

What drive us as a church family? What motivates us? What empowers us? On our 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday together I thought we should spend a little bit of time thinking about why the Windsor Fellowship Church exists.

I think this is wonderfully summed up in the last 2 verses of our reading from Romans 1. Verses 16 and 17 could well be our mission statement for all we are and do here as the Windsor Fellowship Church.

So let's look at them in a bit more detail. Romans is a letter written by the Apostle Paul to Christians living in Rome. He wrote it to encourage them to stand firm on the truth of the gospel, even in the face of opposition. The word gospel means good news, or more accurately, amazing news, we interrupt this programme to bring you this good news, kind of news! It's the, war is over, peace has come, kind of news.

And the gospel referred to by Paul here isn't some general good news. This is very specific good news. If you look at **Romans 1:1-3** Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God— <sup>2</sup> the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures <sup>3</sup> regarding his Son." And then, at the end of verse 4, he identifies God's Son as: "Jesus Christ our Lord." So, this momentous, amazing, war is over, peace has come, news, is all about Jesus Christ.

If you're talking about Jesus' life, death resurrection or promised return, then you're talking about the same gospel as Paul. If you're talking about something different then it's not the true gospel you're proclaiming.

This message about Jesus must be at the centre of all we are and do here at the Windsor Fellowship Church. If we start prioritising something else, we'll be drifting away from what the Bible tells us is of 1<sup>st</sup> importance. Of course this message about Jesus should motivate us to do all sorts of different things as a church, but they all need to be connected to this one, basic, fundamental message.

A church is a family and, like every family, we'll have times when we don't agree with each other, or we're fed up with someone else in the family, or we'd prefer us to do things in this way or that way. At times like that my prayer is that we'd all be able to remember these verses from Romans. We'd think about them and realise again what is fundamental to our life as a church family. We'd focus on what we're really about. We'd reflect on what ever differences we're going through in light of what these verses tell us is really important. This won't automatically solve our differences, but it should put them into perspective.

But, why is this gospel message about Jesus so central, so vital, so fundamental to all we are as a Christian church? Well, Paul tells us in verse 16. Look at that again now. **Romans 1:16** "For I am not ashamed of the gospel," and then Paul tells us why he's not ashamed; "Because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes."

This gospel message must be at the centre of all we do here because it is the power of God. This is the power of the majestic, awesome, sovereign God. The God who created all things, the God who holds all things together. The God who has power over life and death. In this gospel message we have the power of God.

And this power is for a very specific purpose. It is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes. To say something brings salvation implies someone needs saving.

If you're out at sea and drowning you know you need saving, you need salvation. You can't rescue yourself; you're drowning. And when you see the coastguard helicopter come into view you will be full of joy knowing you're about to be saved. But, if you're just paddling at the seashore, having some fun, and then an air sea rescue helicopter hovers over your head and the winchman lowers a sling down to you, you'll think they're mad. You don't need rescuing, you're fine just exactly as you are, thank you very much, and anyway clear off because your rotor blades have spoilt my fun by blowing my beach ball out to sea!

In the terms of the salvation that Paul is talking about here most people think of themselves as like the bloke paddling on the seashore. Most people think they don't need saving, certainly they don't think they need saving from sin. The culture we live in thinks that as long as you're basically good, and don't actively go around hurting other people, then you're alright. For many, maybe even most people, the concept of sin is a Victorian throwback that's about oppressing our innate desire to do what feels right to us.

But, the reality, as shown repeatedly in the Bible, is that each and every one of us is a sinner in need of salvation. Just a couple of chapters later Paul quotes from the Old Testament and says this; **Romans 3:10-12** As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one." That's pretty categorical isn't it!

Think of it this way. If I were to ask yourself to score yourself on my imaginary goodness chart, it's a scale that goes from 0 to 100. 0 is completely and totally bad. And 100 is absolutely perfect. How would you score yourself? Please don't call out and tell us, that would be very un-British and embarrassing for all of us! But, what score would you give yourself?

I'm reasonably confident that we've all scored ourselves somewhere between 60-75%. Much less than that wouldn't be right because clearly we're better than average, think about all the violence and evil in the world, we're better than that! So, we must be at or above 60%. But, much more than 75% would be a bit arrogant wouldn't it. We're pretty good, but like everyone else we're not perfect.

Now, think about the score you gave yourself. By your own admission you are below 100%, which means you are less than perfect! That means, to use the Bible word, you are a sinner, you fall short of perfection. And the Bible makes clear that if you're a sinner you deserve to die. So you have, by your own admission, said that you're a sinner, facing death, in need of salvation.

So, that's a desperate and terrible situation to be. We're all like that swimmer out to sea and drowning. We are hopeless and helpless.

But, imagine the joy, the elation, that swimmer feels when he sees that helicopter hovering above his head. That's exactly the same joy and elation we feel when we believe the gospel, the good news about Jesus Christ, that is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes. It's the glorious news that God has given us the free gift of glorious, abundant, eternal life.

And this amazing message of salvation is for everyone. Just think about that for a moment. Everyone. No one is beyond this message of salvation. All people need to be saved and all can be saved. That is all people. This

salvation isn't dependent on intelligence, wealth, gender, race, language. This salvation is completely and utterly universal in its scope. Everyone. All that is required is that they believe the gospel message about the Lord Jesus Christ.

All that is required is that the person believes they are a sinner in need of salvation and that Jesus, who is God come to earth as a man to die on the cross in our place, took the punishment they deserve because of their sin.

Now, if you're not sure you believe this gospel message. If you're not sure whether you believe in Jesus as your Lord and Saviour. If you've still got questions, then great. Please talk to me afterwards. Or perhaps talk to the person sitting next to you. Find out if there are answers. If there's even the remotest possibility that these claims about Jesus might be true then surely it is worth just a bit of your time finding out?

If you're like me when you hear an offer that sounds too good to be true we assume it isn't true and just ignore them. Buy 1 get 10 free, that kind of thing! But, with this amazing offer from God please don't assume it isn't true, please find out whether it is or not. If it's true it's the most important news you'll ever hear.

But what about those of us who do believe this gospel message? We have this message which is the power of God for salvation for all who believe. This the message we need to take to Windsor.

Imagine we knew that there was a bomb planted up by the castle and it was scheduled to go off at 11am just as the crowds were watching the changing of the guard. If we knew that we'd do everything we could to tell everyone we met what they needed to do to be saved.

And the reality is we do have a message that will save people from eternal death. We have the most precious, glorious, life giving message. The good news about the Lord Jesus Christ. Right at the heart of all we are and do in this church family is this message of life and hope and salvation.

But, you may well be asking, how does this gospel bring salvation? Well, Paul goes on to tell us in verse 17. Look at that again now, **Romans 1:17** For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last.”

In this momentous, good news message about the Lord Jesus Christ, the righteousness of God is revealed. This is the language of the law courts. It's to be declared innocent. So, even though we've already established that each of us is guilty of sin, this gospel message reveals, shows us, makes known to us, how we can have the righteousness of God. How we, sinners that we all are. How we can be perfect in God's eyes.

Paul expands on this amazing phrase massively in the rest of this letter, just one example. **Romans 3:21-24** But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. <sup>22</sup> This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, <sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup> and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.” To be justified is to be treated just as if I'd never sinned. The word redemption means to pay the price that frees someone from slavery. This price that frees us from slavery is paid by Jesus Christ. The price we owed for our sin is our death. If we believe in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour, then, the bible makes very clear, he paid the price for our sin in our place when he died on the cross.

Do you believe this gospel message? If you do, then you're righteous in God's eyes. Then you will live as Paul puts it at the end of **Romans 1:17** "The righteous will live by faith." The mark of someone who believes the gospel is shown by them living by faith. They will trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. They will show they love Jesus by obeying all that he has commanded them. They will reveal their faith by the actions in their life. It's someone who reads the Bible and resolves, in advance, to do what it says.

And as a family we can encourage each other to be like this. We can encourage each other over coffee after church, by meeting together; individually or in home groups. Through sharing hospitality. We can be a family that helps each of us to live by faith.

These 2 verses summarise all that we are and want to be as the Windsor Fellowship Church. We want the message of the Lord Jesus Christ, the gospel of salvation to go out into Windsor and beyond. And we want to be a community that inspires, encourages, challenges each other to live by faith and to show that in what we do.

Do you want to be part of a family like that? I think all of us who are Christians will say "yes" to that. I think it's brilliant that we'll affirm that. But, I find it very helpful to think whether my words are backed up by my actions. I think we could all reflect on what it might look like for each of us to be able to say what Paul does at the start of verse 16. Paul says he is not ashamed of the gospel.

To be ashamed of the gospel is to not want to tell others about it. Sometimes we all think like this. We know that many don't want to hear this message. More than we feel it's quite offensive to tell someone they're a sinner in need of salvation. And for other people who seem so happy in their own faith, in whatever god they believe in, why would I want to upset them, they seem so happy and content. Sometimes we think, Isn't it all just a bit arrogant to claim that there is only one truth. And more than that I'm just not that sure what to say about the gospel anyway.

But, the antidote to thinking like that is knowing what this gospel message is. When we remember that this message is the power of God for salvation. That will help stop us being ashamed. If someone is in peril, surely we'll do whatever we can to save them, to do anything less would be unloving. Even if they don't want to hear it, we'd do all we can to convince them of the rescue that's available to them. If we know the truth that will, not only save them from death, but also give them abundant, glorious, wonderful eternal life. Surely we should do all we can to tell those we know and love this gospel message of salvation?

We have the greatest, most momentous, news that anyone could ever hear. We have the good news that God showed his love for us by dying for us so we can be free. And he continues to show his love for us by changing us, each day to be more and more like the Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, this is my prayer for all of us here at the Windsor Fellowship Church. I want us all to be able to say, with great boldness and courage, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes." And to be able to show that in the way we live; "The righteous will live by faith."

**Let's Pray!**