

Romans 1:16-17

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[0 : 00] Turn with me to Romans 1. Romans 1. And with our Bibles open before us, let's pray again.

! To and with you and the Holy Spirit, be honour and praise now and forevermore.

Amen. So Paul has just greeted the Roman Christians. He's given thanks for them. He's told them of his strong desire to visit them, to come to them.

And incidentally, the prayer of the Apostle was answered, but probably not in the way that he anticipated. He was to visit that church in Rome, but he visited Rome, do you remember, as a prisoner in chains.

So be careful what you pray for. And in verses 16 and 17, he reiterates in many ways what he says in verse 14. Do you remember that? I'm a debtor. I'm under obligation.

[1 : 18] I've got a debt to pay to the Greeks and to the barbarians. And he now goes on to express that this gospel, this good news, this declaration about the Lord Jesus Christ, that it is for Greeks and it's for barbarians and it's for the Jews.

It's for everyone. Martin Luther, the great German reformer, we talk about him often. In 1545, it's the year before he was about to die and it's right at the end of his life, he's writing a preface to his Latin works.

And as he writes that preface, he thinks back on the past 25 years. He thinks what God has done. He thinks about how God has used him.

How the face of Europe and the world was changed in many ways through what he discovered. And as he begins to write this preface to his Latin works, he reminds himself and his readers that it all began in this chapter, Romans 1.

And it all began in these verses, Romans 1, 16 and 17. Because as Martin Luther read these verses, that I am not ashamed of the gospel. For it is the power of God unto salvation for everyone who believes.

[2 : 33] Both for the Jew first and for the Greek also. For in it the righteousness of God, or as Luther would have read in his Latin Bible, the justice of God. The justice of God has been revealed.

And he writes in that preface that he came to hate that phrase. He came to hate the righteousness of God. Because the righteousness of God for Martin Luther was something that condemned him. No matter what he did. No matter how hard he tried. No matter what deprivations he went through. No matter what self-denial he engaged in.

The righteousness of God always condemned him. The justice of God stood against him. And he says, I began to hate God. A strong word, isn't it? I began to hate the righteousness of God. Until he saw for the first time. That the righteousness that God demands. Is a righteousness that God provides in the gospel. The righteousness that God demands.

[3 : 42] Is a righteousness that God provides in the gospel. And when he saw that, Luther says, it was like the opening of the gates of paradise. It was this text.

It was this text, which is a summary of the entire epistle to the Romans. You can summarize the one big point of Romans in these verses.

Verses 16 and 17. Cicero, isn't it? The rhetorician. The man who invented that. That sense that every speech that is given should have one big point. One big idea.

One main point. You should be able to distill into one crisp point. And Romans, you can do that. That in the gospel. The righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith.

That's what Romans is about. Now look at the text of me. Look at verse 16. Look at how it begins. Paul says, for I am not ashamed of the gospel. And that tells us, doesn't it?

[4 : 39] That there was obviously a temptation. To be ashamed. It's obviously a danger, wasn't there? To be ashamed of the gospel.

To be embarrassed, if I can put it like that. By the gospel. But Paul says, I'm not ashamed of it. I'm not embarrassed by it. And the first reason he's not ashamed of it is because it is the saving power of God.

Can you see that? For it is the power of God to salvation. It is the saving power of God. If you did word association, you know that game?

So I say a word and then you think of the first word that comes into your mind. So if I say the word black, you think white.

Some of you are thinking that, aren't you? All right. If I say the word whales, what do you think? That's right, it's levy.

[5 : 38] Well done. That's good, isn't it? So we know words. If I say the word Presbyterian, you immediately think joy, don't you? All right. You know what I'm saying.

Word association, all right? And so in Rome, if you play the word association game, in Rome, if I said horse, they'd think chariot. If I said the word power, they would think Rome.

They would think Rome. Because Rome was the power. It was the awesome power. Rome had changed the entire face of the world.

Rome had stretched as far as you could imagine, all around the world. Their roads went everywhere. Their phenomenal ability in construction.

The Roman legal system. The Roman armies had tramped across Europe and beyond. And power was associated with Rome. But if you were in Rome, they might have also thought Caesar.

[6 : 42] Caesar was all powerful. Power was associated with Rome and with Caesar. One of the great tests for Christians in the first and second and third century was, who is Lord?

Who is Lord? The Christians in those first three centuries, that was the big question. Would they say that Caesar is Lord? And that's why Paul writes in his epistles that Jesus Christ is Lord.

And that is the Christian testimony. That is our confession of faith. But to say that in the first three centuries was enormously costly. Because if you said that Jesus Christ is Lord at the same time, you were denying something, weren't you?

You were denying that Caesar is Lord. Because if Jesus is Lord, Caesar cannot be Lord. And so Paul writes to the centre of the Roman Empire, where Caesar lived.

And where he dwelt. And where the most fundamental power existed in the universe. And he says, it is not Caesar. The most fundamental power in the universe, can you see it, is the gospel.

[7 : 54] It is the gospel of God. And for many of his readers, that is counterintuitive. That would send a culture, that would send a shockwave, right at the beginning of this letter. That the gospel is the power in the universe.

That it outstrips every other power. The power of intellect, the power of economics, the power of science, the power of industry, the power of military might. There is a far greater power than it is the power of the gospel.

The gospel is the power which can translate a person from darkness to light. It can bring someone who is blind to see the truth about God.

It can bring someone who is dead in their transgressions to life in Jesus Christ. It can bring an individual who is travelling on the road that leads to destruction.

And put them on the road that leads to paradise and to life. And Paul says, I'm not ashamed of this gospel because it is powerful. It is the power of God to salvation.

[8 : 59] It is the saving power of God. This gospel is not a weak thing. It is not an effeminate thing. The gospel is powerful.

It is the most powerful force in the universe. I met Dick Lucas for lunch last week. And we were going through my sermons on Romans. And he said to me, what you need to do is you need to get hold of Anders Nygren on Romans.

He said to me, it's the best commentary. He said, somebody has taken it. Or I lent it to someone and they haven't given it back. But you need to get that. And he said, I'll write to my friends and see if I can get it to you. He thought he knew who had taken it.

And I went home, I put on Twitter, can anybody get me Anders Nygren on Romans? And then I looked at my shelf and picked up this book and found Dick Lucas' copy of the commentary on Romans by Nygren.

And so I feel I need a quote from it. He doesn't know yet. Whenever the gospel is preached, the power of God is effective unto salvation.

[10:04] The gospel is not the presentation of an idea, but the operation of a power. And when the gospel is preached, it is not merely an utterance. It is something that occurs. Do you get that? The power of God is at work for the salvation of men, snatching them from the powers of darkness and transferring them into the new age of life.

And Paul says, I am not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God unto salvation. The second reason that Paul is not ashamed of the gospel is it comes with universal significance.

It comes with universal significance. Can you see that in the verse? For it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

To the barbarian. To the Greek. To the Jew. There is discussion, isn't there, over whether the gospel ought to be taken first to the Jews and still today.

It seems to be clear that in the New Testament, the gospel was taken to the Jews first. And then we see it spreading out, don't we, from there. So all the way from Acts chapter 9, all the way through Acts, Paul goes first to the Jews, to the synagogue.

[11:16] He goes to those who have the history of the promises of God. He goes to where there's God-fearers gathered together. But it becomes clear, doesn't it, throughout the book of Acts, that the gospel spreads from Jerusalem to Samaria to Judea to the ends of the earth, all the way through.

That this gospel, which is the power of God to salvation, is not just a gospel for the Jews. It is a gospel for the Jews, and we should still take it to them passionately, but it is a gospel for the rest of the world, to the ends of the earth.

And so the promise at Pentecost that Peter gives, is this promise is for you and for your children. It is for you and your children, all who are afar off.

It's a gospel for everybody. And that is how Paul is going to work it out in Romans. He's going to show in the next two chapters, he's going to say that the Jews who have the law, have the promises of God, they need the gospel.

And Paul is going to show us that the Gentiles, those who don't have all those privileges, they need the gospel. Because the Jews and the Gentiles, all of the world, have fallen short of God's glory.

[12:32] Do you remember in our introduction to the confession of sin, there is none righteous, no, not one. We all, like sheep, have gone astray. It's a gospel for everybody.

There is one way of salvation. And so if you would ask me, what is the issue that in many ways is so difficult to get across to people today?

What is one of the most important issues in the Christian church? It is pluralism. And it comes at us in different ways. There's an idea abroad, isn't there? And it's everywhere.

That some people, if you're of a religious bent, if you're kind of religious, you can be saved by Christianity. But actually you just find your own way.

If you're not like that, that's all right. You just be yourself. You find salvation in being yourself. And so if you're a Christian, that's great for you. But I'm not and I can't go my own way.

[13:33] And in the end, I'll be all right. The gospel says really clearly, doesn't it? That there is only one way. There is only one way.

And that's why the gospel is for everybody. Let's turn it around. And the only way that a Jew can be saved and can find salvation is through this gospel.

The only way that a Gentile, somebody who's not a Jew, you and I, can be saved is through this gospel. And so this morning, whether you are young or whether you are old, if you are a covenant child this morning, you need this gospel.

And only this gospel is going to save you. The fact that you are a covenant child is not going to save you. It puts you in a special place.

It puts you within the people of God. It puts you in a place of great, great privilege. But it doesn't save you because you need this gospel. And so this morning, no matter what your ethnicity and no matter what the color of your skin is and no matter what your social background is, no matter what your education level is, no matter what economic level you live in, it's a gospel for the whole world.

[14:50] And so whether you're from Iran or whether you're from Poland or whether you're from India or whether you're from Bulgaria or Malaysia or Hungary or Canada or Brazil or Portugal or Hanwell, this gospel is for you.

It is for you. It's for the whole world. I'm not ashamed of this gospel because it comes with universal significance, Paul says.

There's not a human being you'll ever meet who doesn't need it. So there's a person in your life, isn't there? Like there's people in my life and they might have a great intellect and they may speak on a level that you can barely understand and we say to ourselves, that person is so hard to reach. Or you know the person who's been hurt by Christians and they are angry and they're very, very angry. And we say they're so hard to reach.

But I am telling you that if they will believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, this gospel will save them. And so not only is Paul not ashamed because the gospel is the power of God and to salvation and not only is Paul not ashamed because this gospel comes with universal significance.

[16:21] Can you see thirdly, he is not ashamed of the gospel because it reveals the righteousness of God. It's verse 17. It reveals the righteousness of God. It's relevant for everybody.

In this gospel, the righteousness of God is revealed. So what is the righteousness of God? First of all, it's a characteristic of God.

God is righteous. God is absolutely faithful to his character. He'll do what he says.

He is absolutely faithful to pursuing his honor and his glory. He is righteous. And he is righteous in the way that he deals with us. God makes covenants.

God relates to human beings by covenants. By solemn oaths. By solemn agreements, if I can put it like that.

[17:27] And you are related to God this morning by that covenant. Now let's think about this. God is righteous. Are you righteous?

You're not, are you? We are unrighteous. He reveals himself as righteous. He's righteous. He's righteous in judgment. He's righteous in condemnation.

He is righteous. We are unrighteous. That's what Luther saw. He saw that the righteousness of God was bad news for him because it condemned him. God was righteous. He was unrighteous.

But to those who are rightly related to him in covenant with God. Those who have believed on the terms of that covenant.

Those who have believed on the Lord Jesus Christ and trusted in him. You will be saved. And God is righteous to that. God holds himself to that.

[18:27] He'll never break that promise. He is faithful to that. And so he says to you, if you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. He will love you. And he will bless you.

And he will have fellowship and commune with you. And he will make promises to you. He is righteous. So the issue is this morning, isn't it? Are we in a right relationship with him? That's the issue.

Because by nature, we're not. By nature, we are in Adam. By nature, we are sinners. That's what Paul is going to take the next two and a half chapters to show you.

That there's none righteous. None righteous. No, not one. And when he talks about sinners, he's not talking about people who are locked up in prison. He's not talking about murderers or rapists or folk that get arrested.

He's talking about everybody. He's talking about you. He's talking about me. For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. So how can we be made right with God?

[19:34] And the answer is the gospel. In the gospel, God is wholly righteous. And he provides that righteousness that we need.

What God demands, he provides. And he provides it through faith in Jesus Christ. Explains elsewhere, doesn't he?

Explains elsewhere that he, God, made the righteous one to be made sin for us. That he who knew no sin, the Lord Jesus, was made sin so that we might be reckoned the righteousness of God in him.

There's this great exchange that takes place. He made him who knew no sin to be sin. In order that we who are unrighteous would be reckoned as righteous in the gospel.

And that's good news. That is great news. That though we are all sinners, that though we are all unrighteous, he goes on to say in verse 18, that the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all unrighteousness.

[20:46] Unrighteousness. In Christ. This morning, if you've hidden yourself in Christ, if you're hiding in Christ, if you are sheltering in Christ and looking to Jesus, his impeccable righteousness is

credited to our account.

And our unrighteousness is credited to his account. And so on the cross, the Lord Jesus experiences the wrath of God that we might be forgiven.

That is the gospel. That is the beauty of the gospel. That is the simplicity of the gospel. That it is not by our works. It is by Jesus' works.

It is not by our obedience, because we have none, but by the perfect obedience of Jesus Christ. So the whole course of his life, he's giving himself up on the cross as our sin bearer and substitute.

And so yes, God is righteous and we are unrighteous. And yes, he condemns us righteously, but in the gospel, there is good news. Because God, in his grace, has solved the final problem.

[21 : 57] So how does that righteousness, which is Jesus' righteousness, how does God's righteousness become mine?

Well, look at the text. Look at verse 17. For in it, the righteousness of God is revealed from faith, for faith. We spend hours on these words and in the various ways they've been interpreted, it means this.

It begins by faith. That is how you take refuge in Christ. That is how you hide yourself in Christ. It begins by faith and it continues by faith.

What is faith? It is, isn't it? Forsaking all I take him. Forsaking all I take him.

I give up on my own obedience. I give up trusting in myself. I give up on my own righteousness. And I take him and I take his righteousness.

[23 : 10] The Shorter Catholicism is so beautiful. It says this. What is faith in Jesus Christ? Faith in Jesus Christ is a saving grace. Whereby we receive and rest upon him alone for salvation.

As he's offered to us in the gospel. R and R. As Jesus Christ is offered to you in the preaching of the word this morning. You receive him.

You take him. And you rest on him. You rely on him alone. What a gospel. For you this morning.

Whoever you are. Whatever your background. Whatever you've done. Whatever your history.

Whatever the skeletons in your cupboard. However great your sins may be. There's a gospel for you.

There's good news for you. That Jesus has died. And Jesus has paid the penalty. And Jesus has borne our sin. And he's risen from the dead.

[24 : 11] And he sits this morning gloriously. At the right hand of God. And he calls on you. To believe on him.

To believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. And you will be saved. And Paul says I'm not ashamed of this gospel. And Paul says I'm not embarrassed by this gospel.

Because this gospel is the power of God unto salvation. And I'm not embarrassed about it. And I'm not ashamed of it. Because it is relevant and applicable to every human being in this world. And I'm not ashamed of it.

Because in it the righteousness of God is revealed. And the way of salvation is revealed. And fourthly I'm not ashamed of the gospel.

Because he says it right at the end. Can you see it? It's confirmed by the scriptures. The righteous shall live by faith. It's a quote from Habakkuk chapter 2.

[25 : 14] Verse 4. And Paul takes the Bible of his day. The Old Testament. Isn't that great? Where does Paul find the gospel message?

He finds it in Habakkuk. How did people come to know God in the Old Testament? How did people come to know God in the Old Testament?

Through the gospel. The same way that you come to know God. By trusting and having faith in the covenant promises of God.

By trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ. I am the way. Not I've just become the way. The truth and the life. You see. This gospel is not just a gospel for New Testament believers.

This gospel is. For the Old Testament as well as the New Testament. There is only one way of salvation. And it is by faith alone in Jesus Christ alone.

[26 : 19] And that's what we preach, isn't it? To the nations. You're not ashamed of it, I hope.

Because this gospel is for you. No matter where you come from. No matter who you are. No matter what you've done. We think, don't we?

Where would I be? Without this gospel. Without this gospel. What would life have been like for the last 20 years for me? Without the gospel.

What would it have been like for you? These last 10, 20, 30, 40, some of you 50 years. If the gospel hadn't come and impacted your hearts and your life.

Where would you be today without this gospel? Where would all those years that would have been wasted. If the gospel hadn't come and changed you. The power of God hadn't come into your life and brought you.

[27 : 21] Into living relationship. With the triune God. Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And if the power of God hasn't come and changed you. It can do that today.

The message of Romans 1. Verse 16 and 17. Is as powerful today as it was then. And I think this is a great help to us in church family isn't it?

Because. It's the same message today. And it's equally as powerful. And what that means is. We must never give way to hopelessness.

We must never give way to hopelessness. We must refuse it. Because the power of God is at work in the gospel. We must not give way to hopelessness about ourselves.

And our own difficulties. And our own problems. And our own sins. And we must not give way to hopelessness about others. And their difficulties. And their struggles. And their sins.

[28 : 22] And their situations. We should never give in to hopelessness. Because in the gospel. The power of God is at work. For the salvation of all who will believe.

Let me read to you. And as I clout. Because whenever the gospel is preached.

The power of God is effective under salvation. The gospel is not the presentation of an idea. But the operation of a power. And when the gospel is preached. It is not merely an utterance.

It is something that occurs. The power of God is at work. For the salvation of men and women. And boys and girls. Snatching them from the powers of destruction. And transferring them.

Into the new age of life. Let's pray. Let's pray.