

The Heart of the Romans Epistle

(Romans 1:16-17)

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Introduction

A rich businessman wanted to buy the best birthday present he could for his elderly mother.

Knowing that she lived alone and loved to talk, he bought her the most expensive talking parrot he could find.

The bird had a vocabulary of 4000 words and could even sing 3 different operas.

He paid \$75,000 for it and had it delivered to his mom the day before her birthday.

On her birthday, he called and wished her a happy birthday and then asked..

“Hey mom, what do you think about the bird?”

To which she replied, “Oh son, it was absolutely delicious.”

The moral of the story is to always communicate your purpose.

It would be impossible to list all the failures in human history due to someone failing to communicate the purpose.

This is why schools teach main idea to kids from a young age.

This is why the SAT and ACT have long sections on reading comprehension and main idea.

It is fundamental to human life to communicate and understand the purpose in things we do.

This is why I work so hard in my study to help you understand the point of the verses that we are examining each time we get together.

If you don't understand God's purpose in what he has written, you won't likely obey or change.

So we work hard to see the point and the purpose of each verse of Scripture.

Now that brings us to Romans 1:16-17 this morning where we will see the purpose of the book of Romans.

In fact, it could be argued that we will see the purpose of the entire NT in these two verses today.

So needless to say, these verses are important to understand, not only because they will help us in see the purpose of Romans.

But more importantly, because they will help us the understand the gospel of God and the salvation of man

And that is critical information to everyone here this morning.

First, to evaluate your own salvation and determine if you are in a saving relationship with the Lord.

And second, to see if the gospel you share with others is the gospel of God.

Now to get us started, let's do a little review.

The book of Romans is letter that Paul wrote the church at Rome in 54 AD.

Paul was former Jew that the Lord saved as Paul was heading to Damascus Syria to arrest Christians.

And Paul had been transformed from a Christ hater to a Christ lover.

Paul was converted from someone trying to tear the church apart to someone who was trying to build the church up.

And the Lord was using him all over the Roman world.

Here is a map of the Roman Empire in the 1st century.

Now understand the church is still not very big in 54 AD.

There are small churches scattered about all over the area but most are located in the northeastern part of the empire.

Some were founded by Paul.

Others were simply the result of Jews getting saved in Jerusalem and heading back to their hometowns with the truth of Jesus as Messiah.

The Roman church was an example of the latter.

Paul didn't establish the church there on a missionary journey.

In fact, none of the apostles had been to Rome as far as we know.

This church was simply founded by believers who were saved in Jerusalem in Pentecost and went back home to Rome.

And God had shown much grace to this church in the middle of the moral depravity of Rome.

They had stayed true to their faith in Christ, but they still needed some instruction.

And though Paul wanted to go to there personally, he had been hindered.

But in 54 AD, Paul writes them a letter to help them grow in their faith and understanding of Christianity.

And this letter which was inspired entirely by the Lord becomes the book of Romans.

And we have begun our study of it a few weeks back.

We first saw the start of the letter in verses 1-7, where Paul introduces himself and his mission, which is spread the gospel of Christ into the Gentile world.

Then last week, we moved from the start of the letter to the heart of the author as Paul opened up his life to the Roman believers reading this letter.

He wanted them to know that he was thankful to God for them.

He wanted them to know that he had been praying for them.

He wanted them to know that he longed to see them, and teach them, and be encouraged by them.

And then he ended that section in verse 15 by saying that he was ready to come to Rome to preach the gospel to them.

Now understand, these believers are saved, so the preaching of the gospel there is not for conversion but for maturity.

I am sure that Paul will preach to unbelievers there but the gospel is also important for believers as well.

WE need to know why we are saved and how we are saved.

And we need to know the message that we are called to proclaim to the world.

So Paul says that he is eager to preach the gospel to them.

It has often said that the preaching of the gospel encourages the church and evangelizes the lost.

And what is meant by that is simple.

The church has believed the gospel but we are forever growing in our understanding and love of it.

While the world needs to hear it so that they can believe it.

So Paul is ready to come and preach the gospel in Rome.

And why is Paul ready to come to Rome and preach the gospel to the church and the people there?

Verse 16..

16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed [j]from faith to faith; as it is written, “[k]But the righteous man shall live by faith.”

In these two verses which serve as the main idea of this letter, Paul is going to give us 4 reasons he is eager to preach the gospel in Rome.

And in these 4 reasons, we will find the foundational truths of Christianity.

If you want to know how you are saved, why you are saved, and what you are saved from, listen closely to these verses.

Let's begin in verse 16 with the first reason Paul is eager to preach the gospel in Rome..

I. For the Power It Displays (16)

In verse 16, Paul simply writes..

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

The first thing we need to do is simply define the word gospel because many believers fail to understand and the use the word as it is intended.

The word gospel is euaggelion in the Greek and it simply means a good message or good news.

In Greek culture, people would simply use the word in greeting one another...

Have you heard any good news today?

We do much of the same today as we meet people and engage in small talk?

Heard anything good today?

Well, euaggelion finds its ultimate fulfillment in the good news in the first coming of Christ to die for guilty sinners.

Because the good news of the gospel of Christ is the best news ever.

The largest headlines in the history of the New York Times were for the moon landing, the resignation of Richard Nixon, and the 9-11 attacks.

But those news events can't hold a candle to the news that Jesus came to live and die so that the guilty sinner could live forever.

The gospel is not just good news but the greatest news ever told.

Therefore, Paul is not ashamed to preach that good news.

In fact, he is eager to preach that good news in Rome.

And the same should be true for us.

We don't have a message that requires us to lower our eye and soften our speech.

We have a message that we should stand and speak with confidence.

It is often said that bad news has made three trips around the world before good news even gets out of bed.

But it should not be this way church.

We must be a people declaring the good news all the time.

Sadly, many in the church are ashamed of the gospel.

We shy away from speaking the truth of the gospel because we don't want to be called Bible thumpers.

We don't want to be seen as religious fanatics.

We don't want to be called fundamentalists.

Though we say in church that we would be bold for Christ, the reality is that most are not.

WE fear the rejection of men.

WE shy away from talking about sin and death and hell and the blood of Christ.

And in the end, we bow to the fear of man and keep our mouths shut when we should speak.

But that was not true of Paul.

He was not ashamed of the good news.

HE was not ashamed of the gospel.

And why was that?

Why was Paul eager and excited and bold in his preaching of the gospel.

Reason #1 - The gospel reveals the power of God.

Everyone wants to see the miraculous.

Everyone want to see the indescribable.

Everyone wants to see something that makes them scratch their head and rub their eyes.

Let me tell you.

The change that comes through the gospel reveals the power of God at work in the human heart.

The Greek word for power here is dumanis.

We actually get the word dynamite from this Greek root.

And what is dynamite a powerful explosive that can make hole in mountains and clear forests of trees.

Look, the good news that Christ has come to save sinners is a powerful truth.

It is truth that causes people to stop what they are doing and take their lives in the opposite direction.

The New Year is always a reminder that people want to change.

Budgets and diets and exercise routines are the talk of the new year because everyone sees a need for change in their life.

And people do all sorts of things in hopes of change.

They set alarms to get up earlier.

They buy books to cook healthier.

They purchase gym memberships to exercise more.

Yet, change from within is difficult to say the least.

But the gospel is a picture of change from an outside source.

The good news is that you don't have to conjure up the power to change yourself.

God changes you through a work of the Spirit, and it is a miraculous sight to behold.

Ever seen someone so different that you knew it had to be a work of God?

Well, that is reminder that the gospel is the power of God at work.

Listen to 1 Corinthians 1:18..

18 For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who [m]are perishing, but to us who [n]are being saved it is the power of God.

The story has been told a fast talking vacuum cleaner salesman going door to door in small town.

He would knock, and when the door was opened, he would barge in and start his pitch.

He came to one house on the outskirts of town, and he really needed to make a sale.

So when a little old lady opened the door, he burst in.

“I have the greatest vacuum in the world, and it will pick up anything. In fact, I am so confident of its ability to clean that I am about to dump a mixture of cigarette ashes and ketchup and grease on your floor. And if this vacuum doesn’t suck up that mess, I’ll eat it off the floor myself.”

Before the woman could speak, he emptied the contents of his mixture on the carpet, and the kind old lady looked at him and said, “We don’t have electricity out here.”

Needless to say, we aren’t proclaiming a message that is lacking power.

We believe in the power of the gospel.

We have seen the power of the gospel in our own lives, and we declare that power of the gospel to the world.

It has been said that religion is using man’s power to get to God, but the gospel is God’s power coming down to man.

Paul is eager to go to Rome and preach a gospel of power.

But he is also eager to go preach the gospel for the salvation it secures.

II. For the Salvation It Secures (16)

Look back at verse 16..

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

Though the gospel is a display of God's power, it is a display of power that saves.

Look, you can see God's power for judgment in the Bible.

God sent the flood to destroy everyone but Noah and his family.

God sent plagues on Egypt for holding Israel captive.

God sent the walls of the Red Sea crashing down on the Egyptian army.

In the future, God's power for judgement will be on display for 7 years as the world is judged in the tribulation.

God's power goes both ways, - for good and for bad.

But the gospel is a display of God's power to save.

And the word in Greek carries the idea of rescue and deliverance.

The gospel, the good news, is that God saves.

Now the natural question is what do we need to be saved from?

If we were on a sinking ship, we would need to be saved from drowning.

If we were in a burning building, we would need to be saved from the flames and fire.

But since we are in the world and apparently doing pretty well, most people go throughout life and never see a need to be saved from anything.

In their minds, they are doing okay.

They know they aren't perfect but they have jobs and homes and family and money.

They aren't on fire.

They aren't drowning in the sea.

So when I come to people with the truth that God saves, most are not even interested.

In their minds, they are good people doing their best they can.

But the reality is that their sin has poked a hole in their boat and lit a rag on fire in their house.

The reality is that they think they are on easy street but it is actually the broad road to destruction.

But the gospel is the power of God for salvation.

It saves people from their own sin, their own ignorance, their own stubbornness, their own arrogance.

It saves people from the ultimate consequence of sin and that is eternal life in a lake of fire that never burns out.

And take note that this gospel of salvation is offered to all who believe.

Paul notes that the gospel came to the Jew first but also comes to the Greek, which is another way of saying the non-Jew.

What does Paul mean by first?

It simply means that the Jewish people were chosen instrument to bring the gospel into the world.

They were given the law of God.

They formed the genealogical tree that gave birth to Christ.

They were given the promises of a Messiah.

And when that Messiah came, he was born in Israel.

He lived his sinless life there.

He first announced his identity as Messiah there.

Yet, the vast majority of Jews rejected him and his message.

They eventually called for his death and the Jewish leadership secured his crucifixion at the hands of the Roman government.

Yet despite all that rejection of that Christ in his life and death, the gospel still came to them first after his return to heaven.

Because the Holy Spirit came to Jerusalem and HE indwelled believers there.

And Peter preached the first two gospel sermons there.

And the first converts to Christianity were those who listened and believed in Jerusalem.

Now that doesn't mean that the gospel is reserved for the Jews, but it does mean that the gospel went to them first.

However as Paul writes this letter, the gospel is going into Gentile lands.

It is even likely that the majority of the believers in the Roman church are Gentile.

So while the gospel has gone to Jew first, it also goes to the entire world.

But also note that the gospel only displays its power and provides salvation to those who believe.

Though we will talk about faith in verse 17, let me simply say that the gospel is universal in its call but it is not universal in its application.

A person who wants to see the power of God and enjoy the salvation of God must believe the gospel.

A third reason that Paul was eager to preach the gospel in Rome is because of the righteousness it offers.

III. For the Righteousness It Offers (17)

Verse 17..

17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed [j]from faith to faith; as it is written, “[k]But the righteous man shall live by faith.”

A key word in the gospel and in the book of Romans is the word righteousness.

And though much has been written about righteousness, let me sum up why this word is so important for you to understand.

First of all, righteousness is the key to heaven.

No one will go to heaven at death without the righteousness of God.

And by righteousness, I mean the absolutely perfect life.

The Greek word for righteousness comes from a Greek word meaning straight.

God is perfectly righteous.

In other words, you can never exist in the presence of God without being perfect yourself.

His holiness will consume anything that is unholy.

So that leaves us with a huge issue.

How do we get this righteousness?

Well, many have tried to work for it.

This is where all the false religions are found.

They are made up of people trying to earn righteousness.

This was Paul in his former life trying to be the best Jew ever.

This was Martin Luther, the great reformer who became a monk in hopes of earning the righteousness of God through good works.

This may be some of you who try to do more right than wrong in order to gain heaven in return.

This was certainly me as a young man trying to cover my sin with good deeds and good prayers each night.

But let me tell you church.

You cannot reach high enough, work hard enough, try to be good enough to earn the righteousness of God.

It must be credited to you by God.

The gospel says that God declares the sinner righteous.

When a person turns from himself and trusts in Christ alone for salvation, he is declared righteous by God.

Which is absolutely miraculous.

Paul had lived a life trying to earn enough righteousness to get to heaven.

There are millions of Roman Catholics who have tried to earn or purchase enough righteousness to get to heaven.

There are people in false religions all around the world trying to do enough or be enough to earn enough righteousness to get to heaven.

Yet the gospel says that God gives righteousness to those who come to him in faith.

And that leads to our final point this morning.

Paul was eager to preach the gospel because of the power it displays, the salvation it secures, the righteousness it offers, and lastly..

IV. For the Faith It Requires (17)

17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed [j]from faith to faith; as it is written, “[k]But the righteous man shall live by faith.”

WE talked about earlier about belief, which is a synonym for faith.

You could use the word trust here.

But the point is simple.

The power, the salvation, and the righteousness of God connected to the faith of the sinner.

Now what is faith?

Well, the book of Hebrews says that faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.

In a practical sense, we live by faith everyday.

If you go into a restaurant and order a meal, you are by faith that they will serve you something that isn't spoiled.

When you drink from the water dispenser on your fridge, you have faith in the water supply coming into your home.

When you drive down the road, you have faith that the car you meet will stay in its lane.

Now faith in the gospel is of the spiritual nature but it is the same principle.

You are believing and trusting in the promises of an unseen God.

But this is the only way to have the righteousness of God credited to your life.

It is through faith alone.

Now understand, a gospel of faith makes no sense to people.

We have been conditioned to work from a young age.

And there is value in work in every other area of life, but work has no value in gaining the righteousness required for heaven.

In fact, work will only condemn you more.

The righteous are those who live by faith.

In fact, I think that is what Paul means when he writes from faith to faith.

He is simply reminding us all that faith has always been the way to attain the righteousness of God.

Faith has always been the way to heaven.

In fact, Paul quotes an OT book at the end of verse 17..

“[k]But the righteous man shall live by faith.”

That is from the book of Habakkuk.

Hab 2:4..

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***“Behold, as for the proud one,
His soul is not right within him;
But the righteous will live by his [f]faith.***

In the context of the book, Habakkuk is warring the enemies of God of their pride.

And he simply says that proud people are not pleasing to God, while people of faith are constantly pleasing to God.

And the point is simple.

God saves those of faith.

And contrary to what many teach, faith is not a one time event in the life of a Christian.

Our initial faith saves us but our enduring faith proves the genuineness of our salvation.

The righteous live by faith.

In other words, true Christians begin in faith by believing in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ but they also continue in that faith until the very end.

Now why is Paul eager to preach this aspect of the gospel.

Because natural man is programmed to work for his salvation, but Paul now knows that God is not pleased with good work, he pleased by faith alone.

This truth of a gospel of faith alone in Christ alone is liberating.

It is freeing.

It is comforting and encouraging.

A gospel of good works enslaves mentally and physically, but a gospel of faith set the prisoner free.

It is amazing how far technology has come, and it is so popular today because it makes life easier.

I can lay in my bed and tell an simply speak to Alexa and she will turn off the TV.

Look, that is such a simple task but we pay for technology because it enables us to do less.

I will never forget the first remote control I ever saw.

I can sit on the couch and change the channel.

We didnt have but 13 choices but it was wonderful.

Let me tell you something.

The gospel is ultimate source of laziness in your life.

It says that Jesus has lived the life you need and died the death you deserved to die, and you can be saved from the comfort of your pew without ever raising a finger.

Simply believe.

That my friends is glorious.

Yet many in the world pass on the remote control are are busy changing channels on the TV because it makes them feel better to work.

Let me tell you church.

The righteous live by faith alone in Christ alone, and that allows them to see the power of God to save them from the penalty of sin.

Conclusion

Let me tell you something church.

The world outside those doors is wanting to be dazzled, so tell them that they can see unexplainable things in the power of the gospel.

The world outside those doors is wanting change, so tell them that that the gospel transforms.

The world outside that door know that trouble is coming, so tell them that their sin will kill them and condemn them to hell.

The world outside those doors wants fairness so tell that the gospel is an offer to all.

The world outside knows they need to be better people, so tell that God can declare them righteous.

The world outside those doors is looking for something to believe in and stand for, so tell them to believe the gospel and to preach it everyone.

Paul couldn't wait to get to Rome and declare the gospel to them.

Now that you understand it, may it change you and excite you in the same way. Let us pray.