

Romans 1:1-18

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[0 : 00] At Kerry Baptist Church in Reading we have an English language school called Bridges. I want to begin this address this morning with a brief English lesson.

In English and some other languages we have something called latotes. It's when you use a negative to express a positive. I ask you how you are and you say I am not very well. What that means is that you feel pretty poor. I'm going to the Hilton's for a meal next Thursday. And you ask me Friday what kind of meal did you have at the Hilton's on Thursday. And I say not bad. Which really means it was a great meal. Well I hope it will be. We use a negative to express a positive. I once wrote a very important lesson on behalf of the church. And I thought about it a lot and so I showed it to one of the deacons to see what he felt about it.

[1 : 11] And he said to me I am not unhappy with that letter. I think he meant he was pleased with that letter. Now Paul uses latotes in a very important verse in the Bible.

In Romans 1 verse 16 Paul says I am not ashamed of the gospel. Romans 1 verse 16 I am not ashamed of the gospel.

Latotes. What he means is that I am proud of the gospel. I rejoice in the gospel. I want to preach the gospel wherever I can.

And I want to preach the gospel in Rome says Paul. In Romans chapter 1 verse 16. I want to preach the gospel in Rome. He says I plan to come to see you many times to preach the gospel in Rome.

But I have been hindered from doing so. But that is still my longing. To preach the gospel in the capital of the Roman Empire. Now all Christians are proud of the gospel.

[2 : 15] And I want this morning to tell you why. Why was Paul so proud of the Christian gospel? Why was he so eager to preach the gospel in Rome? Why are Christians so happy about the gospel?

Or to put that the other way around for the sake of anyone who is not a Christian. Why should you long to hear the gospel? Why should you believe the gospel?

Why is it so important? First of all. The first reason. Because it is a message from God. According to verse 1 of Romans chapter 1.

It is the gospel of God. It is a message which God wants men and women to hear. That's why Paul was proud of it. That's why Paul preached it.

That's why we should believe it. It is a message from God. Paul didn't think up this message to himself. We as Christians haven't thought up this message for ourselves.

[3 : 19] It has been given to us by Almighty God. Almost every day we hear what David Cameron wants us to hear.

Almost every other day we hear what Ed Miliband wants us to hear. Constantly we hear what President Obama wants us to hear.

Sometimes we hear what Professor Richard Dawkins wants us to hear. I don't know about you but I'm tired of listening to what little men and women want me to hear.

Here in the gospel we have what God Almighty wants us to hear. He's our creator. He's the ruler of the whole world.

And here is what he wants to tell men and women. My friend, if you ignore the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, if you sit in church on Sunday and let it go in one ear and out the other without really considering what the gospel is saying, that is a tragic and terrible thing to do.

[4 : 27] It may be okay to treat a political broadcast like that. It may be okay to treat what David Cameron says like that. But to ignore what God Almighty says is tragic and terrible.

When I was a boy we used to spend Christmas Day at my grandmother's house. She was a stonish royalist so every Christmas Day afternoon she would turn on the radio to listen to the royal broadcast, King George VI in those days.

And well betide any of her grandsons who made a noise while the king was speaking on the radio to the nation. Well betide any of her grandsons who didn't listen to what the king had to say.

That in my grandmother's book was a big, big sin. But it is a vast sin to ignore what God Almighty says in the gospel.

That's one reason why Paul was eager to preach it. Why we should believe it. Because it is a message from God. Secondly, Paul was not ashamed of the gospel. He rejoiced in it and was eager to proclaim it because it deals with big issues.

[5 : 50] That follows from what we've just seen, doesn't it? It's a message from God. Well God never speaks about trivial issues. He speaks about big issues.

And the gospel is all about big issues. For instance, it's a message about God. It's not only from God, it is about God.

Have you noticed, Christian folks, the gospel always starts off by talking about God? God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son.

God commended his love towards us in that while we were sinners, Christ died for us. God commands all men everywhere to repent.

The Bible always starts with God. It's all about God. And there is nothing more important in the world than to learn the truth about God. He's the sovereign Lord of the universe.

[6 : 55] He created the whole universe and rules over the whole universe with unlimited power. Verse 20 of Romans 1 speaks about his eternal power and divine nature.

Are we clear about that? The gospel tells us that God is the all-powerful Lord and that we ignore him at our peril.

But it also tells us that God is a God of great love and mercy. That God so loved this world that he made that he gave his one and only Son.

The gospel is all about God, our Maker. His great power and his amazing love to men and women. But the gospel also tells us about ourselves.

That's another big issue. Next to learning the truth about God, the most important thing for us is to learn the truth about ourselves.

[8 : 02] The gospel tells us that we were made by God and that we were made like God, perfect in every way. And that we were made to live for God and that we were made to worship God.

But sadly, we've fallen from that high level. We rebelled against God's laws and now we're all guilty before him.

That's the message of the Bible. The Bible starts with good news. The Bible is the good news, but it starts by giving us bad news.

And the bad news is that we have all sinned against God. We've all done evil in God's eyes. Read Romans chapter 1, chapter 2, chapter 3, and you'll find a dark catalogue of human sin and perversion.

And Paul sums it up in chapter 3 when he says, there is no one righteous, not even one. No one righteous, not even one.

[9 : 12] I remember one Sunday evening in 1964, I had just recently become a pastor in my first church, 1964.

And at the end of the evening service, the church secretary came running up the aisle, all red-faced and angry. And he said to me, you preached to us as though we were all sinners.

He was very angry. And when I explained to him, well, sorry, but that is what I thought. The Bible said that we are all sinners. He got even more angry. But it is true.

There is no one, says the Bible, no one righteous, not one. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.

Are we clear about that? Think of the lies. Think of the greed. Think of the pride you've shown. Think of the selfishness.

[10 : 16] Think of the hasty, sinful, godless words you've uttered. Think of the times you've lost your temper. Think of the time that you've had murderous thoughts in your mind.

Think of the unclean thoughts. Think of the terrible things you've done. All have sinned. And come short of the glory of God. Think of the times you've ignored God and turned your back on him.

All have sinned. And come short of the glory. The Bible deals with the big issues. It tells us the truth about ourselves. And yes, it tells us about the future.

That's another big issue, isn't it? How vital that is. What does the future hold? There are crowds of men and women all around us living for money, living for pleasure, living for self, living for sin, living for sex.

Where will it all end? Do you ever think about that? Where will it all end? The Bible gives us the answer. There's a great day of judgment coming.

[11 : 30] The general election, when it comes next time around, will decide Mr. Cameron's future, will decide Ed Miliband's future, will decide our futures in a sense.

But there's a bigger day than the next election day coming. That's the judgment day of Almighty God. Every one of us will be summoned to stand before God.

Every one of us will be judged by God. And that will determine our everlasting destiny. Heaven, for those who have trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Hell, for those who ignore the Lord Jesus Christ. The Gospel tells us about the future.

God now commands all men everywhere to repent. Why? Because he's appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness. That day is in God's diary already.

[12 : 34] A day when he will judge the world in righteousness. The Gospel tells us all about that. And how certain it is. And how we should prepare for that.

But thank God the Gospel tells us about another big issue. It tells us about God. It tells us about ourselves. It tells us about the future. It tells us about the Lord Jesus Christ.

some Bible versions have this verse rendered like this. Paul says, I'm not ashamed of the gospel of Christ. It is the gospel of Christ.

It's all about this wonderful person called Jesus Christ. It tells us that he's the eternal son of God. It tells us that he shared with God in the creation of the universe.

It tells us that he left heaven and came into this world and became a man. He didn't cease to be the son of God, but he became a man as well. And he lived a perfect life and gave some amazing teaching and did astounding miracles.

[13 : 40] But then was put to death upon a cross. And when he was put to death upon a cross, he actually bore, he actually endured the punishment that was due to sinners like us for our sin.

And then he rose again. And that he's the only savior. The only one who can forgive us. Paul puts it like this later on in Romans chapter 5 verse 6.

When we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. For very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man.

Though for a good man, some might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this. That while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

That is what the gospel is all about. The Lord Jesus Christ coming into this world and dying for poor sinners. Dying for the ungodly.

[14 : 46] In order that they might be forgiven and saved and go to heaven. And that brings us to another big issue that the gospel deals with.

How can we be righteous in the sight of God? How can we be righteous in the sight of God? Paul says in verse 17 that in the gospel, a righteousness from God is revealed.

Let me explain that. The gospel tells us how guilty sinners like us can become clean and righteous in God's eyes.

Now that's the big question, isn't it? That's the biggest question of all, isn't it? The biggest issue of all. How can a sinful, unrighteous person like me get right with God?

How can a sinful, unrighteous person like me become righteous in the sight of God? How can a sinful, unrighteous person like me eventually get to heaven?

[16 : 02] Now I've seen many tragedies in my life over the past sort of 49, 50 years. But the greatest tragedy has been so many religious people who think they can make themselves righteous in God's eyes.

They think they can do it themselves by their good deeds, by their religious ceremonies, by going to church, by doing their best to help other people.

They believe that by all of this they can make themselves righteous in the sight of God. It's a terrible, terrible tragedy. It's a hopeless business.

They've never learned the lesson that a man called Martin Luther learned many years ago. Way back in 1517, Martin Luther was a monk.

He went to mass every day. He fasted and flogged himself in an effort to make himself righteous in the sight of God. He crawled on his knees up the steps of St. Peter's in Rome until his knees were red and raw and bleeding, all in an effort to make himself righteous in the sight of God.

[17:19] He went to mass every day and thought he could do it. But he couldn't. But then he read Romans chapter 1 and realized he could never, never make himself righteous.

Never in the millennia. But people still try. Thinking that they're going to make themselves right with God. I knew a man called Brother Benedict.

For 25 years, he shut himself away in a freezing monastery cell high on a hill in Gloucestershire in an effort to make himself righteous with God.

25 years in a monastery. Fasting, getting up at 4 in the morning, flogging himself, wearing uncomfortable clothes in a freezing monastery cell.

25 years. Trying to make himself righteous in the sight of God. But one Sunday, he was allowed out of the monastery to come to visit his dying mother.

[18:31] And by an amazing coincidence, he attended a gospel church. And the gospel told him that even if he lived to be a hundred, he could never make himself righteous.

And even if he became even more religious than he was, he could never make himself righteous in the sight of God. What hope then is there?

What did Martin Luther learn from Romans 1 verse 17 in 1517? What did Brother Benedict learn from Romans 1 one Sunday in 1980?

Well, here it is. Paul says that in the gospel, a righteousness from God is revealed. The gospel tells us that when Jesus died upon the cross, all our unrighteousness, all our sin, all our guilt was laid on him and he bore the punishment in our place.

That deals with our unrighteousness. Unrighteousness. And when we believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, all our unrighteousness is cleansed away. He died to take away all our unrighteousness and our sin.

[19:59] And the moment we believe on him, we're cleansed. We sing about that sometimes, don't we? The vilest offender who truly believes that moment from Jesus a pardon receives.

But more than that, the gospel tells us that when we believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, when we have faith in him, his perfect righteousness is reckoned, is transferred to our account.

A righteousness from God is given to us and God looks upon us as righteous men and women. It's an amazing thing. Let me put it like this.

Let me use an illustration. Imagine I'm a poor beggar. Imagine I'm penniless. I'm wearing filthy, stinking rags.

I'm the black sheep of the family. I'm an outcast. I'm in a terrible mess. But there's going to be a family wedding. I've heard about it.

[21:05] there's going to be a family wedding and I desperately want to go to the family wedding. But if I turn up in my rags, stinking as I do, they'll throw me out.

But the bridegroom, he's a kind fellow and he hears about my predicament. He's so very kind. So he takes off my filthy rags and he gives me a good wash and then he takes me to Harrods in London and buys me a brand new suit and puts it on me.

And because I've been washed and because my rags have been taken away and because of this new suit which has been given to me, because of the kindness of the bridegroom, I'm now allowed to go to the wedding.

And that's a picture of what the Lord Jesus Christ has done for us. When we believe on him, all our rags of sin are taken away and his righteousness is given to us so we can come to God and go to heaven when we die.

Paul says, in the gospel, a righteousness from God is revealed. Forget your self-righteousness, my friend.

[22:34] Forget all your own efforts to make yourself right with God. Useless. Useless. In the gospel, a righteousness from God is revealed.

And that great blessing comes to us not because of anything we have done, not because we're religious, not because we were christened, not because we go to church, not because we're goody goodies, not because we're decent people who belong to the Rotary Club and the WY, things like

that, not at all.

This righteousness comes to us through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul says here, it's by faith from first to last.

Paul is quoting a verse from the Old Testament from the book of Habakkuk, chapter 2, verse 4, that righteous will live by faith. This righteousness that we receive is by faith from first to last.

Now that's the second reason why Paul was so proud of the gospel. It deals with big, big issues. It's all about God.

[23 : 44] It's all about ourselves and our sins. It's all about the future, judgment to come. It's all about the Lord Jesus Christ. And how he died upon the cross.

It's all about this righteousness. How can I be right before God? These are big issues. That's why you should believe it, my friend. Let me give another reason why Paul was not ashamed to preach this gospel even in Rome.

Very briefly, because everybody, everybody needs to hear this message. Paul says, it's for Jews and for Gentiles.

Everybody needs this message. It has a relevance for everybody. Whether you're rich or poor, whether you're conservative or labor, new labor, whatever you are politically, the gospel is for you. Whether you live in the north or the south, the gospel is for you. Whether you're in England or Wales or Scotland or wherever you are, the gospel is for you. Everybody needs to hear this gospel with a simple reason.

[24 : 58] As we've seen, all of us are sinners in the sight of God. But here's the fourth and the last reason. The greatest reason why Paul was not ashamed of the gospel.

He knew it worked. He'd seen people's lives changed by it. He puts it like this, I'm not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes.

It works. There is a power about the Christian gospel which changes the lives of men and women.

Now when Paul wrote this letter to the Romans, he had been a preacher for many, many years.

And he'd seen this message transform many people's lives. You remember Paul went to Philippi on one occasion, the first time the gospel was ever preached in Europe.

He went to Philippi. and he was thrown into prison in Philippi for preaching the gospel. And he met that hardened jailer, that brood of a man.

[26 : 12] And that jailer heard the gospel and came to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. And his life was totally transformed. Paul went to Corinth, probably the most evil city in the ancient world.

And he preached the gospel there. And he saw people's lives transformed by the gospel. He tells us about it in 1 Corinthians chapter 6. He put it like this. Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God?

Do not be deceived. Neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor male prostitutes, nor homosexual offenders, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor slanderers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

And such were some of you, idolaters, immoral, homosexual, greedy, swindlers, such were some of you.

But you were washed. You were sanctified. You were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God. What a great change in the lives of those people in Corinth.

[27 : 36] Paul came to Ephesus and preached the gospel there. And in Ephesus there were loads of people who were dabbling with the occult into all manner of black magic and things like that.

And so many of those were converted that the silversmiths who made a fortune out of making little idols and things staged a riot.

People changed. And praise God we've seen that too haven't we? Not so often as Paul did. But we've seen it too.

Take Ron. His life was a mess. He was drinking too much. He was a chain smoker. He swore like a trooper. His marriage was on the rocks. One Sunday he got out his bike.

Life was so empty. He said I'm going to find a church. Got his bike. He'd never been to church in his life except for the wedding of his daughter.

[28 : 42] And he came up to one church stopped on his bike and said I'm not going in there. Went there for my daughter's wedding. The vicar there is a wimp dad's army type I won't go in there.

Got on his bike came to a Methods church that was closed. Can't go in there. Got on his bike again came to another church on the letters board ever ever ever ever he could hardly read ever ever

evangelical church I'll go in there.

He came in and heard the gospel and believed and his life was transformed. Became a new man. Seen that happen.

I think of another man Peter his life was in a mess for another reason. He'd been involved in a terrible car crash driving his car sedately along the road when a drunken driver came over the brow of the hill on the wrong side smashed into him and after weeks and weeks and weeks in hospital Peter was now going to be in the wheelchair for the rest of his life.

He was devastated. His wife was devastated. They didn't know what to do. And so they said I think we'll go to church. They hadn't been to church for years.

[30 : 07] And they were going to church and they came and found a church and came in and heard the gospel and their lives were changed. Peter was still paralyzed but now he could see a purpose in life.

Now he had a hope. Now he had a peace in his wife as well. This gospel works. It is the power of God and the salvation. I went one day to a very remote village in the south of India to open up a new church building there made of bamboo and I met two men there.

One was the pastor of the church the first man I met. The pastor of the church he had been a Jain a very extreme form of Hinduism. He'd heard the gospel from a missionary who came from Leicester. And his life had been totally transformed. Now he was the pastor of a church in this very remote village in the south of India. I then met an elder the elder of the church.

Never forgotten it. He was the first convert in that village. He had been the witch doctor. The man who'd done abominable things.

[31 : 23] Terrible initiation rites for boys and girls. He was the one who'd thrown unwanted baby girls to the crocodiles on the river. A vile man if ever there was one.

But he'd heard the gospel and realised what a terrible life he was living. And his life had been transformed. And he was now the elder of the church. The gospel works.

It changes people's lives. That's what you should say to Richard Dawkins Professor Dawkins excuse me but have you got a message which can change people's lives?

Have you got a message which can save the alcoholic? Have you got a message which can save the person whose life has broken up? Have you got a message of hope for people?

Nothing at all. But the gospel works. It is the power of God and the salvation. And there are those of us here this morning who'd want to tell you that the gospel has worked in our lives and has changed our lives.

[32 : 34] Once we were far away from God. Once we were living wretched, helpless, hopeless lives. Once we were steeped in sin. Once we had no hope.

But we heard the gospel and the Lord Jesus Christ spoke to us and it has changed our lives totally, totally.

And our longing is that this will happen to you. Just as we by God's grace have seen our sin and seen our need of the Lord Jesus Christ and trusted in him and found our lives to be changed, we trust that a similar miracle will happen to you.

You say, I'm too far gone. You don't know me. I've come in here this morning but my life is in a total mess. I put on a good appearance when I come to church but my life behind the scenes is in a total, total mess.

No hope for me. But there is. Because the gospel is the power of God and the salvation to everyone who believes.

[33 : 48] No matter what you've done, no matter where you've been, no matter how low you've sunk, the gospel is the power of God and the salvation to everyone who believes.

and if you trust in the Lord Jesus Christ this morning, if you turn to him and say, Lord, I recognize I'm a sinner. I've done some awful things.

The lies, the horrible thoughts, the greed, those awful things. I've done so many terrible things. I confess them to you. I realize that you're my only Savior.

He'll cleanse you and give you his righteousness and you'll go home rejoicing in this wonderful, glorious gospel. Let's pray together and then we'll sing.

Father, we thank you and we praise you for sending the Lord Jesus Christ into this world. And we thank you that there is this good news, the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[34 : 49] and we thank you that many, many people throughout the centuries in this country and many, many, many other countries have heard this gospel and have found their lives transformed and we pray that you do a similar miracle today wherever the gospel is proclaimed through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.