

# God's Gospel is Power

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- [ 0 : 00 ]     Father, it is a wonderful thing that we are able to proclaim that creed with faith.
- And Lord, we say that creed and the Nicene Creed week after week, and we ask that you would grant us and save us from ever saying it, just kind of by rote and just because that's the thing that we always do.
- And we ask that by your spirit, you would make the realities that we have just confessed very, very vivid to us, vivid to our heart, that we may receive your gospel by faith and we may treasure your gospel.
- And now I ask, as we look at your word, will you fill us with your spirit now? Will you fill us with your spirit and enable us to understand and receive by faith Jesus Christ our Lord?
- Amen. Go ahead and sit down, everybody. And, you know, it is just real quick, real quick plug. I am really excited about these new Pew Bibles.
- [ 1 : 05 ]     We have been waiting for them for a long time. Would you grab them? Grab them, open them up. Woohoo! Yeah. Wild and crazy here at St. John's.
- Open them up to page 939, Romans chapter 1. Over the last three weeks, we have been introducing the book of Romans, which we are going to be walking through over these next months, probably about a year I expect it will take.
- And tonight is the last night of kind of introductory material about the book of Romans. Next week, Aaron is going to launch into the main argument of Romans, beginning in verse 18.
- And tonight, we're just looking at two verses. We read a little bit more for context, but we're just looking at verses 16 and 17. But here's the thing.
- Verses 16 and 17 are really big verses. I mean, really big verses. It's not that they're long verses, but there is just really big ideas in them.
- [ 2 : 21 ]     And I have to say, this week, I have been deeply challenged by these verses. I mean, they've kind of cut me open this week.
- And the reason they've cut me open is that verses 16 and 17 have diagnosed a spiritual disease in my heart.
- One of the things that's easy to have happen if you've been a Christian for a while is after you've kind of been in church land for a little bit and you've heard the gospel a few times and things like that, one of the things that happens is you can become very familiar with the gospel.
- Do you know what I mean by that? Have you experienced that? You become very familiar with the gospel. And over time, that familiarity with the gospel can breed a kind of apathy. You forget how powerful and how beautiful and how wonderful and how supremely, eternally valuable the gospel is.
- [ 3 : 30 ]     And as I've worked on this passage this week, look at verse 15. I heard Paul say, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

Why? Why is he eager? For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. Now, I read those verses, those words of Paul, and I realized that I have been sinfully apathetic towards the gospel.

It's not that I've denied the gospel. It's not that I've twisted the gospel.

Now, I'm capable of both of those things. So, every time you listen to me, make sure you're looking at the text more than you're hearing what I say. But I'm capable of both those things, but that's not what I've done.

I have failed to adequately enjoy the gospel. I have failed to see the wonder of the gospel. I've failed to treasure the gospel.

[ 4 : 44 ] I've failed to be continually renewed in the gospel. And I've been satisfied with just kind of looking at all its intricacies and analyzing it and things like that.

And the main place I've realized this week where I recognize that I am becoming apathetic towards the gospel is I've noticed that I've become timid in evangelism.

I mean, that's always the sign or one of the signs. Now, why am I telling you all this? It's not confession time. I'm telling you this because one of the signs of a mature Christian and one of the signs of a healthy church is a persevering and ever deepening love for the gospel.

Just we are to be a people who love the gospel. Paul, in this passage, in verse 16, is boasting. He's saying, I'm not ashamed. What he means by that is I am proud of the gospel.

I am boasting in the gospel. And that's what God wants us to be like. So what I want to do tonight is just look at two questions. First of all, why should we boast in the gospel?

[ 6 : 03 ] Number one. And number two, how do we do it? How do we become people who are absolutely unashamed of the gospel? Okay? Okay, first of all, why should we boast in the gospel?

Look at verse 17. One of the main reasons that the apostle Paul here is just full of pride in the gospel is that the gospel deals with one of the biggest questions of human experience.

The gospel deals with the question of how is God going to deal with evil? Verse 17. For in the gospel, the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith.

As it is written, the righteous shall live by faith. Now, that word doesn't use the word evil. I mean, that verse doesn't use the word evil.

But it has everything to do with how God is going to deal with evil in the world. Let me explain. If you read through the Old Testament, I could show you, if we had time, I could show you a bunch of different examples of this.

[ 7 : 14 ] But if you read through the Old Testament, as the story of Israel unfolds, you know the Old Testament is primarily the story of God and Israel interacting together. And as the story of Israel begins to unfold, before long you get this really perplexing problem.

Because on the one hand, the Old Testament is very, very clear that God is absolutely, completely pure and good and has absolutely no tolerance for evil.

God's goodness means he can't tolerate evil because to tolerate evil means you participate in evil. And God's goodness means he can't tolerate evil because he can't participate in it.

So, on the one hand, God is totally, perfectly good. But then on the other hand, the Old Testament also says that God is completely merciful. He loves being kind and merciful and gracious to people.

Now, on the surface, that sounds great. I mean, you say, Jim, where's the problem in that? Where's the perplexing problem? Well, it is a problem.

- [ 8 : 23 ] Because as the Bible unfolds, you realize that we live in a world that is absolutely saturated with evil. And all of us are saturated with evil.
- And that brings up the question. Here's one of the key questions of the Old Testament. It's one of the key questions, particularly, of the book of Habakkuk. This is just for extra credit.
- If you want to go read the book of Habakkuk, have fun with it. We read a little bit of it earlier. One of the key questions is, how is God going to deal with evil in the world without, on the one hand, sacrificing his goodness or, on the other hand, sacrificing his mercy?
- Do you understand the problem? Because it would be very easy for God, in his goodness, to come and just squash evil. Just kind of squash it like a cockroach.
- Right? And sometimes, I mean, haven't you kind of wanted God to do that? Just get in there and get rid of it. But if he did that, and that would be within his rights to do that, if he did that, then the question would be, where would his mercy be?
- [ 9 : 36 ] Because he would have to end up squashing evil people. But on the other hand, a lot of people want God to be just really fuzzy and nice.
- You know, just a fuzzy, nice teddy bear God. And that would be fine, except that if God was just, you know, nice and fuzzy all the time, he would end up tolerating evil.
- And he would sacrifice his goodness. I mean, this is, it ends up being a really big problem. And it's not just a philosophical, theological question.
- It's not just a problem for people who go to Regent College, or people who, you know, write books about theology and things like that. This is a real problem for you and me. Haven't we all been victimized by evil in our lives?
- I don't mean to pry, but if I began asking you about your family life, it would not take me very long before I searched around and discovered one way or another in which you have been victimized by evil.
- [ 10 : 49 ] I mean, in all of our families, there is deep and profound pain. And when you think about the pain that you have experienced, probably at the hands of people whom you love and who were supposed to love you and maybe did love you, but just didn't know how to express it or whatever it might be.
- When you think about the pain that you have experienced at the hands of evil, doesn't it make you cry out, God, how long? How long until you're going to fix this stuff?
- How long until you're going to stop? If you're so good, why are you letting evil run rampant? I mean, this is a problem for us.
- We need God to kill evil in the world. But it gets stickier than that. Because if I kept on asking you about your family, we'd find ways in which you have been hurt by your family and victimized by evil.
- But be honest. Wouldn't we also find that you would pass the favor along a few times? I mean, haven't we all? I mean, all of us have been victims of evil, but haven't we also all been perpetrators against other people?
- [ 12 : 05 ] Aren't there other people who have been hurt? And if they told the story of their pain, your name would come up? Hasn't that happened? Isn't that true? And do you see why the problem becomes so pointed?
- On the one hand, we need a God who's going to kill evil, but at the same time, we need a God who's going to show mercy to us. How are those two things going to come together? Now, back to the Old Testament.
- As the Old Testament begins to unfold, particularly when we get to the prophets, and even the bit of Habakkuk that we read, there's this wonderful growing expectation, this wonderful anticipation that one day, one day, one day God's righteousness is going to be revealed.

God's righteousness is going to be revealed. One day, God's going to reveal how he's going to solve the problem. One day, God is going to show us how he's going to crush evil with one hand, but at the very same moment, rescue people with the other.

Okay, back to verse 17. Can you see now why Paul is so excited about the gospel? For in the gospel, the righteousness of God is revealed.

[ 13 : 28 ] Do you see that? Now, real quick, I know that for a lot of us, the word righteous is a really negative word. It conjures up connotations of judgmentalism and self-righteousness and all that kind of thing.

Don't let those negative connotations distract you. The righteousness of God in this passage is God's work of crushing evil and destroying its power with one hand, and at the very same moment, rescuing and releasing guilty people.

Okay, how does he do it? Well, we're going to hear more about this as we go through Romans, but it's all about the cross. That's why the cross is always front and center in the church.

When Jesus went to the cross, he voluntarily took upon himself the guilt and the penalty for all the evil and sin and wickedness that the world had ever seen or ever would see.

And when Jesus died and suffered upon the cross, God was crushing evil. God was destroying its power, just like he promised he always would.

[ 14 : 41 ] But then you know the story, right? Three days later, three days later, Jesus rose from the dead. And when Jesus rose from the dead, he rose with power.

We talked about this two weeks ago. When Jesus rose from the dead, he rose with power and authority. And with a unique kind of authority, he had authority to transfer and share his status as the innocent son of God with you and I, with guilty people.

So that you and I, even though we are so guilty, even though we have been perpetrators of evil, you and I, by receiving the status of Jesus as the son of God, we can walk utterly pardoned, utterly justified before God.

And do you see how the righteousness of God is displayed in the cross? Because in it, God's utter hostility against evil and his utter mercy towards guilty people come together in perfect harmony.

Now, can you see why Paul is so proud of the gospel? I hope you can see it. I mean, where else, friends, think about this, where else does truth and goodness and beauty all come together in such perfect, perfect harmony?

[ 16 : 07 ] I mean, if you're going to be proud of anything in this world, wouldn't, wouldn't it be this? Okay, but it gets better. The gospel not only reveals how God is perfectly righteous, but it also unleashes his power in the world.

Look at verse 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.

Let me tell you a story. When I was in my first year of university, I think I took the class that everybody has to take.

I think everybody has to take intro to philosophy. Anyways, I took intro to philosophy and for some reason, I pulled an all-nighter on a Saturday night, which I have no idea why I was doing that.

But I did, and I stayed up all night reading Friedrich Nietzsche, which is a page-turner, let me tell you. And it was the first time I'd ever read him, and so here I am, turning the page.

[ 17 : 16 ] I forgot what it was. I forgot which one. Genealogy of Morals, or I don't know. But anyways, I know that he was just lighting into Jesus and the gospel. I mean, he was just taking the gloves off.

I'm not sure Friedrich Nietzsche ever had gloves on, but he was just going to town. And Nietzsche is a lot smarter than I am, and so as I was reading this, I was getting really, really stressed out, and I was thinking, oh, oh, maybe Christianity isn't.

Oh, maybe, oh, maybe it's just all weakness. It's just because I'm weak or something like that, you know. And so, all night long, particularly, you know, reaching its kind of apex at about 3 in the morning, I was having this university existential crisis.

And then the sun came up, and I went to church. And at the time, I was attending a church on the south side of Chicago. And it was a church that met in a very poor neighborhood, and it was mostly Hispanic.

There were some white people like me. And I showed up, and it was a baptism service. And it was a bunch of adults being baptized. And these brand new Christians, I mean, they had only been walking with Jesus for about three months, three months of pretty intense discipleship, and then they were being baptized.

[ 18 : 37 ] And the church was just on fire. Just on fire. And I looked around the room, and I saw something just remarkable. I saw Hispanic people and white people hanging out full of joy, full of excitement, full of praising God.

And in south Chicago, I mean, that's something to write home about. And I looked over, and I saw, you know, former gang members, and I kind of got an education about this.

Some of their tattoos meant that they had either received, been the recipient of gang violence, or that they had perpetrated gang violence. And some of them were just fresh out of jail.

And here we were rejoicing together as we saw our brothers and sisters being welcomed into the family of God. And as I watched this unfold, I realized something.

I realized that, you know, whatever Nietzsche has to say, and he has a lot of things to say, and a lot of it is really insightful. But whatever he has to say, and whatever stones you can throw at the church, and you can throw a lot of stones at the church, I realized that all those things aside, I was watching power happen.

[ 19 : 58 ] I was watching the gospel happen. I was seeing what it looks like when God's righteousness comes pouring into South Chicago. And I realized, this is the ship I want to sail on.

This is the ship I want to sail on. See, friends, when the gospel of Jesus is proclaimed, when the gospel, the good news that Jesus Christ is the Lord of all, when that is proclaimed over a people, God uses it to make, to recreate people, to take guilty people, and pardon them, and turn them into new kinds of people, who love God, and love other people, in ways that they never could have otherwise.

And friends, there is nothing more beautiful than that. I challenge you. I challenge you to show me something more beautiful than that. Show me something more beautiful than, when sinners become saints.

Show me something more worth pride. Not pride in ourselves. I mean, that's stupid. Pride in Jesus, and what he's done. Okay. That's why we should boast in the gospel.

How do we do it? It's really simple, friends. The only way we become a people who are really unashamed of the gospel, and really boast in the gospel, the only way that can happen, is if we continually receive the gospel by faith.

[ 21 : 28 ] Look back at the verses. Look for the word faith. Count how many times it happens. Four times. The gospel is all about what God has done for us, and on our behalf.

But the thing is, friends, it only becomes, we only gain the benefit of it, when we receive it by faith. faith. And faith is more than just cognitive agreement.

This is really important. I like to eat a great deal. I like to eat a great deal of food, and I like eating it a great deal.

But faith, faith is like eating. Imagine for a second that you're invited to a party, like a really big, awesome feast.

And you show up to the party, and everybody else shows up, all the guests show up, and you walk in, and all the food is prepared already for you. You haven't purchased anything.

[ 22 : 34 ] You haven't prepared anything. All that's done for you. But you do show up hungry. And your job, it's very simple, your job is to receive the food.

Your job is to, you know, be hungry, and get the munchies, and eat. And as you eat, as you receive this food, the food changes you.

It strengthens you. It gives you nutrients, and those sorts of things, so physically you're stronger. But it also is part of the joy of the party, right? I mean, parties where you don't eat, aren't as much fun, as parties where you do eat.

There's something, that adds to the joy, and the fun of the party, when you eat. Well, faith works kind of like that. Because in the gospel, God has done everything for us.

He's prepared everything. Jesus has done all the heavy lifting. But our job, our job is to live by faith. Verse 17.

[ 23 : 39 ] A Christian is someone who has received Jesus, the Lord of all, who has accepted his lordship, said, yes, yes, I submit to his lordship, and I receive the benefits of his mercy.

And just like food, fills you with physical strength, and joy, when you place your faith in Jesus, when you receive him, it will inevitably change you.

It'll strengthen you physically, so you can go out and obey Jesus, but it will also, it'll also do something to your heart. You'll be filled with gratitude. Because you'll see all the wonderful things that God in Christ has accomplished for you.

And that gratitude begins to churn within the Christian, and swell up, and turn into joy, and then overflow into a kind of holy pride.

Like I said, not in ourselves, but a holy pride in Jesus and what he's done. And that holy pride pushes us outward, pushes us to praise God, pushes us out to love others, and to share the good news with other people.

[ 24 : 51 ] I mean, have you ever seen a new Christian? Do you remember when you were one? They're always doing two things. They're always praising God, but you don't have to teach a new Christian usually how to praise God.

It just kind of comes natural. And they also want to share the gospel with other people. Now that's what God wants for you, even if you've walked with him for a very, very long time.

And the key thing for us as a congregation is we need to be a people who cultivate a practice of continually, not just once 10 years ago or 20 years ago receiving Jesus, we are to receive Jesus all the time.

We are to feed on Christ in our hearts by faith. You remember that from the communion service? Feed on Christ in your heart by faith with thanksgiving. That's how we boast in the gospel.

Now friends, at the beginning I said that I had realized that I had become apathetic towards the gospel.

[ 25 : 58 ] Romans wants to kill apathy in you. Wants to kill it. The gospel is just too precious for apathy. So let me close by asking you a few questions.

Do you treasure the gospel? Is the gospel precious to you? Does the gospel drive you, drive your life?

Does it set the agenda for your family? Does it set the agenda for how you relate to other people within the church, outside the church? Does the gospel motivate you to have a holy ambition that the gospel would spread in this great city?

Do you treasure the gospel? And I don't know how you answer that question. Some of you are saying, yes, yes, I do. I love the gospel.

And some of you are saying, eh, I wish I did. I should. Now I feel kind of guilty that I don't. Whatever. Either way, either way, let those questions drive you to the gospel.

[ 27 : 05 ] Drive you to Jesus again. Stop feeling guilty and just get to Jesus. Stop feeling good about yourself that you're really, really happy about the gospel and just get to Jesus again. Fall on your knees before Jesus and rehearse the gospel again and Jesus will use the gospel to replace your apathy toward the gospel with joy and gratitude towards God and he will replace your timidity and evangelism with boldness.

that's what God wants for us. Let's pray. Jesus, you are Lord of all and you have displayed the righteousness of God and given it to us.

change us that we would treasure you and treasure the good news for the sake of your glory in this city.

Amen. Amen. Let's continue in prayer.

You can kneel or sit however you're comfortable. ■