

The gospel in one word?

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[0 : 0 0] Well, this morning I'd like us to turn together to Romans chapter 8 and we're going to continue our study in this great chapter. We're nearly at the end of the chapter. We've come to verses 31 to 34. In this chapter Paul has been giving a great summary of the many blessings that are ours in Jesus Christ and over the previous verses he's been drawing attention to the fact that for everyone he trusts in Jesus we have a wonderful future, a great promise of the fact that we will be brought to be with God in glory forevermore. So we have this wonderful hope which gives us strength and encouragement in our sufferings now. Then we pick it up at verse 31 where Paul says, what then shall we say to these things? If God is for us who can be against us?

He who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn Christ Jesus as the one who died? More than that who was raised, who is at the right hand of God who indeed is interceding for us. Over the course of this study that we've been doing in Romans we've been highlighting the fact that the great theme of this letter is the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ. When you look at Romans that is the great theme that Paul is talking about. Back at the beginning in chapter 1 he said, 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. That is what Christianity is all about. It's a message of good news, a message of salvation for absolutely everyone. And in this letter Paul is explaining how that gospel works and in doing so he's taught us many things. At the start he begins by diagnosing the problem of sin. He gives us the bad news if you like before he gives us the good news highlighting the fact that we are made by God, we are accountable to God, we have been created to serve and worship and live for him and yet we have rebelled against him and instead of loving and serving and worshiping our Creator we've turned away from him and we've rebelled against him and that's had disastrous implications for humanity and for the world. But Paul goes on to say how that damage can be undone and in particular how our unrighteousness, how our sin can be dealt with. The unrighteous can be declared righteous. Paul's telling us that we can be justified through faith in Jesus Christ because of everything that he has done for us. A great reminder that at the heart of the Christian faith is the fact that Jesus died on the cross and because of that death we can be saved, we can be forgiven for our sins. So he diagnosed the problem of sin, he then says however the problem can be fixed, the unrighteous can be declared righteous and then he goes on to give us wonderful teaching about all the blessings that flow on after our justification and that are ours through union with Christ. And Romans chapter 8 in many ways is just a great summary of the astounding blessings that we have if we are trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ. So Paul has been teaching us all about the Gospel and there's a wealth of amazing teaching in this letter that we're studying.

But today I want us to ask a question. Can you sum up the Gospel in one word? Now that maybe seems like a wee bit of a strange question because over the centuries millions I think of books have been written discussing the Gospel. There's a huge depth of effort and thought and study has gone into the whole of the Christian faith and even with millions upon millions of books about the Gospel, even that will never fully convey the depth of riches that are found in the message of the Bible. So there's a sense in which it's a crazy question, there's a sense in which you can't sum up the Gospel in one word because there's just amazing, there's so much to look at. However, I do think that there is one word that really does capture the key truths of Christianity. There's one word that lies at the heart of the Gospel and that word is in verse 31 of Romans, the first verse there, it's on the first line. What do you think it is? The word that sums up the Gospel is the word for.

[5 : 3 3] The word for. It's an incredibly important word and it's a word that lies at the very heart of Christianity. It's a word that basically means on behalf of and so when Paul is summarizing the

Gospel, he is telling us that God is for us and that means that God is working on our behalf and that's a principle on which the whole of the Christian faith is grounded. The Gospel is summed up in this one word and in these, the rest of these verses here, verses 31 to 34, we can look at it in a wee bit more detail because here we find three key areas in which God is working on our behalf. These are three things that lie at the heart of the Gospel and these are the three things that we're going to look at together for a wee while today. So number one, God the Father provides for us. God the Father provides for us. That's what verse 32 tells us, he who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all. How will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

At the heart of the Gospel is the fact that God makes a provision for us. Here we've been reminded of the fact that when it comes to our salvation, God takes the initiative and he makes the necessary provision. It's a reminder that the Christian faith is not about us trying to initiate a reconciliation with God. It's not about us trying to provide an adequate appeasement to God. So many people think that Christianity is about that, that it's about us trying to impress God. So many of the other faiths in the world are based on this pattern. It's like God is up there waiting for us to do something that will impress him so that we might receive his favour. So many religious systems are based on the idea that we are working our way up to God. We take the initiative, we are trying to impress him. Christianity is not like that. That's the opposite of what Christianity is. Christianity is grounded on the fact that God takes the first step. God is the one who makes the provision that's necessary. First and foremost, the good news of Jesus Christ is not about what we give to God, it's about what God gives to us. That's why it is such good news. God is willing to provide for us. But of course that raises the key question, what does God provide? And the answer to that question is the most astounding truth that has ever been revealed to the human race.

Because if you look in that verse you'll see that God provides his son. He did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all. Now that word gave him up basically means to hand over. And so God the Father hands over his own precious beloved son. He does not spare him but he sends him. He hands him over, he takes his very own son and by giving him he makes provision. It is the most astounding act of generosity and provision that the world has ever seen. God the Son is provided by God the Father. Now it's virtually impossible I think to describe the nature, the monumental nature of the provision that that is. It's pretty much impossible to describe, I think pretty much impossible to grasp. But to help us understand the level of what God is doing here, we can go back to the Old Testament and we can see a shadow of what this really means. And that shadow is found in Genesis 22 which is the passage that we read where God asks Abraham to sacrifice his own son Isaac.

Now Isaac was possibly the most precious child that you could say arguably one of the most precious children who's ever lived because Isaac waited year, Abraham waited years and years and years for this son to be born. And finally after years of waiting this precious promised son was born and then we have this incredibly tense chapter where God says to Abraham go and sacrifice your son. And it seems it's kind of and you think what on earth is going on here? And you're reading through the chapter it's incredibly tense you're thinking is Abraham really gonna do this?

Is this precious son really supposed to die? And when you reach the point where Isaac is spared? It is such a massive relief. You think we are so glad that this child was not sacrificed, that this son was spared. But of course you have to make sure you never forget that when Abraham saw his beloved son being spared, God the Father knew that when it came to his son there would be no sparing. He'd have to give him up. And that's what God's done. He makes the most astonishing provision. His perfect son, the son who is righteous, the son who is obedient, the son who is so deeply loved and so deeply treasured by God the Father. That's who God provides.

[12:14] And that provision is for you. God provides his son on your behalf as it says there he gave him up for us. That means that you are the reason. You are the purpose. You are the motivation. You are the outcome. You are the one that God wants to save. This is happening because of you. He did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all. And this is where we get to the real truth in regard to the whole issue of self-worth. Many, many, many people struggle with the whole issue of self-worth. We look at ourselves. We live in a society and in a world that's very, very competitive, that's very judgmental and where there's immense pressure on people to meet certain expectations and many, many, many people are finding themselves in that world feeling as though they are complete failures. And so we look at ourselves and we are full of disappointment. We are dragged down by our inadequacies, by our weaknesses and by our mistakes. We look at everybody

else. We think they are so much better whether it's at work or in a community or even on Facebook. Everybody else's life looks so perfect. Our lives seem to be so rubbish in comparison. We feel that everybody else is so much better. We feel like a waste of space and we struggle, struggle, struggle with a sense of self-worth. And the world tries to deal with that in lots of ways. So there's pressure on you to achieve things in your career so that you can prove your worth. There's pressure to have possessions that are going to impress other people. There's a desire to be popular so that you're going to be valued by your friends. There's a great effort to get people taking an interest in you. Very often social media there's this desire to have followers and likes and comments and all that kind of stuff.

And then there's the mindset that says well if you look within yourself and look hard enough you'll maybe find worth and meaning in who you are. And maybe some of that is okay. Some of it can be helpful but some of it can be very, very, very damaging indeed as people try to impress others and yet always find that they're never able to do enough. And ultimately all of that stuff will count for little. But the levels, whatever levels of self-worth you can find in these things, they are absolutely nothing compared to the self-worth that the Bible will give you.

Because here in the Bible you discover that in the eyes of God the Father giving up his son for you is worth it. It's worth it. Because you mean more to God than you will ever know.

I heard this summarised brilliantly in a sermon and I think I've said this before but it's so good I'm going to say it again. In a sermon by a Church of Scotland minister called Eric Alexander who I often mention. It's funny lots of ministers these days quote Tim Keller. I don't know if you've heard of Tim Keller but he's a very, very well known writer. Lots of people quote Tim Keller.

Tim Keller is fantastic, great to read him. But Eric Alexander is my Tim Keller. I really like Alexander and I always quote him. He said this, he was talking about Abraham. He says you look at Abraham with Isaac and you see Abraham willing to sacrifice his son and you'd say wow see how much Abraham loved God. And then he said but if you go to the cross and you see Jesus Christ dying there you say wow see how much God loved me. The greatest and most costly and most astonishing act of provision ever made was made for you. In the Gospel God the Father provides for us. Number two Jesus Christ died for us. That's in verses 33 to 34 we see that says who shall bring any charge against God, God's elect. It is God who justifies who is to condemn. Jesus Christ is the one who died. Here Paul points us straight back to the cross where the Son of God Jesus Christ died. The cross is the pivotal moment of the Christian faith. It's the pivotal moment of all history because there on the cross is where God's great work of salvation is completed. The Bible is just a great record of God's plan of salvation and at the heart of that plan central to it is the cross because there God's great work of salvation is fully achieved and I'm going to put up some verses from the New Testament that highlight some of the things that were achieved. So on the cross Jesus fulfills all the covenant promises of the Old Testament. So Old Testament is pointing forward to the New Testament. Jesus speaks about that in Luke 22 where he institutes the Lord's supper. He took bread when he had given thanks. He broke it and gave it to them saying this is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me and likewise the cup after they'd eaten say this cup is poured that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood. Old Testament is Old Covenant pointing forward to the New Covenant where God's plan of salvation is complete.

[18 : 34] Everything fits together pointing towards the cross. So on the cross Jesus fulfills the covenant promises of God. On the cross Jesus takes the punishment for sin. 2 Corinthians 5 21 for our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

That was why Jesus died. He was taking the punishment for sin. On the cross Jesus secures redemption from the implications of the curse of a broken law Galatians 3 13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us for it is written cursed as everyone who is hanging on a tree. So the curse the implications of a broken law are placed on Jesus. He takes that and by doing so he restores secures redemption. He died on the cross as a perfect sacrifice as it says there walking love as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. So in the Old Testament you have the sacrificial system that's repeated again and again and again and again and again but it's all pointing forward to the one sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross which is once for all. He dies as a perfect sacrifice and there on the cross Jesus suffered immensely as Peter tells us in 1 Peter 2 21 for to this you've been called because Christ also suffered for you on the cross Jesus suffered immense agony but there he accomplishes

everything that is necessary in order for there to be an atonement in order for there to be salvation and the astonishing thing is all of these are for you for you for you for our sake for us for us for you the bearing of sin the carrying of the curse the receipt of punishment the endurance of suffering the purchase of redemption the paying of the ransom the offering of the sacrifice it is all on behalf of you and that's the amazing thing about the Gospel when

God sends his son he's not sending his son to come down to us and dictate to us what God requires and to whip us up into shape in order to satisfy God God the son does not come to stand over us and lay down the law God the son comes to stand in place of us and to lay down his life in order to deal with all the consequences of our sin and that's why a Christian is simply someone who places all their dependence on Jesus because he died on the cross on our behalf Jesus Christ died for you and then thirdly we see Jesus interceding for us and we see that verse 34 who is to condemn Christ Jesus is the one who died more than that who was raised who's at the right hand of God who indeed is interceding for us now the first two points that we've highlighted are looking back God provided for us by sending his son Jesus died for us almost 2000 years ago on the cross but the Gospel is not simply about what God has done in the past Paul is reminding us here of the glorious truth that Jesus is continually ministering and continually acting on our behalf and that ministry is a ministry of intercession now that word interceding intercession basically means to speak on behalf of another and that speaking is done with a sense of urgency and intensity so we think in terms of petitioning or appealing or even pleading with somebody and you're conveying a sense of concern and of identification and of solidarity with somebody who is in need so right now Jesus is engaged in a ministry of intercession so he is speaking on behalf of others he's deeply concerned for the needs of others he's urgently appealing for the welfare of others he's championing the cause of others he's pleading on behalf of people who are in desperate desperate need he is interceding but who is he interceding for you

Jesus is interceding for you and that's pointing us to the fact that Jesus functions as our great high priest now that might sound a bit complicated but really it's not it basically is convenient the idea that Jesus represents us and it is through him that we have access to God Hebrews talks about that Hebrews is a great letter great book of the Bible to read to learn all about Jesus as our high priest we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens Jesus the Son of God in 924 Christ has entered not into the holy place is made with hands which are copies of the true things but into heaven itself to appear in the presence of God on our behalf and Paul is highlighting and hinting us towards this in Romans 34 and he particularly reminds us of the fact that both Jesus's death and his resurrection are central to this work of interceding in death

Jesus died as a sacrifice for our sins of an offering a priestly offering in our place and in his resurrection Jesus is now at the right hand of God making intercession for us the result is that Jesus is a great high priest for you for all who put their trust in him so he died for you he now stands for you he represents you he speaks for you he pleads for you he intercedes for you and all that simply means is this that everything that happens between you and God goes through Jesus and that is really what Christianity is all about the fact that Jesus is the mediator between humanity and God the Father by faith we are united to Jesus our identity is entirely bound up with who he is by him we have access and that means that in every area of your life where you are inadequate he is all sufficient and that also means that when it comes to your struggles your needs your fears your plans your challenges your weaknesses your decisions your burdens in all of these things Jesus is concerned for you he is standing for you he is representing you he is a sympathetic high priest and so if you ask yourself the question what is Jesus doing right now you ever thought of that question what is Jesus doing right now we can easily think of

[26 : 11] Jesus at the throne of God and resting from his work because it's completed and there's a sense in which that's true but Jesus is never resting from his work of intercession and that means that if you are trusting in him there is never ever a moment when you are not on Jesus's mind he is standing at the right hand of God the Father interceding for you so in all of this I hope that you can see that this little word for really does sum up the whole gospel and it's telling us that if you put your trust in Jesus then God is for you in every way he initiates a plan of salvation for you he dies on the cross and bears the curse of sin for you and he continually makes intercession for you the gospel is telling you that God is for you for you in the sense that he loves you and wants to save you for you in the sense that he takes your place even to the point of death for you in the sense that he pleads your cause and ever lives to make intercession on your behalf the whole of the gospel is grounded on the fact that God is for you now I want you just to think about that for a minute do you remember

the diagram we made at the start of our study in Romans it's called the creator creation distinction this is this is a diagram explaining a central element of a biblical world view now central to the biblical world view is the fact that God is creator and everything else is creation so you look at the we circle and within that we circle is all of history all of time all of matter all of reality the whole universe is in that we circle and it's tiny compared to God because God is God and then if you try to think well what am I in this diagram you are the most tiny tiny tiny tiny tiny little speck in the we circle and you realize just how big God is and how small we are and yet you see from the teaching of Romans 8 that that God who is creator of all things who is bigger stronger wiser more powerful than we could ever ever understand that God is for you he's for you and that tells you two wonderful things and Paul highlights them here tells you first of all that if God is for you then he's not against you that's the great truth of the gospel that your relationship with God can be restored through faith in Jesus so although our sins has made us have made us at enmity with God that broken relationship is now being reconciled through Jesus Christ the damage that sin has caused can be healed and the result is that

God is for you he's not against you so often we think that God is against us we think that we are just a big disappointment to him and that he would be displeased with us we think that obeying God might hurt us we think that God is this sort of harsh taskmaster or cruel controlling tyrant but none of that is true God is none of these things he is the perfect father and he is utterly for you that's why if we follow him he is working all things together for our good even when things are difficult and that's why we should trust God with every part of our lives and with every step we take because as verse 32 tells us if he's given us his son then he'll absolutely definitely give us everything else that we need as well if God is for you then he is not against you he is totally for you loving you caring for you and we'll look after you if God is for you he is not against you but secondly if God is for you no one else can be against you either ultimately so can anybody bring a charge against God's elect no we can't be accused before God because it's

God who justifies he's the one who's delivered the verdict and his verdict is final can anyone condemn those who are trusting in Jesus no because Jesus has died and he's risen again and he now intercedes for us and can anyone separate you from the love of God that's in Christ Jesus is not a chance not a chance because God is for you and so can you sum up the gospel in one word yes you can it's a tiny wee word for God is for us but the key question now is how do we respond and the answer is very simple we say to God from this moment on until my very last breath I am living for you too may God make us all like that let's pray God our Father we thank you for the amazing provision that you have made for us in your son Jesus Christ and we're just amazed to think that you would be for us for us in terms of of ready and willing to help us for us in the sense that you provided your son to stand in our place and for us in the sense that we now have a great high priest who's interceding on our behalf and so it's just amazing because we are so inadequate incapable and weak and yet we have you we have you standing for us and we thank you for that so much and we pray oh God that in light of all of this that we would live for you ourselves that everything would be for you would be for you amen