

What is the Gospel?

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[0 : 0 0] Well, we're going to turn to our Bibles, to the Word of God, and to our reading for this evening. And we're reading in two places. First of all, from Romans chapter 1, a few verses at the beginning of Paul's letter, and then just two verses in Acts chapter 10.

So that's page 939, and then back on page 919, if you have one of the visitor's Bibles. So reading then the first five verses of the Epistle to the Romans.

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures, concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh, and was declared, appointed 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 all the nations.

And I turn back to Acts chapter 10, at verse 42, where Peter is in the household of Cornelius, and is explaining to Cornelius, in answer to his question, exactly what it is that Jesus Christ, before he had ascended to glory, commanded his apostles to go and to preach.

[1 : 3 3] Jesus commanded us, says Peter, to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead.

To him all the prophets bear witness, that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.

Amen. Well do pick out your Bibles if you would, and find your way to Romans chapter 1. If you have a church Bible, page 939.

And if you can just find that passage in Acts chapter 10 as well, and stick your finger in there, we will arrive there eventually via also Acts chapter 2.

So actually you might need two or three fingers, if you can manage that. A new term, new leaders. It's a useful time, isn't it, to remind ourselves what our gospel ministry is really all about.

[2 : 4 0] So I want tonight, just for a short time, to go back to basics, to absolute basics, and to ask the question, what is the gospel? There are so many misconceptions, aren't there, among people today, if you were to ask them out in the street, what is the Christian gospel?

High up there on the list would probably be, well, it's helping the poor, isn't it? Or it's being loving. Or, well, really it's just that all religions lead in the same way, in the end, to the same place.

That's the sort of thing you'll hear, isn't it? But what would you answer if I was to just, you know, ask somebody to stand up and give us their answer? I won't. Oh, Phil, perhaps, no, I won't.

Not yet. But what is it? Well, you might say, well, the gospel is the way of salvation. Or the gospel is believing Jesus is your savior.

Or the gospel is about being forgiven your sins. And that's much better, isn't it? Certainly. But actually, none of these things really come anywhere near what the Bible considers the gospel actually to be.

[3 : 46] In fact, the gospel in the New Testament, as the New Testament defines it, isn't something about us at all. It's not about us. It's not about our sins. It's not even about our salvation. It's not really about us at all.

No, the gospel is a message. It is a great announcement to the world about Jesus Christ. That's how the apostle Paul certainly spoke about the gospel.

He said to Timothy, in 2 Timothy chapter 2, Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, offspring of David, as proclaimed in my gospel.

The gospel is first and foremost a great declaration about the Lord Jesus Christ. Look down at Romans 1, these first few verses we read together.

Paul says there, doesn't he, he has been set apart, verse 1, for the gospel of God concerning his son. What is the message about God's son, Jesus? Well, it's summed up, isn't it, there in verse 4, at the end of it.

[4 : 46] Four words. Jesus is the Christ. That is, he's the Messiah of Israel. And he's our Lord. That is, he is the promised great king and the ruler over this whole wide world.

That's the gospel. Promised, he says, in the Old Testament, but fulfilled and proclaimed by the New Testament witness to the risen Lord Jesus Christ.

You see, that is so important. Look at verse 3. Jesus was descended from David. That's the great anointed king of Israel, according to the flesh. That's the gospel, you could say, from the Old Testament point of view.

He is the great son of David who was to come and rule the whole world from David's throne. And the gospel, the news that is announced by the New Testament apostles, is that that has at last been fulfilled.

And it's been fulfilled uniquely in the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth from the dead. Verse 4, do you see, his resurrection declares or appoints Jesus as the Son of God with power.

[6 : 00] Now David, Solomon, all the kings of Israel, all the descendants of David were called the sons of God. They ruled God's people on earth on his behalf.

But Jesus, you see here, is appointed the Son of God with power. He is the Messiah. He is the Messiah. He is the promised Christ. He is the one who will now rule forever and ever because he will live forever and ever.

Unlike them, death can no longer ever destroy the rule and the reign of this Son of God, this King. So you see, the resurrection of Jesus, in that sense, is the gospel.

It's the gospel. It's the news. It's the announcement that all of the Old Testament promises about the great King are fulfilled in this real man, in real history, Jesus.

That is the gospel, according to Paul. Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David. And the rest, you see, of Paul's whole letter to the church in Rome explains what that means and the impact that that news must have on the whole world.

[7 : 15] Not only does this gospel declare Christ's rule and his lordship, it is, if you look down to verse 17 of chapter 1, it is the revelation, he says, of God's righteousness. And it's the instrument of salvation from, do you notice, the wrath of his coming judgment, which is also revealed in his gospel.

Look at verses 17 and 18. It's unfortunate there's that gap in paragraph in between them. They belong together. A righteousness is revealed because God's wrath is being revealed.

And we need to take that last thing very seriously, as Paul does for the next whole three chapters of this letter to the Romans. He is speaking there about the coming wrath of God in God's coming judgment.

Because that is what Paul says the gospel of Jesus Christ announced. That's why it is a message that absolutely must be engaged with seriously by all people in this whole world.

So I want to focus tonight just on this apostolic proclamation of the gospel, but not forgetting the prophetic promise of the gospel which preceded it. So first of all, the apostolic proclamation of the gospel, which is, listen, that Jesus is the appointed judge of all mankind without exception.

[8 : 57] That's what Paul's words here in Romans 1 mean. But I want to turn you back to Peter, to his preaching in Acts chapter 2 on the day of Pentecost, just so that you can see that it really is the focus of all the apostolic preaching in the early church.

In Acts 2, in verse 36. See, Peter has been saying that Jesus was raised, that they witnessed his resurrection.

And therefore, he says in verse 36, it is certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ. That is the Messiah promised in David's line and the king of this whole world.

What that means, you see, according to all the Old Testament promises for that day, what that means is that the great promised day of the Lord has now begun.

It means the kingdom of God is upon us. And that means, if you read anywhere in the Old Testament, absolutely plainly, that means that the day of judgment has begun for this world.

[10 : 06] Notice all Peter's quotations from the Old Testament in this long sermon. First of all, from verse 16 and following, he quotes from the prophet Joel. What's it about? It's all about judgment day.

Verse 20, that great and magnificent day of blood and fire, when only the name of the Lord will be able to save you. And then from verse 25 and following, he's quoting from Psalm 16 about God's Holy One, who will conquer death and no corruption will see his body.

And then verse 35, you see, he's quoting there from Psalm 110, where the Messiah, the Son of God, is exalted. Where to? To the throne of judgment, from which he will judge all his enemies.

And then in verse 36, he's referring there, when he speaks of him as both Lord and Christ, he's referring back to Psalm 2, which has exactly the same theme. The promise of God's Son ruling the earth with his rod of iron, judging all the earth.

You see, the apostolic preaching of the gospel is absolutely plain. It says this, Jesus is risen, and Jesus is therefore the ruler over all the earth, and therefore Jesus will return to judge all the earth.

[11 : 30] You might call that the three R's of the apostolic gospel. Jesus is risen, Jesus rules, and Jesus shall return. Because the gospel announces that the last days of this earth have begun.

And therefore that judgment has begun. And judgment will certainly come to its completion at the return of Jesus Christ. Now those who were listening to Peter on that day very certainly got the message.

Look at verse 37, they were cut to the heart. They cried out, what do we do? And Peter says, you repent. You must repent, or you will face certain ruin.

Jesus is risen. He rules now. He will return to judge you all. And so you must repent now. You must bow to his sovereign lordship.

That's the gospel. That was the gospel that John the Baptist announced right at the beginning. It's the gospel that Jesus announced right at the beginning of his ministry. Repent. Do you remember?

[12 : 40] For the kingdom of heaven is at hand. In other words, judgment is at hand. Those were Jesus' opening words of his ministry. He was just repeating exactly what John the Baptist had said.

Go back and read Luke chapter 3. You'll see it. John says, His winnowing fork is in his hand, and the chaff he will burn with fire. It's an unmistakable announcement of the coming judgment of God.

Which tells us, doesn't it, by the way, that the translation so often in our Bibles of good news is not really an adequate translation of the word gospel. Luke says that John the Baptist, with these words, preached the good news to them.

Well, it certainly was not good news for everybody. It wasn't good news for anybody who would not repent. It was very, very bad news. That's why the command of the gospel is not, rejoice therefore, but repent therefore.

Even now, said John, the axe is laid at the root of the tree. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and cast into the fire. With these words, he preached the good news to them, the gospel.

[13 : 51] And said to them, repent and bear fruit in keeping with repentance that is real, not sham. That was the apostolic preaching of the gospel, friends. Always read the New Testament.

That's what you'll find. Proclaiming the kingdom of God has come, the lordship of Jesus as Christ, as the king and the judge of all the earth. Read through the acts of the apostles and see if I'm telling Phibs.

It's all there. And that is why you see the resurrection is absolutely central to all the apostolic preaching. The resurrection has absolutely nothing whatsoever to do with trying to prove that Jesus was God.

The New Testament apostles never use it in that way. Now, the apostles hold the resurrection as central because what it does prove is that all the promises of the Old Testament scriptures are fulfilled in the person of this man, Jesus Christ, that this Jesus is the one in whom God's king and his kingdom have come.

And therefore now, because of that, all the world, not just the Jews, but the entire Gentile world must submit to his unique and universal authority.

[15 : 05] So in Acts chapter 17, when Paul preaches to those clever philosophers in Athens, he says to them that the ignorance, the ignorance of people like you, has been quite an affront to them.

The ignorance God has overlooked in the past, he said, but not any longer. No, he commands now all people everywhere to repent because he has fixed a day for judgment by the man he has appointed.

And of this, he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead, Jesus Christ of Nazareth. You see, that is the consistent apostolic proclamation of the gospel.

That is the New Testament gospel. God's judgment and his judge are declared by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Turn with me a little further on to Acts chapter 10.

One more reference, just so we're absolutely clear. Here's Peter speaking to Cornelius, the Roman soldier, who has asked him directly, tell us what Jesus told you to come and proclaim to the world.

[16 : 19] So beginning at verse 37, Peter tells them all about Jesus, life, his death, his resurrection, witnessed by himself, witnessed by all the others. And then in verse 42, look, he says, Jesus himself commanded us to preach to the people, what?

About the coming judgment. Do you see? He is the one appointed by God to be the judge of the living and the dead. That is the apostolic message, the news, the gospel that Jesus commanded them to go and preach.

That is the New Testament gospel. There is wrath to come because now at last judgment day for this whole world is imminent. And Jesus Christ is the judge of all mankind without exception.

That is the New Testament gospel. Jesus commanded it to be preached. But do you notice that alongside this new message, which was the heart of the apostolic proclamation, Jesus' own command, but alongside it, you see verse 42, there is also an old, old message, isn't there?

Because that verse gives us the prophetic promise of the gospel. And it tells us that Jesus is also the appointed savior of all who believe, without distinction.

[17 : 51] To him, all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name. Jesus is risen.

He does rule this world and he shall return to judge the world. But until the very last of these last days has come, he is still the rescuer.

To save from the wrath and the judgment that is to come. By bringing forgiveness now, before that great day. And the gospel, friends, you see, is a message of real salvation.

Because it is a message that saves from a real judgment that is still to come. It promises salvation from the wrath that is yet to come. Full salvation, you see, salvation in the New Testament for Jesus, for his apostles, is still a future thing.

No one has yet been saved, have they, from the wrath of God. That's why Paul says in Philippians 3, we await a savior from heaven. Jesus delivers us from the wrath that is to come, he says to the Thessalonians.

[19 : 02] We shall be saved from the wrath of God, Paul says in Romans 5, because already now we have been justified by his blood. We can be rescued now, in the present, from what Jesus coming will mean in the future for this world, because of what his coming already has accomplished in the past, at the cross, at the place of forgiveness.

But you see, you receive that forgiveness now, you find that rescue now, only, only by submission, by surrender to the authority, to the rule, to the lordship, of the risen Jesus Christ.

That's what repentance means. Repentance isn't accepting Jesus as your savior, as though Jesus was somehow helplessly outside, knocking on the door, saying, hello, hello, please, please pay me some attention, let me in.

No, no, no, no, no. It's not about us, making decisions for Christ, as if we were doing Jesus a favor. Favor by giving us some attention, by giving him attention.

No, no, no. The gospel is a command from the sovereign lord. It's a command of power and authority, demanding that every single person in this world bows down and gives him the mastery, the homage, the obedience, the worship, as king and lord.

[20 : 41] Of course, yes, it is an offer of grace, it's an offer of mercy, it is wonderful, forgiving grace, beyond anything that any of us could ever deserve, ever merit.

But it is also the sovereign command of the Lord of heaven himself, the risen Jesus. And that's the message that begins and ends Paul's great gospel letter to the Romans.

We read it in chapter 1, verse 5. His apostleship, he says, is to call the nations to the obedience of faith, to bow to him. He ends in chapter 16, saying, it is the command of the eternal God to bring about the obedience of faith among all the nations.

So what is the gospel? Well, I think these two verses in Acts 10 are a wonderful summary to tell us. That the resurrection declares with unmistakable power that the promise of the scriptures is true and it is fulfilled, that Jesus Christ is the appointed judge of all people without exception.

And that Jesus also is the appointed savior of all people who will believe without any distinction. That is, who will bow to his mastery, to his lordship, submit to his rule now, today, and his rule alone above all others.

[22 : 11] In other words, who will repent and who will bear fruit in keeping with real and true repentance. What is the gospel?

That's the gospel that we are commanded to believe and to proclaim. And if that is what the gospel really is, and I hope that I've convinced you, then let me just give you three fairly obvious implications for the message that we as a church must bring to our city and to the whole world today.

First, we have a unique message and a universal message. That Jesus alone is the judge of all people. That the wrath to come is real and terrible.

And that the judgment of God will be absolutely universal. There can be no escaping his judgment, not by any. And therefore, there is only one, only one single way through that judgment.

And that is on judgment day, to find that the judge is the one who already is your savior, is your rescuer. Only he will pronounce that final judgment on every single person who has ever lived.

[23 : 26] That's why there is no other name under heaven by which we must be saved, but the name of Jesus Christ. So we must proclaim a gospel that is unique, a salvation that is in Jesus alone.

And we must proclaim it universally to the whole world, no matter where you come from, what your color, what your creed, what your race, what your country. It is the gospel for all without distinction.

We have a unique and a universal message. Secondly, we must therefore have an uncut message. That Jesus alone is Lord and judge of all.

That means you cannot have Jesus as your savior without submitting to his lordship, without surrendering to his total authority. You must confess that Jesus is Lord, says Paul, in order to be saved.

And that means, you see, that for the church to proclaim Jesus as savior alone is not the gospel. It's not a word that can save anyone. In other words, a gospel that does not demand real repentance, submission, bowing to the lordship and the command of Jesus Christ is not a gospel at all.

[24 : 45] Because he is Lord and he is judge. And we must bow to his mastery. To become true disciples, we must become those who are taught to obey everything that he commanded his apostles to teach us.

There's no cheap grace anywhere in the New Testament. Don't say, Lord, Lord, said Jesus, and not do what I command you. And so the church of Jesus Christ today must proclaim an uncut message, the whole gospel.

A gospel that demands repentance. Only that is the true gospel. And thirdly, then, of course, we have an urgent message.

That's surely obvious, isn't it? He alone is Lord and judge of all. And the judgment and the wrath to come is real. And it will be terrible, my friends. And that means that the single most unloving thing in all this world must be to fail to proclaim the truth about Jesus Christ.

Must it not? That he is risen. That he does now rule. That he shall surely return to judge us all.

[26 : 02] And so we must now repent and call others to repent, to believe, to trust in him and bow to him before it's too late. We must proclaim that urgently.

But also, of course, to proclaim that when you do repent and bow before him and throw yourself upon him, he is still the rescuer.

That to him, all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins in his name. That's the gospel that unites us here together as this church.

That's the gospel that is behind everything we do. That is the gospel that in every activity of this church, together, and every conversation from us as Christian believers, individually, all through the week, wherever we go, whatever we do, that is the gospel that we believe and the gospel that we are here to proclaim.

The uncut unique and universal and urgent word of God to every single person in this city of Glasgow today. So the question for us together as a church tonight is do we really believe that?

[27 : 30] Do we believe it? And if we do, will we really and truly proclaim it? Well, let it be our prayer together that the answer to both of these things is yes, Lord.

So help us until the Lord Jesus comes. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for the clarity of the gospel declaration in your word.

we thank you that it is a message so solemn at times we can hardly bear it and yet so wonderful that often we can hardly believe it.

Help us, we pray, to embrace it, to love it and together always to be proclaiming it in our lives and on our lips. that when the Lord Jesus comes he might find faith deep, real, true, pervasive all throughout our church but increasingly more and more among all of those that we know and love and cherish in this city and beyond.

So help us, Lord. And to that end, may your spirit never depart from us but fit us for this task. for we ask it in Jesus' name.

[29 : 11] Amen.