

Power to Save – Romans 1:16-17

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Recap

1. We concluded last Sunday with the first part of v. 16, where Paul says he *wasn't ashamed* of the Gospel of Christ.
2. Though he'd suffered much for the Gospel's sake, he knew he was called to take it far & wide, sharing it where ever he went. So he did.
3. When he preached, there were 2 basic reactions: *Some believed, others rejected*.
4. Among those who *rejected, most* just turned away disinterested, *a few* became hostile & determined to make life miserable for Paul.
5. All he had to do to avoid the ridicule & suffering his enemies heaped on him was to shut up, to silence his message.
6. But that was never an option for Paul.
 - a. Even when angry mobs gathered to tear him apart, Paul just saw them as another group to preach to.
 - b. His friends were barely able to persuade him wisdom lay in moving on.
7. The reason Paul was not ashamed to preach the Gospel of Christ was because he knew it was *nothing less than the power of God to accomplish salvation*
8. That's where we ended last week; realizing the power of God we see demonstrated in creation is *now applied* in accomplishing our salvation.
9. No wonder Paul wasn't ashamed of sharing it!
 - a. So what if some mocked & rejected him?
 - b. He knew there would *always be some* who'd come to faith & be forever changed.

B. Today

1. What we need to do today is *dig deeper* into vs. 16 & 17.
2. There's truth here that can *revolutionize our understanding* of what it means to **BE SAVED**.

II. TEXT

A. Power To Save

¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.

1. **Salvation!** To the modern ear that word carries strong religious overtones.
 - a. Some get a mental picture of a neon sign over a Rescue Mission – “**Jesus Saves**”.
 - b. Others imagine a televangelist calling people to the altar.
2. *Like many words* that today have a mainly religious connotation, *salvation* did not *begin* as religious word.
 - a. It referred to the *rescue* a heroic leader accomplished for his endangered people.

- b. Salvation is what the Allied powers brought Europe when they defeated Nazi Germany.
 - c. Salvation is what the Riders of Rohan brought Minas Tirith on the field of Pelennor when they defeated Sauron's army.
 - d. It's what your older brother did when he rescued you from that menacing bully.
3. Salvation is used in the Bible to describe *God's action for us* because that's what it is – a *Rescue* of His people from danger.
4. In the OT, the Hebrew word for salvation is “yesha.”
- a. It means *to bring into a spacious place*.
 - b. The root word means *freedom from limitation*.
 - c. Another Hebrew word often translated as “salvation,” means *to redeem*.
 - 1) It speaks of *recovering something that's fallen into enemy hands*.
 - 2) The Hebrew *Goel*, the kinsman-redeemer, is one of the titles for the Messiah whose mission it to *save* His people.
5. Salvation was a concept that grew in the OT to mean God's action in history to rescue His people from the Fall,
- a. To *liberate* them from bondage to sin & death
 - b. *And bring them* into a place where all that was lost in the Fall is restored.
 - c. The end result of salvation is *complete wholeness & untroubled peace*.
 - d. When salvation is complete, *all threat of danger is past*.
6. In the NT, the Greek word “soteria” means the same thing.
7. Think about this now as we consider what Paul says here.

The gospel of Christ is the power of God to salvation.

8. What Jesus did at the Cross & thru His resurrection accomplishes our salvation; all of it, from beginning to end.
- a. It paid our debt of sin.
 - b. It provides the power we need to live a new life.
 - c. And it guarantees our final entrance into the glory of heaven.

10. In the NT salvation has 3 tenses: *Past, Present, & Future*. → Get this, these terms.

- a. **Past** - Jesus **HAS SAVED** us from the *penalty* of sin. - *Justification*
 - b. **Present** - He **IS SAVING** us from the *power* of sin by the work of the Holy Spirit. – *Sanctification*
 - c. **Future** – He **WILL SAVE** us from the *presence* of sin when He takes us to heaven. – *Glorification*
11. Paul says *all God's power* is involved in this 3-fold work of salvation.
12. Now – consider this . . .
- a. How much of our assistance did God need to save us from the *penalty* of sin?
 - 1) None! He did it all.
 - 2) All we need to do to receive forgiveness is believe Jesus died for us.

- b. How much assistance does He need to save us from the *presence* of sin when He takes us to heaven?
- 1) None – He’ll do it all.
 - 2) All we need to do is keep believing to the end.
13. So why do we think that now, *while we’re being saved from the power of sin*, He needs our assistance?
- a. Is His power somehow *less capable* of dealing with our present than our past & future salvation?
 - b. No! It’s all the same power.
 - c. So why do we think *our sanctification*, our being delivered from the power of sin *into* the image of Christ is up to us?
 - 1) Why do we think the key to spiritual growth is *making resolutions to be better*?
 - 2) Or that growing in Christ requires devoting ourselves to a rigorous lifestyle of hard discipline.
14. Our sanctification occurs *the same way* our justification & glorification comes – by faith, not works, not self effort!
- Look → **I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes.**
 - Not → **for everyone**
 - **who works real hard to earn it.**
 - **who prove themselves worthy by doing good works.**
 - **who reads 10 chapters a day, prays for 3 hours, double tithes, signs up for 5 ministries at their church, never misses a meeting, & goes on at least one short term mission trip every year.**
15. ‘Gospel’ means Good **NEWS**, not good *advice*.
- a. It’s an *announcement* about what **IS**, about the change that’s occurred because of what Jesus did.
 - b. The Gospel is not a *suggestion* on how to have a happy life.
 - c. It’s a *report* about a *new reality* that’s invaded the time & space of this fallen world.
16. So when Paul says in 2 Cor. 5:17 we are new creations in Christ, where the old identity has passed away & everything about us has become new – that’s a Fact!
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17. The implications of this are staggering!
- a. It means *everything* we read in the Bible about the way we *ought to live*, the way we *ought to be*, we can in reality have *right now*!
 - b. It doesn’t matter what’s happened in our past, or how we “*feel*” about it.
 - c. Because of what Jesus did on that cross & thru the resurrection we’ve been given a *new identity*.
 - d. We’ve entered into a new relationship with God that sees *all His power* made available to help us *walk in the reality of who & what we are now in Christ*.
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18. Can I bring out my old saw, Gal. 2:20 here? It fits so perfectly!

19. In John 15 Jesus told the disciples –

“Abide in Me, & I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in Me.”

a. There it is! These vs. help us understand what Paul means in Rom. 1:16.

b. The power we need to live the Christian life isn't from us! It's His resurrected life IN us.

c. And that life *flows to us* when we simply *abide*, when we *trust* in Him.

20. Let me see if I can use an illustration to help here when I say the Gospel is Good NEWS, not advice.

a. Have you seen those late night infomercials where some guy is holding a seminar telling people how they can make a million dollars in real estate?

b. Supposedly by following his techniques, with no money down, you can buy property for pennies on the dollar, then turn around & sell it for huge profits.

c. What he *doesn't* disclose are all the laws & the 1 in a million chance the average person has in finding the kind of property he's referring to.

d. Yet hundreds of people sign up to take these seminars, at big fees. Someone's getting rich alright, but it's not on real estate – it's on seminar registrations.

e. Okay – let's say you're up late watching TV with remote in hand.

f. You're channel surfing and come across one of these seminars – financial **ADVICE** on how to make a million dollars.

g. You think, I could use a million dollars, so you watch for a while, then get bored & change the channel.

h. The news is next and you're about to press the button when there's a report about a wealthy benefactor who's giving away a million dollars to *anyone* who wants it.

i. There's no gimmick involved, no requirements to meet. The guy just wants to give his money away and has plenty of it. All anyone has to do to get a million dollars is to drive to the guy's house.

j. To prove the veracity of the report, the reporter who's interviewing the benefactor says, “Can I have a million dollars?” And the guy hands her a briefcase, which she opens to reveal neat stacks of thousand dollar bills.

21. What does any sane person do – sign up for the sham seminar or make a quick trip to where they're giving money away?

22. The Gospel isn't *good advice* on how to create your own spiritual wealth.

23. It's good news that in His mercy & grace, God is giving it to those who will simply believe & trust in what Christ has done.

B. A Key Insight

1. I want to share a key insight into something central to the Christian life many have missed. It flows from this passage.

2. Real spiritual growth comes from an abiding faith in Christ that puts us in such close fellowship with Him it's His life that animates us. That's what Paul is saying in Gal. 2:20.
4. If there's a *sin* in my life that needs to be *overcome*,
 - a. It's not going to be *my effort* to conquer it that's going to do it,
 - b. It's going to be His victory over *all sin* at the cross that defeats the power of *that sin* in my life.
5. If there's a *virtue* I need to *install* in my character,
 - a. It's not going to be my effort at being a better person that's going to accomplish it.
 - b. It's going to be the power of *Christ's resurrected life in me* that produces that virtue.
6. The *proof* Christ has affected His salvation in me over that sin & implanting that virtue is that I'll not stumble in that sin & will consistently bear the good fruit of that virtue.
7. The evidence it's *only been my effort* to overcome sin & be a better person is that I keep struggling & never *really* change.
8. The invitation of Christ remains the same -
Whoever wants to be mine, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, & follow Me.
 - a. All we do in following Jesus is die to self & look to Him to live in us.
 - b. He does the rest – it's His life & power that will conquer sin & install virtue.
 - c. Only His life can create His image in us.
9. Here's the Key: *Yield, don't struggle*. Surrender to Jesus, don't wrestle with your bad self.

C. Jew & Gentile

1. Paul ends v. 16 with . . .
for the Jew first and also for the Greek.
2. He's *not saying* the Gospel applies to Jews **MORE** than Gentiles,
3. Only that it *came to* the Jews first because they were the people through Whom the Savior arrived.
4. But the Gospel isn't just for one group – it's for **ALL**.

D. V. 17 = We Live By Faith

¹⁷ For in it [the Good News of Christ] the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith."

1. V. 17 is *the pivotal point* of the whole Gospel.
2. This is what marks the crucial turning point between Judaism & Christianity.
3. Really what Paul says here *marks the dividing line* between all religions & the Gospel.
4. You see, religion is man's attempt to reach *up* to God, it's man's attempts at being good enough to secure God's approval.
5. Even orthodox Judaism thinks God's favor is gained by keeping the Law.

6. **Righteousness** is determined by how closely one observes the rules.
7. Where Christianity separates from all other religions is in its belief that **true righteousness** isn't the product of our attempts to be good; it's a **gift** God gives to those who believe in Christ.
8. **The righteousness God requires** isn't self-manufactured, it's not **our** rightness; it's **HIS!**
9. That's what the Gospel announces—that when we put our trust in Christ, God's righteousness is **attributed to us**.
10. In 2 Cor. 5:21, Paul spells it out even more clearly when he says, **[God] made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.**
 - a. At the cross, Jesus took our sin on Himself & paid its ugly debt, breaking the power of sin in our lives forever.
 - b. In exchange for our sin, He gave us His own perfect righteousness.
 - c. What an exchange! We give over our sin & He bestows His righteousness.
 - d. We definitely got the better deal.
11. The phrase “from faith to faith” is an idiom meaning this transaction takes place **all by faith**. The NIV version renders it well when it says it's “by faith from first to last.”
12. Paul knows what he's saying is a radical idea, so he proves he's not making it up out of thin air by quoting Habakkuk 2:4 – “The just shall live by faith.”

III. CONCLUSION

A. Martin Luther

1. The rest of Romans is an elaboration of vs. 16 & 17 & especially this last part of v. 17 so I'll leave further comment for later.
2. Let me end today by telling a story of how **powerful** this passage has proven to be.
3. Martin Luther was brilliant. He'd been studying to be a lawyer when circumstances re-directed his path into being a monk.
 - a. He began teaching the Bible at the University of Wittenberg, Germany.
 - b. His analytical personality, coupled to his training in law & studies in the Scriptures combined to create such an overwhelming sense of guilt he despaired of ever pleasing God.
 - c. He spent many days fasting, praying, & studying trying to purge his mind & heart of the tormenting sense God was poised to squash him for his sins.
 - d. The more he tried to gain God's favor, the worst it got.
 - e. He even went to Rome, thinking a visit to the mother church would help his quest to find peace with God. But his distress only grew.
 - f. While climbing the Lateran staircase on his knees as an act of penance, a verse he'd studied in Romans came to mind – this verse, Rom. 1:17.

In [the Gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, *“The just shall live by faith.”*

- g. Luther later said in that instant it all became clear –
- h. The righteousness God requires isn't something he could produce by his own works.
- i. The only righteousness that satisfies God is *perfect* righteousness, His *OWN* righteousness, which He *gives* to those who *live by faith* in Christ.
- j. Luther suddenly realized all his agony of soul & efforts to make himself acceptable to God were really a gross rejection of God's grace.
- k. The whole time he thought he was *proving* his desire to please God, Luther was in fact *insulting* Him by rejecting His salvation & trying to save himself.
- l. After all, if Martin could make himself good enough, what *need* was there of Christ?
4. He got up off his knees, returned to Wittenberg & began to teach his students the real Gospel, the *Good News* – that salvation is a gift God gives to those who trust in Christ, not themselves.
5. That truth holds a power so full & free, it can transform even the most sin-wrecked life into a thing of glorious beauty.

B. Good NEWS

1. Remember, the Gospel is Good *News*, not advice.
2. It's a *report* about a *new reality* open to all who believe in Christ, who place their trust in Him, *not* themselves.
3. Just as it's the power of God that *has saved* us from the penalty of sin & *will save* us from its presence,
4. It's the power of God that *saves us today* from the power of sin.
5. All we need to do is continue to trust & abide in Christ.