

Text: Romans 1:2-3, 16-17 (Read: Romans 1:1-17)<sup>1</sup>  
 Series: Right Living: God's Righteousness Transforming Our Lives  
 Title: Part 1 -- What is the Good News?  
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**“Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God” Romans 1:1**

What does the word “gospel” mean?

The Greek word it translates is made up of two words that mean: “good” and “news.” “Gospel” simply means: Good news. It's from the Old English: “gud spiel.”

The Grammy awards have several "gospel" music categories. For them it primarily seems to be a style of music that grew out of churches. You can clap to it, you can dance to it, it's happy, upbeat and the lyrics usually make some reference to God or Jesus and salvation.

That sort of follows the definition that the Bible translator, William Tyndale gave centuries ago when he said that the gospel is "the good, merry, glad and joyful tidings that make a man's heart glad and makes him sing, dance and leap for joy."

During a Texas revival meeting in 1910, a man in the congregation was overcome with the love and mercy of God. He had killed four men and never dreamed God could care for him. This man was so touched by the gospel that he stood up and shouted: "Saved! Saved! Saved!"

Jack Scholfied, the musician for the revival meetings, was so moved by this joyful outburst that he used those words to write a popular hymn. These are the words that the joy of this four-time murderer inspired:

**"I've found a Friend who is all to me, His love is ever true;  
 I love to tell how He lifted me, And what His grace can do for you.  
 Saved by His power divine, Saved to new life sublime!  
 Life now is sweet and my joy is complete, for I'm saved, saved, saved!"**  
 (Jack P. Scholfied)

That man in Texas had found Good News for his own life and he couldn't help but jump and shout.

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In Rom. 1:1 Paul tells us that he was set apart as an apostle to preach God's Good News and I'm sure that as he shared this message throughout his world 2,000 years ago, he saw people "dance and leap for joy" as they found in his message release for their troubled hearts. This morning, 2,000 years later, I want to tell you that it's a message that can still make you glad!

What is the good news? There are three things about the Good News that Paul highlights in these opening verses of his great letter to the church in the city of Rome.

**First of all, the Gospel is Good News about a person – the living Lord Jesus Christ.**

Paul tells us here that he is an apostle of ...

**“the gospel of God 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 his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord,” Romans 1:2-4**

It's the gospel "concerning his Son ... Jesus Christ our Lord."

The core of the whole gospel message is the simple truth that Jesus Christ defeated death, he broke its power and rose again and is alive today!

The Good News isn't that we need to follow a religion or join a church to find happiness -- the Good News is that Jesus wants us enter into a living relationship with Him, the living Lord.

In Romans 1:6 Paul says that the invitation is "to belong to Jesus Christ." It's not to a theology or philosophy about Jesus -- but an invitation to the living Jesus Christ himself!

Philosophy says, "Think your way out."

Religion says, "Serve your way out."

Science says, "Invent your way out."

Industry says, "Work your way out."

Indulgence says, "Drink your way out."

But Jesus says, "I Am the Way out!"

The Gospel is about a living relationship with the resurrected Jesus – it's not about a religion.

I love Garrison Keillor's comment: 'You can become a Christian by going to church just about as easily as you can become an automobile by sleeping in a garage.'

Paul tells us **three important things about this person-focused good news:**

**First**, Jesus carried a message that had been **promised by God**.

700 hundred years before Jesus was born, the prophet Isaiah wrote about the promised Good News...

**“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns.’”** Isaiah 52:7

God can be trusted to keep His promises! And that is Good News, too!

**Second**, Jesus delivered the Good News as **God's personal messenger**.

When Jesus began his ministry in Nazareth, his home town, he read from the Scroll of Isaiah these words...

**“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”** Luke 4:18-19 (quoting from Isaiah 61:1-2)

**Thirdly**, Jesus' message of Good News was **authenticated by the fact that he rose from the dead**.

Words alone weren't enough to make this message good news! For over seven hundred years people had known what the message would be -- peace, freedom, comfort, salvation.

But it wasn't until Jesus rose from the dead that the message was proven! Isaiah's prophecies about the Good News also carried this promise of resurrection:

**“Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.”** Isaiah 53:10

A man attempting to start a new religion was having trouble getting things going and he sought the advice of the great French diplomat-statesman, Talleyrand. "What would you suggest I do?" he asked.

"I should recommend," said Talleyrand, "that you get yourself crucified, and then die, but be sure to rise again the third day."

The resurrection of Jesus Christ makes all the difference -- the Good News is a message that's been authenticated with God's power and is being communicated by a living Lord.

On October 4, 1997 over a million men gathered in Washington, D.C. for the Promise Keeper's "Stand in the Gap" Rally. One of the events worship leaders was the author Max Lucado. In typical fashion, he creatively illustrated a significant point about salvation. He called for the massive crowd to shout the name of their individual denominations. Denominational names were lost in the verbalization of our church affiliations. It created nothing more than a loud rumble. He then called on the assembly to shout the name of their Saviour. From a pathway of men over a mile in length reverberated the same name and message ... Jesus Christ. It was clear, obvious and strong.

If we look for salvation in the church of our choice we will find a confusing and contradictory message. Yet when we look to Christ for the security of our hope and salvation we will find consistency, clarity and truth.

The good news is about a person -- the living Lord Jesus Christ!

As the song goes:

**"And because He lives I can face tomorrow,  
Because He lives all fear is gone,  
Because I know who holds the future  
And life is worth the living, just because He lives. "**

**Secondly, the Gospel is Good News about a power -- God's power to save.**

Paul confesses ...

**"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." Romans 1:16**

The good news is more than information, it is a dynamic force! This gospel reaches into people's lives and saves them. **Saves us from what?**

**First** of all, the Good News is that Jesus' death and resurrection **has saved us...**

**... from the penalty of sin.**

Notice the danger we are in because of our sin...

**“the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men....” Romans 1:18**

According to the Word of God, sin must be punished. The prophet Ezekiel wrote that **“the soul who sins shall die.”** (Ezekiel 18:4) Later in this letter, Paul tells us that **“the wages of sin is death....”**

But the good news is that Jesus took our punishment on our behalf...

**“... but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Romans 6:23**

When Jesus died, he died for us and took our punishment. If we have believed in Jesus there isn't any punishment left to give -- God's wrath against our sin has been exhausted, poured out on Jesus, there isn't any left for us. Jesus died in our place.

Jim Newell, a Baptist pastor and former RCAF officer, tells the story of a fellow RCAF officer who had spent time during WW II in a German POW camp. The experience there had coloured his life forever.

During his imprisonment there had been an escape attempt. The guard had counted off every tenth man to be taken away and shot as punishment for the escape. This RCAF officer had been one of the "tenth" men. But he began to argue with the guards that he was innocent and that he should not be punished for what others had done.

Seeing that the guards were becoming angry at the man's tirade, the man next to him, a much older prisoner, quickly defused the situation by stepping forward and volunteering to take his position as a "tenth man." "He's just a kid. Let him go," the older man said. The guards accepted and the younger man went free.

BUT for the rest of his life, that man was haunted by the memory that he was only alive because somebody else died in his place. He could never satisfy his conscience that his life could replace that of the man who died for him.

Reflecting on Jesus' death for him, Jim Newell writes:

*"Unlike my friend, I don't have to live with a burden of guilt because Jesus died for me. I give thanks daily that he did. Although I can never make restitution either, I don't even have to consider doing so. In his wonderful love, God arranged that three days after his crucifixion, Jesus rose from death, leaving all those sins behind to be remembered no more ... I can rejoice with a clear conscience in the hope of someday meeting Jesus, that friend who died for me."*

Jesus has saved us from the penalty of sin.

**Secondly**, the Good News is that Jesus death and resurrection saves us...

**... from the power of sin.**

According to the Word of God, sin is a power that controls our lives. But the good news is that Jesus broke the power of sin when He died and rose again.

Paul tells us later in this letter...

**“We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.” Romans 6:4**

I love the story Charles Colson tells of his visit to a prison in Brazil. Twenty years ago, in the city of San Jose dos Campos, a prison was turned over to two Christian laymen. The prison had only two fulltime staff; the rest of the work was done by inmates. Every prisoner is assigned another inmate to whom he is accountable for his actions. In addition, every prisoner is assigned a volunteer family on the outside who works with him in prison and after this release. And every prisoner is required to attend chapel or take courses on character development. The walls of the prison are decorated with Biblical sayings from the Psalms and Proverbs.

The prison has an astonishing record. Its recidivism rate – the rate at which released prisoners return to a life of crime and are re-incarcerated -- is 4 percent compared to 75 percent in the rest of Brazil and the United States. How is it possible?

*"I saw the answer," Colson wrote, "when my inmate guide escorted me to the notorious punishment cell once used for torture. Today, he told me, that block houses only a single inmate. As we reached the end of the long concrete corridor and he put the key in the lock, he paused and asked, "Are you sure you want to go in?"*

*"Of course," I replied impatiently. "I've been in isolation cells all over the world." Slowly he swung open the massive door, and I saw the prisoner in that punishment cell: a crucifix, beautifully carved by the ... inmates -- the prisoner Jesus, hanging on the cross."*

*My guide said softly, "He's doing time for all the rest of us."*

Jesus' death and resurrection had broken the power of sin in the lives of those men in that prison.

The Biblical reality is that He isn't "doing time" for us -- *He's already done it!* In heaven, it's as if the record of our sin has written across it the words: "Time Served."

There's the story of Patricia. Patricia was one of Brazil's street kids. Life is tough on the streets, but it seems to draw young people like a magnet. She came to the Baptist Friendship Home cold, wet, sick, and tired of the life on the streets. Through the witness of the workers at the Home, Patricia gave her life to Christ but about 3 months after she arrived her former boyfriend came and asked her to move in with him. Patricia was faced with a tough decision. She knew that if she went back with him, she would probably end up on the streets again. She read her Bible long into the night, and when her boyfriend came back the next day to collect her, she told him she wasn't going with him. Patricia had made her decision. She told her boyfriend that she was a new person in Christ and wanted to live for the Lord. She was baptized, she's now in school, and she wants to make something of her life.

Mildred McWhorter, head of the Baptist Mission Centers in Houston, Texas, has seen...

- ...street gangs who surrendered to Jesus Christ and left their knives at the center believing that Christ would protect them with His power,
- ...a man who once begged bread from her but is now a pastor of a Spanish-speaking church
- ...a man who was a drunk and who beat his wife who now packages free bread at the center.

Changed lives – by the power of the Gospel!

If we took a survey here this morning I'm sure we could here testimonies of the power of God that saved you!

This power to save from the penalty and power of sin is available ...

**“to everyone who believes”**

“Everyone” – that means you and me; rich and poor, wise and simple, powerful and weak...everyone!

“Who believes” – it's the living Lord who has the power to change you; this power doesn't come from “within,” it comes from above!

The Gospel is Good News about a person – the living Lord Jesus Christ.

The Gospel is Good News about a power – God's power to save everyone who believes.

**Finally, the Gospel is Good News about a gift – God’s gift of righteousness to those who put their faith in Christ.**

Paul wrote ...

**“For in [the gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, ‘The righteous shall live by faith.’” Romans 1:17**

"Righteousness" means "right standing." We are "in the right." Our universal problem is that we are so often in the wrong with God. We constantly break his laws, offend against Him --- you can search the whole world and never find anyone who is fully righteous.

No matter how hard we try to live a good life, we constantly fail to match up to God's standard of perfect holiness. The good news of the gospel is that we don't have work for right standing with God -- He gives it to us by faith.

When we come by faith to Christ we receive His righteousness, the moral perfection of Christ, as a gift. We are given the credit for His perfect obedience of God's law when we put our faith in Him.

It seems like such an unfair deal -- in one sense it is! It seems very hard to accept that there's nothing we can do to earn such a gift.

A missionary became a friend of an Indian pearl diver. The two had spent many hours together discussing salvation, but the Indian could not understand anything so precious being free. Instead, in making preparation for the life to come, the diver was going to walk the nine hundred miles to Delhi on his knees. He thought this would buy entrance into heaven for him. The missionary struggled to communicate to his friend that it is impossible to buy entrance into heaven because the price was too costly. Instead, Jesus had died to buy it for us.

Before he began his pilgrimage, the Indian gave the missionary the largest and most perfect pearl he had ever seen. The missionary offered to buy it, but the diver became upset and said that the pearl was beyond price, that his only son had lost his life in the attempt to get it. As he said this, suddenly the diver understood that God was offering his salvation as a priceless gift.

Before we became Christians it was impossible for us to gain right standing by our good living.

Now that we are Christians – it’s just as impossible for us to gain right standing by our good living!

Righteousness, the Bible says, is “from first to last.” The ESV footnote provides a translation that amplifies what Paul means: “beginning and ending in faith.”

It seems we think that we get saved by faith, but then from then on to keep our salvation or to gain God's approval, we have to combine faith and our efforts.

No! It's faith “from first to last” – “The righteous will live by faith.”

### **What is the good news?**

**First**, the Good News is that the living Lord Jesus Christ rose from the dead, defeating the power of sin and death.

Are you enjoying a relationship with the living Lord or are you struggling along in a life-less religion?

**Second**, the Good News is God's power to save everyone who believes.

Do you know the joy of having your sins completely forgiven?

Do you realize that God's power is available to you to break the power of sin in your life?

**Thirdly**, the Good News is that God wants to give the gift of righteousness to everyone who simply believes in Jesus Christ.

Have you received God's gift by faith in Christ? Would you like to receive it today?

- **Prayer**
- **Final Song: My Savior's Love (“I stand amazed in the presence...”)**
- **Benediction**