

The Power of the Gospel February 11, 2018

Romans 1:16-17

16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, "The one who is righteous will live by faith."

Today I am going to talk about the apostle Paul's letter to the Romans. The original audience is the Christian church in Rome which is made up of a group of small house churches. Paul did not start the Roman church. But we know from Acts that Paul met believers from Rome and we know that he wanted to visit Rome. There is evidence that there is a church there where believers made their way to Rome probably in the early 50's. The churches that Paul founded are mostly made up of Gentiles. Being predominantly Gentile, part of the church is connected to Judaism. The church had some Jews and they probably still attended the synagogue because believing in Jesus did not stop being faithful Jews.

All of Paul's letters are written for a specific occasion; to address specific situations within the church that he is writing to. Paul wants to claim the Roman church, even though he did not start it, so he says I am the Apostle of Gentiles. He identifies himself as being different from other apostles whom are called by the church. Paul states that he is set apart for the gospel of God. He is set apart; he is called by God. The goal is for them to accept him and to accept him as **the** apostle to the Gentiles and to clear up anything that they may have heard about him. Paul also wants the Romans to help him. He wants to take an offering to Jerusalem. He wants to continue his missionary journey into Spain. And he wants to address conflicts or division within the church. All the things that he wants to accomplish shapes the way that Paul writes the letter.

I want to make sure we understand the cultural context. Romans is about God's people. It is not about individuals or individualism. It is not about how we view it in the culture of American Christianity. America is all about the individual. In other places of the world, it is about the people, the community. This is closer to how Paul reveals the people of God. In Romans Paul addresses the human condition, the sinful state of humanity, how humans have fallen from God. His answers are based on his interpretation of Christ and his knowledge of Scripture.

In chapter one Paul identifies himself as a servant, or slave, of Jesus Christ. This says a lot about his perception of self. It means he identified himself not as other human beings but as belonging to Jesus. As I mentioned earlier he also says he is called to be an Apostle. Paul sees himself as being sent by God. Paul had a unique experience; he had a direct, one on one, encounter with the resurrected Jesus. His whole life and mission changed due to this experience. He is set apart for the gospel of God. Then Paul expresses thanksgiving. I thank God for all of you because your faith is proclaimed throughout the world. And Paul expresses his desire to see them and is eager to proclaim the gospel to them.

Then we get to today's Scripture which can be seen as the theme of Romans. I think it is encouragement for all of us - to boldly proclaim the gospel. For I am not ashamed of the gospel. It is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed and the one who is righteous will live by faith. There is a lot to unpack from this Scripture. I plan to refer back to it from time to time as we journey through Paul's letter to the Romans.

I will start with the statement "I am not ashamed of the gospel." Why would Paul state that he is not ashamed of the gospel? It is possible that Paul is saying "I am proud of the gospel"

or "I have full confidence in the gospel." I think he is in essence saying "I am not afraid to preach and teach the gospel." Paul knows the Roman Emperor is thought of as the lord of world and that the Jewish Messiah as Lord is seen as a threat to the emperor. I think Paul is saying that he has no fear when it comes to the gospel.

Years ago I was serving another church and we had a guest minister for our revival. We were driving around visiting people in the community, church members, and passing out flyers. As we were driving around we were talking about different things: the sick, things going on in the community, and various aspects of the ministry. There is one thing that he said that has stuck with me "I am not ashamed of the gospel." He was, of course, quoting today's Scripture. But it was more than a quote. It was a concise summery of his ministerial mission. I am not ashamed of the gospel says a lot about the person that speaks it. For that minister it meant that he is not embarrassed to share his faith. He is not ashamed to be a witness. He desires to proclaim the gospel. He wants to give his testimony and he will boldly give his testimony.

For the Apostle Paul it meant basically the same thing. It is a concise summary of his missionary journey. Paul was not embarrassed to share his faith. Paul was not ashamed to be a witness. Paul desired to proclaim the gospel. Paul wanted to give his testimony to Rome, to Spain, and to the world. Paul boldly gave his testimony. Not only that, but Paul was bold even in the face of persecution.

The lesson for us is to be the same. Do not be ashamed of the gospel. Do not be embarrassed to share your faith. Do not be ashamed to be a witness to the resurrected Jesus. Take pleasure in proclaiming the gospel. Give your testimony! Every Christian should give their testimony. There is a lesson here for Church members and leaders. If you get shot down or criticized, let the gospel be your shield. If you do most of the work and don't get the help that you need, let the gospel strengthen you. Make it your mission statement I am not ashamed of the gospel as you go through the trials of life and it will give you the confidence you need and strength for your journey.

The scripture lesson is that for the Apostle Paul the gospel is the power of God to bring salvation. And for the Apostle Paul it is never just belief. Faith is more than affirming the right things. Faith is something you commit yourself to. Faith is an orientation of your life. The Just will live by faith. It is a matter of orientating your life to live a life of faith.

That's the lesson for us here today. The situation is the human condition; humans are trapped by powers of evil. God responds to this in different ways. One response is judgment. Everyone will face judgment. One response is salvation. God's saving grace is offered to everyone. One response is love. God acted out a tremendous act of love. But there is a question for us. How do we respond? It is easy of all you have to do is confess. That is a popular belief and a traditional thought that dates back to Martin Luther. But that is not what is in Romans. The one who is righteous will live by faith. It is a matter of living the life of faith.