

Romans 1:1-6

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[0 : 0 0] And again, let me welcome you. It's great to have you with us this morning. I don't know if you've watched the news this week. Have you watched the news? I don't normally watch the! I've kind of given up on the news a few years ago. But I did watch the 10 o'clock news on the day there were the riots in Washington. And I think it would be fair to say it was the most depressing half hour I've had in a very long time. The news is terrifying at the moment, isn't it? I felt guilty for breathing at the end of the news. In response to the all sorts of things. And we use the word news in different ways, don't we? We say when we find out something, well that's news to me. When we want to shock someone, have I got news for them? Think of the couple that have been going out and courting and the boyfriend has gone to see his girlfriend's father and asked him to marry his daughter. And then he's proposed to the bride and then there's a family gathering and they come to the family gathering and they say, we've got some news. Or the couple that have been married and they've been wanting children and they've been longing for children. And there's a family gathering. Do you remember what they were like? And you come to them and the couple with tears in their eyes hold this little photo of a kind of baby in the womb and they say, we've got some news. And one of the reasons why I've been fighting so hard to keep churches open, and I'm still fighting hard to keep churches open, is that it's my privilege as a preacher of the gospel today to say, I've got news for you. I've got great news for you. There's some news we say, oh that's just the news I was waiting for. That's just the news I needed. And this morning this news is the news you've been waiting for. This news is just the news that you need. Because it's God's news. That's the first thing we find out. Do you remember last week we saw that Romans, the big theme of Romans is that it's a book about God. It's a book about God. There's an astonishing number of references about God to his character and his work. And what we find out, first of all this morning, there are two things right at the start that Paul wants you to know about God. The first thing is this, verse 1, God has got a gospel. The word gospel means news. God has got news for you this morning. It's the gospel of God. The first reference to God in the book of Romans is that he's got a gospel and that's good news. And the second fact is that this good news, this gospel, concerns his son. We're told verse 3, concerning his son. Our God has got a gospel and his gospel is about his son. And so before we go any further, before we understand anything else with regards to God or the way that God deals with us, just notice that Paul does not begin with the fear of God. You ought to fear

God. Paul doesn't begin with the wrath of God. You need to understand the wrath of God. Paul doesn't understand, doesn't start with the will of God, that God calls you to behave in this way and his demands of you. All those things are true and he'll come to them in Romans, but the place he begins is this. God has got good news for you this morning. He begins by establishing that God has got good news that he gives to us. God is joyful this morning and God brings joyful news concerning his son. And God has created you and I in such a way that there's something in us that hungers for God. Yes, it's been marred. Yes, it's been damaged by sin.

And yet when we hear these first few facts about God, our hearts immediately begin to skip a little bit, to beat a little bit more fully and fervently. God has something joyful to say to you this morning that concerns his son.

And that concerns Jesus Christ. And Paul says that is the heartbeat of my message. Paul, the servant of Christ, was a believer in God, but a believer in the joyful news of God.

He was a passionate spreader, a super spreader of God and the joyful news of God. And so there's something in me that wants to pause for us as a church family and the church in the UK and say, have we got this right?

[4 : 3 7] Have we got this balance in our understanding of the gospel of God? One of the dangers, I think, with churches like ours is that there is bad news in the gospel.

There is, but we always start with the bad news. The wrath of God, the wrath of God against ungodliness. We'll get there in the next couple of weeks. We begin with our sin. And of course, Paul will come to that almost immediately.

But he starts by saying, listen, what you're going to hear from me is joyful. And God is joyful. And in the gospel, God brings his joy into our lives.

And God has created you and I in such a way that unless we're so hardened, unless we're so given over to sin, that something responds, I need that joy. I want that joy. Give me that joy.

And Paul is passionate about this joyful news. And then he tells us this other fact, doesn't he? This joyful news concerns the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ.

[5 : 36] That's the second thing that we're going to see the Apostle Paul, a passionate believer, a passionate spreader of the gospel. He's a man who's a believer and an enjoyer of the Son of God. And so, in these first few verses, Paul brings you and I face to face with God.

with God's good news about the Son of God. And that Jesus Christ has the supreme place. The joyful news is about the supreme place that Jesus Christ holds.

And I think it's really important for you and I to be reminded of that. Because we can get distracted, can't we, into all sorts of minor things that we end up treating as supreme, but they're not.

The gospel of God concerning his Son, that is supreme. That is the big issue. And I think it's important if you're not a Christian this morning, that you need to hear these facts, that that's what our faith is all about.

That's what we proclaim to you today. God has joyful news for you, and that joyful news is about Jesus. And so let's look at it more closely.

[6 : 42] Let's look. Point one, that as we learn about God in the book of Romans, God has good news. There's three things in verse 2. Can you see them? It's really obvious. Three things concerning the gospel, which he, number one, promised beforehand, number two, came through the prophets, and number three, is written in the Holy Scriptures.

And I think there's certain implications right there as you stand back from that verse. Number one, that God keeps his word. That God is trustworthy. That God has made a promise, and he's made a promise beforehand, and he's delivered on that promise.

And so God is one this morning that can be trusted, and who keeps his word, and God will not let you down. And God will not fail you in what he plans, and God does not forget.

And the other implication here is that we're talking about and looking at things that are holy, aren't they? Written down in holy writings, holy scriptures.

And that is, when we talk about the gospel, about the Son of God, that's not something ordinary. It is extraordinary. There are things in life which are sacred. There are things that are holy.

[7 : 55] There are things that are to be approached with reverence. There are things that are to be approached with a serious of mind. Not jokingly, not in a kind of comedy way, but they are holy.

Holy writings, holy scriptures that are sacred. There's lots in life which can be approached without a sense of reverence. There's lots of things which are funny, but we must approach these things reverently.

And so, if you're not a believer this morning, my appeal to you is just listen carefully because there is evidence here that God keeps his word, he does what he says, that he's trustworthy, and the things that we're looking at are holy.

And so, don't be flippant as you approach this, but engage your mind and heart with reverence before God and humble yourself that you haven't got all the answers and pray to God and say, my heart is open.

And as Christians, if we find ourselves this morning just thinking, well, it's just the gospel, we already know this. Let's not fall into that. We must approach it reverently.

[9 : 09] We're being told that it is good news that has been given to us from God, which is exactly what our culture needs, that it originates from God and it concerns the Son of God.

And so, let's look at these little phrases. First of all, he was promised beforehand. promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures. And so, God is really simply telling you that Jesus Christ is not an afterthought.

God was not caught and aware and surprised. I was in a Christianity Explored group once and somebody was there supposed to be helping me and I went out to the bathroom and when I came back in, I don't know what the question was, but the person who was supposed to be helping me

said, well, so what happened in the Bible is that God sent Adam and that didn't work out and then he tried with Israel and then Israel failed and so God then came up with the plan of sending the Lord Jesus.

There are times, aren't there, when there are people who are supposed to be helping are profoundly unhelpful in Bible studies with non-Christians. But you need to find out that God is not caught unawares.

Jesus Christ was promised beforehand. By whose hand? Before whose hand? Before Paul? Well, yeah. Before the disciples, certainly. Before the prophets, yes.

[10:34] Goes back all the way to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. It goes back into eternity, but we find out about it in the Garden of Eden that we have the promise of a saviour from the very beginning.

When he speaks to sinful men and women, God promises a saviour, a rescuer, a deliverer. And so that means to you and I that when Adam and Eve fell in the Garden of Eden, God was not surprised.

God wasn't surprised and suddenly had to change his plans. When the children of Israel, he rescues them and they begin complaining and rejecting him and being disobedient and grumbling in the wilderness, God is not surprised by that.

When you find King Saul chosen to be king in his folly behaving in a disobedient way, God is not surprised. When you find Saul of Tarsus persecuting and murdering the church and Jesus says, why are you persecuting me?

God is not surprised. He promised beforehand to send his son into the world to bear the sins of his children. And there are many views of the Christian faith that just don't get that.

[11:46] They've grasped what Paul was saying here that Jesus Christ was promised beforehand. It's not an afterthought. And God knows what he's doing all the way through history before the world was even made.

And that is where this good news comes from. It's an astonishing thing. And the second thing is Jesus is not only an afterthought not only is he not an afterthought in God's plan but it's not something novel.

What God is going to proclaim to you and I and what God is going to tell us through the apostle Paul concerning himself is not something that the apostle Paul made up.

Every now and then the Jews of his day accused Paul of adding something to Moses as though Paul was bringing something new or novel. But Paul is not doing that.

He's saying, he's not saying anything that the prophets did not hint at. Or that the prophets did not already have a sense of something. It's not novel.

[12:51] The prophets themselves were looking forward to this gospel. The prophets themselves announced this gospel. So we could go to Isaiah 53.

And you can't read that and think that Isaiah didn't know what was going to happen. You can't read those suffering servant passages without seeing that they were looking and they knew that they needed God themselves to come.

They needed God himself to bruise the one who comes and crush him for our sins and iniquity. And so Paul, he does proclaim more than the prophets but not something new.

Not something novel. And then the third thing we learn, not only is Jesus not an afterthought, not only is the gospel not something novel but it's written for you in black and white. And God has ensured that it would be written down.

It's been given to us in the holy scriptures and so God speaks for you through his word which is holy. And what does he have to say to you?

[14:01] What has God gone into print for? What has God gone into print to convey something to you? What is it? What does he say? He says, it's good news that I want you to know.

So what is this good news? So my second point is this. God has good news for you in Jesus. Look what he says verse 2 which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures concerning his son who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the son of God in power according to the spirit of holiness by the resurrection from the dead.

Jesus Christ our Lord. And so what are these joyful things that God has for us? What is this news? Well they concern his son and Paul opens it up in a couple of ways.

First of all he speaks about Jesus' birth. He says the first fact that you need to know about Jesus is he was descended from David according to the flesh. That the son of God was born and in some way through his birth he is linked in descendency and genealogy he is linked to the throne of King David.

And that's something that he's saying it is according to the flesh. If you look at Jesus simply according to the flesh according to his humanness Jesus is one of us. Please don't misunderstand what he's saying here.

[15 : 31] He's also saying that he was already the son of God before he comes to be born. Before Jesus becomes one of us he is the son of God descended from David according to the flesh.

It is not that Jesus at his birth suddenly becomes the son of God or that Jesus at his baptism where God the Father says this is my son that that's the moment Jesus becomes the son.

No it's not that. He already existed and he steps into this world and God the son becomes a descendant of the king the great king David.

The king that they all looked back to and they loved the king that they thought of that is the glory days of our nation they said and they yearned for his return they longed for another David and here is the descendant who is God the son.

Do you remember the significance of the title the son of God? It means doesn't it when Jesus says it that he's speaking of God as his father and when he calls himself son of God and God as his father the Jews how did the Jews respond when they heard Jesus called God Father they twitched didn't they?

[16 : 53] it rumbled them it annoyed them immensely they understood what such a claim meant so you go to John chapter 5 and it tells us there in John 5 verse 18 that the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him why were they seeking all the more to kill him?

because not only in their view did he break the Sabbath but he was even calling God his own father and he made himself equal with God to be the son of God to call God his own father was not to imply in any way there's an inferiority between him and the father but the Jews understood it the Jews understood that it implied equality that standing before them was this man Jesus of Nazareth who was claiming equality with God the father who himself was fully God and so the son takes this step as a descendant of David that's the first thing we learn in this gospel it's about the son of God the son of God who becomes one of us who's born into our world with a real body with a real flesh he's a real descendant of David and of course what Paul has done here is he's compressed this truth you know you get a zip file sometimes in your emails do you ever get a zip file?

and you get a zip file and you open it up and there's hundreds of files in there and that's Romans 1 in fact that's the book of Romans there's this massive truth that's been compressed into this little statement the humanity of Jesus Christ the son of God and that little phrase according to the flesh compressed into all that truth is his virgin birth the incarnation of Christ his life his suffering his temptations his ministry and so if you're going to summarize it you could say that in this first aspect concerning the son Paul lets us know something of Christ's humanity but I actually think as you look at this passage more deeply in the light of the second truth which we'll come to in a minute Paul is not only telling us of Christ's humanity but his humility it's a statement of how he's humbled himself and that's what the gospel is about isn't it?

that we're learning about God who gives us good news which centers on his son and how does that news come to us? it comes to us because the glorious son of God humbles himself he takes a step into our world and he makes himself of no reputation Isaiah understood this let me read you from Isaiah 35 verse 3 and following it says they shall see the glory of the Lord the majesty of our God strengthen the weak hands make firm the feeble knees say to those who've got an anxious heart listen to this if you've got an anxious heart this morning be strong fear not behold your God will come what is Paul saying?

he's saying our God has come God the son has walked on earth he's humbled himself and he's become a descendant of David according to the flesh and he will come with vengeance and the recompense of God Isaiah said he will come and save you and that is the prophets beforehand isn't it?

[20 : 18] then the eyes of the blind shall be opened we see that don't we? again and again in Jesus' ministry the years of the deaf unstopped the lame will leap like a deer the tongue of the mute will sing for joy you see that in the gospels?

behold your God your son shall come your God shall come and water will break forth in the wilderness streams in the desert burning sand will become like a pool thirsty ground will become like springs of water in the haunts of jackals where they lie down the grass will be like reeds and bushes a highway shall be there and it shall be called the way of holiness the unclean won't pass over it it shall belong to those who walk on the way and even if they are fools they shall not go astray thank God Isaiah tells us no lion shall be there nor any ravenous beast come upon it they shall not be found there but the redeemed shall walk there that is the ministry of Christ now because behold our God has come and he's humbled himself to be one of us and the ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with singing and everlasting joy shall be upon their heads and they will obtain gladness and joy and sorrow and sighing shall flee away behold this is good news your God shall come and so Christ humbles himself and so that means for us singing doesn't it there's joyful news in the gospel that causes us to burst into song that's the first thing he sets out about his son this great joyful gift that God gives to us but then he changes direction look what it says in verse 4 he says this son of God was declared to be the son of God in power according to the spirit of holiness by the resurrection from the dead

Jesus Christ our Lord so it not only deals with his humanity and his humility but it then deals with his divinity that he is God and his exaltation his humility and his exaltation his humanity and his divinity here's good news it's not only that Jesus stepped into your world and he set us free but Christ stepped out of our world into glory and he's now exalted and in between verses 3 and 4 can you just see what there is just look in between verses 3 and 4 what is that what's the big step in between the humiliation of Christ and the exaltation of Christ through the resurrection what is there between there's the cross the cross is in between those verses and the pinnacle of his humiliation is the beginning of his exaltation and the turning point of Christ centres on the cross in bearing our sin in suffering in our place now these verses are not easy look at verse 4

I know it's a little bit dense this morning but stick with me alright look at verse 4 I want us to do a little bit of work here so he was declared to be the son of God first thing in power according to the spirit of holiness by the resurrection of the dead so let's just think about that what does it mean that he was powerfully declared to be the son is that what it means powerfully declared to be the son of God some people say the argument here that Paul is making is Jesus is proven to be God because he's raised from the dead that isn't right that can't be right because Lazarus rose from the dead didn't he the widow's son rose from the dead ok or was it that he was declared to be the son of God and then given power or with power and at that point I think it's what the latter of that it was a powerful declaration it really was this is the son it's certainly saying

Jesus' work was accepted there is a powerful effect of the resurrection but I think it's pointing more here to the power that the Lord Jesus is invested and appointed as the king of his church he is the mediator he rises up from the dead and he ascends to the father and he comes before his father and he says behold I and the children you've given me and the father looks upon his son and by raising him from the dead declares that this is the son of God he humbled himself for a little time his glory was veiled but it's now unveiled and the power is now his so that after the resurrection Jesus says all power in heaven and earth belongs to me therefore go that's the declaration the declaration of the glory that belongs to Jesus Christ as mediator that belongs to him as king of the church it's good news it's joyful news that today right now this morning in this world all power is his and so no demon no devil no fallen power no principality can ever undo what Jesus Christ has done and that is great news joyful news he's been declared to be the son of God in power according to the spirit of holiness so that phrase what does that mean this is the only time you find this phrase in the new testament does it mean that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead by the powerful working of the holy spirit it may be or does it mean the powerful working of Christ's own spirit who is spoken of here as the spirit of holiness again contrasting his humility is veiling the glory that was his

[26 : 29] I don't think that's right because was Jesus veiling his power when he was on earth I don't think so was Jesus veiling his holiness the spirit of holiness when he was on earth I don't think so either so what does it mean I think it refers to Christ's own spirit I wouldn't want to argue that intensely because I think it's tricky to understand I think it does refer though to his own power in that by his own power he raised him from the dead so the new testament teaches doesn't it three things the new testament teaches you that the father raised Jesus from the dead and the new testament teaches you that the son raises himself by his own power and the third thing the new testament is the spirit rises Jesus from the dead and all three facts are taught and I think it could be referring to the spirit of Christ who was holy and he raises himself from the dead

I found someone to agree with me which always helps so let me tell you John Piper what John Piper says John Piper says this why does Paul use this unusual expression the spirit of holiness there is nowhere else in the new testament here's my suggestion Piper says dealing with the dead is dirty business and so when King Saul wanted to commune with the dead he went to the witch of Endor and it was secretive and illicit and mediums diviners sorcerers were an abomination in Israel and when the dead are dead you leave them alone and you don't have dealings with them sayances were and are unlawful for believers dealing with the dead has been kind of black magic it's not beautiful not clean not holy anything but and so talk of an executed man being raised from the dead must have sounded to Roman ears horrible and gross and dirty and unclean like dark sorcery like black magic and so over against this can you see what Paul does he lays the stress in exactly the opposite way he says

Christ was raised from the dead in accord with the spirit of holiness not a dark spirit not an evil spirit or a defiled spirit but the very spirit of God himself who was marked by holiness he was not defiled in raising Jesus it was a holy thing to do it was right and good and beautiful and God honouring not God belittling it was holy and so for a season Christ is humbled and he goes down into death but now when God the Father and the Son and the Spirit raise Christ from the dead it is not contaminating but rather it breaks the power and the effect and the darkness of death by holiness holiness being at work in the presence of death is beautiful and so here is the exaltation here is the joyful news that God has for you that God in Christ who humbled himself is now exalted with all the power that is necessary for your salvation to keep us to keep us to that very day when that same saviour will return in judgment he's got all the power of holiness to deal with death and its foulness surely there's no better news of that but there is someone that can deal with the death that our country is so absolutely terrified of and then he says thirdly in this verse he says by the resurrection from the dead and I don't know why the

American ESV says his resurrection from the dead can you see that I've got the American ESV I was reading from but you hopefully have got the UK ESV because it should literally be in verse 4 the resurrection from the dead it's quite important so let me give you a big word children alright here's your big word alright can you say this Juan ESCATALOGICAL alright you learn that word can you say that ESCATALOGICAL very good that's a good effort that's a good effort so this means this alright ESCATALOGICAL it means it's a last day's event that it happened then it happened right there and then but it started something bigger the resurrection of Jesus is the beginning of something great and so we pray don't we your kingdom come the kingdom has come the kingdom is coming the kingdom will come it's an eschatological event there's a now and a not yet and in the same way with the resurrection of the dead so when

Jesus rose from the dead it wasn't just something personal to him he is the resurrection from the dead his resurrection started something great he is the firstborn from the dead he's the first fruit he represents everyone else who will rise from the dead and so this event like every event in the life of Jesus is momentous it's not simply local and concerning him it's eschatological it's the beginning of the last days and it concerns us all and it has begun and so what the apostle Paul is saying in verse four in these three ways declaring him to be the son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness it's the beginning of the resurrection from the dead and so you and I we wait we wait for the return of the Lord Jesus Christ but in all these ways what happened to Jesus happens to you and I as we are in

[32 : 37] Christ we are carried in the train of his powerful work overthrowing sin and all its effect so death is overthrown in Christ and the devil's work and the devil's attack and malice are overthrown here's something joyful that centers on Jesus Christ and so here's the fact first thing about God is he's got joyful news for you here's the second fact about God is he's got joyful news for you that centers on Jesus and I want you to see really clearly as we finish and I know it's been hard work this morning but look at the end of verse four it's the language of faith isn't it Paul says Jesus Christ our Lord that's the language of faith that's the language he says I lay hold on him I take him to be my saviour I won't stand before God in anything else other than Jesus Christ and his righteousness and so here's the question is he your Lord is he your

Lord are you seeking your joy in anything but Jesus Christ that's the question and so have I got news for you yeah come to the joy that our joyful God gives us come freely and enjoy him and glorify him let's pray let's pray Thank you.