

The Power of the Gospel

Introduction

In our age of social media we see announcements of good news all the time, whether it is an announcement about a sporting victory, an engagement, a new job, a pregnancy or a new grandchild. When something exciting is happening in our lives we want other people to know and so we share it far and wide.

In this series on the book of Romans we will be unpacking the first 4 chapters, all about the good news of Jesus.

Romans is a book that scares a lot of people because they think of it as heavy and theological. There is some truth in that. Romans is a letter from the Apostle Paul to the church in Rome. In this letter he lays out more thoroughly than any other letter what he believes about God, about Jesus, and about salvation. Through the history of the church Romans has been a vitally important book for this reason. When its truths have been understood at a personal level lives have been transformed.

It was by reading Romans that Martin Luther came to an understanding of how he could be right with God by faith alone which sparked the reformation of the church in the 16th Century.

Throughout history it has been the same for other people as they have read this book. They have understood what God has done for them in Jesus and how they need to respond. At its heart the book of Romans is all about the gospel, the good news of Jesus, and how we should respond to it. Gospel means a good announcement or good news.

The Power of the Gospel – the Gospel about Jesus Christ

Romans 1: 1-7

In this introduction to the letter to the Christians in Rome Paul tells us four things about the gospel (good news):

Gospel origin

1. Where does the gospel come from (v1)?
2. What are the implications of this for us?

Gospel predicted

3. The gospel was foretold by the prophets in the Old Testament (v 2, see for some examples Gen 3:15; Isaiah 7:14; Micah 5:2; Psalm 22: 16-18).
What might this mean to the original readers of Romans?
4. What does it mean for us as we read about the gospel in the book of Romans?

Gospel and Jesus

5. The gospel is all about Jesus (v3-4). What does it mean to you knowing the gospel is about a person?
6. Translations of v4 differ but the Greek is best translated to say that Jesus was 'appointed the son of God'. The term 'son of God' was used of kings (see Psalm 2: 6-7), including Caesar. How does Jesus' resurrection appoint him to be Lord and king over all (See Phil 2: 6-11)?

Response to the gospel

7. What response does the gospel demand (v5)?
8. What did obedience look like for Paul (v1) and the Christians in Rome (v6-7)? What should it look like for us today?

Pray Together

Take time to praise Jesus, our Lord. Pray for each other as you live out your faith through obedience this week.

The Power of the Gospel – Not Ashamed of the Gospel

Romans 1: 8 – 17

Paul and the Romans

1. Paul had not met the Roman readers of his letter and did not bring them to Christ. However, note what Paul does do (v8 – 10) indicating, and probably fuelling his affection for them.
2. What lessons can we learn from Paul for our own formal and informal ministries?

Paul and evangelism

3. How do we in the contemporary church tend to view evangelism? How do our attitudes compare with that of Paul's (v14 -16)?
4. In verse 14 Paul says he is 'under obligation' to the Romans. A more literal translation would be 'I am debtor'. Paul had not borrowed anything from the Romans. In what way was he under obligation?
5. Why was Paul eager to preach the gospel in Rome (v15)?

The power of the gospel

6. Even though he knew sharing the gospel was not easy (See 1 Cor 2:3; 1 Cor 1: 18, 23) Paul declared he was not ashamed of the gospel (v16). Why?
7. In what situations are you ashamed of the gospel? How does Paul's attitude encourage us?

The gospel reveals God's righteousness

8. What does 'the righteousness of God' (v17) mean and how has it been demonstrated? (See also Rom 3:25; 2:5; Phil 3:9; I Cor 1:30)

Pray Together

Give thanks for the gospel that gives us salvation and righteousness. Pray for boldness and opportunity to live out the gospel and to share the gospel with friends and family. Pray for grace and strength for the challenges that may present.

The Power of the Gospel – The need for the Gospel

Romans 1: 18 – 32

This passage can be difficult to understand as we try to follow Paul's argument. It contains some verses you may feel uncomfortable about or have trouble understanding or accepting in today's world. Life Group is a safe place for you to wrestle with your questions but as you work through the passage try also to keep Paul's main question in mind – why do we need the gospel of salvation?

1. This passage speaks of sin and the wrath of God. What do we mean by these?

We are all without excuse v 18-23

2. What is the underlying problem with humanity v21?
3. What exchange has been made as a result v23? How is this evident in our own lives and in our world today?
4. Why have we all been left without excuse for our sin before God v19-20?

We must stand to account for our decision-making v 24- 27

5. This passage is about the wrath of God. How is God handing them over to their sinful desires a necessary out-working of God's wrath v24, 26?
6. The literal meaning of 'sinful desires' in the original Greek is 'over-desire'. How do our over-desires of good things highlight the problem with our hearts v24?
7. How does Paul's discussion of homosexual behaviour illustrate the spiral downward that occurs when we are handed over to our over-desire of a good thing (sex within marriage of a man and woman)? [See also Gen 2:21- 24; I Cor 6: 12-20, 7: 2]

We are powerless without the power of the gospel to save v28- 32

8. Paul gives us a long list of vices v29 - 31. What are the characteristics of people who practice these vices v32? What is the real problem v28?
9. Take time to remind yourselves of Paul's main point of this passage. Why do we need the gospel? Why do we need salvation?

Pray Together

Take time to support each other in prayer, especially asking for help from the Holy Spirit to understand the truth of God and to apply that to your lives. Ask God to protect your hearts and minds from the temptations around us.

The Power of the Gospel – The Judgement of God

Romans 2: 1 – 16

1. The judgement of God is something many of us are uncomfortable thinking about. How do you feel about it? What are your questions?

God's judgement is inescapable

2. Compare those described in Rom 1: 29 – 32 and those in Rom 2: 1, 5. What is the critical factor that results in both deserving God's judgement?
3. What is the problem with passing judgement on others and why do we have a tendency to do it v2 - 3?
4. How can we show contempt for God's character v4 -5?

God's judgement is righteous

5. Compare those described in v7 with those in v8. What is the critical difference in motive between the two? [See also Rom 1: 23 to understand v7]
6. How, then, can we explain the seeming contradiction between Rom 2: 6 and Rom 1: 17, 5:28?

God's judgement is equitable

7. How does Paul argue that God does not show favouritism v9 - 15? Paul speaks of the Jews and Gentiles (non-Jews). What does this mean for Jews today and for us as Christians?

Jesus our judge

8. What does it mean to you knowing that Jesus will be our judge v16? Thinking about this passage how can we prepare ourselves to meet Jesus our judge?

Pray Together

Praise God for his kindness, forbearance and patience with us, that his judgement is righteous and that he shows no favouritism. Pray for each other as you might persist in seeking God, his glory, honour and immortality he alone can give us.

The Power of the Gospel – No room for boasting

Romans 2: 17 – 3:8

In this passage Paul answers the question of whether, or not, a religious person needs the good news of Jesus. Paul addresses the Jews (v17) but he might just as well address Christians today.

Is it enough to satisfy God by following the rules, the law (v 17-24)?

1. What problem did the Jews have with the law v21 – 24?
2. What are some of the excuses we hide behind to cover our imperfections and hypocrisy?
3. In verse 24 Paul quotes from Isaiah 52:5; Ezekiel 36:20, 23. How is it that God's name blasphemed? You might be able to think of some examples of how God's name is blasphemed today by the actions of Christians.
4. Read ahead in Isaiah 53; Ezekiel 36: 25 – 27. How does God address the problem of our inadequacy to follow the rules?

Is it enough to satisfy God if we undertake religious rituals (v25-29)?

5. Circumcision represented the covenant God made with Israel [See Gen 17: 4 – 14]. When does circumcision have value for the Jew? What is Paul's real point in v25?
6. What are some of the religious rituals or practices Christians today might claim as important outward signs of being a Christian?
7. How does Paul counter the problem of relying on outward religious practices to please God v28 – 29? [See also Deut 30:6; Jeremiah 31: 33; Ezekiel 11: 19; Col 2: 11]
8. What does it mean for the Jews to be entrusted with the words of God, Rom 3: 2? How did God, in his faithfulness counter the Jews failure to be faithful to their responsibility with the words of God [See John 1: 14]?

Pray together

Give thanks for the faithfulness of God who sent Jesus to meet our need for a saviour that following rules and rituals could never do. Pray for the Holy Spirit to root out areas of your life where you trust rules and rituals over the grace of God and what Jesus Christ has done for us.

The Power of the Gospel – There is no-one righteous

Romans 3:9 – 20

‘No one is as bad as he or she might be’ while ‘no action of ours is as good as it should be.’ (J.I. Packer)

Sin – a universal problem

1. Paul concludes his argument of the last couple of chapters. Who does he claim to be sinful (v9 – 10, 20)? [Remember 1: 28 – 32; 2: 1 – 6; 2: 17 – 29]
2. The charge that we are all sinful and will be accountable before God speaks of our legal position before God, but righteousness speaks of our relationship with God. What does it mean to be ‘righteous’ (v 10b, 20)?

Sin – rejection of God

3. What is the fundamental problem with sin (v11 -12, 18)? [Remember 1: 18 – 21; 2: 8]
4. What does our world seek? Practically, how can we seek God himself in our lives?

Sin’s power in our lives

5. What does it mean to be ‘under the power of sin’ (v9b)? [See also Rom 5:12]
6. In v 13 – 15 Paul quotes some verses from Psalms to illustrate the extent of the power of sin in our lives. Unravelling the poetic language of these verses, how does sin impact us?
7. If no-one is righteous, how can we explain the good things non-Christians and Christians do?
8. How is it we become righteous? [See 2 Cor 5: 21; Rom 6: 10 – 11; I John 1: 9]

Pray Together

As Christians it is good to be in a regular habit of confessing our sin. You might confess specific sin or use a general prayer of confession such as the one from the Anglican Prayer Book. Give thanks for his forgiveness.

The Power of the Gospel – Righteousness through Jesus

Romans 3: 21 – 31

Over the last chapters Paul has been at pains to point out that it doesn't matter whether you are unrighteous or self-righteous, know the law or have never seen it, Jew or Gentile, '...no one is righteous, not even one: there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God' (Rom 3: 10 – 11). But now ...

Salvation by Grace Alone

1. We can be tempted to establish our own righteousness (Rom 10: 3) but where does real righteousness come from (Rom 3: 21, 5: 17)?
2. Who takes the initiative so that we might have the righteousness of God (Rom 3: 21, 22, 24, 25-26)?
3. What does it mean to be 'saved by grace' (Rom 3: 24)?

Salvation through Jesus Alone

4. Justification (v24) is a legal term. Explore the meaning of condemnation vs justification. How is justification different from pardon?
5. Redemption (v24) is a term that was used in the marketplace when someone was bought out of slavery, to be set free. What does this mean for you today?
6. Atonement (v25 - 26) is a term referring to sacrifice. Thinking back over the last chapters, what does Jesus' death on the cross save us from? (See also Leviticus 16: 20 – 22)

The concept of substitution may be said to lie at the heart of both sin and salvation. For the essence of sin is man substituting himself for God, while the essence of salvation is God substituting himself for man.ⁱ

Received by Faith Alone

7. Our justification is received by faith (Rom 3: 24, 26, 27, 28, 30). Think about how faith is the opposite of self-centredness and our attempts at self-righteousness.
8. As we approach Easter, what have you gleaned from this study to make our celebration more meaningful?

Pray Together

Take time to praise God for his righteousness freely given. Pray that God would give you a deeper sense of his love as you contemplate and celebrate the meaning of Christ's death for us.

The Power of the Gospel – Righteousness through Jesus

Romans 4

Grace- Gift

1. What are some of the ‘gifts’ we expect in life, that we feel entitled to? Have you ever received something totally unexpected, when you weren’t even entitled to a gift?
2. In Rom 3: 22 we learnt that salvation comes by grace alone, it is a gift. How does Abraham’s story illustrate this principle, Rom 4: 1 – 5? (See also Gen 12: 2 -3, 15: 6)
3. How does Paul add to his argument that Abraham was gifted righteousness (Rom 4: 10 – 12 and 13 – 17)? [Note the Law was given to Israel about 400 years after Abraham lived.]

The Gift of Forgiveness

4. After a serious moral failure and misuse of power David wrote Psalm 32: 1 – 2 (Rom 4: 7 – 8). How does this Psalm illustrate Rom 4: 5? What does this mean for you in your daily walk with God?
5. Reflect on the gift of forgiveness and reconciliation freely available to us and what that means for you. (See Rom 5: 8 – 11; 1 John 1: 8 – 2: 2)

The Gift of a Promise

6. Abraham had a clear promise for a very personal matter but one that was hugely important in God’s plan (Gen 15: 4-5). But if we take a look at his life soon after he received that promise it would seem like it wasn’t going to happen (Gen 16: 1, 18: 10 – 12, 21: 1-5). He tried to take matters into his own hands (Gen 16: 3, 15-16) yet Paul tells us Abraham did not give up hope (Rom 4: 18 – 22). What might Paul mean by this?
7. We don’t usually receive such specific promises from God. Nevertheless, how does Abraham’s experience of grace encourage us through times of doubt and when circumstances are discouraging, especially in the matters that are very personal to us?
8. Take time to recall some of the promises God gives us in the Bible that we can be sure of.

Prayer Together

Praise God for his gift of forgiveness and justification. Pray for grace to trust him fully in all areas of our lives, including the most personal.

ⁱ John Stott, *The Cross of Christ*.