

Gospel-Centred Living

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Preacher: Andrew Reid

- [0 : 00] Now, friends, there was to be a sermon outline and I totally, totally forgot about it. If you would like one, put your hand up and Rob here will bring one to you.
- So we'll just wait for a moment. So yeah, if you like a sermon outline, if it helps you, put up your hand. Rob will make sure you get one. Yeah, split them up, otherwise.
- No more hands? Okay.
- Okay. Well, friends, what I want to do tonight is I want to begin this Bible talk at the beginning. That is, I want to begin at the beginning of the Bible.
- So I want you to open your Bibles at page one. Turn with me to Genesis one. And to give you a bit of relief tonight, this sermon is going to be a little shorter than the ones we've been having these last few weeks.
- [1 : 45] So that should help you. So let me just talk about Genesis one. Genesis one paints a picture of God at work. And out of nothingness and out of chaos, he forms things and he creates.
- And it's a wonderful picture of God at work. Systematically, he forms the various parts of his creation. Light, water and sky, land and vegetation, sun, moon and stars for light.
- Land and vegetation. And then he populates these places with things. And so he puts sun, moon and stars for light. He puts fish and birds in the water and in the sky.
- Then animals and humans for the land. And then in Genesis chapter one, verse 31, he looks upon everything that he's done. So this is up to day six. And he says, this is very good.
- That is, I think what he means is this is a good place for my purposes in my world. This is going to be a good place for those purposes to be worked out. And then Genesis two gives some shape to exactly what his purpose is.
- [2 : 49] You see, God concentrates on human beings. Humans are made to live in his presence. They're made to live in harmony with him, in harmony with each other and in harmony with the environment that he's placed them into.
- And what is the goal? Well, it's the same as God's goal. It's rest. Rest in God's presence. Rest and harmony and peace with God, their creator. That's what God wants for his world.
- He wants those humans he's made to be living with him, with each other, with the environment he's placed them in and at a place of rest and harmony. It's a wonderful, idyllic picture.
- Humans enjoying their creator in a wonderful garden full of good things from his hand. However, the picture is not without potential problems when you think about it.
- Because after all, there are two sorts of trees in the garden. One sort may be eaten, a range of them. Others, the other may not.
- [3 : 50] Just one single tree that may not be eaten from. And the presence of these two sorts of trees shows that humans have the possibility of decision. That is of choice.

They can choose God's goodwill for them by eating the good fruit, including the tree of life. Or they can choose to reject God's goodwill by eating the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

The choice is theirs. But in one sense, the potential is there for them to make choice. And humans make their choice. Mind you, with a little help from a serpent.

And they choose to determine their own future. They reject God's choice for them. And what happens is, all of a sudden, disharmony erupts. Their harmony with God is shattered.

Now they want to hide from God. And they don't want to actually be there when he comes around. Their harmony with each other is shattered. So now they want to cover up both before God and before each other.

[4 : 46] And no longer be naked together. And so on. And their harmony with the environment is shattered. Because now it produces thorns and thistles. And, you know, pregnancy is with all sorts of pain.

And the animals they're out of sync with as well. And not only that, but God casts them out of his presence at the end of chapter 3 of Genesis. Out of the garden they go.

And the cherubim stand at the gates to the garden to ensure that they don't try and come back in and eat of the tree of life. That's the end of Genesis 3. Now turn with me to Genesis 11.

We read it earlier on. So turn into Genesis 11. Now let me just tell you a little bit of what's happened between Genesis 3 and Genesis 11. Humanity has flourished outside the garden.

They've grown in number. They've begun to build cities. They've learned how to cultivate fields. They've learned how to play musical instruments. And they're getting pretty good at some of these things. They've learned how to make some wine and get a bit drunk if they need to.

[5 : 48] Evil has also flourished. And God has punished their evil with a disastrous flood. The flood of Noah. But still they are filling the earth as God set the task before them.

Now in Genesis 11 what they do is they band together on the plain of Shinar. And they effectively I think challenge God. God may have his ideas for their future.

He may have his kingdom in mind for them. But they have their own kingdom aspirations. You see look at verse 4. Genesis 11 verse 4. They will make a name for themselves.

In other words they're not happy with God to make a name for them. They will make a name for themselves. What they're saying is we don't really want to be shaped by God's desires and purposes. We'd really like to shape our own future.

We will shape our own destiny. Can you see what they're doing? They're actually repeating Genesis 3. They decide we know better than God. And they challenge God's good will for them.

[6 : 51] And God repeats the judgment of Genesis 3. He scatters them. And he confuses their language. And they babble. And he names the place Babel. Or Babel.

And in the Bible Babel becomes the city of Babylon. That great and evil city. Wherever you read about it as the Bible goes on it's not a good place. It becomes a symbol of human pride.

The sign of humans saying God we'd like to do things our own way without you. Thank you very much. The kingdom of humans pitted against the kingdom of God. So friends there's the first 11 chapters of Genesis.

Let's step back from them for a moment and reflect on what we learned from them. What have we learned from 11 chapters? Well first what do we learn about God? Well the primary thing that we learn about God is that God is a good and loving creator and king.

He is just. He is kind. He is benevolent. And his concern is of course for the humans that he's made in his world. But God's primary concern is actually for the whole world.

[7 : 59] Not just for humans in it but for the whole world. And it's harmony. God's primary concern is for this. It is that the whole world reflects his good purposes.

And that all the world is bound together in harmony. Not just humans. But humans and him. Humans and each other. Humans in the environment. And that it's a good rich place for everyone and everything.

God's primary concern is that all creation enters the rest of his presence and his rule. Now let's turn to humans. What have we learned about humans from these 11 chapters?

Well we learn that they are created for relationship with God. We learn that they were created for rest with God in God's presence. That they were made for worship and service of God.

Not as slaves but as wonderful free people loving God. But humans can't easily do this. That's what we've learned. For to do this would be to allow God to shape their future and their destiny.

[9 : 02] And they don't want that. They want to shape their own future. Their own destiny. You see to allow God to control your future means losing control of it yourself. And none of us like that terribly much.

Means losing power to create your own name for yourself. It means you've got to rest on God creating a name for you. And well he may not want to do that. And so what humans do is they replace a real God with an idol.

And the idol is who? Themselves. Friends under every idol in this world. Lies human beings.

Human beings are the ultimate idol. Human beings are saying I want to replace God and his purposes with me and my purposes. The kingdom of God becomes supplanted by the kingdom of humanity.

So that's our introduction. Now we need to flip to the other end of the Bible. So go with me to Revelation please. This has all been just introduction for our passage tonight.

[10 : 04] Where these ideas are going to be picked up. Now our passage tonight comes from Revelation 14. Now I don't have to tell you that the book of Revelation is different from nearly every other book in the Bible.

John Calvin, I think it's the only one he didn't write a commentary on. So even he was a bit stumped by it. So the book of Revelation is very different. It's got lots of images in it.

It speaks in images and numbers and colours. It's about humans and human destiny. And it talks about it in weird ways. With wonderful creatures, angelic beings, trumpets, cities, whores and horrors.

It's got the whole deal in it. It's a book about reality though. It's not a book about a picture world. It's a book about how the world really is. And it uses all these images and these portraits and what amount to sort of political cartoons.

To tell us what humans are like. And what God is doing in his world. So let me set the context. Open your Bibles at Revelation 12. I'm going to take a very quick skim through two chapters.

[11 : 10] So just bear with me and stick with me. So chapter 12 sets the context for chapter 14. And it's important you follow in your Bibles. Revelation 12 tells the story of a woman.

And it tells us that this woman, she's grand. She's got crowns. And she really is a very special woman. And she's pregnant. And she's in pain with childbirth.

And verse 5 tells us that the child that she is bearing, that is about to be born, will be a king. And that his birth will not be without difficulty. After all, verses 3 and 4, can you see them there, tell us that there is a great red dragon sort of crouched over her.

Ready to devour the child as soon as it's born. And if you look at verse 9, you get the identity of this dragon. It's the devil or Satan. And his threat is a very real one.

But verse 5 tells us that the child is whisked away. Now, the child is clearly Jesus. Satan opposed his ministry. Then he died. He rose from the dead. And he ascended to the throne of God, just as he does here.

[12 : 15] And God provides shelter and refuge for the rest of this woman's children, which I take it is the people of God. And then war breaks out in heaven. And Satan is thrown down to the earth.

And now look at the final verse of chapter 12. The dragon turns his focus away from the child to elsewhere. He turns his focus to the people of God.

That is, to those who hold the testimony of Jesus. And as he looks for a focus, he takes his stand on the sand of the seashore. And he looks across at what his future target might be.

He looks across the sea. And from this vantage point, he draws out two great beasts. It seems from John's description that anyone in the first century who heard what was about to happen had no trouble identifying the first beast.

The first beast came out of the sea, and it is the Roman Empire. It also represents every other secular and totalitarian power throughout all history. And it draws its power from the evil one.

[13 : 26] It is proud. It's resilient. It's blasphemous. It's despotic. It's cruel. It wages war on the people of God who believe in Jesus.

Friends, we have such people in our world today. It wages war against those who believe in Jesus. And the people of the world bow and they worship before this despotic ruler.

And then in verse 11 comes a second beast. The first one, well, it arose out of the sea. This one is an earth beast. It arises out of the earth. Elsewhere in Revelation, he's called the false prophet.

If you want to note down some verses, chapter 16, verse 13 calls him the false prophet. And his role is to deceive. So this beast who comes out of the earth is a deceiver.

So now we have a trinity of evil. Satan, the one behind them all. The sea beast. And the earth beast, the false prophet.

[14 : 26] And the deceptive earth beast uses, marshals all sorts of powerful signs and tricks in order to cause people to worship the sea beast. And finally, we get to chapter 14.

And we're introduced to the lamb again. And this time he has company. A hundred and forty four thousand of them. Now, just so you know this, those of you who know maths will, what's the number?

It's 12 squared by? By 10 cubed, isn't it? So if you get all of that, yeah. So if you get all of that, it's the people of God, 12 squared, rounded out and filled up, okay, into a whole number.

So it probably represents all of the people of God. Those who belong to the lamb. They're redeemed. And if you read on, you'll find they're pure and they're blameless. They have not bowed the knee or given worship to the false beasts of chapter 13 and that evil trinity.

And then we come to our passage for tonight. Now, we are on the home straight, I need to tell you. So just in case you're getting worried at this point. Okay, and it is going to be a long, no, it's going to be shorter tonight.

[15 : 38] So have a look at the verse. We read this. Then I saw another angel flying in midheaven with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth, to every nation and tribe and language and people.

And he said in a loud voice, Fear God and give him glory for the hour of his judgment has come and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water. Now, the first thing I want you to notice is the word gospel there.

Let me tell you, this is the only time that that word occurs in the book of Revelation. The verb for gospeling occurs one other time outside of this verse.

However, this is the only time the noun is used. So the only time the word gospel is used in Revelation. Second thing I want you to notice is where the announcement comes from. Can you see it there?

It comes from an angel flying in midheaven. Let me tell you what I think that means. I think it means it comes from the highest point you can go where it's possible to reach the largest number of people.

[16 : 38] I think that's what midheaven means. So you can really proclaim it. It's the best place to broadcast your message. Third, I want you to notice to whom it is addressed. It is addressed to all who live on earth, every nation, tribe, language and people.

That's a way of saying everyone. That is addressed to everyone. It is universally applicable. It is for everyone. Now, there's some debate about this, but my view is that this represents a final gospel call to the people of the world.

This is their last chance. If they do not hear this and repent, they are in trouble. So, the only reference to the gospel in the book of Revelation.

We've had the gospel announced so the world can hear it. What it amounts to is a final chance for the people of the world. Now, let's have a look at the content of the gospel that the angel proclaims.

Look at verse 7. And as you look at it, I want you to ask yourself a question. What special characteristics are present and what are missing?

[17 : 41] So, here we go. The angel says to all the world, remember what I want you to listen for? What is present and what is missing? Fear God and give him glory.

For the hour of his judgment has come. And worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water. Now, think of every gospel message you have ever heard.

Now, every preacher who said this is what God is about in his world. Think of all the gospel outlines you might know. And tell me, in this little gospel outline, what is present?

Well, firstly, there's a call to fear God and give him glory. That's good and healthy, isn't it? That amounts to a call to repent. Stop doing what you're doing and do something else. In other words, the world is to turn away from the false trinity of chapter 13.

They are to honor and respect the true God. So, that's turning away and turning to. That's common gospel message. Second, there's a statement that God is going to judge the world.

[18 : 44] Presumably, he's going to judge the world for its sin and worship of false gods. Third, there's a call to acknowledge that God is the creator of the world. Again, very good gospel.

If you read Acts, you'll find that as soon as you speak to Gentiles, you tell them God's the creator of the world. Four, implicit in the call, is that if you don't repent, if you do repent, salvation is possible and possible now.

And fifthly, the gospel is called an eternal gospel. In other words, it's perpetually valid, permanently valid. It's for everyone and you can access it anytime.

Now, so that's what's present. Now, what do you reckon is absent? Stop for a moment. I'm just going to give you about 10 seconds to think about it. What is absent? That is, if you heard a normal gospel outline, what's not here?

Listen to it again. I'll read it to you again. And think to yourself, what is missing here? If I, you know, if I had an evangelist here and they were preaching the gospel, what's missing?

[19 : 52] The eternal gospel in midheaven is this. Fear God and give him glory for the hour of his judgment has come and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water. Did you notice what's missing?

There's a number of things missing. There's no mention of Jesus. Now, that's striking, isn't it? For a gospel, no mention of Jesus. Second, there's no mention of his atoning death.

It's not all that uncommon because sometimes in Acts, the preachers in Acts don't mention the atoning death. Third, there's no explicit offer of salvation. Now, all of those things have been mentioned elsewhere in Revelation, but they're not mentioned here.

But what I want you to notice is it's very much like what Jesus himself says when he first starts his preaching message. So if this is the last gospel announcement, what was the first one?

Well, the first one when Jesus first started his ministry in Mark chapter 1, verses 14 and 15 is this. The time is fulfilled. The kingdom of God has come near.

[21 : 02] Repent and believe in the good news. Believe the gospel. So it's very much like how Jesus starts his ministry. Friends, I wonder if you can see what's going on here. In chapter 12, God establishes his kingdom.

The devil sees that his days are numbered. So he attacks humans at their weak spot. That is, he attacks them where they're vulnerable. Now, where are humans most vulnerable?

Well, God made us for worship. We are so constructed by God that we must worship. That's why every culture on earth worships.

But we are so like Adam and Eve, aren't we? We're like the tower builders in Genesis 11. We don't like to yield our own will to God's will.

We just do not like handing over control to God. We like our own kingdoms instead of being dependent on our creator. And so what do you reckon Satan and his cohorts are going to do?

[22 : 05] Well, they're going to sell us a lie. They're going to tell us that we can indeed worship a God of human construction. We can have a kingdom of humanity headed by a human being instead of the kingdom of God.

We can indeed worship the creature instead of the creator. That's what's going on in chapter 13. And the great mass of humanity in chapter 13 is sucked in. They do a Bible again.

They say, this looks good because we can avoid God this way. And in verses 6 and 7 of chapter 14, God tells us there is an eternal gospel truth you need to comprehend.

And that eternal gospel truth is that all opposition to God will be eventually squashed. Look at chapter 14, verse 8.

God tells the world, Babylon is ended. Now what does that mean? Every attempt to supplant God's rule with human rule has ended.

[23 : 08] It is gone. Finished. I have done away with the Babylons of this world. That is, I have made an end to all human and all demonic kingdoms.

Prince, take this on board. That's what God is saying. Take this on board. Repent. Fear God and give him glory. For the hour of judgment is coming. This is the end.

No more opportunities. Worship the true and living God, the one who made you in all the earth. And the way you do this is by putting your faith in Jesus. Friends, the gospel, I think, has been proclaimed since the Garden of Eden.

It's just not as clearly as perhaps we would have liked. It is an eternal gospel. And it is this. God created the universe.

And he created us for worship of him. And because God created us, he owns us. And he has a goal for us and his world.

[24 : 06] And that goal has him, that goal has him and his son at its center. God's goal is to sum up all things together under Christ.

Nothing can stop God's goal. So let me see what I can do to apply this to two groups of us here tonight. And then we'll wrap up. First, I want to speak to you, to those of you here tonight who are not Christians.

If you are not a Christian tonight, then I want to plead with you to give up your independence. God has a great goal for his world and for you.

And that goal is to bind you together with him to eternal life, in eternal life. However, if you resist him and replace him with false gods, then hear this from him.

You will not be able to stand. Please turn back to him. Please put your trust in Jesus and what he's done for you on the cross. Please line up with God's purposes by trusting in Jesus.

[25 : 11] Fear God and give him glory. Please. Please worship the God who made you and me and everything that exists. And if you need some help with this, then come and talk to me or Jono or one of the leaders here.

But if you're not Christian and you haven't feared God and given him glory and believed in his son, you need to. Please do. Second, I want to speak to those of you who are Christians.

I want to do this by getting you to turn to the very last page of the Bible. Very last page. In fact, it's split into two pages here on my version.

So, well, you can find it. I don't need to tell your page numbers, do I? You can work it out for yourself. You just look to the last page. It's easy. Here's a picture of God's purposes. This last chapter, picture of God's purposes.

Now, I want you to notice no Babylon. Babylon's gone, just as God said it would be. Instead, there's a garden city. God's alternative. God's kingdom alternative. And God the Father is there.

[26 : 12] You can see that in the first few verses. And the Lamb is there. That is, God the Son is there. See, it's God the Father. God the Son. Present in this great city.

But it's a garden city. And it's a garden city and the tree of life is there. And here is God's plan for his world. Harmony and life in his presence.

Harmony and life in the presence of his Son, Jesus. As verse 14 says, If you have washed your robes in the blood of the Lamb, then you'll be there. But now I want you to look at verse 17.

I've only found this verse. Well, I've read it so many times, but not realized what is going on. It is an absolutely astounding verse. You see, in verse 17, remember, we've already heard of God the Father.

We've already heard of God the Son. And now the Spirit speaks. That is, the whole Trinity speaks. That is, we have heard from all three persons of the Godhead.

[27 : 18] And they are joined, well, the first two, and they're joined by the Spirit. And I want you to see what the Spirit says. And that Spirit, the whole Trinity, is joined by the Church.

And they echo the invitation to everyone who hears. And they say, And the Bride and the Spirit say, Come.

See, friends, this is our role in the world. It is to speak the double-edged word of the Gospel. On the one hand, tell people to repent, just as we do in Revelation 14.

But Revelation 17 gives us the other side. It says, Offer the invitation, as we'll say to everyone, Come. And you notice it's the Church doing that, along with the Spirit.

We're also to offer a word of invitation. God the Father, God the Son, And God the Holy Spirit, And we the Church, Urge people to come in. That is, We preach the Gospel.

[28 : 20] We say, Come. Friends, Let us be this sort of Church. And may it be that many who are thirsty, Come. And may God bless us, That many, Through our witness here at Holy Trinity, Take the water of life as a gift.

Because that's what we're for. Let's join with the Spirit and say to the world, Come. For if you do, you will avoid that horrifying day of the Lord.

Let us pray. Let us pray. Father, thank you, That the day of the Lord, As we trust in Jesus, Will not be a horrifying day, But will be a day of great grandeur, As we meet with you, And with your Son, And bound together by your Spirit, And bound together as the whole people of God.

Father, please help us not to build our own kingdoms, Like the builders on the plain. Help us not to set ourselves against you, But help us to fear you, And love your Son.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.