

Passion for the Gospel

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Preacher: Devin Toh

[0 : 0 0] familiarity breeds contempt. When Krispy Kreme doughnuts first came to Australia in 2003, people were mesmerised.

The doughnut industry had receded into the background. I talk like there's actually industry data on doughnuts. But now Krispy Kreme were making the doughnut great again.

A thin glaze, hot out of the oven, melt in your mouth. When I first tasted my very first Krispy Kreme doughnut, I was shook. We even went all the way to Sydney just to buy this Krispy Kreme doughnut to bring it back for our friends in Melbourne.

When the first store opened in Victoria, the line was over 500 metres long just to buy a stupid doughnut. People queued for hours. People went even as far out as Nary Warren just to eat these doughnuts.

That's sacrifice. Nary Warren, wow. And sure enough, more than 50 stores opened rapidly in Australia. Profits are high. Business is booming.

[1 : 0 8] And then suddenly, the strangest thing happened. Australia officially got over the Krispy Kreme doughnut. By 2010, Krispy Kreme Australia went into voluntary administration.

Stores began to close everywhere. And although the brand has somewhat stabilised, they are a shadow of what they once were. Maybe if you're lucky at an airport at your local 7-Eleven, you might see some Krispy Kreme doughnuts.

But we all know we aren't buying any. I wonder if you can remember the first time the gospel gripped your heart.

I remember being 19 years old, reading Mere Christianity by C.S. Lewis, hearing the gospel preached for the very first time, reading the book of Romans for the very first time.

This was news so liberating, so powerful in my life, that it changed everything. So instantly, I joined a church, and I began to put my hand up for every ministry in this church.

[2 : 1 8] I was a welcomer. I handed out pamphlets. I was a Sunday school teacher. I taught the kids. I was a Bible study leader. I taught the young adults. I was even a board member. The church would later regret that decision.

I was even a singer in the music band. The church would also later regret that decision. But more than that, I wanted to share this gospel with everyone, with my friends, with my family.

I took every opportunity I had to serve and to learn. I would say that this passion characterized my early Christian walk.

But that faded. What used to be so exhilarating to me, now just feels a little blah. I wonder if you can relate.

I fear that the biggest barrier to the gospel taking root in your life is that you've heard it all before. It's so familiar now.

[3 : 19] Romans again. We just spent a whole Bible study last year going through this book. Why are we back in this book again? And now the gospel in your life maybe has been reduced to something you know you should believe, but it's something that rarely brings you to your knees.

Don't accept this as the inevitable trajectory of your faith. I believe that our passion for God, for his gospel, will drive us to do some significant things for his kingdom.

A preacher once said, you don't need to know a lot of things for your life to make a lasting difference in this world. But you do need to know a few great things and then be willing to live for them and to die for them.

That's what the apostle Paul would call the gospel of Jesus Christ. And Paul writes this book of Romans to introduce himself to a church he's never met.

And in this letter, Paul showcases his passion, his purpose in life, and his desire for his church. The gospel literally means good news.

[4 : 38] And in the Roman world, a gospel announcement heralded the birth of a new emperor or a military victory. Every other religion in the world tells you what you need to do, what you must do for God.

Only the gospel tells you what God has already done for you. It is news to rejoice in, to simply place your faith in.

So what makes the gospel good news? Firstly, in verse 2, the gospel is God's plan of salvation. Read with me. This is verse 2, the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures.

If you look on the screen, the gospel was always God's plan. From the very beginning, God promises in Genesis 3, right after humans first sinned, that a son of Eve would crush Satan's head, and though he himself would be wounded.

We know that Jesus then comes as the true son of Eve, though he was wounded, crushes Satan's head on the cross. In Deuteronomy 18, God promised to raise up a prophet just like Moses, one whom God would put his very words in his mouth.

[5 : 57] Jesus then comes as the new Moses, who speaks God's words, and leads his people out of sin, into the heavenly promised land. 2 Samuel 7, God promises that a son of David would establish an everlasting kingdom, a kingdom that would not end.

Well, Jesus is that true son of David, who rules from the cross. He's exalted as king forever. And then from the prophet Isaiah, Jesus is the suffering servant, who takes on Israel's sin, so that by his wounds, we are healed.

The Old Testament screams of Jesus. In Star Wars, when you realize that Darth Vader is Luke's father all along, that's a 38-year-old spoiler alert.

When you realize that Darth Vader is Luke's father all along, you go back, you re-watch all the movies again, but you watch it in a completely different way. It's the same with Jesus.

When you realize that all of God's plans are culminating, they're converging in his life, in Jesus' life, his death, his resurrection. It changes how you see everything.

[7 : 14] We see that the whole Bible, from start to finish, is telling one great story. From Jesus Christ concealed in the Old Testament, to Jesus Christ revealed in the New Testament.

It's all about Jesus. Secondly, this is the gospel about God's son. In verse 3, Paul says that this is the gospel regarding his son, who as to his earthly life was a descendant of David, and who through the spirit of holiness was appointed the son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord.

The gospel is not about religious principles. It's not simply about doing good. It's not even about you. It's about a person. A person who entered human history as an earthly descendant of David, who ruled as a king, not through force, not through oppression, but through humility, even to death on a cross.

But not only does Jesus die for our sins, he is raised through the power of the Spirit. So that Jesus, now we know that Jesus is no longer in humility, but he reigns in glory.

Jesus is not dead. Jesus is alive. That's why we're Christian. Paul says that the gospel is all about Jesus, his human descent, his divine authentication as Lord.

[8 : 45] You know, if Christianity is simply an ideology, if it's simply just another good idea in the marketplace, you might intellectually assent to it, it might raise your curiosity, it might raise your curiosity, but you would not love it.

But if the gospel is a person who knows you, who loves you so much that he would give his life for you, then this is someone you can love.

We're not called simply to agree with the gospel, to assent to it. We are called in verse six to belong, to belong to Jesus Christ. Studies show that we live in one of the most lonely generations ever.

The rise of social media, of technology, has bred in us a lack of intimacy, funnily enough, loneliness. And as much as we aspire for success, as much as we aspire for power and for security, what we really lack, what we really desire, is relationship.

We desire at the very core of who we are to be known. We're going as far as to even build robots now for love, for companionship.

[10 : 07] We are so lonely. So psychologists, they advise that the cure for loneliness is to meet as many people as you can over lots of cups of coffee.

True story. But the gospel goes so much further than just a cup of coffee. At the heart of a Christian message is a person to whom we belong.

We know, don't we, that we are fully known by God. He knows all of our strengths. He knows even our darkest, most humiliating moments of our life. He knows everything about you.

And yet he delights in you. The gospel calls us into relationship, into an inclusion in the family of God. This is the gospel that fuels Paul's passion.

And I want you to see that this message, the gospel is reshaping his identity and his purpose. Look at how Paul describes his identity back in verse 1.

[11 : 10] Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus. Or literally a slave of Christ Jesus. And we know that a slave has no other purpose but to serve his master.

His whole life belongs to Christ. How different is this attitude to that of our world, even in our churches, where life is all about me?

What I want? Is the music good enough here? Is the teaching good enough here? Is the Sunday school good enough for our kids? Paul flips the narrative.

He realizes that he's living in the gospel for something so much bigger than himself. And it grips him. But not only is he a slave, but in verse 1, he's called to be an apostle set apart for the gospel of God.

You know, we glaze over the fact that Paul is an apostle, a key leader of the early church. But we need to realize that for Paul to be an apostle is astounding.

[12 : 15] Paul was one of the greatest opponents of Christianity. He was a murderer of Christians. He imprisoned them. He did everything in his power to stamp this religion out.

But God changed his life. Paul became one of the most influential Christians who has ever lived. Because that is what the gospel does and continues to do.

It takes some of the greatest enemies and transforms them into its greatest supporters. And with this renewed identity, Paul, he dedicates his entire life to the preaching and living out of this gospel.

And so if you jump down to verse 8, we see a little bit of Paul's heart for the church in Rome. In verse 8, first, Paul is desperate to visit this church.

He's never visited this church before. He prays and prays that he could see them. He wants to impart a spiritual gift to make them strong, to mutually be encouraged by each other's faith.

[13 : 39] We don't know what this gift is, but the point is that he wants to come to strengthen the Roman church in their faith. And what is clear that Paul wants to, in verse 13, to reap a harvest among the Jews, sorry, among them, both Jews and Gentiles.

And that's why in verse 15, Paul is so eager, he says, to preach the gospel to the church in Rome. But why?

Why? Why would Paul be so passionate to preach the gospel to a church that already has heard it? Sure, there would be many that would continue to come to place their faith in Christ, but many of these people were already Christians.

We're talking about an established network of churches in Rome. So why come here? Why go to Rome? It's because it's not just people who aren't Christian that need the gospel, but Christians need the gospel just as much.

The message about God's plan, about God's son, is not just the message that saves us, but for Christians it's the message that keeps us saved. It grows us.

[14 : 56] You know, some people think that once we become a Christian, then we can finally move on. Teach me some better doctrine. Teach me some more practical life lessons I can use.

But we never outgrow the gospel. Keller says that the gospel is not simply the ABCs of the Christian life, but it is the A to Z of the Christian life.

We are people desperately in need to hear and re-hear, preach and re-preach the gospel to each other. That's why you come here each week at HTD and you're going to hear the same thing each week.

You're going to hear the gospel preached week after week, year after year. You're going to hear this gospel of Christ crucified because that's what we need. Paul's passion for the gospel does not fade.

he knows that Christian maturity is not moving past the gospel but going deeper into it. It's a little bit like marriage. Once you're married, you don't look for someone new.

[16 : 02] Maturing, growing in marriage is not looking for an upgrade. It's about appreciating your spouse more. It's about discovering so much about them that you may have never learnt before.

It's about loving them more deeply than you did yesterday. It's the same. CJ Mahaney, he writes this about the gospel. He says, if there's anything we should be passionate about, it's the gospel.

And I don't mean passionate about sharing it with others but passionate about thinking about it, dwelling on it, rejoicing in it, allowing it to colour the way we see our world.

Only one thing can be of first importance and only the gospel ought to be. And last, Paul gives us his reason why the gospel is his singular passion.

Because the gospel is the power of God. In Genesis 1, we see a God who speaks and the world is brought into existence.

[17 : 05] As Jesus comes to earth, we see a God who speaks and the storms are calmed instantly. In Jesus, we see a God who, with a single voice, commands the dead to rise.

Jesus says to Lazarus, get out of the tomb even though he was dead for just a few days. And in the words of the King James Bible, he stank. We see a God who demons are terrified of.

They shriek in fear as Jesus stands before them. You know, I can't stand horror movies because I'm terrified of evil spirits. I'm terrified of demons. But the Bible says that this same fear that I have is the same fear demons have when they look at the Lord Jesus.

But yet, Paul doesn't describe any of these things as God's power. verse 16. I am not ashamed of the gospel because in it the power of God for salvation for all who believe.

First for the Jew, then the Gentile. Only the gospel is described as the power of God. You know, in modern society, we've kind of worked out how to control behavior.

[18 : 24] If you want to stop someone from doing something, you slap them with rules, you slap them with punishments, to deter behavior. If you want to get someone to do something, you incentivize.

You hand out grants, you hand out tax breaks, you hand out money. But modern society with all of its progress, with all of democracy, equal rights, advancement that we have made, we have never worked out how to make people righteous.

How not just to control behavior, but to change the heart. We cannot do that. That's why the gospel is good news. The gospel is not God helps people who help themselves, but the gospel proclaims a message where God saves those who can't do anything to help themselves.

We are literally running towards hell. Grace has pulled us out, it has reconciled us back with our creator. Paul says in verse 17 that the gospel is the righteousness of God revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last.

In Christ, God has declared me righteous. He sees me as if I was perfect, as if I was perfect every day of my life. This is not just a righteousness revealed to us, but this is a righteousness that was revealed for us, for our good.

[19 : 52] Miracles cannot transform a heart. That's why they're overrated. Jesus heals, he raises the dead, he feeds 5,000. He only laments that they believe in him only because they get what they want.

Only the gospel has the power to transform our hearts completely, to change our status completely before God. A simple way to know that the gospel is really the power of God is to consider what should have been.

Think about it. If you were a God, what is the most obvious way as a God to assert your power, assert your rule over the world? Surely you come with a sword.

Surely you force everyone to submit by sheer power. You're strong. Not surprisingly, this is how some of the most powerful movements in history spread. Through power, through force.

Power at that time would have been associated with the Roman Empire. The Roman Empire was the most dominant in ancient history because it had one of the most organized, one of the most efficient military units seen in history.

[21 : 07] But it's so different from God's way. God doesn't spread his kingdom with a sword. But he wants to use the weakest means possible.

He uses words simply through preaching God's plan about God's son. The weakest way. And yet, Christianity has grown from 12 disciples into billions of followers through preaching and where Rome has just come and gone.

It no longer exists. The gospel has endured and it's not slowing down. It's booming. That's why Paul says that he's not ashamed of the gospel because this is God's means of salvation.

This is God's solution. Proclaiming Christ crucified. This is a message that Paul goes on to describe as foolishness in the eyes of the world.

The gospel is the ultimate entity in which God's power resides and does its greatest work in this world. I'm not ashamed of the gospel says Paul.

[22 : 17] You know, sometimes we think of passion as just a feeling. A feeling of excitement, of invigoration. These are good things. But passion is more.

Passion is a conviction to do whatever it takes. The reason they call Jesus' death the passion of the Christ is because Jesus suffered.

It wasn't a feeling. He was willing to suffer to save. Hebrews 12 says that for the joy set before Christ, he endured the cross.

Paul would be so passionate about the gospel that he was willing to do whatever it takes to take it to the world. And we know that for him to preach the gospel came at great personal cost.

The Jews persecuted Christians because Jesus undermined their teaching. The Romans persecuted Christians because they refused to bow to their gods. Paul would receive ridicule.

[23 : 18] He's imprisoned. He's beaten. He's stoned. He's ultimately killed. Why? Because the gospel is the power of God and he's willing to do whatever it takes.

Why do people quit six-figure salary jobs? Why do they give up their house in nice neighborhoods? Why do they fly to a third-world country just to tell people about Jesus?

It's because the gospel is the power of God. Why do people serve so joyfully at church week after week when no one notices? No one has thanked them in a long time because the gospel is the power of God.

Why do people forgive? Why do people show so much kindness to people that only hurt them so many times? Because the gospel is still the power of God.

But maybe for you, this passion that used to characterize your life is just not there anymore. And the fear you might have is that the gospel might just become another Krispy Kreme.

[24 : 26] Will your love for the gospel just fade away? If the gospel is so powerful, why does it feel so powerless in our lives? It's because we find confidence, we're finding power everywhere else but for the gospel.

people. I wonder if you can relate. We pride ourselves now as a culture on how together our lives are, how good we are, how friendly we are, how kind we are.

We have stable jobs, we have a steady income, a supportive family, a great set of friends that we can show off. And all these things, these are good things but these things lead us to believe that we got this, that we're self-sufficient, that we can finally look after ourselves.

But the funny thing is self-sufficiency increases, passion for the gospel decreases, it fades. A desire for the lost fades, affections for Christ will fade, a love for his word will fade.

My fear for us is that we become fine preachers, fine teachers of the gospel to everyone else, but terrible preachers of the gospel to ourselves.

[25 : 46] That's what I'm afraid of. That we've become so confident in ourselves that even though we might not admit it, we don't need the gospel anymore. Lisa went the other way.

One particularly failed relationship left her just feeling lonely, feeling forgotten. Lisa struggled to hold down a job. Sometimes she would experience so much social anxiety that just turning up to church was like a mountain to climb.

She experienced bouts of despair, depression, and she wondered if things would ever improve. But even with all this mess in her life, I was so amazed at the power of the gospel in her life.

she was generous with the time and the energy that she could spare. It wasn't much. She was faithful week after week, just meeting up with just one other person. That's all she could do, just one other person to encourage her, to care for her.

She had a genuine, genuine love for Christ that wasn't in your face, but it was real. She was deeply passionate for the gospel.

[27 : 00] Why? Because she knew she was weak. Christianity is not a religion for the strong. It is for the weak.

Paul says in Corinthians that he delights in weakness, because when he is weak, he is truly strong. It's the gospel that works through him, and that has the power to save.

So if you're feeling weak, don't be scared of your weaknesses. Your weakness is precisely what God will use to show the power of God. I'm not ashamed of the gospel, says Paul.

In weakness, in persecution, the gospel always thrives. Maybe you're someone that struggles with confidence. Why would anyone want to listen to me?

Why would anyone ever be interested in me? Maybe you're feeling burdened and shameful from sin. I'm too messed up.

[27 : 57] I'm just far too gone to be used. Maybe it's your health. Maybe I just don't have the energy to do what I think I need to do. Take heart, because then you're ready.

The gospel is the power of God, says Paul, not you. Through your weakness, God wants to use you to be a blessing for his kingdom. Passion starts by recognizing that Christ is our only hope, hope that nothing else can save, nothing else can put us back into relationship with God.

That's the message of hope that Paul's preaching. The gospel is the power of God. Would he imprint that deep into our hearts? Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you that your gospel is power, and that it's made powerful and manifest through our weakness.

so Lord, humble us, teach us how to be weak. Father, we ask that you would grow in us a passion, a desire for the gospel, that we would see it as our only hope, and that this would characterize how we live.

In Jesus' name, Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.