

Rom. 1:16-32 -Pt1- the Power of God

by Charles Leiter

The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation, it is the message of Jesus Christ's death and resurrection, and it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone.

Duration: 32:13

Scripture: Romans 1:16-22, Philippians 3:9

Topics: "Gospel Power", "Spiritual Transformation"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the transformative power of the gospel. He shares examples of individuals who were initially resistant to the gospel but later experienced radical changes in their lives. The preacher highlights the story of Boxing, who initially rejected the Bible but later became involved in multiple churches. He also mentions John Bunyan, who went from using foul language to writing the famous book 'Pilgrim's Progress.' Lastly, the preacher mentions a man who was hostile towards Christians but eventually surrendered to God. The sermon emphasizes that the gospel has the power to save anyone and that it is the central theme of the book of Romans.

Transcript

Let's open our Bibles to Romans chapter 1, and we'll read this entire section this time from verse 16 down to verse 32, at least read it this first time. I'm reading from the New American Standard Translation, but I hope you'll be able to follow along. Paul says, 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. For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness. Because that which is known about God is evident within them, for God made it evident to them.

For since the creation of the world, His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For even though they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.

Therefore God gave them over in the lust of their hearts to impurity, that their bodies might be dishonored among them. For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions, for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural. In the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire towards one another. Men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.

And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind. To do those things which are not proper, being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, malice, full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice, their gossip, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful. And although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.

Let's pray before we begin. Our Father, we thank You for this revelation that You've given to us. In this book of Romans, and we thank You for Your Holy Spirit, and we ask You for Your Spirit, a spirit of faith and power and love and of a sound mind to help us this evening to speak and to hear and to understand Your Gospel.

We pray in Jesus' name, Amen. As the Lord wills, I'll be speaking these four days on this last half of Romans chapter 1. And in that time, at best, all we're going to be able to do is to get an overview of this tremendous portion of Scripture. But I trust that what we will be able to get will be helpful to us.

The great theme of the book of Romans is the Gospel. That's the theme. And beginning from verse 16 here where we started, and going all the way to the end of chapter 8, we have the most systematic and profound presentation of the Gospel in all of the Word of God.

What is the Gospel? Well, it's a whole lot more than what we usually think of it as being. Paul says, I'm eager, verse 15. He says, I want to get up here.

I'm ready to preach the Gospel to you that are at Rome. Well, he wants to get up here and preach the Gospel to Christians. Well, you say, I'm a Christian.

I don't need the Gospel. Yeah, you do need the Gospel. Because there's nothing more and there's nothing deeper.

And you want something more profound than the Gospel, there isn't anything any more profound than the Gospel. The Gospel reaches all the way from eternity past to eternity future. And it certainly takes in all of the Christian life.

It's much more than the basic message of how to become a Christian. It's all-encompassing. And Lord willing, we'll be looking this evening at two verses, verse 16 and 17.

And so let's get started in verse 16. Paul says, I'm not ashamed of the Gospel. And it's very significant that he starts out with the negative.

He starts out saying, I'm not ashamed. Why does he put it like that? Why does he put it in the negative? Well, I think just this. There is a great temptation to be ashamed of the true Gospel.

He says, I'm not ashamed of it. Why does he put it like that? Because there's a great temptation to be ashamed. The true Gospel is not liked and not received well by men.

The true Gospel often causes people to become angry. It often leads to persecution and contempt. People lose their jobs because of the true Gospel.

And sometimes they lose their lives because of the true Gospel. It's not a popular message. And it's not easy to give oftentimes.

And there is a temptation to soften it down just enough. You know, take out just that one thing that will make it a little bit easier and a little bit softer and take all the power out of it and make it a false Gospel instead of the true Gospel. So you've got to ask yourself, am I ever tempted? Do I ever feel the pressure on me to soften what I'm about to say to somebody? Because if I don't ever feel that temptation, I've already compromised in some way, and I'm not giving the true Gospel anymore.

So right off the bat in this negative that Paul gives, we learn something here. If you've got the true Gospel, you're going to feel the temptation to soften it and to change it, compromise it in some way. How does this temptation to be ashamed come to us? I think, first of all, it comes to us just in the area of our pride.

Because we want to be liked and we want people to respect us and think that we're smart. And there's nothing wrong with that necessarily in itself. The only problem is that the Gospel is not liked and it's not thought to be smart.

And you know what it says in 1 Corinthians? He says, we preach Christ crucified to the Jews a stumbling block, an offense, and to the Greeks foolishness. Now who else is left? You've got Jew and Gentile, and to the Jew it's an offense. Well, you cannot offend people and have them like you at the same time.

And you cannot, to the Greeks, foolishness. You can't preach a message that they think is stupid and foolish and have them think you're a smart fellow at the same time. So there's this temptation just from the fact of desire to be liked, a temptation that comes through the area of pride.

Think of the context here in verse 15. Paul says, I'm wanting to preach the Gospel up there to Rome. Verse 16, for I'm not ashamed of the Gospel.

Now think of what that is. Here's a Jew going to go up to the imperial capital of the world, the capital of pride, the capital of human power, and he's going to go tell those Romans, say, I want to tell you, I want to proclaim to you that a crucified Jew is the Lord of the universe. And the Romans, you can about hear the rounds of laughter right now, you know.

And so he says, I'm ready to preach the Gospel even in Rome. I'll come up to Rome to preach it because I'm not ashamed of the Gospel. You see, the temptation to be ashamed.

Well, the second way the temptation comes to us is in the area of fear. There's a cost involved, as we said, in speaking up for the Lord. For a student, and there's a number of students here tonight, for a student it often means a lower grade in the class.

And it sometimes means not being able to get a degree in a certain subject. That's a cost. There's a fear there.

There's a price that's got to be paid. My fellow pastor there in Kirksville, many years ago, when we first came to Kirksville, he started to get his master's degree in counseling. The first day of one of the classes, it was a psychology class, the first day he got to witness to a girl.

The next day, the teacher said, I'm going to do everything I can to keep you from getting your degree. He said, I've been counseling with that girl for three years, and you ruined it all in two or three hours. That says a lot about counseling, doesn't it? But you see, there's a price to be paid.

How many other people that claim to be Christians went through that class without any problem? What happened? They compromised the Gospel. Sometimes it means a pay cut or a loss of a job. And you know we're not talking about theory here.

It's for real. Sometimes it even means the loss of a wife or a husband. Bak Singh, whom the Lord used to establish over 400 churches in India when he was converted, he went back to India and his wife met him as he got off the boat and spit on him and left him.

That's costly. Sometimes it means physical abuse or persecution. 2 Timothy 1.8, he says, Don't be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord.

Join with me in suffering. You see, that's a shame. I'm not ashamed of the Gospel.

2 Timothy 1.16, The Lord grant mercy to the house of Onesiphorus. He often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains. You know, here's this guy in jail, and you go and identify with him.

That's not easy to do. There's a temptation to soften and compromise, but let's go on. Paul says, I'm not ashamed.

Not enough to stop at the first part. I am not ashamed, Paul says. Well, why not? Why was he not ashamed? Next verse.

I am not ashamed of the Gospel, or middle of the verse, for I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God. Now, that's why he's not ashamed. The fact that the Gospel is the power of God.

And you know this word power, dunamis. And a lot of times, preachers will compare this to our word dynamite, but I think there's a better word, and that's dynamo. We're talking about a massive powerhouse that keeps on surging.

The Gospel is the dunamis of God. It's the power of God. That verse I quoted in 1 Corinthians.

We preach Christ crucified to the Jews a stumbling block, to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, Christ the power of God. And notice what he says. He says, this Gospel is not just power, not just a lot of power, it's the very power of God.

In other words, the Gospel message, beloved, he's saying the Gospel message is infinite in power. It's the very power of God. It's divine, absolute power.

The very power of God. Notice this. He doesn't say the Gospel is about the power of God.

It is the power of God. It is a dynamo. This word of God is living and powerful.

Remember there in Acts, he says, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, it's powerful, it's able to build you up and to give you an inheritance. 1 Thessalonians 2 verse 13, he says, we're so thankful you received this not as the word of men, but what it really is, the word of God. And it's working, effectually working in you, doing its work.

It's a powerful Gospel. It is the power of God itself. Now, what does all this mean? Well, it means that wherever the Gospel is preached, the Holy Spirit is at work in almighty power to save people.

That's just what it means. To transform and save men. I mentioned this man, Bak Singh.

What was his response to the Gospel? Somebody gave him a Bible, he tore it in two and threw it on the ground. A little bit later, he's found in 400 churches. That's the power of God.

Here's John Bunyan, cursing so bad that his friends who are lost are afraid to be around him. And they reprove him for his vile language. A little bit later, he's writing Pilgrim's Progress.

Translated into more languages than any other book in the Bible. I've got a better one than that. Here's a guy going down the road, breathing out threatenings and slaughter.

Hating Christians. A little bit later, he's on his knees. What do you want me to do, Lord? That's the power of the Gospel, you see.

I'm not ashamed. This is this very man. I'm not ashamed of the Gospel.

It's the power of God unto salvation. I can testify in my own life. I got up in the morning quite a few years ago now, 1965.

I got up in the morning. I had no thought about God whatsoever. By the time I went to bed that night, I was rejoicing with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

What happened? I heard the Gospel. And it was like a white-hot sword. And it wasn't some great preacher.

It was one or two weak words shared of testimony. And you know, a lot of times we think, you know, it's not going to do any good to say anything to that guy or give that guy that tract or share that verse with him. It won't do any good.

You know what you're saying? The Gospel's not the power of God, but it is. And sometimes one word. I mean, my brother-in-law said to me, he said, well, I know I'm going to heaven just like that, a white-hot sword.

And I cried for probably two or three hours on that one. Isn't that amazing? That's the Holy Spirit bearing witness, honoring the Gospel. I'm saying the Bible says it's the power of God unto salvation.

Infinite in its power. When I was in college, there was a guy next door to me that was a skeptic. He didn't believe the Bible and had a lot of doubts about everything.

And different people started sharing with him. He's been my fellow pastor now for about 20 or 30 years. There was another guy, loud fraternity boy.

Whenever he was drinking, he was particularly obnoxious. He's been the pastor in Sedalia for quite a few years. Some of you know him, too.

What happened to power of God unto salvation? This week, you may feel like you're not able to do anything. You say a few words for the Lord. God can use that almighty to save people.

The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation. And the devil will constantly try to, because we're not seeing much happening sometimes, it's still just as powerful as it ever was. And you don't know who the next person may be.

God will use some simple word to reach down and save the most impossible case. Well, Paul says, I'm not ashamed of the Gospel. It's the power of God.

But it's more than that. It's the power of God all the way to salvation. This Gospel will take a man and save him, and it will save him all the way to full and complete salvation.

And you know the word salvation is such a big word. In one sense, we already have been saved. What's it say in 2 Timothy 1.9? He has saved us and called us with a holy calling.

He's already saved you. But then he tells you, Philippians 2.12, work out your salvation, present tense. And then he says in 1 Peter, he says, we're waiting for this salvation to be revealed.

And a lot of our salvation we haven't gotten yet. There's a lot of it left that we're going to get. But the Gospel is the power of God all the way to absolute and total salvation.

It will save you from all of your past sins. But it will save you right now from your present sin. Whatever it is you're facing, beloved, there's good news for it, because there's a Gospel for that.

It will save you from that sin. And not only that, it will save you from every sin you ever face in the future and keep you from falling and save you all the way to glory. He says, I'm not ashamed of the Gospel.

It's infinite power all the way to salvation. It will take a man out of the dunghill, out of the dirt, and save him and save him all the way to heaven. I'm not ashamed of that.

It's the power of God unto salvation. There's more why he's not ashamed of it. It's the power of God unto salvation to everyone.

Now what he says, the power of God unto salvation to everyone, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. Who's the Jew? Well, he's the man with the Bible. You know, the lost religious churchgoer who's already heard a thousand times.

Think of the Pharisees. You know, read their Bibles, memorized the Bible, prayed, tithed, fasted. And then when they got done with all that, they went to hell.

But you know what? God saved some Pharisees. In fact, he saved one of the biggest ones there was. The Gospel will save Pharisees.

It will save the most self-righteous person in the world. Gospel will save them. God's willing to save people like that.

He did it with the Apostle Paul. Well, who's the Greek? He's the man without the Bible. You know, he might be an intellectual so-called.

Somebody like Francis Schaeffer. The Gospel will save them. He might be a barbarian.

Maybe a serial killer like David Berkowitz. The Gospel will save somebody like that too. It's the power of God unto salvation for everyone.

But more than that, it's the power of God unto salvation for everyone. What do you got to do? Just believe. Give up and cast yourself upon the mercy of God and put all your weight upon Him.

Anybody that just believes, that just gives up. You say, I'm lost. I need the Gospel.

I need the power of God unto salvation in my life. Then give up and put your trust in Him and rest on Him. You see, look away from yourself.

Now, you see why Paul's not ashamed of this? He says, there's pressure. There's temptation to be ashamed. But I'm not ashamed of it because the Gospel will save anybody.

Now, another question comes up. How can the Gospel be so powerful? How can it be? Now, think of what we're going out and telling people about this Jewish fellow that died on a cross. And we're telling them a story.

We're telling them this account of what happened there. This fellow that came and died on the cross and rose again. You tell them that story and they believe on Him.

And they're saved forever. How can the Gospel have that kind of power in it? Just believe that. Believe that and God saves.

How can it even be right for God to save somebody on that basis? Well, there's another four here, isn't there? I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ for it's the power of God unto salvation. How can it be so powerful? Because in it, therein, in the Gospel, something is revealed. Now, what is it that's revealed in the Gospel? Well, he says in the Gospel, the righteousness of God is revealed.

Now, what is this righteousness of God? What's he talking about here? Well, he tells us the same thing over in Romans chapter 3, verse 21 and 22. He says, Now, apart from the law, the righteousness of God has been manifested. See, the same things he's saying here.

It's been revealed. What is this righteousness? Even the righteousness of God which is by faith in Jesus Christ. To anybody that believes, you see, he's talking about a righteousness that's being given to you.

All right? Let me give you another one. Philippians chapter 3 and verse 9. He says, So what? The righteousness that comes from God through faith in Christ. See, this righteousness of God.

What is this righteousness of God that saves me? Well, first of all, let me say this. It's not talking about the justice of God. The justice of God, the righteousness of God in that sense, it condemns you.

It doesn't save you. Now, this righteousness that he's talking about here justifies you. All right? The righteousness of God in the sense of His justice condemns you.

This righteousness of God, if you get this righteousness, it justifies you. Okay? And secondly, when he talks about the righteousness of God, he's talking about something different than all human righteousness. Not having a righteousness of my own derived from the law.

You see, that's human righteousness. He said this is a God righteousness. It comes down from above and it's given to you.

In other words, this righteousness is contrasted not only with human unrighteousness, but with human righteousness. This is a righteousness that comes from God. And you get it as a gift.

And beloved, a God righteousness is the only thing that will help us. Why do I need this God righteousness? Because in yourself you are unrighteous. Now, man is unrighteous.

But look at this. There's two sides to it. He's unrighteous on the inside.

That is, out of the heart proceed all these evil things. All right? And that's usually what we think of. If I said, that man over there is really unrighteous, you think about what his heart's like.

But when God uses the term, there's more to it than that. Here's a guy that's murdered ten people. And somehow he has a change of heart and he'll never murder another person again.

Okay? So he goes before the judge. He says, yeah, I did murder those ten people, but I'll never murder another person again. He'll still suffer for his crime.

Because it doesn't have to do with what he is on the inside. It has to do with what he's done. Now look at this.

Just stay with me here. Men are unrighteous on the inside, but more than that, they're unrighteous on the outside in the eyes of God's law. They're condemned in the eyes of God's law.

They're not right in the eyes of God's law. And this righteousness that's given to me is a right standing in the eyes of God's law. That's why the gospel is the power of God unto salvation.

It's given to me. It's imputed to me. I receive it by faith.

You know, Proverbs 17 and 15, there's a great problem presented. It says, He who condemns the righteous and he who justifies the wicked is an abomination to God. How's God going to justify us? The only way He's going to justify us is if He can give us a righteousness that's not our own in the eyes of His law.

That's what we're talking about here now. The righteousness that comes from God. He made Him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God.

There's that phrase again in him. 1515, there was an Augustinian monk and professor in Wittenberg, Germany named Martin Luther. And he began expounding Romans to his students.

And this is what he said later, I greatly long to understand Paul's epistle to the Romans. And nothing stood in the way but that one expression, the righteousness of God. Because I took it to mean that righteousness whereby God is righteous and deals righteously in punishing the unrighteous.

Night and day I pondered until I grasped the truth that the righteousness of God is that righteousness whereby through grace and sheer mercy, He justifies us by faith. Thereupon, I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise. The whole scripture took on a new meaning.

And whereas before the righteousness of God had filled me with hate, now it became to me inexpressibly sweet in greater love. This passage of Paul became to me a gateway to heaven. Now, beloved, do you get this? The gospel is the power of God unto salvation because something is revealed in it.

And what is revealed in it is a righteousness that comes down from God and is given to you. It is a righteousness that is worked out by Christ and given and laid to the account of those who receive it. What does it say in Romans 5? Those which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness.

You receive it, a gift of righteousness. Well, finally, how does this righteousness of God come to us? Well, he tells us in verse 17, The righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith as it is written, but the righteous man shall live by faith. What is faith? Well, it is not doing something, but it is receiving this gift of righteousness.

Now, I just want to say a few more things. Hold on a little longer. Paul wants to make it clear that this is not some new thing that he is teaching, so he quotes a verse from the Old Testament from Habakkuk to prove that this is not something new, as it is written.

Now, I used to think, he quotes this verse, The just shall live by faith. The word just, you know, is the word righteous. The righteous shall live by faith.

I used to think, the righteous man has to really live a life of faith. That is true, but that is not what he is saying. What is he saying? Well, turn with me in Galatians 3. Galatians 3 and verse 11, Now that no one is justified by the law before God is evident, for the righteous man shall live by faith.

However, the law is not a faith, on the contrary, he who practices, he who does those things shall live by them. Now, I used to think that meant, he who does those things shall really do them, really live by it, you know. That is not what he is saying.

He says there are two ways here now. One way is, you do those things, you practice the righteousness of the law, and you do that perfectly, and you will get life if you do that. He who does those things shall live by doing them.

Now, there is another way to get life. The righteous shall live, he will get life through faith. And if you want to get down to what Paul is saying here, you can word it this way, and some translations do in the margin.

He who is righteous by faith shall live. That is the idea. You become justified in the sight of God through faith, and as a result of your justification, you have life.

That is the idea. Well, Lord willing, tomorrow, we will look at why men so desperately need the righteousness of God. And that is what Paul gets into next.

Amen.

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