

The Gospel, more precisely

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[0 : 00] But let's again ask God for his help. Heavenly Father, we need you. We need you every single day when we need you to understand the scriptures.

We pray, Lord, that your gospel and your word will come now to us, not just in words, but in power and by the power of your Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. Please give us a strong conviction, Lord, that the gospel is all that we need today.

We pray all this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen. So as I mentioned already this morning, we're going to begin a new series thinking through more thoroughly the very first of our core convictions to be centered on the gospel.

You will have noticed, I hope, that we belong to a denomination called Boneal Evangelical Mission, and our church is called Gujing Evangelical Church.

And in essence, that word evangelical, I think, simply means gospel-centered. So if you're a part of our church, I take it that's what you want to be.

[1 : 08] But what does that mean? What is being gospel-centered all about? Well, my hope is that over the next month and a half, we'll get a much clearer idea of what that involves, so that we can all be on the same page and know what we are aspiring to be through the praise of God's glory.

But why is being gospel-centered so important? Well, let me tell you a sobering anecdote from the world of aviation. According to pilots, a rule of thumb is that when a plane's flight coordinates are off by just one degree, after every 60 miles, you will be one mile off course.

If left uncorrected, you will soon find yourselves a long way from your destination with possibly tragic consequences. That's what happened in 1979 when a passenger plane crashed into the side of a volcano in Antarctica, simply because the flight plan was mistakenly off by just two degrees.

And what is true in aviation is true in church life as well. That's what we discover in the book of 1 Timothy, where our passage is drawn from today.

You see, in 1 verse 3, Paul tells his co-worker, Timothy, that he needs to go and have a face-to-face, man-to-man chat with some of the other teachers in Ephesus, where Timothy was.

[2 : 53] Why? Well, it appears they had gone off track. Their spiritual flight coordinates were wrong. Not because they were not teaching the Bible.

Oh no, they were really into the Bible. In 1 verse 7, we're told they wanted to be teachers of the law. If you visited your congregations, you would have called them Bible-based.

But the problem was that although they were preoccupied with the scriptures, they had completely missed its point. They had made the law rather than Jesus' center.

You could even say they had made the law the gospel. They had confused the two. And this was no small matter.

For what happens as a result? Well, let's have a look. In chapter 1 verse 4, Paul tells us that this failure to make the gospel the main thing led to controversial speculations that failed to advance God's work.

[4 : 06] Worse still, he says in 1 verse 6, should there be no cause correction, this leads to people turning away from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith.

Perhaps most soberingly, down in 1 verse 19, it leads to people's lives being shipwrecked. I mean, just imagine that. Exposure to the Bible by itself, without the gospel at the center, can still lead to a spiritual plane crash.

That's how important this is. This is not theoretical, academic stuff. This has real-life consequences. And that is why Paul does what he does in the passage we're going to be looking at today.

1 Timothy 1 verse 12 to 17. He restates the gospel for us. And he shows us what happens when the gospel is the anchor.

It has a profoundly positive impact on his life. Not in the sense that he never faces any more suffering, or hardship, or disappointments, but in the sense that he is now in possession of something nothing in this world could ever take away.

[5 : 37] And he wants you and I to hold onto that pure, simple gospel today. Today, there are many counterfeit versions of the gospel out there.

Some of them, as in Ephesus, confuse the law with the gospel, making it all about what you need to do. Others promise you that God wants you to be rich and healthy and successful.

Still, others promise you that if you just believe hard enough, you'll eventually find your soulmate, or at least have your worldly aspirations fulfilled. And some promise to fill up your self-esteem because God loves you exactly the way you are and he wants you to make you happy the way you envision. But these so-called gospels will never be able to deliver. They cannot live up to their promise.

Instead, they leave people hurt, broken, and disillusioned.

Worse still, they cause people to turn away from the very truth that can give them life to the full. So Paul says, leave those aside, come back to the true gospel, come back to the word you can trust, come back to something you can bang on, something that can bear the weight of all your feelings, all your flaws, all your faults.

[7 : 22] come back, 1 verse 15, to the trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance. And so for the rest of this morning, following Paul's lead, that's simply what I'm going to do too.

All I want to do today is very simple. I simply want to restate and meditate on the gospel a little more precisely.

and if you are a Christian this morning, what I hope you will see is not necessarily anything that is new. In fact, I would be worried if a lot of the things I said were new to you.

But I hope you still find today's exposition fresh. I pray that it sparks in you a thankfulness and a desire to keep making the gospel the heartbeat of your life.

And if you are not a Christian here this morning, well, I hope you will find what you hear today to be good news. So firstly, let's explore the essence of the gospel.

[8 : 31] And before we even begin exploring the contents of the gospel, I want to begin by getting us to think a little bit more about that word, gospel itself.

What does gospel mean? How did people in Bible times originally use that word? Well, in the ancient world, the word gospel refers to an announcement of happy or important events.

Is there a military victory? Gospel it! Is there a significant birth or wedding? Gospel it! In the Old Testament, when a messenger brings news of his army's victory back to King David in the palace, it's called a gospel.

And so the word gospel by itself simply means good news. Or perhaps a little more precisely, to better capture its urgency, we could say that it is not just good news, but it is breaking news telling us something life changing has happened.

And so what is this gospel that Paul brings, that he deems as absolutely worthy of our trust? Well, the answer is in verse 15.

[10 : 02] Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. success. That's the breaking news. But why is this piece of news so significant?

Maybe it's just another piece of overhyped journalism. The other day, there was an article on a well-known Sarawakian news portal breathlessly reporting how Burger King was going to open an outlet in Kuching International Airport.

And quite a number of people, not unreasonably, asked, is this news? Are there not more important things to report on?

And maybe we are tempted to think that this piece of news falls into that category as well. After all, what's so special about this Jesus?

What's so special about this native of Galilee back in the first century? It's a different time, a different place. What has that got to do with me?

[11 : 12] Well, the clue lies right at the beginning of this trustworthy saying. Notice, how is Jesus described? Answer, not just as Jesus, but as Christ Jesus.

In fact, you would notice that's how he's consistently described throughout these few verses. So what, you might say, Jesus, Jesus Christ, Christ Jesus, isn't that all saying the same thing?

But here's something we often forget. Christ is not a surname. name. It is not even just an alternative way to refer to the same person.

It is an honorific title. And so Jesus and Christ are not equivalent terms. When you say, Brian is preaching and pastor is preaching, now that's not wrong because that accurately reflects my vocation.

but Brian does not mean the same thing as pastor. It is the same with Jesus and Christ.

[12:33] Christ is a title. But what sort of title is it? Well, it is a royal title, a kingly title.

You see, Christ or Messiah, they're the same thing, simply means anointed. one. In the Old Testament, prophets, priests, and especially kings, were anointed with oil.

It was a way of saying that they were set apart to act in that particular office. And so to call Jesus the Christ or the Messiah is to say he is acting in his royal capacity.

It is to say he is the king or more specifically the king foretold in the Old Testament who would be good and honorable and righteous.

king. And here is the breaking news. This king has come. King Jesus has come into this world.

[13:48] But okay, you might say, I suppose if Jesus has a royal title, that might make him a little bit more newsworthy than your average citizen. reason, but to be honest, I don't really pay attention to what the young di-Petuan Agong or King Charles is doing or where they are going all the time.

So why should I care? Well, the prophet Isaiah tells us. Back in Isaiah 52 verse 7, he says this.

It should be on the screen. how beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, that is the gospel, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, that's the gospel word again, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, your God reigns.

And so this is what Isaiah is telling us. To oversimplify it a little, he's saying when the Messiah comes, that's the good news, it's the same as saying God himself has come.

When this king comes, it's equivalent to saying God is ruling here. He is in charge now. His kingdom is here. And that is significant because when God is in absolute charge, with no challenge to his rule, what does the world look like?

[15:28] Well, all we have to do is to look at the beginning of the Bible when that was the case.

When God is in absolute charge, with no challenge to his rule, the world looks fruitful and abundant because God himself is fruitful and abundant.

There is no sickness or suffering. Everyone is at peace with one another. It is truly a place of blessing. And Jesus now says, that is the kind of kingdom I am going to restore.

I'm going to bring in a new creation, so to speak. when you saw me healing people and casting out evil spirits, you saw a glimpse of what my future, eternal kingdom looks like.

One in which suffering and evil has no place. So Jesus is the king. And through him, God is in charge now.

Suffering and evil quake in your boots. Be gone. Christ is here. And if I told you that someone is here to vanquish suffering and evil forever, would that piece of news not be significant?

[17:03] but, but, but, if that was all there was to it, that wouldn't by itself make it good news for us.

Why not? Well, when King Jesus surveys our broken and malfunctioning world, and he asks, what is the root of all the suffering and evil in the world, what answer will he come up with?

Well, the answer that he will rightly come up with is us. Where are the problem? After all, what is the history of humankind in a nutshell?

It is simply a history of people hurting and being hurt by one another. And the Bible says that's because we are sinners.

What is a sinner? Now, the Bible has multiple definitions, but let me just give you one. At its heart, it's when I choose to make life revolve around myself rather than God.

[18:17] And what happens when everyone chooses to live that way? Well, this illustration not original to me might help. the solar system works harmoniously when all the planets orbit around the same center, namely the sun.

If, however, all the planets decided on their own what to orbit around or to orbit around themselves, what will happen?

The solar system as we know it will fall completely apart because they're not orbiting around the correct center. There will be death and disintegration.

And that's exactly how our sin has impacted our world. We have failed to revolve our lives around God, the true king, the only king, and that has disastrous knock-on effects.

And so King Jesus would be well within his rights to say, well if my kingdom is going to be one where suffering and evil have no place, then I've got to banish all sinners from my kingdom.

[19 : 32] And given that is what we are, well that is not good news, is it? But here is the gospel. What is the gospel? gospel? King Jesus came into this world not to remove sinners, but to save sinners.

He came into this world not to those who were for him, but to those who were against him. He came not to be served, but to serve those who serve themselves.

He came not as a general, barking orders to us to show how we can do better. He came not as a philosopher to dazzle us with a list of sophisticated ideas by which we can improve ourselves. He came not as a motivational speaker trying to inspire us out of our predicament. He came as a king who was a servant, and his service to us was to die on the cross.

[20 : 41] As the theologian Michael Horton puts it, Jesus embraced the cross precisely as a king embraces a scepter. And vindicated by the resurrection, he now takes his throne in heaven, a throne that is universal and endearing.

That, my friends, is the essence of the gospel. But I am not content to stop here because Paul isn't. And this takes us secondly to the impact of the gospel, the impact of the gospel.

You see, there's a difference between getting the bare facts of the gospel and personally taking the gospel in. How do you know if a certain restaurant is good?

Well, you could read all the reviews online. you could see that it got a Michelin star. You can see that the presentation of the food looks nice.

But the best way is simply to go and taste the food for yourself. You could get all the facts about the restaurant food, or you could take it in.

[22 : 02] And so Paul wants to know, have you tasted the gospel? Have you taken it in for yourself? has it impacted you? Because it certainly impacted him.

I don't think you could read these verses without getting a sense of how personal the gospel is to him. Paul knew who he was.

In verse 13, he is not afraid to admit what he was. he was a blasphemer. He said the most offensive things against God, even though he might not always have realized it.

And then he got worse. He was a persecutor. He was in effect a Taliban commander. He didn't just spout hateful words against God, but turned those words into action by actively seeking to hurt the people of God.

And he was a violent man, a big bully, someone who was out to inflict pain for the sheer enjoyment of it. Paul names all of the ways he is a sinner, and he is not afraid to be specific.

[23 : 26] specific. But even though he was once a blasphemer, and persecutor, and a violent man, even though he was once all of that, God turned him around.

God showed him mercy. God did not give him what he deserved. And Paul just cannot get over this. And my friends, I am increasingly convinced that we will never ever feel the impact of the gospel for as long as we do not admit what great sinners we are.

If we only kind of vaguely nod along to the fact that oh yes, we are sinners, but we do not own the specific ways in which we have gone wrong, in which we have gone against God, we will not understand how glorious the gospel is.

Doing that requires great humility, doesn't it? It's easier to say, I made some mistakes, rather than to admit to the Lord, I gave in to lust last night and look at some things I shouldn't have.

[24 : 44] It's easier to tell God, sorry, I got jealous, rather than saying, God, I confess that I am jealous of the talents that you gave to so and so, talents that I think are wasted on him rather than on me.

I confess that I am proud. To say that I'm a person with an anger problem, or I'm an addict to gossiping, doesn't make me look good.

on the contrary, I want to prove that actually I'm not so bad after all. I'm a pretty good boy. I am not like the others. But, as one Christian musician once said, it might just be the best thing for us if our deepest, darkest sins, the ones that we work hardest to hide, the ones that we don't want to admit even to ourselves, were exposed to the world and broadcast from the rooftops.

For, if our sins were exposed, we would have no way of hiding from them and we would have to deal with them.

And, of course, here is the irony. this is exactly how our sins have been exposed to Jesus. Jesus sees and knows them all.

[26 : 25] He already knows you have an anger problem or a pride problem or whatever problem it is. And, he is just waiting for us to come round to that fact.

because Jesus wants to heal us. You see, if we come humbly and meekly before him, admitting that this is what we are, and throwing ourselves before him, what do you think Jesus will do?

Do you get out the rotan? Shame us in front of everyone else? Throw us to the wolves?

No. Verse 14, he pours out grace on us abundantly. That is what Paul gets.

Now, here, our English translations struggle to capture this adequately. what Paul says literally in verse 14 is something like this. He super overflows grace to us.

[27 : 41] Now, that is just great, isn't it? Paul is like a kid who can't quite find the right word to capture what God does, and so he just says, his grace doesn't just overflow, it super overflows.

It comes to us like a dam that has just burst. When you come before Christ with your sin, even if you think you are the worst like Paul does, he sends a flash flood of grace your way to make you clean, to make you fit to be in the presence of a king.

Christ gives what you don't deserve. He wore the crown you should have worn, the crown of taunts, so that we will wear the crown he wears, the crown of glory.

That's grace. That is the good news. That is the good news, not just for non-Christians, but for Christians as well.

You see, every single day, as Christians, we need the gospel fresh. We sin every day. We still wrong God. We fail to please God soften. And we wonder if there was ever a time, if there will ever come a time when Jesus says enough.

[29 : 04] I've had it with you. But his supply of grace never runs out. The pastor Ken Hughes once tells of an artist who submitted a painting of the Niagara Falls to an exhibition.

The gallery decided to title it More to Follow. That's a picture of God's grace. Like the Niagara Falls, which has been spilling billions of gallons of water every year for centuries for all to enjoy, God's grace just keeps coming.

There always is more to follow. Or as the apostle James so beautifully says, he gives us more grace. Or consider the words of Martin Luther on the screen.

Just as the sun is not darkened by the whole world enjoying its light and could indeed light up ten worlds, just as one hundred thousand lights might be lit from one light and not detract from it, just as a learned man is able to make a thousand others learned and the more he gives, the more he has, so is Christ our Lord an infinite source of all grace so that if the whole world would draw enough grace and truth from it to make the world all angels, yet it would not lose a drop.

The fountain always runs over full of grace. I've laboured on this because I've really wanted to communicate how lavish God's grace is, how much of an impact the gospel can have on us if we are ready to take it in.

[31 : 01] You see, for as long as we think that the gospel is for good people, not bad people, we will not take it in. But when we admit, first of all, that we are bad people, and then we know that the gospel is for bad people, not good people, everything changes.

Perhaps one or two of you are thinking now, I'm not good enough, I haven't done enough, I don't qualify for grace. But look at Paul. It is precisely when he said those things that he qualified for grace.

And so, verse 16, he became an incredible testimony to Christ's immense patience. He became a living counter-argument to anyone who has ever said, I'm just too bad for God to ever come and fix me.

If he can turn the church's greatest enemy into one of his finest servants, he can certainly do much more. My friends, no matter how bad you think you are, if Jesus can forgive Paul, he can forgive you.

And this brings us thirdly to the response to the gospel. What is going to be our response? What can we say to such amazing grace, such profound mercy?

[32 : 45] But what does Paul say? Look at verse 12. I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has given me strength that he considered me trustworthy, appointing me to his service.

He says, thank you, thank you, thank you. Thank you for strengthening me, thank you for considering me faithful, and thank you for putting me in your service.

This is how you know that you're truly drunk of the sweet waters of the gospel. When you want to live for Christ and serve him because of what he's done for you, well, that's when you've been

captured by Christ's gospel.

Serving him won't be a burden, serving him won't be tiresome because the gospel has turned you inside out and made you a new person.

You see, when you come to Jesus, you are joined to Jesus. He begins to sprout Jesus' DNA in you. [34 : 01] And that's why if you look at verse 14, you don't just get grace, but you get faith and love in Christ Jesus. He shares with us what is inherent to himself.

And the faith and love he shares with us is so abundant, he expects us not to have room to keep it to ourselves, but to overflow with that same faith and love.

Yeah, sometimes people ask, isn't the gospel a bit of a cop-out? God brings forgiveness and then I can go and do what I want? Well, perhaps if we think of the gospel as a mere insurance policy and nothing more.

But when we grasp that the gospel is actually about a king, that it is about a king who has shown his heart towards us and shares all good things with us, who is patient with the weak and gentle with the repentant, then we will never have that thought.

Instead, we would want to pledge loyalty to this king. We would want our entire lives to be a display of verse 17. We would want to give our lives to the king eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God to give him honour and glory forever and ever and ever.

[35 : 38] So my friends, how are you responding to the gospel? If you're not a Christian this morning, then let me urge you not to put this message aside, but to investigate it, to ponder upon it, to ask God to help you to understand it, and ultimately to accept it.

for it is not a religious message, it is a life-changing message. And if you are a Christian this morning, reflect on how your heart is receiving the gospel.

Are you receiving it with a yawn and a shrug? With a I've heard all of this before attitude? If so, then let me urge you to consider that your flight coordinates might actually be off base.

And so why not this New Year's Day cry out to God to help you to recalibrate? Why not ask him to excite you with the gospel all over again, to move you towards greater service of him, to depend on him afresh for strength?

As Spurgeon once said, if Jesus were greater in our esteem, our lives would be grander by far. For this is our gospel, the one and only unchanging gospel, the one and only trustworthy saying that is deserving of our full acceptance in 2023.

[37 : 11] Christ Jesus came into this world to save sinners. Let's live and stand by this gospel. Let's pray.

Father, I pray that we would drink in of the depths of the gospel this morning.

I pray that we would not just take a sip or two, but we will drink the whole lot. Father, help us to be like Paul, to admit that in many ways we are sinful, we are without excuse, but then help us to overflow with gratitude, with thankfulness, that you sent your son Jesus to come and rescue people just like us, and in response, we just want to magnify and to declare your name in lip and in our lives.

All this we pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.