

# An IMPOSSIBLE yet POWERFUL Gospel

By Paul David Washer

“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”

Romans 1:16

## An Impossible Gospel

The Apostle Paul's flesh had every reason to be ashamed of the Gospel he preached because it contradicted absolutely everything that was held to be true and sacred among his contemporaries. Yet there is still another reason for fleshly shame: The Gospel is an absolutely impossible, unbelievable message; a ludicrous word to the wise of the world.

As Christians, we sometimes fail to realize how utterly astounding it is when anyone truly believes our message. In a sense, the Gospel is so farfetched that its spread throughout the Roman Empire is proof of its supernatural nature. What could ever bring a Gentile, completely unaware of Old Testament Scriptures and rooted in either Greek philosophy or pagan superstitions, to believe such a message about a man named Jesus?

✎ He was born under questionable circumstances to a poor family in one of the most despised regions of the Roman Empire; and yet, the Gospel claims that he was the eternal Son of God who had been conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of a Jewish virgin.

✎ He was a carpenter by trade and an itinerant religious teacher with no official training; and yet, the Gospel claims that he surpassed the combined wisdom of every Greek philosopher and Roman sage of antiquity.

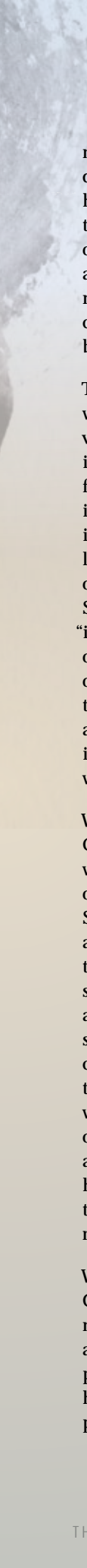
✎ He was poor and had no place to lay his head; and yet, the Gospel claims that for three years he fed thousands by a word, healed every manner of illness among men, and even raised the dead.

✎ He was crucified outside of Jerusalem as a blasphemer and an enemy of the state; and yet, the Gospel claims that his death was the pivotal event in all of human history and the only means of salvation from sin and reconciliation to God.

✎ He was placed in a borrowed tomb; and yet, the Gospel claims that on the third day he rose from the dead and presented himself to many of his followers. Forty days later, he ascended into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God.

✎ Thus, the Gospel claims that a poor Jewish carpenter, who was rejected as a lunatic and a blasphemer by his own people and crucified by the state, is now the Savior of the World, the Lord of lords and the King of kings. At his name, every knee, including Caesar's, will bow.

Who could have ever believed such a message except by the power of God? There is no other explanation. The Gospel would have never made its way out of Jerusalem, let alone, beyond the Roman Empire and into every



nation of the world, except that God had ordained to work through it. The message would have died at its birth had it depended upon the organizational abilities, eloquence, or apologetic powers of its preachers. All the missionary strategies in the world and all the clever marketing schemes borrowed from Wall Street could have never advanced this foolish, stumbling block of a message.

This truth brings both encouragement and warning to those of us who endeavor to advance the faith in which we have believed. First, it is an encouragement to know that the simple, faithful proclamation of the Gospel will ensure its continued advance in the world. Secondly, it is a warning to us that we not succumb to the lie that we can advance the Gospel through our brilliance, eloquence, or clever strategies. Such things have no power to bring about the “impossible” conversion of men. We must cast ourselves with hopeful desperation upon the only biblical means of advancing the Gospel - the bold and clear proclamation of a message about which we are not ashamed because: “It is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes!”

We live in an unbelieving and skeptical age. Our faith is ridiculed as a hopeless myth and we are portrayed as either narrow-minded bigots or weak-minded victims of a religious ruse. Such an attack often puts us on the defensive and we attempt to fight back to prove our position and relevancy with apologetics. Although some forms of this discipline are quite helpful and necessary, we must realize that the power still lies in the proclamation of the Gospel. We cannot convince a man to believe, any more than we can raise the dead. Such things are the work of God’s Spirit. Men are brought to faith only through the supernatural working of God, and He has promised to work, not through human wisdom or intellectual expertise, but through the preaching of Christ crucified and resurrected from the dead!

We must come to grips with the fact that our Gospel is an unbelievable message. We should not expect anyone to give us a hearing, let alone believe, apart from a gracious and powerful working of God’s Spirit. How very hopeless is all our preaching apart from God’s power! How very dependent is the preacher

upon God! All our evangelism is nothing more than a fool’s errand unless God moves upon the hearts of men. However, He has promised to do just that if we will be faithful to preach that one singular message that has the power to save - the Gospel!

### A Powerful Gospel

The Scriptures abound with demonstrations of God’s power. He creates the world with a word. He leads forth the starry host by number. He calls them all by name and because of the greatness of His might and the strength of His power, not one of them is missing. He separates the sea with a blast from His nostrils. The mountains melt under Him like wax before the fire and water poured down a steep place. He plays with the Leviathan as with a bird. He does according to His will in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of earth. No one can ward off His hand or say to Him, “What have you done?” Such is the power of our God, and yet none of these demonstrations of divine strength can compare with that power revealed through the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Recognizing that the Gospel is foolishness to men and a scandal to all, we can now begin to appreciate Paul’s exultation in its power. For this very reason, he could walk into the Areopagus and declare a crucified Jew to be the God of the Universe and the Savior of the world! He needed no persuasive argument or eloquence of speech. He knew that men would be converted if he endured in preaching boldly and clearly this singular message. This is the same confidence that carried William Carey and countless other missionaries through the long years of drought before the harvest. The Gospel is the power of God for salvation. Men will be converted if it is preached!

The word “power” is translated from the Greek word *dúnamis* from which we derive the word “dynamite”. There is nothing subtle about this explosive agent. Whenever it is ignited, power is unleashed, and the effects are evident to all. The same may be said of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The true preaching of the Gospel will create a ruckus. Either men will run to it with violent passion or they will oppose it with equal violence. Either way, it will upset the world. On the same note, the genuine conversion of a man through the Gospel is possibly



the greatest of all demonstrations of the power of God. It would be more likely for a man to have dynamite explode in his lap and notice no effect of its power, than for him to be saved by the Gospel and not be radically changed.

Concerning the power of the Gospel, it is helpful to ask ourselves two questions. The first is, "Do we recognize the great power required in the saving of men?" Salvation is not a light work, but an impossibility for all "but God." This is due to man's fallen state and moral corruption. The Scriptures teach that the image of God in man has been seriously disfigured and moral corruption has polluted his entire being. As such, man has declared war on God and does everything in his power to block out His truth. The Scriptures teach that man cannot come to God, because he will not come to God, and he will not come to God because his heart is evil. Jesus taught this truth in John 3:19-20:

*"This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed."*

The walls of depravity around the heart of a man are much stronger and thicker than those that surrounded Jericho. If men cannot bring down the walls of a city with a shout, they cannot bring down the depravity of their own hearts. It must be the power of God. For this reason, it is often said that the power of God

manifested in the salvation of one man far exceeds the power of God manifested in the creation of the universe. God created the world ex nihilo or out of nothing. However, when God saves a man, He does an exceedingly more difficult thing. It is far easier to create the "good" out of nothing, than it is to recreate the "good" out of fallen mass of corruption.

We cannot truly appreciate the power of the Gospel in the salvation of man until we comprehend something of the fallenness and moral corruption of man. The greater we view man's depravity, the greater we see the power of the Gospel in salvation. We also become acutely aware that the methodologies and marketing strategies, props and gimmicks on display in much of contemporary Evangelicalism is vanity. If men are to be saved, they are to be saved by the supernatural power of God through the preaching of the Gospel!


The second question is, "Do we recognize that the power to save is found uniquely in the Gospel?" The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the power of God for salvation. It is not just the core, or a part, but the whole. For it to have great affect upon men, it only needs to be proclaimed. It does not require a revision to make it relevant, an adaptation to make it understood, or a defense to validate it. If we stand up and proclaim it, it will take care of itself. One preacher who has thrown away all his weaponry, but the proclamation of the Gospel, the work of intercession, and the labor of sacrificial love will do more for the world than all the schemes of strategists and innovators combined.

## Come Over & Help Us

The harvest is truly plentiful and the laborers are few. At this moment, there are countless works throughout the world that could be expanded if only Christians would turn from the vanities of this world and give themselves to the will of God in making the Gospel known to every man, woman, and child under heaven. The Great Commission can be divided into two distinct, but interrelated ministries. You are either called to go down into the well (i.e. go as

a missionary) or hold the rope for those who go down (i.e. support missionaries). Either way, there will be scars on your hands. Those who do not go are called to support those who do with the same dedication and sacrifice. Where are your scars? What has it cost you to fulfill the Great Commission?

As a Christian, you have been called to participate fully and sacrificially in the Great Commis-



A study of contemporary Evangelicalism shows that this bold thought is no longer believed. It sounds well thought in the old hymns, but to actually believe it and apply it would be considered naive to say the least. Many of the “model churches” of the day look more like a Six Flags over Jesus than a ship of Zion. They not only offer the Gospel (I use the term loosely), but they offer so many other attractants, that the Gospel becomes difficult, if not impossible, to find. Power no longer resides in a simple message, but in bold leadership, cutting-edge strategies, cultural sensitivity, and the ability to morph the church into whatever the culture dictates.

As our world becomes increasing irreligious and anti-Christian, Evangelicalism is running aimlessly to find a remedy. We carefully study the fads and fashions of the culture and then make the necessary changes in the Gospel in order to keep it relevant. When our culture no longer desires what we have, we give them what they want. When it draws a crowd of carnal men, we write a “how to” book that lays out a strategy for the rest to follow. However, we fail to see that we are not making the Gospel relevant. We are only catering to a godless culture in order to keep it within our walls. In the end, the Gospel is gone, God is not honored, and the culture goes to hell.

The Church needs men who will stand before the opposing masses with nothing to help them or defend them except the Gospel and the God who has promised to work through it. How cumbersome was Saul’s armor to David,

and how ridiculous did David appear when he wore it? His agility and strength were sapped by the sheer weight of it. Yet, he made the crucial decision to put it off and to face the giant with nothing more than the Name of the Lord. Likewise, we must refuse Saul’s armor and weaponry, and go to battle with nothing more than the smooth stones of the Gospel. We must make that crucial decision to throw off the props, strategies, and clever techniques of modern day evangelism, and face the twin giants of unbelief and skepticism with open Bibles and the clear, uncompromising message of Christ crucified. Then we shall see the power of God manifested in the genuine conversion of the greatest sinners.

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sion (Matthew 28:18-20) in either going to the unreached or supporting those who go. However, it may not be God’s will for you to do so through this ministry. Please seek the Lord in prayer and in the study of the Scriptures before sending financial support. Please do not send financial support to this ministry if you are not being faithful in giving to your local church.

