

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Gospel of Christ

Scripture: Romans 1:16-17

Code: 45-08

Look with me in your Bible to Romans chapter 1 and we're going to be looking at verses 16 and 17 tonight. Let me read these two verses to you and then we'll comment on them as the Word of God is open to us.

Paul says, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For in it is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith."

This is the most life-transforming truth ever put into men's hands. If we really understand and respond to these truths in these two verses, time and eternity is totally altered. Now I believe that these two verses form the theme and the thesis for the epistle to the Romans. In brief but glorious and comprehensive terms the epistle is compressed into these basic truths. It is a statement of the gospel of Christ. Paul begins by saying, "I'm not ashamed of the gospel of Christ," and then in concise terms expresses it in those two verses.

Now remember that Paul has concluded a masterful opening statement, a statement that really has two parts. Part one has to do with the gospel of God, the content of the gospel. Part two has to do with Paul's own personal representation of that gospel. We look at the message in the first part of chapter one, and then the messenger in the remaining part.

So, he has discussed his message. He has discussed himself as the messenger. Now he crystallizes the thesis of the epistle, which will unfold in the remaining chapters. The whole epistle is really an expansion of what we see in verses 16 and 17. And so it is essential that we get a proper perspective on these two verses.

I really believe that up to this point Paul has been endeavoring to make contact with his audience. He has been endeavoring to make a connection, to get the people's attention. And now that he has their attention, he establishes his thesis. Look again at verse 16. He says, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ." That phrase is the last statement in the section dealing with his ministry. He closes that section by saying, "I'm not ashamed." And then he says, "of the gospel of Christ," and that introduces his theme. The theme is the gospel of Christ.

Paul is not ashamed of the gospel of Christ. All the learned religionists, all the philosophers of Rome do not intimidate Paul. They did not intimidate him in Athens. They did not intimidate him in Corinth. They did not intimidate him in Ephesus. They did not even intimidate him in Jerusalem. And they aren't about to intimidate him here.

He is proud of the gospel. He is overjoyed at the privilege of proclamation. He is utterly and absolutely eager to preach Jesus Christ. And even though it is a stumbling block to the Jew, and foolishness to the Gentile, the gospel is still the power of God unto salvation to all that believe, and Paul is not hesitant to preach it.

He has been imprisoned in Philippi. He has been chased out of Thessalonica. He has been smuggled from Berea. He was laughed at in Athens. He was seen as a fool in Corinth. He was nothing but an irritant and sore spot in Jerusalem. He was stoned while in Galatia. And yet he will be eager to preach the gospel at Rome, also.

I guess all of us would like to be able to identify with Paul in that same way. But the fact is for you and for me very often we are ashamed of the gospel of Christ. I don't think we'd confess that. I don't think we'd state that. I don't think we easily admit that, but that's the way it works out. Because in those times when we could speak, we don't speak. When those times come when we could be bold, we are not bold.

We face the hostility of the world. We face the unimpressiveness of the gospel. It talks about sin and blood and death. And it sounds so foolish and so silly to men. And we're afraid of what they might think, and so we tend to be silent when we should speak. But Paul calmly viewed the disdain of the unbelievers. He understood the contempt and the ridicule of those who rejected Christ. He faced death itself for the gospel, but never once did he become ashamed of Christ. Timothy did. But Paul never did. He would face anybody, anytime and preach Jesus Christ.

Oh, how the fear of men brings a snare. Paul seemed to be able to overcome that in the power of God. I've been told that if you trace on the floor a circle with white chalk and put a goose in the middle of it, the goose won't cross that white chalk. It will stay in that circle, according to what I read, and die before it will cross that white chalk. Kind of reminds me of some people who are gooselike. They have around them chalk marks of fear of custom, the fear of convention, the fear of ridicule, the fear of being thought foolish, the fear of being rejected, and they never walk outside that circle because they're afraid. People say silly things about the gospel and about Christ, and they never open their mouth.

But not Paul. Sadly, fear of opposition and fear of contempt from the world often leads us to be silent, or else it leads us to corrupt the message and accommodate the message to men. That's sad.

I was sharing with the men at Moody this week that there is a new movement in America called the "Health and Wealth" ministries. And they're promising people that in Christ you get health and wealth. You get physical comfort and possessions. Do you know something that fascinates me? In Matthew chapter 8 a disciple came to Jesus and said, "I'll follow Thee wherever Thou goest." And Jesus said, "Well, I'm sorry, but foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." He said, "Fella, I do not accept you because you're looking for comfort, and you're looking for ease, and you're looking for all of those kinds of things to make your physical life comfortable, and I'm not offering that." And Jesus rejected him. He wanted comfort. Jesus said no.

There are people who are telling people today that Jesus will make you well. Jesus will give you healing. You'll never be sick. You'll never have a cold. Life will be blissful in the physical dimension. They are offering the very thing that Jesus rejected.

A second man came and said, "I'll follow You, too, but first let me go bury my father." Jesus said, "You'd better let the dead bury the dead." The point was the man's father wasn't even dead yet. But he wanted to hang around to get the inheritance. He came to Jesus and said, "I'll come but let me get my money." Jesus turned him down.

These people are playing into the hands of the lies of Satan. The things that keep men from Christ are personal comfort. They're afraid of giving up comfort. And personal possessions. They're afraid of losing those. And here comes these false teachers and offer the very thing that keeps men from Christ to them. And thus they bypass the real gospel for a phony. And we must confront people with the gospel, being unashamed to speak it, and so unashamed of it in its truth that we do not compromise it to accommodate the sin of man.

Now, why was Paul bold? And here's the key. Why was he bold? It says so in verse 16. He was "not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: because it is the power of God unto salvation." And now we go from the heart of the apostle to the heart of the epistle. He is bold to preach because of what the gospel is, because of what the gospel does.

The reason why Paul is not overcome by the temptation to be ashamed of the gospel, but quite the contrary, the reason that he proclaims it so joyously, so anxiously is because it is powerful, it changes lives. And he knows that, and he has seen that, and he believes that. Sure it's a stumbling block, 1 Corinthians 1. And of course it's foolishness, but it's also the power of God unto salvation to them that believe, and he knows that.

It reminds me of the old story I told you a few years back about the vacuum cleaner salesman that went out to the farmhouse. And he walked in there with his typical motor-mouth approach and didn't wait for the lady to say a word. She opened the door and he was in the living room. And he said,

“Ma’am, I want to tell you about this vacuum cleaner. It will suck up everything in this house. You have to be careful you might even lose your floor it’s so powerful. And I’m going to - ” And she started, “Well, wait a - ” And he just kept going. He said, “I’m going to show you how much this will do.”

And he dumped ashes in the middle of the floor out of his bag, and garbage, and junk, and everything. And he said, “Ma’am, if this vacuum doesn’t suck this up in two minutes, I’ll eat it with a spoon.” And finally she got an opportunity to speak and she said, “Well, you’d better start eating. We ain’t got no electricity.”

I mean, before you sell the product you better know whether there’s any power to make it operate, right? And the reason the Apostle Paul was not ashamed was because he knew the power of the gospel. He knew it could change lives in spite of what men thought. His supreme passion was to see men saved.

He in Romans 9, even says he could almost wish himself accursed for the sake of seeing the salvation of his people. He didn’t care about his personal comfort. He didn’t care about his reputation. He didn’t care about his popularity, and even his life offered no compromise to a clear confrontive gospel. He would preach the gospel because he knew what it could do. It could change people.

Now that gets us into his introduction of the theme. And understanding the gospel of Christ comes to us in understanding four key words in this passage, four key words. In verse 16, the word is “power,” and that’s the first word we want to look at.

The first word of great importance is “power.” The second word is “salvation.” The third word is “believeth.” And the fourth, in verse 17, is “righteousness.” If you understand the meaning, and connection, and transition of those four terms, you understand the gospel.

First of all, the first key word in the divine vocabulary of the gospel of Christ is that it is the power of God. The good news about Jesus Christ has power. The word is *dunamis*. We get our word “dynamite” from it. And Paul has in mind the fact that the gospel of Christ carries with it the omnipotence of God. The all powerful God is behind it, operative in regenerating a person.

Men would like to change, do you know that? I believe that. Really, all advertising that goes on in the world is based on one presupposition, and that is people want things different than they are. They want to look better, feel better, think better, have better experiences. They want to change their life. Basically, people want to change their life. There’s an appeal to that because that’s a basic human drive. And deep down inside people, they really want things to be different, but they are utterly impotent to change things.

In Jeremiah 13:23 Jeremiah says, "Can a leopard change his spots? Can the Ethiopian change his skin?" You have just about as much chance to change your heart. Men are impotent. They can't do a thing about what they are. They can't change anything. Oh, they may make a few reformations here and there and operate a little differently, but real changes never happen.

Jesus said in Matthew 22:29, "Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God." And He said that to the religionists of His time. You don't even know the power of God. You don't know what power is. The gospel of Jesus Christ has the power to change men, to take them from sin, from Satan, from judgment, from death, and from hell.

Men try other things to change them. The Bible says that some men believe they can be changed by doing good works, the deeds of the law. But the Bible says the deeds of the law cannot save. The Bible says the flesh cannot save. The Bible says the church cannot save. The Bible says religion cannot save. For neither is there salvation in any other name, for none other name under heaven is given among men whereby we must be saved than the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Only the power of God can change people. There's no other way.

In Romans 5:6, "When we were yet without strength, Christ died for the ungodly." In other words, man is impotent, can't change himself. He is utterly trapped and unable to do a thing about it.

In Romans 8:3, "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son" was able to do. In other words, you can take man and even give him good standards, and give him good rules, and good principles, and he can't change himself. It can't be done. That is the frustration of man.

In James 1:18 it says, "Of His own will begat He us with the Word of truth." In other words, what man cannot do for himself, God can do for man.

In 1 Peter chapter 1, essentially the same thing. It says that we have been born again not of a corruptible seed - not of a human decaying seed - but of an incorruptible by the Word of God. So, God's Word can do what we cannot do for ourselves. That is the basic principle of the gospel. Man is sinful and unable to remedy his condition, unable.

The gospel, then, becomes a force. And I think the word *dunamis* is throwing the emphasis on the force rather than the process. It is the power in the sense that God is the source of an incredible power, a limitless power that can transform lives.

Now look with me for a moment at 1 Corinthians 1:18, and I want to look specifically at the scripture I have mentioned a couple of times, and just briefly. "The preaching of the cross is to them that perish

foolishness.” I mean, a crucified Christ is just ridiculous. “But unto us which are saved it is the power of God.” You see? That is the key point. The gospel may be foolishness to men, but to us that are saved it is the power of God.

Verse 23. “We preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Gentiles foolishness; But unto them who are called, both Jews and Gentiles, Christ is the power of God, and the wisdom of God.” And again, the same emphasis.

You know, the Gentiles used to laugh at the Christians. The pagans in Rome and Corinth mocked them. You see, the key principle of their own religion was that their gods were basically indifferent. That they just were there, and they couldn’t care less. They were apatheia, apathetic, detached, remote. And the idea of an incarnation of God was utterly ridiculous to them.

In fact, in doing some digging around Rome, archaeologists have found some interesting things. And on the Palatine, which is one of the seven hills of Rome, they came across a caricature from the Christian era. And it depicts a slave, and a slave is bowing down before a cross. And it says underneath this particular drawing, “Alexamenos worships his god.” And crucified on the cross is a jackass. Now that tells us a little bit about the attitude of the Romans at that time toward Christianity. They thought it was absolutely ridiculous, foolishness.

Somewhere around the year 178, Celsus wrote a bitter attack on Christianity. He said that the Christian view was, “Let no cultured person draw near. None wise, none sensible, for all that kind of thing we count evil. But if any man is ignorant, if any is wanting in sense and culture, if any is a fool, let him come boldly to Christianity.” It was for fools, he said. “And of the Christians,” he further wrote, “we see them in their own houses: Wool dressers, cobblers, and fullers; the most uneducated and vulgar persons.” He said Christians are like a swarm of bats. They’re like ants creeping out of their nests. They’re like frogs holding a symposium around a swamp. He said they’re like worms cowering in the muck. Nice guy, Celsus. And then he said, “Christians worship a dead man.” Foolishness. It’s foolishness. “But unto us who are saved it is the - ” what? “ - power of God.”

The world laughs at us, they mock us. But we know better, don’t we? And because it is the power of God in 1 Corinthians chapter 2, as Paul goes on, he says, “When I came to you, I came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, I declared unto you the testimony of God. And I was determined to know nothing among you, except Jesus Christ and Him - ” what? “ - crucified.” Had one message and it was the very message you despised. It is the cross. Mock it, if you will. It is still the power of God, and so I preach the cross. “That your faith might not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.”

I have seen the message of the cross transform hundreds, thousands of people in my lifetime. Let the world say what it will, the evidence is in and the cross transforms us.

Later on in 1 Corinthians 4:20 Paul says, "The kingdom of God is not in word, but in power." You know, the biggest thing in my life is to know that God uses me as a channel to change people for time and eternity. It's incredible, incredible.

I look at my own life. I have certain weaknesses in my own life that I struggle with all my lifelong and I can't really seem to do much about them. I have limitations in my mind. I have limitations in my physical body. I have limitations in my perceptions. I can't do anything for them, and yet God uses me to be the tool to change someone's total being. Incredible. That's the power of God.

So, behind the gospel is the power. How much power is behind the gospel? I'll tell you. The Bible says God has great power, Psalm 79:11. The Bible says God has strong power, Psalm 89:13. The Bible says God has glorious power, Exodus 15:6. He has mighty power, Job 9:4. He has everlasting power, Isaiah 26:4. He has sovereign power, Romans 9:21. He has effectual power, Isaiah 43:13. He has irresistible power, Deuteronomy 32:39. He has incomparable power, Psalm 89:8. He has unsearchable power, Job 5:9. He has power.

Jeremiah 10:12 says, "It is He who made the earth by His power." Jeremiah 27:5 says, "It is I who by My great power and My outstretched arm have made the earth."

In Psalm 33:8-9 it says, "Let all the earth fear the Lord: let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him. For He spoke and it came to be." What power, what power.

By the same powerful command the Lord maintains the universe. Behind each miracle in the Bible there is the power of God. God can part the sea. God can bring food from heaven. Miracle after miracle show His power. But I really believe the greatest expression of His power is found in His power to save, to transform people, to change their nature, their time, and their eternity.

Psalm 106:8-9, "He saved them for His name's sake, that He might make known His mighty power." You see, the manifestation of His power comes in salvation.

The New Testament presents the same power. In Matthew 28:18 He said, "All power is given unto Me." He had the power to cast out demons. He had power over sickness, every illness, to heal. He had power over the universe to provide for the needs of the people. He had the power to still the storm, the power to walk on the water. He had power over death. He called Lazarus out of the grave. He gave life to the dead son of the widow of Nain. He gave life to the daughter of Jairus. He raised Himself from the dead. But most of all, Romans 1:16 says it, he had "the power of God unto salvation." He had power to save.

That's the first key word, "power." And you should never – beloved, listen to me - you should never, and nor should I, entertain the thought of being ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God. Let it fly.

Second word, "salvation." It is the power of God unto strian. "The power of God unto salvation." Oh, that's a great word. The power is seen in salvation because men, says Ephesians 2, are dead, and the salvation act of God makes them alive, to live forever, cleansed of sin and fit for the kingdom of God. The word "salvation" is used 18 times by Paul, 5 times in Romans; and the verb form 29 times by Paul, 8 times in Romans. It's a very key word. It means "deliverance." It means "deliverance."

I preached one time and I was preaching to young people at a youth rally and I used the word "being saved." And I said, "You young people need to be saved." And somebody came to be afterward and said You shouldn't use that word. It's not contemporary. I'll never forget it, a lady. She said, "That word is not contemporary. Kids can't really dig on that word. You've got to use a better word."

You want to know something? I couldn't think of a better word. That was God's word. You know, my first reaction was, "Lady, that's God's word. I'm not interested in what your word is. That's God's word." What does it mean to be saved? It means to be delivered. From what? From sin, and Satan, and judgment, and death, and hell, and only the gospel of Christ has the power to do that.

Man's safe passage through human trials, and his safe passage by divine judgment, and his entrance into eternal blessedness is bound up in his being saved. It includes forgiveness. It includes escape from wrath. It includes life in the Spirit. It includes resurrection. It includes eternity. The gospel is God's effective power active in the world to bring about deliverance for men from God's wrath, from sin, and Satan, and judgment, and death, and hell.

I believe that culture in which Paul wrote was ready for this message. I think they were looking for salvation. Men are today. Oh they think they need economic salvation, or political salvation, or social salvation. They just need to upgrade their lives and their society. But they're looking for salvation. They were then, you know? There was a time at the time of Paul when Greek philosophy was turning more and more to that which was internal. And it was looking at man and saying, "Things aren't right with man. We need something to change man."

We're trying to find that now, only we're trying to find it from maybe stimulating his brain, controlling him somehow so we can change him. Well, they were looking at all kinds of things in Paul's day. They turned to a kind of moral philosophy.

For example, Epictetus, one of the writers at that time called his lecture room, "The Hospital for the Sick Soul." Epicurus called his teaching, "The medicine of salvation." They were looking for something to deliver man from the constancy of sin.

Seneca, whose life coincided with the life of Paul, said that all men were looking, *ad salutem*, toward salvation. "What we need," he said, "is some hand to reach down and lift us up. Men," he said, "are overwhelmingly conscious of their weakness and their inefficiency in necessary things." And he said himself he was a "*homo non tolerabilis*," a man not even to be tolerated. He said men love their vices, but they brought only despair, and men needed salvation.

Men have always needed that. But sometimes when they hear the gospel, they think that as the answer sounds so stupid. But it is the power of God. Salvation has many dimensions. When a man or a woman is delivered, he is delivered from life's infection. We are saved, says Acts 2:40, from a crooked and perverse generation. We are coated, if you will, with a divine antiseptic.

Salvation is not only from life's infection, but salvation is from lostness. Jesus said He would come to seek and to save that which was what? Lost. See, man's on the wrong road, doesn't know where he's going, where he's come from, or where he is. He's lost. And all of a sudden, when he comes to Christ, instantly he knows where he came from, where he's going, and right where he is. It means salvation from sin. Man is a slave to sin until Christ releases him. It means salvation from the inevitable judgment of God. In that sense, it is an eschatological salvation that culminates in a triumphant eternity.

The various aspects of salvation, by the way, will be unfolded to us throughout the epistle of Romans. I guess it's enough at this point to stop and say it takes divine power to accomplish this salvation because man is so lost, and so infected, and so doomed, and damned, and so dead in sin, it takes the power of God to burst him through that. Can't do it on his own.

God characterizes man in the Bible as grossly, willfully ignorant. As purposely self-indulgent and unwilling to forsake all. He characterizes men as deep in false religion, as covered and directed in all they do by Satan. As filled with wrong motives and self-deceived. As trusting in their own good deeds, which are at best filthy rags. As loving the passing things of the world. As hating the truth. As proud, pleasure-seeking, guilty, lustful creatures. And as such they have no right to enter the kingdom of God, so they have to be delivered from all of that. And only the power of God can do it.

So Paul says, "My thesis is the power of God can bring salvation." How? That's the next key word. How? Verse 16, "To everyone that - " what? " - believes." "Faith" is the third key word, or "belief." I mean, if the power of God can do it, for whom does it do it? For everyone that believes. Salvation power operates only through faith, that's all. Where there is faith, there is the power of God operative in salvation.

You say, "What is faith?" Faith is believing. You all live by faith every day of your life. You turn on your faucet, fill the glass, and you drink it. That's faith. You don't know what's in there. You have no idea

whose been playing in your pipes. I remember reading in a Reader's Digest about a city in Kansas that had a great big water tank and their water was fed to them through this tank. It was pumped up from a well, and filled the tank, and then it came out of the tank into the town. And they converted to a piped-in system and drained the tank and they found all kinds of strange creatures in the bottom of the tank. They all got retroactive dysentery. They had been living by faith, but they had their faith in the wrong thing.

I was flying into L.A. yesterday and Bill and I and Monty were sitting on this airplane and all of a sudden for some reason or another it just went whoa, straight down for awhile, and everybody sort of got instantly religious. I don't even know who's up there in the front of that airplane. In fact, I don't know if anybody is up there. You see the pilot coming down the aisle shaking everybody's hand, and somebody always says, "Who's flying this thing?"

We live by faith all the time. Faith is trust. You go to a restaurant and you eat what they feed you. We all live by faith. I mean, that's the only way you can survive. God has put it in the heart of a man that he understands to live by faith. And faith in the spiritual dimension is far different than that kind of faith, but it is nonetheless the same idea. It is trusting and believing, and yes the power of God can save, but it will save only those who believe. Believe what? Believe in thine heart that God has raised Him from the dead. That means that you believe He is who He said He was, that He died for the reason He said He died, and that He rose again from the grave. And if you believe that you believe. "For by grace are you saved through - " what? " - faith, that not of yourselves. It's a gift of God, not of works lest any man should boast."

Faith. Salvation is not professing Christianity. It's not that. Salvation is not baptism. Salvation is not moral reform. Salvation is not going to church, it's not conforming to rules. It's not self-discipline and restraint. It's not morality. So many people think they're saved for the wrong reasons.

I sat next to a lady going to Chicago. I've had all kinds of experiences this week that are unbelievable. I sat next to this lady, 78 years old. And I sat down beside her and she had a little smile on her face. She had been to see her daughter in California, now she was going back to somewhere up in northern Michigan. And after awhile she perceived that I was a man of the cloth. And she said, "Are you a reverend?" I said, "Well, I don't know about reverend, but I am a pastor." I said, "Do you have a church where you attend?" She said, "I'm Catholic." I said, "Oh. Do you know Jesus Christ as your personal Savior?" She said, "Oh, I've gone to the Catholic Church all my life." I said, "Well, that's interesting." She said, "Do you know that the Catholic Church has changed?" I said, "That's right. It has. It's changed a lot, hasn't it?" She said, "Yes. And I don't like it." She said, "I liked it better the old way." Well, she's 78. You know, it's tough when tradition changes.

I said, "Well, what do you mean by that? She said, "You know what they're doing now? They're doing the services in English." I said, "Is that a problem?" She said, "I liked it better when I did not

understand what they were saying.” It’s exactly what she said. She said, “Then I could go in there and just meditate within myself.” I said, “What did you gain by that?” “There was just a quietness in meditating within myself.” I said, “Don’t you think that it’s important to know the principles of the Word of God?” “Well, I think we should know some things.”

Well, the conversation was not as fruitful as I would like to have had it. But it got to the point where it was evident that her security was in the fact that she went to a church. She didn’t even care if she understood anything they were saying. In fact, she liked it better when she didn’t. I said, “You know, ma’am,” I said, “only one thing matters. At your age, when you leave this life that you be ready to meet God because you know His Son the Lord Jesus Christ. Not what church you went to.” I don’t know. I hope she thinks about that.

Salvation doesn’t come through the church. Salvation comes because a man or a woman recognizes that he has no resources and he sees himself lost, and undone, and he sees the filthiness and deformity of his sin. And he perceives the rottenness of his heart, and the pollution of his nature, and he is drawn to Christ as a remedy. And he sees One who died for his sin, and who conquered his sin, and paid the price, and wants to give him new life. And he says, “I believe. I believe.” And it doesn’t matter who that man is, you know? It says in verse 16, “Every one, whether Jew or Greek, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.”

Yes, the primacy of salvation was extended to the Jews. Salvation has primary relevancy to the Jews since they were God’s specially chosen people. It is to the Jew first that Messiah came and said, “I am not come but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” Yes, it was to them He came for the lines of preparation for the full revelation of the gospel were laid with Israel, and so the gospel is preeminently the gospel for the Jew.

The great commentator Robert Haldane has some clear thought on this. Listen as I read what he wrote. “From the days of Abraham their great progenitor, the Jew had been highly distinguished from all the rest of the world by their many and great privileges. It was their high distinction that of them Christ came, who was overall God blessed forever. They were thus as His kinsmen, the royal family of the human race. In this respect higher than all others, and they inherited Emanuel’s land. While therefore the evangelical covenant, and consequently justification and salvation equally regarded all believers, the Jews held the first rank as the ancient people of God, while the other nations were strangers from the covenants of promise.

“The preaching of the gospel was to be addressed to them first, and at the beginning to them alone. ‘I am not sent,’ Jesus said, ‘but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.’ And He commanded that repentance and remission of sins be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. Thus while Jews and Gentiles were united in the participation of the gospel, the Jews were not deprived of their rank since they were the first called.”

And then he says this. "The preaching of the gospel to the Jews first served various important ends. It fulfilled Old Testament prophecies. It manifested the compassion of the Lord Jesus for those who shed His blood, to whom after His resurrection He commanded His gospel to be first proclaimed. It showed that it was to be preached to the chief of sinners and prove the sovereign efficacy of His atonement in expiating the guilt even of His own murderers. It was fit, too, that the gospel should be begun to be preached where the great transactions took place on which it was founded."

Sure, to the Jew first, but also to the Gentiles. The salvation of God was not limited to any nation. To everyone, the Jew or Gentile.

Now follow me here very carefully. The gospel of Christ has power. It has power to save. It has power to save the one who believes. But how can it even if he believes? How can it change him? Because, verse 17, "For in it - " that is, in the gospel " - is the righteousness of God revealed." You see? The reason it can save is because when you believe, the righteousness of God is revealed to you. In other words, it becomes yours. That's how it can happen.

You say, "Man is so sinful, so evil, so hopeless, so helpless, that even if he believed, and even if it has the power to save, how can it?" It can, not because we all of a sudden become in ourselves righteous, but because all of a sudden to us is revealed the righteousness of God.

And that takes us to the fourth word, "righteousness." Along with faith, by the way, this word is used 60-plus times in Romans. Key word. And we'll see it again and again. The reason why the gospel powers are released in salvation by faith is because faith - listen to this - activates the revelation of the righteousness of God. If I am to be righteous, I have none of my own. God must give me His righteousness. And He does.

You see, Jesus took our sin and in exchange God gave us His righteousness. That's why it says that Christ became sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. When Paul says "the righteousness of God is revealed," he doesn't mean it's just disclosed to human minds. He doesn't mean it's just spoken in human history. He means that it is specifically revealed in the action and the operation of regeneration. That is why the gospel "is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes." Because that belief activates the righteousness of God.

And by the way, the best translation is "righteousness from God." "The righteousness from God is revealed." It wouldn't matter what I believed. I couldn't be righteous in myself, could I? I could believe, and believe, and believe all I wanted to believe, but I still can't be righteous by God's standard. I can't be perfectly holy. I can't be without sin. And that's the perfect standard. So God says, "If you'll just believe, I'll give you My righteousness." How can you do that, God? Because Jesus has borne your penalty. The price is paid. I give you My righteousness.

God demands from man what man could never pay. He demands absolute perfect holiness. Some people think that might be unjust. How could God demand that? Why doesn't He lower the standard? Well, let's say He lowered the standard a little bit. Let's say God said, "Well, in order to be saved, you have to be highly intelligent." Would that be fair? No, it would be unjust to morons. Well, if He said you have to be rich? No, that would be unjust to poor people. No, you have to be moral. Well, that wouldn't be very just for the wicked and immoral people. No, you see, He set a standard that nobody could qualify for, so nobody can boast. And nobody needs to be left out. And then said, "I'll give you my righteousness no matter who you are."

In Romans 3:21, as we draw to a conclusion, it says, "And now the righteousness of God apart from the law - " it's apart from any works or law keeping " - the righteousness of God is manifest." How? Verse 22. "The righteousness of God is by faith in Jesus Christ unto all and upon all who believe." There it is again. Same principle, same truth. Look at 4:3. It's even true in the Old Testament. "Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for - " what? " - righteousness."

In Philippians 3:8-9, I just want to mention this. "Yea doubtless - " says Paul " - and I count all things but lost for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: whom I've suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but refuse that I may win Christ." Then this, "And be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith."

You see? That's the message. This is the glory of the gospel that it is the power of God unto salvation. That it is activated by faith, and that faith activates it because faith releases the manifestation of the righteousness of God on our behalf.

Count Zinzendorf wrote these words, and you know them and love them. "Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness, my beauty are my glorious dress. Midst flaming worlds in these arrayed with joy shall I lift up my head. Bold shall I stand in Thy great day, for ought to my charge shall lay? Fully absolved through these I am, from fear, and sin, and guilt, and shame. How Jesus Thy blood and righteousness."

So he says in verse 17, "The righteousness of God is revealed - " and then this little phrase " - from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith." What does it mean, "from faith to faith"? I think it has the same idea as everyone that believes. You might look at it this way. He says, "And the righteousness of God is revealed from - " watch this " - faith to faith - " to faith, to faith, to faith, anyone's faith, or everyone's faith, no limitations.

I see it moving across the world from faith, to faith, to faith, to faith. Just as it was in the Old Testament, it's nothing new. Habakkuk 2:4, "The just shall live by faith." Nothing new. "Abraham

believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness.”

“Not the labor of my hands can fulfill the law’s demands. Could my zeal no anger know, could my tears forever flow. All for sin could not atone - ” what’s the next line? “Thou must save and Thou - ” what? “ - alone.” That’s from the “Rock of Ages.”

So Paul presents the theme of the gospel: Power, salvation, faith and righteousness. I hope you know Christ. I hope you put your faith in Him.

I close with this. One of my favorite missionaries is John G. Paton. He went to the New Hebrides filled with cannibals. And when he arrived in the New Hebrides, he came to an island at the moment when there was a terrible epidemic. People were dying of disease. It had utterly decimated the population. He went into the huts of the sick people and tried to care for them. He buried the dead. He tended to the dying. And when the epidemic had passed, he was received by all, and they loved him, and he stayed with them.

He first thought to learn their language. And he began to listen to their speech, write down in a notebook all the words and phrases he learned. The natives got accustomed to him always having a notebook and stopping in the middle of the conversation to write some things down. There came a time, then, when he decided that he ought to translate some of the gospel into their language. But they had no word in their vocabulary for “faith” or “trust” or “believe.” They just didn’t trust anybody. But you can’t do much translating in the Bible without a word for that. And so he began to think.

At a time of frustration, he began to go deer hunting. And they shot a deer-like animal and several smaller game and started to carry the kill back to the house of the missionary. The weather was at the equatorial point in the globe, oppressive. The hill in which they hunted was trackless, and they finally arrived back absolutely exhausted. They dropped their heavy burden and all of them just flopped on the grass.

One native said, “Oh, it’s good to stretch yourself out here in the shade.” John Paton shot off that grass, excitedly he had that companion recite that sentence again and again. And he wrote it all down in his notebook. And then he translated John 3:16 this way, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever stretcheth himself out on Him shall not perish but have everlasting life.” That’s faith, and it activates the righteousness of God in your behalf.

Thank You, Father, for our time shared tonight. What a good night. Can’t think of a better place to be unless it’s in Your presence than to be right here. I feel sorry for those who aren’t here that they should miss the testimonies, the joy, the gladness, the truth of the Word. But I thank You for these that are here by Your divine appointment.

If there are any in our midst who have not yet experienced the wonders of salvation, may they know that before they leave tonight, their life is in Your hands. May they, by faith, receive the power of God unto salvation and be recipients of Your righteousness.

Thank You, Father, for a good day. Bless every precious soul here tonight. And may this truth given to us be something we give to others that they might know You, whom to know is life eternal. For Christ's sake we pray. Amen.

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