**December 31, 2017 “New Year’s Eve” Romans 1:1-6**

The end of the year is here. And so, I want us to focus on what’s the most important central thing we could end the year on, and begin the year on. The gospel.

And to do that I am going to be using the first chapter of the book of Romans. So, let’s begin, Romans 1:1- 6.

In the very first verse we meet the words, “the gospel of God”. What is the gospel? I remember when I became a member of a church once. And in order to do so, my wife and I were interviewed by a couple of the elders or Pastors. Whatever you want to call them.

And we both had to answer 2 questions. We had to answer the question, what is the gospel? And we had to answer the question of how we came to experience the gospel personally. Personally I don’t think there is anything wrong with that. It is good to take the gospel seriously in our churches. And people who are Christians should know the gospel.

Now, there are many different ways we can explain what the gospel is, but there is only one gospel. I always remember when Nevaeh was younger, and I used to ask her. What is the gospel? And she would say, it is good news. And I would say, and what is the good news? And she would say, the gospel is good news.

Well, in these first 5 verses Paul summarizes the entire gospel, in a most beautiful way, with

Jesus Christ as the very center. I see 5 things that makes Paul’s summarization here so full and wonderful. First, the source - the gospel comes from God vs. 1-2. Next, the preparation - the gospel is promised in the OT by the prophets vs. 2. Third, the Center - The gospel is about the son, descended from David and declared to be the Son of God vs 3-4. Fourth, the messengers - The gospel is proclaimed in the NT by the apostles vs. 5. Fifth, the recipients. All nations vs. 5 … The gospel is not a maybe, if, or hopefully. It’s a for sure thing. It will be obeyed by all nations.

Colossians 1:19 says, “For in him (that is Jesus) all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things (all things, not just to be people’s personal saviors but to reconcile all things), whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.” Do you really believe this?

And finally, the purpose, the why of the Gospel. For the sake of his name. For the sake of his name, among all the nations vs. 5 including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ One of my favorite lines in one of my favorite books, “Let the Nations be Glad” by John Piper goes like this: “Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn’t. Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man.”

The gospel is all about God. The powerful summary of the gospel in verses 1-6 at the beginning of the book of Romans we could spend a lifetime unpacking. The gospel begins with God. He is the source. It continues with Christ. He is the means. And ends with God. His fame is the goal!

Another way to say it, is found at the end of Romans chapter 11, “For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen”.

I once read another book called God is the Gospel. And it’s true. The good news is not that we get eternal life. The good news is that we get eternal life with God. We get reconciled to God.

We get to be intimately connected to the one we were created for. Friends, we will never find true, and everlasting joy that can’t be taken away or lost until we find joy in the one we were created to find joy in.

C. S Lewis a great Christian apologist of our day once said that our longing for something more than this world is one of the clearest evidences that there is something more than this world. Friends, we were created for something more. And the gospel brings us to that.

One strange thing I find in these opening verses is found in vs. 5, It says, Paul received his apostleship by God to bring to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations” “the obedience of faith”.

If you have been around Christianity for any length of time, that sounds strange. Isn’t the gospel all about grace and faith and not about works? Obedience sounds like a really works orientated thing doesn’t it.

Well, two things really quick. Number 1, we can never separate our obedience from faith. Although the book of Romans and the whole of the Bible makes it very clear that we can never be saved by our obedience, salvation is always by grace everywhere in the Bible, it also makes it very clear that true faith always leads to obedience.

Number 2, Theses words remind us that the gospel must be obeyed! The gospel is a command from God! Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved! (Acts 16:31) Does that sound like a suggestion? No. It is not a suggestion.

It’s a command by the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords to lay down your arms, surrender to his offer of peace that he himself paid a great price for or perish. There is no middle ground. There is no other way.

If you hear the gospel and don’t do what it is calling you to do, that is repent and believe, you are in rebellion, and you will die eternally in your rebellion.

It’s why in Psalm 2 verse 12, it says Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.”

The idea is the Son is King. The eternal Son. Jesus Christ. And the picture is of, in the old days a person would bow before the King, as the king put forward his hand and kiss his signet, to signify a giving of allegiance to.

And so, all who bow their knee to Jesus, surrender to him, repent of trusting in their own way, and give their allegiance to him will not perish. Think about it. Jesus Christ left heaven. He came from a far country. Emptied himself of all he had there.

Conquered in the most unlikely way possible. By dying on a cross. One of the most staggering verses in all of scripture to me is found in Isaiah 53. Isaiah 53:10 says, “It pleased the Lord to crush him” Scripture literally says it pleased God the Father to crush his son. How can this be?

Because Jesus became sin on that cross. He didn’t become sinful. That would be impossible. But he died in the place of sin. The sins of the world were laid upon him. And it pleased God to crush him. Why?

Because God hates sin. And you think. Well, I have always been told that God is a God of love. He doesn’t hate anything. Friends, this is just not true. If you love anything, that means you have to equally hate anything that would hurt the thing you love.

And God hates sin. Psalm 5:4-6 says, “For you are not a God who delights in wickedness; evil may not dwell with you. The boastful shall not stand before your eyes; you hate all evildoers. You destroy those who speak lies. the Lord abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man."

Psalm 7:11 “God is a righteous judge, and a God who feels indignation every day. If a man does not repent, God will whet his sword; he has bent and readied his bow; he has prepared for him his deadly weapons, making his arrows fiery shafts.”

And God had all the hot fiery shafts of indignation pointed at Jesus that day. And let them loose. He let loose his war bow. The knife that was once in Abrahams hand came down upon Jesus. The stored-up flood gates of His wrath against sin, that looked like for so long he overlooked came down upon Jesus that day.

All the righteous anger of the almighty. Jesus stood in our law place. The place where sin was to be punished.

And it pleased God. And with broad shoulders, he King of Kings, Lord of Lords, descended from David according to the flesh, bore it all.

And then 3 days later he rose from the grave with a mighty triumph over his foes. Oh, it was pleasing for Yahweh the Father to crush Jesus, the son of Abraham, the son of David, the son of man. But I believe it was even more pleasing to him when he arose from the grave.

A plan well succeeded. A job well done. Jesus Christ the Lord. He drank every drop. He satisfied the full measure of God’s righteous requirements and paid for the sins of God’s people. The resurrection is proof that God was satisfied by the substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus. He who knew no sin became sin on our behalf so that we who are not righteous might become righteous on his behalf. That’s what 2 Cor. 5:21 says … It’s what Martin Luther always called the great exchange. Our sin to Jesus for Jesus righteousness to us.

But the resurrection is also proof that God judges. It might look like God is overlooking sin right now. Oh yes there is wickedness. Everyday there is. But all day every day, people everywhere in the world are not getting what is due to them according to their sin.

But one day they will. There is coming a day when all those whose sins haven’t been covered and paid for by Jesus will have to face the judgement of God on their own. Right now, mercy and grace are being extended. The message of the gospel is going forth. But one day, the gavel will drop, and time will be no more. And the resurrection is proof that this day is coming.

Listen to Acts 17:30, “The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”

Those who don’t bow their knee and give Jesus the honor due him, will in no way whatsoever receive pardon but instead will stand before God without any representation to receive their just punishment.

That sounds so harsh. That sounds so against everything our culture tries to say about God. What’s the big deal? What is such the big deal about sin? I will tell you what is such the big deal. God is good.

And because God is good, sin taints everything that he is. It’s not so much that sin in is horrible, though it is, but it is more who is being sinned against. And all sin is first and foremost against God. You come into someone’s house with mud all over your shoes and rub that mud all over a Walmart bought carpet. Not such a big deal. You come into someone’s house with dirty shoes and rub it all over their white pristine cashmere carpet… it’s a big deal.

And friends this is God’s world. It’s his house. He created it. He owns it. And sin has marred the infinitely pristine creator of the world. It’s a big deal. You tell me your view of sin, and you have told me your view of God. Or even the other way. You tell me your view of God. You tell me what you think of his holiness and his majesty and I will tell you what you think of sin.

And so, the gospel is not just a suggestion, it is something to be obeyed. It is a divine edict from the Lord of glory. Repent and believe. 2 Thessalonians 1:8 says, that when the Lord Jesus returns he will come, “from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.”

But as is so often the case, for those who are called to belong to Jesus Christ, like vs. 6 says - God gives us the ability to do what he has commanded us to do. Bowing our knee is what is demanded of us. Allegiance. Surrender. A hearts devotion towards God. And yet, how do we do that? How do hard impenitent sinners do that? It’s grace friends!

Not only did we not deserve Jesus to die on the cross for us. We also do not deserve God the Holy Spirit to convict us of sin and show us the savior. The gospel says, repent! And God the Holy Spirit works through preachers to grant repentance.

“And a servant of the Lord must not be quarrelsome, but he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, and forbearing. He must gently reprove those who oppose him, in the hope that God may grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth” (2 Timothy 2:25).

God grants repentance. How amazing is that? The longer and longer I have been a Christian, the more and more I have come to realize that obedience is not so much me doing. But more God doing in me and through me.

Oh, it’s us doing, indeed it is, we need to bow our knee. Every day we need to. But it’s so much more than that. It’s God doing. God calls us to repent. He commands us to repent. And then he grants repentance. What love! What amazing love.

We could never out mine or out plumb the depths of the gospel. In that one word. Gospel. Is all the riches of the whole Bible contained. The Bible is the story of God. More specifically, it’s the story of redemption that comes from God.

It’s the story of a great king, that comes to rescue his bride. It’s the story of God’s mission to Without the gospel, the Bible is just a series of random stories, that seemingly don’t connect and in all actuality, have no point. The gospel is the central theme of the Bible.

Every central theme. Every central, most important message and concept of the Bible converge in the gospel. The glory of God converges in the gospel. The covenantal love of God for his chosen people converges in the gospel. The kingdom of God converges in the gospel. It all does.

God and all that he is doing and all that he is is most clearly seen and he is most ultimately glorified, in the gospel. This is God’s mission and purpose, and central driving force, from the beginning of time. Revelation 13:8 says that Jesus was the lamb slain before the foundation of the world.

The glue that holds the hold Bible together is God’s plan that he made amongst himself to save a people for himself. In Acts chapter 2 vs. 23, the King James, it’s called the determinate counsel. In Christianese we call the covenant of redemption.

God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit - the Eternal Father, never was a time when he was not the Father, and the Eternal Son, never was a time when he was not the Son and the Eternal Spirit, never was there a time when he was not the Spirit - made an agreement – an eternal covenant to save a people as their very own possession.

You can see it in the Bible so clearly laid out. It is the Father who chooses. It is the son who dies for and purchases. It is the Spirit who calls and seals. All three members of the Godhead working together as one - in one accord. With one purpose. One plan. One mission. What a glorious the gospel is!

Skip on down to verse 16 of Romans 1.

And then vs. 16 --- ‘For I am not ashamed of the gospel,” Paul writing to these Roman Christians, hoping to encourage them, to impart some spiritual gift. Roman believers. Roman Coliseums. You get the picture. A small band of believers. And they are living amongst the largest and most powerful nation in the world. It might be really easy for them to be ashamed of the gospel. Can you imagine being thrown into the coliseum to fight lions or being burned at the stake for show while thousands watched on in enjoyment.

Yes friends, we don’t understand much of the hardship of being a Christian where we are at. Maybe that’s a good thing. But even in our day we can get ashamed. But why? What is so shameful about the gospel?

Well, in human standards. If you think about it. There is nothing appealing. The gospel literally goes against everything, we as people are naturally inclined to. The gospel tells us that we are such spiritual failures that the only way to gain salvation is for it to be given to us.

This is offensive to people who want to pat themselves or to think their decency somehow gives them an advantage. Yet, it goes a step further, not only are we such spiritual failures that salvation had to be given to us, but the only way it could be given to us, is that the Son of God had to die for us.

This is offensive to our self-worth and the idea that man somehow has this spark of good in him. No, my friends, in and of ourselves, we have no spark of good in us. Think about it, the only hope for our salvation is the death of the only begotten son of God.

This is also offensive to the idea that somehow any nice person anywhere can find God in his or her own way. We don’t like losing our ability to make our own decisions and do things our way. The gospel tells us you can’t do things your own way, there is only one way, and that is through Jesus Christ.

We don’t like our freedom to be limited. We want there to be many saviors. We want to be our own savior. We want to be the captains of our own fate and the masters of our own destiny. And the gospel comes along and says too bad, you can’t be. You want to go your own way, you will not be a master of anything. But instead will be a slave to your own sinful desires. Carried about by your passions, not in control of anything.

The gospel also tells us that our salvation was accomplished by Jesus’ suffering and serving not by his conquering and destroying, and that following him means to serve with him. Who in our day wants to follow a servant? Or worse yet, be a servant.

Even we who are Christians often like the idea of being more than conquerors but don’t so often like the idea of how we are to conquer. “In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us” says Romans 8:37. In all the things mentioned in verses 35 and 36. Through tribulation, distress, persecution.

famine, nakedness, danger or sword, “As it is written: “For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.”

Oh, how we like the idea of being children of God but don’t so much like what all that entails. We might like the idea of having a savior who was crucified for us. We like being adopted into the family of God. Maybe it hasn’t hit us so hard that we are in and of ourselves morally bankrupt but more look at it as, wow, look how amazing I am that Jesus thought it was worthwhile to die for me. I am not saying you are not amazing.

But if first and foremost you look at that way. Yeah. I am all that. Of course, Jesus died for me. How could he not? You don’t know what grace is. I am telling you, there is nothing you can point to in yourself for the reason that God loves you. The reason is an extension of who he is, not who you are.

But despite all that. That’s for you to wrestle with. Many of us get the idea of Jesus being crucified for us and suffering the wrath of God in our place. But we don’t like the idea of following a crucified savior. Because where does that take you. It takes you to a place of suffering with him. It takes you to place of denying yourself. It takes you to a place that this world and this life you are living right now is not supposed to be all about you. Your comforts, your safety, your fun.

We too often think about things like - how is this going to benefit me. Instead of how is this going to benefit God’s mission? There is a modern Christian song I just love, though I have never heard it on the radio before for some reason, called. If you want an easy life, don’t follow Jesus.

And it’s true. Where do you see in the Bible that Jesus called anyone anywhere to the easy life? Oh, the abundant life and one filled with joy. But not because it is easy. Or because it is filled with stuff we would naturally want anyway if we were not Christians. And this is what I am getting at. We like the first part. But sooner or later those who have identified with Christ are going to suffer, not just because we live in a fallen world filled with sin, though that is true, suffering is just part of this world.

But sooner or later you are going to suffer specifically because you are following Jesus. Sooner or later your identity in Christ is going to bump up against the identity of the world. And you will suffer. And you will conquer. The gospel will have victory. If you are a Christian you will prevail. But it will cost you.

We follow a crucified savior. A suffering servant. Therefore, we must serve. And we must suffer. We can’t always take the path of least resistance or always choose the better of two evils. Sometimes we have to say, come what may, we are going to be faithful to God and if that means suffering and hardship then so be it.

That is offensive. And it could be something to be easily ashamed of. But Paul says, he is not ashamed of the gospel. What say you? Are you ashamed of the gospel? v 16 says “it is the power of God unto salvation”.

It is words with Power, filled with lots of implications. Paul is saying that the gospel is not merely an idea. In the gospel, words and power come together. Ten chapter later, vs. 17 of chapter 10, Paul goes on to talk about how gospel power is transferred. He says, “Faith comes by hearing and hearing... and hearing by the words of Jesus.

The message of the gospel is what God has done and will do for us. Paul says that the gospel is therefore a power. He doesn’t say it brings power or has power, but that it actually is power. The gospel message is actually the power of God.

When it is outlined and explained, or reflected upon, its power is released. Maybe a poor illustration but an illustration it is. If you think about a chili pepper or a jalapeño, outwardly it seems to be cold ... I mean if you touch the pepper, it is cold, not hot to the touch but once you crunch it with your teeth, you experience the sensation of burning fire. It’s full of sensational power. The burning might even bring tears to your eyes.

In the same way, the gospel can appear at first like an interesting idea. But if we take it in personally, and chew on it, meditate on it, we find it is full of power. As the Psalmist says “oh, taste and see that the Lord is good! Blessed is the man that takes refuge in Him” (Psalm 34:8).

As the year comes to a close and the new year is about to begin. Don’t lose this. Don’t just be after all the beautifully mundane things of life. Live your life with the very thing that made you a child of God as the center.

Jesus once told a story of a rich man who had all kinds of wealth, so he built up bigger barns in which to store it all. And that night he died and was told his soul was required of him. Oh, how stupid it is, to gain the whole world and lose your soul.

Why do you think Solomon talked like he did in the book of Ecclesiastes? Because without knowing God through Jesus Christ, everything is useless and vain. We must fear putting anything else in your life, in a more important place than him.

Because of the gospel, we are free to not live inward focused lives that rob and destroy and cheat and suck the life out of us. But rather because we have everything. In Jesus Christ all the godhead fully dwells. We have all riches. We are set in heavenly places. We have eternal life. We are pardoned and forgiven forever. Because of all that and so much more. We have everything.

Therefore, we are free to risk it all. Because we can’t lose any of it. And if we do. Jesus says we will get back whatever we have given up in way larger quantities. Mark 10:29, “Jesus said, “Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first.”

You want to make a good investment. Risk it all for the sake of the gospel. The gospel is so powerful because it can do what no other power on earth can do. The biggest problem that anybody has, is not that they need to be more educated, or just need a hand up, or need more money or need more friends. If you educate people better without the gospel. You got better educated sinners on their way to hell. If you get people more money without the gospel. You got more powerful sinners on their way to hell.

The biggest problem that mankind has is that we are sinners who are enemies with God. When that one central problem is taken care of, it changes everything. It changes people. It changes families. It changes societies. It changes the course of history. The gospel changes everything.

The gospel is the power of God for salvation to “everyone who believes” (v 16). Do you believe this? Let that be our new year’s resolution.

If we were to have one new year’s resolution. Let that be it. Believe the gospel! And not just in an initial first time saving way. Though, I implore you with all my heart, if there be any here today who have never bowed their knee and trusted in Christ, I pray you do it today.

But also, those of us, who have already trusted in Christ, let us not just leave it there. Let us press on. Let us believe the gospel for all that it is. Let us be whole souled gospel people. Living it, breathing it and dreaming it. Mulling over every detail of it to see how it affects every aspect of our lives.

Jesus Christ is about reconciling all things to himself. Let’s make it our resolution to believe that this year.