

The Continued Centrality of the Gospel

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[0 : 00] In just a moment, I'm going to come and read just a few verses of Scripture for us from Romans chapter 1, with a special emphasis upon the Word, the Gospel.

And you will note in your bulletin, our message is entitled, The Continued Centrality of the Gospel. Such remains the purpose for the existence of Grace Bible Church.

New and better ways have been discovered for proclaiming it, but there is nothing new or better about the Gospel itself. The greater need for today is the boldness necessary for its proclamation, without apology or equivocation.

Let's get on with it. So, Gary, come and read, and we'll be in Romans chapter 1. There are two passages this morning.

The first verses will be Romans chapter 1, 8 and 9. And then we'll be looking at Romans chapter 1, verses 14 through 17.

[1 : 29] First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world.

For God, whom I serve in my spirit in the preaching of the gospel of His Son, is my witness as to how unceasingly I make mention of you.

I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. So, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

For I am 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 to faith, as it is written, but the righteous man shall live by faith.

[2 : 49] After all of these years that we have been together, it might seem somewhat strange to begin a new but a brief series regarding the subject of the gospel.

After having gone through the New Testament, virtually verse by verse over the years, and through many of the books of the Old Testament as well, not all of them, but many of them, verse by verse, how is it that we find ourselves, after all of these years, dealing with something as basic and as simple as the gospel?

And the answer is, there is nothing simple about the gospel. It is the most profound subject that we can undertake.

Do you realize that in order to make the gospel a reality, the triune Godhead had to be, in some fashion, altered in order for one member of that triune Godhead to take upon him human flesh and be born as one of us so that he might have a body that could die on a cross for the sins of the world. There is nothing simple about that. It is the most profound undertaking that we can even imagine that he who knew no sin was made to be sin for us so that we might become the righteousness of God in him.

[4 : 43] This is the most profound thing that we can possibly undertake. So we are going to emphasize the gospel and what it is and what it isn't and the power that resides in it to change lives and other things in connection with it and we'll probably be on this for at least three or four weeks.

There is no more advanced truth for humanity than that which is contained in the elements of the gospel. And what do we mean by continued centrality?

By continued centrality of the gospel, we are recognizing it as the core, the heart, the centerpiece of the plan and program of God.

It is all wrapped up in this thing called gospel, which literally means the good news. The gospel is that around which all else in the Christian life and the world circulates.

So every one of us should have as much as possible, as great, as full, as deep an understanding of the gospel as we can because everything regarding your life, present and future, issues forth from the meaning that is wrapped up in that gospel, the good news.

[6 : 11] It is the beginning of one's spiritual life and it is the anchor for all that we believe. The gospel is inseparable from the one who has come to own the term from the first century.

I suspect that there are a number of things that have the word gospel attributed to it. There is the shooter's Bible that is referred to as the gospel for shooters and that means simply it is the ultimate authority and the word gospel is attached to other things in life, such different kinds of occupations that people buy and they say that that is the gospel and that means that that is the ultimate truth regarding that particular item.

But I can assure you and you would probably know this already that the word gospel still has after 2,000 years a special kind of connotation to it that cannot be denied and it is inseparable from the person of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Therein lies the gospel and he has come as I've said to own the term. It is just automatically associated with him. The gospel has morphed from being good news in general to being a very specific good news in particular and I say that because as the word gospel was used originally in the Greek language good news it simply conveyed the idea about good news regarding anything. It didn't make any difference what it was. There are all kinds of good news. So and so got a raise got a promotion Mrs. Smith had her baby these are all items of good news. These are all gospels and that's the way the word was used during New Testament times before Jesus ever came on the scene.

[8 : 08] But what particularizes the gospel now and has come to particularize it is his connection with it. And Paul the apostle makes that very clear in Romans chapter 1 and beginning with verse 1 when he says Paul the bondservant of Christ Jesus called as an apostle set apart for the gospel of God.

The good news of God. Hey world there's lots of good news out there about a lot of things but this good news is the good news and we read on which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures concerning his son.

That's what the good news is all about. It's all about Jesus he who came took upon him human flesh went to that cross paid the ultimate penalty for our sins rose again the third day from the dead.

That's the gospel. And Paul says when he writes to the Corinthians that that which I also receive I proclaim to you that which is of first importance do you get that?

That which is of first importance that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures that he was buried and rose again the third day according to the scriptures.

[9 : 34] And Paul says this is of first importance. Everything else takes a back seat to that. The gospel is the you probably don't recognize this word but I'm going to give you a little bit of Greek now.

The gospel is the eongelion the what? The eongelion that's the way it would be pronounced in the Greek and it looks something like this.

I forgot my alphabet. You could never do that.

Eongelion and in English it looks like this. And you might be more familiar with this word evangel or evangelistic it all comes from the same word and it has to do with the good news the evangel and the eongelion this part literally means good you eongelion this is the word from which we get the word angel and angel is a messenger so the eongelion and the good news is the good message sometimes it is a word that is used to translate the word angel because angel the word angel literally means messenger and when you put this together the eongelion it simply means the good message or the good news and this word eou in the in the Greek and we use this a lot in the in the English as well we use the word eou euthanasia that is when you have a pet or an animal that you have to put down and it's a sad time in everybody's life but the pet has reached the end of its years and it's suffering and we talk about euthanasia we euthanize the pet we put it to sleep and the word e-u that comes from our word that makes up our word gospel can also be u-l-o-g-y eulogy and that simply means good words you say good words regarding someone when you give a kind of testimony or experience at a funeral people offer a eulogy on behalf of the deceased and that simply means that they have good words to say about them and here's another word euphoria that's that's the feeling that a young man has when he falls in love and he knows that she's the right girl and he's ready to pop the question he is euphoric he kind of looks like he's out of his mind he

acts kind of giddy and silly like he doesn't know what day it is he is smitten he is euphoric and all of this good this this you'd be surprised how many words from the greek we use all the time and then there is a word the last one

I'll just bore you with this and it's called you can't see it I'll put it up here on the top euphemism what what in the world is that well it's good something and it is good saying or good speaking and it's kind of related to the gospel but what it means is you take the reality of a word that everybody is familiar with but because the word is kind of hard hitting and harsh you tone it down a little bit that's called a euphemism what happened to Mr.

[14:16] So and So he died that is not a euphemism what happened to Mr. So and So well he passed on that's a euphemism you soften the blow he went to his reward he went to heaven and so on and these are words but when you hit somebody with he died that's kind of blunt and jarring so you want to reduce it a little bit so that it's not so shocking and we think of alternative words to use in place of it and that's what a euphemism is okay all of that comes from that word eu that begins the euangelion the good news that we are called upon to proclaim and have the privilege of so the gospel or the good news is presented in the bible as god's panacea for all human ills well that's a good word too let me put that up there a panacea i'm doing this primarily for the benefit of the young people a panacea the word this word pan the prefix means across or that which bridges we talk about pan american and a pan american includes includes all across the scope we had a well they're not in business anymore but it was pan american airlines and that meant that they covered all of the americas and we have the pan am games and that true has to do with the scope so the gospel is a panacea this this word means to cure and a panacea is a cure-all for whatever ails you we do not have to contend with this now well it comes pretty close sometimes on television when they're selling certain things particularly pharmaceuticals but years ago there used to be peddlers that go around we call them snake oil salesmen and you buy dr.

i curam's bottle of magic elixir and it's good for the gout and it's good for the kidneys it's good for the liver it's good for this it'll cure this and mostly it was just phony baloney but it was considered a panacea and there were a number of people that would try it and sometimes get amazing results so the gospel is a panacea that means the gospel the good news of Jesus Christ is the human cure-all for spiritual and physical ills it cures the spiritual immediately and it is a promise to cure the physical finally and when we are glorified with a body that is like under the body of Christ so the gospel is God's cure-all for present moral and spiritual needs in the immediate and for the physical needs in the future it does this upon one's believing the gospel which results in the regeneration of the believer in his interior being and nobody has ever figured out how that works all we know is that it does how

God reaches into the heart into the core of your being and regenerate you making you alive to him a new person in Christ gives you eternal life forgives you all your sin we don't have a clue how God does that we only know that he does and it is the most glorious thing that can ever happen to a human being we fully recommend it and this is in part what this church is all about is to make this good news available to all let me ask you a question suppose you had come upon a sure fire cure for cancer what would you do with it well the most humane thing that you could do with it would be to make it available to anybody and everybody that had cancer

I mean if you have a panacea for cancer that will cure any kind of cancer and you take this particular medication and it will result in the destruction of every cancer cell in your body wouldn't that be about the most wonderful thing that ever happened to the human race well no not really it might come in second but it wouldn't be first because the most wonderful thing that's ever happened to the human race is God's panacea for our spiritual ills for the forgiveness of our sins and cancer compared to that runs a dead last you know so by comparison there is no comparison if you had that formula that could be applied to anybody and everybody who had what kind of a person would you be if you withheld it could you possibly take it upon yourself to withhold that cure and not share it with others knowing full well the results of what would happen to them and what that cancer would eventually do to their body what kind of a person would you be how would you characterize yourself you may be saying to yourself well

I couldn't be that selfish I couldn't be that cruel I couldn't be that unloving I would just have to share it with others do we feel that way about the gospel because the implications of embracing the gospel or not embracing the gospel are far greater the ramifications are far more involved than are those with a cure for cancer because what we're talking about is a life that exists beyond this life

cancer can do nothing but kill the body that's all it can do it can kill the body but it cannot kill the human spirit that which God makes alive through regeneration is something that cancer cannot touch now we would be honest about it we'd be a whole lot more excited about distributing what we knew to be a cure for cancer than we are presently about distributing the gospel aren't we yeah we are and I say that to our shame and

[21 : 07] I use the word our because it applies to me also we are living today in a culture the likes of which this country has never confronted before it is a culture that has become increasingly unaccepting to the gospel of Jesus Christ less and less willing to tolerate the spiritual implications and all this tells me is when the time comes that the gospel is less and less received in more and more circles that's the time for us to step up our game that's the time for us to become emboldened we need to match what the world is throwing up against us as regards the gospel and we aren't doing it too many of us are intimidated by silence because we know it may not be well received and

God forbid that someone should be offended that's pathetic the time has come for Christians to come out of this cocoon and start taking the responsibility for the gospel that we have and proclaim it with more boldness in fact just complain it with boldness period doesn't even have to be more boldness the boldness isn't there now just a little bit of boldness would help a lot but we're flagging in this and again I emphasize the we because I include myself I have come to realize much to my regret and to my shame that I have on too many occasions withheld an opportunity for the gospel that I should have taken I bypassed a gospel opportunity that I should have taken and I was just kind of covering you know one of the reasons that we do this is we all have a yellow streak running down our back for some of us it's wider than others but all too often we are intimidated into silence when we've got the most wonderful news that anyone has ever heard

I want you to look at a couple of references here and we'll open this for Q&A; if we have time I think we'll be able to do that this morning in the book of Acts let's go to Acts chapter 4 if we may Acts chapter 4 you may be reading from the King James I've got the New American Standard here and I'm looking at verse 13 this is when the apostles are placed in jeopardy by the religious authorities called on the carpet and we read in verse 13 as they observed the confidence of Peter and John and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men they were marveling and began to recognize them as having been with Jesus what a compliment huh where did they get their confidence what buoyed them up what sustained them it was simply on the basis of what they knew they could not deny what they had seen and heard nothing gives you more confidence than experiencing something of which you are a part and the confidence that you are to have is that which results from Jesus Christ visiting you as an individual and changing you on the inside and forgiving you of your sins and making you a child of heaven all of that is to give you the confidence that cannot be denied and the ability to proclaim that to someone else with great assurance problem with the world today is they have no idea what is available to them and all

Christians are called upon to do is inform them because unless they get information to process so that they can reach a conclusion they remain lost our principal objective is to be dispensers of information and I suppose you know that's all that a preacher is he just dispenses information people need to be given a reason to believe something and when you share your testimony with them like Peter and John are doing here the reality of which cannot be denied it comes across as very convincing after all they were there they know what they know they saw what they saw they heard what they heard and this they are communicating to people you could attribute it if it were one person you could attribute it to well they just had some kind of what shall we call it some kind of an experience some kind of maybe they saw a vision or something or maybe they just imagined it but when you have multiple people communicating the same message that gives credibility to it and when

[26 : 52] Christians in a community are all saying the same thing regarding the forgiveness that is available in Jesus Christ it makes an impact it has an effect upon people it gives them something to think about and I want you to think about this it is not at all required that you be able to lead someone to faith in Christ that's wonderful if you have the opportunity and can do that but be advised that is not what is required of you after all as someone has said the Holy Spirit is really the only soul winner but we are dispensers of information and all we are called upon to do with this gospel is to give people information that they did not have so that they've got something to work with that's all sharing the gospel is about and it comes in bits and pieces here a little there a little line upon line precept upon precept when you show the word of

God when you give someone the gospel or some element of the gospel that begins in their heart and mind a period of gestation just like a baby when the seed is planted in the womb and the egg there begins a period of growth and we call this the gestation period it takes about nine months for that seed to grow and develop into a baby a human being and it is going to be delivered in nine months and it takes while for that all to develop so when you give someone just a couple of elements of the gospel you're giving them something to think about that they hadn't thought about before that's all we're required to do that's not that hard and it can be done with something like this something as simple as this have you noticed what's going on in our world that I'm sure you have the shootings in Texas or Florida or whatever the chaos that's going on and what's going on in Washington are you keeping up with are you abreast of this you see what's happening most people will say yeah it's a mess isn't it it's really something tell me do you think that if our problems could be solved by politics that they would have been solved a long time ago yeah that's right I believe that well let me ask have you ever given any thought to spiritual matters or to spiritual solutions and very often they'll say something like well what do you mean well I'm talking about the way the world is and the way people are have you ever given any thought as to why things are the way they are you know most people really haven't do you realize there is a source there is a base for all our human problems there is a beginning where things got out of whack and they have had the consequence and the fruit of what we are experiencing today and it started way back when people never think in these veins but this is true and this is what the truth is and all you're doing is planting a little seed giving people something to think about and you know what happens they can build on that some other believer some television program some cd that they pick up some neighbor next door adds to this and sometimes this gestation takes years they take years and years before a person finally comes to the place of where they understand and see their need and all the while we're doing is just sowing a little seed and watering every time you have an opportunity to share spiritual truth with someone from the gospel you are watering you are either planting a seed or watering the seed that's been planted you don't know which it is but in either case we're supposed to be doing it sometimes

I think Christians get scared of the idea of thinking I could never lead anyone to Christ I'm afraid I wouldn't do it right I'm afraid I would mess it up I'm afraid they would still be all kinds of things you don't have to worry about that the Holy Spirit is the only one who can bring people to Christ anyway but we are called upon to be sowers of the seed and this by the way is the principal reason why we are securing these booths that we're going to be sharing and staffing at the county fairs we've got to get on with this thing the world is in worse shape than it's ever been in when it comes to morality and spirituality and we are the only ones with a solution if we're not addressing this who is we are the ones called upon to address the world for what it is Ephesians tells us that we are to have nothing to do with the expose them and that means we have to reveal these things for what they are and call them out kindly with compassion but with firmness and boldness and then present the solution many times they are not going to be receptive to that message you know

I've often said a lot of people have to get mad before they ever get saved that happens a lot people get offended they get upset and what happens is when the truth is shown conviction can be set in and the conviction weighs on a person it is the guilt thing that weighs on an individual and makes them available and open for a solution what can I do about this how can I get rid of this and the Christian proclaiming this message in one way or another and one facet or another is adding to that day by day and you're giving that person something to think about that's all we're called upon to do sharing the gospel gives people something to think about you may have opportunity to give them the whole nine yards very often you do not but you just give them some segment of the gospel and very often that provides all they need to think about and God can use that and does use that truth in the mind and heart of the person and they can't let go of it that's the nature of the word but when we don't give it out they can't receive it they can't process it they can't act upon it so here in

[33 : 32] Acts chapter 4 they were seeing the man who had been healed standing with them they had nothing to say in reply the evidence was right there and they are it's kind of humorous if you read on verse 15 and 16 and when they had ordered them to go aside out of the council they began to confer with one another this is the religious authorities and they're having a little huddle and they're saying how are we going to handle this we've got a real item here how are we going to get out of this predicament and they say what shall we do to these men for the fact isn't it interesting that they call it a fact the fact that a noteworthy miracle has taken place through them that says healing of this man born lame never walked a day in his life 40 years that way has taken place

through them is apparent to all who live in Jerusalem and we cannot deny it what an admission do you see the corruption in this what they're saying is we would deny it if we could but we can't it's impossible so in order that it may not spread any further among the people let us warn them to speak no more to any man in this name and of course that's the name of

Jesus and when they had commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus and you must understand that this prohibition is coming from the authority this is the recognized authority but Peter and John answered and said to them whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God you be the judge for we cannot stop speaking what we have seen and heard we cannot remain silent wouldn't it be wonderful if today's Christian community at large would adopt the same attitude and say we cannot be silent but you know what our problem is we can be silent we can be silent are we able to be silent because we do not have the kind of visible miracle that these had to point to that emboldened them is that what it takes do we not have as

Peter said a more sure word of prophecy that is revealed to us right here in scripture listen let me tell you bottom line is this we ought to be far more bold than what they were we have more information available to us than they had we are negligent in revealing what we clearly know to be true and our fear is that it will not be accepted or they may reject us or they may call us a name or they may isolate us or they may brand us this or that and our problem is we care far more about what other people think about us than we care about what God thinks about us that's one of the things that compels our silence God is not pleased by our having this message of life and being unwilling to share it we we we we we we had that panacea for cancer that cure all for cancer we would not hesitate one moment in noising it abroad and making it available to everyone let me tell you something the thing from which people are suffering is far worse with more eternal consequences than any kind of cancer anybody can have do we understand that do we see it maybe we see it intellectually but we don't see it emotionally we see it up here but we don't feel it down here and you know what moves people what do you think the word motion means motion means movement we are moved to do something when we know something it is an emotional involvement that causes us to care about people not just intellectually how much do we care do we care enough to confront

I'm talking to myself as much as I am talking to you I feel that I personally have been more negligent in this area than I have any right to be I don't know if you want to own that kind of confession or not but I must honesty compels me I have passed up too many opportunities that do you know what ten years ago I wouldn't have passed them up why am I doing it now I suggest it is because of what we've already mentioned we are intimidated by the present climate in this culture and their general attitude toward things spiritual it just makes us kind of pull back and hunker down and say well maybe the time isn't right listen the time is always right for the proclamation of the gospel there there is no bad time for the communication of spiritual truth

I care not where you are or what the circumstance the word of God is always appropriate you I don't know where this is going to go but I know I am greatly exercised in my own spirit and I deeply want this congregation to sense and to be a part of what is available to us in igniting something that really desperately needs ignited and I don't know if God would be pleased to start something here in this little assembly or not but if it's going to start anywhere it has to start somewhere and I think that if we are able to catch the vision of our reluctance and of our and here listen now and of our sin I said of our sin in being willing to withhold the precious truth that is confined in the gospel can we deal with that can we accept that can we believe that can we own that can we admit that

[41 : 07] I'm not speaking for anyone but myself but I must own it I've been negligent I've been unwilling I've been reluctant and I have no business being that way and if that's the attitude of your pastor how can I possibly fault you if that's your attitude repent means to change your mind and there's only one thing to change your mind about and that is you are wrong about something doesn't make any difference what it is repent means to change your mind when you discover that you have been wrong about something anything doesn't make a difference what it is doesn't even and I'm just here putting you on notice that the preaching of the gospel is not limited to preachers some of the most successful communicators of the gospel in the

Bible were not what you would call professional clergy some of them were we are called upon to be equippers of the saints and what we are to equip you with is the gospel and all that shows all that comes forth from that gospel spiritual maturity begins with the gospel someone said salvation is the

end of the gospel but it's the front end and what we need to do is proclaim that gospel without apology without equivocation and we're not doing it like I said we are hunkered down we have gone silent we have been neutralized you know yourself that people are not coming to christ like people used to 10 20 30 years ago it's not happening it's just not happening and the reason it isn't happening is because people like us who make up the body of christ have gone silent or we've said let the preacher do it that's what we pay the pastor for and that's not the right attitude each of us who has received the gospel has a responsibility pass it on are we meeting our responsibilities no one hates legalism more than

I do I'm not trying to lay any kind of guilt trips on you let me tell you something if you have no reason to feel guilty nobody can lay guilt on you think of that well pastor he's just trying to lay a guilt trip on well if you've got no reason to feel guilty there's no way that I can lay a guilt trip on you but I'll tell you what I feel guilty speaking for myself and repentance begins here and I'm acknowledging my loss and my lack and my sin in this in not communicating the gospel when I've had opportunity after opportunity it's easy to think that well there are other ways they can hear it there are other people who are sharing it you know well that just that's just evasion that's just designed to get us off the hook so that we won't have to feel guilty but I'm going to own it for myself haven't talked to anybody about this until now haven't even talked to

Marie about this haven't talked to anybody about this until now if there's going to be any change here any serious sharing of the gospel going on needs to start here and I'm trusting the Lord through my acknowledging and repentance that you might see fit to do the same nobody can do it for you and it's something between you and the Lord and if you don't see a need there and you don't feel the conviction there alright let it roll off don't own it don't buy it let it go but if you do I urge you to do something about it and only you can before the Lord pray with me if you would please Father we recognize that merely possessing the gospel entails an enormous responsibility but not only is it a responsibility it is a privilege and so often we do not look upon it as a privilege we look upon it as a kind of uncomfortable responsibility and we all need to get beyond that get beyond that so for my own part

I want to acknowledge before you and this company my own negligence and my own reluctance and at times my own unwillingness to communicate the gospel truth to people who desperately need it simply because I feared that there would not be a pleasant exchange there would be a rejection of the message they would be indifferent to it they would somehow think less of me all of these things result from the fear of man rather than the fear of God and that is something we need to repent of as well so as best as I know my heart I want to acknowledge this and look to you for the direction and wisdom that will enable me to turn this around as well as people in this congregation who may feel like minded that we can see the need and the opportunity say by the grace of God I'm going to take this gospel and with a new attitude and a new commission and a new agenda going to seek ways to communicate it to others their eternal destiny is lying in the balance thank you father for this time to share together thank you for cleansing of heart and soul and mind thank you for your forgiveness for your grace and we pray that each one here will own whatever responsibility they should and will respond with a glad and willing heart for the privilege of communicating the best news that the world has ever hurt we pray in christ's name amen