

"The Gospel: The Power of God"- Romans 1:16-17

I. INTRODUCTION

A. *What Book?*

1. There's a little game I like to occasionally play with people
2. We'll be out to lunch or dinner with someone; or maybe they've come over to our house for a night of fellowship
3. I like to ask questions to find out more about a person
4. One of them I like to ask is, "If you had to be isolated on a island for one year with nothing else to do but read one book of the Bible, which book would you pick?"
5. Think about that for a moment: what would you say?
6. I've thought a lot about it and I've narrowed my choice down to two books that I have a rather difficult time deciding between: Ephesians & Romans
7. I'd probably try to wrangle taking both of them; but if I was really pressed to just one, it would probably be Ephesians
8. And you'd have to fight me to get me to leave Romans behind

B. *Ephesians & Romans*

1. Well, it just so happens that I have the tremendous honor of being allowed to teach this semester at the Calvary Chapel Bible College extension campus in SB; and I am teaching the Ephesians course
2. And now, here on Sunday mornings, since we completed Kings last week, we follow our typical pattern of study and jump back up to the NT for the next book in our study through the Bible; and guess what—it's time to study Romans!
3. I fell like the proverbial kid I the candy store!

C. *Background*

1. We'll be doing more background and introductory study on Romans this Wednesday in our mid-week study
2. But this morning, let's begin simply by saying that the Apostle Paul, who wrote Romans, had never been to Rome prior to his writing this letter
3. It was his intention to go there, but he awaited the Lord's timing and direction
4. Since Rome was the capital and center of the known world,
5. And since he had heard a large and vibrant church was already in existence there,
6. He wanted to make sure what they believed was the full and pure Word of God
7. So he wrote this letter to them, as kind of an "A to Z" presentation of the Gospel of Christ
8. Bible students and scholars see in Romans the most complete expression of the Paul's theology

9. Indeed, many critics of Christianity who have read the bible to find ammunition to discredit the faith have been systematically lead to faith in Christ as they read the inescapable logic of Paul's argument in Romans
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10. After his typical greetings at the opening of the letter in Ch. 1,
11. Paul tells them how he longed to visit them and prayed he would be able to
12. He told them his great desire was to preach in Rome, the center of the mighty empire
13. Then in vs. 16 & 17 he boils down his whole message into it's essence, and says . . .

II. TEXT

A. Vs. 16-17

{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.

{17} For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith."

1. Really, the rest of the book is but an elaboration of these two verses
2. This is the essence of Paul's whole ministry:
 - a. to proclaim the gospel of Christ
 - b. to declare a message that has inherent within it the power to radically and fundamentally change an individual and all of humankind

B. Not Ashamed

1. He begins by saying, "**I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ,**"
2. It's a good thing Paul was not ashamed of the Gospel!
 - a. his boldness to declare it resulted in the spread of the gospel around the entire Mediterranean Sea in his single lifetime
 - b. few men have had a more dramatic impact on the whole course of human events than Paul
 - c. and all because he wasn't ashamed of the gospel of Christ
 - d. but was convinced it was the power of God
3. Yet we might think he would have good reason to be ashamed and to be intimidated by man
4. After all, consider how Paul was often received when he came preaching and teaching the Gospel of Christ
 - a. he was imprisoned in Philippi
 - b. chased out of Thessalonica
 - c. smuggled out of Damascus and Berea
 - d. laughed at in Athens and called a "seed-picker"
 - e. considered a fool in Corinth
 - f. declared a blasphemer and lawbreaker in Jerusalem,
 - g. and in Lystra, he was stoned and left for dead
5. Still, he was not ashamed of the Gospel
6. Why? Because he knew it's power to *transform* the human life
 - a. he had seen it in his own life

- b. and he had witnessed it countless times in the lives of those he preached to
- 7. Though we all know it is a serious sin to be ashamed of Christ, we also know it is very difficult avoiding that sin
 - a. when we have the opportunity to speak for Christ, we often do not
 - b. we know that to the lost, the gospel is *unattractive, intimidating, and repulsive*
 - c. it exposes man's sin, his wickedness, and depravity
 - d. it lays bare his lostness, and declares pride to be despicable
 - e. it shows the utter pointlessness of trying to gain God's acceptance by mere works
 - f. very simple, to the unbeliever, the gospel isn't good news, it's bad
 - g. for that reason, the fear of man, and of not being able to handle their hostile arguments is the single biggest hindrance in sharing Christ with others
- 8. If you draw a circle with white chalk around a goose, it will not leave that circle for fear of crossing the line
- 9. In the same way, the chalk marks of criticism, ridicule, and rejection keep many believers from leaving the security of silence to share the gospel with the lost
- 10. Much of the corruption of the Gospel we see taking place today is the result of people trying to help the spread of the message by removing some of its more offensive points,
 - a. like sin and the call to self-denial
 - b. they've removed these and replaced them with things less offensive and more appealing to the mind of fallen man
 - c. like positive thinking and the promise of unbounded health and unending wealth
 - d. Geoffery Wilson wrote, "The unpopularity of a crucified Christ has prompted many to present a message which is more palatable tot he unbeliever, but the removal of the offense of the cross always renders the message ineffective. And inoffensive gospel is also an inoperative gospel. Thus, Christianity is wounded most in the house of its friends." [\[1\]](#)

- 11. Paul wasn't ashamed because what he had to share was truly good news, which is what the word "gospel" means
- 12. 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 is probably the most compact presentation of the Gospel in the NT
- 13. There Paul wrote,

{3} I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,

{4} and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures

- a. *this* is what he did not shun to declare
- b. *this* is what he wasn't ashamed of
- 14. In fact, it was such good news, his opponents couldn't shut him up

15. Even when they stoned him to death and dragged him outside the city to toss his body in the garbage heap, God raised him up, and he wanted to go back into the city and keep preaching
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16. Oh that God might give us such boldness and change our sense of shame to something holy like a shame for our sin that would keep us from doing it
17. I'll never forget something that happened when I was in 6th grade
- a. I was with my friends, one of their mothers had picked me up at our home and we were all going somewhere for an outing
 - b. the car was filled with boys and girls, I was the last to be picked up
 - c. my mother came out of the apartment and stood on the sidewalk, smiling and waving as we left
 - d. at that moment, I was terribly embarrassed of her
 - 1) here I was with a group of my friends, at that age in which I was emerging into my teens
 - 2) and my mother was waving and smiling at me like I was some kind of a little child
 - e. I got bright red with embarrassment, and made some really shameful comment about how stupid she was
 - f. for the next ½ hour I felt embarrassed, then it gradually subsided
 - g. but quite a while after that, whenever I thought of it, I got embarrassed again!
 - h. now that many years have passed, I look back on my reaction with great shame!
 - i. instead of embarrassment, I should have cheerfully waved back and took pride in the fact that my mother cared enough about me to come out and say good-bye and wish me a good time
 - j. [to tape]
17. How often are we ashamed of the gospel? How often do we totally misplace our priorities and get embarrassed for being a Christian?
18. When we stand in eternity, what will be our evaluation of such foolish and petty shame?

C. The Power Of God

1. Paul tells us where the source of his confidence came from
 - a. it wasn't because he had psyched himself up to be some kind of a spiritual masochist
 - b. he wasn't ashamed of the Gospel of Christ because he knew it to be **"the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes."**
2. Let the mockers scoff! Let the critics argue! Let the profane ridicule and decry him!
3. To Paul, it was all nothing more than the ramblings of the ignorant
4. Because he had seen the power of God inherent in the good news of Jesus Christ
5. This word *power* is the same word we get out word *dynamite*, and *dynamic* from
 - a. it's the power that moves things

- b. it's a power that brings change
 - 6. People have an innate desire to be changed
 - a. they want to look better, feel better,
 - b. have more money, more power, more influence
 - c. the premise of most advertising is that people want to change in some way or another, and the job of the advertiser is to convince them that their product or service will add a desired dimension to their lives
 - 7. A host of programs, philosophies, and religions promise to make *inward* changes
 - 8. But it's not within man's power to change himself
 - a. In Jerusalem. 13:23 we read (Jer 13:23) "Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots? *Then* may you also do good who are accustomed to do evil."
 - b. only the power of God is able to overcome man's sinful nature and impart spiritual life
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- 9. So God's power works to bring *salvation*
 - 10. Now here's a word that sounds distinctly Christian
 - a. non-Christians expect believers to talk about "being saved" and such
 - b. it's a word that has come to be synonymous with being "born again"
 - 11. It comes as a bit of a surprise to realize that it really had little such religious connotations in the time of the early church
 - 12. The word "soteria" was a relatively common yet rich word which meant to rescue, to make safe, to deliver, and to bring to health
 - 13. Every one of these subtle differences in the meaning of the word are taken up into the message of what Jesus had done for us in His death and resurrection
 - a. He has rescued us from the clutches of sin and death
 - b. He has made us safe by breaking the power of sin and satan
 - c. He has delivered us from hell and bondage to the devil
 - d. and He is bringing us to health by progressively conforming us to His image
 - 14. Another way to think of God's power to save is to think of it in the three tenses of time
 - a. past, present, and future
 - b. **for the PAST:** we *were* saved from the *penalty* of sin by the death of Christ on the Cross
 - c. **for the PRESENT:** we are *being* saved from the *power* of sin by His resurrected life and the in-dwelling of the Holy Spirit
 - d. **for the FUTURE:** we *will be* saved from the *presence* of sin by His ascension into heaven and the promise we will be gathered there to Him
 - 15. Indeed friends, there is good news, and it is this: the power of God in salvation is great because it includes all we are, past, present, and future
 - 16. We are forgiven, redeemed, adopted, changed, made safe, and given an unshakable hope!
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- 17. But notice that Paul limits the sphere of this power to only those who believe

18. While Christ died for all, only those who come to Him in faith and receive his gift will be saved
19. Those who reject Christ and live whatsoever way they please, hoping that when they stand before God in judgement, they will find Him to be just a big cosmic creampuff are badly mistaken
20. Death seals our choices; The time to come to faith in Christ is now!
21. Salvation is real; the power of God is available to save, but a man must believe in order for that salvation to become operable in his life
22. Like the electricity in the wall and an appliance
 - a. the appliance will sit there motionless until it is plugged in
 - b. even so, faith wires the soul for God's gift of salvation

D. Jews & Greeks

1. Paul says that it is "**for the Jew first and also for the Greek.**"
2. He is not setting up some kind of two-tiered experience of Christianity here
3. he is simply speaking historically
 - a. the Jews had simply been the people God had chosen to bring His salvation through
 - b. someone had to be the agent of salvation; so He picked the Jews
 - c. therefore, it was natural that they be the first to hear
 - d. but once that first expression of the gospel was given, it came also to the Gentiles
 - e. from the beginning, it was God's intent to bless all peoples [\[2\]](#)

E. The Righteousness of God

1. Paul now gives us the real essence of his message
2. In v. 17 he writes, "**For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith."**"
3. In the gospel, the righteousness of God is revealed
4. Since this is what he goes on to elaborate on in chapters 3 & 4 in some of the most profound words to ever be uttered in the entire course of history, we'll leave it till we get there to develop this in greater depth
5. But let me just whet your appetite with this . . .
6. Paul says that in the gospel of Jesus Christ is revealed the manner in which God saves us and makes us right
 - a. that phrase at the beginning of v. 17, "the righteousness of God" is better understood as "the righteousness *from* God."
 - b. you see, the all consuming concern is how sinful man can be accepted by a holy God
 - c. and Paul drops a theological bomb by saying that God takes *His* righteousness, which is totally perfect, and by faith, puts it to our account
 - d. so that while we are in experience and practice, not perfect, God reckons us to as perfect
 - e. "**from faith to faith,**" or to say it another way, *from start to finish*, faith is the critical issue

7. Paul knew that salvation by faith alone was a complete reversal on the expectations and sensibilities of man
8. He knew that it flew in the face of all religion and philosophy with their incessant harping and high morality and good works
9. So he quoted from Habakkuk 2:4 to support his position
10. The OT prophet Habakkuk wrote, "The just shall live by faith."
11. Indeed, even as early as the time of Abraham, God showed that salvation was an issue of faith not works
 - a. we read that Abraham believed God, and that God accounted his faith as righteousness
 - b. Abraham, the great father of the Jewish nations was saved, not by works, but by faith
 - c. God declared him righteous simply because Abraham trusted in God and not himself
12. Before becoming a Christian, Paul had himself tried to stamp out the merging Christian movement
13. As a Pharisee, he had lived by a strict code of morality and a fanatical attention to the details of the law of Moses
14. But after Christ confronted him and he was brought to faith, he came to see that a man is not made right before God on the basis of his deeds, but on the basis of faith in the cross
15. Not once, but two more times Paul quoted this passage from Habakkuk
 - a. in Galatians 3:11
 - b. and then again in Hebrews 10:38
 - c. the central place it takes in his writings, you have to conclude this was his life verse
16. What does it say? The one who is just, the one who is right before God, is the one who lives by faith.
17. This truth totally transformed Paul's life, and as a result, changed the course of history
18. Habakkuk 2:4, as quoted by Paul here in Romans, had another significant impact on the course of history
19. For some 1400 years later a young German monk was teaching the book of Romans in a university course
 - a. he was totally preoccupied with the idea of the righteousness of God
 - b. but he was tormented by it, for he could only think of it as a standard he had to attain to
 - c. and the harder he tried, the shorter he fell
 - d. till finally, he became almost consumed with guilt and could no longer function
 - e. he took a trip to Rome and tried absolving his sense of guilt by the many tasks the priest gave him to do
 - f. finally, while climbing the Lateran staircase on his knees, in order to show his sincerity to God and penance for his sins, the words of Habakkuk 2:4 burst from his memory into his conscious thoughts
 - g. and there, while still on bleeding knees, he suddenly realized that righteousness is the gift of God received by faith

- h. in a moment, all the darkness that had filled his soul for years was swept away
- i. he rose to his feet, returned to Germany, studied Paul's words here and in the rest of Romans, and compiled his findings in several points
- j. then he wrote them up, along with several abuses he saw in the church of his day
- k. and nailed them to the church door at Wittenburg
- l. his name of course, was Martin Luther
- m. and the sound of his hammer was the first sound to be heard in the Reformation
- n. the legacy of which see us gathered in this room this morning to worship God and study the scriptures

III. CONCLUSION

A. *Grab It*

- 1. Such is the power of the Gospel of Christ
- 2. Such is the power of these words, "The just shall live by faith."
- 3. Friend, let's take hold of this power
- 4. Let's appropriate it for our own lives
- 5. May they work a new reformation in our own lives and in our church
- 6. And may we never be ashamed of sharing this good news with those who need so to hear

B. *What About You?*

[1] *Romans: A Digest of Reformed Comment* [Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1976] p.24

[2] Genesis 12:1-8