The Gospel – Part 1
Romans 1:1-17

Back in my seminary days—seminaries are graduate schools that train people to be pastors—one of the courses I had to take was “Sin and Salvation”. I think it was the second half of my first year so I had not been there long. I go into the bookstore to purchase the required books, we didn’t have Amazon or the internet back then. So the books were placed by class with signs saying whether it was required or just recommended. I found the theology classes section and then found my class and I just stared. One of my required texts was this huge book just labeled SIN – S I N – that’s it – that is the whole title. I immediately turned to the last page and found it was 600 pages long! 600 pages just on sin? My mind started to go crazy:

• What? Are they going to take 600 pages to describe sins?
• Are they giving illustrations?
• Don’t we know enough about sin already – after all we’ve given testimony that we are each sinners and have confessed & repented to God of our sin?
• Are they going to teach me how to recognized sins or categorize sins?
• Do I get a fancy sin chart? Are we going to rank sins?
• Is this meant to increase my sense of sin – you know, make me feel more guilty?
• Is it meant to identify more sins in my life – so I can confess more different areas than the sins I most struggle with daily?

How could anyone write 600 pages on sin that would be useful to other people! Remember, salvation was in a different book. This was just “Sin”. Then I look at the table of contents and the 4 parts were the origin of sin, the knowledge of sin, the essence of sin and the spread of sin. It really was only about SIN!

As we tackle the first 3 chapters of the book of Romans in the next 2 months, there is going to be a lot said about SIN. God wants us to understand sin in a way that genuinely helps us, others and society. While we all think we understand sin because we have all chosen to do it – the truth is, if we don’t understand it rightly, then we are going to have trouble cooperating with God as He seeks to help us overcome it. It is like my muscular dystrophy (MD). I have known I had Muscular Dystrophy since I was 14. That helped some as my muscles wasted away. But it was when the doctors & I finally figured out which type and subtype, that we could take actions which really helped and gave me 14 years of strength back into my life so I wasn’t in a wheelchair. The purpose for understanding sin is the same as any of our other teaching – we want to see the greatness of God and His plan so worship comes more naturally, our relationship with God becomes more significant, our love for others grows, selfishness is recognized & challenged, we’re willing to sacrifice more for the advancement of Jesus’ work in this world, we experience more of God’s joy & love and a whole host of other special results. Having said all that, we actually aren’t going to talk about sin for several weeks! 😊

PROPOSITION: The “gospel” is the good news of Jesus Christ who died for our sins and rose bodily from the dead so we might be rescued and transformed.
I. Central to our lives Romans 1:1

What the book of Romans starts with is “the gospel of God” READ v 1. What is “the gospel of God”? The word gospel simply means “good news”. We get our English words evangel, evangelize, & evangelical from the original Greek word. The word “angel” is from the second half of that original word. The gospel is a good message; it is a declaration of good news. The apostle Paul uses this word often: 60 of the 76 times the noun is used in the NT and 21 of the 54 times the verb is used (to “proclaim the good news”). The gospel is “good news”. If there is NO “good news” in what you think or share about the Christian faith, then there is “no gospel”.

We like hearing & sharing good news! But satan, culture and the old nature have convinced a lot of people that the message of Jesus is really bad news?

• They say the gospel of Jesus stops people from having a good time.
• They cry out that the gospel of Jesus will restrict your activities & limit your pleasure.
• They insist the gospel of Jesus will bind you up with rules & regulations you don’t want.

But “gospel” means “good news.” There was good news long before the coming of Christ. Whenever a baby was born, it was gospel, “good news.” The gospel of God is good news because ...

• It brings a lasting answer to our problems.
• It delivers us from the bondage of sin that will ultimately destroy us.
• It sets us on course that is for our highest good.
• It provides for us all things that pertain to life and godliness.
• It transforms our wants & desires so they line up with God & His created purpose.
• And it turns us from a pathway of self-destruction to a pathway of eternal life, joy, and peace.

The gospel is good news for anyone who will hear it and receive it. When you truly receive the gospel, this truth becomes central in your life.

II. Promised beforehand Romans 1:2

READ v 2. This gospel was promised long before Jesus by God. This good news is not some sudden, new novelty, but part of God’s plan for all time! The words “Holy Scripture” in v 2 refers to the Old Testament. The “prophets” are those Old Testament people who spoke God’s word to the people. It is common here in the book of Romans for God to emphasize the continuity between the Old Testament and the New Testament. Between the gospel of Jesus and God’s work with His people in the Old Testament! We are not proclaiming some religious novelty, but God’s very plan for the beginning!

III. Focused on Jesus Romans 1:3-4, 9

Most of all, the gospel, this good news, is all about Jesus. READ v 2-4. God’s good news concerns God’s Son, identified as Jesus Christ our Lord. That the gospel is focused on Jesus is re-confirmed in v 9. READ. Notice that the gospel is specifically referred to as “the
Clearly, Jesus is the unique Son of God. V 3 starts with the words “regarding His Son”, so this whole description in v 3-4 refers to this unique Son of God. We are told to think of the unique Son of God in two very different ways. The first involves Jesus’ earthly life - that unique Son of God became a man, in the person of Jesus, who was a descendent of King David – meaning Jesus is clearly Jewish and qualified to be the promised Messiah. The second involves Jesus’ power after the resurrection, “who through the Spirit of holiness (that’s the Holy Spirit) was appointed the Son of God in power by His resurrection from the dead.” This is clearly NOT saying that Jesus became the Son of God for the first time after the resurrection (that is a false teaching called adoptionism) – we know that can’t be the case because v 3 started by saying He was already the Son before He took on a human body, died or was resurrected. There is no change in the Son’s essence spoken of here – but a change in status or function. The Son is “appointed” Son. That is, the eternal Son is appointed to a new and more powerful position as Son in relation to the world. That is why we speak of Jesus now as our Lord – our Boss – the One we follow above all! Old Testament believers didn’t speak that way, but they looked forward to the Christ coming!

Turn forward a few pages to the next book, 1 Corinthians, and go to chapter 15. In simple terms, the incarnation through the virgin birth (that’s God becoming a person which we celebrate at Christmas), Jesus death on the cross for our sins (that’s what we specifically remember each communion service & on Good Friday) and Jesus’ bodily resurrection from the dead (which is why we meet on Sunday for worship every week & we have our grandest celebration of that every Easter Sunday) – these truths about Jesus are absolutely necessary to understand the gospel – that’s what God’s good news is based on. READ 1 Cor 15:1-4. Leave out any of these truths and you abandon the Christian faith. Anytime someone says Jesus was just a human or denies Jesus died on the cross to pay the penalty of sin or says it really isn’t important whether Jesus rose bodily & physically from the dead, they deny the faith. It doesn’t matter how nice they are, how friendly the church is or if people feel ‘uplifted’ by the service, the good news, God’s gospel, has not been preached, taught or believed! Head back to Romans 1.

The Son’s title at the end of v 4, “Jesus Christ our Lord”, is the heart of the gospel.

- Jesus, He is God come down as a real human showing His love for us.
- Christ or Messiah, is the One promised to come and fully rescue us.
- Our Lord, the all-powerful One who is exalted through the resurrection to claim authority over us. Anything less than this exalted picture of Jesus is not the gospel.

IV. Extended freely by God

Because of the time it would take for me (the over explainer) to explain this one, we are going to skip point 4 in your bulletin and move on to v 14.
V. Offered to all Romans 1:14-15

**READ v 14-15.** Notice that the gospel, or good news of Jesus, is offered to all. “Greeks and non-Greeks” (or “barbarians” in some of your translations) is how those in the educated world divided people up – the Greeks were those taught in Greek education & saw themselves as more cultured. Everyone else was considered a non-Greek or barbarian which was considered far less cultures. The same is true for those who divide the world into those who are wise and those who are foolish. It doesn’t matter how you divide people up in the world, what Jesus did for us personally should make us want to bring that good news to everyone. We need to bring the gospel to the Republican and Democrat, to the conservative and progressive, to the city dweller and rural folk. God offers the good news of Jesus to everyone so it may transform those who believe. Hudson Taylor gave up everything in the 1800’s to go to China to bring the message of Jesus to them. Someone asked him if the reason he made such a great sacrifice was because he loved the Chinese. To this he shook his head and answered thoughtfully, “No, not because I loved the Chinese, but because I love God.” This desire to give everyone an opportunity to hear Jesus’ good news goes beyond our natural feelings and current alliances!

VI. It is the power of God to rescue believers Romans 1:16

**READ v 16.** “I am not ashamed of the gospel”. There is a difference between being shamed for the gospel and being ashamed of the gospel. Let me say that again (repeat). If we are faithful Christians we will be shamed for the gospel. People will proclaim we are foolish, ignorant, un-educated, un-scientific, stupid, bigoted, or narrow-minded just because we believe Jesus died for our sins and rose from the dead. We will be the target of shaming behavior. But, we never want to be ashamed OF the gospel – the message of Jesus – because it is so powerful and brings salvation to everyone who believes! The gospel itself, the message itself, is powerful. That why we don’t have to say things perfectly or find the exact right time to speak. In fact we can stutter, get tongue-tied, say things at inopportune times, flip words around, not have answers to their questions and it won’t slow the work of God’s gospel down! Don’t try to avoid feeling shame in public by making the message of Jesus more popular and leaving out anything people might find offensive. NO, we avoid feelings of shame by remembering that the gospel alone brings forgiven sinners to final, everlasting joy. The gospel is the only sure, final, triumphant message in the world. And this gospel is NOT just to make converts. Look back at the end of v 15 – Paul wants to preach this gospel to the Romans he is writing to who have already committed their lives to Jesus as Savior & Lord.

The gospel message is the POWER of GOD to transform people. The word “power” in the original is where we get our word “dynamite”. The good news of Jesus is dynamite.

- Dynamite to break the strongest addiction!
- Dynamite to penetrate the most selfish heart.
- Dynamite to soften the hardest heart
- Dynamite that can bring down any argument, get through any opposition, and open the eyes of any person.
In the book called *A Turtle on a Fencepost* Allan Emery tells the story of Joseph S. Olzewski who lost his life in the North Atlantic February 3, 1943. Now the day after Pearl Harbor, Emery, like thousands of others, enlisted. He chose the Coast Guard so he was immediately put to work as a quartermaster in his hometown Boston. One particular Friday he was given night duty to guard one of the docks. As Emery was wisely getting some sleep before duty, a new acquaintance names Joseph Olzewski came in really dressed up. Olzewski gave his biggest smile and asked Emery how he looked. "You look great – what is the big occasion?" Joe excitedly explained he had met this wealthy gal at the USO the previous night and she had invited him to the opera then to stay at her apartment for the weekend with plenty of alcohol! He didn’t have to be back for duty until 700 Monday morning. Joe ended the story by saying, "This is going to be the greatest time of my life."

Emery replied that he would be praying for him. His friend walked out but immediately reentered asking, "What did you say?" "I said I’d be praying for you," replied Emery. "Why will you be praying for me when I’m going to have the first great weekend in my life?" "Because, Joe, Monday morning you'll be back aboard ship and you will not be the same person you are tonight. Sin leaves its mark." Joe swore at Emery and went out into the night.

Emery prayed for Joe that night. Later he was startled when an agitated Joe suddenly reappeared in the guard floodlights. "How can you have a good time when someone’s praying for you?" Joe said. "You’ve ruined my weekend. I stood up my date, and I’ve been waiting until you came on duty. Now tell me how to find God."

That night Joseph S. Olzewski genuinely heard the good news of Jesus & some of the incredible promises of God for the first time in his life – and he believed. The change was immediate. He joined Park Street Church, spent his free time on the Boston Common inviting other servicemen to services, prayed with his buddies at St. Paul’s Cathedral which was always open, and grew in his knowledge of the Scriptures under Dr. Harold Ockenga. Then on February 1, 1943 he volunteered for sea duty on a mine sweeper headed for Iceland, and just a few days out of New York a torpedo found its mark.

Somehow true stories like this remind all of us what is really important in life. We are all going to die and none of us know when. We aren’t worthy of eternal life in the paradise of heaven on our own. Christ can change all that. It is so simple. The gospel message is "the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes." It is a matter of faith. Do you personally believe? And having ‘believed’ do you continue to live your life in that simple childlike faith? Those on the prayer chain shocking learned that Jeff Shomper died Thursday night just minutes after he got home from work. That morning Jeff Shomper had no idea he would be dead that night, but Jeff was ready. He not only committed his life to Jesus in faith, but just days before he excitedly told me about some others who had surrendered to Jesus last Sunday. Do you believe in Jesus who is God come down in human form, lived to show us God’s way, died on the cross to pay the penalty of our sin and bodily rose from the dead to prove all He said and did was eternally true? Don’t put it off, don’t be half-hearted, don’t
just glide along! If you, like Joe, have never surrendered your life to Jesus – then take this moment to repent of your sins – confess them to God without excuses or explanations – and seek to take a step in the opposite direction. Affirm you believe the things we have said about Jesus and then surrender to go God’s way instead of your own (prayer?). If you have committed your life to Jesus as your Savior and Lord, then let the gospel message touch every area of your life. Let it give you greater power over temptation, lust or greed. Let it give you encouragement in the midst of problems, stresses and despair. The gospel alone can triumph over every obstacle and bring us to eternal joy. Whatever it costs, stand in it, hold it fast, believe on it, feed on it, savor it, count it more precious than silver or gold.

VII. Shows the righteousness of God

How does belief in the gospel of Christ bring salvation? READ v 17. The gospel reveals the radical, heavenly righteousness of God. What this “righteousness from God” is — it is a radical, heavenly righteousness. The gospel is revealed through Christ, who suffered in our place because our human righteousness was not good enough. Christ’s righteousness is then credited to all who believe.

It was this verse, v 17, that radically change Martin Luther’s understanding of God and His righteousness. Before this Martin Luther was trying desperately to be good enough to make it to heaven. He thought that “the righteousness of God” was a condemning righteousness — a standard of judgement he was supposed to meet, but agonized over because he saw how he kept falling short! Little by little God’s word began to transform his thinking until he finally understood that God, in the person of Jesus, gives His own righteousness to make man righteous through faith. Luther’s life was turned upside down the Protestant Reformation was unleashed and Luther went on to withstand the entire world! Imagine, you and I can stand sinless before God, know we have eternal life, and be free from the impossible task of trying to earn righteousness & Heaven. The sole requirement is faith. This is good news indeed — the greatest news ever proclaimed!

We have genuine spiritual enemies (the satan & the demonic) who are trying to rob us of our peace and joy by accusing us. They’ll point out every impure thought that has crossed our mind, every slip of the tongue, & everything you didn’t do. When we take our eyes off of Jesus, we will begin to agree & question our salvation. If we aren’t convinced Jesus has credited His righteousness to us, we aren’t going to repent of those wrongs & freely receive God’s grace & repentance — we are going to try to prove we can rescue ourselves, we can turn around by our own effort, we can do everything right because we are going to put more effort in. Don’t lose sight of what Jesus has already done for us. He gave His life for us. Jesus poured out His blood so we could have favor with the God the Father! When the devil comes knocking, remind him and yourself that the blood Jesus shed on the cross gives you righteous standing with God. This didn’t happen because you tried really, really hard, but it is a gift from God that Jesus bought at a high price and freely gives to any who truly believe the gospel! May this good news of Jesus empower and encourage every day!