

Sola Dei Gloria

<i>Text</i>	Romans 16:25-27
<i>Readings</i>	Psalm 115, Romans 1:1-17
<i>Theme</i>	Paul concludes this letter by giving glory to God for revealing the good news about Jesus.
<i>Purpose</i>	To urge you to give glory to God for the revelation of the good news about Jesus.

As we come to the end of this year it seems appropriate to go to a passage of the Bible that directs our attention to the broad scope of what God is doing in the world. These concluding verses from Paul at the end of Romans certainly do this. They come at the end of a long and comprehensive letter and they pick up a number of its themes and emphases. As Paul concluded this great letter he gave God the glory for the good news about Jesus.

This is a vitally important subject. Fifty years ago a well-known Christian pastor and writer, A.W Tozer, expressed his concern about a low view of God in the church of his day. He said it was the cause of many other ills in the church. The situation has not improved since then. We need a large, high and wide view of God and his majesty and his glory. Paul does that here – he glorifies God for the gospel of Christ. This is the theme.

We'll consider three things about this gospel: its power, its revelation, and its purposes.

1. THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL

Paul began his conclusion with the words; “now to him **who is able...**” Those words, “who is able” translate a Greek word which means to be powerful or effective, and from which we get our English word *dynamite*! God is able to do powerful things.

He is able to **establish you by my gospel.**

The word “establish” means to strengthen, make firm, cause to be stable.

Luke used this same root word in the book of Acts to describe how Paul and his companions visited the churches to *strengthen* those new believers in their faith. The same word again.

Paul used it in chapter 1:11 when he explained that he wanted to see them to make them *strong*. It is the same word.

As Paul closed this letter he recognised that only God is able to strengthen us in our faith. God uses other people to do that, but ultimately it is the powerful work of God, and so he must be praised, he must get the glory!

God used **the gospel** to strengthen them in their faith. The word gospel means good news and in the Bible it refers to the good news about Jesus.

Paul could have used drama to strengthen those believers. The Greeks loved their drama festivals and put on lavish productions that involved many people and cost large amounts of money.

Or he could have imitated the Roman games that were so popular and adapted them for Christian use; after all, they drew the crowds!

Or he could have used the rhetorical techniques of public speakers of his day to persuade his hearers.

But he didn't use any of these. He knew that God "is able to establish you *by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ.*"

Consider the situation today.

Many churches are seeking to imitate the methods of the world as they seek to convert unbelievers and establish believers. They will use drama, games, Christian music festivals, movies, and motivational talks. When the movie "The Passion of Christ" was showing many thought this would be a powerful means to convert unbelievers.

But the primary means God has chosen to use to convert unbelievers and to establish believers is "*my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ.*"

Are you more established in your faith now than you were at this time last year - more well-grounded and stronger? In 12 months' time will you will be even more solid and stable in your faith, more well established by means of the preaching and teaching about Jesus Christ? This is the power of the gospel.

2. ITS REVELATION

It was hidden.

At the end of verse 25 we read that the gospel was a "mystery hidden for long ages past."

When we use this word "mystery" we usually describe something we cannot understand - we say, "I don't get it, it's a mystery!"

Paul uses the word in a very different way; he means that this message about Jesus had been hidden but was now revealed; it was unknown but has been made known.

He explains that it was hidden "for long ages past" or "eternity past" (verse 25).

He looked way back to when we were chosen in Christ from before the creation of the world.

Even before God had made the world, and even before the fall into sin, he had chosen to rescue his people. The triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, had planned this out in what theologians call the Covenant of Redemption. But this was hidden from us because we weren't even there!

What was hidden **has been revealed**.

If God had not revealed it we would never have known about it.

Paul wrote to the church in Corinth; "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him - but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit" (1 Corinthians 2:9-10).

What was hidden in the mind of God from all eternity has now been "revealed and made known **through the prophetic writings**" (verse 26).

The first promise was given in the Garden of Eden immediately after the sin of Adam and Eve. There God promised one who would crush the head of the serpent.

Later God made promises to Abraham about being a blessing to all the nations (Gen 12), and through Jacob about the sceptre not departing from Judah (Genesis 49:10).

Later still God made clearer promises through Isaiah about someone called the Branch, the Servant of the Lord, the Prince of Peace, Emmanuel.

The Old Testament contains hundreds of promises and prophecies about the coming Messiah, the Christ. Those OT people did not fully understand all their messages; they did not know how their words would be fulfilled.

Peter wrote; "The prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow" (1 Peter 1:10f).

This promised grace finally came **in Jesus Christ**. Jesus came as the revelation of God the Father.

The writer of Hebrews wrote; "In the past God spoke to our forefathers at many time and in various ways but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son." (Hebrews 1:1-2)

Paul wrote about this earlier in Romans (3:21) wrote; "But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify."

Jesus was this righteousness from God. We have just celebrated his coming in the Advent and Christmas season - that "good news of great joy that will be for all the people." (Luke 2:10)

The good news is that Jesus was and is God and man; that he is our prophet, priest and king; that he is our Saviour and Lord; that he taught us about God the Father; that he suffered and died for the sins of his people; that he conquered death and the grave by his resurrection; that he ascended into heaven and sent us his Spirit! All this is the good news about Jesus!

God has commanded that this gospel he has revealed should be **proclaimed to all nations**.

Jesus gave this as his final instruction before leaving this earth: "...go and make disciples of all nations..." (Matthew 28:19)

"You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8)

The disciples began to obey this command ten days later, on the Day of Pentecost when, filled with the Holy Spirit, they preached about Jesus to the crowds assembled in Jerusalem.

Ever since then Christians have been proclaiming this good news to all the nations of the world.

Leighton Ford has written a book on evangelism called "Good News is for Sharing". That's right, isn't it? A couple become engaged, parents announce a wedding, a baby is born, a student passes her exams - all these events are good news, and good news travels fast - we want to share it.

So too with this good news about Jesus - it is for sharing. Have you been doing that this past year? If you have, will you keep on telling others? If you have not, will you resolve to do this - to make disciples, to be a witness of the Lord Jesus?

This good news about Jesus has the power to make you strong and firm in your faith.

It was hidden from all eternity in the mind and will of God but has been revealed in the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

3. This brings us to consider **ITS PURPOSE**.

God has commanded that this gospel be proclaimed "so that all the nations might **believe and obey him**." The Greek literally reads, "to obedience of faith". Paul used this exact phrase in chapter 1:5 to describe the purpose of his ministry to the Gentiles. As he concluded his letter he wanted to remind them of the purpose of the gospel.

The first act of obedience to God is faith. God wants everyone to believe in him.

Jesus said; "The work of God is this; to believe in the One he has sent." (John 6:29).

John wrote; "And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us." (1 John 3:23).

Just as unbelief is the beginning of sin so belief is the beginning of obedience.

Do you believe? Have you responded in faith? Children, young people, long-standing members of this church, guests and visitors? This is the most important question anyone will ask you: Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ? Do you trust in him for the forgiveness of your sins?

If you do, you will express that in a *life* of obedience. "If you love me", said Jesus, "you will keep my commands."

Listen to one of the most sobering warnings in the Bible Jesus said; "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord', will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 7:21). It is not enough to believe; you must live that out. This is the test; this is the proof of the pudding. Just as a good tree will bear good fruit so true believers will produce the good works of obedience. Are you proving your faith by your works?

God has commanded that this gospel be proclaimed "so that all the nations might believe and obey him." That is the first purpose mentioned here; but it is secondary one, it is the lesser one.

The most important purpose of the gospel is that **God may be glorified!** This is what Paul has been building up to in this long sentence. "Now...to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ!" (verse 27). This is the ultimate purpose of our existence. This is the chief end of man. This is our high calling. This is our supreme goal.

Jim Boice has written that we will never rise higher than our idea of God. That is true; we need a big view of God, a high view of God and his glory!

As Paul closed this letter he reminded them that the Lord God was the **only** God. He wrote this letter to the church in Rome. They lived in the capital of the empire with all the Roman gods and idols. Even the Roman Caesar was considered a god.

But we know that "...all the gods of the nations are idols, but the Lord made the heavens." (Psalm 96:5)

Psalm 115 described how useless those idols are, but "Our God is in heaven, he does whatever pleases him" (v 3). He is the Maker of heaven and earth. He is the only God.

And he is the **wise** God. Paul wrote about this at the end of chapter 11 when he concluded his magnificent description of God's sovereign election; "O the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgements, and his paths beyond tracing out!" (verses 33-34).

That profound wisdom of God is seen in how God designed and unfolded his plan for our salvation and how he worked it out in history.

The wisdom of God is supremely seen in the Lord Jesus, "who has become for us wisdom from God" (1 Corinthians 1:30). In him "are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Colossians 2:3)

God is the only God, and he is all wise, and he will receive the glory "**through Jesus Christ**". All three persons of the trinity may be praised and worshipped, but ultimately all our worship centres on God the Father. (1 Corinthians 15:28)

He is praised through Jesus because Jesus made him known. It is because of the death and resurrection of Christ that we can know God the Father and be reconciled to him and approach that throne of grace with confidence.

"To the only wise God **be glory forever...**"

This is a major theme in the Bible, and it needs to be because we are self-centred by nature. Far too often we want God to meet our needs, to satisfy our desires, to fulfil our wants. We want to be in the spotlight; we want people to glorify us.

But God has created us to glorify him. "Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name be the glory!" (Psalm 115:1)

To give God glory is to give him his weight, his due. It is to recognise his splendour; it is to praise him for his greatness; it is to extol him with music and song; it is to honour and worship him as God! This is the great need of the church today.

We have the privilege of being able to do that as individuals in our daily lives, but we do that even more as a church as we gather Sunday by Sunday in corporate worship. It has been our privilege to do that each Lord's Day, morning and afternoon, through this past year, and also today.

We praise God for the good news about the Lord Jesus; for its power to establish us in our faith, and for God's revelation of it in his Son.

To worship God is our most fitting response. Now, and in the future, *all the saints* will give God *all the glory* for *all eternity*.

To the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.