

Gospel

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[0 : 0 0] I want you this morning to keep in mind some of the words that we read together in Romans chapter 1, but also I'm going to be looking at one or two other verses because we're looking really at the theme of the Gospel and the importance that Paul places, that the Bible places, obviously on the Gospel when he begins to write all his letters. So in Romans chapter 1, the passage we read, verse 16, he says, I'm not ashamed of the Gospel because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes, first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the Gospel, a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is my faith, from first to last, just as it is written, the righteous shall live by my faith. So in these next four weeks, apart from next Sunday, where it's the ordination and Bob Ackroyd will be preaching, so Tom will be becoming an assistant minister with us here, Tom's preaching tonight as well. Apart from next Sunday, for the next last Sunday and for the next three Sundays, we're looking at our vision and strategies of church, the kind of underpinning of it, maybe not the nuts and bolts, not just the absolute detail, but the kind of general underpinning of what we are. Last week, we looked at God's glory, if you remember, and really, I guess the very short summary of that is that we exist for God's glory rather than God existing for our glory. And that is a whole radical turnaround. It is a change of thinking, a change of position, a change of the whole direction of our lives that we're not living for ourselves, but we're living for the glory of God, both as individuals and as a congregation. And so today, I'm looking at the second of our themes as leaders that we kind of summarized and recognize as significant, which is the gospel. So what we're doing is we're really looking at our DNA, our DNA is a church, what we're about. So it's primarily we live and exist and seek to for the glory of God, not just as a, and I don't mean this institutionally, well, I kind of do, but I don't because the church is just made up of individuals, it's made up of you and me. So when I'm saying our church, this is our DNA, I'm saying this is your DNA as well, as part of the church and as part of the Christian community that makes up the church, both the glory of God and also the gospel. And it's absolutely radical, both the glory of God and living out the gospel at the core of our lives. So really what I'm hoping to do today is to challenge myself and yourselves by asking the question, what are we about? You know, why do we exist? And why am I here? What's my place in this community and this gospel community? And to broaden our thinking a little bit to see the churches being far more than just the one hour that we're together, to listen, to sing, to pray, to respond, to reject, to accept, to mock or to write the preaching or the preacher or the message and from that one hour leave and then live the rest of your life on your own terms or on my own terms. The challenge is to see that the church to which we belong, which I hope we saw last week a little bit, is much bigger than just the hour that the 167 hours of the week that we live out of this church is equally as significant. We still remain part of the gospel community when we are outside of here. And hopefully then to be drawn together under these important truths, you know, rather than any secondary truths or truths that are maybe not so key and so vital in terms of our fundamental reality. So as we grow and God in His grace and in His goodness is allowing us to grow and to divide and plant churches, then we find the greatest difficulty is keeping things simple.

It all gets really complicated and we're really trying to keep it simple. The glory of God, the gospel. We want to be a gospel church. We exist to live the gospel and to love the gospel and to embrace the gospel. And that is a simple foundational truth for us. Well, what is the gospel? What is, you know, what gospel means? It means good news. I'm sure you all know that gospel means good news. Well, can I just ask you to flick with me to another bit of the Bible, to another beginning of a letter where Paul is laying out what the gospel is, its foundation, what he's coming to do. 1 Corinthians 2 and verses 1 and 2. And he's reminding this church as we are reminding ourselves and you, when I came to you, brothers, I came, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaim to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except

[5:17] Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear and with much trembling. My message in my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power so that your faith might rest not on man's wisdom, but on God's power. So the gospel is the testimony about God. It's the revelation of God. It is about Christ and him crucified. And that is how we know God through Jesus Christ and through what he has done in the cross for us. Jesus makes that clear in John 14.9 when he is with his disciples and they're asking who the Father is and Jesus says to them, anyone who has seen me, don't you yet understand this, Thomas? Don't you understand? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. So if we are to know God, then it is through Jesus Christ and him crucified. That's the good news. That's the gospel that we believe in. And that is what theology, for only we talk about theology for brunch, theology is the knowledge of God.

And we have the knowledge of God through Jesus Christ. So the whole of the Bible, the theology of the Bible is the theology of knowing Jesus and the gospel of Jesus Christ. Christ and him crucified. It's not Christ and him as a carpenter. It's not Christ and him walking on water. It's not Christ and hospitality. It's Christ and him crucified. While all of these things are important in the revelation of Jesus, none matches the foundational reality of a crucified and risen Savior. That is the good news. That's the gospel that we believe.

That is the truth that Jesus Christ proclaims and that will change us. I am saying that confidently. That gospel will change us and it will transform this congregation and it will transform our community as we recognize it and see it and know and understand it more.

The good news. I say a few things about that good news. It's unique good news. It's a crucified God. That's the gospel. Jesus Christ and him crucified. That's a unique gospel. That is what the whole Bible is focused on and revolves around through creation, sin, guilt, redemption, judgment. It's all focused on this truth of Jesus Christ and him crucified. It's mental.

There's no other gospel like that. There's no other good news. It's utterly and completely unique and if we will allow it, if we'll allow our minds just to grasp it for a moment, it will make sense of who God is, a God of love and a God of justice. It makes sense of the darkness and the blackness of our own souls. It makes sense of the hope and the newness that Christ offers. It makes sense of why people will be willing to die for him. It makes sense that it transforms our whole lives and turns us upside down and inside out. It's a good news message of rescue, but it's utterly and completely unique. That's why Paul makes clear each time he goes to a church that, you know, as he says, I began the service with these solemn words, let him be eternally condemned. Anyone that preaches another gospel, you want to hear another gospel, you will get that. You can go places and hear a nice trendy flash, warm, exciting gospel, but it's different if it doesn't focus on Jesus Christ and him crucified because that is the gospel. It's a message of salvation. So we're a people who believe, we're a church who has this foundational unique message that God gives us and it's one of salvation. It's not one of flower raining. It's one of salvation. It's one to say that we need a Savior. We need Jesus Christ. He has come to rescue us. He has come to save us. This is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes. There's an urgency in that. And sometimes we come under the sound of the gospel and we hear that lovely hymn just in the back of our minds as we walk in the church, just as I am without one plea.

[9 : 48] And we think that's fine. I'll just come as I am. And that's fine. We come as we are, but we don't stay as we are. We don't just come as we are and then stay like that and think, well, God died for us and he was crucified. I can live any way I want. He's come to save, rescue, transform and renew us because he wants us to look in his eye with our righteousness that he can look on. And none of us have that by nature. So there's a rescue. So there's a sense we come to church and it's not just the hour because we're coming into a place.

And I don't really want to emphasize the building and I don't want to emphasize the hour because I think that gets plenty of emphasis. I think we want to emphasize what we're coming to in terms of Christ. We're coming to someone who will turn our lives upside down. You are coming to someone who is going to be your Lord if you're a Christian and will turn the ugliness and brutality and the selfishness and the greed of our hearts on its head to heal us.

He's the God who sees the cancer and who says, I want to heal you. But the healing has pain. But sometimes we need to wake up and smell the spiritual coffee and let God deal with us with his salvation. But it's a gift, you know, this gospel, what is the gospel? It's rescue. It's unique. It's a gift, you know, he says, for the gospel, righteousness from God has revealed that it's by faith. It's a gift of faith. It's a gift of faith that we ask for that no one can earn that we can't go into God's presence. This is why this is my best efforts. This is what I'm trying. He says, look, I have come. I offer you a righteousness that's from God. That is the life of Christ and the death of Christ is atonement for us.

And he says, you can take his salvation and his righteousness and claim it to be your own. That's the gospel. It's a gift. This thing, a man this week who's dying of cancer is not a Christian and I tell him it's a gift, not a gift you're born with, not a gift that some people can have and other people can't have. She's a gift for you to grasp. That's the gospel that we share. That's the gospel that we have. It's a gift that God wants to give to us and that wants us to live and share with others. It's the offer of peace with him. I'm reading a book just now called the, I can't remember what it's called. It's something of sin. The bravariate, I can't remember. I can't pronounce it. I've never heard the word before, but it's about sin and his great intention in the first chapter, I've only read the first chapter. I'm really just bragging because I haven't finished.

I've got 77 books somewhere in the ether that I've not finished and I've only got past the second chapter with. They've got to be good to keep my attention. But the first chapter says that the great reality of sin is dis-peace. You know, God is a God of peace between his people and sin brings dis-peace. You look at the news tomorrow. You look at the struggles and the battles and the difficulties you have both personally in community, in churches and with God and the problems dis-peace and he comes to offer peace and healing and probably in terms of summarizing the gospel, if we summarize it here from this passage in Romans and also from 1 Corinthians, both of them say it is the power of God. It is not ashamed of the gospel because the gospel is the power of God. It's God's divine power to change us. You know, he doesn't say the powers and other things. It's not on the tip of her finger. The power isn't in the power of her personality. It's in the gospel of Jesus

[13 : 49] Christ. That is where God's power is and we are not a people and we're not a church, you know, individuals who look for power politically or power and personality and popularity or in community on its own or in wealth or in health. The power of God is the gospel which promises us a new heart. Nobody else can give you a new heart, a heart that is righteous with God and it's his gift. But in order to experience and know that gift, we must be plugged into the source of that power. So the gospel says, drives us to Jesus. It drives us, what I say again, to be as a people, a church, a praying church. You know, we struggle so much in our lives. Why do we struggle? Why are you struggling so much in your Christian life? When was the last time you prayed? When was the last time you were dependent on God on a daily basis so that you could go out of the house and live for His glory in every decision and everything we do? I can't live for His glory in my own strength. And when

I don't pray, that's when I generally become selfish and I'm not saying that in a ritualistic way, it's that whole concept of desperate need. And also, the power of God in our lives, new heart. And as a people, we will preach and live and this church will be a gospel church because the gospel is what changes people. And the gospel is what the power of God is. Do you feel a powerlessness spiritually in your life that God is impotent and God is far away and that your life is spiritually vacuous and weak? I think we all feel that.

Is it because we've lost sight of this promise that the gospel is the power of God? Not our intelligence, not our abilities, not our understanding, not our own efforts, but the gospel of God and all that the gospel is in its unique vulnerability and weakness that we declare as we come to the God of power and gospel. That gospel will not change. I will be eternally condemned if I preach another gospel from this pulpit or if our leaders present or live a different gospel here. We will never become wiser than God's gospel because his foolishness is wiser than men's wisdom. And it doesn't change. Okay, society changes. Technology changes.

Science grows and knows. But the gospel doesn't because God doesn't change and we don't change and our need doesn't change. And we need this gospel because it's the power of God. We continue to need forgiveness. We continue to need His grace and His love. We continue to need to be rescued. And that is significant. That is the gospel that is the foundation of what we seek to do here. What does it mean for us? What does it mean for you and your life?

And I'll try and summarize and bring things together. Well, we'll be a church and we seek to be a church where the gospel is at the core of everything we do. It defines our Christian faith. So we're not going to come back here every year and say, okay, gospel is up for grabs. What do you want it to mean this year? How will we make it more significant? How will it reach the people of Edinburgh? Can we change it? Sophisticated people. They are not going to accept this gospel. Is it going to be different in the West Highlands? No. Is it going to be different in China? No. The gospel is the same. So it's not going to be up for grabs every year. The gospel is to be the motivation for your life and for this community. We are to be a living, vibrant, growing, stumbling, failing, forgiving, rejoicing organism. And that is to be reflected in community and in our individual lives. I'm going to ask you a very significant question to people who are here today. Is that why you belong here?

[18 : 02] It is such a searching question. Is that why you belong here or any gospel church if you're a visitor with us today? To know Christ and to live the gospel. We will be gospel to the core. That is the resin detra for our belonging. And we will seek to keep that simplicity.

It's a real tough thing to do. We will seek to keep that simplicity. And that gospel to the core, which is simple and which is the mark of our belonging is also ought to be marked by joy. There's a thing. The gospel should mark both our Christian lives and our communities with joy because our identity is in the gospel. And the gospel is, what is it? Is it bad news? No, the gospel is good news. Did I say that before? No, I didn't.

I said it at Aimeen Kirsten's wedding, which was last week and it's a lovely other back from the honeymoon in one piece. And it's good. But at their wedding we said, you know, Jesus uses the gospel or sorry, uses weddings and marriage to explain the gospel because it's about love and joy and celebration. He doesn't use a funeral to describe the gospel even though within the gospel there's solemnity and there's bad news about our condition.

The bad news is only there to prompt us to the good news of the gospel and to drive us to Jesus Christ. So our Christianity, our church worship services, our lives in here and out of here, both in community and individually should be marked by joy because that's our identity. Our identity is the gospel that we are loved as Christians by the eternal God, that He has gone to the nth degree to save us even when we were enemies of Him and couldn't care less and weren't even born. And the divine being was crucified and we are right with Him in a broken and sinful world. We are people in the midst of a battle and I'm not decrying or downgrading the battle and the struggle. I know that. I know the battle. But we are people who play music in the battlefield. We are people who have a song to sing, not in a careless and a proud or arrogant or in a other worldly way, but because our identity is in the gospel and even in the darkness, His light shines possibly even when we don't recognize it. We are to bring encouragement and to bring light and to bring joy into people's existence because we have been touched by the gospel of the

Lord Jesus Christ. So our church and our identity as Christians is never just ritualistic. It's never just the culture that we belong to or the denomination or the theological tradition or the worship style or the, these are all significant. They all play a part because we're humans and we're all different. But their primary reality is the gospel. Not is it our part in the church, a place where we earn favor with God or where we are judgmental and the people outside or we self-righteous about ourselves. Damnably that is. That's damnably. If we've made up a reason for being together that doesn't include the gospel and the humility of the gospel, it's damnably. That's how serious it is. If it's another gospel, we will be sent to a lost eternity because we're taking the precious truth of what Jesus has done and we're saying thanks very much. I'm sure that was very costly, but I've got a much better idea of what the gospel should be. Better than the living God, better than Jesus Christ, better than his outstanding love for us. The gospel that we have is marked by joy. If our lives are utterly miserable as Christians, then we need to ask if we understand the gospel because the gospel is good news. And please don't think that

[22 : 26] I am downplaying struggles and battles and difficulties you may be in. But as the course of your life, as the general direction of your life is not marked by the gospel of good news, then is powerless, then we need to ask ourselves if our understanding of the gospel is biblical. So what does it mean for us? It means that we're gospel to the core. It means that we're going to be a church of gospelers. Okay, not a great word. Couldn't think of a better one, but we're going to be a church of gospelers. Okay, the Romans once said I am not ashamed of the gospel. Okay, we're going to be gospeling people.

Okay, now what does that mean? Well, it means that we've all got different gifts. Okay, and some of us have the gifts, some here have the gift of evangelism. There's a guy in the front seat there who's got the gift of evangelism Paul and who works as an evangelist. He's got a specific calling and a gift to evangelize. He's got that gift. But we all are to be gospelers in our own lives. We're not saying, I don't have that gift, you know, but we all are to be ambassadors for Jesus. And none of us are to be ashamed of the gospel. So we need to live the gospel and we need to share the gospel. And that's what it takes you again out of the doors. So we're going out of the church just now. We're going into your halls of red residence and we're going into your workplace. We're going into your home and we're going in your neighborhood. We've left St. Columbus. We've left the building. You're no longer in the pews. Okay, and you're living the gospel when you go from here. You're living that gospel. Your identity is in Jesus Christ, the gospel. And you're living this gospel because He has transformed you and you've been born and you as a Christian. You're no longer old Joe blogs, you're new Joe blogs. Why do you always use that name? We're different.

It is you and you live it. That means the gospel because it is now the new you will spill out of your life. You know what, there's a great example of that both within the church and out with the church that Paul uses in the first Thessalonians too. He says, we loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God, but our lives as well because you had become so dear to us. So it's about the sharing of our life.

That is the gospel. It's the sharing of our life with someone. It's not just an agenda that we follow, a formula that we spill out. It's about sharing who we have become because of the gospel. The gospel has changed us so that we are in policies. We're not ashamed of that. We're not embarrassed by it. I think we struggled and I struggled manfully and bitterly with dualism with a double identity with believing the gospel where it's convenient and easy, but then not living the gospel and knowing Jesus as my best friend in the world, being ashamed. It's not that we have a good news, just a good news message. We have good news to live. Your life is good news. You've been redeemed, not just your intellect, not just your understanding, not just your philosophical viewpoint, not just your religious, it's you that have been redeemed and therefore you live that life. You live grace and grace that is lived is counter cultural and as you live it, Christ will spill out because you will be and I will seek to be like Jesus. It will spill out. So we live it, but of course we also share that. We share what spills out because it's still a message. And what I'm saying is that don't learn a formula for sharing that gospel. Don't learn an ABC of sharing it, but learn to share your story of Jesus Christ that is modelled around the truth and the gospel that has come into your life. Now go back to Corinthians again just for a moment.

I'm going to go back to Corinthians one that we read before. One, two, I, six and 27. What does he say? He says, brothers, not many of you were wise or influential or noble and he chose the foolish things of this world, but it also goes on to say that we struggled today and he's reminding us that we learn, go in front of the mirror and pretend there's someone there that has asked you about your Christian faith and tell them how you're going to share it or tell them the gospel and practice how you're going to share it because we do that. Don't we? We're practicing what is real to us, what we think will trigger other people to understand the gospel because they see it as transformed our lives and we pray for the people that we come into contact with that Christ will spill out and we will share him together. That is what will turn the city upside down and this country upside down.

[27 : 57] It's a gospel to the core. We're going to be a church of gospelers and we're going to be a gospeling church. That's our great commission, isn't it? Go into all the world and make disciples.

That's the commission that Jesus has given us and it's the message we believe as a community of believers that are gathered together, people need to hear. We're going to be ascending church sent, I hope, by Jesus Christ to go and to tell them about Christ and him crucified.

That means here we want to have a strong city centre presence. We're a gathered community here. We come from all over the city. That's fine. We want to come together and the core of what we do together is gospel centred. You pray that you'll hear gospel centred preaching here. It will be gospel inspired praise here from your heart and from mine that it will be a community of people together gathered. It will be a place of oasis and learning and love and belonging. We want that and we strive for that and we struggle to do that and we fail to do that but that's our aim. But 99% of the people have been but I will never come near this church. They'll never come into this gospel. They'll never come into this community. We also want to reach out with the gospel by developing small church in communities through city groups, through the work that we do and use that as a kind of prototype, I hope, for small gospel communities within the whole city, be a church planting church. But that's, you know, it's good to be here. We have great opportunities here. We have opportunities here with tourists in the summer. We have opportunities with international students. We have opportunities with lots of people who will come to the city. But we also want to reach the city. We believe the best we have reaching the city with the gospel is to plant gospel communities. That's the New

Testament model. Paul and Marnimus were sent out from Jerusalem to Antioch. Antioch sent them out to plant churches throughout the whole region and they preached to gospel.

People were converted. Leaders were appointed and they moved on and they came back in love and grace to see how they were getting on. That was how the gospel spread throughout the whole world. It was through churches being planted again and again and again. And our strategy here is a gospel church is to reach the city with new churches. And we'll do that. As God leads us and guides us and it's a learning process, we stumble, we fail, we make mistakes. We don't know the detail of that strategy but that's by His grace where we are. That's where we hope to be. We mentioned that on Wednesday night how God has revealed and helped and strengthened us so far. And we've seen it work at one early stage with Cornerstone where there's a fresh and a prayerful and passionate people who want to reach out with the gospel in that part of the city. But it's impossible, you know. It's absolutely impossible. It's a nightmare. The first word you write on strategy for the church is impossible.

[31 : 24] We need God's grace. We need to do it for God's glory and we need to keep our eye on the gospel. And so as we finish my challenge to each of us is to remind ourselves of how short life is. I know many of you are just at the cusp of growing freedom in individual lives away from home and are young and full of energy and that is wonderful and brilliant, amazing privilege. But life at its longest is short and we want to be part of God's God's story with all our vulnerability and with all our weakness and with all our lack of wisdom and understanding to be growing by His grace and to be doing that together.

God's put you here to be part of this. We love each one of you. We need each one of you. I invite you to be part of this work for His glory. I invite you if you're not a Christian to not be content just with being part of the church, part of a community. And it's an attractive community at that level. I certainly hope it is. But to be committed to the Christ of the church, the Christ of the gospel and to pray that we will be a people always a people who live for the glory of God and who live with the gospel at the very core of what we do. And it makes sense, doesn't it? It makes sense and it avoids all the ugliness and the brutality of church life and of division and of separation and of bitterness and of pointing fingers and of finding fault and of all the things that happen in churches.

And I am amazed and amazed that I come to church on Sunday morning. There's anyone here. You think, God by His grace and by His glory allows us to be together. And that's a wonderful thing. Amen.