

The Power of God for Salvation

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[0 : 00] Romans chapter 1, verses 16 and 17, the Apostle Paul writes, 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.

For in it, the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, the righteous shall live by faith.

Father, by Your Spirit, give us insight now into Your Word. We ask in Christ's name. Amen. You guys be seated. There have been occasions throughout history when the events in an individual's life, not events that would be heard and known about all around the world normally, but for whatever reason, for the circumstances and by God's providential care over the world, the events in a person's life, in an individual's life, affect the entire course of human history.

One of those events occurred in 1519, as Martin Luther was in a tower in Wittenberg, Germany, studying the Word. His trial before the Roman Catholic Church for heresy, technically it was an inquisition, had already begun a year later, a year earlier, and had taken sort of a hiatus because there were distractions going on.

More important things apparently came up. And so here he was, sort of in the midst of a trial, on a bit of a break from it, waiting to find out whether he would be condemned to death, or whether he would be set free eventually.

[1 : 43] And he was locked away in his study, looking at the Word of God. And in particular, he was focused upon, he was rivet upon these two verses. And the insight that the Lord gave him into these verses changed the entire course of human history.

He came to see and understand the truth of the Gospel because of his meditation upon these verses and because of God's kindness in allowing him to see the truth. In fact, these verses are pivotal in the book of Romans.

This is the thesis for this entire book. So that if you go wrong here, if you misunderstand these two verses, you are not likely to get much right in the rest of the book.

Martin Luther had already lectured through the entire book of Romans. And yet he says that at that time, much of Romans remained a mystery to him. Remained just outside of his grasp.

He was unable to understand what the Apostle Paul was saying throughout this letter until he understood what the Apostle Paul was saying in these two verses. because these verses set the stage for the rest of the book.

[2 : 49] We have to get these two verses right if we're going to get the rest of this book right. So it's imperative, it's important for us to sort of pause and camp out here this morning on just these two verses in this book.

If we want the rest of our study of Romans to be profitable, if we want God to be honored in it, if we want to come to a right understanding of the rest of these chapters, then we need to make sure this morning that we have a right understanding of these verses.

So let's just start. Let's take a look at the basic logic that's laid out in these verses. Paul begins by saying that he's not ashamed of the Gospel and he's going to tell us why in the rest of verse 16 and verse 17.

He says he's not ashamed of the Gospel because in the Gospel the power of God for salvation is the power of God for salvation and because in the Gospel, verse 17, the righteousness of God is revealed.

So here's his logic. I'm not ashamed of the Gospel because the Gospel is the power of God to save people and the Gospel is the power of God to save people because the Gospel reveals and makes known the righteousness of God.

[4 : 02] That's the logic. Not ashamed because it's power for salvation and it's power for salvation because it reveals the righteousness of God.

So we begin with this phrase, the power of God unto or for salvation. What does that mean? You have to ask basic questions when you come across big Bible words like that.

Christianese that we throw around. We tell people all the time that they need to be saved. We're concerned that the lost people around us be saved. We want to share the Gospel with people so that they can be saved.

So what exactly does Paul mean by this? If you say that someone needs to be saved or rescued, you are implying automatically that they need to be rescued from something.

And so we need to ask the question to begin with, from what does Paul envision the Gospel as saving people? What's it going to save people from? And the answer is found throughout this book, but you can see it clearly in verse 18.

[5 : 00] He says in verse 18 that the wrath of God is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. So Paul is saying that we need to be rescued from God's wrath.

The wrath of God that is revealed against all unrighteousness and ungodliness of men. And that's all of us. We are all filled with unrighteousness.

We are all unrighteous before God. In fact, look over just in Romans 3, verse 10. We are told there that it is written, none is righteous. No, not one.

Not a single person in the world can claim by God's standards to be righteous. And so we have a problem. And that problem is that God's wrath is revealed against unrighteousness, poured out on the unrighteous, and you and I are the unrighteous.

Your relatives, your neighbors, your friends, your co-workers, everyone that you know fits into the category of unrighteous. And Paul says the wrath of God is being revealed against unrighteousness.

[6 : 08] And so when Paul speaks of being saved, he means that we need to be saved from God's wrath that is due to us for our sin. Our primary problem in life is not that we need more self-esteem.

Christ did not come to earth in order to increase our estimation of ourselves. That's not what He came here to do. Our primary problem is not that people come against us and that people do mean things to us and that people say rude and ugly things to us.

That's not our main problem. Our main problem is not that we need to advance economically or that we need to get a raise or a promotion or anything like that. Our problem is not that we need better kids or better grandkids or any of those sorts of things.

Some of those things might be true about you, but that's not our problem. That's not what Christ has come to rescue us from. That's not what Christ has come to save us from.

Christ has come to deliver us and rescue us from the wrath of God. And the gospel is the power that makes that possible. The gospel is God's power to rescue us from God's wrath.

[7 : 17] And how does it do that? Very simply, by revealing or making known to us the righteousness of God. Notice how he words this.

The gospel is the power of God for salvation. Verse 17. Because or for? Because in the gospel, the righteousness of God is revealed.

So the gospel has the power to save us from God's wrath by revealing to us God's righteousness. That's confusing. Because the problem is that we are unrighteous.

And God is Himself righteous. Which is why He pours out His wrath on sinners. So how can the gospel showing us and making known to us the righteousness of God, how can that possibly save us?

In fact, how can the revelation of God's righteousness to sinful people be called good news at all? How is that gospel? Take a look down in chapter 3, verse 5.

[8 : 24] Paul says there that since our unrighteousness serves to show the righteousness of God, what shall we say? That God is unrighteous to inflict wrath on us?

So here, the righteousness of God is the very standard by which we are deemed to be unrighteous. Here in chapter 3, verse 5, our righteousness highlights the righteousness of God because His righteousness brings His wrath down upon us.

And yet, in chapter 1, verse 17, the revealing of God's righteousness is called good news. How is that possible? If the righteousness of God is the standard by which we are declared to be unrighteous, and therefore, the standard by which God decides to pour out His wrath on us, how in

the world can the revelation of God's righteousness to sinners become good news for us? What sense does that make? What is the Apostle Paul thinking here in this verse? Well, he cannot possibly be referring by the righteousness of God, he cannot possibly be referring to the righteousness by which God measures our unrighteousness.

He cannot simply be referring to God's moral perfection because it's God's moral perfection that sets the stage for our condemnation. So what exactly does he mean?

[9 : 49] Is there some other sense in which God's righteousness might be made known to us? There is. In fact, if you move down in chapter 3, he will contrast two kinds of righteousness of God.

He's already spoken of the righteousness by which God pours out His wrath on us. Now he's going to speak of another righteousness. Verse 21, But now, the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the law and the prophets bear witness to it.

So now, there's another kind of righteousness that's been manifested or made known. But now, the righteousness of God has been made known and here it is, verse 22, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.

So this is not the righteousness by which God judges us. This is an entirely different kind of righteousness. This is a righteousness that God gives to us as a gift by faith.

Notice what it says. It is a righteousness of God that comes through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. How can the revelation of God's righteousness be good news for sinners who deserve God's wrath?

[11 : 10] Only if that righteousness comes to us as a gift from Him. Only if by that righteousness we are counted to be righteous before Him and in His presence.

And notice how Paul notice how Paul words things here in these verses. I am not ashamed of the Gospel. It's the power of God for salvation. To everyone who believes faith is crucial.

For in the Gospel the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith or from faith to faith. It's another way of saying that this revelation of the righteousness of God is entirely bound to faith.

It doesn't happen apart from faith in Jesus. It's not revealed. It's not made known to us in any other way than by faith. The righteousness of God now made known to us through and because of faith in Jesus.

You don't need faith in Jesus to see the righteousness of God revealed in His wrath. You don't need anything other than your own sinfulness to see that. It's not necessary.

[12 : 18] There will come a day. Judgment Day will come. And all will see His righteousness on display and it will be the standard by which He measures all of us.

And yet here, righteousness is made known in another way. This is not the revealing of God's righteousness in wrath on Judgment Day. This is the revealing of God's righteousness now by faith in Christ.

This is an altogether different kind of righteousness of God. This is the righteousness by which God declares us to be righteous.

This is a righteousness performed by Jesus, achieved and earned by Jesus in His life upon the earth and now credited to us as a gift through faith and by the grace of God.

God this is a kind of righteousness that does not condemn this righteousness saves. Now we have the righteousness of God delivering us from the righteous wrath of God and all of that happens by faith.

[13 : 36] All of it. There's not a secret, there's not, there's not some secret way to obtain this. There's no, there's no secret incantation, there's no words that you can say that can achieve this.

This happens simply and purely by faith. When we come to see and understand that we lack righteousness and we're going to be judged by God's standard of righteousness, then we recognize that we need righteousness.

That's what you need. You need righteousness. But you can't achieve it on your own. You can't do it on your own. You can't earn it on your own. It's impossible. And so in the gospel and by faith, God offers to us His own righteousness as a gift to cover us as a blanket over us covering our sins so that on judgment day when we stand before the righteous one, He will not see our sins.

He will not see our ungodliness. He will not see our unrighteousness. He will only see reflected back to Him His own perfect righteousness given to us as a gift through faith and faith alone.

When Martin Luther came to understand this, when he came to see this insight, that the righteousness of God in Romans 1.17 was not the righteousness by which He judges us, but was

instead the righteousness that He gives to us as a free gift through faith.

[15:19] It changed everything for Him. Let me read you what he says. He says that he had conceived a burning desire to understand what Paul meant in his letter to the Romans.

But thus far, there it stood in my way that one word which is in chapter 1. the righteousness of God is revealed in it. He says, I hated that word the righteousness of God which by the use and custom of all my teachers I had been taught to understand as referring to the formal or active justice as they call it.

To that justice or righteousness by which God is just and by which He punishes sinners and the unjust. That's how he saw this. He thought Paul was saying in the Gospel God reveals the righteousness by which He judges the world.

And that's not good news because we can't attain that righteousness. And he knew that. He understood that he fell short of that righteousness. This did not sound like Gospel to Luther. He hated it. But then he says later on he says now I exalted this sweetest word of mine the righteousness of God with as much love as before I had hated it with hate.

[16:39] He says that this phrase of Paul was for me the very gate of paradise. Coming to understand that this righteousness of God made known in the Gospel through faith was a righteousness that God gives to those who trust in Jesus by faith.

Was a declaration of not sinful but righteous. Freely given. when he came to see that it became for Luther the very gate of paradise.

Because that's exactly what it is. Because knowing and believing and understanding that through faith in Jesus God will grant to us God will credit to our account righteousness.

It opens the way to paradise. A way that has been shut. A way that we were barred from entering. Now now that the Gospel is revealed to be the power of God to save us by giving to us the righteousness of God now the gates are open and all who trust in Christ are free to come in.

[18:00] All who trust in Christ are free to come in through that way. Notice how he highlights this. He says that the Gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

That's a confusing phrase. What do you mean Paul? Why would you say this? Wasn't it not enough to say to everyone who believes? Why add to the Jew first and also to the Greek?

Why would he say that? I think for two reasons. One is just the obvious reason that the Gospel had been revealed to the Jews first. It had been revealed in the Old Testament and Paul is going to go throughout the rest of the book of Romans using the Old Testament to prove up the Gospel.

It had been revealed to them through the prophets so that they received the message about the Gospel first. And that was practically true in Paul's ministry as well. Every time he entered a new town, first he went to the synagogue and proclaimed the Gospel to the Jews and then turned and proclaimed it to the Gentiles.

So just practically, the Jews received the Gospel first. That's one reason I think that he says this. But I think a more important reason that he says this is so that we understand that it's not just the Gentiles who are saved this way.

[19:22] It's the Jews as well. I mean, if anyone were going to be declared right before God by their own obedience and adherence to God's standards, wouldn't it be those to whom His standards had been revealed centuries before?

Wouldn't it be those who had access to God's law for all of these generations? If any group of people was ever going to achieve a right standing before God on the basis of their own ability and their own works, it would definitely be the Jewish people.

They have all the advantages. They have the law. They have the prophets. They have the covenants. They have all the advantages. And yet the Apostle Paul says, I want you to know, first of all, that this gospel saves through faith for Jews and also for Gentiles for the rest of us.

So there's no alternative. There's no other means by which the gates of paradise might be opened for us than the revelation of God's righteousness in the gospel.

It alone is the power of God to save and nothing else. I want you to see this. Turn over a few pages to Romans chapter 10. I want you to listen very carefully to what the Apostle Paul has to say in chapter 10 verse 3.

[20:51] He's speaking about his Jewish kinsmen. He said in verses 1 and 2 that his desire is for them to be saved, so he assumes that they are not saved.

And then he tells us why in verse 3. For being ignorant of the righteousness of God. They don't know God's righteousness. They don't know how righteous God is.

That's not what he means here. He is not talking about God's righteousness by which he judges the world. He's talking about the righteousness that we receive as a gift. And they're ignorant of it.

For being ignorant of the righteousness of God and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. Why are they lost?

Why are his Jewish brothers and sisters lost? Why are those who receive the prophets and the law and the covenants, why are they now cut off from Christ? Why are they now without hope? Why?

[21 : 54] Because they are ignorant of the righteousness of God that comes as a gift by faith. And in its place, they try to establish their own righteousness. righteousness. The surest way, the surest way to hell is to try to earn your way into heaven.

There's no quicker path. There's no easier route to condemnation than to try to earn a right standing before God when God says, receive my righteousness as a free, free gift to you by faith.

Jew, Gentile, all, all are saved only by means of faith in Jesus so that His righteousness becomes yours as a free gift through faith.

There is no other way. There is no other hope. Not for Jew. Not for Gentile. There is no other way for the gates of paradise to be opened for you and for me than the righteousness of God credited to us through faith in Jesus.

There's no other way. So what do we do with this message? This is not a new message that I'm preaching to you. I say this in one form or another every single week.

[23 : 23] I'm not sure that there's been a week and two and a half years of preaching at Church of the Cross that I haven't found some way of getting to this basic message. This is nothing new. I'm not telling you a new thing.

It's news. It's good news but it's not new. If you've been here more than one week this isn't new to you. You've heard this before. You know this. So what do you do with this?

You do exactly what the Apostle Paul does. You start by believing it. You start by trusting in this Gospel in this good news that you cannot be rescued and saved and delivered by your own efforts but you can only be rescued, saved and delivered by the righteousness of God credited to you by faith in Jesus.

You have to actually believe that. It's not enough to just sit and hear it from me week after week and say, yeah, that sounds good. I agree with that. It's not enough to agree with that Gospel. You must believe in it.

It's not enough to hear it, be glad to hear it, and then go out and live the rest of your life as if you are very practically trying to earn a right standing before God.

[24 : 29] It's not enough to say, that sounds like a good message and then to assume and affirm in your own heart that you're okay with God because you live a pretty decent lifestyle. That's not enough. You have to actually believe in this.

You must really trust in this message. So you start, you start applying Romans 1, 16 and 17 with faith. This Gospel has power to save through faith.

This righteousness is revealed from faith to faith. It's all of faith. And if you don't start with faith, you'll get nowhere. You must believe.

What if you've already believed? You hear the message one more time and you say, I'm glad for that and you move on with your week as if nothing has changed and nothing has happened?

I don't think so. Remember how Paul began this passage? He said that I am not ashamed of the Gospel. But he begins that statement with the word for or because.

[25 : 38] So it ties into what he's just said in verse 15. And in verse 15 he has said that he is eager to preach the Gospel to you also who are at Rome. He's eager.

He has a great burning desire within his heart to go to Rome and preach the Gospel to them. And so, he's not ashamed to do it.

He's not ashamed to go to Rome and proclaim the Gospel to them. Nothing's going to prevent him. Nothing's going to stop him. And if anyone had reason to be ashamed of the Gospel, it's the Apostle Paul.

I mean, everybody attempted to shame him. Everyone. Imprisoned multiple times. Shipwrecked twice. Beaten countless times. All because he proclaimed this message.

If anyone had sort of a right to be ashamed, to shy away from preaching the message, to be concerned about the results of preaching the message, it would be the Apostle Paul.

[26 : 33] And yet he says, I'm eager to preach the Gospel to you because I'm not ashamed of it. It stuns me that the Apostle Paul, who had languished in prison and been beaten countless times, had a burning passionate desire to go to the other side of the empire across the sea to preach the Gospel.

And that we are too scared to cross our yard to share the Gospel with our neighbor. It astounds me that a man like Luther, when he sees this, when he understands this truth, would lay his life down, would refuse, refuse to stop proclaiming the Gospel of God's righteousness credited through faith, would refuse, even in the face of the death penalty.

Refuse. And yet, we find it difficult to invite our waiter to come to church and hear this message.

You want to know what to do with these verses? Don't be ashamed of them. Don't be ashamed of this Gospel. Don't live your life, don't cower away, don't shrink away every time you're given an opportunity, and it happens all the time.

All day long you have opportunities to share this message. Don't be ashamed of this. In fact, yesterday, I pulled them to a gas station because I wanted a snack.

[28 : 21] I didn't need gas. I was just hungry. I went in. I was good though. I just got water. Okay? I got water. I went up and paid for it. Had a conversation with the cashier.

Just a brief conversation and thought to myself as I'm talking to her. Hey, how do I say something to her? How do I say something? Paid for my water and I walked out. Got in the car. Started to drive off.

I had my trailer hooked up and everything so it was a big deal in this little gas station parking lot. I started to drive off and I thought, this is ridiculous. So I turned around.

I got my trailer all turned around. I pulled back in. I pulled right up next to the store and she looked out the window at me like I was crazy because I'm pulling this trailer and trying to get it in and trying to do all this. And so I went in and I said, hey, by the way, and just began to share with her and invite her to church.

And I got back in the car after that and thought, why did I walk out the first time? Why didn't I say something the first time? Especially when I'm about to tell everybody tomorrow, don't be ashamed of the Gospel.

[29 : 27] Don't be afraid to do this. Don't be afraid to speak to your waiter. Don't be afraid to say something to your neighbor. Don't be afraid to say something to your co-worker. Don't be afraid. What's the worst they're going to do?

Say something rude? Okay. They're threatening to kill Martin Luther. The Apostle Paul will eventually have his head taken off for this.

Never be ashamed of the Gospel because it is the power of God to save people. It and it alone is the power of God to save people.

And if you believe that, if you believe that this message comes with power, you have no reason to ever shy away from proclaiming this Gospel.

No reason and no excuse because it doesn't depend upon you. It doesn't depend upon your eloquence. It doesn't depend upon whether or not you can remember all the Bible verses that you memorized in our evangelism class.

[30 : 34] It doesn't depend upon whether or not you can smoothly transition into a conversation about the church or about the Gospel. It doesn't depend upon any of those things because you're not the power of God for salvation.

The Gospel is the power of God for salvation. And all you need to do is somehow stutteringly, uncomfortably, and awkwardly to spill out the Gospel and the power of God will begin to do its work. Never be ashamed of this very simple message of the righteousness of God credited through faith in Jesus because it opens the gateway to paradise.

I think I think