

News for the New Year

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, can you believe it's 2022? I mean, where has the time gone? Who's hoping that this year will be a bit better than the previous two? Who's not sure?
- It would be nice to have some good news this year, wouldn't it? Like the good news of Ash Barty winning the Australian Open. I don't know if you saw that match last night. It was pretty awesome.
- But I wonder what sort of news you're hoping to hear this new year. Some of you may have heard that we ran out of chicken recently. The shops was bare with chicken.
- And on the next slide, even KFC had to limit its menu because it ran out of chicken. And so for those who love their KFC, perhaps the news that chicken is back is the news they're hoping to hear this year.
- Or more seriously, with Russia still poised on the Ukraine border, perhaps it's the news that they've decided to retreat, as it were. That would be good news to hear, wouldn't it?
- [1 : 0 8] Or for all of us, that COVID has been cured and exists no more. Now that would be good news to hear, worth hearing this year. What news would be worth hearing for you this new year?
- Well, I want to suggest that the gospel is still the best news worth hearing this new year. The word gospel itself just means news, although we know it as good news.
- That's predominantly how it's used in the New Testament. In the Old, it's used for bad and good news. But why is it still the best news worth hearing this year?
- Why should we concern ourselves with it yet again? Why is it worth sharing even while COVID is continuing?
- Well, I've got four reasons. They're in your outline. It's either on the back of your reading or it's in the bulletin. Either way, please yourself. But have a look at the Bible, though.
- [2 : 1 0] So, first reason, because it's divine news. Verse 1 and 2. Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God.
- The gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures. Now, we'll come back to Paul in a moment. But did you notice it's called the gospel of God?
- It's God's gospel. It's God's news. It belongs to him and is from him. He is the source of this news.
- And we all have our preferred news source, whether it's ABC or Sky News, The Age or The Australian. And we tend to tune in to those sources we trust or listen to those sources that carry more weight for us.
- Well, how much more so when the source is God himself? Is he not the most trustworthy source? Ought he not carry the most weight for us?
- [3 : 1 7] I notice in verse 2, this gospel has been promised long ago through the prophets in the Old Testament. So, this gospel is not some last-minute news you're not sure is real or not.

I like this piece of old TV news. I don't know if you can see the headline down the bottom there, but it says, President Obama, I'm going to get something to eat. That's the headline breaking news.

I don't know if it's real or not. I don't know if this is fake news or real news. If it's real, they're pretty desperate, aren't they? Either way, God's news is not some last-minute breaking news you're not sure is real or not.

No, this has been carefully planned and promised. And so, this is divine news, news from God, promised by God through the prophets of God.

And that alone makes it news we ought to hear above any other news this year, wouldn't it? But it's also personal news, point two.

[4 : 21] And it's personal in two ways. At first, it's about a person. So, verse 3, the gospel, which is regarding or about his son, who as to his earthly life was a descendant of David.

You see, this news is regarding or about a person, and not any old person, but it's centered on God's own son, who is also the king.

And that's what it means to be a descendant from King David. It means you are one of God's chosen kings. A king who was supposed to save God's people from their enemies and help God's people live God's way.

The problem was, all those kings from David's line died, didn't they? So, what makes God's son the king?

Well, it's that he rose, verse 4. And who through the spirit of holiness was appointed or declared the son of God in power.

[5 : 30] How? By his resurrection from the dead. Jesus Christ, our Lord. You see, the son in verse 3 refers to the divine son, God's own son.

But the phrase in verse 4, son of God, actually was another title for the chosen king. Every king from David's line was actually called a son of God.

But verse 4 says that Jesus is appointed to be the son of God in power. In other words, he is declared to be the king from David's line.

Because unlike every other king in David's line, he didn't stay dead. He rose. His resurrection declares him to be the son of God in power, the king.

Which is why Paul ends verse 4 by saying, Jesus Christ, our Lord, the king. So, the gospel is personal because it's about the person of the son.

[6 : 41] It's centered on the son who is the king, the Lord. But it's also personal because that has implications for every person in this room and online and in the world.

You see, if Jesus is the king, if he is our Lord, then he has a claim over our lives, doesn't he?

This news is personal for us. For all people, everyone is to believe in and obey Jesus.

For Jesus Christ, our Lord, he is. Which is why Paul's job is to call all people to believe and obey Jesus as Lord.

Verse 5. Through Christ, we received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith for his name's sake.

[7 : 49] Through Christ, on the road to Damascus, actually, you might remember, Christ called Paul and gave him the job of being an apostle.

Christ called Paul and gave him the apostle to the Gentiles, the non-Jews. And his job, notice, was to call all Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith.

Which means calling them, firstly, to have faith in Jesus. To believe he really did die to save us from our enemies of sin and death.

That we might be made right with God, with life eternal instead. And to believe that he really did rise from the dead, declaring he is Lord.

Paul's job is to call people to believe in Jesus as their king who saves. And so much so, they live out their faith in obedience.

[8 : 49] And obeying Jesus, by the way, is actually for our good. People, even non-Christians, still quote Jesus' teaching.

I mean, have you heard people, I've seen it in movies, people quote the golden rule, for example. You know, do the others as you would want them to do to you. That people know, even if they don't know it's from Jesus, that that teaching is for our good.

But notice why we are to obey Jesus in verse 5. It's not for our good, end of verse 5.

It's for his name's sake. To honour Jesus. You see, we rightly want people to believe so they can be saved.

We rightly want people to obey, including us, for our good. For their sake. But we often forget that people should believe and obey for Jesus' sake.

[9 : 52] To honour him. For he is the king who died to save. He deserves everyone's obedience.

He deserves all people's allegiance. He deserves all people's adherence. This is personal news.

News about the person of Jesus, the king who saves. Which also affects every person in the world who ought to believe and obey.

This affects every person, in fact, more than any other news. I know the news about COVID seems to have affected every person in the world.

For a cause on every person to believe it's real and get vaccinated. But there are exemptions. And the restrictions do seem to vary depending on what country or even state we live in.

[10 : 52] WA, for example. And so even that news does not affect every person the same way. Yet this news does. For it calls on every person to believe and obey Jesus.

The same way, according to his word. This is divine news. This is personal news. And this is strengthening news. Point three, verse seven.

Have a look at verse seven to 15. Paul writes, To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be his holy people. Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you. Because your faith is being reported all over the known world. God whom I serve in my spirit in preaching the gospel of his son.

Is my witness how constantly I remember you. In my prayers at all times. And I pray that now at last. By God's will.

[11 : 54] The way may be open for me to come to you. Why? Well, I long to see you. So that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong. That is that you and I may be mutually encouraged.

By each other's faith. I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that I plan many times to come to you. But have been prevented from doing so until now.

In order that I might have a harvest among you. Just as I had among all the other Gentiles. I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks. Both to the wise and the foolish. This or that is why I'm so eager to preach the gospel also.

To you who are in Rome. Notice that last verse. Paul is eager to preach the gospel. To those in Rome.

But hang on a second. Aren't those in Rome already Christian? They are, aren't they? Verse 6. They already belong to Jesus.

[12 : 55] Verse 7. They are already loved by God and called his holy people. Verse 8. Their faith is already being reported all over the known world.

And yet, verse 10. Paul still prays he can visit them. Why? Well, verse 11. So he can give them some spiritual gift that makes their faith strong.

Which is not some magical protein shake or double espresso. But verse 12. Some mutual encouragement from their common faith.

That's what will strengthen them to bear fruit for God. And in this way, verse 13. Paul will reap a harvest of fruit among them. As he strengthens them to bear the fruit of godliness and goodness for God.

After all, he is the apostle to the Gentiles, isn't he? That's his job. And so verse 14. He's obligated to all Gentiles. Whether Greeks or non-Greeks.

[13 : 57] We have both Greeks and non-Greeks at our church. And he is obligated to all Gentiles. Whether wise or foolish. We have both wise and... No, no.

We just have wise at our church. But the point is, he wants to strengthen all these Gentiles, verse 15. By preaching the gospel to them.

Even though they're already Christians. So how does that work? Is he going to just keep telling them over and over again? Jesus Christ our Lord. Jesus Christ our Lord. Until they've got it.

No. Rather, he's going to unpack the gospel for them. Help them grow in both their understanding. And appreciation of it. Let me demonstrate, if I can.

Here is a box called the gospel. I'll leave that out later. And in its simplest form, in verse 4.

[14 : 56] It says, Jesus Christ our Lord. And so we can put up the first one here like this. And... I used to be a primary school teacher.

You can take the teacher out of the classroom. You can't take the classroom out of the teacher. Sorry. So Jesus Christ our Lord. But of course, as you know, you can expand that to say more.

Who died for our sins. And then more. Which we are all guilty of. And then more.

But who rose proving he is Lord. And defeated sin and death. So we, should say, can be saved from sin and death.

Being forgiven instead. You're wondering when it's going to end. Given life eternal. Life eternal is going to have to wait.

[16 : 10] Accepted into God's family.

If we have faith in him. Or because of God's love, grace and mercy.

And so you can unpack it quite a bit, can't you? And what Paul is going to do is unpack each part so that they can understand it more.

And grow more in appreciation of it. In fact, that's what he does in the first 11 chapters of Romans. He unpacks all those things. Like how it's faith alone that gives us assurance.

Chapter 4 of Romans. Or just how great God's love for us is. Chapter 5 of Romans. And that chapter 8. Nothing can separate us from God's love. And so on. Paul's going to unpack the gospel.

[17 : 23] But he's still going to stick with the gospel. Because he knows the spirit doesn't just use the gospel news. To save non-Christians. The spirit also uses it to strengthen us Christians.

So it points in the rest of the letter. Paul reminds them of different parts of the gospel. To strengthen them to live as Christians. For example, in chapter 12. He says, in view of God's mercy.

Here it is. It's in the gospel. And he says, in view of God's mercy. Let that strengthen to offer your bodies as living sacrifices. Or on the next slide.

In chapter 15. He says, accept one another then. Just as Christ accepted you. Here it is. Accept it in the family. It's in the gospel. He appeals to the gospel. And lets that strengthen them.

To accept one another. And on it goes. When he visits. He'll no doubt spend time helping them. Not just to understand it. But to ponder it.

[18 : 19] And appreciate it more and more. Because it takes time. To really appreciate the depth. Of these profound truths. And so for example. If you need strength.

To love others. Then hear afresh of God's love. For you in this gospel news. Now take time to ponder. Just how deep the Father's love for us is. That no matter what you've done in life.

God still loves you. Pretty extraordinary really. Given how we've sometimes treated him. Or think of that most annoying person in your life.

We all have one. Okay. Think of that most annoying person in life. Whether a neighbor or a colleague. Or a politician dare I say. And ponder how much you'd have to love them. To die for them.

Or to give your loved one to die for them. Take a moment for that to sink in. How much would you have to love them to do that.

[19 : 22] And then once you realize that. Realize that that is only a drop. In the seed. Of God's love for you and me. Hear afresh the gospel truth.

And take time to ponder it. Let that truth. Then strengthen you. To love others in this case. That's how it works.

Which means. We need to do all we can. To keep hearing it. And helping others do the same this year. Whether that's by tuning in to online services. Or joining a Bible group.

If you can. We're hoping to have the list up next week. Or whether it's reading the Bible for ourselves. Why not take the rest of this term one until Easter. To read through the rest of Romans.

We've done the first passage together today. And ponder afresh these profound truths. Or whether it's helping others to hear it by serving at church in some way.

[20 : 20] Like you know welcoming people. So they're happy to come and hear. Or teaching it to people. Like with kids church. Or sharing some aspect of it with someone in conversation after church.

Or continuing to pray. For a particular person or ministry. If you can't do any of those things. Our prayer night actually is next week. We're to do all we can to keep hearing.

And helping others to hear this news. This year. And it also means. Coming to church when you can. After all Paul longs to see them.

Verse 11 and 12. But it's harder to be mutually encouraged. By one another's faith. If we don't meet with. One another. Isn't it? Now yes COVID complicates things.

So we leaders. Need to keep doing what we can. To provide a safe environment for you. I like continuing to make some services. With predominantly vulnerable. Vax only.

[21 : 23] And I'll be writing another letter this week. To talk about that. But you also need to be sensible. About your own situation. And loving to others. Like getting the booster.

If you can. Or if you have symptoms staying away. Or if you're vulnerable. And live with vulnerable people. Then perhaps staying away longer. But we're not to use COVID.

To excuse undue fear. Or laziness. Like saying on a sunny day. I will go to the beach. Instead of church. Because the beach is outside. So it's safer. Is that the real reason?

Or I'll go to my extended family's get together for a few hours. But I'll keep clear of my church family for one hour. Even though both families have been out in the world.

Or I'm vaxxed and boosted. But I'll never leave my home. Even though we did during flu season. Every other winter. Perhaps even without the flu vaccine. We're to be wise.

[22 : 21] Not foolish. For our situation. COVID still exists. Still out there. But we're to be faithful. Not fearful. Vaccines do make a difference. And we're to be loving.

Not lazy. Doing what we can. To help us and others hear the gospel. And so as I've always done. Let me give you one biblical principle. To help you decide what to do.

So later on in Romans chapter 14. He says everything that does not come from faith is sin. In this context. Faith is what we believe pleases God.

When it comes to what to eat. Or what days are sacred. That's chapter 14 of Romans. But the principle can be applied to coming to church during COVID. So ask yourself.

Do I believe my choice is pleasing to God? The spirit still works through our conscience. And if your conscience is clear. Then rightly stay away. Because you know that's the loving thing to do.

[23 : 17] That's okay. But if your conscience is pricked. And you're thinking actually. It's a bit of an excuse. Not a reason. Then perhaps you ought to come. Either way ask.

Do I believe my choice is pleasing to God? But the point is. This news is strengthening news. So we're to do all we can this year. To keep hearing it. And helping others inside the church.

To hear it too. And finally and more briefly. It's also saving news. Verse 16. For I'm not ashamed of the gospel. Because it is the power of God.

That brings salvation to everyone who believes. First to the Jew. And then to the Gentile. For in the gospel. The righteousness of God is revealed. A righteousness that is by faith.

From first to last. Just as it is written. The righteous will live by faith. Now Paul is unashamed of this gospel. Because as it says. It's God's power to save.

[24 : 14] It's the way God makes people Christians. For this news reveals the righteousness of God. That is how to be right with God. With life eternal.

And it's by faith. We're told. From first to last. Just as the prophets like Habakkuk. Foreshadowed in our first reading. The righteous will live by his faith.

But the point here is. This is saving news. This is the way God saves. This is God's power to change hearts. It's not having great music. Or morning teas. As helpful and nice as they are.

It's the gospel. For the spirit works through this news. Not only to strengthen us. But to save others. And so again.

We're to do all we can this year. To help others outside the church this time. Hear this news. Whether it's by sharing yourself. With non-Christian friends or family.

[25 : 12] Or giving money to support missionaries. Who do? CMS has these cool little money boxes. That were just dropped off this week. There's a better picture on the slide.

So you can see. This is a great way. Just to you know. Take care of your loose change. Or give it to the grandkids. It's great for little kids. To learn how to promote the gospel.

By giving to gospel ministry. There's some. They come as a flat pack. Kind of thing like this. And you pop it out. And make it together. It's not too hard.

I managed it. Okay. So. Not too hard. We've got some available after church. For example. Or perhaps. It's by serving in an outreach ministry. Like ESL. Or J Kids.

Or again. If you can't do any of that. Perhaps it's committing to pray. For a particular person. Or outreach ministry. We'll do all we can. To help those outside the church. Hear this news.

[26 : 07] Unashamedly. Even if our family or friends. Think we're still bonkers. For believing it. Well. I saw this news headline. On the next slide. That says homicide victims.

Rarely talk to the police. I'm not sure. They thought about that one. Or this next one. China may be using sea.

To hide at submarines. Again. I'm not sure. They thought about that one. There is some news. That can I suggest. Is not worth hearing. But this news.

Is. The gospel. Is still the best news. Is worth hearing this year. For no other news. Is such divine news. Such personal news. Such strengthening news.

And such saving news. As this news. Let's pray. Our gracious heavenly father. We pray.

[27 : 05] That you would give us. Wisdom this year. To know. To know. To know. How we can be. Involved. In hearing. And helping others. To hear. This good news.

Depending on our own. Situation. Please help us. We pray. And never seek. To graduate. From the gospel. Onto new. Some new. Fangled teaching.

But to cling. To the gospel. And to grow deeper. In understanding it. And appreciating it. Our father. Please use. This great news.

To grow. Our church. This year. For Jesus. Sake. Amen.