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SERIES: The Gospel Is
MESSAGE: Romans 1-8 Recap
PASSAGE: Romans 1-8
SPEAKER: Ryan Harmon

If you were to ask me what I believe to be the greatest danger facing Christians, and therefore the church today, I would answer without hesitation. I understand there are a number of things that we could look to externally that might pose threats, might be dangerous, but I believe the greatest danger facing us as believers today is this: that we would settle for anything less than the truth as God has presented it in his word. That we would settle for anything less than the real thing. That we'd settle for a small version of Jesus, a version of him that essentially makes him irrelevant to the way we live our life day to day. That we'd settle for a shrunken gospel, a gospel that only has to do with getting our ticket to heaven, but it has no bearing on how we live life week to week. That we'd settle for a diminished view of the mission and the work of God, a view so small that it doesn't compel us—it has no power to compel us to action, to be engaged in the work that God is doing right now right around us. That we would settle for anything less than the real thing.

Of course, when we open our Bibles, and we look at the scriptures, we read them with intentionality, we read to listen—we find not a hint of settling, do we? Rather than settling, what we find is that our view constantly gets larger. Our vision gets larger of who God is, who Jesus Christ is. The wonder, the depth, the beauty of the gospel, displayed in all its richness. The wonder and the work of God in creation right now, right in our world, in our very midst to bring people back to himself, the compelling drama that is unfolding right in our world. No, the more we engage in scripture, the larger our view becomes. As Christians, we have to resist the temptation to settle.

So I ask you this morning, when it comes to the gospel, have you possibly settled for a shrunken gospel? Or have you embraced it in all its beautiful richness? As we've been walking through the book of Romans for 14 weeks now, each week we've been challenged to think more deeply about the gospel. Paul has pressed on us to not think small about it. And so now as we close our spring series here this morning, for one last weekend, I wanna take a look at the broad sweep of Paul's argument—all 8 chapters that we've covered—and challenge ourselves, be confronted once again, with the glory, with the depth, with the beauty of the gospel.

If you have your Bibles, you are welcome to open them to chapter 1 of Romans, but I will warn you, we are covering all 8 chapters. Now, we're going to go through chapter by chapter, so you'll be able to follow along, but it might also just be helpful this morning just to listen as I read the sweep of Paul's thought. Romans chapter 1. We began, of course, three and a half months ago, and we began with a simple but far-reaching statement that has profound implications. We said this, we said the gospel is God's power to save. The gospel is God's power to save. That comes straight from the pages of Romans 1, in verses 16 and 17, Paul lays out his very mission, and this then becomes the theme for the entire book of Romans. So listen to Paul's words here, Romans 1, verses 16 and 17. He says, "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 [that is in the gospel], the righteousness of God is revealed from faith, as it is written, but the righteous man shall live by faith."



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So now before we talk about a few details within these two verses, I do want to address a mystery that maybe some of you have been wrestling with for fourteen weeks. You might have wondered, what are the X's and the V's and the I's up there in the corner? I've been asked a number of times, what does that mean? Well, it's Roman numerals. For 1, 16 and 17, the theme verses of Romans. Now, I don't know if in Roman numerals there were ever dashes, but we took some creative liberties there. Now that leads to a second question, though. Maybe another mystery that you have been wondering about, why is it listed 3 times, and what is the significance of the circles? Going to reveal that. Are you ready? Our designer thought it looked good. That's the meaning of the circles, I think. Maybe there's more significance? I don't know. I think it just looks nice.

I am not ashamed of the gospel, Paul said. The gospel, if we could name one single word that summarizes the theme, the entire focus of Romans, it is this word, the gospel, which literally means good news. And this is good news that is extraordinary. This is good news that absolutely took over Paul's life. Paul, of course, was an enemy of the gospel. He was an enemy of Christ, an enemy of Christians. But then God, through the gospel, grabbed a hold of his life and turned his world absolutely upside down. He became a missionary. And through Paul and through his travels throughout the entire Mediterranean world and through his proclamation of the gospel of this good news, God, in turn, turned the entire world upside down. It is not an overstatement to say that the gospel absolutely changed the world. The gospel changed the world.

Now, in these first two verses, there are 2 things that I want to draw attention to. In the first, we already said, in saying that the gospel is God's power to save, Paul said, I'm not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation. When someone believes the gospel, God works an extraordinary miracle in an instant, in the moment of belief. The moment of expression of faith, placing their trust in Jesus Christ, God changes them immediately. Instantaneously. That person moves from spiritual death to spiritual life in a moment. It is a miracle brought about by the very power of God. The gospel is God's power to save.

Now in verse 17, Paul tells us a bit about the content of the gospel. It has something to do with this very important idea in Romans of righteousness. Paul said, "for in it, the righteousness of God is revealed." Now, in our first week, we talked about this term at some length. But let me summarize it this morning by just first saying the righteousness of God refers to the fact that he alone is holy. He alone is perfect. He alone is righteous. But in Romans, it also conveys this idea that God in his righteousness is inclined to save, is inclined to save his people. And God's righteousness presents a problem for us because we are unrighteous. All of us have fallen short, but God's righteousness is such that God is willing and he is able to save we who are unrighteous.

Now Paul's going to get into that in just a moment. But this is why the gospel is good news. It's good news because we are in a position, apart from the gospel, of very bad news. Because we are stuck in sin. That's why we said in our second week. That the gospel is God's response to our desperate need. God's response to our desperate need. We are desperately needy. And so as Paul begins his deep exploration of the details of the gospel, that's right where he begins as he turns to verse 18, he starts with our desperate need. Chapter one, verse 18. Paul continues, saying, "for the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness. Because that which is known about God is evident within them, for God made it evident to them."

The gospel is good news because all of humanity is in a position of bad news because we sit under the wrath of God. That's bad news. That's where the story begins. It's bad news. Now, of course, everything began perfect, and that gets us into this idea of God's wrath. When we think of the wrath of God, we think of that term wrath in human terms and we think maybe of unleashed, unreasonable outbursts of anger. That's human wrath. But God's wrath is different. God's wrath is his righteous and appropriate response to the ruin of his good creation. Everything was created



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just right, perfectly. But then through sin, everything became corrupted. Sin entered the world, began to reign, through the choice of Adam and Eve—and all of this, of all of us, along with Adam and Eve. Sin entered the world and brought pollution, corruption, decay into God's perfect world, and his wrath is his righteous response that seeks to resolve the problem. It's an expression of his love, an expression of his very commitment to his good creation. God, because he is righteous, has to act.

See, we were put, human beings were put, in a perfect situation, designed perfectly for them. And not only that, God also left behind abundant evidence of his presence and his divine power. That's what Paul tells us. But what every single human being, you and I, have done is, we have rebelled against the holy God. Therefore, God's wrath is his response. The story starts, the story, the gospel starts with bad news. Sin itself is bad news, but we can't just talk about sin as some kind of ambiguous thing. We all are sinners. We all fall short. We all act against God and we go our own direction. Because of that, we all are under judgment, we face God's wrath.

So Paul's saying in verses 18 and 19, now, the human problem is this, this is what we do. We either deny that we have desperate need, turn a blind eye to the fact that we are desperately needy, or we begin to compromise and negotiate. We start to say things to God like this—we start to say, “well, I know I've done some bad things, but look at all the good things I've done.” Or we say, “I know, I know I'm not perfect, but look at John over there. I mean, he's really bad. So if we grade on a curve, I should be fine.” We start to try to find human solutions, human responses, to our desperate need.

And the truth is, there is no human response that is adequate to our desperate need. And that's why the gospel is extraordinarily good news. Because God responded to our desperate need. Nothing we could do, but God, in his righteousness, God responded, and here's what God did: he looked upon us, humanity, we as we are, unrighteous, rebellious, and sinful, and he made a way for the unrighteous to be declared righteous.

That's why we said the gospel is justification by faith. Justification, a legal term that means to be declared righteous in a court of law, to be declared in the right. God made a way for that to be possible. He explains that in Romans 3:23, a verse we are all familiar with. Romans 3:23 says, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Now, we are all familiar with that verse, but often we forget to continue reading. “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory God.” Verse 24, “being justified as a gift by his grace through the redemption, which is in Christ Jesus, whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation [propitiation means satisfaction, as a propitiation] in his blood through faith.” God made a way for we the unrighteous to be declared righteous through faith. The gospel is justification by faith.

Now that is a loaded sentence. It is a deep idea, entire books written on that single idea, but the summary is this: what we could never do for ourselves, God did. We are completely undeserving. There's nothing we could ever do to repay God for the generous outpouring of the gift of his grace to make us, the unrighteous, righteous. Now, it's because of this that sometimes it's hard for us even to comprehend the goodness of this gift, the goodness of his grace, because it's so unhuman.

This isn't how we give gifts. Here's how we give gifts. I give a gift that is in proportion to the goodness of the person receiving it. So I give a really good gift to someone that really deserves it. My wife gets really good gifts. A coworker, not that they're not deserving, but they get a paper weight or something. They get, they get something, but we base the extraordinary nature of our gifts on how much we think that person is deserving or valuable to us.



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But here's what God does. None of us are deserving, and he pours out his generous abundance of grace upon us. The more we understand the nature of the gospel, the more we will wonder at God's generous grace, this generous gift that he poured out. It's almost scandalous because we are so undeserving. This gift of his grace, of justification by faith, is completely out of proportion with what we deserve. That's what God does, because God is absolutely righteous, infinitely glorious.

Now, all of this was accomplished, of course, through his son, through Jesus Christ. That's why at the heart of the gospel is the moment, the fact of the cross of Jesus Christ. It was on the cross that God's wrath was satisfied. It was on the cross that redemption was accomplished. Because of the cross, we, the unrighteous, are able to stand before a holy God, be declared righteous, not by any doing of our own strength, our own merit. We don't deserve it. We simply believe. We trust God, we surrender. We acknowledge our desperate need, and then we say, "I can't help myself," and in that moment, God, by his power, saves us, makes us alive. Declares over us, we who stood under a verdict of guilty, declares over us innocent, righteous. It's justification by faith.

Now throughout this series, because the nature of the gospel just over and over again is so outstanding, we have said a number of times, if you have not yet believed, we plead with you: simply believe. If you have not done that up to this point, I plead with you this morning, I urge you, cast your trust upon Jesus Christ.

Sometimes what we do is we say, you know, let me let me clean my life up first. I'm not as deserving as I could be. If I get everything in order, then I'll be a little more prepared. And that is completely contrary to the truth of the gospel because none of us are deserving. None of us are deserving. We acknowledge our desperate need. We surrender to Jesus. We trust him, and in that moment, God performs his miracle, he moves us from death to life. And that sets us on a brand new course of life. A brand new course of life. A life that's marked by a totally different quality.

That's why we said as we continued that the gospel is our peace and hope. The gospel is our peace and hope. Romans 5 verse 1. Paul says, "therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction into this grace in which we stand. And we exult in hope of the glory of God." Our justification by faith brings about immediate results. Immediate. We immediately move from a verdict of guilty to a verdict of righteous. We move from spiritual death to spiritual life in a moment by the power of God.

And we also move from a place where we were enemies of God, in conflict with God, to a relationship that is grounded in peace. We now have peace with God. So Paul said, "being justified by faith," having been justified by faith, "we have peace with God." And I'd take it a step further. The implications of our peace with God is that now relationship with him can proceed. We're friends. We have peace. Now we can grow in intimacy.

I love that Paul says, "this was our introduction into the grace in which we now stand." What a shame it would be to think that we're supposed to remain at the introduction. If I go with you somewhere and you introduce me to someone, that is in order to now develop a friendship, develop a relationship. If I hand you a book and you hand it back to me and said, "I read the introduction, it was wonderful." I'd say, "you know there's more." After the introduction, God does not intend that we stay at the introduction. No, we continue. We proceed with him. We move into a glorious future. But Paul said, "we exult in hope." That word exult means to be victorious, to be jubilantly joyful in hope. Exultation, jubilation. Overwhelming joy.

So let me ask you this: if the creator of everything who spoke it into existence by the word of his power, if you now have peace with God, the one who, the one who has all power, do you have every reason to be absolutely jubilantly joyful and full of hope? Absolutely you do. God is for you



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now. God is for you. God for me. Now, when my world seems to be crashing down, when I'm walking through moments where it seems like a lot of people are against me, I need to be reminded and comforted and encouraged by this truth. God is for me. And in Christ, God is for you. You now have peace with God, and you exult in hope. Peace with God is possible. Hope is available through the gospel. And all of that is true because of what Jesus accomplished on the cross.

As Paul continues, he gives us this astounding statement. We summarize it this way. We said the gospel is the end of death's reign. The end of death's reign. Ever since sin entered the world, death reigned. Death reigned. That's why we were in desperate need. We were under the reign of death. Bound fast, living under the tyranny of sin and death, absolutely desperate. But the gospel ushers out an old era and moves us into a brand new era. The reign of sin is past tense. Death reigned, but now something else reigns. Grace reigns.

Paul says, "where sin increased"—I'm sorry, this is Romans 5:20—"where sin increased, grace abounded all the more. So that as sin reigned in death, even so grace would reign through righteousness, to eternal life, through Jesus Christ, our Lord." Sin reigned. But now grace reigns. We are no longer under the reign of death, living under that tyranny, the dictatorship of sin. Out from under that, into a new life, a new country of freedom marked by the reign of Jesus Christ, and his reign is a reign of grace.

See, at the cross, at the cross, a pivot in human history occurred. Death reigned. But it rains no longer. Now grace reigns. Grace reigns. Through righteousness, to eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord, the one who is king, the one who is reigning. See, being transferred from the reign of death to the reign of grace ushers us into a brand new life, a totally different quality of life. A restored life, a refreshed life. A new life.

That's how we summarize it on Easter morning. Grace. The gospel is new life. New life. Romans 6, verse 4, Paul says, "therefore, we have been buried with him through baptism." Now, we talked on Easter morning about how that is simply Paul's shorthand for saying the moment we placed our faith in Jesus. We were buried with him into his death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead, through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. So thankful, we need to remember the gospel story—Jesus' story—does not end, did not end, on Good Friday. He arose on Sunday morning. Jesus went to the cross and he accomplished more than we can possibly fathom.

We just sang about it a few minutes ago. Jesus paid it all. It was a ransom that he paid, accomplished forgiveness, redemption, satisfied God's wrath. But the accomplishments of the cross were then confirmed through the resurrection. The fact that Jesus arose vindicated him. He truly was the Lamb of God that came to take away the sins of the world. And Paul says something astounding just as Jesus Christ was raised from the dead, so we too now—this is my translation—we get to join him. We get to join him in the life that he is now living.

What would it look like to settle for a shrunken gospel? It would look like this. It would be to say, "I know I'm forgiven, but life looks no different until I die." That's a shrunken gospel. That diminishes the work of the cross and the glory of the resurrection and the truth of the life that we have been called into now. We were buried with Christ in his death. We are now raised up with him. And that gives us brand new possibilities, brand new opportunities.

We summarized it this way. Tyce, when he preached, reminded us that the gospel is freedom to choose the better master. Freedom to choose the better master. And a brief statement in Roman 6, verse 14, Paul says, "for sin shall not be master over you. For you are not under law, but under grace." What is the mark of this newness of life in which we now walk? It is freedom from the bondage of sin. Sin was our master, but now in Christ, it is our master no longer. We are now free to live, to serve a better master. We are free to serve Jesus Christ. Bound fast now to him. So to



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continue to live our life as if sin has ultimate say in our life, that we are still in bondage to sin, is to mistake, is to overlook, the fact that Jesus made the reign of sin and the mastery of sin past tense for those of us that are now in him. Past tense. Our present tense reality, and our eternal reality, is we are now with him. And that means we now can cultivate relationship with him.

As Paul continues, he explains that we've been brought into this new union with Christ. We've been joined together with him. The gospel, he said, is our union with Christ. Chapter 7, verse 4. He says, "therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may be joined together to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God." See, to be united with Christ, to be joined together with Christ through faith, means, first, that we are no longer under the mastery and reign of sin, and we are also no longer in relationship with the Old Testament law.

Now, God used that law as a governor during the reign of sin. Paul bent over backwards to make sure he made it abundantly clear, the Old Testament law, the law of Moses, it was good, but it was not able to free us ultimately. It was limited. It could not save. And while we did live in relationship with the Old Testament law, now in Christ, we have been joined to another. That means that we are now dead to the law.

Now what Paul described is that in that moment of death, in that moment of death, when we joined Christ on the cross, through faith, we were joined together with him. The old relationship ceased to hold sway over us. We are now free to live in a brand new relationship, a new marriage, if you will. We are joined together with Christ, to pursue and cultivate that very relationship. So to live as if we are still united, still in relationship, with the Old Testament law is to use Paul's metaphor, to commit adultery. That's the way he described it. We now have a new, singular, monogamous relationship with Jesus Christ. To continue to live as if the Old Testament law can somehow bring about righteousness in us, it's to believe a diminished gospel because the gospel is this: Jesus paid it all. Jesus alone saves, and through faith we are now united with him and him alone. We are united to Christ. That means we have newness of life, living with him now, with Jesus, an unending relationship.

Now, of course, that raises a question: does that mean that now, as we live this life out, that everything is gonna be simple? Piece of cake from here on out? And we answered that question. Unfortunately, no. No, there will still be struggle in our Christian life as we seek to live out the truth of who we are in Christ. There will still be struggle, but God has provided power within the struggle. If we moved into the end of Romans 7, we summarized it this way, we said the gospel is power in the struggle.

See, as we live out this newness of life, what is true of us in Jesus Christ? We still live it out in these frail human bodies. We are still fleshly. Our bodies are still wasting away, limited, frail. Still holding on to old habits. Sin still seeks to attach itself to our new life in Christ. It can't take us away from him, but it certainly can mess up our life, and it seeks to. And so as we live out this new life, there is this struggle. And sometimes it can become overwhelming. Sometimes it can be incredibly discouraging. That's why I think we all resonated with the cry that Paul exclaimed in Roman 7, verse 24. Paul said, "wretched man that I am, who will set me free from the body of this death?" Just feeling stuck. But thankfully, Paul didn't stop. He continued, verse 25, "thanks be to God through Jesus Christ, our Lord." Thanks be to God.

There is hope in the midst of the struggle. God, in his gospel, didn't save us and then expect us to turn back to power for living this Christian life in the law. He didn't say to us now, okay, go back to the old ways. God didn't save us and then say, now, go back and trust your own strength. Rather, the key that Paul has pointed us to in verse 25 is that is that God has given us power through Jesus Christ. And then thankfully, as we turn the page into Romans 8, we learn the agent, the person that



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supplies that power. Thankfully, Romans does not end in chapter seven. We turn into the goodness, the glory of chapter 8, where we proclaimed, the gospel is life in the power of the spirit. Life and the power of the Spirit.

And that opening section, as Paul opened up Romans 8, he described who we are now in Christ. In Romans 8 verse 4, he says, “we are those who do not walk according to the flesh.” And Paul, always, “walk” means “live.” We don't live, we don't carry on our life, according to, by means of, by the power that the flesh supplies. The flesh—we just got done talking about it in Romans 7—we're fleshly. It's weak. We can't do it. But thankfully, that's not how we have to live. We do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. According to the very Spirit of God.

See, God did not leave us as orphans. He didn't save us—he didn't, in the courtroom, declare us righteous— and then say, good luck, I'll see you when you die. That's not what God did. He lavishly poured out his empowering Spirit upon his people. And every single believer in this room, the moment you placed your faith in Jesus Christ, you were indwelt. God placed his Spirit in you to empower you to increasingly, progressively, walk in the Christian life as God has called you to walk. The Spirit is power for life. Power to live according to the ways of God.

See, to turn back and to say, okay, I know that God saved me, but now it's my job to bring about my transformation, that is to cling to a false gospel. We don't begin with grace and then begin to trust our own strength. No, it's grace all the way through, and God, in his grace, supplied us with his Spirit, that he might bring about transformation that we cannot accomplish on our own. Our job is to seek him. To seek him, to worship him, to ask him that he would continue to conform us to the image of Christ. The good news of the gospel is certainly that we are forgiven for our sin. We have moved from guilty to righteous. It is also that God is doing a work in us, transforming us. And he has granted us his very Spirit to empower us to live and to begin to walk more and more according to his ways.

And that means that life now can be filled with the present current hope. Current hope and a future glory. And that's what Matt proclaimed to us last week. The last statement we had, the gospel is our present hope and promise of future glory. See, since we have the Spirit, we are able to walk in this newness of life, and not only that, we have the confirmation, the assurance of what God is like. Therefore, no matter what we're going through, Romans 8:28 told us, no matter what we're going through, we have a God who we are now at peace with, and he is able to turn whatever we bring to him, and bring it out for good. Turn it out for good. Therefore we can be full of hope. Full of the hope in the midst of trial.

Not only full of hope, but also anticipation of a future glory that is beyond all comprehension. The last few verses of Romans 8, Paul just worked towards this crescendo that was so overwhelming, so beautiful. I'm just gonna read those three verses to you. Here's how he ended Romans 8, verse 37 to 39. Paul said, “but in all these things, we overwhelmingly conquer, not on our own, we overwhelmingly conquer through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord.” Amen.

So I ask you now, if this is the kind of God that we serve, if God is the kind of God who has the power to save, if God is the kind of God who responds to our desperate need, who justifies the righteous through faith, who grants peace and hope, who paid it all, and ended death's reign, who gives new life, who freed us from the bondage of sin, who united us to Jesus Christ, empowers us to live, and promises he will never leave us or forsake us, and grants us his very Spirit—if that is what God is like, will he ever abandon you? Never. Never.



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See, the gospel puts God's very character on display. That's why we must resist this temptation to ever settle for anything less than the real thing. Because a diminished gospel in time gives birth to a diminished view of God, a diminished view of Jesus Christ. A diminished view of the life we've been called to live in right now and a diminished view of the mission he has called us to. We cannot settle.

So here as we close Romans, let's commit, let's covenant together: we will never settle. Rather, we will take in the full beauty and richness and goodness of the gospel. We'll drink it in. We will marinate in it, that it might transform us, that we might proclaim that God is better than we can possibly imagine, that we might be a people that can join Paul, that we can say deep from within our heart, "I am not ashamed of the gospel." For it's the power of God, for salvation, to everyone who believes.

Our Father, we thank you. We thank you for the goodness, the richness, the beauty, the glory of the good news of the gospel. That you did for us what we could never do on our own. You sent your son. Jesus, through your death and through your resurrection, and through your current reign, you have now called us to live life with you, and you have made a way possible. And Father, we praise you for the giving of your Spirit. The Spirit of God, the Spirit of Jesus Christ, alive and dwelling in us to empower us to live the life that you have called us to. Lord, give us the strength, the courage, to never settle for anything less than the real thing, that we might glorify you and that we might represent you in a desperate world full of desperate need, we pray. Amen.

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