

The Power and Scope of the Gospel

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[0 : 00] So you might like to turn up Romans chapter 1, page 939. Romans chapter 1, and we'll read from verse 8.

Paul writes, First I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world. For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you.

For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you. That is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine.

I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I've often intended to come to you, but thus far have been prevented, in order that I may reap some harvest among you, as well as among the rest of the Gentiles.

I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

[1 : 19] For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for the salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also the Greek.

For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith. As it is written, the righteous shall live by faith. Well, we can also sing Go Forth and Tell, can't we?

But I sometimes wonder if it's a little bit easier to sing than it is to do. I don't know about you, I often find it very difficult explaining the gospel to folk.

But the good news, friends, this lunchtime, is that Paul's going to help us with our evangelism from this passage in Romans chapter 1. So he wants his motivation, his passion to rub off on us this lunchtime.

So Paul's letter to the Romans, and in chapter 1, verses 16 and 17, we get a pithy summary of the whole of Paul's letter to the Romans.

[2 : 32] You know, I might like to just read that again, chapter 1 and verses 16 and 17. For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for the 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. And we'll be concentrating on that verse 16 this lunchtime.

And we've got two points. The first point is the danger of being ashamed of the gospel. And the second point is two reasons not to be ashamed of the gospel.

So first of all, the danger of being ashamed of the gospel. In verse 16, Paul says, I am not ashamed of the gospel.

Doesn't he? But what about us? Are we ever ashamed of the gospel? And we all say, no, Paul, we're not ashamed of the gospel. We're with you on this one. We're not ashamed.

[3 : 38] But I wonder, friends, I wonder if we're sometimes sort of a little bit ashamed. Or maybe, you know, 10% embarrassed sometimes about the gospel.

You know, have you ever had a really good opportunity to talk to somebody about Jesus and you've avoided the subject? Or is it just me? Paul was arrested, wasn't he?

And he was persecuted from pillar to post. 2 Corinthians chapter 11. Beaten with rods, stone, shipwrecked. He was in constant danger.

But he wasn't ashamed of the gospel. He kept telling people about Jesus. I don't know about you, but I've never been beaten because of the gospel.

But I've buckled under with much less persecution and adversity. So here's someone slipping into hell without a saviour. He's me. I know the gospel.

[4 : 37] And we often pass like ships in the night. And there's no engagement. Of course, I know it's impossible to speak to everybody.

We cannot speak to everyone, can we? But I'm sure we've all missed good opportunities to speak about Jesus. You know, we've kept our heads below the parapet.

One Saturday morning, I was waiting for a train at Paisley Railway Station. I dropped the car off to have some work done. And this young lady came up to me. She asked me if it was the right platform for the train to Ardrossan.

So I looked up at the screen and I says, Yes, it's the right platform. The train will be here at whatever time it was, 8.22 or something like that. And she says, Oh, that's good.

And she sat down right next to me. She had an East European accent, but she spoke really good English. I thought about telling her about Jesus. And then I realized there was all these people sat around and they'd sort of be eavesdropping.

[5 : 41] I thought about telling her about Jesus. And then I thought that she might think I was trying to chat her up. And everyone was watching and they might all be thinking the same.

I thought about telling her about Jesus. And I realized that time was quickly running out. I thought about telling her about Jesus. And the tannoy interrupted. The train at platform 1 will be arriving imminently.

I don't know what the words they use. And the train rolled up and I thought, There it goes. Another opportunity. The Lord had arranged everything, hadn't they? His sovereign.

Everything that she'd done that morning. Everything that she'd said. It even sort of sat her right next to me. And I didn't tell her about Jesus. And she stood up and I realized there was another opportunity gone.

So in principle, Paul, I'm with you. I'm not ashamed of the gospel. But in the nitty gritty of human relationships, perhaps there is an element, an element of being ashamed. You know, sometimes it's 10% I might be ashamed or a bit embarrassed.

[6 : 46] And I don't use the opportunities the Lord gives. Think about it. A crucified carpenter. 2,000 years ago.

Such a contrast, isn't it, to the world in which we live. The world of the iPhone. The world of the X Factor. The frenetic pace of life.

Iran's nuclear ambitions. TV soaps. New cars. New kitchens. Scottish devolution. There's so much, isn't there, going on.

I'd like to tell you about Jesus. Well, it just sometimes doesn't seem to mesh, does it? And we just don't get to that point. And we can feel discouraged, you and me. Am I right?

What? You know, we want to hide out of the way and retreat into our shells. And so we not only miss opportunities, friends. We sin. Yes, we do.

[7 : 45] We don't tell people about Jesus. If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with his holy angels, says Jesus.

What Jesus is saying, he's saying, if you're ashamed of me, there's consequences. It's a sin of omission, isn't it? When we don't do things that we ought to do.

And perhaps we all feel like we've failed. You know, like we've not lived up to our calling. So let's quickly get to our second point before we all get depressed.

So our second point. It's like Paul's got his quill and it like touches the parchment and he begins to write with some beautiful words that fill us with hope.

The Bible's like that, isn't it? There's hope for us lot. Verse 16. Can you see? For I am not ashamed of the gospel.

[8 : 49] And here's the good news. Look. For it is. He's going to explain now why he's not ashamed. In the NIV it says because. For it is.

And so think about it. Paul's not just telling us, is it as a confident evangelist. He's going to give us the reason, isn't he? Why he's got so much confidence in the gospel. So he's going to tell us what inspires him this lunchtime.

What motivates him. For it is. This is why I'm not ashamed of the gospel, Paul's saying. And we're all ears, aren't we? This lunchtime. Brothers and sisters.

We want to hear the Apostle Paul, no less. You know, he's going to share his motivation in evangelism with us lot this lunchtime. It's like we can pull up to verses 16 and 17 with sort of half empty tanks when it comes to motivation in evangelism.

I don't know about you, but my gauge is sometimes in the red. And it's like Paul's got the nozzle there. He's going to fill us up and send us out into the world. Go forth and tell. To the second point anyway.

[9 : 55] Two reasons for not. Two reasons for not being ashamed of the gospel. Have a look with me again at verse 16. And just notice the transition in the verse.

For I am not ashamed of the gospel. For it is the power of God for salvation for everyone who believes. To the Jew first and also the Greek.

Isn't that amazing? Is it the power of Paul? No. The power of God for everyone. The Gentiles. Us. It's great, isn't it?

So, two reasons why Paul is not ashamed of the gospel. Firstly, the gospel is the power of God. So, here's Jesus on the cross. Just imagine him in your mind's eye.

He's there on the cross. He's nailed in his wrists and his feet. He's been humiliated, mocked, deserted, beaten, spat upon.

[10 : 54] He saved others, but he can't save himself. And it looks like the antithesis of power, doesn't it? When you look at Jesus on the cross. Like one from whom men hide their faces.

He had no form or majesty. We esteemed him not. And the world thinks, what a failure. How stupid to build a religion around him.

But all is not what it seems. Is it, friends? The Christian message didn't end, did it, at the cross? Jesus rose victoriously from the dead.

And Paul is saying the same power that raised Jesus from the dead, that that very same power fuels the gospel when we're telling others about Jesus.

The world likes power, doesn't it? Am I right? The world wants power, doesn't it? Powerful cars. Powerful motorbikes. Powerful hair dryers. Powerful computers.

[11 : 56] Powerful weapons. But they're nothing, are they, compared to the power of God? They're absolutely nothing. So God created the world through his word.

Genesis chapter 1. He created life through his word. And when we communicate the gospel, listen, he's recreating through that very same word.

It's getting out into our world. The creator is speaking. So, King David, Psalm 51, after Bathsheba.

It's like he's saying, well, I've tried, I've tried, in this heart, I just can't patch it up. And so he says, creating me, Psalm 51, verse 10, creating me a new heart.

It's like he's saying to God, do your creation work in me again. And that's what's happening when people are hearing the gospel. God is recreating.

[12 : 59] Ephesians chapter 2 captures this. You might just want to look it up. Have a look at Ephesians chapter 2. It's on page 976.

Ephesians chapter 2. Can you see Ephesians 2? And you were... What's that word? Can you see?

Dead, yes, that's right. It's like ultimate, isn't it? You were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince and power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience, among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of our body and the mind.

And were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. The sun was shining on Saturday when I was outside here on Buchanan Street.

You look out and there it is, a mass of humanity. My wife would say it was jumping on a day like that. It's very busy, the town centre, isn't it, when the sun shines.

[14 : 14] There's just a whole throng of young people going up and down the street, sophisticated, attractive, fashionable clothes. They've all got their nice shopping bags with what they've just bought from their fashion chains, but they're mostly dead, aren't they?

You know, if you could view Buchanan Street somehow with biblical glasses on, it would be awful, wouldn't it? To be a sad sight. Corpses. The devil's done far worse than Auschwitz ever did.

The living dead. You are dead, says Paul, Ephesians 2, 1. But then just as we read on, look at verse 4.

But God, being rich, it's a nice word, isn't it? Rich in mercy because of the great love which he loved us. Even when we were dead.

In other words, we couldn't do anything about it in our trespasses. Made us alive together with Christ. By grace you have been saved. And raised up, it's resurrection language.

[15 : 22] And raised up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places. It's certain, isn't it? Our salvation in Christ Jesus. Verse 10. Look at verse 10.

It's like Genesis chapter 1, revisited. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

So we were dead, says Paul. Objects, weren't we, of God's wrath. Yet God made us alive, didn't he? Raised us up.

Verse 10. Created us or recreated us in Christ Jesus. Jesus says to Nicodemus, doesn't he? You need to be born again. And this is the power of God, friends, flowing from the gospel.

When people are hearing about Jesus. Paul is telling us this lunchtime that when we open our mouths and we talk about our Lord and Savior Jesus, the power of God is let loose.

[16 : 23] It's unleashed the line of the tribe of Judah. But Judah, isn't that amazing? Through his word and spirit. And so, yes, you and me, we're weak, aren't we?

We're fairly inadequate. And that's an accurate assessment. Isn't it? But it's not about us. Paul says we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that the all-surpassing power is from God, not from us.

2 Corinthians chapter 4. We do feel inadequate, don't we? The wrong words come out. We struggle.

Someone might say, well, yes, that's all right, but I just get so tongue-tied when I try and talk about Jesus. Well, give someone you know a gospel booklet.

There's plenty of them here. Or Wesley Owen. Give someone you know who's not saved a gospel booklet. Let's have a look at that together. Give them a CD with a talk on.

[17 : 34] Say, let's have a coffee and listen to that together. And invite them to hear Rico Tice. Here at the beginning of April are some lovely cards that have just been produced. You might pick one up from the little room in the side there.

I don't know if they've been officially released. I think they've just come out today. But take one of those with you if you want. There's plenty of resources, isn't there? Keep on praying for those that you love, those who don't yet know the Lord Jesus Christ.

Pray that God would work around our hesitancy. And our weaknesses. So two reasons why Paul isn't ashamed of the gospel. We've thought about the first one, which is the gospel is the power of God.

And now secondly, another reason why Paul isn't ashamed of the gospel as we finish. Just notice God's commitment to his creation here.

Paul says that the gospel is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes. Think about it.

[18 : 42] The scope of the gospel matches the scope of the problem, doesn't it? From verse 18 and for the next couple of chapters in Romans, Paul explains how all of humanity, we all rightly deserve God's wrath.

Yes, we do. Romans chapter 3 verse 10. There is no one righteous, not even one. And so all of us, we've all earned God's wrath for the way that we live on his planet.

But the gospel brings salvation to everyone who believes, says Paul. Jew, Gentile, all of humanity.

So the bad news is that we've all sinned and therefore we're under God's wrath because of sin. But the good news is that God is committed to all of his creation.

And through the gospel, all who believe will be saved. Jew, Gentile, Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, Atheist, Agnostic.

[19 : 52] Your family who don't yet believe. Friends, colleagues, they can all be saved if they believe in the gospel and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross for them.

Think of the unlikely characters that you know that the Lord has saved. We all know, don't we? Think of yourselves. Everyone who believes, says Paul.

So he brings people, doesn't he, back from the dead. Transfers them from death to life. Transforms their lives.

Just think of yourself. Think of your own story. And how God is broken into your own life. And ministers to you. And draws the family of his church close around you.

And you hear him speak. Think of everyone who believes, says Paul. Paul says, go ye into the world. Doesn't he? And so she boarded the train to our drosson.

[21 : 03] And I prayed for her. I prayed that somebody else would get the opportunity. And have the courage to speak to her. And we leave it in God's hands, don't we?

And we live to fight another day, don't we, you and me? And all the time, God is building our character. Building our experience. Forging us into better instruments that he can use.

Developing our gifts. And giving us lots and lots of opportunities. We're not short of opportunities, are we? None of us are. So here it is, friends.

Verse 16. For I am not ashamed of the gospel. For it is the power of God for the salvation to everyone who believes. To the Jew first.

And also the Greek. Shall we pray? Dear Heavenly Father, we thank you for sending your son into this world.

[22 : 05] And we thank you that that same son has not yet returned in judgment. And so this is a world full of opportunities. Whatever might be going on on the world stage.

Whatever might be going on in our own lives. This world is a world of great opportunities. To bring people to the knowledge of your son, Jesus Christ.

And so we pray, Father, that you'd help each one of us here. Through your spirit. You'd guide us. You'd give us good recollection. And you'd help us to harness the situations that you place us in.

Pray we'd use the good resources that are available. And so, Father, in all these things, we pray that you'd be drawing a people to yourself. For your glory.

And we ask in Christ's name. Amen.