

Shamelessly Preach Christ

From Romans

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Bible Text: Romans 1:16-17
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From Romans 1 which are Paul's theme for the book of Romans. Hear God's word, Romans 1:16-17.

16 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.

17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "But the righteous man shall live by faith."

Let's pray, please.

Father, thank you for your word. Thank you for the grace that you give us in Christ Jesus. Thank you for these folks who serve you and we pray that as we talk a little bit this evening about this text and from this text and apply this text, that you'll be pleased to be with us to use your word as a means to energize and change our hearts to bring each of us more into conformity to Jesus Christ who is the only Lord and Savior. Amen.

Well, I think most of you are involved in preaching and those of you who are not involved in preaching certainly do some teaching at some level in the church or in your communities. Preaching and I'll add this side of it too, but primarily preaching is application. Very important for us to get this fact, preaching is application and the question, of course, would come immediately, "Applying what?" Well, it's the application of Scripture, the application of particular texts of Scripture. But when it comes to applying the Scriptures in the congregation or in a public meeting like this, sometimes the minister, and I'll put it this way, I'll be a little less pointed here, the minister will tend to draw back. "Well, I don't want to embarrass anyone. I don't want to be red-faced myself after the service is over and have someone come up to me and pull me aside and correct me." And sometimes when it comes to application of the Scriptures, there's a little bit of shame that arises of, "Been there, done that," after a lot of years of ministry. Been there, done that, and when you and I look at the verses in Romans 1:16 and 17 and say to ourselves following the commentators, "These verses are the theme verses of the book of Romans and Romans is a great theological treatise where Paul treats justification and the fruits of justification and the ends of justification," I shake my head and I say, "No. Read

the text. Hello? Read the text." It turns out that there's a sense in which Romans 1:16 and 17 is a testimony that the Apostle Paul is giving.

"I am not ashamed of the gospel," and Paul talks a lot about shame from various perspectives but in this context, he talks about not being ashamed of the Gospel, and Paul was an individual, therefore, who shamelessly preached Christ and shamelessly preached the Gospel and I say to you men and women here this evening, that this is the point toward which the text drives you and me. You need to shamelessly preach Christ and shamelessly preach the Gospel. I know I'm speaking to ministers and several of you are in uniform here and I am thankful for that and I thank you for your service and I praise God for the work that you're doing and I know the pressures of being in uniform and preaching the Gospel, but yet the injunction is true for all of us, is it not? So this is the point that I want you to get tonight.

I've got a little book over here that's called "So, Pastor, what's your point?" and so I always make sure that I give the point that I want you to get and this is the point: shamelessly preach the Gospel.

Now when we enter this text in Romans 1:16 and 17, the Apostle Paul is very likely in Corinth. It's toward the end of his third missionary journey. He has collected offerings for the church in Jerusalem which is in need, and he's about ready to go back to Jerusalem to give to the church the collections that he has received for the benefit of the people there, and before he departs from Corinth, he writes to the church at Rome and in verses 14 and 15, just before our text, he says, "I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. So, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome." Paul is eager to preach the Gospel and he not only wants to go to Rome but his plan is to go further west. He wants to go to Spain. He wants the world to hear about Christ and he's eager that that should take place.

Dear friends in Christ, you and I must be eager to preach the Gospel. There are a lot of other things that we can preach about in the Bible, there are a lot of subjects which the word of God touches in the Bible but the center of all is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Bible is given to us, is given to you and to me, to set forth this Gospel and you and I must be eager to preach the Gospel. I'm afraid, is this the experience of any of you as a pastor perhaps? I've had this experience, I'm afraid that many pastors sit in their study. It's very comfortable in the study. Nice library. Comfortable chair. Good desk. Nice writing material. I'm still old-fashioned, I like a ruled pad, you see. But then we never get out into the community to preach the Gospel to the people in the community. We must be eager to preach the Gospel.

And why is Paul eager? Why is he so eager to preach the Gospel? Well, our text tells us. Paul is eager to preach the Gospel because the Gospel is the power of God. Paul says, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God." What? The Gospel is a message. That's what the Gospel is. The Gospel is news. The Gospel is the message about Christ. It's the message that God so loved the world that he sent his only begotten Son into this sin-depraved and darkened world. He sent his Son into the world as a helpless

babe with a bed as a feeding trough, as a carpenter's son who learned the trade of carpentry. I wonder how many times Jesus hit his finger with a hammer? Well, he was perfect so maybe he didn't hit his finger with a hammer, but the Bible doesn't tell us about these things.

But he grew up in this kind of work. It's hard work and at 30 years of age he began a ministry and he preached about his Father in heaven and because he called himself the Son of God, the Jews in Jerusalem and in Judea and in Samaria went after him and they plotted against him, even when he healed the sick and raised the dead, and they nailed him to a cruel cross, and from that cross he said, "Father, Father, forgive them for they do not know what they're doing." And they didn't know what they were doing because if they had known who he was, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. Then he was in that tomb and on the third day he rose again from the dead and he ascended into heaven and sat at the right hand of his Father, and from that position, he poured out the blessed Holy Spirit upon the likes of you and me. And the message, the message in the Old Testament in Isaiah 52:7, "Our God reigns!" And in the New Testament, what is it? "Jesus Christ is Lord!" Jesus Christ is Lord. "If you confess with your mouth Jesus is Lord and you believe in your heart that he was raised from the dead, you shall be saved."

That's the message and it's the power of God. That message is the power of God, not some other message. Not some other message about legal justice here and, you know, helping the poor here. That needs to be done, don't want to disparage that, but the message is Jesus Christ is Lord and it's a simple message. God has chosen that message, he's chosen to use that message as his means to save men and women and one reason that this message is the power of God is that it's through that message that we come to understand God's righteousness.

Look again at the text, "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," in that Gospel, the righteousness of God is revealed, "from faith to faith; as it is written, 'But the righteous man shall live by faith.'" And the whole idea is that when Jesus Christ walked in this world, he lived a totally righteous life.

How do you define righteousness? Well, one way to define righteousness is by means of the 10 Commandments. Paul says in Romans 7 that the law is holy and righteous and good. Part of the law is the 10 Commandments. "You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol." What's the name of that tv program? What is that program? American Idol. Interesting. "You shall not make for yourself an idol. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain." You shall not use the name of Jesus in a useless, ugly, empty way. "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy." God has given a day of worship. "Honor your father and your mother." Family. Family, so important. "Honor your father and your mother. Do not murder." How many millions of babies have been murdered in the womb in the USA? Millions. "You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery." Adultery is glorified in our culture. "You shall not steal." What do you mean? It's alright if I shave the grades in my classes, isn't it? No, it's not

alright. Take away from one and give to another? No. "You shall always tells the truth." And the last commandment, "You shall not covet."

Well, let me go back to the ninth. My wife and I were traveling in Colorado several years ago, we were going to camp and we pulled up behind a car in Colorado Springs with a bumper sticker. I said, "Oh, that's interesting. Question: what would happen if everyone would tell the truth?" I turned to my wife and I said, this is what I said, I turned to my wife and I said, "The entire political establishment in Washington, DC would disintegrate instantly."

Righteousness, and the problem is that too many individuals, you see, pastors are prone to this too, too many individuals are prone to patting themselves on the back and saying, "Well, I've done my job. I've done my work adequately. God will accept me." That's the standard answer people give to the evangelism explosion question, is it not? What will you say or why should God let you into his heaven? "Well, I've been okay. I haven't lived such a bad life." I'm depending upon my own works, my own righteousness and the text says the Gospel reveals, what? The righteousness of God, a righteousness that comes from God, an alien righteousness, a righteousness that Christ alone has achieved. He is the one who lived a perfectly righteous life.

If you have your Bible, look at Romans 10, just the first few verses. Paul says, "Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation. For I testify about them that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge. For not knowing about God's righteousness and seeking to establish their own," not knowing about God's righteousness, a righteousness which is a perfect righteousness, a righteousness that is given to individuals through faith in Christ, "not knowing about God's righteousness and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end," or the goal or the telos, "of the law," Christ is the one toward whom all that is written in the law points. He is the end and the goal of the law and Jesus said this himself, "If you believe Moses, you believe in me." That's the beauty of it. "For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes."

So there's a marvelous transaction that takes place, is there not? And actually, it's a double transaction that when you believe in Jesus Christ, your sins, all of your sins past, present and future, are placed upon Jesus Christ and he takes the wrath of God for those sins. And that's not enough, is it? On the other hand, the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ is given to you and you stand accepted and righteous in God's sight.

Go back to Romans 1:16 and 17. You see, this is what Paul is talking about. "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 to faith; as it is written, 'But the righteous man shall live by faith.'" The righteousness of God given to people like us so that we become righteous in God's sight not because of anything we have done. You and I have absolutely nothing to offer to God. Zero. Nothing.

It comes by faith, doesn't it? Did you notice this in the text again? "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 to faith; as it is written, 'But the righteous man shall live by faith.'" Several years ago in Central Kansas in the pastorate, we were in a Bible study and talking about these same matters and one of the men in the congregation raised his hand and he says, "I have something to offer to God." I said, "Oh? What would that be?" He said, "My faith." I said, "Wait a minute, what is faith?" Faith is not something you possess that merits recognition by God, it's not something you offer to God that makes you worthy, then, of God. Faith, in fact, is just the opposite. Faith is a recognition of the fact that you have nothing to offer to God and that Jesus Christ has everything to give to you. That's what faith is. Faith is a recognition of your emptiness and faith, on the other hand, is a recognition of Christ's fullness. So coming to God through faith in Christ is a recognition of the fact that he is everything and you and I have nothing to offer to him. How does the Bible always put it? You are saved, right? Something happens to you. God takes you through Jesus Christ and in his grace and mercy takes you out of the miry clay and saves you.

In South Korea as a second lieutenant, I was given the task of giving a class to the company of which I was a part and I was supposed to talk to the company about if they had a problem, they could get some help from the Red Cross and it was this sort of thing. When I looked at my watch and there was a little bit of time left in the class, I said to the members of the class, "You know, if you have a problem that you don't know how to answer and no one else has been able to answer, maybe a good person to go to would be the chaplain." So I dismissed the class. In God's providence, right across from the theater where the class was, was a chaplain's office. So I'm walking out of the theater going up the hill away from the theater past the chaplain's office, I did an about-face, walked back down to the chaplain's office. So I sat there. It was a little Quonset hut. Some of you would know what that is. There was somebody else in the chaplain's office before me. Another GI came out and I went in and I sat down next to the desk in the little chaplain's office and it was the division chaplain of the First Cavalry Division in Korea at that time and he said, "Lieutenant Prutow, what are you doing here?" "I don't have the vaguest notion," which was true. The very next words out of his mouth were, "Have you ever accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior?" I thought to myself, "Not a good idea to lie to the chaplain," so I said, "No." And he pulled out a New Testament and he started going through various Scripture verses, "For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." I already knew I was a sinner. He didn't need to prove that to me, I had that picture well in hand. John 3:16 and other texts and for the first time in my life I understood the Gospel and we prayed and I went out of that office a different person.

It's by faith. It's by faith and Paul says that this Gospel which is the power of God, which reveals God's righteousness and which is received by faith, is to be freely offered to everyone. The text again, "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." To everyone who believes. To the Jew first and also to the Greek. And of course, the priority

was that the Gospel be preached in Israel first and then it would branch out to other areas of the world, and that's what Paul is talking about. So the Gospel is to be freely offered to everyone and men and women everywhere are to be called to faith in Christ, and when you and I are preaching, it's incumbent upon us to freely present the Gospel. It doesn't matter who's present, it's incumbent upon you and I to freely present the Gospel to men and women everywhere, all people everywhere.

Now that's a big job, isn't it? And that means that you and I need to sow God's seed bountifully. I believe in the ministry too often we take the posture of sowing the word of God sparingly and Paul is very clear, is he not, if you sow sparingly, you will reap sparingly; if you sow bountifully, you will reap bountifully. I take that promise seriously. Do you take that promise seriously? I believe the Bible is true in this regard, and following up on that full idea that the Gospel ought to be broadcast freely to men and women, years ago, I, myself, entered into a little newspaper ministry. It would have to be years ago. Right now you wouldn't do this probably in the newspaper. Alright, I get it, but this was a few years ago and I wrote little devotional columns for newspapers and I wrote two newspapers and said, "Would you be interested in carrying these devotional columns?" And I built up a subscription of over 800 newspapers. It was my desire to sow the word of God bountifully.

Well, you never know what's going to happen in those kinds of circumstances and as a result of that, we sent people cassette tapes. A couple of years ago, wouldn't do that now obviously. But every month we would send 3-4-5,000 tapes to people who would respond to these newspaper columns and one day I got a letter from a man in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Where was I? I was in Meade, Kansas. Look it up on a map. Little town in western Kansas. And this letter said, "I read your column about needing to be born again." And I wrote back to the man to encourage him and we really think through this little interaction this fellow was converted and we sent books and pamphlets and songbooks to Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Of course, you know that Christian worship is illegal in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, and this person was meeting with people in an underground church in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

Sow bountifully and reap bountifully. That's the plea, that the word of God which is the Gospel which is the power of God, is to go to everyone, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. So think about all this as you put it together. Paul says, "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 to faith." It's all about faith. It's revealed from faith to faith.

Paul says, "I'm not ashamed of the gospel," and what does he do in Romans? He begins in Romans to unpack the sinfulness of Jew and Gentile in chapters 2 and 3, and when you get to chapter 4, Paul begins to talk about, actually at the end of chapter 3 and beginning of chapter 4 he begins to talk about justification and he gives Abraham and David as his examples of those who are saved by grace through faith. Abraham, who believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness. And David who sang how blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute his sin. How blessed is such a man.

Then Paul begins to unpack some of the ramifications of the Gospel in justification, that there's peace with God. Peace with God. Imagine. Peace with God.

Then as you continue to work through Romans, you get to chapters 9, 10 and 11 and Paul addresses the so-called Jewish question. What about the Jews? And Paul says, you know, that the Jews were hardened for a time so that the Gentiles could be brought in, so that people like us could hear the Gospel and be saved, and when the fullness of the Gentiles is brought in, there will be a great harvest from Israel.

Then what does Paul do? Paul contemplating all of this cannot constrain himself. At the end of chapter 11, he breaks out into these paeans of praise, "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor? Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to Him again? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever." The Gospel, the power of God, he's just overwhelmed with what God was doing in the salvation of Jew and Gentile. So Paul says, "I'm not ashamed. I cannot be ashamed of the Gospel, not of this Gospel, not of this message." And this is a testimony, is it not? Is this not? It turns out to be a testimony, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel because it is the power of God for salvation." Is this your testimony? Is this your testimony? Shamelessly preach Christ.

Let me give you a little encounter I had as a chaplain in Vietnam. I was a battalion chaplain, captain. It was a mechanized infantry battalion on the north edge of the Delta, and the base camp where I was stationed had a little chapel that had been built by a previous chaplain and every Sunday morning we'd have a service in the little chapel. On this particular Lord's Day, I planned to preach about the love of God in Christ from the book of Hosea and I was going to talk about Hosea's love for a woman who became an adulteress, whom God said, "You need to go back and reclaim her and buy her back." And my plan was to explain how this portrayed and looked forward to the love of God in Christ who paid for our sins, so I worked out my sermon. Time for chapel came and I went into the chapel, stood up behind the little pulpit and in the very first row there sat my Commanding Officer, Lieutenant Colonel Smith. That was fine. I was glad he was there. Right next to him was his mistress. I thought to myself, "Okay, Denny, it's decision time." I was a little intimidated, a little embarrassed thinking about what I had planned to preach on. So I decided, "Lord, in your providence this is the sermon that was prepared, this is the circumstance you've brought me to to preach, I'm going to preach my sermon." [gulp] So I preached my sermon and as everyone went out, my Commanding Officer shook my hand and his mistress, was right next to him, and he said to me, "Next time, chaplain, give me a little warning. Message received." I never got a bad recommendation from that Colonel.

Fearlessly preach Christ. That's the message. Fearlessly preach Christ. Your testimony should be, "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....as it is written, 'For the righteous man shall live by faith.'" Fearlessly preach Christ.

Let's pray.

Father in heaven, thank you for your goodness, grace and love expressed in Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. We are here, O God, to be your servants, to be faithful servants of yours. May it be that we will, indeed, be those who are shameless in the preaching of Christ. And where we have been, Father, where we've faltered, forgive us. We know that you love us and we know that you've sent us on a mission, sometimes difficult, and so be pleased to bless us but burn this message into our hearts to shamelessly preach Jesus Christ the Savior. We pray in his good and gracious name. Amen.