

**Romans 1:16-17**  
**(Psalm 34:1-8; Luke 9:23-27)**  
**“I Am Not Ashamed of the Gospel”**

**Introduction**

For some of us, the gospel is simply a story, a tale so often told that it has no power to move our hearts or call to mind the wonder of God’s mercy or the beauty of his grace. In our text, Paul speaks as one who understands the cost of the gospel, the extent to which God’s Son was willing to go in order to redeem rebels like you and me and make us his friends, in order to restore us to our heavenly Father and offer us the glorious liberty of the children of God.

I find intriguing Paul’s response to those who have inadequate views of the gospel, who even perhaps find it a bit embarrassing. He writes, “I am not ashamed of the gospel!” Why does he defend something as wonderfully positive as the gospel in this negative way? We would not expect someone telling us about his wife or his family to say, “I am not ashamed of my wife!” “I am not ashamed of my family!” We would wonder what had happened, why he was being so defensive.

But that is precisely the point: in Paul’s day as in ours, the gospel is despised by its enemies and often downplayed or soft-pedaled by its friends. How many Christians hope that the subject of the gospel never comes up for fear they will face a quiet room full of expectant people awaiting their defense of what they believe? How many students have been humiliated by sophomoric professors who could not stand in the same room with an articulate theologian, but who enjoy bullying college students? How many new Christians have been put down by a family member with a few religion courses under his belt, who has mastered the pseudo-academic sneer?

But in truth, it is more than that. Martyn Lloyd-Jones has suggested that anyone who has never been embarrassed by the gospel probably doesn’t yet understand it. He writes, “If you have never known this particular temptation then it is probably due to the fact, *not* that you are an exceptionally good Christian, but that your understanding of the Christian message has never been clear.”

The gospel is completely counter-intuitive. It is foolishness to the wise of this world and weakness to the strong of this world, *until their eyes are opened by grace* to realize that the weakness of God is stronger than human strength, and the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom.

This morning, I would invite you to look with me at these tremendous words of the apostle, words that state as clearly and simply as can be stated the central tenant of the Scripture, and the central doctrine of the Christian faith. In these two crucial verses, Paul tells us what the gospel is, and how the gospel saves us.

## Body

### 1. First, Paul tells us what the essence of the gospel is.

*The gospel is nothing less than “the power of God.”*

The Greek word Paul uses here for power is *dunamis*, from which we get the word, dynamite. It is nothing less than the explosive power of God that created the universe, and that recreates human beings broken by sin and rebellion, under bondage to sin and death, and utterly unable to shake off that bondage. Every other religion calls me to do things to awaken myself from the sleep of death, to set myself free from the grave. Thus every other religion, when played out to the final note, leaves me either hopeless or filled with spiritual pride, and thus alienated from God. But God has done what we are not able to do, and has done it with a power that is greater than our weakness, and a grace that is greater than all our sin.

*The gospel is “for salvation.”*

The word “saved” has fallen out of favor with most Christians. It accentuates the reality of our fallen-ness, of our lost-ness, of our being dead in sin and unable to save ourselves. We don’t like that fact accentuated, so we prefer words that make it seem that we had some part in our salvation. It has been a long time since I’ve heard anyone tell his story by saying, “I was saved” in such a way at such a time. However, it is the language of Scripture because it is the great need of every person ever born, except for Christ himself. “Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, but now am found, was blind, but now I see.” John Newton captured the message in those words, and Paul reveled in his salvation. It did not make him ashamed, because it was the message that brought him life.

*The gospel is “to everyone who believes.”*

There is no distinction of race or nationality or social status, nor is there a distinction between the kinds of sins we have committed. There is no one left hopeless because they have sinned too greatly or because they are too poor or too young or too old or too broken or too bound. It is God’s power and it is for the salvation of everyone who believes.

But there is the key: you must believe, not merely with your head, but with your heart. In other words, you must not only believe that the message is true, that God offers his grace to sinners, but your heart must rest in God’s promise, your life must be given over into his hands, into his control. Nothing less than this new movement of the heart is worthy of the biblical name of faith. You say, “But I am not competent for such faith. I can never work up such a thing in my heart.”

*Precisely!* It is only the power of God that can save you, give you a new heart and mind, and enable you to turn in faith and lay hold of God's promise. And he has promised to give his Spirit to those who cry out for him. "Ask, seek, knock!" These are the words of our Lord Jesus, and he promises that those who ask will receive, those who seek will find, and that to those who knock the door will be opened.

## **2. Then, Paul tells us how the gospel saves us.**

*Through the gospel "the righteousness of God is revealed."*

In the gospel, God reveals to us his own righteousness, and makes that righteousness his gift to us. Apart from the gospel, we may deceive ourselves through the exercises of religion into thinking that we are very good people, righteous in ourselves, full of goodness and mercy and truth. We compare ourselves to other people, and come up feeling pretty good about ourselves.

But then comes the gospel, and it first convicts us of our sin and rebellion against the One to whom we owe everything, all that we have and all that we are. We realize that he alone is righteous and we are not, and that apart from his mercy we are without hope. But then the question arises, "How can God forgive a sinner like me and still remain righteous? How can he who promised in his Word to punish sinners simply turn around and forgive a sinner like me?"

The answer is that he himself has provided righteousness for me through the sacrifice of his Son in my place. He bore my sin and offered his righteousness in place of my brokenness. Lloyd-Jones used the wonderful expression, "God's majestic juggling of the books, whereby all of my sin is put on Christ, and all of his righteousness is put on me."

*Through the gospel God's righteousness is revealed "from faith for faith."*

How do I receive that righteousness? How do I realize all the benefits of the gospel? It is "from faith, for faith." Again, Paul emphasizes that this is not to be had through our own best efforts or religious performance: it is received through faith alone. It is trusting Christ, resting in his completed work, taking God at his word and believing that his promise is for such as you. The righteousness that we receive through faith is again declared to be for all who believe, "from faith, for faith," in other words, it a matter of trusting God from the beginning to the end.

*Through the gospel "the righteous shall live by faith."*

Here is something too often overlooked: God's righteousness is not only revealed *to me*, but *in me* and *through me*. As Paul writes elsewhere, "He who knew no sin became sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God." Salvation is a life, a brand-new life that is God's gift of his own life in us, of his Spirit living

through us as we increasingly submit to his control and realize that in such submission is our highest joy and freedom. “The righteous shall live by faith,” and *living* is the key. As Jesus’ brother, James, wrote in the letter that bears his name, “Faith without works is dead.” In other words, the life we live either validates or invalidates the things that we profess to believe.

## **Conclusion**

So, in conclusion, let me ask again why we should ever be ashamed to declare our gratitude, our wonder, our overwhelming joy at the gospel of Christ that alone is able to set us free to be all we were created to be, that alone is able to set us free from brokenness, sin and death, and that alone is able to give us confident hope that we “will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” The greatest need in every human life is a need that only God can satisfy, and he has done so through the gospel of his Son.

Therefore, we would say with the apostle, “I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes... For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, ‘The righteous shall live by faith.’”

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