

There are spoken words, there are phrases, there are messages in the English language that have power, that carry the weight and authority to change lives. Think about the word, "Guilty." That single word, when spoken by a duly appointed judge, has the power to transform individuals, families, the accused, the victims. Likewise with the words, "Not guilty." Those are powerful words. Or think about the words, "I do." That is a powerful declaration that binds two people together, ostensibly for life. Or think about the words, "I love you," or, "I hate you." Those pronouncements, even when spoken carelessly and impulsively have the power to shape the course of a person's future and their self-image and their relationships for the rest of their lives. Depending on who speaks those messages and when and where, certain words carry tremendous force and potential.

In the first chapter of the Apostle Paul's letter to the church at Rome – the NT **book of Romans** – Paul claims there is a message that has more power than any other words that ever have been or could be spoken. It's a message with supreme power; absolute power; transcendent, unparalleled power. It's a declaration that has the power to change, not just a person's entire life, but their spiritual status, their identity, their eternal destiny. And not just theoretically, but truly, actually, meaningfully, actually. Paul began his letter by introducing himself as a slave of Christ, as an apostle to the Gentiles, as one set apart by God for the message of the gospel. We then saw him lay out the features of that gospel message: its ancient origins, its content, and its effects. And last week we saw how he articulated his affection for the recipients of the letter, the

believers in Rome. And he ended last week's passage in v.15 by sharing his eagerness to visit them and preach the gospel there in Rome. And so, in the passage we're going to dig into this morning, beginning with v.16, he unlocks the "why," why he is so anxious and enthusiastic to come to them with the message of the gospel? And in answering that question, Paul establishes the theme of the whole letter, the thesis statement of the whole book of Romans. So if you haven't done so already, let me invite you to take a Bible and turn with me to Romans 1:16 (page 939 in pew Bible), and follow along as I read vv.16-17 [READ].

Now before we get into the text itself, I want to unpack a word we've already seen Paul use four times by this point in the letter. It's a word we use a lot here. It's a word we sometimes assume the meaning of. But I don't want to

assume; I want to be clear and explicit. It's the word, "gospel." What is **this gospel**? Well the word itself means "good news" or "glad tidings." And the good news that Paul speaks of is the message of what God has done to save sinners and make all things new through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. That's the 6-second nutshell version of the gospel. To be a little more specific, using the verbiage Paul has already used to declare the content of the gospel to the Romans, it is the message of the eternal Son of God taking on humanity, with all its weakness and frailty and limitation, coming to earth as the Son-of-God-in-flesh, dying as a perfect man in the place of sinful men, being raised by God through the power of the HS, and being enthroned as the Son-of-God-in-power to rule and reign over an everlasting kingdom. That's the gospel message. Jesus comes, lives, dies, rises, and reigns.

That's the message Paul says he is eager to preach to those in Rome.

But why? Why is Paul so desperate to proclaim that message, that gospel? Look back at v.15. He says, "So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. For – or because – I am not ashamed of the gospel..." He longs to announce the gospel message to them because he is **not ashamed** of it. Now when we hear that with our 21<sup>st</sup> Century American ears, we immediately think of shame as an inward, subjective, psychological feeling. Like when you get caught doing something wrong you feel inwardly embarrassed and ashamed. And that inward emotion may be PART of what Paul is saying. He certainly does not feel embarrassed or inwardly humiliated by the gospel. And neither should we.

The message of Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and rule should not stir in us any inward fear or reluctance or shame. There are things we are ashamed of, things we probably should be ashamed of. What are those things for you? Your past? Your thoughts? Certain habits? The things you do when you think no one is watching you? And what about the things you are entirely UNashamed of? We've all got those as well. What are the things you have absolutely NO hesitation bringing up with a total stranger? Your sports allegiances? Your political views? The weather? Your hobbies? Your grandkids? Is the gospel one of those things of which you are UNashamed? If not, why not? And are you willing to pray and strive to be unembarrassed by Christ and His saving message?

But it seems Paul is thinking more specifically here of shame as a social category. Shame is a state of disgrace and degradation. It's weakness and foolishness and contempt. It's public humiliation that comes from having put your confidence in something false. Shame is the opposite of honor and glory and esteem and dignity and wisdom and power. It's an open declaration of a person's status or condition, like when Jesus says in Luke 9:26, "For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels." So for Paul to say he is not ashamed of the gospel, he is declaring that this message is NOT weak or foolish or shameful. He stands ready to proclaim it publicly, confidently in the face of opposition and competing messages. It is not an inferior or deficient message. And

so he is not intimidated to confess it, to bear witness to it, to contend for it, even when, as he says in 1 Corinthians 1, the Jews call it offensive and the Gentiles call it foolish. People still label the gospel with those two accusations today. Offensive. Foolish. But Paul is not ashamed of this message. He is not disgraced by it.

And WHY is he not ashamed of the gospel? He tells us, "...for (because) it is the power of God for salvation..."

There it is. Not only is this message not weak or foolish or disgraceful. Quite the opposite. It is the **power of God** that results in or brings about salvation. A more powerful message and a more consequential effect than "guilty" or "I do" or "I love you." The preaching of the gospel – something that I fear we take for granted, the fact that we get to hear this message proclaimed every single week –



unleashes an effectual transforming power that turns sinners into saints, that brings dead people to life, that makes enemies into sons and daughters. I want you to really see this. The gospel doesn't just make salvation possible. It doesn't just invite people to believe with no assurance that they will. The preaching of the gospel – this word that you're hearing right now, this morning – actually works salvation fully and effectively in people's hearts. It awakens faith in them. It removes the veil from their eyes so they can behold the truth and beauty of Christ. It draws them to Him. And not just theoretically. Truly! Actually! It happened to Paul! It happened to every single Christian in Rome who was hearing these words. It is exactly what happened to me. And to you, if you are a born-again follower of Jesus. And if you're not, it's what can happen to you TODAY. This message that is coming from these

pages through my lips doesn't just contain power or bear witness to power. It is, itself, the power of God to save. Keep in mind, Paul is writing these words surrounded by the claims and assumptions of Roman political power and military power. And yet, he is able to point to a greater power, the greatest power. It makes sense that Paul is not ashamed.

And what about the salvation that the gospel accomplishes? When Paul uses this word, he's usually referring to a future deliverance from the judgment and wrath of God. The final rescue fully accomplished. But even though we have to wait until the end of time for it to be fully consummated, it is also something that has already been inaugurated and accomplished, and so we can experience it now. Those who have believed the

gospel have been saved from the penalty of sin, they are being saved from the power and pollution of sin, and ultimately they will be saved from the very presence of sin. But it's also not just that we are saved FROM sin and God's judgment against it. We are also saved FOR the glorious renewal and restoration of all things that God invites us to share.

So who is this salvation for? Paul says, "...to **everyone who believes**, to the Jew first and also to the Greek." It is for ALL who believe, Jew and Gentile. It is inclusive. There is no distinction or discrimination ethnically, culturally, economically, educationally, regarding age or gender or class or title. When Paul says it is to the Jew first, he means first chronologically – Jesus came as a Jew to the Jews, and the gospel was played out in front of and first

announced to the Jews; the first Christians were Jews – but also first in historical priority. The Jews were the recipients of the promises. God sent them the law and the prophets. He made His first covenant with Israel. They were the people created to be the channel of blessing and vehicle of redemption for the world. Which is why he adds, “...and also to the Greek.” The fact that Gentiles can and are being saved by this same gospel is the fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham that all the families of the earth would be blessed through him. It’s the fulfillment of Israel’s purpose, to be a light to the nations. All those promises and purposes are coming true. The gospel is for ALL who believe.

But at the same time, it is ONLY for those who believe. So it is also exclusive. Anyone is invited to believe it. But you

have to believe it. And that belief is more than just mental acknowledgment of a set of facts. To believe the gospel is an act of trust, commitment, reliance, dependance on God. It's staking all your hope and the entirety of your future on His promises and their fulfillment in Christ. Total, unreserved, unshakable confidence in the finished work of Jesus. And at the same time, forsaking all confidence in one's self, his works, his upbringing, his background, his religiosity, his own goodness. That's what it means to believe. And it's not about how strong your faith is; it's about what your faith is IN! Not the quality of your faith, but the object. Back in v.3 Paul said the gospel is concerning God's Son, Jesus Christ. So believing in the gospel is believing in Jesus with a belief, a faith called into being by the preaching and hearing of the gospel. That's good news, right?

Well Paul isn't finished. He's eager to preach the gospel in Rome because he's not ashamed of it. He's not ashamed of it because it is the power of God so save all who believe. But WHY is it the power of God to save all who believe? Paul says, "For (because) in it (in the gospel) the **righteousness of God** is revealed..." So it is the power of God to save because it discloses, it unveils, the righteousness of God. That sounds nice, doesn't it? But what does it mean? Righteousness sounds like a good thing, but what is it? Well there are a few different ways that word is used throughout the Bible. First, righteousness is an attribute. If someone is righteous, they are just in their character. They are morally upright, virtuous, objectively good. So the righteousness of God is His objective justice, His goodness, His uprightness. It's

what He is. Second, Scripture sometimes connects righteousness to God's relational disposition. God is righteous in that He is faithful to His covenant and loyal to His covenant people. He is righteous in keeping His promises. He displays His righteousness by intervening to save His people. So, in that sense, it's how He acts.

And while each of those plays a role here, Paul seems to be emphasizing a third understanding of the righteousness of God. In addition to being an attribute and a disposition, righteousness is a declaration, a gift. So more than who God is and how He acts, righteousness is what He gives. To those who believe, He gives His gift of righteousness. Theologians call it "forensic righteousness," a legal pronouncement, a judicial verdict. The righteousness OF God is the gift FROM God of right standing before Him.

How does that happen? Jesus earned righteousness for us through His sinless life of perfect obedience to God's law, so that when we trust in Him and are united with Him, His earned righteousness is imputed (credited) to our account so that we, being sinners, can instead be counted and declared righteous, as righteous as Jesus Himself in the sight of God. It's the righteousness spoken of in Romans 3:22, the righteousness FOR all who believe. Or Philippians 3:9, the righteousness FROM God that depends on faith. Or 2 Corinthians 5:21, that in Christ we might become the righteousness of God. If you are a Christian today, God has not only taken away your sin and forgiven you. He has given you the gift of righteousness and declared you as righteous as Jesus in His sight. You ARE the righteousness of God in Christ. The preaching of the gospel is the power of God for salvation because it



displays and unleashes this justifying gift that declares sinners to be righteous.

And how to we experience this power? How do we receive this gift or righteousness, right standing before God? Well earlier, Paul said that salvation was for all who believe.

Here, he goes back to that idea, saying that God's gift of righteousness is **from faith for faith**. Or your translation might say from faith to faith, or by faith from first to last.

And I'll tell you the truth, no one really knows with any degree of certainty what that means. There have been a lot of guesses: from OT faith to NT faith, from faith in law to faith in gospel, from the faith of the preacher to the faith of the hearer, from faith in the promise to faith in its fulfillment, from God's faithfulness to the human response of faith, from one person's faith to another person's faith.

Maybe the simplest understanding is that Paul says it that way for emphasis, meaning that from beginning to end, from first to last, salvation and righteousness are ALL of faith and ONLY of faith. It doesn't start with faith and then end up depending on something else (your works, obedience to the law). Paul rebuked the Galatian church for that. No, we are saved, we are justified (declared righteous) by faith alone. Ephesians 2:8-9, "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast." Galatians 2:16, "...we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified." What is necessary to be rescued from sin and

death, restored to eternal glory, declared right in God's sight? Faith alone in Christ alone.

And finally, as the cherry on top, to show that this isn't any new message, but is the ancient truth that has been declared through the ages, Paul quotes an OT passage, Habakkuk 2:4, "as it is written, 'The righteous shall live by faith.'" The difference is, in its original setting in Habakkuk, God seemed to be saying that the faithful person will live his life trusting God, even in the face of hardship and difficulties because God is faithful. But remember, that was before Jesus, before the cross, when the message of the gospel was still in signs and symbols and shadows. The promises were still that: unrealized, unfulfilled promises. Here, Paul takes that same verse, puts it in the context of what Jesus has accomplished for us in His life, death, and

resurrection, and it takes on a richer, fuller meaning. Paul says that the righteous one – the one who, by faith in Christ, has been given the gift of righteousness and declared right by God – will obtain life, will be brought to life, will live. Now, the first message is still true. Being faithful to God does mean living a life of trust in Him to keep His promises even when it's hard. But Paul's message is so much better, so much fuller and richer and deeper! If you trust in the finished work of Jesus and are justified by faith, you will live. You will live NOW, experiencing the abundant life of Christ as you are conformed to His image and as the fruit of the Spirit is produced in your life: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. AND you will live at the end of time at the great resurrection when the dead in Christ are raised to be with Him forever.

The righteous will live by faith. Or, said differently, the righteous by faith will live. You, if you have been declared righteous by God through trusting in the work of His Son, will live.

In light of what you've heard and what we've seen this morning, I want you to consider that all of humanity can be divided into two groups. You have those who have experienced the power of God for salvation, who have heard and believed the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ, who have trusted in His righteousness alone, who have been granted the gift of righteousness from God to stand justified in His sight, and who have been brought from death to life. And then you have those who have not experienced that power, who have not believed the gospel, who have not trusted in the righteousness of

Christ, who stand guilty before God in their own unrighteousness, and who are still spiritually dead in their sin. Which of those two groups are you in? Consider that seriously. If you are in that second group, I have good news for you: the gospel is the power of God to save ANYONE who trusts in Christ's righteousness alone. Believe the gospel, trust in Jesus, and live. If you are in that second group, you have been saved and declare righteous through a message that is the power of God to save. Do not be ashamed of the gospel. Instead proclaim it boldly and confidently to all and let its power work to accomplish salvation in them as well.