

The Gospel of Grace

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Preacher: Dylan Marais

- [0 : 0 0] Welcome to 2025. You know, I don't know how your New Year's party went, or how your New Year's celebration went, or what your outlook for 2025 is going to be.
- Typically, we all want it to be something like Leonardo DiCaprio, epitomized by this New Year's meme. Cheers to the New Year, good luck to 2025.
- It just looks so nice. There's bubbles, there's a glass of champagne, and of course it's Leonardo DiCaprio. He's looking forward to it. The world is his oyster. 2025 is going to be... If that's how it starts, that's a great way to start the year.
- But maybe you're more of a Dwight Schultz kind of a guy from the office. Happy New Year, wrong. The happiness of the upcoming year has yet to be determined.
- So you're not quite sure what the year is going to hold, or maybe you're like this last one. I still don't know what I'm wearing to my living room New Year's Eve. I might not even go.
- [0 : 5 7] Most of us long for a good year ahead, obviously. None of us hope for a bad year. But a lot of that is often just wishful thinking. There are things we want, but we can't be sure that we're going to get.
- Or if we do get them, we don't know if they're going to deliver on the promise of happiness and security that we think that they'll give us. But if we place our hope in what God has promised, then we can be sure of having not just good news, but the best news that can carry us through the whole year ahead, indeed through our whole lives.
- And so the gospel is the best hope that we have, the only real hope, because in the gospel, God does all the work to wipe away our past and give us a new start.
- And so we're going to do a two-week mini-series on placing our hope for 2025 on gospel foundations. So I'm just going to, back to the basics, what is the gospel all about?
- What does God do to save us? What can we trust God for in the year ahead? And so this week, we're looking at what God does for us in the gospel. What is the gospel all about?
- [2 : 0 7] How does it work? And then next week, we'll look at what the gospel does to us. How the gospel, how the news about Jesus Christ gives us new power to live a truly changed life.
- One of the best places to do that is from Paul's letter to the Romans. Martin Luther called it the brightest light in the New Testament. We're going to focus on Romans 3, but Paul's explanation of the gospel starts in Romans 1.
- So if you've got your Bibles, just turn there or open your app or just go online. And Paul's entire argument starts at chapter 1, verse 16, where he talks about the power of God.
- And it makes the vital point that the gospel is entirely the work of God. Indeed, it is his most powerful work.
- So Romans 1, verse 16, Paul says, I'm not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.
- [3 : 1 1] First for the Jew, then for the Gentile. Because in it, in the gospel, a righteousness from God is revealed. A righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written, the righteous will live by faith.

First, the gospel is all about what God does. It's about his power that changes reality.

His power that changes things. His power that changes our lives. It's not our power that changes our lives. Many people go into 2025 with that enthusiasm.

New year, new you is one of the sayings. But of course, we all drag our old self along with us in the new year. By this stage, or if you've lived life long enough, you know that there's a flash of happiness in your new year.

And then the same old problems recur during the course of the year. And we barely make it. We're happy just to make it at the end of the year intact again. So the gospel is all about what God does.

[4 : 14] It's about his power to change things, meaning that we don't have the power to change what is needed to change in our lives. That means we've got to trust God and ask God for help if you want a different life in 2025.

Now this is not any ordinary power. The Greek word behind the word, the power of salvation, is the word dynamis. We get the word dynamite from it. Because it's God's power, it's power that's mightier than anything in the universe.

A power so vast that it actually created the universe, and a power that is then going to save this whole world that has gone drastically wrong.

It's new creation power, it's new life-giving power that is found only in the gospel, in the message about Jesus Christ, in the message about what God has done to change the world.

It's a power that fixes everything that is wrong with the world because it's a power that's aimed at saving humans. Now we need to hold on to this element of the gospel as of first importance, that God does the saving, that we cannot save ourselves, that we can't contribute anything to our salvation, but this should really give us hope and peace.

[5 : 36] We all know how difficult it is to live up to our New Year's resolutions. One guy said that he's not taking any New Year's applications for his gym because the New Year's gym, when you go to gym at New Year's, it's just a mess.

Everyone tries to get their New Year's resolutions going, and then literally by the end of the month, it's back to normal again. It's just this huge dive off. We can't keep up with our New Year's resolutions, let alone try and be the kind of person that God wants us to be.

Because that takes New Year's resolutions and just amplifies them, jacks them up to a level that's just not sustainable for any human to keep up.

It's utterly impossible to do ourselves. And the fact that we try and do those things is the cause of so much stress and anxiety and burnout in our lives.

And so the gospel says, stop trying to change yourself by yourself. Give up your striving. Give up your excuses.

[6 : 42] Trust in the salvation that God has actually already done for you. Your New Year's resolution shouldn't be to try harder at being a better you, but rather trust God with your failings, your mistakes, and your mess-ups.

And so that should take the pressure off and allow God to do the change. Because if you think about it, how good of a job have you done at making your life better on your own?

We don't do a very good job. Some of us can do it for a little bit, but we often and very, almost always slide back into our old habits unless we've got the power of God working in us.

God has done the saving. It is the power of God, not the gospel is the power of God. It's not the power of us to change ourselves. So this year, let God do the changing, and you'll have real change in your life.

But the verse here is God's, it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes. Okay, but what does God's power save us from?

[7 : 47] What does God's power save us from? The thing is our mess-ups and our mistakes, what the Bible calls our sin, and we sort of downplay that, don't we? We call it our mistakes, we call it our mess-ups.

In the way I used to work at U-Turn, where we dealt with people who were doing, coming off drugs, and their lives were just a total mess. The Christian therapist called it their oopsies.

It's just a little oopsie, spilt some milk. Now that was obviously because they were feeling guilty, really guilty about the stuff they'd done, so we just had to put it into context. But we're good at making what we do wrong seem not that bad.

But the thing is our sin, our mess-ups, our mistakes don't just cause problems for us and others. It does that.

But there's a far more serious thing that our sin does. It alienates us from God, and our sins actually make Him angry with us.

[8 : 49] Now this is not something you hear often from churches anymore, because, let's be honest, we're starting the year, the last thing you want to hear is about a God that's angry at you. But if you're going to diagnose the problem correctly, and have come up with a correct solution, you need to take seriously what the Bible says.

He's so angry with us, because of our sin, because we don't live the way we should, that each of us is under the penalty of death. So the gospel starts with the good news that God is bringing salvation, but then it tells us why we need to be saved, and what we need to be saved from.

And if you look in Romans 1 verse 18, you see that we need to be saved from God Himself. The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them.

And so when you look around at the world, you think, we did a series about the great questions, and is God really there? And yes, of course He's there, because He's made this world.

And people instinctively know that there's a God. We don't have to actually prove it, but how many people live like there's a God, and live like they've been made in His image, and do what God wants them to do?

[10 : 11] Very few people. And even the ones that want to, Christians, struggle with that. The problem is our sin. It's this thing that just doesn't want to do what God tells us to do.

We're like teenagers. Clean up your room. Urgh! Well, let's be honest. It's not just teenagers that have that problem. Anytime someone tells you to do something, urgh!

Just get that little stiff neck, that little muscle at the back of your neck, and you're like, you know you've got to do it, but often our first instinct is, ah, man, I really don't want to do that. What Paul does in the next three chapters of Romans, it takes three chapters of Paul hammering home this point, that God is mad with the human race.

Really angry. Okay? It's not the irritation of God that is revealed against mankind. It's the wrath of God. Okay? It's the highest level of anger that you can get.

It's so angry that it's going to result in all of our deaths. Now, we instinctively know this, whether you acknowledge it or not, but actually deep down, each of us knows this. The proof of it, that there's a God that is angry with us, is the sufferings that we go through, and that all of our lives are going to end in death.

[11 : 29] But just Paul does this incredible overview, critique of the human condition.

I'm just going to read from chapter 1, because it just takes too long to go through all the issues that humans have caused. But just from chapter 1, from verse 28, because we don't think about God, he says this, furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so we're just, we're there, there's a God, but you know what, don't really need Him.

So, God gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they do what ought not to be done. What Paul is talking about is just all of humans here. There's something wrong with our brains. And he says this, they've become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed, and depravity.

They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, and malice. They're gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant, boastful.

They invent ways of doing evil. They disobey their parents. They have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy. And although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things, but also approve of those who practice them.

[12 : 57] Not a lot has changed in the human condition since Paul wrote this 2,000 years ago. Just look at any New Year's Eve party, that you might have gone to yourself, but we all see online, and it's a wild party, people getting drunk, all kinds of naughty things happening in the corners.

And then everyone says, hey, come and join us. Don't be so old-fashioned. Come have a bit of fun. And they don't think about the mess, and the hurt, and the pain that these things cause.

And so the awful truth is that every human stands guilty before a holy God for not living up to our calling as His representatives on earth. And we would all still be under this judgment of death and under God's wrath were it not for the gospel that we find shining out from Romans chapter 3.

So we're going to turn to Romans 3 now and pick up Paul's argument. So Romans 1, 2, and 3, up until verse 21, is about Paul showing that both Jew and Gentile alike are under God's judgment.

Gentiles, because they know that they should have been living a certain way because there is a God, even though they don't have the law, and the Jews are just as guilty, even though they've got the law, in a sense they're even worse because they're hypocrites.

[14 : 19] They don't do what the law says. Their hearts are far from God. And so all of humanity is under God's judgment of death were it not for the words that we see in chapter 3, verse 21.

And this is where the good news begins. The good news begins here. Romans 3, 21, but now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known to which the law and the prophets testify.

This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There's no difference. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. And all who trust Him are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

We're going to spend our time unpacking that. But the key thing here is the but now. Those two little words changes everything in human history.

Up until that point, God had been showing His righteousness. He's saying, but there's a new righteousness being shown now in the gospel. Up until this point, God's righteousness had been shown in judging sin in the world.

[15 : 37] And He was right to judge it. A holy and just God cannot not punish sin. He has to. We don't like to hear that because we're the ones in the dock. We're the ones that are in trouble.

But actually, if you think about it, it is a good thing that God punishes sin. In the same way that if you've been wronged by someone, you want justice to be done. You don't want them to get away scot-free.

Our biggest problem is that we cause half the problems that we come across in our own lives and so we don't know where to stand with, we want justice to be done but the last person we want it to be done is on me.

Up until this point, the righteousness of God has been shown in judgment. In the gospel, a new righteousness is going to be shown. It's a righteousness that takes bad people and says, you know what?

I'm going to make you right. I know you've done wrong but I'm going to change your status. I'm going to say that you're not wrong, that you're right. But we'll unpack that as we go along. This is the gospel of God's amazing grace.

[16 : 47] The gospel tells us that God has decided totally on his own, without any reference to you or your works or the good that you've done. The gospel says, God decides to make you right with him by forgiving you your sins and declaring you not just innocent but righteous.

And you can do that because of Jesus. We've got to ask ourselves, why is it that God can declare people righteous? Is that because, isn't he a judge?

Doesn't have to find, if they've done something wrong, he's got to say they've done something wrong. So, how is it that he can declare us righteous? The reason he can do this is because of what Jesus has done for us.

Which is the center, the heart of the gospel. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.

this righteousness from God comes through faith to Jesus Christ to all who believe there's no difference for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

[18 : 01] And verse 24, the key verse there, we are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ. We are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ.

Now that term justified is the key word here. This is the center really of the gospel. What Christians will call justification by faith. But what I want you to notice is that you are justified, I'll explain that in a second, freely by God's grace.

It's not something that you can do or earn. It's opposed to the works of the law. It's a simple gift of God. All that God does, he says, you know what, I know that you're guilty.

I'm going to say that you're not guilty. So justification, it's a big word that we don't often use in our ordinary everyday life, but it comes from the law courts. It's law court language.

Just so that you know, both the word justification and righteousness both have the same word in the Greek and the Hebrew. They both mean the same thing in biblical terms. In the modern day terminology, when you've done something wrong and someone takes you to court, you're either guilty or innocent.

[19 : 17] In biblical terminology, you're either guilty or righteous. Now that doesn't mean that you are holy and have never done anything wrong. It just means you are in the right standing with the law.

So when God says that you are justified, it's a declaration from him as the judge seeing you in his law court and saying, yes, I know that you're guilty, but I am going to declare you not guilty.

But there's no, in the Greek and Hebrew, there's no word for innocent. The word is, the judgment that will come down is you are righteous or you are justified.

It means to be in right standing, not have, you haven't done anything wrong. You're okay. You're free to go. And the fact that this is a free gift is the most amazing thing because how on earth could you work for that?

There's one way, we all know how it works in South Africa, for you to get the judge to decide in your favor if you are guilty. We've seen it how many times in our law courts? You just pay a little bribe and hey, the judge says you're innocent.

[20 : 34] Of course you can't do that with God. But how is it then that God is able to say that you're innocent when in fact he finds you guilty? Sin has to be paid for.

And this is the next step in the gospel. The reason that we can be justified freely by God's grace is that we've been redeemed by Christ. Redeemed by Christ. And he says we are justified freely through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

And that God presented him, now depending on your translation, God presented him as a propitiation or sacrifice of atonement through faith in his blood.

So depending on your translation, but I'll unpack those words first in a second. You're justified freely by God's grace, not something you can do.

He's declared you righteous. How is that? Here's the reason. The reason that God can count you as righteous is because of the sacrificial death of Jesus. Your sins have been paid for.

[21 : 42] It's just not you that's paid for them. Jesus did. And here's the beating heart of the gospel. The irony, the beating heart of the gospel that makes it come alive is it costs Jesus' death because our lives are forfeit.

And the amazing exchange in the gospel, the amazing love that God puts forward is, look, I'm going to have, you're guilty, I'm going to have to kill you. There's only one reason why God doesn't kill people.

Or any judge does anything. It's because he loves the person. He might have to do it, but... And so what he does is he says, well, I'm going to, the punishment that's coming your way, I'm going to pour out on my son.

And it cost him his life. That's the, the wording of propitiation and sacrifice of atonement in his blood. But before we get there, I just want to highlight this redemption language.

You've been justified freely, I'm in verse 24, justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

[22 : 58] What is the redemption? What does that mean? Again, another word that we don't often use in our everyday language. Originally, this word redemption was used in the slave market. So, the first century audience completely understood what it meant to be redeemed.

Because they all had slaves. The redemption is literally, it's the price that is paid to set a slave free. The Greek word is the redemption, is the money you would have paid to set a slave free.

It had a technical term. Not just, oh, I give money. You would say, walking down to the market, where are you going? I'm going to redeem my, I'm going to redeem the slave.

You wouldn't redeem food that you bought. It's not just a normal, everyday payment. It's a specific payment to set a slave free. The cost of our freedom is Jesus' lifeblood.

It's Jesus' lifeblood that God was willing to pay on your behalf to set you free. Not only are you free, but you've actually been brought into God's family.

[24 : 06] You're adopted as one of his own. We'll find that out later in Romans. So you've been redeemed. Redeemed means brought out of slavery. Slavery from what? Slavery to your own selfish heart, your own selfish desires, your own broken thinking.

Freedom from being, from fearing others, from fearing your own anxiety, from fearing the future, from all kinds of everything that we worry about that impacts us and holds us bound.

Specifically, probably your guilt and your shame. That's a problem of moving into the new year. You've got so many things that are pulling you back from the stuff that you've done last year.

Redemption means I've brought you, you don't belong to that anymore. You belong to me now. You belong to a new master. But it's a master that sets you free. This is the heart of the gospel.

Not only that, but Jesus' redemption, the cost of our justification, is this propitiation. Jesus' death is counted as a propitiation. Now again, depending on your translation, I'm using the old word propitiation.

[25 : 22] It occurs in some of the older Bibles. And again, it's not a word that's used often. You might have sacrifice of atonement or something similar to that. But they mean the same thing.

This word propitiation isn't used often because people don't like it, especially modern people. It seems a little bit too pagan. It's because propitiate means duplicate. We're going back to a God of anger here and people don't like that.

But the Bible is clear what God thinks of our sin and what He thinks of people. And He needs to be placated. Something must happen to His wrath because payment for sin has to be made.

To propitiate means to placate, to turn away anger and to make friends. Many can't line up with the God of love, but we shouldn't be surprised because we've already seen that our sin arouses God's wrath and rightfully so.

What we need is something to take His wrath away. And Jesus' death instead of ours is exactly that. Jesus died.

[26 : 33] The price is paid. God's wrath is assuaged. It's placated so that you can live and be counted righteous and innocent before God. God's wrath I honestly don't know of any better news than this to build your life on in 2025.

This is the best way to start the new year with a clean slate and to let go of all the things from the past year, maybe from your past life if you've got to go further back. We've all got things, skeletons, we've all got these things gnawing away at the back of our minds, things that we've done, things that have happened to us, things that we hold on to.

You can put that all away because every bad thing that has happened to you, every bad thing that you've done, totally paid for by the blood of Christ.

Totally paid for. I don't know, a good question to ask is what would you be willing to give in exchange for this freedom?

God says He doesn't want any payment. He doesn't want you to work for it. You can't work for it. You just need to receive it by faith.

[27 : 48] And so that's the last point we're going to look at. That this gospel, this message, this salvation, this new life, this freedom is received through by faith.

you can't work for it. You can't impress God with your good works. That doesn't work in a court of law. It's not going to work with God.

So just think about it. You're guilty of some crime in the court and your defense is, well, let's say you stole a car and your defense is, yes, but I gave money to the animal welfare society.

okay, so they're trying to find out if you stole the car. You saying that you did something nice for animal welfare society doesn't matter in this court here right now.

They're just going to find you, well, that's fine, but you still stole the car. So that's what our work, our works can't do anything to stop the fact that we've made, we've done bad things. There's only one thing that can change that and that is if you pay for the sin yourself, in which case you're going to die or someone else pays it for you, in which case you get to live.

[29 : 07] But how do you, how do you accept that? It's a gift and the only way to accept a gift is not to work for it, it's not something that's owed you, it's not wages, it's not payment, it's the same as what happens at Christmas.

Here, have a present. And the only thing you do is take it and say thank you. And so this gospel is received through faith.

So in that verse 25, God presented him as a propitiation through faith in his blood. All we have to do to receive these promises is nothing.

Yes, you must believe, but that's not a work in God's eyes. It's an acceptance from what God has done for us. It's accepting God's gift, his gift of love, his gift of mercy, and you just receive it.

Now, faith is another word we don't use that often. It just means to trust God, to trust Jesus, to trust the gospel, to trust this message that although we're guilty because of our lifestyle, because of the blood payment that Jesus made, God counts you righteous.

[30 : 23] He declares you in good standing, you're free to go. And it's not a work as some think of it, it's just open-handed acceptance of this gift that comes our way.

And it's yours if you want it. Faith is the opposite of work. Trusting doesn't require us to do anything. There's no requirements of the law.

Just believe it's true. Believe it and receive the blessings of the gospel in your life. So friends, everyone hopes for a new start to the new year.

The problem is we all bring our old selves along with us. The gospel is the only thing that can make a decisive break in your life, that frees you from your past mistakes, frees you from your past life, and gives you a new future.

Trusting in God, trusting in Jesus means not trusting in your own abilities to change and mold and change your life, get the things that you want, hoping that that is going to deliver the things that you need.

[31 : 32] Trusting is giving that up and saying, yeah, I'm not going to try that this year. I'm going to trust in God and He is going to provide me everything I need because He's saved my life from His wrath and from death.

So if He's given you that, how will He not give you everything else you need to live for Him? So if you're not yet a Christian, you need to do business with God.

You need to look into these truths, read the scriptures, but above all, trust on God, trust in God, call on Him. Take your sin, lay it at the foot of the cross and receive forgiveness from God.

if you're a Christian already, keep reminding yourselves of these truths. Keep believing in them. Believe in them more and more. Remind each other of these truths.

Just think about it. When last did you tell another Christian, hey, your sins are forgiven. Don't stress. God loves you. Don't worry. Jesus died for you.

[32 : 36] Go and live for Him. Let this thing go. It's been paid for. God doesn't care about it. Why do you care about it? In the end, when we carry our stuff around with us or we don't respond to this message, we're saying that the death of Jesus means nothing.

And that's not a, that's not something you want to throw in God's face when you're standing before Him in a court of law. Amen. Our problem is we do stress.

We drag our problems around with us because we tend to forget what God has done for us which makes our life so much harder than it needs to be. So if you're a Christian, trust in what Jesus has done, the payment that He's been made and rest in your salvation.

Luther says, faith is a living, unshakable confidence in God's grace. It is so certain that someone would die a thousand times for it. This kind of trust in and knowledge of God's grace makes a person joyful, confident and happy with regard to God and to all creatures.

And so friends, this is the best way I know not just to start the year on the right track but to keep it on the right track. Let's pray. Lord God, we become so familiar with your promises and what you've done to save us, we sometimes take it for granted.

[34 : 15] Lord, forgive us for not fully trusting you with all the issues in our life, with all our mistakes, with all our fears, with all our anxieties. Lord, we know that you've given us all good things.

You've paid for everything that we cannot do right. Help us, Lord, to trust in your salvation, to trust in Jesus and to live lives free from the mistakes of our past and with a new hope for the future.

Amen.