

## THE GOSPEL: THE POWER OF GOD

Romans 1:1-17 (key verse 16)

*“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.”*

The world system says you need to be successful and make lots of money in order to save yourself. On campus students believe that earning marks is their way to save their lives, either remove family from poverty or earn good marks to have a good life. These are not bad desires, however, they are based on performance. As if to say if I do not perform I die. So we actually perform in order to save our lives. It is a performance based salvation. And it is extremely burdensome, when one fails one can become fatalistic. However, in this passage Paul presents some good news to all of us. That the gospel of Jesus is the power of God for salvation. And this salvation is received through faith in Jesus Christ. It is not a performance based salvation but rather obtained through faith.

Look at verse 1, “Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God—” Paul begins the book of Romans with a clear identity of who he is before God. He says, he a servant of Christ Jesus. In those days a servant was fully understood to mean a slave, so Paul was essentially saying he identifies with the world through being a slave of Christ Jesus. Secondly, he says he was called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel. Paul used to persecute the church and be an enemy of God. However, one day on his way to Damascus he met Jesus in person. This was all the grace and mercy of God given to Paul, where Jesus called him to be an apostle for the gospel. Paul was a sinner who was adamant to prevent the church from preaching the gospel of Jesus. Yet because of the gospel he was set apart for the gospel of God. This means that his life was dedicated for the gospel of God. Through the grace of God, Paul was saved by Jesus from the life of sin and meaninglessness into a worker of the gospel. Verse 2 reveals that this gospel was promised through God’s prophets in the holy scriptures. The gospel was not something that just came from nowhere, the gospel came from God. Thus the passage today is about the gospel of Jesus. May learn through Paul’s eyes and life experience the power of God.

Look at verse 3-4, “regarding his Son, who as to his earthly life[a] was a descendant of David, 4 and who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power[b] by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.” The gospel of God is centred on Jesus, who is the Son of God, yet came to this world in human form and had an earthly life. Like any human being, Jesus also had a lineage, he was the descendant of David. This means that the gospel is not some father Christmas made up story to make us feel hopeful, a make believe of some sort. The Gospel is from God and is based on a real person who walked the ground of this earth, the person Jesus Christ. Look at verse 5-6, “Through him we received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from[c] faith for his name’s sake. 6 And you also are among those Gentiles who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.” Because of Jesus there is apostleship grace. This is the grace that saves a sinner and same time calls the sinner into becoming an apostle of Jesus. What an amazing grace of God. Looking at verse 5 again, Paul says through him **WE** received this grace. It was not only Paul who received this amazing apostolic grace, but those who will come to believe in Jesus has received apostleship grace. This includes Jews and Gentiles, which means this amazing grace is available for anyone and everyone.

In verses 7-10, Paul shares his thankfulness to how the grace of God has worked on the believers in Rome. How their faith has been reported all over the world. They too were once sinners living meaningless lives, however because of the gospel of Jesus they received apostleship grace, and now their faith is demonstrated all over the world. Because of the gospel they could live purposeful lives. That is why their faith is reported all over the world. They did not shrink back under the hardships and difficulties of this world, but because of the

gospel of Jesus, they could become apostle of Jesus. So Paul prayed for them continuously so they may be co-workers in the preaching of the gospel especially in Rome and be of mutual encouragement of faith to one another [10]. And so because of the gospel, Paul did not see himself as though he was bullet proof from being discouraged or tempted to fall back and sin, rather he still saw believers in Rome as a source of encouragement for him as they continue to life by faith in Jesus.

Look at verse 14-15, "I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish. 15 That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are in Rome." Paul was eager to preach the gospel to those in Rome. At the time Rome was the epicentre of the world, however Paul was eager to preach in Rome because he felt obligated to both Greeks and non-Greeks, to the wise and the foolish. This means he felt indebted to preach the gospel to anyone and everyone. Where did this sense of debt come from? It came from the grace of Christ. Paul was a great debtor to Christ. He was once a blasphemer, a persecutor and a violent man. But God had mercy on him and the grace of our Lord Jesus was poured out on him abundantly. He said, "Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners--of whom I am the worst" (1Ti 1:13-15). In his grace, the Risen Jesus had entrusted the gospel to Paul to preach to the Gentiles (1Th 2:4; Titus 1:3). This shows that Paul did not preach the gospel because he had to or out of compulsion. Paul preached the gospel because he remembered the grace of God revealed to him through Jesus Christ.

We, too, should have a sense of obligation to God. We were like the man in Jesus' parable who owed his master 10,000 talents--a debt that was so huge it was impossible to pay back. Because of sin, we deserved judgment and everlasting punishment. We were so burdened every day because of this debt of sin. But God, out of his great mercy, cancelled all our debts through our Lord Jesus. He enables us to serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness, before him all our days (Lk 1:74-75). Moreover, he gave us the great commission to "make disciples of all nations" (Mt 28:19). Based on Jesus' grace and commission we should have a sense of obligation. But it is not like credit card debt. Such debts make us feel pressured, anxious and burdened and we repay reluctantly. However, our sense of obligation to Jesus is totally different. It comes from remembering what God has done for us and leads us to share the grace of Jesus with others willingly and joyfully. This enables us to grow, bear fruit, and be a blessing to others.

Let us see Paul's second reason for being eager to preach the gospel. Let us all read verse 16, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile." The first thing Paul expresses in this verse is that he is not ashamed of the gospel. Why would Paul talk about shame of preaching the gospel. I believe it is because Rome at the time was the epicentre of the world. All kinds of things were present in Rome, immorality, unbelievers who ridiculed faith in God and so on. Our campus is filled with all kinds of people with all kinds of beliefs and sin. And so we are tempted to be ashamed of the gospel in a sinful and adulterous generation. Shame comes if we have a lack of confidence in the gospel. Shame comes when we are more influenced by the world's values than God's kingdom values. For example if our campus was filled with bible believing Christians who spoke about Jesus grace most time, we would have no reason to be ashamed to talk about the gospel of Jesus. However that is not the case. Yet still, Paul was not ashamed of the gospel even in such a hostile environment. How could Paul not be ashamed of the gospel? Verse 16b says, "...because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes."

Rome conquered the world with military power. However, she could not conquer the power of sin and death, rather, she was destroyed by them. No philosophy, ideology or religion, no economy, no military power can defeat the power of sin and death. Only the gospel can do that. The gospel is not about words or theory, it is power. It is power to make a proud person

humble. It is power to make a bitter and sorrowful person thankful and joyful. It is power to make a fearful and doubtful person confident and courageous. It is power to make a hateful and mean person loving and kind. It is power to make a stingy and greedy person generous and sacrificial. In short, it is the power of God to transform anyone who believes into a new creation. The gospel has changed so many people, including each of us. The gospel is not outdated. It is still the power of God that changes people. This happens to everyone who believes. Paul experienced the power of the gospel first hand in his life, he was a persecutor of the church, he hated the name Jesus and the followers of Jesus. He was hostile and violent man. However, because of the gospel he became a new man, an apostle of Jesus. This is unbelievable, imagine someone in your community who used to terrorise people, would kill with no shame and now they have become new person, preaching Jesus mercy and love. Paul was such a man. That is only possible because of the gospel of Jesus, it is the power of God for salvation.

A number of expert and smart people when we were nearing the year 2000, said the Christian faith will become null and useless, basically obsolete. That as science advances people will be moving away from Christianity. However, throughout the years the Christian faith has been growing. This is because of the power of the gospel. The gospel touches what really matters in our lives and it is the real power that saves, saving us from the power of sin and death. Jesus is alive he is the same yesterday and today and forever. That is why we should continue to share the gospel of Jesus with others. The gospel of Jesus will never be out of fashion like how our feelings, moods and culture change. May we be eager to share the gospel and live a gospel filled life.

Paul's third reason for being eager to preach the gospel is that the gospel reveals something. Look at verse 17, "For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last,[e] just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith." Here "the righteousness of God" is a right relationship with God. We cannot earn this righteousness with our own works or through what we do. We can have this righteousness only by faith in Jesus. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." This righteousness is imputed to us the moment we believe. To believe is not just a one-time transaction to obtain salvation. It is a way of life through which we maintain our relationship with God. We need to live by faith day by day from the beginning to the end. This is consistent with the teaching of the Old Testament, which Paul supports by quoting Habakkuk 2:4: "The righteous will live by faith." In the rest of his letter, Paul will explain how the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel. Let us pray that we may not be ashamed of the gospel, but rather have confidence in the gospel. I pray that we may experience the power of the gospel in our practical lives.

I came to the faith while I was in Kuruman. There was a full gospel church that was being established just a street opposite. Since they were starting the church with no members they went door to door to invite people to the gospel of Jesus and to join the newly established church. I was still in middle school and so their attention was mainly on my parents and older siblings. I don't remember what they said that day however they forgot their bible. Somehow I found myself interested to know what the bible was about. So since no one in the house bothered about that bible, I took and started to read it daily. The more I read the more I grew more in love with the bible. My life and values were also starting to change, I started going to Church not because my parents wanted me to go. I would even go alone when they were absent to go. At Church I wanted to hear more what the passages in the bible meant. I wanted to be born again since I kept reading about that in the bible. I then came across Romans 10:9, "If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." I went down on knees as though talking to another person, confessed with my mouth according to the verse. It refreshed my heart for the first time, at that moment I felt the peace that I am born again, that Jesus was my Lord. This was the start of my journey for I still did not understand how I was a sinner. I understood it theoretically but

could not relate with it in my personal life. However, one thing for sure was the grace of God I could not deny, I somehow started to defend the gospel, at high school became member of the Christian association which met every Fridays. I would serve and even deliver messages when given the opportunity. The things of God had more meaning than the things of this world. I desired to serve God and live for God, though I may not have fully understood what it all meant. What was clear was that my heart had changed and was being changed as I continued to depend on the teachings of the Bible. I remember I even lost a potential girlfriend because first day after I told her I liked her, I told her no kissing and sexual activities in our relationship so we may respect God. She broke up with me the following day through a letter. I was so hurt in my heart since I really liked her. But honouring God was more important for me so I let her go. I therefore believe I experienced the power of the gospel of Jesus. Jesus changed my heart and is continuing to change my heart even to this very day. Jesus has called me into a life of faith, all I need to do daily is to live this life by faith and I will continue to witness the saving power of the gospel from sin both in my life and the life of others. May I daily accept God's calling by faith to be a campus shepherd for his glory. May the grace of God continue to be with effect in my life.

In conclusion, this passage has provided us with three reasons why the gospel is still relevant today. Firstly, we have an obligation to share the gospel because we are indebted to Jesus Christ. Jesus paid all our sin and paid all the price so that we may not face God's judgement. Secondly, the gospel is the power of God for salvation. Anything that promises to save our lives in this world is a illusion because nothing in this world can save us from the power of sin and death. No one wants to die but ultimately we know we all going to die one day and there is no power in this world that can save us from the power of sin and death. However, Jesus conquered death, Jesus laid down his life for our sin, he was killed and on the third day rose from the dead. This is the gospel, the good news for the world. That the gospel is the power of God for salvation and anyone who comes by faith in Jesus will be saved. Thirdly, in the gospel a righteous of God is revealed. Through the gospel we can now live by faith in Jesus Christ who is continuing to make us holy. Living an upright life before God is not matter of performance or human efforts, but a matter of faith in the finished work of Jesus for our salvation. The righteous shall live by faith, literally. I pray that we may all accept the gospel of Jesus by faith so God may use us as source of blessing in this world. Amen.