

HOPE AGAIN

Hope Again

Message 1 | The Gospel Defined

I want to welcome all of you today to our brand-new series called **Hope Again**. I've been looking forward to this series literally for the last year and praying for you guys to be a part and receive all God has for you over the next six years. You know – we've all been feeling pressure amidst very difficult, divided, and contentious times. Our world is broken. We are often surrounded by negativity. When you want to make changes, it's hard to know where to start, when there's so much going on. Because of that, we can often be left feeling anxious... and even hopeless. I understand what living without hope can do to you emotionally, spiritually, relationally, and even physically. There have been times in my life, like my first year in college, when I felt as though hope...*all hope*...was lost. Just prior to coming to Christ, I felt like the road I was traveling was going one way... and that was *down*. I was beat-up, bruised, disappointed in life, and to be honest — pretty angry. I was wasting my life — sure I was going to college — but I was empty and going nowhere.

Perhaps you've been there. Maybe you're there right now, asking the questions, "*Can I Hope Again? How do we find peace in an ever-changing world, when the ground beneath our feet seems to be breaking apart?*" Well, I can tell you this... You've made the right decision to be here today. Stick with me over the next six weeks as we find out how to live with hope and confidence for our future. That's why we're doing this series, **Hope Again**. It's for you... In our series, we are going to spend six weeks studying the first eight chapters of the book of Romans. I believe this study could be one of the most transforming in the life of our church, and in each of us individually. My **prayer** for all of us in this series is found in **1 Corinthians 9:23** where the Apostle Paul says: **Now this I do for the gospel's sake, that I may be partaker of it with you.** You see, Paul was a partaker of

the gospel, my hope and prayer is we'll all be partakers of the good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in a whole new way after this series.

Personal/Funny:

Speaking of the gospel, or good news – I want to look at what the Gospel is **not**, before we look at it is. **The Gospel is not:**

Trying to do the right thing. A lot of people have the opinion the Gospel is somehow analogous to turning over a new leaf, like making New Years' resolutions – or just trying to do better in life. Some people see it as a 60-day moral improvement series or a self-help book. They might say, "If I read this, then everything is going to be ok." But, is the gospel simply us trying to do better?

Feeding the poor or helping people. Some people believe the gospel is simply helping people when they are down. They say: "If I can just help enough people who are less fortunate than I am, then I will be right with God." Is helping people the gospel, or is it the outworking of the gospel?

Telling people about God. Some people immediately associate the gospel with telling people about God, travelling to other nations, and doing evangelism. While that is even commanded by Jesus and a great thing to do, that is the *proclamation* of the gospel. Although it is necessary to talk about God, it's important we first understand the message we proclaim.

I believe there are a few reasons some people misunderstand the gospel:

1. We have **failed to communicate** what the gospel is and have **watered down** the biblical understanding of how God relates to man and how we are supposed to relate back to God.

2. We have failed to communicate what the gospel is, by placing an **over-emphasis on the outworking of the gospel**. For example, when we are truly impacted by the gospel, we will end up doing better in life, making wiser decisions, etc. Also, when we are truly impacted by the gospel, we will want to reach out and help other people. But helping people and doing better in life is *not* the gospel.

So, you may ask, why are we looking at the **book of Romans**? First, Romans has the most **succinct explanation** of the gospel. It is truly one of the most theological books of the Bible, while at the same time, it is one of the most practical books regarding our relationship with God and the outworking of that in our lives. Some theologians believe Paul's writing of the book of Romans contains the greatest biblical explanation of what God has done for us in Christ and God's desired response from us. Second, I feel it's critical we understand, as Christians, what the main thing is. **The Gospel is our message!** Paul wrote the book of Romans as the handbook or blueprint of the gospel. If we start with the main thing and have a clear understanding of what it is, then we'll end up on track. If we start a little bit off track, we can end up miles off course.

Example: A compass reading in the woods.

In the remainder of our time today, I want us to gain an overview of the book of Romans, particularly looking at the book's author, **Paul**, and gain a fresh understanding of **The Man, The Mission, and The Message**.

1. The Man.

Romans 1:1-7 says: **Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God² which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures,³ concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh,⁴ and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.⁵ Through Him we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name,⁶ among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ;⁷ To all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.**

We would all be challenged to gain an understanding of the book of Romans without looking first at the book's author, Paul. Some of you may know His story. Paul was a real **mix**. He was a Jew, a citizen of Rome, a trained rabbi, a Pharisee, and even a tent maker. He was also a strong leader, powerful orator, and capable writer. Paul was **passionate** and fiery. Before coming to Christ, Paul saw Christianity as a heresy to Judaism and even travelled around persecuting and killing Christians. He was present and actually oversaw the stoning of

Stephen in Acts chapter 7. We read in Acts 9 where Paul was transformed by Jesus Christ. From that point, God called him to be an apostle, or messenger of the gospel to the Gentile or non-Jewish world. Immediately following his conversion, Paul spent a number of years in Arabia and Damascus. It is believed that in these “silent years” that Paul grew deeply in his relationship with God. It was also during this time that he gained a grasp of the calling of God on his life – *to carry the gospel message*. In response to his call, Paul travels on three missionary journeys taking the gospel throughout Asia and Europe. Paul ended up writing 2/3 of the New Testament and is responsible for taking Christianity worldwide.

If you look at **Romans 1:1** you will clearly see God’s call on Paul’s life. It reads: **Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God.** This one verse alone shows Paul as a **servant** – who is honored to belong to Christ. The word here for servant, *doulos*, is the common word for a bondservant or household slave and shows the deep humility in Paul’s heart demonstrated in his commitment to Christ. Speaking of humility and thinking what is required to be an effective communicator of the gospel, I am reminded of perhaps one of the humblest men of the last generation: **Billy Graham**. Billy Graham was amazing. There he was at the inauguration of President Bill Clinton, praying so simply and beautifully, “Lord, help us to carry out the challenges we’ve heard.” Now, if you or I had been asked to pray at the inauguration, we would probably have given a “sermonette”. But not Billy. In the same way, we see this heart demonstrated in the life of the apostle Paul – a humble servant who had tremendous access to the kings and leaders of his day. And yet, connected with the common man as well. Not only was Paul a humble servant, but he was an **apostle** – that simply means “One called and sent out on a mission.” So, we have a better picture of Paul, now let’s look at...

2. The Mission. In **Romans 1:8-15**, Paul outlines his plan and says: **First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world. ⁹ For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers, ¹⁰ making request if, by some means, now at last I may find a way in the will of God to come to you. ¹¹ For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established— ¹² that**

is, that I may be encouraged together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me. ¹³ Now I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that I often planned to come to you (but was hindered until now), that I might have some fruit among you also, just as among the other Gentiles. ¹⁴ I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise. ¹⁵ So, as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also. In the ancient world Paul lived in, all roads led to Rome. Paul must have thought, “If I can only get to Rome, and share the gospel, it will spread rapidly and reach the entire world.” Paul desired to go to the imperial city – not only to launch the gospel from Rome, but to bless the people there. Although his plan was brilliant, Paul was unable to get there for a number of reasons. But instead of feeling defeated by what he couldn’t do, he grabbed some parchment and a pen, and did what he could do. Unable to go to Rome initially, Paul instead penned a letter to the Romans, and because he had never been to Rome, he was able to concentrate solely on life-changing, impacting, revolutionary theology. You see, in his other epistles, Paul addressed the problems and personalities unique to the cities to which he wrote – like he did in First Corinthians and Galatians. Not so with the book of Romans. In the book of Romans, Paul gives us a comprehensive teaching on the **righteousness, justice, the goodness of God, and the gospel of Jesus Christ.**

When Paul wrote Romans around A.D. 56 — again, he had not yet been to Rome — but he had been preaching the gospel since his conversion in A.D. 35. Now he was nearing the end of his third missionary journey. This letter is a mature statement of his understanding of the gospel. Paul most likely wrote Romans while he was in Corinth. His desire was to take a collection to help the needy Christians in Jerusalem. Then, He planned to go to Jerusalem with this collection, then visit the church in Rome. He wrote to tell the Romans of his impending visit. In view of his personal plans, Paul wrote to introduce himself to a church he had never visited. At the same time, he set forth a full and orderly statement of the great principles of the gospel that he preached. Paul also wrote this letter because he wanted to unite the Jews and Gentiles in Rome under the common theme of the gospel. This is so important in the day in which we live. People have tried using human strategies – but in the end it comes up short. Only the gospel truly unites.

That's why we are doing this right now. Our world is broken. Our nation is broken. We need the gospel!

The irony of Paul being called the "Apostle to the Gentiles" is he preached the gospel to as many Jews as Gentiles. We read in the book of Acts he would start his ministry in many towns first by preaching in the synagogues. Paul was a major "includer" in the message of the gospel. He believed the gospel was for all people and accessible to everyone. Paul preached a gospel of racial reconciliation – he preached to the Jews, the Gentiles, the barbarians, the rich, the poor, the educated, and the uneducated. I believe Paul modeled through his teaching and his life what churches should strive for in their preaching of the gospel – inclusive of everyone – sharing the life and light of the gospel with all people. This leads us to point three...

3. The Message. In verses 16 and 17 we see the essence of Paul's message in the book of Romans. **Romans 1:16-17** says: **For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. ¹⁷ For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith."** **What does the word Gospel mean?** The Greek word as it appears in the original language means 'Good news.' It originally did not refer to the story of Christ as a whole, but literally meant the 'good news,' and generally referred to an oral report of good tidings about the work of the gods, the announcement of the birth of a royal child, or the good outcome of a battle.

What did Paul mean when he referred to the gospel? In **1 Corinthians 15:3-4** Paul says: **For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures,** This passage has Paul's summary of the gospel, which included the death, burial, resurrection, and witness of the living Christ. And in Romans 1:16-17, Paul makes it clear that this gospel is powerful for those who believe in it—to those who believe, it is the very power of God. This is the challenge right now as Christians – it's not just getting better. It's not God just wants us to help others. We have to be clear what the Gospel truly is.

By **Gospel**, Paul meant **The good news or the story of the life, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.** D.L. Moody said, "The gospel is like a **lion**. All the preacher has to do is to open the door of the cage and get out of the way!" But the gospel is more than a message. It is the working of God's salvation in the lives of people. "The salvation Paul spoke of is more than forgiveness of sin. It includes the full scope of deliverance from the results of sin."

In Romans 1:16-17, I want us to focus in on two words as we conclude today. The first word of great importance is **power**. The second word is **believe**. The first key word in the divine vocabulary of the gospel of Christ is, it's the **Power** of God. The good news of Jesus Christ has power. The Greek word for power is *dunamis*, and it's where we get our word dynamite. And Paul has in mind the fact that the gospel of Christ carries with it the omnipotence of God — the all-powerful God is behind it, operative in making us new. I believe that all of us would like to change for the better. If you look at it, all advertising that goes on in the world is based on one presupposition that people want things different than they are. They want to look better, feel better, think better, and have better experiences. They want to change their life. Basically, people want to experience a better life. There's an appeal to that because that's a basic human drive. And deep down inside, people really want things to be different, but they're impotent to change things only God can change.

Jeremiah 13:23 says: "**Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots?...**" You have just about as much chance to change your heart as a leopard does its spots! People are powerless to change their own heart. Oh, they may make a few reformations here and there and operate a little differently, but real heart change never happens without God's help. In **Matthew 22:29**, Jesus says: **..."You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God."** He said to the religious people of His time, "You don't even know the power of God, you don't know what power is." The gospel of Jesus Christ has the power to change people, to take them from sin, from Satan, from judgment, from death, and eternal separation from God. People try different things to change them. The Scripture says some men believe they can be changed by doing good works, or the deeds of the law. But the Bible says the deeds of the law cannot save. The Scripture says the flesh

cannot save. The Bible says the church cannot save. The Bible says religion cannot save. For neither is there salvation in any other name, for none other name under heaven is given among men whereby we must be saved than the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. **Only the power of God can change people.** *There's no other way. The gospel is good news for our broken world.* The gospel is the power of God, and it is the answer to our fallen state. The gospel has the power to fulfill us—satisfy our longings, to save us—from our shame of what we have been through and the guilt of what we have done, and the power to change us—to transform us. The gospel is the revelation of God's grace and salvation through Jesus Christ, which takes our unrighteousness and sinfulness and replaces it with God's righteousness.

All we need to do from verse 17 is **Believe**, which is our second word. Salvation power operates only through faith, that's all. Where there is faith, there is the power of God operative in salvation. You say, **What is faith?** Faith is believing. We all live by faith ... every day of our lives. **Faith is trust.** You go to a restaurant, and you eat what they feed you. How many of you know – at some restaurants you have to live by more faith?! We all live by faith. I mean, that's the only way you can survive. God has put it in the heart of a man that he understands how to live by faith. And faith in the spiritual dimension is far different than that kind of faith — but it is nonetheless the same idea, it is trusting and believing that the power of God can save, but it will save only those who believe. Biblical faith is focused faith on the person and work of Christ. Jesus is the object of our faith. Believe what? Believe in the gospel – the life, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. That means that you believe He is who He said He was, that He died for the reason He said He died, and that He rose again from the grave. And if you believe that—you are saved. Salvation is not baptism. Salvation is not moral reform. Salvation is not going to church. It's not conforming to rules. It's not self-discipline and restraint. It's not morality. Salvation comes when we recognize our sinfulness, our need for Christ, and embrace the gospel. Then God transforms our hearts. All the rest is an outworking.

Decision Call

Outline:
Hope Again

Message 1 | The Gospel Defined
1 Corinthians 9:23

The Gospel is not:
Trying to do the right thing.
Feeding the poor or helping people.
- Telling people about God.

1. The Man.
Romans 1:1-7

2. The Mission.
Romans 1:8-15

3. The Message.
Romans 1:16-17, 1 Corinthians 15:3-4

Gospel: The good news or the story of the life, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

A. Power.

Jeremiah 13:23, Matthew 22:29

B. Believe.
Romans 1:16

What is God saying to me through this message? Who can I invite to church next week?