

The Gospel: God's Power for Salvation

Romans 1:16-17

On Jan. 24, 1848, James Marshall surveyed a ditch that was part of the sawmill he was constructing along the South Fork of the American River when he noticed a few metal flakes in about six inches of water. Much as he tried to keep it a secret, word soon spread: "There's gold in them thar hills!" The news concerned the presence of something valuable, and prospectors the world over responded to it. Thus began the California Gold Rush.

The gospel, or good news, is like that. The gospel announcement and story reveals something valuable, the salvation from God that makes sinners right with God by believing in Jesus Christ.

Today we are looking Romans 1:16-17. These two short verses present one of the greatest summaries of the Gospel ever written by man. In these verses Paul gives a clear declaration of God's power and purpose in the Gospel message.

Listen as I read them slowly:

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."

Before we look at these verses in detail, we need to see the flow of Paul's reasoning. He begins verse 16 with the word "for," which connects it with verse 15. There Paul said, "**So, as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also.**" Why was he eager to preach the gospel at Rome? Verse 16, "**For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ**" Why was he not ashamed? "**for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.**" How is this gospel the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes? Verse 17, "**For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith.**" Where does Paul get that idea from? The scriptures. He cites Habakkuk 2:4, "**as it is written, "The just shall live by faith."**"

In this way Paul sets forth the theme and thesis of his letter to the Romans. Already in chapter 1 we have seen Paul's focus on the Gospel of God. In verse 1 we saw Paul, the messenger of the gospel. In verses 2-7 we studied the message of the gospel that as the scriptures promised the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, has come in the flesh, has died and been raised to life and has called us to be His holy people. Last time in verses 8-15 we saw the mission of the gospel and how God fulfills that mission through His church. Today in verses 16-17 we focus on the meaning of the Gospel. Everything that Paul will write in the rest of Romans is an expansion of these two verses. Here Paul gives the thesis. In the next 16 chapters, he expounds on it.

Paul packs a lot into these two verses.. Paul tells why this good news is such good news and why we must believe it and share it. When Paul says that he is not ashamed of the gospel, he means, "I glory in the gospel. I'm proud of the gospel." He is overjoyed at the privilege of proclaiming the good news. He is utterly and absolutely eager to preach Jesus Christ. And even though as he writes in 1 Corinthians 1:23 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. Paul had

not had an easy time of it as a preacher of Jesus Christ. In Galatia they stoned him. They imprisoned him in Philippi. They chased him out of Thessalonica. He had to be smuggled from Berea. They ridiculed him in Athens. He was seen as a fool in Corinth. In Jerusalem his enemies wanted him dead. Why is he so bold?

Because of the meaning of the gospel. Because the gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. Because in the gospel, sinners are made right with God

Today I want to focus on four words that convey the meaning of the gospel: power, salvation, righteousness, and faith.

1. The Gospel is the Power of God.

The gospel does not tell people about the power of God. Rather, it is **“it is the power of God to salvation.”**

The word power here is the word from which we get the word dynamite. It means the might, the force that is inherent in the gospel. Paul wants us to know that the gospel conveys the very power of the Almighty omnipotent God. Whenever the Gospel is preached it is as if God Himself came into the midst of us.

To many who hear the message of the gospel, it sounds like anything but a powerful force. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 1:18, **“For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”** B. B. Warfield described it this way:

A dozen ignorant peasants proclaiming a crucified Jew as the founder of a new faith; bearing as the symbol of their worship an instrument which was the sign of ignominy, slavery and crime; preaching what must have seemed an absurd doctrine of humility, patient suffering and love to enemies—graces undreamed of before; demanding what must have seemed an absurd worship for One Who had died like a malefactor and a slave, and making what must have seemed an absurd promise of everlasting life through one Who had Himself died, and that between two thieves.

But Paul does not shrink away from the simple message of the gospel that Christ died for sins and was raised to life. He goes on to say in 1 Corinthians 1:23-24, **“but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.”**

Paul knew first hand about the power of this Gospel. Paul testifies in 1 Tim. 1:13 saying, “I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man.” He calls himself the chief of sinners. But his life was transformed by the Gospel of Christ. The gospel did that for me also. I was a hypocrite, a proud and selfish sinner. But the gospel of Jesus Christ had the power to transform my life. I have seen the message of the cross transform more lives than I could count. Let the world say what it will, the evidence is in and the gospel is the power of God.

Let me say it again, the gospel is the power of God. The gospel is not helpful advice that a person may decide to try out. It is not a philosophy for us to follow. It is the very power of God imparting new life and salvation to those who were dead in their sins and under God’s just wrath and condemnation.

We can proclaim the gospel of God boldly because it is the power of God!

2. The Gospel is Salvation.

Salvation meanings being saved, rescued, delivered. From what are we delivered? From sin, and Satan, and judgment, and death, and hell, and only the gospel of Christ has the power to do that.

This anticipates the point that Paul makes from 1:18 through 3:20, where he shows that all have sinned and thus fall under God's righteous condemnation. Paul will demonstrate that mankind is grossly, willfully ignorant and rebellious. He characterizes men as deep in false religion; 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 sinners, they have no right to enter the kingdom of God. So we have to be delivered from all of that.

Salvation is being rescued from God's wrath and judgment that we deserve because of our sin. It means being delivered from the penalty of sin, which happens the moment we believe; being delivered from the power of sin, as we grow in godliness; and, being delivered from the very presence of sin when we stand blameless in His presence in glory.

So Paul says the gospel is the power of God to salvation—to save lost sinners.

3. The Gospel is the Righteousness of God.

Verse 17 says, **"For in it the righteousness of God is revealed."** what does Paul mean when he says that in the gospel, "the righteousness of God is revealed"?

First, we must understand God is righteousness. He always does what is right, what is just, what is holy and good. The gospel reveals this to us. If a person has no concept of the absolute righteousness of God, then he cannot understand why he is condemned as a sinner. So one of the things the gospel reveals is God's righteous character, which shows us our desperate need for salvation. It should drive us to the savior.

But more than that when Paul uses the phrase, **"the righteousness of God,"** he refers to the righteousness that comes from God, which He gives to those who believe. The gospel reveals how sinners may be righteous or justified before God by faith. Paul explains this more clearly in Romans 3:21-26 when he writes:

But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

God's righteousness is revealed in the gospel in that He can grant right standing to sinners because His Son met the righteous requirement of His perfect Law and died to pay the penalty that sinners deserve. So God remains righteous in justly punishing sin while at the same time justifying sinners.

How can God save those who believe? How does the gospel have the power to save, to transform sinners? The reason it can save is because when you believe, the righteousness of God is revealed to you. In other words, it becomes yours.

You see, Jesus took our sin and in exchange God gave us His righteousness. That's why Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5 that Christ became sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. In the gospel 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.

Here is where the greatness of the Gospel is clearly seen. It provides for us what we could never provide for ourselves. On our own merits we all stand condemned before the Almighty. Who is there who would dare to say, "I am good enough to go to heaven." As someone has said, "A clear conscience is the result of a poor memory."

The only people who think they are good enough to go to heaven are the people who don't know how bad they really are! Righteousness is what we need but do not have. Therefore God, knowing that we could never be righteous on our own, has provided a righteousness which comes down to us from heaven above. It's not earned or deserved, but is given to us by God as a free gift

So Paul says the gospel is the power of God to salvation—to bring God's righteousness to sinners because of what Jesus Christ has done.

But how? How can we attain this righteousness of God?

4. The Gospel is by Faith.

Verse 17 explains what verse 16 says, "**it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes.**" So in verse 17 he says it is "**from faith to faith; as it is written, 'The just shall live by faith.'**"

If the power of God saves, who does it save? Everyone who believes. Salvation power operates only through faith. In fact he says the whole thing is of faith from first to last. You say, "What is faith?" Faith is believing. But it is not just believing anything. Faith must be in Jesus Christ. John 3:16 says, "**whoever believe in him.**" We must believe in Jesus Christ the Son of God who died on the cross, was buried, and was raised on the third day. That is the message of the gospel. But saving faith is more than just knowing the facts or even agreeing that it is true. It is a heart response that causes us to repent of our sins and trust in Christ as our only hope of eternal life. It is confessing that Jesus is Lord in my life.

Saving faith is not a work that we do, but rather simply receiving all that God offers to us in Christ. It is the hand that receives the free gift of God.

I ask, "Have you believed the gospel?" Have you abandoned all of your self-righteousness and all of your good works as the basis for your standing before God and instead trusted only in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ?

Do you believe this good news when you fail and Satan accuses you? On the basis of your right standing before God, do you daily battle against sin, so that your attitudes and behavior are progressively righteous? Is God's power to save you from the power of sin evident in your relationships in the home?

Do you proclaim unashamedly this good news?

