

What is the Gospel?

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[0 : 00] I invite you to take your Bibles this morning and turn with me over to the book of Romans. We're going to be in Romans chapter 1. We're going to begin in verse 1, work our way through verse 17. So Romans chapter 1, verses 1 through 17.

And this morning, we are going to ask a rather simplistic question of Scripture. And that question is, what is the Gospel?

What is the Gospel? I mean, is the Gospel simply walking down an aisle, shaking a pastor's hand, or saying a sinner's prayer, and then never, ever allowing it to transform you?

This morning, we're going to look at Romans chapter 1, verses 1 through 17. And these verses are going to help us answer this question, what is the Gospel?

I love the way the Apostle Paul concisely answers this question in verses 16 and 17. Look at it with me. It's going to be up on the screen.

[1 : 08] He says, Would you pray with me?

Father, this is your Word, and we are thankful this morning that we can come together to worship you here in this place. Your Word is holy. It is without error. It is infallible, and it is authoritative for our lives.

And so, Father, this morning we come to worship you and to be changed. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen. Amen. My wife, Karen, she loves to buy large toys for our children.

And children, especially my kids, they love to receive large toys, right? They love playing with these things. And if you come over to our house, you're going to notice all over the place large toys.

Because large toys have large price tags, and you don't ever want to throw them away. So they just kind of pile up in the house. And so we've got large toys in the bedrooms. We've got large toys in the garage.

[2 : 28] We've got a large toy called a trampoline out in the backyard. Sometimes these large toys kind of trickle out onto the back patio, but you kind of get my drift.

They're large toys with large price tags. And large toys come with large instruction manuals on how to put these things together.

About four and a half years ago on Christmas, my wife convinced my parents to buy our daughter a dollhouse. But not just any old kind of dollhouse.

This dollhouse was this tall. It is this wide, and it came in a box that narrow. And so this box, which weighed about 100 pounds, we couldn't just put this dollhouse together before Christmas and then hide it.

I mean, where are you going to hide a dollhouse that's this tall and this wide? And so that required me and my dad to kind of put this thing together on Christmas Eve after we put the kids to bed. And so we began putting this big old dollhouse together in the room over the garage, the bonus room, beginning around 830 at night.

[3 : 38] And it took us almost five hours. My dad and I, we did not kill each other because sometimes that's what fathers and sons do when they work together on projects. They kill each other.

But we came out of the room unscathed. We got this thing together. My dad and I, man, we were proud of ourselves. Because this wasn't just any old dollhouse. I mean, every single thing in the dollhouse had to be put together.

Not just the dollhouse, but the furniture in the dollhouse. I mean, it had toilets. It had appliances, washers, dryers, you name it. Carpet. It was three stories high, so it had steps.

Everything had to be put together according to the instruction manual. So my dad and I, we got this thing put together and we were so proud of ourselves. And we've got to take this thing downstairs

now and put it under the Christmas tree.

But one thing we failed to do was to measure just how wide the dollhouse was going to be after we got it put together. And the dollhouse ended up being about that much wider than the door of our bonus room.

[4 : 41] And so my dad and I proceeded to take the door off the hinges and get us a little bit more room because we weren't taking this thing apart. So we got it to the door and, like I said, by this time, now that we've got the door down, we've got about this much room.

Between the edge of the roof, which is plastic, and the door jam itself. And so we just mashed that thing through the door. It did nothing to the dollhouse. The dollhouse was completely okay.

But the door jam, on the other hand, yeah, it got scratched up pretty bad. And so we got this big old dollhouse downstairs. We put it next to the Christmas tree. Christmas Day comes and down comes Ava.

Michael was just an itty-bitty thing at this point. Ava comes down and she sees this dollhouse and, man, she's excited. And she plays with this dollhouse all day long.

The next day, she invites her friends over. Her friends come over and they play with the dollhouse all day long. And then the next day, on the 27th, she plays with the dollhouse again, but not all day long.

[5 : 46] Just maybe, you know, three, four hours. Then the next day, she plays with it for about another hour, maybe two. The day after that, about 30 minutes. The day after that, about 15 minutes. And then the day after that, New Year's.

Well, it didn't get played with very much after that. That dollhouse, four and a half years later, is now sitting in our house in the upstairs hallway next to the laundry room where we throw our dirty laundry on top of it every now and then.

We don't want to throw it away. It costs a lot of money. It took a lot of time putting it together. And it's just sitting there right now. Now, I tell you that to say this.

Big toys, large toys, have large instruction manuals. This morning, we are going to be looking at the Book of Romans.

And the Book of Romans is much like a large instruction manual. It is one of the most systematic of Paul's letters. It reads almost like a theology textbook, if you will.

[6 : 49] Now, the Book of Romans was written by the Apostle Paul. He wrote it to the church at Rome. And I know that sounds very obvious. I mean, the book is called Romans. But it's important as we work our way through these 17 verses that we understand that Paul's audience here are Christians.

He's writing to the church. They know Christ. And so he's writing to them, to the church in Rome. Also, during this time in history, if you know anything about secular history, the whole Mediterranean world was under what was called the Roman Empire.

They were under the thumb of the Roman Empire. And obviously, the capital of the Roman Empire was none other than Rome. And so I want you this morning to kind of view the Roman Empire, to view Rome itself as a Washington, D.C.

Because that's essentially what it was. Right? Every single vice known to mankind could be found in Rome.

Alcohol, drugs, sexual promiscuity, you name it, it was there. Rome was religiously diverse, culturally diverse.

[8 : 02] It was a melting pot, much like Washington, D.C. is today. And so Paul is writing to this church, and it's important for us to understand the culture.

One secular historian wrote this about Rome. He said, quote, Rome was a severely overcrowded, loud, and smelly city.

A place that provided every virtue and vice known to mankind. The church at Rome came out of this environment. The people that made up the church in Rome came out of this environment.

And since they came out of this environment, naturally, there were questions. And one of those questions is, what is the gospel? And so this morning, what we're going to do is we're going to look at these 17 verses, and we are going to pull out of it three insights into what the gospel truly is.

Number one, the gospel was promised in the Old Testament. The gospel was promised in the Old Testament. Look what Paul says here, verses 1 through 7.

[9 : 11] He says, Pete says, He was descended from David according to the flesh, and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by His resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of His name among the nations, including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.

To all of those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Now we could literally take the next three weeks and go over these seven verses, but for the sake of time, we're going to look primarily at verse 2 because that's what we're concerned with.

The gospel being promised in the Old Testament, and that's exactly what Paul says here. He says, look at verse 2 again, he says that the gospel was promised beforehand through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures.

In other words, before the New Testament was written, before Jesus Christ was born, the Father had already promised that a Messiah was coming.

And He promised, it said, through His prophets, the authors, if you will, of the Old Testament, He promised through the prophets in the Holy Scriptures.

[10 : 47] Now, what scriptures is He referring to? Well, we know the authors are the prophets, but also Romans wasn't written until 57 AD.

It's a rather early New Testament book. And so the gospel that He's proclaiming here is not Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

The book of Romans was written before that. The gospel He's referring to here, the place that it was proclaimed and promised, is none other than the Old Testament.

The gospel, ladies and gentlemen, is not an afterthought of God. It's not like Genesis chapter 3 happened, and then God was like, oh, I've got to do something about this.

The gospel was already promised. Matter of fact, when original sin entered into the world, when Adam and Eve sinned in the garden, right after they sinned, the gospel is proclaimed.

[11 : 47] Genesis 3.15, God is talking to the serpent, otherwise known as Satan, and He says to the serpent, I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring.

He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel. In other words, God is promising that someone's coming, right there in Genesis chapter 3.

Someone is coming who is going to do what? He's going to crush the head of the serpent. And as we make our way through redemptive history in the Old Testament, all the way up into the New Testament, it is slowly revealed to us that this Messiah who is coming to crush the head of the serpent in Genesis chapter 3.15, is none other than our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

And so the gospel is not an afterthought. The gospel was promised in the Old Testament. It's kind of like this, talking about promises. We're on to now the summer days where the kids are out of school, and people like my wife who work for the school, they're out of school.

They get to stay home with the kids. And that's awesome. Until about late June, early July, where let's just be honest, we're ready for them to go back to school.

[13 : 09] And Karen is there with the kids, and sometimes, sometimes, children test the limits. They test the limits of their mama.

Let me tell you a very exaggerated story here. I'll come home from work one afternoon, around 4.30, 5 o'clock, and I'll pull up into the driveway, and everything we own is out on the front lawn. Everything we own is out on the front lawn. And there's our kids running around, yeah, yeah, yeah, you know, just having a good old time. And I walk into the house, and there's my wife sitting on the only piece of furniture left in the whole house, on this chair, with her hand on her head like this. And I look at her, and I say, sweetheart, what is going on? And she says, I only turned my back on the kids for one minute. One minute is all it took, and they got everything we own out onto the front lawn.

My mom called, and I took the phone call. I should have never done it. And then I said this, and gentlemen, don't ever say this to your wife in this situation, because you will sleep on the couch that night.

[14 : 17] I said, why does this happen when it's only you with the kids? I'm not there? Why does this not happen when I'm at home?

Yeah, wrong thing. I learned very early on as a dad, that's the wrong thing to say to your wife after she's been home with the kids for the last eight to ten hours. And so, in all seriousness, when things start going south, my wife will often make a promise to our children.

And the promise will go something like this. You wait until your daddy gets home. Right? You wait until your daddy gets home. Everyone in here, if you've tested the limits of mama, you have heard those words.

You wait until your daddy gets home, and you know mom's not playing. You know that's a promise that you can take to the bank, that when daddy gets home, yeah, it's all like Donkey Kong. It's going to get real, real fast.

And so Karen will say to the kids, and she'll make that promise, you wait until your daddy gets home, because my kids know daddy don't play. Promises mean something.

[15:22] Now, people break promises, unfortunately. Your friends will break promises. Family members will break promises. Sometimes parents, pastors will break promises.

But there is one person that never, ever, ever breaks his promise. And that's God. God never breaks his promises. And one of the promises we see here in Romans chapter 1 is the promise of the gospel that is rooted in the Old Testament.

The gospel was promised in the Old Testament. Number two, the gospel is a way of life. The gospel is a way of life. Look at verses 8 through 15.

First, and I love the way he says first, he's just given us seven verses of incredibly dense material. And then he says, okay, now I'm going to say what I meant to say.

He's like a typical preacher. First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you because your faith is proclaimed in all the world. For God is my witness whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his son that without ceasing, I mention you always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God's will, I may now at last succeed in coming to you.

[16:44] For I long to see you that I may impart to you a spiritual gift to strengthen you. That is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine. I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I have often intended to come to you, but thus far have been prevented.

In order that I may reap some harvest among you as well as among the rest of the Gentiles, I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish, so I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who is in Rome.

The gospel is not something you just simply believe to be historically true. I say often to our youth that just because you say you believe something to be true doesn't mean you are that which you believe.

For example, I believe Hitler lived, it doesn't make me a Nazi. I believe Stalin lived, and that does not make me a communist. And so, just merely affirming the historical facts of something you say you believe doesn't make you a follower of that thing that you believe.

I say that because I want you to look again at verse 8. Paul says to the Romans, to the Christians at Rome, he says, your faith is proclaimed in all of the world.

[18:14] I want you to think about the world at this point. It's the Mediterranean world. These people are located in Rome. Their faith is known all over the Mediterranean world.

It's 57 AD. There are no phones. There's no internet. There's no radio. So how did the whole known world at that period of time know how big the faith was of those Christians in Rome?

I'll tell you how. Word to mouth. Word to mouth. They believed in Christ. They believed the gospel. But they didn't just believe it. It impacted their lives, and it impacted their lives so much that people saw a difference in them.

And that reputation spread all over the Mediterranean world. And so when Paul is talking about faith here, he's not referring to just that initial trust in Christ that brings about salvation.

He's talking about the persevering trust that brings about spiritual strength and growth which is ongoing. And so Paul moves on into verse 12, and he wants to be, he says, mutually encouraged by each other's faith both yours and mine.

[19:30] Paul, the Apostle Paul, knew that it was important to be plugged into a local church. He knew it was important to be worshiping, to be fellowshiping with a body of believers.

I want you to think about who Paul is for just a second. Paul wrote 13 books of the New Testament. He's the greatest missionary this world has ever seen. He has received direct revelation from

Jesus, but yet he knows it's important to be involved in the life of the church. He wasn't someone that just showed up once or twice a month on Sundays when he had the time. I would argue that Paul was instrumental in the churches that he was involved in. It was important to him to be involved, and so I ask this of you and of I. If the Apostle Paul, 13 books of the New Testament, greatest missionary, direct revelation from God, if the Apostle Paul knew it was important to be plugged into the local church and to be involved, how much more you and I? And so Paul wants to be encouraged by each other's faith and he goes on to say, I am eager to preach the gospel to you who are at Rome.

[20 : 52] Now when I was preparing for this message, the first question I had when I read that, I was like, why does Paul want to preach the gospel to the Christians in Rome when their faith is already so big that the whole Mediterranean world knows about it?

Here's the answer. The gospel is not just something we say we believe. It's not just affirming a historical fact or saying a sinner's prayer.

Yes, the gospel is that initial trust in Christ that brings about salvation, but when we receive the gospel, when we trust in Christ truly as our Lord and our Savior, it impacts our lives.

The gospel is a way of life. Now, like any good speaker, you always want to illustrate the point you're trying to make. And the point we're trying to make this morning is that the gospel is a way of life.

And so what I'm going to do is I'm going to give you an illustration that just FYI, it's going to break down, but I think we can kind of put the pieces together and understand it. The gospel is a way of life in the same way that being an athlete is a way of life.

[22 : 07] For example, to become an athlete, you've got to try out for the team. You make the team, you become an athlete. athlete, right? However, if you don't show up to the practices, if you don't put on the uniform, if you don't come to the games, if you're not a team player, if all you ever do is make the team and earn the title athlete and never do anything else, are you really an athlete?

No. What about like a student? The gospel is a way of life in the same way that being a student is a way of life. To become a student, you register for classes.

You register for classes, you're now a student. But, if you never show up to class, you never do the work, you fail everything and you drop out, are you really a student?

And more importantly, for high school students, it's even more a way of life. They go to proms, they've got homecoming, they go to football games, they've got these different organizations that they're a part of, it's even more of a way of life.

If all you do is go to Pickens High School, register for classes and never show up ever again, are you really a student? No. Because when you're a student, it's a way of life.

[23 : 25] When you're an athlete, it's a way of life. The gospel is a way of life. It transforms us. We come to faith in Christ, Christ.

We exercise the spiritual gifts that God has given us in his church. We are involved in the church.

We worship in the church. We fellowship with one another. We serve with one another.

We go on mission trips with one another. Youth go to camp with one another. It's a way of life.

That's what the gospel is. So the gospel is rooted in the Old Testament.

The gospel is a way of life. And then finally, the one point that I think everyone in here is familiar with is that the gospel is the power of God for salvation. It's the gospel that saves us.

Verses 16 and 17, Paul says, For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith as it is written, the righteous shall live by faith.

[24 : 32] As we come to a close in this message, I want to leave you with an encouraging word. That encouraging word is, the gospel will bring you persecution.

Praise the Lord. Right? The gospel will bring you persecution. All over this world, even today, people are beaten and murdered for their faith.

Now, we don't have that problem necessarily here in our country, but I will let you know you will be persecuted for your faith. Why? Because the gospel is a way of life. It alters the way you think.

Your worldview will be different than other people's worldviews. Your priorities will be different than other people's priorities. And every now and then, people might look at you and think, man, you're a little weird.

Right? The gospel will bring you persecution. And so, Paul says, in light of that, in verse 16, he says, I'm not ashamed of the gospel.

[25 : 37] In other words, I don't care what kind of persecution comes my way. And think again about who Paul is. Paul was locked up, beaten, often near death.

He was flogged, stoned, shipwrecked, and he was always looking over his back because his countrymen wanted to kill him, and the Roman government wanted to arrest him and execute them, which they ultimately did.

And Paul says, in light of all of that, I don't care. I don't care what's going to come my way. I am not ashamed of the gospel. Why?

Tells us right here in this passage. Because it's the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. First Baptist, there is no greater decision that you will ever make than who is Jesus Christ. Your career plans, your college plans, your family plans, our vacation plans, now that we're in the summer, don't matter at all compared to who is Jesus Christ.

[26 : 53] It is the greatest decision that you will ever make. Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, came to this earth and lived 33 years without sin, completely fulfilling the law.

He went to the cross willingly and died. He was buried. Three days later, He rose from the dead. dead. And here's where it gets real.

Not only did He just raise from the dead, but He was seen by not just one person, not even by His eleven remaining disciples.

He was seen by hundreds, hundreds of people over the period of forty days. He ascended back to heaven.

He is seated at the right hand of the Father. You know what He's doing right now? He's praying for you. He's praying for me. The greatest decision you will ever make is who is Jesus.

[28 : 03] The gospel was promised way back in the Old Testament. It's a promise rooted in the Old Testament. the gospel is a way of life and it's the gospel that brings about salvation.

Would you pray with me? Heavenly Father, we come before you this morning humbled for what you have done for us. None of us in this room are worthy of what you have done for us.

So this morning, Lord, we come before you. We're thankful for the gospel. We're thankful for your grace, your love, your goodness. And Lord, there be somebody in this room this morning that does not know Christ.

It is my prayer this morning that this would be the day of repentance, the day of faith, that they would trust in Jesus as their Lord and their Savior. Father, I pray as we begin these summertime months that we are reminded the gospel is just not simply believing a series of facts.

The gospel impacts our lives. May we leave here reflecting that in this community, in the people that we come into contact with each and every day.

[29 : 25] We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. pour an ■■ into the future.