

Welcome! Turn with me to Romans 1. We're currently in our 317 series talking about our mission, vision and priorities. Last week we talked about our top priority of worship; today we are going to talk about the gospel.

Sometimes, when it comes to understanding the gospel, we who have been in church for a while are really confident, we know what it is, but there's a chance we might be off base and need a little help. I think about this woman who was on Family Feud a few months ago - she was asked the question "What is Popeye's favorite food?" and immediately answered, with extreme enthusiasm, "Chicken!" She was clearly confident she was right, but she answered the question with the wrong "Popeye" in mind. Her opponent answered correctly - but her wrong answer cost her *ten thousand dollars*.

When it comes to the gospel, it's not enough to *think* we have it right, we have to make *sure* we have it right! When the Bible talks about the gospel, it centers around a man named Jesus. The shortest and best definition of the gospel comes from Philippians 2:11. What is the gospel? "Jesus Christ is Lord." That four-word phrase is shorthand for Jesus Christ is the Son of God who died for our sins, rose again, he is restoring and redeeming all things, and he is ruling over the universe. And because Jesus Christ is Lord, as a church, we proclaim the good news of Jesus and center our lives on his teaching and example. We want to proclaim the good news of Jesus and tell everyone we know who Jesus is and what he has done. And we want to center our lives on his teaching and example, which means that we are saying, "Jesus isn't just the Lord in a universal sense, he is Lord in a personal sense. He's not just in charge of everything in the world, he's in charge of everything in *my* world. Because Jesus Christ is Lord, his words are my marching orders, and his life is the perfect example I want to pattern my life after."

Around the year 58 AD, the apostle Paul wrote a letter to Rome. Rome was the capital of the empire, an empire that had its own gospel. The gospel of Rome was clear: Caesar is Lord, Caesar is in charge, Caesar is the one you should obey and give your loyalty and devotion to. And it was to that city that Paul wrote about the gospel of Jesus Christ. Let's take a look: "Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God - the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures regarding his Son, who as to his earthly life was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord. Through him we received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith for his name's sake." We could say a lot of things about the gospel from this passage, but there are three aspects of the gospel I think would be most helpful to highlight: the history of the gospel, the focus of the gospel, and the implications of the gospel.

Let's begin by talking about the history of the gospel. 1:2 tells us that this is "the gospel God promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures." For hundreds, even for thousands of years, God had been telling people about his plan to save the world through his son. Can I give you some of those passages? For example, in Genesis 3:15, right after Satan tempted Adam and Eve and sin entered the world, God spoke to Satan and said: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel." As soon as sin entered the world, God promised to do something about it. He promised to send his Son, who would pay a personal price, but who ultimately would crush the head of Satan and bring an end to his destructive work once and for all.

Or how about Isaiah 7:14: "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel." A virgin conceiving? Who would prophesy that? That's

impossible! But then it happened. And this prophecy and miracle allowed for Jesus, the Messiah, to be fully God and fully man. He looks just like us, he was tried and tempted just like we are, but his name is Immanuel, which means what? God with us.

Or how about Isaiah 53:4-6: “Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.” The gospel cuts to the quick about who we are! The gospel doesn’t mince any words - we are more sinful than we ever dare to imagine, and the gospel confronts us in our iniquity and selfishness. And at the same time tells us we are more loved than we ever dreamed possible. Yes, we have gone the wrong way, we have sinned and committed transgressions, but what did God do? He laid on his own Son the iniquity of us all. By his wounds we are healed. 700 years before the crucifixion of Christ, God, in the Scriptures, promised the gospel beforehand.

2 Corinthians 1:20 says, “For no matter how many promises God has made, they are ‘Yes’ in Christ.” Every promise he made, all 48 of them, are perfectly fulfilled in Christ. That is why when Paul went around the world telling people about Jesus, he pointed them to the Scriptures, reminded them of what God promised, and showed them how Jesus perfectly fulfilled the promise. For example, when he was in a town called Berea and told them about Jesus, take a look at what they did. Acts 17:11, “The Berean Jews received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.” So, they heard about Jesus, they went back into the Old Testament to see if what Paul said was really in there, and when they discovered that it was, what happened? 17:12, “As a result, many of them believed.” The Scriptures themselves told that Jesus was to come.

One of my favorite sports stories over the last number of years is from Jason Terry, a player for the Dallas Mavericks in the 2011 season. In October, he decided, like many NBA players, to get a tattoo. But he was not getting a tattoo of his wife or kids or his favorite dog - he got a tattoo of the Larry O'Brien trophy, given to the team who wins the world championship. Now, for perspective, the Dallas Mavericks had never in history won the championship before. Jason Terry had never in his life won the championship before, but he got that tattoo in October 2010, and in June of 2011, he held that trophy in his hands. Clearly promising to win an NBA championship is a lot different than God promising to save the entire world by sending his son to die, but I want you to take notice that *God made the promise*. He told the prophets and all who would listen for hundreds and hundreds of years that he would do it. He recorded it in the Scriptures. And then most importantly, he actually did it!

So, we see the history of the gospel, now let’s look at the focus of the gospel. Look at Romans 1:3-4, “Regarding his Son, who as to his earthly life was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.” What is the focus of the gospel? *Jesus Christ* is the focus! Our message is about him. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 4:5, “For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord. As a church, our focus and priority will never be on ourselves, our focus and priority will always be on Jesus. Because it’s not us people need, it’s Jesus. And there are so many different aspects of Jesus for us to tell people about.

We could focus, for example, on his miracles. Over his three-year ministry, the Bible records 37 different miracles. They tell of Jesus at a wedding, turning water into wine, and how he went to fishermen and turned empty nets into nets that were so full other boats had to help them out. He took two fish and five loaves and turned 5,000 hungry, grouchy travelers into people who were stuffed! The people were laying back, belching, taking their afternoon nap, while the disciples picked up 12 baskets of leftover food. He walked on water, he calmed the storm, he cast out demons. He touched a leper and said, “Be clean.” He

looked tenderly at a woman who had been bleeding for 13 years and said: “Your faith has healed you.” And she was healed. He talked to a man who had been lame for 38 years and simply said, “Pick up your mat and walk.” He opened the ears of the deaf, he opened the eyes of the blind, he opened the tomb of Lazarus and said, “Come out!” Jesus actually said in John 14:11: “Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves. Not one of the gospel writers said, “If we recorded everything Jesus did, not even the whole world would have enough room for the books that could be written,” but they told us these specific miracles so that we might believe in him, and by believing have life in his name. No one had ever done works like Jesus before.

We could focus on his miracles, or we could also focus on his mercy. One of the most captivating stories from the life of Jesus is when a woman who was literally caught in the act of adultery was thrown before him. The crowd stood at a hushed silence, waiting to see what Jesus would say. In our culture something like that would no doubt be very shameful or humiliating, but their culture, it would warrant the death penalty. All those standing around were holding stones, waiting to hear permission to take her life for her sin. And what did Jesus say? “He who is without sin, cast the first stone.” One by one, everyone walked away. Jesus bent down, looked her in the eyes, and said, “Neither do I condemn you.” The world had never seen such mercy before.

We could focus on his message:

John 6:35, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry.”

John 7:37, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.”

John 8:12, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

John 10:10, “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”

John 14:6, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

John 15:17, “This is my command: Love each other.”

John 17:3, “Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.”

No one ever spoke the words like Jesus spoke before.

We could focus on his miracles, his mercy, his message, all of which really point to his majesty! When Jesus was born the angels sang, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace to those on whom his favor rests.” As a little baby, wise men traveled hundreds of miles to bow down before him, worship him and offer him gifts. When Jesus was riding into Jerusalem, he chose to come in on a donkey. Other kings rode into the capital on a white horse to indicate their power, but Jesus chose a donkey to indicate his meekness. People cut down branches and said, “Hosanna, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.” When doubting Thomas, who refused to believe his friends who had seen Jesus risen from the dead, finally saw Jesus stand before him and say, “See my hand, put your finger here and feel the hole. See my side, reach out and touch it where the spear went in.” What did Thomas say? “My Lord and My God!” He had majesty we cannot comprehend.

The focus of the gospel is all on Jesus! We will always be a Jesus church, and the focus will always be on him. Listen to what Fredrick Faber has said about Jesus: “All our lives long we might talk of Jesus and yet we should never come to an end of the sweet things that might be said of him. Eternity will not be long enough to learn all he is, or to praise him for all he has done, but then, that matters not, for we shall be always with him, and we desire nothing more.”

Romans 1 tells us about the history of the gospel (God promised it beforehand in the Scriptures), about the focus of the gospel (Jesus Christ our Lord), and also about the implications of the gospel. Look with me at 1:5, “Through him we received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith for his name’s sake.” Did you see why Paul says he was sent? Not just to preach the gospel to the obedience that comes from faith. If it’s true that Jesus is Lord, then the implication is that all people everywhere should bow down to him, worship him, honor him and live for him! Listen to what Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:15, “He died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for him who died for them and was raised again.” If the gospel is true, we don’t live for ourselves anymore - not our preference, our desires, our dreams, but for him and him alone!

The way we express our priority of gospel isn’t simply to say: “Jesus Christ is Lord;” we follow it up with these words: “We center our lives on his teaching and example.” We don’t just say he’s Lord, we *live* as he’s Lord. Listen to what Jesus himself said in Matthew 7:21, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.”

It’s not uncommon for someone to ask me to spend some time with them for the purpose of mentorship and spiritual formation. It is always a joy and honor to journey alongside someone as they are growing in their faith. When I do, there are two questions I usually try to begin to ask: are the fruits of the Spirit evident in their life? Is there love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control in their life? The second is: Is the Lordship issue settled? What’s the Lordship issue? Does this person believe, in the core of their being, that Jesus is Lord, and because he is Lord, he gets what he wants, when he wants, how he wants in their life, regardless of personal preference? ]We don’t just proclaim the good news of Jesus, we center our lives on his teaching and example.

In the beginning of Romans 1 Paul tells us three things about the gospel, but if you skip down a bit, you’ll see Paul tell us one more thing: the power of the gospel. Look at verse 1:16: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes.” God works through the gospel to change people’s lives. He has changed my life through the power of the gospel. I look around this room today and I see so many who have been changed by the power of the gospel. I want you to take a moment and listen to Lee Ladd’s story, and hear how the gospel is changing lives in our prisons and correctional facilities. (View the video recording of this sermon to see this clip).

We live in a world in desperate need of hope. Several people in our church have died in the last two weeks, some of them unexpectedly. Families are grieving. The coronavirus is spreading. The stock market is falling. Everywhere you look these days, people are in need of hope. And not just a weak, superficial hope, but a real hope. There is hope in the gospel of Jesus! As a church, we are going to prioritize the gospel. We are going to proclaim the good news that Jesus Christ is Lord, and we are going to center our lives on his teaching and example.