

A Real Gospel Purpose

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Preacher: William Philip

[0 : 0 0] Well, we're going to turn now to our Bible readings this morning, and for the last time, at least in the meantime, we turn to Paul's letter to the Romans. Don't be confused. We are going to read the first few verses of the letter as well as the last few verses.

We're not starting right at the beginning all over again, but we're going to read the first 17 verses of the letter and then turn to the doxology at the end, which will be our focus this morning. I think the reason will become obvious because you'll see how Paul, as so often, begins and rounds off his letters by summarizing some of the key concerns that he has and that he fills out in the rest of all of these 16 chapters.

So Romans 1 at verse 1.

I want you to know, brothers, that I have often intended to come to you, but thus far I've been prevented.

In order that I may reap some fruit, some harvest among you, as well as among the rest of the Gentiles. I'm under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish.

[2 : 3 0] So I'm eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. For I'm 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. Now turn to the last few verses in chapter 16 at verse 25.

Now to him, says Paul, who is able, who is powerful to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages, but has now been manifested.

I'm going to read this slightly differently in order. has now been manifested and made known through the prophetic writings, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith unto all the nations.

To the only wise God, be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ. Amen. And may God bless to us this, his word.

[3 : 5 0] Well, let's turn, shall we, to the scriptures, to Paul's letter to the Romans at chapter 16. And as we come to the end of this great letter to the Romans, Paul's doxology in these final verses gives us opportunity to look back and to get crystal clear in our minds Paul's purpose in writing.

There's not much point in studying Romans unless we get its purpose, because the reason that Paul first wrote to the church in Rome in the first century is the same reason that the Holy Spirit has preserved this letter for every church, including our own.

So what is Paul's aim? What's he wanting to do in writing this message to the church? When we are doing our preaching classes at Cornhill, we often ask the students, what's your theme sentence and what's your aim sentence?

In other words, what's your message about? And what's it meant to do in your hearers? What response are you looking for? Well, what's the aim of Paul's letter here?

What's he wanting to do? Well, when you turn to the very beginning of the letter that we read, and you read it alongside the end of the letter, we're struck again, aren't we, about some of the things that were so important for Paul.

[5 : 10] And surely the key thing above all that comes up again and again there is the gospel. So the opening verse began, Paul, a servant set apart for the gospel of God.

Verse 9 of chapter 1, I serve the gospel of his son, he says. Verse 15, I'm eager to preach to you the gospel to you also in Rome. Verse 16, I'm unashamed of the gospel.

Quite unmistakable, isn't it? And here we have in the very last paragraph of the letter, now to him who is able to strengthen you, according to my gospel. So whatever Paul's purpose was in writing this letter, it was undoubtedly a great gospel purpose.

But what exactly is that gospel purpose? Well, ultimately, of course, it is just what this doxology says. Look, to him whose gospel it is, to the only wise God, there should be glory evermore through Jesus Christ.

That is Paul's purpose. But, of course, that's not just a vague wish on Paul's part. It's not just a sort of pious, conventional way that you round off a letter.

[6 : 26] Now, notice very carefully in this doxology, notice how those first three words, now to him, how it breaks off and resumes at the end of verse 27. Now to him, to the only wise God be glory evermore.

And those two sections are like brackets, aren't they, that hold together what goes inside. And what comes inside those brackets, that ascription of glory, tells us how it is that God is going to be glorified forevermore.

You see? Look at it carefully, I'm sure you'll see. What Paul says is, as the church is strengthened in life now, through the gospel, and through the manifestation of God's plan in the world among the nations, that is how God will be glorified evermore.

And that is Paul's real gospel purpose, therefore, in writing this letter to the Romans, so that the church will be strengthened by God's grace for God's eternal glory.

Now, so again, look at how Paul begins and ends the letter, and you see how that comes out. Chapter 1, verse 11, Paul says, I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you.

[7 : 38] And here, verse 25, now to him who is powerful, to strengthen you, according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ. So he was eager to come to the church in Rome and preach the gospel to them, to strengthen them.

And in the meantime, when he wasn't there, he wrote to expand and to apply this gospel to do that very same thing, to strengthen the church until he came. His real gospel purpose is to strengthen the church by God's grace for God's eternal glory.

Well, why did they need strengthening? We know it was a good church, a strong church. After all, we read in chapter 1, their faith was widely known and celebrated all through the world.

We've seen several times in chapter 15, verse 14, that Paul himself says they're full of goodness and knowledge and ability to instruct one another. And why do they need to be strengthened?

Sounds pretty good to me. Well, of course, Paul is no fool. Paul is a realist. Paul is a toughened gospel warrior who knows that any church and any Christian that is really serving the Lord God in mission will always need strengthening.

[8 : 52] Because it will always be facing great pressures from the world, the flesh, and the devil. And there are at least three things, there are many more, but at least three things that this letter strongly hints at which the Roman church and indeed any church will always be up against and need strengthening for.

The first is shame. Saw that in chapter 1. It's no accident that Paul says, I am not ashamed of the gospel. Wherever Paul went, there was persecution, there was opprobrium, there was opposition.

And that is always so when the true gospel is being proclaimed. And friends, let me tell you, it is very easy, isn't it, to be ashamed of a gospel that always puts you in the doghouse with polite society, that always puts you in the doghouse with institutional religion, the culture around about us.

And so the church must be strengthened so that they're not ashamed of the gospel, so that they are willing to suffer for the gospel with Paul, so that they're willing to be real partners in the gospel in its mission to the world.

Well, there's plenty of opposition today to Paul's gospel, isn't there? And we also need to be strengthened so that we too are unashamed partners in that same mission to the world. Second, the church needs strengthening in the face of suffering and death.

[10 : 13] That's so clear, isn't it, from what Paul says in chapter 8 of Romans where he tackles full on the present realities of life in a still suffering world and life in still sinful bodies under the curse.

Because the real Christian life is a hard life, isn't it? And it's easy, so easy to despair, to lose heart, especially when people tell you that, oh, real life in the fullness of the Spirit ought to be much more than this.

It ought to be full of joy and glory and healing and all of these things now in your experience. And so we need strengthening by the truth, the truth, the truth that it is the first fruits of the Spirit that we possess now, that we're saved, as Paul says, in hope for a salvation that is still future, for something far better that awaits us, but only when we receive our resurrection bodies.

Our full salvation is not yet. And so often we need strengthening. In just the same way we need strengthening, don't we, in the face of struggle.

the ongoing struggle with sin which so easily makes us despair, makes us give up and doubt that the Gospel really has any power. And so Paul is so clear, isn't he, as we've seen, especially in chapter 6 and 7 of Romans, about the truth that yes, we are indeed liberated from sin's power over us to rule us, to shape our destiny, but we are not yet liberated from sin's presence.

[11 : 43] So he writes to strengthen us in our struggle against sin, to encourage us that this is the evidence of the daily work of the Holy Spirit within us, leading us as real sons and daughters of the living God as we put sin to death in our bodies day after day, putting to death the deeds of the flesh.

And every real Gospel church and all true Gospel people face the struggles of sin. And we face the struggles of the pain of suffering and of death.

And we face temptations, don't we, because of that, to feel shame at a Gospel that the world hates. And so even good and strong and teaching and fruitful churches need strengthening.

They need it always if God is going to be glorified through them and glorified forever through the fruit of their mission and their lives. and that is why Paul wrote Romans.

And that's why we need to study Romans so that our lives and especially our corporate life, our church life will be strengthened so that we do bring glory to God forevermore.

[12 : 59] So then as we come to the end of our study in Romans today, let's allow this doxology to remind us how the message of this letter does so strengthen us by God's grace that we may live truly for God's glory.

Because these verses I think sum up magnificently almost everything that Paul has squeezed into these marvelous 16 chapters that we've studied. Let me summarize it this way.

What Paul says here in the doxology encapsulating everything he says in the whole letter is that God will be glorified forevermore as the church is powerfully strengthened.

is it strengthened by always loving the message of the true gospel and by living the mission of the true gospel. It says the church loves and lives the true gospel of grace that it will be powerfully strengthened by God to bring glory to God through Jesus Christ forever.

So let's think of that first thing loving the gospel. Paul says that God is able God is powerful to strengthen the church when the message of the true gospel is proclaimed. When the message of the true gospel is proclaimed.

[14 : 13] Verse 25 He's powerful to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ. God's strengthening power is at work says Paul when the authentic Christ and his gospel is proclaimed.

That's why Paul's eager to preach to them. And that's why this letter therefore expounds the gospel of the authentic Christ to strengthen the Romans so that they will know what kind of gospel it is and what kind of ministry it is that will go on strengthening the church to the glory of God.

It's my gospel that you need says Paul. Do you notice that? Personal. My gospel. Paul is the apostle of Christ to the Gentiles and he proclaims the authentic gospel.

It's not that it's different from the gospel of the other apostles but Paul's gospel does have some very distinct emphases and God charged Paul clearly to be our chief teacher of many of these things because quite plainly he is the author of so much of the epistles of the New Testament.

And so the clear implication friends is that if we ignore Paul's gospel if Paul's gospel is not at the very heart of the church's life then the church will not be strengthened because it will be lacking in preaching of the authentic Jesus Christ.

[15 : 37] It's very important for us to be clear about that. Where Paul's influence is weak in the church today then those churches will lack the strengthening power of God and they will therefore surely fail greatly in their task of bringing glory to God.

That must be so. So last week with the men training in the pastor's training course we were reading together and critiquing a book. A book that was claiming to be recovering the true message of Jesus but in fact it was a deeply distorted message of Jesus and very interestingly and perhaps typically there was only one small reference in the whole of that book to anything written by the apostle Paul.

Well when books like that marginalize the gospel of the apostle Paul where they hold influence in the church the church will inevitably be weakened. But if the church today is to be strengthened then it must certainly be strengthened by Paul and does not the church in Scotland badly need strengthening today?

Well the power of God for that strengthening says Paul comes according to my gospel because that is the preaching of the authentic Christ.

So we need Paul's gospel in the church today. Isn't it striking that in chapter 1 we begin with the gospel which is the power of God for salvation to all who believe and here we end in chapter 16 with the gospel which is the power of God for strengthening all who believe.

[17 : 12] Without the gospel there will be no salvation and no strengthening. In other words there will be nothing. Well what is Paul's gospel then? That is the power of God to strengthen us by his grace for God's good.

Let me mention five things there could be many more but five that characterize Paul's gospel here in Romans that we have seen so clearly. First Paul's gospel is a gospel that warns us unsparingly about the truth concerning God's coming wrath and concerning God's certain judgment.

Immediately we find ourselves balking at that perhaps being ashamed of that. There are few things today so utterly unacceptable in our culture than the very notion of a God of wrath and a God of judgment.

And indeed the church at large is equally afraid of these things and dare not so often speak of the judgment of God. Even some of the most popular evangelistic courses used in the church today hardly mention the wrath and the judgment of God for that reason.

But Paul is not ashamed to warn us unsparingly about God's judgment. Indeed it's where he begins his exposition in chapter 1 verse 18. And we have three whole chapters of relentless unremitting warning about the terrors of sin and judgment before there's any let up at all in chapter 3 verse 21.

[18 : 43] I'm sure you can remember how awful it was when we were preaching through it. I can certainly remember how awful it was to have to preach it. The wrath of God says Paul is being revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

Chapter 1 verse 18. Because of your hard and impenitent hearts you're storing up wrath for yourselves on a day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.

Chapter 2 verse 5. Every mouth is stopped. The whole world is accountable to God. All alike are under the power of sin. Chapter 3. Relentless unsparing warning that God is angry.

Angry because his holy purity and goodness is besmirched by us. We have perverted the truth, exchanged the truth for a lie, exalting ourselves and debasing God's name and in doing so defacing our image of God in us, debasing ourselves in mind and body, celebrating everything that's evil and perverse and turning away from everything that is glorious and immortal and good.

People are living a lie, says Paul, living a delusion, despite the whistleblower who warns of disaster coming, who flags up the uncomfortable, the unpalatable truth.

[20 : 17] that is fallen human nature, says Paul. We see it all around us, don't we? There were those years ago who warned of the inevitable disaster of a single currency for so many nations bound together in Europe, allowing profligate nations to borrow money at cheap rates as though they were fiscally responsible countries.

There were people who warned and described exactly the things that we're seeing happening today. they were utterly written off as cranks and mad and they were suppressed and kept off the air. You can silence the truth.

We do it all the time. But it's still the truth and a day of reckoning will come. And all the worse for having been ignored. That's what we're finding out today all around the world.

And so it is, friends, with the truth about God. Only the truth can liberate and set people free. And only a gospel that warns and tells the truth about God's righteous anger against sin and his righteous commitment to justice and to punishment for sin, only that truth has power to save the sinner and to strengthen the church.

Because only that opens people's eyes to reality. And only when reality replaces fantasy can there be the beginning of any real or lasting solution.

[21 : 38] Whether it's the problem of the crushing debts, of foolish nations, or whether it's the problem of the crushing debt of sin before a holy God. Paul's gospel is a gospel that warns the world unsparingly.

Second, Paul's gospel is a gospel that humbles the church utterly, that humbles us under sheer divine grace. There is salvation for God's wrath, says Paul, but it's a salvation that shatters all human pride.

It's a salvation that leaves us in the dust, where we can't look down ever on anybody else through any superiority of our own pedigree or our performance. Paul's gospel humbles us utterly and leaves us crushed, crushed under the weight of our own sin.

And yet then he humbles us even more as that guilt is removed, removed from all without distinction, only by God's sheer grace alone, that comes as a free gift to which we ourselves contribute absolutely nothing, except for holding out our empty hands, and seeing just how empty they are, as we receive the forgiveness of his grace.

Paul's gospel humbles the church utterly. We're humbled by the sacrifice at the heart of his saving grace, the sheer costliness of our redemption, that it can only be through the blood of the Son of God himself, wrath, because God's wrath against sin must be punished.

[23 : 10] And it was our sin that put him there. It humbles us. We're humbled by the sheer simplicity at the heart of God's saving grace that there's nothing, nothing for us to contribute, not at all.

Simply these open hands, as we receive it all, empty, as a gift paid for by another. The simplicity of our salvation is a slap in the face of our pride, isn't it?

Remember Naaman, the great warrior, captain of Syria. He would gladly have paid gold and silver and jewels and clothes to be healed of his leprosy by the man of God. He would gladly have done great heroic exploits to be healed of his leprosy.

But he was utterly humbled by the simple command to walk down into a dirty river and wash himself seven times. Humbled.

We're humbled, aren't we, by the sovereignty of God's grace. Isn't that what chapters 9 to 11 hammered home to us so powerfully? It's not because of our works. It's not because of our pedigree.

[24 : 15] It's not because of anything at all but God's sheer sovereign call. He has mercy on whomsoever he has mercy and he hardens whomsoever he wills.

He's consigned all to disobedience, says Paul, that he may have mercy on all just the same way, by sheer grace. So do not become proud, he says, whoever you are, but stand in awe of a gospel that humbles you.

The extraordinary, pride-destroying, sheer grace of God that saves us and saves every other person, whatever culture or background or status they have in this world, that saves them by his sheer mercy alone.

And only that gospel, says Paul, can strengthen the church because only that gospel can slay the pride and the self-belief in the human heart that's the root of every tension, every division in the world and in the church.

The pride that comes from a feeling of spiritual superiority to others because of your pedigree or your knowledge or your theological acumen or whatever it is, your library or the grudge that you nurse because of a sense of inferiority because you don't seem to have the in things that others do in your particular church.

[25 : 39] Isn't that so? But it's a church where all such pride, all such self-consciousness is crushed by a grasp of the real humbling grace of God in Christ.

It's that church that will lose that destructive inward-looking focus and will be strengthened in outward-looking mission focus to bring glory to God through the glad service that brings others also into the orbit of that grace.

Third, Paul's gospel is a gospel that assures us completely. It assures us and gives us certain hope amid all the struggles in these still sinful bodies and this still suffering world because we know that we are united with Christ by his spirit forever.

That we are in a personal union which can never be broken, not in all eternity. And so although because we are so conscious of our ongoing sin and the struggles of this flesh and the decay of this suffering world under the curse, although because of that so often we feel condemned by our sin.

Chapter 8 verse 1 so marvelously says, there is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus. For the law of the spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.

[27 : 03] There is no condemnation. And as the last verse of that marvelous chapter reminds us, there is no separation therefore from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

And so we have assurance. We have a solid hope of glory to come, a hope that will never be put to shame because we have the love of God poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

The Holy Spirit of adoption by whom we know God as Father and cry out even in our struggles, Father, Abba, the Spirit who bears witness with our spirits that we are genuine children of God, heirs of God, fellow heirs with Christ, who will share in his resurrection glory because because we share now in his sufferings united to him in the way of the cross.

You see, Paul's gospel gives us real assurance because it explains why the Christian life is so hard. It tells us why it's so full of struggle and suffering. It's because we are united to a crucified Savior and we suffer with him in order that we may be glorified with him.

there is nothing so destructive, friends, nothing so destructive to Christian assurance than the falsehood of a prosperity gospel, a gospel that says the real sign of spiritual blessing is health and healing and well-being now at all times.

[28 : 37] That if you don't have that, you lack faith somehow. You're not doing enough to impress God so that God will bless you. You need to have more prayers and more fasting and more special services and more ceremonies.

No! The real gospel assures us that the hard-pressed suffering saint is on the true road to glory.

That this is evidence of the spirit of adoption. That this is the way of gospel power. The power that is made perfect in weakness, just as it was for our Lord Jesus Christ.

So the church is strengthened to persevere in its mission in the midst of a dark and a hostile world as it holds forth the word of life, assured that in its weakness even God's power is at work.

So Paul's gospel is therefore a gospel that fourthly unites the church harmoniously. Indeed as we've seen only a gospel of sheer sovereign grace alone that saves everybody through faith alone by grace, from a judgment that all alike are under, only that gospel can unite the church because only that church will be people humbled together under God's grace.

[29 : 58] Banishing all boasting, all prideful thoughts. Those thoughts of pride in our hearts, that boasting is the bitter root of all simmering resentments and jealousies and grudges and self-seeking and self-assertion.

But it's utterly excluded by Paul's gospel. That's what we saw so clearly, isn't it, as Paul applies this gospel to the church from chapter 12 onwards.

Only this gospel will make people think soberly about themselves and others. Only this gospel will make people serve one another in love, honour others above themselves, love all the brothers with brotherly affection, causing them to bear with each other, not berate each other for their inadequacies.

It's only a church that is not divided inwardly, that can possibly be dynamic outwardly in mission. It's obvious. But a church that does cherish the sheer privilege of God's grace and knows the uniting power of that grace to overcome all barriers to fellowship among all kinds of different people, that church is confident in the sheer power of God's grace that has changed them to also change the world.

So the fifth characteristic of Paul's gospel is that it's a gospel that sends the church outward constantly. Outwards and onwards to regions beyond with this gospel to bring the message of grace to the very ends of the earth.

[31 : 35] We've seen in these last weeks, haven't we, in chapter 15 and 16, the driving force in Paul's writing is to impress on the church in Rome their true gospel calling, to share his passion as partners in mission, as real gospel people who understand the call of the kingdom, to rejoice in sharing the priestly duty, not only of offering themselves to God as living sacrifices, but offering others, Gentiles, outsiders, from the ends of the earth, as they too bow the knee to the Lord Jesus Christ and become a pleasing sacrifice to him.

And that is Paul's gospel. That's the only gospel that will ever strengthen the church. And where you see the church in decline, where you see mission not interested in at all, where you see people divided and a church pulling against itself, you can be sure that the authentic Christ, that Paul's gospel is not being proclaimed, that Paul, is being ignored and despised.

Because without the true gospel, that warns of God's wrath, that humbles people under grace, that assures them in hope, even in the midst of pressure and persecution and suffering, without that there can be no unity in the church, only division.

And there can be no mission, only hopeless attempts at maintenance, which will lead only ultimately to morbidity. and in the end to sheer rigor mortis.

And if that describes many churches and denominations in the western world today, and alas it does, then the message is clear. The church will be strengthened only when the message of the true gospel is proclaimed.

[33 : 27] God is powerful, says Paul, to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, the authentic Christ. But secondly, and much more briefly, the doxology also reminds us of what Paul has been at pains to get across all the way through Romans, that loving the gospel and living the gospel always go together.

So he says here that God is powerfully at work to strengthen the church when the mystery of the true gospel is manifested. In other words, when the authentic church is being manifested and made visible and tangible and obvious in the world.

Look here in verse 25 and 26. Paul speaks about the revelation of the mystery kept secret for long ages but now disclosed, now manifested. That is visibly and publicly and tangibly made known, he says.

How made known? Made known through the prophetic writings, that is through the promises of God and according to the command of God, that is in line with God's plan and purpose from the very beginning.

To bring about, he says, the obedience of faith unto all the nations. Those two phrases should go together really as they are in chapter 1 verse 5. What he's saying is that what God promised to Abraham to make him the father of many nations would at last be fulfilled through the gospel of Jesus Christ, become manifest, become visible and real.

[35 : 02] As all who believe through the Lord Jesus Christ, all whom God is calling from both the Jews and the Gentiles are grafted together into one family, into one olive tree, into one church by God's grace through faith.

If you read Ephesians 3 verses 1 to 6, you'll see that Paul speaks there about this mystery being revealed in just the same way. And a mystery in the New Testament means something that was once hidden, perhaps almost unbelievable, but now is made very clear and very obvious to everybody.

In Ephesians 3 verse 6, he says this, this mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, fellow members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

gospel. And he goes on to say that it's thus through this church that reunites humanity together as one.

It's through this church that God's glory is going to be displayed forever and ever in the heavens and in the earth. So what he's saying is that the proclamation of the authentic Christ must lead always to the manifestation of the authentic church.

[36 : 22] And when it does, we see with our own eyes it's made known to all that it is the gospel. And it's the gospel alone that has power to reunite fractured humanity.

That brings together in peace those who are rent asunder by strife. Through all the rivalries and divisions of race or gender or class or culture, a hundred other things that cause divisions in every relationship in our world.

It's through the gospel that God's ultimate purpose of glory and of recreation of this universe to be what it is meant to be, that it's brought about through the proclamation of the gospel.

And what a wonderful strengthening it is to us, he is saying, in the church of Christ when we see that actually happening before our very eyes. When we sense it and experience it in our own experience.

the mystery of the ages is manifest in our midst. And doesn't it strengthen us when we see that? Even today, just look around this building.

[37 : 32] You'll see, don't you, people from all sorts of different backgrounds, religious backgrounds, cultural backgrounds, different colors, different languages. churches. Even on a day when we got hammered by England yesterday, we could be here, Scots and English, praising God together.

Only the gospel can do that. There are so many things, aren't there, that naturally are conditioned to cause people to fracture and dislocate and dissociate, become hostile to one another, scorn one another, even hate one another.

But now, says Paul, all of these can be brought together, united, to glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. And only the gospel can do that.

And doesn't that strengthen you in your faith? Doesn't that convince you in your heart of the power and purpose of God being at work to bring glory to his name when you see it? Doesn't that encourage us every Sunday when we come to church and see one another, to know that God's great purpose for eternity will not fail?

It's happening before our eyes. Doesn't it spur us on in our task? To keep on going out into all the world, to fulfill the promise of God, to fulfill the command of God, to bring about the obedience of faith.

[38 : 57] Knowing that this gospel has the power to reunite fractured humanity and communities and personalities and people and families and marriages and cultures and languages and everything.

Knowing that God's gospel is the power of God for salvation to all who believe. And that people will believe. And they will be brought to obedience from every background and nation and tribe and tongue.

As we see before us, being made manifest, God's eternal plan coming to pass in the church, through the gospel, as the authentic church is being born, our faith is strengthened.

We have courage to go on proclaiming the authentic Christ. And when we see that transforming power of the true gospel of grace at work in our midst, humbling our own hearts, humbling our own pride, humbling our own self-righteousness, reuniting us in the disputes that we have, uniting our hearts together in love, then we know, don't we, that this grace that has so changed us that it can change anyone, however sinful.

We know how sinful we are. Nobody else knows how sinful I am but me. God can change me. And so I'm confident in the power of the gospel to change anyone and I'm even more committed to the task that we all share together.

[40 : 38] That's why Paul wrote Romans for the church. That's why we as a church need Romans. His great gospel purpose is that the good news of God's grace will be preached in all the world by a church that is resilient in faith, not reticent in fear.

And that will happen where the authentic gospel is manifest in the whole church. A church united humbly by the privilege of grace, not one that's divided horribly by the pride of religion.

And therefore he knows for that to be so, the authentic gospel must be proclaimed in all its fullness. And so Paul wrote this letter to the church in Rome in the first century, but God preserved it for us as the church in the 21st century that we too might be strengthened by God's grace and be for God's eternal glory.

Strengthened as we both love the message of the gospel and live together the message of the gospel. A gospel that does warn unsparingly of the wrath to come, but humbles all joyfully under God's grace in Christ.

Assures us completely of the hope of glory and unites us in love and sends us out with great confidence to proclaim Jesus Christ as the power of God for salvation for all who believe.

[42 : 00] All. So friends, as we end our study in Romans, we must say emphatically that Paul's purpose in writing is not merely academic.

It was not so people could write PhDs on the book of Romans. Nor was it just theoretical or even theological. It is doxological. That is, its ultimate purpose is to bring glory to God forever.

But that comes through Jesus Christ, says Paul. And so his immediate purpose in this letter must be missionary. And so must ours if we are to bring glory to God.

He writes to strengthen the church by the gospel for the gospel so that we might fulfill our calling according to the command of the eternal God to bring about the obedience of faith among all the nations.

All the nations coming to Glasgow and all the nations beginning from Glasgow. So that the disobedient will bow the knee to Jesus Christ through that gospel.

[43 : 09] So that the unbelieving will become people of faith through Jesus Christ. And so as we close our studies in Romans, may indeed God, who is able to strengthen us according to Paul's gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, may he be pleased to use even us and grant us here in St. George's Tron to play our part and every one of us as Christian believers to play our part.

that there may be to the only wise God glory forevermore through Jesus Christ. Amen.

Let's pray. Lord, we thank you for our brother, the Apostle Paul, and for his gospel, and for the proclamation of the authentic Jesus Christ.

Fill our hearts, we pray, with love for this message. And fill our lives also together as a church that we might live this message.

And daily be strengthened to go out at the command of the eternal God to bring about the obedience of faith unto all the nations.

[44 : 37] We ask it for Christ's glory. Amen.