

Gospel Joy and Sorrow

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[0 : 0 0] the gospel of course is good news and the gospel is what the book of Romans is all about here's the thing I want us to think about today how the gospel gives us both joy and sorrow now that might seem a strange thing to say but I hope you'll see what I mean when we look through because as we move from chapter 8 in the book of Romans into chapter 9 where Paul starts to address a different subject if you like which is the way in which many people in his day particularly the Jews he's going to talk about don't believe the gospel he moves from the joy the kind of overflowing joy of the end of chapter 8 into his own personal sorrow at the fact that they don't believe the gospel now I want us to see how that works and what Paul says about that and I want us to see how that might in fact affect us and change our own hearts and minds as well first of all joy

Paul you may or may not know was radically changed by the gospel so he's somebody who previously didn't believe the gospel and didn't in fact want anything to do with it apart from to stamp it out so if you think about that for a moment and remember it Paul a Jew by birth by belief met Jesus or we should say Jesus met him and radically changed his life and now Paul's life is all about the gospel he's all in on the gospel he's he's not just kind of mildly different he doesn't just think it's okay and improves his life a little bit and he's not doing this uh going around preaching the gospel and actually suffering an awful lot of hardship with his arm kind of twisted it's not like he's saying oh okay then I'll speak about the gospel I was reading the paper last week and I was reading about a senior civil servant somebody who helps administer government policies and the funny thing was that the the article was all about how he did his job we could say under duress particularly when he had to implement policies that came as a result of Brexit now whatever you think of Brexit that's not my point the point is he really didn't believe in Brexit but he had to implement policies that were as a result of

Brexit so he did his job with grinding his teeth as it were thinking I I really don't agree with this but okay then I'm going to have to do it now that's not like Paul Paul has been changed has been made a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ and he he continually overflows with love and joy because of Jesus he's all in he has no reservations I want to just give you a bit of a survey of the book of Romans and if you like 10 bullet points they give us a picture of what happens over the course of the book of Romans you don't have to turn to these I just want to read them out and help you reflect on the way in which the whole letter up until this point has been an unfolding of the goodness of the gospel let me start in Romans 1 verse 16 Paul writes I am not ashamed of the gospel because it's the power of God for salvation now it's interesting that he says I'm not ashamed of it because presumably he maybe knows some people who were ashamed of it it might be that people were thinking Paul you're getting a load of grief for being a Christian and for going around talking about the gospel and maybe like we could feel in our own day if we find ourselves in our community or in our workplace or whatever as the only Christian in the room it might be tempting for us to be a bit ashamed of the gospel and Paul says no way

I'm not ashamed of the gospel because it's the power of God for salvation and he goes on a couple of verses later to say this he says the wrath of God is revealed against all unrighteousness now that might seem like not a joyful thing to say but what Paul's saying is in the face of unrighteousness or we could say sin or we could say badness which however we think of it every human being is affected by it says that God is angry at that too God will deal with all of the badness in the world and then he goes on in verse in chapter three rather to say this about this unrighteousness the righteousness of God has been revealed against all unrighteousness so in other words in the face of all our unrighteousness or our badness or our sinfulness God doesn't say well you've made a right mess of things sort it out that's often the way we think about life isn't it the way we're tempted to think about it and sometimes we do have to sort out things in our lives but here we hear about a righteousness of God that he has revealed to us so there's like there's shafts of light breaking through the dark clouds of our experience of life we'll come back to that a little bit later in chapter three Paul poses another question and here we see another facet or aspect of the good news of the gospel Paul says or he asks a question is God the God of Jews only now that's relevant because in the church in Rome it was made up of and very distinctly a Jewish community and people from what we might call a Gentile or non-Jew community and these people mixed and they coexisted but they were from different backgrounds and they had different experiences and particularly and this is a New Testament thing in the Bible a lot of the time the Jews who'd become Christians had to kind of get their heads around the fact that not just Jews could become Christians and followers of Jesus so Paul asks is God the God of Jews only or of Gentiles also yes he says of Gentiles also so another aspect of the good news is revealed in chapter three and then in chapter four he says and this comes back to this whole thing of righteousness the promise to Abraham who was in many ways one of the earliest people in the world to receive hope of the gospel of God the promise to Abraham didn't come through the law but through the righteousness of faith there's a key word that Paul wants to unfold in the book of Romans and it's a key word for Christians it plays off against this idea of law so the idea that we can get right with God through our own efforts Paul's starting to say actually there's a different dynamic here and it is faith belief in this righteousness that God reveals to us then he says in chapter five so or therefore since we're justified or made right with God by faith faith we have peace with God through Christ peace with God where before we didn't have peace with God we can't earn peace with God by ourselves but we have peace with God through this great provision that

God makes and if I can just move forward a few chapters chapter eight you start to get to this wonderful kind of culmination of all of the thoughts that Paul's been putting together and he says so or therefore there's now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus so as we were praying earlier in the service when faced with the reality of who we are our sinfulness the mistakes we've made the hash we've made of certain situations when we come to God and confess our sins when we receive this righteousness of Jesus through faith there's no condemnation God no longer holds you guilty and you have peace with him he goes on to talk about Christian living and the hardship of life Paul was somebody who suffered many Christians in the days of Romans suffered in fact at one point the emperor simply ejected from the city a whole bunch of the Christians the Jewish Christians because he didn't want them around anymore it's really difficult to live through times like that but Paul says I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed now you see what he's saying there he's talked in some of the verses that we've been looking about at about the dynamic of the gospel how it changes our identity how it changes our status before God that is good news to the suffering

[9 : 01] Christians there and then in Rome it is of course good news to anybody who hears and believes that word now so to you and me all of God all that God does in our hearts through faith in Jesus Christ means that we have peace with God this morning however you feel whatever's going on you are at peace with God if you have faith in Jesus Christ but also in the middle of your sufferings and they may be the ordinary sufferings of life or they may be the sufferings that you face for being a Christian for being the person who stands out in your street or your office or whatever as the odd one out the person who still believes in Jesus Christ when it feels like not many people do there is a hope of glory that is promised to you in the gospel in other words God is with you now and he will take you to be with himself he will make his dwelling with us one day again and that means that that in the sufferings that we face now we have hope and we have the promises of God and to just two more okay just as we come to the end of the chapter 8 we're really bringing us up to date with this the passage that I started reading in verse 31 Paul writes so what should we say then if God is for us who can be against us and what that means is that whatever the opinion of people around you of you whatever people think about you if God is for you who can be against you and that speaks about your identity in the gospel who you are as a treasured and loved child of God and so we get to the end of the chapter and we get this wonderful as I said culmination if you like crescendo of all that Paul has been saying verse 39 I say that nothing in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord so you may ask at some point why do I believe this gospel again why do I keep going putting my faith in Jesus Christ or your friend might say to you why do you go to church when that's so 200 years ago or whatever they presume about Christianity and in many ways the core or the heart of your answer is because of the love of God in Christ for me that is a promise and that is a hope that doesn't come from you you didn't make that happen in fact we could spend all of our lives trying as hard as we possibly can and it we really wouldn't get close to sort of earning or deserving the love of God because of all the other things that we do that would as it were disqualify us all the sins all the selfishness all of the bitterness all of these things but the truth of the gospel is that because of the will of God and the love of God he sets his love upon those who put his faith in his son the Lord

Jesus and so what you say to yourself if you need reminded sometimes and what you may say to your friend if they ever ask the question is that the eternal creator of the universe which we say we believe in bothers to put his love on us ordinary people going about our business doing our daily life with all of the ups and downs that's the core that's the flow of the message of the gospel that Paul wants to layer upon his hearers all through the opening eight chapters and it means that we have job that's in keeping as well with what Jesus says when Jesus spoke to his disciples he wanted them to come to see who he was and you know if you've read the gospels we often see the real struggle that the disciples had to really come to terms with who Jesus was and to get to get a correct vision of the reality of who was standing before them but seeing him for who he was should transform their lives they should see that the Messiah was standing before them the son of God come to be their rescuer and their redeemer and Jesus says in John chapter 15 and let me just read these this verse to you just now and this ties into what we're saying about joy if you keep my commandments you'll abide in my love just as I have kept my father's commandments and abide in his love these things I've spoken to you that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be full Jesus wants us to abide in his love and a big part of that is by he says keeping his commandments again not so that we earn our salvation so that we pattern our lives as

Jesus patterned his life living in connection with God seeking to obey him and walk in the way that he wants us to walk again as we said to the children knowing that he knows what's good for us but when we do that abiding in him as it were putting our hand in his and allowing him to lead us through our lives then we know the joy of his presence and the assurance of his care for us and we know as well the joy of salvation that God the eternal God would bother to set his care over our lives so all that Paul has been saying here is the same as what Jesus would want us to know as well that to live in connection with him to live in fellowship with him is to know the spiritual the deep lying joy that is as a result of being at peace with him it means that Jesus we take account of the fact that

Jesus if I can put it like this subs in for us when he goes to the cross all that we deserved Jesus says that he will take the payment for he is the one who goes to the cross for us and so he is the one who covers our shame when we stand humbly before his throne it means that when we come to him on an ordinary Sunday morning and we seek to worship him we enter his presence and we pray to him we can have confidence we don't come thinking will he bother to listen we don't come thinking do I even have the right yes in the name of Jesus he wants us to know this salvation and he wants us to have the joy of the gospel but as I said this is yours if you believe it by faith it was Paul's because he believed it by faith but the second dynamic if you like that we see as we move into chapter 9 and I'd like to do this with you just briefly just now is that the gospel produces both joy and sorrow why how and why would I say that this morning I don't mean to turn from the great happiness of the first section to a kind of downer but let's look at what goes on as Paul moves into chapter 9 he says if I can just read it again to refresh your memory I speak the truth in Christ I'm not lying my conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart okay so there's a change in mood there's a change in tone this is because Paul wants to address the fate if you like of his people the Jewish people who at the time of writing for the most part didn't put their faith in Jesus didn't know the joy of the gospel that Paul is speaking about and so if I just read on a couple of verses he says I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart for I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers those of my own race the people of Israel he's really sad because his as he calls them his brothers don't believe the gospel let me just pick out a few details with you verse 2 this is really emphatic he's not just saying this for effect he's not just a little bit discouraged he's really really sorry so verse 2 I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish now that doesn't mean Paul's trying to show how much this matters to him it doesn't mean he always walks around looking miserable because he often speaks about how we are always to go around in prayer he speaks about how we are to have continual joy so he can't only be one or other one or other of each of these but what he's saying is this really really matters to him it's a really big deal and then he says something which could almost be shocking to us it certainly would have been shocking to the people who heard Paul's letter in the first century look at verse 3 he says I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers now think about this for a moment Paul had been apart from Jesus before he became a Christian then he became a Christian because of what Jesus had done and what he's saying is this matters to me so much that that it's almost like I could wish I was cut off from Jesus again so that the word that he used there cursed and cut off really does mean cursed the word is anathema it means just not just separate from Jesus but separate and judged apart from Jesus cut off spiritually dead not knowing all the blessings

that he had previously been speaking about in chapter 8 and that I read with you from across the whole like the sweep of the letter up until this point so I noticed the detail he's not saying I wish I was cursed and cut off because I think that would have been just too far I can't imagine Paul saying I actually want to be apart from Jesus because of course Jesus is now his life but he's saying I'm so sorry that they're not in Jesus it's as if I would almost want to sacrifice myself for them Paul is deeply moved by the way in which these people who he still lives amongst if he's writing this I'm sure with particular people in mind I'm sure he's got faces and names of friends family members who he's thinking about he goes on to speak a little bit more about why this bothers him so much you know I've already drawn attention to this but in verse 3 he talks about the fact that these people who he's thinking of are his brothers of his own race okay so they're his people we live in a pretty transient society now so people often are born and move around quite a lot maybe it used to be the case or maybe it still is the case for you that you can think of your hometown or the place where you grow up that maybe matters a lot to you sometimes people still speak of my people you know if you've come from a different country if you've come from a different part of the country or whatever and maybe there's still a real affection for that town every so often you see the people that you grew up amongst and you love them well Paul really loved the people that were his people and and here's something that and this is the last thing I'll say about this little detail here's why he gets even sadder about this it's that these people his people his brothers had the blessings of knowing God or at least they should have done they had so many privileges as God's chosen nation if you like this is going back into the Old Testament with all of what we know about the Israelites who were set apart to be faithful to God and yet who so often weren't if I can read verse four with you now he goes on to say the people of Israel theirs is the adoption of sons theirs is the divine glory theirs is the covenants the receiving of the law the temple worship the promises theirs are the patriarchs or we could say the fathers of the faith people like Abraham who was mentioned earlier and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ in other words he's saying and don't forget this was him too at one point as well he was one of these people not realizing the full reality of the revelation of God all of these privileges were given to these people but they weren't joining up the dots they weren't putting two together and the result of that was that they were rejecting

[22 : 23] Jesus as the Christ the Messiah the promised Savior the one in whom we are to have faith the one who enables us to know the righteousness of God the one who enables us to have peace with God the one in whom we have joy I don't want to say a lot more about that I think it's kind of obvious if you were to read on you would notice the way in which chapters 9 and 10 and 11 develop this theme and Paul starts to talk to his audience about like the Jewish people and his hopes for them and what he thinks might happen in the future as a remnant if you like a small number will turn to worship God what I want us to see just now is the gospel dynamic the joy and the sorrow the hope that really drives our longing for ourselves to make sure that we do know this gospel with all of the revelation of the joy and the goodness that we get in it and it also helps us think about how we see those around us other people again maybe people very dear to us here's just a few bullet points by way of application as we finish at first and this is maybe obvious it's possible to be apart from Jesus and not saved you know Paul isn't just saying about the Jews I want them to be a bit more like me in the way they live my their lives sometimes we think people should be just like us that's that's not what he's saying he's saying they're cut off from Jesus so in other words when we hear the gospel we are faced with and we need to be faced with a stark a reality that calls us to answer the question first and foremost am I in Jesus or am I cut off from him if you drive through the cow gate in Edinburgh there's all kinds of things going on of an evening it's a busy and a noisy and a pretty expressive place there's a neon sign on one of the walls that I notice when I go through every so often it says not all those who wander are lost now that's that can mean all kinds of things but I think what it's supposed to mean is that life can be very interesting if you feel like you're off the main path if you're following your heart if you're doing your own thing that's really in many ways the way people think nowadays I don't have to follow the same groove as everybody else I can just be myself be my own person now that's fine at one level in terms of who we are the kind of interests we have and for many people it's about the lifestyle they choose and all the rest of it but if we were to take that phrase and apply it to the gospel all those who wander apart from Jesus are lost so that's the stark reality that we're faced with in God's word and what he wants us to make sure that we are reconciled with that we're not wandering from Jesus but what it then does is it makes us think about all those around us who we know family members friends people in Winsborough people that you live amongst people who you care for and it helps us have a focal point it helps us think we don't just want them to become like us to kind of dress like us to do the same kinds of things that we do we want them to be in Jesus and until they're in Jesus that's what gives us sorrow not because we patronize them not because we think we're better than them but because in the same way that Paul wanted for the Jews we want Jesus for them it drove the way Paul thought of others and here's the thing it means this morning that if you maybe have sorrow in your heart for a loved one a family member a

friend a neighbor Paul knows how you felt how you feel Paul knows that experience Jesus too Jesus wept over Jerusalem he called out to Jerusalem if only they would allow him to be as it were the one who shepherded them and cared for them if only they would see him as the Messiah so that's actually a very real experience if you feel sorrow for a loved one then it's validated here it's the way Paul felt but finally the final thing I want to say this morning it becomes if you like the gospel motivation for our lives that others would know the Jesus that we know Paul says I'm going to read one more verse with you in Romans chapter one in Romans chapter one he's introducing his letter and he's talking about as I already noted before how he's not ashamed of the gospel because it's the power of God to salvation but he also says this in in Romans chapter one he says I'm obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks both to the wise and foolish that's why I'm so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are at Rome he uses an interesting word there he says I'm obligated to Greeks and non-Greeks if you look into the the word it means that he's in their debt he says basically I have the gospel the gospel the gospel reveals to me Jesus as my savior and I am in other people's debt until I've passed on that news to them it's what drives him it's what moves him because he longs for them to know

Jesus and because he knows that he has what they so desperately need so what do we do with all this well we allow ourselves to see the promises of God and pray that they would give us joy as we put our faith in Jesus remember who you are in Jesus Christ remember that Jesus desire is for you to take account of your life to put yourself in his hands and to know his joy but then allow the gospel to be the thing that moves you as you move towards other people sometimes it's not easy we don't get an awful lot of opportunities maybe to share the gospel we're maybe not super apostles like Paul who are called to preach in a culture where preaching was normal everywhere they go but it's what moves us to pray it drives the love of our hearts to at least in the moments before we maybe go to sleep remember again the loved ones that we have the family members and the people in our streets so that we would pray that Jesus would meet them and reveal his love to them also let me leave it just there this morning I'm going to pray just to finish off and ask that God will help us in these things and then we'll sing our final song dear Lord again we just pray that you would please help us with these things thank you so much for the gospel Paul is so excited about all of the promises that are in it please give us a vision for your love for us and please move us Lord to care for others with a gospel sorrow we long for people to come to hear the gospel and to come to know Jesus and we pray that your holy spirit would move even here in Winchborough Lord or in the places that we come from to draw people to give opportunity for people to hear the gospel and to come to see Jesus for who he really is hear our prayers and answer them according to your good and perfect will in Jesus name

Amen