

Gospel-centered

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[0 : 00] If you've got a Bible, you can turn to the New Testament, to the book of Romans, Romans chapter 1. While the kids are all shuffling out there and some of you are shuffling through your Bibles, I wonder maybe just if the vision team from the U.S. might mind standing briefly.

And that's just so that the congregation can see you so they can come and talk to you at coffee after the service. So the guys who are here with the vision team, if you mind just standing very quickly, so now you know who they are, you know what they look like.

We're just really appreciative to have you guys with us. It's just a joy to spend this week with you. And I really encourage the rest of you to just chat with them, find out which parts of the U.S. they are from, what their churches are like back there, and what they're doing here, why they're actually here in the first place.

So there I've given you a whole bunch of questions you can ask when you get to the coffee table afterwards. So nobody should be standing there awkwardly looking around going, I don't know who to speak to or what to say. You've been given the questions.

You've been given the people. So go and fellowship and chat afterwards. We're going to read from the Bible. We're going to read from the book of Romans. This is the Apostle Paul's letter to the church in Rome.

[1 : 13] And he writes these words from chapter 5 and verse 1. Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.

And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings because we know that suffering produces perseverance, perseverance, perseverance, character, and character, hope.

And hope does not put us to shame because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.

Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person. Though for a good person, someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this.

While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him?

[2 : 26] For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life? Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

This is the word of God. Let's pray. Let's ask for God's help as we study this morning. Gracious King, we are thankful for the treasure that is your word.

Lord, we are thankful that it is a treasure we're able to return to time and time again and to see new and beautiful things that fill us up with a sense of awe and wonder at who you are and remind us of your grace to us in Jesus Christ.

And so we pray you would feed us this morning from your word, that you would show us truth, and that we would be changed by the truth that we see, Lord. This is not a fleshly activity, it's a spiritual activity.

We need your Holy Spirit to do this work in us, and so we pray that you would have that special mercy on us through him. Help us now, we ask, for Christ's sake. Amen. So we step away from our series in Acts for a moment to do something of a one-off, both this week actually and next week, so it's not a one-off.

[3 : 45] I suppose it's a two-off. I don't know what you call that exactly. But we knew there was a lot going to be going on this week, and there were going to be guests in town, so we thought, well, let's pause Acts, let's do some other things, and we'll come back to Acts leading up to Easter.

And I thought, from time to time, it's really important for us as a congregation to stop and remind ourselves, what are the key values that drive us as a church?

What do we do? What are we doing? And particularly in a congregation like this, where you have a really high turnover in a city center, people come work in the city for a short period of time, they're here in this congregation for three years, and then the next thing they're off somewhere else in Johannesburg, or London, or Sydney, or New York somewhere, or if they're getting older, then maybe Hermanus or Stellenbosch or something like that.

I don't know. Pick whichever one you want to go to. And so there's this constant need to go back to the basics, to say, hey, guys, this is what we're about. This is our heartbeat.

This is what makes us tick. If you've come to the Union Chapel and you want to know, well, what keeps us up at night? What do we think about? What are we planning for? How do we shape all the ministry? These are the things that keep us ticking.

[4 : 49] And if you go to our website, our values are actually listed there on the website, and you'll see that the very first value that we have listed there is a value that says we are gospel-centered. You might have heard that term, and you say, well, what exactly does that mean?

Is that just some sort of catchy phrase that churches use, but it's very broad, and it's sort of nebulous, and that if I put a test paper in front of you and said, hey, what does gospel-centered mean, you'd go, I don't know, I like to say, but I'm not actually sure what it means.

Well, I want to talk about that this morning and try and make it less nebulous. Sixteen years ago, my wife, Robin, and I were privileged to attend a conference in New York City, and the guest speaker there was Timothy Keller, the pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian at the time and the founder of Redeemer City to City.

And I remember him saying that we live in a very curious time right now. We live in a curious time as evangelicals because evangelicals aren't really sure what the gospel is.

Now, it's curious because the word evangelical literally means of the gospel, as in evangelicals are the people of the gospel. So the people of the gospel don't know what the gospel is.

[6 : 03] And that was back in 2009 that we were at that conference. Since then, that statement has actually been borne out in research. So in 2020, a study came out in the U.S. Now, maybe we're just better here in South Africa, but I think this probably translates here to South Africa as well.

But in 2020, a study came out in the U.S. It said 52% of self-identified Christians believe that their good works are what will make them acceptable to God in the end equation.

In other words, 52% of U.S. Christians believe that the gospel, the central message of the Christian faith is, be a good person and God will accept you.

Now, maybe you are sitting here this morning and you're going, wait, is that not the gospel? If you are thinking that, then I want to say it's not the gospel, but I also want to say I think you're in a really good place this morning because we're going to try and figure out exactly what the gospel is and why it is not, I thought Christianity was be a good person and you get into heaven.

So we're going to try and figure that out. What is the gospel and what does it then mean to be centered upon that gospel? I'm going to use those two words as an outline, gospel and centered.

[7 : 16] Super creative this morning. We're going to be in Romans 5, that passage. So you can keep it open, 1 to 11. What is the central message? What is this gospel that we believe?

If you look at verse 1, the apostle Paul writes to this ancient church in the city of Rome and he says this. He says, therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

So we've believed something. There's that faith element. We've believed something, Paul says, and that belief has resulted in our justification. That is our right standing before God.

Now you go down to verse 6 and you get some more details here.

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die.

[8 : 17] But God demonstrates his own love for us in this. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him?

For if while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life? Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

So that is the gospel. That is the gospel. So here it is. Here's the summary form, in case you weren't quite tracking with that. Out of great love for us, God sent his son into the world to die for us, sinners, so that we might be reconciled to him.

And there are a whole lot of beautiful things that are included in this reconciliation package. It's like a bumper deal. You get a whole lot of stuff with this. So we're justified, forgiven of sin, and declared to be in a right standing in God's sight.

We're saved from wrath. That is, we're saved from God's judgment, his perfect, just judgment against all sin. We have peace with God. We are no longer alienated in terms of our relationship with him.

[9 : 31] And it's all because of what Jesus did. Not what we did. Did you see that? Not what we did. All because of what Jesus did. What he did. So you can, I hope, right there and then, I hope you can see the problem with any gospel that says, you be a good person and then God will accept you.

Any gospel that, like that, that takes Jesus out of the center of the picture is a distortion. At best, then it turns Jesus into a spiritual guide, helping you become a better version of yourself.

But the biblical gospel, the biblical Jesus, is not a spiritual, personal assistant Jesus. He's Jesus the Savior. Start to finish, he saves us.

Your job is to rest in that. To say, I don't actually want to live the way I was living before, to repent, and to say, I trust in you to save me. The gospel is the good news of what Jesus has done to save you, not what you must do to be saved.

In fact, inherent actually in that gospel call is the reality that you can't actually save yourself. So look down at verse 6 again. You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.

[10:50] So we were weak, he says. We were helpless. At the time that God came into this world and came to humanity, in the time that the person of Christ came, we, humanity, were powerless to save ourselves.

We were powerless to deal with sin. We were powerless to deal with corruption. We were powerless to deal with the brokenness that we experience in ourselves and out there in the world. Now, saying that, and the way he just kind of says it without batting an eyelid here, deals a bit of a gut blow to the notion that we as human beings can sort of overcome all of our struggles in this world and build a nice, perfect society, both sort of for ourselves, internally and more generally, as we come together.

But I want to say, I'm not sure any of us actually believe that anyway, that we can really do that. And you know how I know that we don't believe that we can really do that, build this perfect world for ourselves and for each other.

The reason I know that is because, as I've shared with you very, very many times from this pulpit, I am a connoisseur of dystopian, post-apocalyptic movies and TV shows. I have recently just finished Disney's Paradise, which is another great addition to that whole genre.

But if you think about that genre of movies in the last three decades, if you never watch post-apocalyptic stuff, I'm sorry, you're missing out, you should. It's a really good commentary on the nature of humanity. But think about all the shows, think about the movies, think about the books, think about The Walking Dead or Cormac McCarthy's The Road or World War Z or going back the Terminator franchise or even further back Mad Max or Clockwork Orange or even Planet of the Apes.

[12:26] They all have the same theme. The same theme. We kill the world. You notice that? Every single one. We kill the world.

There is no market for movies and TV shows that paint utopian pictures of the future. Where humans figure everything out together and make the world a better place and we all live happily ever after.

There is no market for that. Because deep down, we think it's more likely that a group of genetically modified apes are going to take over the planet than that we are going to build a perfect society together.

We secretly suspect that we're going to bring about our own doom. Now why do we think that? It's because deep down we know there's something fundamentally wrong with the human race. We fear that every day.

Now the Bible comes along and says that gut instinct is right. It's not in your head. It's right. It's true. We are powerless to save ourselves.

[13:31] Our final destination actually is destruction and despair. If we're allowed to carry on into eternity doing the things we're currently doing the way we're doing them. but at just the right time while we were still powerless Christ died for us.

And listen friends this death this love is so very very counterintuitive. So look at verse 7. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die but God demonstrates his own love for us in this.

While we were still sinners Christ died for us. So here's Paul's logic as he's writing this sentence or set of sentences. Generally as a rule of thumb people don't ordinarily die for anybody.

Right? Very very rarely will someone die for someone who is reputedly righteous. Someone might die for another person who's demonstrably good a demonstrably good person.

But Jesus he's in a different category altogether. Because he dies for people who aren't reputedly righteous and who aren't demonstrably good. He dies the passage says for sinners. So he turns that general rule of thumb on its head.

[14 : 50] He does something inconceivable for you and me. The best way that I have heard this explained was years and years and years ago I was in a preaching class. Now this was before even going to seminary.

And we had to do little seven minute long sermons and then we'd have a group of pastors who were a little bit older than us who would tell us why we just completely messed up the Bible and needed to go back and do our homework better. It was a pretty brutal class.

We used to get it in the neck quite badly. But I remember one of the guys was a British guy a young British guy and he gave an illustration in his little seven minute sermon and that's still one of the best illustrations of this whole thing.

He said think of presidents. Now I know we've got all sorts of views about presidents out there but just think of a president. You know that you always get the president and then you get these people who are with him with the suits and the sunglasses and something that looks a little bit like this earpiece.

And they're there. You don't know what their names are. You don't know who they are. You don't know about their family. You know everything about the guy in the middle but you know nothing about them. The security detail.

[15 : 52] Now their job is if a weapon comes out a gun comes out or something and a person raises a gun at the chest of the president they are to selflessly throw themselves in front of the president and take the hit.

So what you've got is you've got the, at least in terms of kind of social strata you've got the infinitely more worthy person being protected by the nobody.

Like he's expendable. That's his job. He's there to be expendable. No one knows about him. I mean it's sad but we've got to protect the person who's up here on the social ladder with the person who's down there on the social ladder so he dives in front and yet in the gospel we seem to have the exact opposite of that.

We have the person who is infinitely worthy diving in front of the person who has no worth to take the bullet. The person who should be protected who should be afforded honor and status and privilege jumps in front of the person who is of far less consequence.

Friends, Christ died for us. We're the bodyguard in this equation in case you were confused. The insignificant. He died for us. And it's not like he just reforms us.

[17 : 09] It's not like he comes to earth and says, look you guys are a little bit messed up so I'm going to start some focus groups. We're going to do some Bible studies. We're going to do ethics 101 so you can be better behaved. He changes us from the inside out.

He comes and he dies for us. That is our gospel. That is the good news of what Jesus our Lord has done to reconcile us to God. And so in that sense you can't actually do the gospel.

you can only respond to this news. And there are two responses. You can either ignore it, face the consequences of ignoring it, or you can respond in repentance and faith.

And so I ask that question. You might be sitting here this morning and you might be that person who's thinking, well I have this whole time of thought that the gospel is I must be a good person and that God is going to look favorably about me for that reason.

And I want to say what you need to do this morning is repent and believe that gospel and God will be faithful to save you. Now if that is the gospel, I think it's pretty clear in the Bible that that is the gospel, how do we stay centered on it as individuals and as a church?

[18 : 17] So here's the second word, centered. Here's our problem. What do we do with the gospel after coming to faith? So the gospel saves us, but does it have anything to do with Christian growth?

Like the rest of the Christian life? Well here's Paul again in a different letter. This is his letter to the church in Colossae. In Colossians chapter 2 verse 6 and 7 he says this, and this verse has been incredibly instrumental on me and how I think about ministry.

He says, so then, to this church of believers, he says, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught and overflowing with thankfulness.

So how do Christians grow according to Paul? Well he says growth starts with coming to Jesus, and it really continues by continually coming to Jesus.

Just as you received him, he says, continue in him. How did you receive him? Repentance and faith. How do you continue in him? Repentance and faith. I think maybe if you've been in church for a long time, you think that the gospel is really only this thing that makes you a Christian, it's like the entranceway.

[19 : 37] You have to believe a couple of principles, Jesus died for my sins, tick, I believe that intellectually, I'm in, I said the prayer, I got baptized, became a member, I'm in. And then that was all we did with the gospel.

It was like, thanks very much for the key in, now it stays over there on the mantelpiece or something. Paul says, no, no, no, no, no, no, wait. The same way you came into the faith, by repenting and believing the gospel, is the way you continue in the faith, by repenting and believing in the gospel.

And so to be gospel-centered is to realize that belief in the gospel is both the way that people become Christians and the way that they mature as Christians. Growing in deeper love, growing in deeper obedience towards God.

When you look at the cross of Christ, you're not just seeing the mechanism by which God makes you a Christian. You're seeing the very power by which God changes and then transforms you into maturity.

So let me show you how this works. When you look at the cross, and I don't mean you obviously weren't there on that day, but when you mentally think about the cross and you think about that moment, when you look at the cross of Christ, what we're really seeing is we're seeing the pinnacle of supreme love.

[20 : 52] You're seeing God's very, very personal, very, very powerful, very costly love letter to you and to me. The cross, Jesus dying, his broken body, is God saying right now, actually in this moment to you as you meditate upon that, he's saying, I love you.

I love you more than you can possibly imagine. Now surely the heart comprehension of that, of that love letter has to change us.

has to make us different people. A deed of true love has to change us. In the words of the cinematic masterpiece, Frozen, only an act of true love can thaw a frozen heart, right?

When Anna sacrifices herself to save her out of control sister, it changes everything. Breaks the icy grip Elsa's magic has on her heart, it defeats the devious Prince Hans from the southern isles.

I really thought he was a good guy at the beginning and then it all went bad. It brings back summer, it opens the castle gates once and for all, it changes everybody that's involved in the story.

[21 : 58] Now if that's what it can do in a cartoon, imagine what it can do through the life and the death of resurrection in Jesus. Imagine what Christ can do for you with that sort of love.

The gospel saves us and the more that we reflect on it, the more that we take it down deep into our hearts and apply the depth of the gospel to different parts of our lives, we are changed by it. We have to be changed by it. How can you stare at love in the face?

It cannot be changed. To the extent that we appropriate the gospel for ourselves, we will be changed. So how do you practically do that? You say, that's really nice, but how do I get there?

How do I practically get there? Well, three things. There could be more, but three things to appropriate the gospel for yourself. Number one, you need the gospel to go from your head to your heart. See, what if you're that person who's kind of grown up in church, grown up in Sunday school, you've been to church service after church service, you've heard the ABCs of the gospel a thousand times, you can pass that written test with flying colors, but it doesn't move you, it doesn't compel you to change.

We see, we have a propensity to lock the gospel up in our heads. That is, we intellectually understand it, we understand the details, but it stays in our head as a set of propositions that we agree with, we ascend to, and then nothing more.

[23 : 21] That is not actually what this passage is talking about though, back in Romans 5. And it's a very clear example of that. Look in verse 5. Paul says, hope does not put us to shame because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

You see what he's actually saying there in that moment. He is saying that God makes his love real to us. Not that he just gives us a proposition, but he actually, by the supernatural work of the Spirit, makes his love real to us.

The love of Christ has to be supernaturally experienced in the heart, in the center of our being. That's more than just the emotions, that's the will, the desires, the affections, all of it. God, by his Spirit, somehow supernaturally pours that love into our hearts, not into our heads, into our hearts.

In other words, that saving love that we know to be intellectually true, becomes manifestly experienced by us in a deep and powerful way. I would want to caution you that if there is absolutely no experience of God's love in you at all, and that doesn't mean that Christians don't go backwards sometimes and go through really dark places sometimes, for long periods of times, really dry spells, but if there is no experience of God's love in you at all, you really need to stop and wonder if that gospel penny has dropped from up here down to here.

And this is a supernatural work of the Lord, Paul says. Think about it this way, when we talk about the gospel, we are talking about something that centers on a historical event that happened 2,000 years ago, which means, just logically, that it is geographically, chronologically, culturally removed from you and me and from our day-to-day experience.

[25 : 10] Like, it is way far away from me just walking around the new Riverlands mall on our fancy new checkers that we've got there. Like, there's nothing further away than walking around Riverlands shopping mall and Jesus Christ hanging on the cross 2,000 years ago in ancient Palestine.

There's a lot of distance there. So as much as you might believe, well, that happened and it was for me and it was good and I want it, it's hard to feel it.

And so God has to bring the significance home to you. God, by His Spirit, has to get over those geographical, cultural, chronological hurdles, take it off of the pages of an ancient book and put it in your heart.

Let me give you an illustration of how this works. And this is a slightly morbid illustration, but I think it works. Think about death. You all know that death is a terrible thing, right?

I don't have to tell you that. Death is a terrible thing. You know intellectually that death is a horrifying, terrifying, terrible thing that you wouldn't wish on anybody, whether it would happen to you or to somebody else.

[26 : 18] But you, this morning, are not all so consumed with the horror of death that you're afraid to wake up tomorrow morning, right? You're not so overwhelmed with the terrifying nature of death, even though intellectually you know it is terrifying that you're unable to walk out of this building after the service.

You're not all living under that fear. You're able to distance yourself, aren't you, somehow, emotionally, psychologically distance yourself from the reality of what death actually is. You can distance yourself.

Until when? Until somebody dies. somebody close to you dies. Then the experience rushes in. Then you feel the horror.

Then you feel the grief. Then you feel the sadness. And you cry your eyes out. That which you knew to be intellectually true has now become experientially true.

You taste it. It's real. Now God, he does a similar thing here. By his spirit, he takes the intellectual truths of the gospel and he brings them home to you.

[27 : 29] He makes them real. So that you don't just know that God loves you. You feel that God loves you. Even Presbyterians feel that God loves them.

Now how do you get more of that? Well it's God who pours out his spirit into our hearts.

We don't sort of conjure it up. And so I can think there is no other response then but to pray. To humble ourselves and say, Lord, let me taste the fullness of your love to me in Jesus Christ.

Pray, pray, pray. You cannot grow as a Christian without prayer. But then there are some other things you can do. You can nurture the love of Christ in your heart. So here's the second thing.

The second way you appropriate the gospel is by nurturing the love of Christ in your heart. The gospel is part of a love relationship. Remember it's based on the premise that there is a broken relationship between you and God.

[28 : 31] And so Jesus on the cross is not just forgiving you of your sins, he's actually bringing the two parties back together again. If you think about the very beginning of the Bible, this is fairly obvious.

Adam is in the garden, he has this wonderful access to God, he walks in the cool of the day and talks with him, there is relationship, there are friends. When Adam sins, he gets kicked out of the garden and he thinks, well look, maybe I'm just not going to be invited around as often as I used to get invited around.

but in case he's tempted to think that the relationship is just slightly impaired, God puts an angel, a scary being, people are always freaked out when they see angels in the Bible, they're not like creatures with fluffy wings, a scary being and a flashing sword at the entrance.

That is like we're not friends anymore, don't come back here, this relationship is severed, it's done, it is over. But the gospel comes and it puts the relationship back together again.

And so like all relationships then it needs work. Even if the Holy Spirit is pouring warm fuzzies into your heart, that relationship still needs work. If you think about a marriage for example, marriages start with all those warm fuzzies, chemistry, sparks, flying, I still has warm fuzzies in case you were wondering, but everything seems effortless at the beginning, right?

[29 : 57] But if you want those warm fuzzies to continue and to carry on and to even translate into something even bigger and deeper and more profound, you've got to put in the work of service and sacrifice, giving up your needs for the sake of the other.

You need to put in the work, otherwise those fuzzies dissipate. Now it's no different when it comes to God and His love for you. Yes, God is pouring His love into your heart by His Spirit, but if you're not nurturing that in some way, then please, please don't be surprised that you're coming here on a Sunday morning and going, I feel a little bit dead inside when I think about the love of God.

I don't feel anything there. It's empty, it's cold, it's gone. How do you nurture that relationship? It's not rocket science. It's what the Protestant Reformers called the ordinary means of grace.

Regular Lord's Day worship, what you're doing right now. Participation in the sacraments. studying your Bible, prayer, fellowship, spiritual disciplines, engaging in the activities where their gospel truths are being reinforced over and over and over and over again.

That's what it is. That's how you nurture the relationship. You are gospel-centered when the ongoing nurture of the gospel is going on in your life. Third thing, third reason we don't appropriate this gospel is because we spoil our appetites.

[31 : 25] Our mothers know best. My mother used to say to me in the afternoon when I was out playing with friends and I was maybe coming into the kitchen and there was a sweet there. She said, don't eat the sweet because it's going to spoil your appetite, right?

There's real science behind that. It wasn't just mother's wisdom. If you eat that sweet, you get a little shot of sugar and you suddenly think you're full but you're not really full and then you miss out on the big feast that comes afterwards and you don't really want to eat your meal and you miss the real sustenance from the real feast that comes afterwards.

You spoil your appetite. Same thing happens in Christianity. You spoil your appetite for Christ's love when you thereby rob it of its power to change you when you nurture other false loves, loves that lead you to sin.

sin. So when you nurture your pride or you nurture your selfishness or your lust or your anger or your arrogance and there are many different ways you can do that. We've talked a lot about the whole concept of idolatry and heart idolatry and the different ways we creatively nurture!

these other loves. But when you willingly participate in activities or thought patterns that you know are going to feed those sins, you put yourself in great danger of missing out on the feast.

[32 : 36] See, what you need to do is you need to look inside and you need to say, when I look at those sinful desires, as enticing as they might look to me, they are actually just little sweets.

And there is an unbelievable feast on the other end, waiting to nourish me, to nourish my soul in a way that I just cannot explain. I would be a fool, I would be the fool of fools to spend my life chasing off to the sweets when the feast is over there, on offer to me.

Friends, listen, you won't grow until the broken, bruised body of our Lord Jesus Christ becomes your bread. You won't change until his blood becomes your drink.

You need that feast. Do you know why I want the Union Chapel to be a gospel-centered church? church? It's because I want people to come in here week after week and to taste that feast.

It's what I want. It's what you should want. We are surrounded by some of the best restaurants in the city where this building is right now. In fact, we're surrounded by some of the best restaurants in the world. But I actually think we've got a better meal to offer over here.

[33 : 55] Not because we're a spectacular church. We're not. We're pretty ordinary. not because I'm a particularly gifted communicator. I'm not. I saw the eye-rolling during my attempts at humor.

We don't have the best Sunday school programs or the best music or the best discipleship programs. None of that. It is because we at least try to consistently preach and teach the only message that can truly fill you up and satisfy you.

This message in the words of the most prolific, one of the most prolific hymn writers of the 18th century, Anne Steele. Listen to these words. Lord, we adore thy boundless grace, the heights and depths unknown, of pardon life and joy and peace in thy beloved son.

O wondrous gift of love divine, dear source of every good, Jesus in thee what glory shine, how rich thy flowing blood. Come all ye pining, hungry, poor, the Savior's bounty, taste.

Behold a never failing store for every willing guest. Here shall your numerous ones receive a free, a full supply. He has unmeasured bliss to give and joys that never die.

[35 : 17] You can't get a meal like that in any other restaurant in the city. You can't get a meal like that in any other activity in this city. but so long as we stay gospel centered, you'll be able to get it here.

And so I pray for you that you would be centered on the gospel and I pray collectively the Lord would center us as a church on the gospel that we might know and taste and experience that feast.

Let's pray together. Amen. Our Lord, our Savior, this is such a glorious gospel.

It is remarkable that we can basically preach the same thing every Sunday and never tire of hearing it. We have no other message, we have no other hope, but the finished work of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And so teach us to know it, teach us to love it, teach us to build our lives upon it, Lord. And through resting by faith in Christ, won't you allow us by your Holy Spirit to experience that love in its fullness, to know beyond any shadow of doubt that we will sit at that feast in eternity and to turn away from things that would distract us from that glorious feast.

[36 : 40] Lord, I pray for any person who is sitting here right now who maybe doesn't know that gospel, who has never said, I repent of my sin and I trust in Jesus for my salvation. I pray you would bring them to faith this morning. They would come to you.

I pray for the person who is sitting here who is saying, I don't experience the love of Jesus. I believe these things. I believe them for a long time, but I feel cold and dry and almost dead inside. I pray that they would humble themselves in prayer and that you would meet them, Lord, and commune with them.

That the Spirit might pour his love into their hearts. And I pray for us as a church. Lord, keep us faithful. May the term gospel centered never just be a catchphrase on a website.

May it be the descriptor of who we actually are as people together. Help us in this journey, we pray for Christ's sake. Amen. Friends, we're going to respond to the teaching of God's word by saying a prayer of confession together that's going to be on the screen there.

We confess our sins together as a congregation corporately every Sunday. one of the reasons we do that is because this is a shunning the sweets activity. This is like seeing the sweets for what they really are so that we can look at the feast more clearly.

[37 : 51] And so I invite you to confess your sins before almighty God. Won't you say these words out loud? O Lord, we want to enter your presence, awed by your majesty, greatness, and glory, encouraged by your love.

Yet there is a coldness in our hearts, a hardness toward you, an unwillingness to admit our sin and need for you. Forgive us for Jesus' sake.

Come near and strengthen us until Christ reigns supreme within us in every thought, word, and deed. Give us a faith that purifies the heart, overcomes the world, works by love, fastens us to you, and always clings to the cross.

In Jesus' name, Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.