your commute. Or you might be sitting next to a manspreader right now. But the problem is, the problem is, it's probably not true.

People think it's actually a hoax. It's fake news. Russian disinformation being sent around the world. Fake news was word of the year in 2017.

And it's alive and well on the internet today. Lots of news this week about fake news. There was panic about widely reported French President Emmanuel Macron said last week that after Brexit, from next summer, UK people will need visas to visit France.

[5 : 04] Big panic, big news. And then he said on Friday, it was fake news. He didn't mean that. It wasn't true. So fake news is being described as one of the biggest threats to democracy and liberty in the world today.

We've got free access to more news stories than we've ever had before. But we don't know which ones to believe. But fake news, or at least false news, disinformation, isn't a new problem.

In fact, it was a problem for the church in the first generation after Jesus had died and risen and ascended. So we're in Romans chapter 1. And as Stephen read it, I don't know whether you noticed, but there was a key word in those first 17 verses of Romans.

And the word is gospel. It comes again and again, probably more times than anywhere else in Paul's writing that word gospel. That word gospel, in the original language, it's a word euangelion, euangelion.

And that's where we get the word evangelical from, that we're people of the evangel. So at St. Silas, what matters much more to us than the denomination we're part of, that we're part of the Scottish Episcopal Church, which is an Anglican church, we're part of the Anglican Communion.

[6 : 17] What's much more important to us than that is that we're an evangelical church. We're people of the gospel. That's where the word comes from. And we want to share the news we believe with people around us.

And that's evangelism. We are people who share the gospel, the evangel. What does it mean? Well, euangelion, the Greek word eu, means good. And angelion, angel, we're used to that idea with angels, aren't we?

We think of angels as spiritual beings. But the word angel has in the idea of a herald, a messenger. So euangelion is good news. The gospel, it means good news.

That's all that it is. And it's the theme of this opening section of Romans before Paul begins a magnificent setting out of what Christians believe, what the gospel really is.

That's what we're going to see in the coming chapters. But why is he writing about it? We see at the beginning of this Bible book, Romans, that it's not a theology textbook that we're reading.

[7 : 20] It's a letter. It was written, says verse 1, by Paul. He starts by seeing who he is, writing the letter. Paul, he says he's a servant of Christ Jesus.

So he has been, he's come to faith in Jesus and he treats himself as literally a slave of Jesus now. And he says who he's writing to in verse 7.

He says, To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be his holy people. In other words, it's written to the church at the center of the world. At that time, the Roman Empire.

This is written to the church at the center of the world. Paul was a great missionary and church planter. He's never met these Christians in Rome, but he's planning to visit them.

And before he visits them, he sends them this letter. So he tells us a bit more about himself in verse 1 and how he relates to the gospel. If you just see that in verse 1.

[8 : 18] He says that he's a servant, a slave of Christ Jesus. Then he says he's called to be an apostle. So that is that Jesus, he is one of the 12 men who Jesus gave authority to, to be his apostles and take the message about Jesus' death and resurrection to the ends of the earth.

And then he says that he's set apart for the gospel of God. He's been separated off from the other things that he might live for, from the distractions of life, of wealth and power and status and worldly pleasure and family.

And instead, he's literally a man with a mission. The mission to take the gospel to the world. Now, often when you read a letter, you find out much more about the people that are being written to than the person writing.

Because if you think about when you write a letter, it's often because of something going on in the person's life that you're writing to. That's true of us, isn't it? But sometimes you write a letter not

because of them, but because of you.

And when we look at why Paul wrote this letter, we find it's got much more to do with his situation than their situation. When we get to the end of the letter, chapter 15, he says this about his readers.

[9 : 36] It's on the screen. He says, I myself am convinced, my brothers and sisters, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with knowledge and competent to instruct one another.

So why is he written? He says, Yet I have written you quite boldly on some points to remind you of them again. Then he explains his role to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles.

That just means to the nations. So the church he's writing to, they're on the right track. He's not writing to correct something in their lives as a church. But the reason he's writing is because of what's going on with him and not them.

He is at a key moment in his own life and ministry. He says later in that chapter 15, you can look it up for yourself later. He says that he has now completed the missionary journeys that Paul is kind of remembered for, that we read about in Acts.

He's finished those journeys and he's now on his way back to Jerusalem, where he's taking with him some famine relief, some money for the church in Jerusalem, from the churches of the Gentiles that he has formed.

[10 : 38] And it's a great expression of the truth that the gospel is for all nations, that he can bring this poverty relief for the Jewish church from the Gentile church. And at that key moment, after he's done that delivery, he wants to take the gospel to Spain.

He wants to travel where he's never gone before. No one's gone with the gospel yet to Spain. And on the way, he wants to go to Rome. So it's really important for him that the church at the center of the world is right on board with his gospel, his gospel for the nations, so that when he stops in Rome and visits them, they're right behind him and they're willing to support him as he heads to Spain.

And the threat that he faces and that they face that might stop them being on board with Paul's gospel is fake news. He mentions in chapter 15, there are people around Jerusalem in the churches who are hostile to Paul and to Paul's gospel.

They think Paul's got it wrong. They are false heralds in the early church. You know, we get our news from the TV, from the media, from the radio, the internet. They got their news from heralds arriving in towns, in churches with the news.

And here are these false heralds in the churches, visiting, going around with a different gospel to Paul's, trying to steer people away from what Paul believed.

[12 : 01] And he needs to make sure that this church, perhaps of all churches, is right behind his gospel for the nations. So I take it that that makes Romans an essential letter for us today at St. Silas.

The church in the 21st century, just like the church in the 1st century, has a big fake news problem. You could shop around churches in Glasgow, you could visit different churches, and you'd find all kinds of different gospels being proclaimed and being believed.

And here we have the apostle writing to reiterate and vindicate his gospel. And it's not just his gospel. That's key in verse 1. He doesn't say, my gospel.

He says, set apart, verse 1, for the gospel of God. The reason we should believe this is not because it's Paul's gospel. It's because it's God's gospel. And he goes on to say, verse 2, it's the gospel God promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures.

So there's nothing, in one sense, there's nothing new in the gospel that Paul is expounding here. Because the whole of the Old Testament, with all of its history, and all of its poetry, and all of its wonderful promises, and all of its revelations, it was pregnant with the gospel.

[13 : 19] And now, as Paul sets out the gospel in Romans, he shows us what was being promised and mysteriously revealed to us in the Old Testament.

Here it is, the culmination now set out here in Romans. So we're going to see, in these first verses, the heart of the gospel, the fruit of the gospel, and thirdly, the power of the gospel.

So first of all, the heart of the gospel. Now I just wonder if you could think, how would you answer that? If you would say you're on a bus tomorrow, and the person next to you says to you, they find out you're a Christian, they say, what's the real essence of what Christians believe?

What's the heart of it? I wonder where you would start. Well, Paul tells us in verse 3 where to start. He says, God's gospel, verse 3, is regarding his son.

Then he tells us two things about God's son, about Jesus. As to his earthly life, was a descendant of David, and who through the spirit of holiness, was appointed the son of God in power, by his resurrection from the dead.

[14 : 28] And then he summarizes it, that Jesus is the Christ, and Jesus is the Lord. Jesus Christ is Lord. So the gospel is about the historical person, Jesus of Nazareth.

It's good news about him, that he was the Christ, the one that God had promised for thousands of years. God had promised a thousand years before Jesus came to King David, that a ruler would come in David's royal line, who would reign forever.

And God would rescue his people, all across the world, through that royal ruler. So Jesus is God's great rescuer, promised. And that same person, Jesus Christ, is Lord.

That is that when God raised him from the dead, the Holy Spirit was declaring to the world, that Jesus is the son of God in power. He is the reigning one.

He's the king. He's seated in victory, over the whole world. So that's the heart of the gospel. So is it your gospel? It's good to think about that.

[15 : 32] Paul says the heart of the gospel is not a system, it's a person. It's not a mechanism, it's a man. If somebody could ask, if somebody asked you what the gospel is, you could use big technical terms.

There are some big technical terms out there that Christians use when they're talking about God, Jesus, the Bible. You could use terms like imputed righteousness, propitiation, forensic justification. You can even use Latin words like *ordo salutis*. People in colleges get very excited about these words. But fundamentally, the gospel is magnificent news about a man, about a person.

And that person is not you and me, it's Jesus. Just think about it. Last year, U2 did a big concert, the Joshua Tree Reunion Concert.

I wanted to go. I didn't get to go. Some of you might not want to go to that. So if you think of a concert you would have wanted to go to, you know, Shania Twain was on at the Hydro, wasn't she recently?

[16 : 37] Maybe that's your cup of tea. Whatever it would be. My friend went to the concert. Okay, so I asked him, I said, I can't believe you're going to the Joshua Tree. I just can't believe it. And he, so he started, he said, yeah, I'm so excited.

He said, basically, yeah, we're dropping off the kids with these guys in Hackney and then we're going to get the train, the tube, and then we're going to get the train from Waterloo and then we're going to, we're going to pack some food.

We're going to go to a nice place, get some nice picnic food and it might rain so we're going to get a rain cover to cover us and hopefully the kids will be all right. And he'd made the concert, his story of going to the concert was all about him and I didn't want to know about him.

I wanted to know about U2. What are they going to be playing? What's it going to be like? What are the lights going to be like? So he had made the whole story about himself and his trip and often we explain the gospel in quite a man-centered, me-centered way, don't we?

We think of the gospel as all about me, how I treated God, what he's done for me, where mankind has gone wrong, what God has done about it for us, how that affects us and everything we say could be perfectly true and wonderfully true.

[17 : 48] The gospel, in one sense, is about us because it so radically affects us. It is life-transforming news. But that's not the heart of the gospel because in the true gospel, Jesus is on center stage, not you and not me.

And it's news about a person with great authority. Did you see that? So that when Paul describes his burden to share the gospel with the nations, he says in verse 5 that he calls the nations to the obedience that comes from faith.

Now it's quite a surprising verse that if you're somebody who is used to knowing that the gospel saves you by faith, not by obedience, you just put your trust in the gospel message and you're right with God.

And that's true. But when you put your faith in this message, it's a message that there is a new king, that God has made somebody Lord of the world with authority over everyone.

And when you believe that, you accept that he is in charge. It's trusting submission. It's trust, but it's submissive trust to a new master, someone who has every right to be obeyed.

[18 : 57] So when you think as a Christian, why do we obey Jesus? We obey him, not just because of his kindness, although he is very kind, and that does move us in our hearts to want to obey him because he's kind.

And we obey him not just because of his wisdom, although he is very wise. And when you obey him, you find that his will makes sense of life and of the world. It's the best way to live.

He's wise. But it's not just that. We also obey him because of his status, that God has exalted him and he is king of kings and lord of lords.

That's God's good news of the gospel, good news for the world. And we should ask ourselves, is his gospel, my gospel, good news about Jesus, a person on center stage who was born a king in David's line to rescue God's people so they can be with him forever and he rose from the dead to reign forever.

So how does that news affect us? Well, we get a glimpse of that in Paul's next section as he describes his relationship with this church in Rome. The fruit of the gospel is our second point.

[20 : 08] Now the first thing that the gospel clearly gives to any believer is security, thankful security, complete confidence. They're on the right track with God.

Have a look at verse 8. He says, First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you because your faith is being reported all over the world.

So this Roman church, they don't get the hair dryer treatment from the apostle Paul. Instead, Paul can't stop thanking God for them and he wants to reassure them just because they've put their faith in the gospel.

He is so thankful and the whole world is hearing about this great church. It's so reassuring for them.

Then we see another great fruit of the gospel and its community, its fellowship, brotherly affection, if you just look at the language that Paul uses to describe how he feels about these Christians.

Verse 9, God, whom I serve in my spirit in preaching the gospel of his son, is my witness how constantly I remember you in my prayers at all times and I pray that now at last by God's will the way may be open for me to come to you.

[21 : 22] I long to see you. And that's what the gospel does when you believe the gospel. It brings people together. We get filled with a knowledge of God's goodness and God's love in Jesus that in turn fills us with love for him and love for other people, for his people.

And then we see what else the gospel does. The fruit of the gospel in Paul's life is it makes you ambitious for other people that they will grow in the gospel. So in verse 11, why does he long to see them?

Verse 11, so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong. That is that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith.

He says then in verse 12 that he wants, sorry, verse 13, that he wants to have a harvest among them, that I might have a harvest among you just as I've had among the other Gentiles.

He's looking for fruit and that description, that metaphor of fruit is the idea of when people trust in the gospel, it produces fruit in their lives and he longs to see that harvest in the lives of the Roman church as people come to faith and as people grow in their faith, their knowledge and love of God.

[22 : 39] So that's the fruit of the gospel. It's why we should be bold in speaking the gospel to each other and to our city. It's news from God that brings security. Just by putting your faith in it, you know that you're right with God, you're on the right track.

It brings community, it pulls us together with love for each other and it brings ambition for each other that we long to see each other grow in the gospel. I don't know about you but I would love to have more of that.

If you think about security, a few years ago I got very ill, I had a brain tumor and had to think about death in a way that I'd never thought before and what I really needed as I thought about death was to have security, to have confidence knowing even if I die what I believe about God has set me right with God and I will meet him and have nothing to fear from death.

So we need a gospel that will give us assurance, security. If you think about community and Paul here overflowing with affection for people he's never met, he's never been yet to Rome but he loves the people and he longs for them and he prays for them all the time and I would love to feel more like that for you guys and for people in other churches around Glasgow who believe the same gospel as us.

Just think what it would be like to have that same longing and affection created by the gospel for other believers all because we share that in common, our belief in Jesus.

[24 : 10] You think about Paul's ambition that he longs to see them grow in their faith, to maturity and so often I'm held back from sharing the gospel with people, people who are already believers or people who are not believers because my priorities are wrong.

Maybe I don't want to make things awkward or challenge anyone or I don't want to be not liked. I'd rather be liked and it's easier to be liked by not mentioning the gospel but actually Paul is such an ambition for these guys to grow in the gospel and see the fruit of the gospel that he wants to share the gospel and spread the gospel.

So these are the things that I know I need and I get them from a deeper grasp of the gospel and it's so important for us as a church when we're thinking about who we are as a church and we're a church that's been growing over the last few years and new people arrive and that raises questions and people have left and that raises questions and you ask what kind of a church are we?

What is God calling us to be? What's our identity as a church? And the danger when a church is asking those important questions is that we fixate on the secondary things.

What's the view of baptism here? What's the view of communion to kids here? What's the music style here? What's the view about gender and men and women or the gift of tongues or the millennium?

[25 : 34] These are issues that Christians disagree on and we can get fixated on them and make them the main thing that we stand on but what we mustn't disagree on and we mustn't get distracted from is the gospel.

That's what's central and so that's why we need to get into Romans. It straightens out your view of the gospel. It's a message that brings security. It brings community, loving community, brotherly affection.

It brings a new priority and ambition for the nations and for each other to grow. So we've heard about the heart of the gospel. Secondly, we see a glimpse of the fruit of the gospel and thirdly, we hear about the power of the gospel.

Paul says in verse 15 that he's eager to preach the gospel and then he contrasts that with shame. If you look at verse 16, for I am not ashamed of the gospel.

So why would Paul need to tell us that? This is seen by lots of people as a bit of a headline, this verses 16 and 17. for what he's going to say in the rest of the letter and he starts, I'm not ashamed of the gospel.

[26 : 40] Now if someone tells you I'm not ashamed of something, I take it the reason why they say that is because there are reasons why they might be ashamed of it, that other people are ashamed of it or that he's tempted to be ashamed of it.

Why might we feel ashamed of the gospel? We might feel ashamed of it because other people don't believe it. The BBC doesn't believe the gospel. The people we live with and work with.

Fellow students. Parents of our children's friends at the school gate. Some people are offended by the gospel because the gospel offends you because it smashes your pride.

Think of a friend who I brought to a guest service at my church in London and she said afterwards, you're not going to get people of our generation into church with a message that says I'm a sinner that for all the effort that I've made in my life I'm not good enough for God on my own.

It's not going to get me into church. See, if we feel that we're striving to be good, perhaps we feel offended by a message that humbles us by saying you're not good enough for God.

[27 : 52] Behind the thin veneer of respectability where God sees our hearts, we're not good enough for him. It's humbling and it offends people. And in a place like the West End of Glasgow, people get offended by the gospel not just because it's humbling but because it's simple.

It's a simple truth claim about what God says is really wrong with the world and what God has done about it through Jesus. It says, however different people might seem in our society, that's multicultural, our biggest problem is fundamentally the same and God's solution for all of us is the same.

It's so simple a child can understand it and the temptation is to despise that. We want a message that's more sophisticated, that's more nuanced than the gospel.

And so when we encounter that as Christians, the danger is we start to feel ashamed of the gospel in its simplicity, in its humbling, power. But Paul knows that the gospel is glorious.

That's why he's not ashamed of it. And it's glorious because it's got God's power in it. Have a look at verse 16. Let's read on. He says, I'm not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes, first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.

[29 : 18] 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.

I don't know whether you've seen the new movie just come out, *The Wife*. It's got Glenn Close in and it's about a married couple, Joe and Joan Castleman. And he gets the news at the start of the film that he's a writer and he's going to win the Nobel Prize for literature.

He's been awarded it and they're going to fly over and get the prize. And the movie explores the idea of what it means to be approved of. So both the married couple, Joe and Joan, were writers and they've got a son who wants to be a writer and his dad doesn't really like his writing.

And his dad says, you don't need my approval to be a writer. And Joan says, Joe, everybody needs approval. Everyone needs approval. And then the movie, you see in the movie what it looks like for someone to get the Nobel Prize for literature as Joe walks onto a stage and all the elites of his profession are there to applaud him.

And he's given this award and it's this moment of great recognition and approval and his wife, Joan, is in the crowd and she's never been given that recognition and approval and how it's got at her over the years that she never feels that she's been recognized for what she's done.

[30 : 46] Well, these verses in Romans, they're like a headline for Paul and they summarize what he's going to tell us in the next chapters. And what he says is, whoever you are, when you believe the gospel, God gives you his approval.

God says to you and to the world, I approve of you. You wear his medal and his verdict on your life becomes that you are righteous in his sight.

He says, well done, congratulations, because he chooses to look on you as though you've lived the perfect life. All your mistakes are wiped away. Now, how can God do that?

We're going to find out as Paul gets us into Romans in the coming weeks. But it's about God giving you a righteousness that's not your own as a free gift received by faith so that whatever mess you've made, whatever you regret, the burden of that is lifted from you.

And whatever other people think of you, however much you might feel overlooked in your life or that people have rejected you, what matters is that the living God is delighted with you.

[31 : 51] He approves of you. It means that your biggest achievements won't consume you with pride because you know that the verdict that counts is the one from God that you already have.

And your worst failures won't destroy you because your heart can be stamped with the reality that you are approved by the living God. And that's why the gospel can save anybody who believes it.

And it's what makes the gospel so powerful. And that's why Paul is not ashamed of it. So folks, in a world of fake news, how refreshing that when we turn into Romans we get truth.

We see the heart of the gospel, not a system, but a person. Not fundamentally about us, but about him. We've seen the fruit of the gospel that it gives you security, thankfulness, brotherly affection, a longing for a harvest in others.

And we've seen the power of the gospel to save anyone, to save everyone, by faith alone in this wonderful message. Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, we praise you for the Lord Jesus Christ.

[33 : 12] We thank you that you sent your son, Christ Jesus, descended from David to rescue us. Holy Spirit, we thank you that you raised the Lord Jesus to life in power by his resurrection from the dead, declaring to us his identity as Lord.

And Lord Jesus, we thank you and praise you for who you are, that you are Christ and Lord, and that your gospel message is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes.

We pray for us as a church, as your church, for a fresh and deeper grasp of your gospel news that bears fruit in our lives as a church and as individuals and all the flaws to our city for their salvation and the glory of your name.

Amen.