

Friday Evening English

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 15 February 2013

Preacher: Rev I Watson

[0 : 00] We'll keep our seats and bow our heads as we pray together. Our gracious God and our heavenly Father, as we prepare to consider your word together, we are very conscious of our dependence upon your Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit who caused this word to be written, we are dependent upon that same Holy Spirit to understand what is being said.

Lord God, it is easy for us to have an intellectual understanding, but we pray, Father God, that you would take us beyond that, take us to the very heart of the matter, take us to the very heart of our lives, to our souls.

Lord God, you accept us as we are, but you do not leave us as we are. You are a God who transforms.

You are a God whose aim and purpose for your children is that we should reflect the image of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

[1 : 26] We pray that the end result of our time together this evening will be that we will be more like Jesus, more like Jesus than than we are now, more like Jesus at the end of the day than we were at the beginning.

May the words of my mouth, may the meditation of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, our Lord and our God.

To you be all the praise and glory. Amen. Now, I'd be very obliged if you would have your Bibles open at Romans chapter 1.

Now, there was a time, and not so long ago, when disability was regarded as something to be ashamed of.

We spoke about handicapped children in hushed tones. Their parents were viewed by their neighbors with pity.

[2 : 41] They were sent to special schools. There was a stigma attached to not being normal. It was a shame.

And surely one of the greatest advances that we have made as a society in the last generation is to have uncoupled disability from any notion of shame.

Now, that hasn't been easy. Attitudes don't change overnight. It took some very brave people to declare that they were not going to hide away.

That they were not ashamed of their disability. That they were not ashamed of their child's disability. It was hard work. But now, Parliament has passed laws outlawing discrimination and enforcing disability access into public buildings.

And last year's Paralympic Games opened many eyes to just what is possible despite having a so-called disability.

[3 : 51] Now, I know there's still a long way to go before there is full and unfettered integration. But I hope I am right in saying that the notion of shame the notion of shame is all but gone.

The notion that someone with a disability has something to be ashamed of. Now, here in Romans chapter 1 verse 16 the Apostle Paul says for I am not ashamed of the gospel.

I am not ashamed of the gospel. Now, that is a strange thing to say. Why does he not say I am proud of the gospel?

We only say that we are not ashamed of something if we have the feeling that others think we ought to be ashamed.

Now, sometimes we should be ashamed and saying that we are not ashamed is just an act of pure bravado. But on other occasions we might be challenging perceptions that need to be changed.

[5 : 02] I want to ask a couple of questions of this text tonight. First of all, why does the Apostle Paul feel the need to say that he was not ashamed of the gospel?

What is there about the gospel that might have caused him and his readers in Rome to be ashamed of it?

What was there about the gospel message that might cause us to be ashamed of it so that we are reluctant to share with others what we believe?

That's the first question. What caused the apostle to say that he was not ashamed of the gospel? And secondly, why should we not be ashamed of the gospel?

Why should we not be ashamed? Why should we not be embarrassed to share what we believe? Well, first of all then, why does the apostle feel the need in the first place to say that he is not ashamed of the gospel?

[6 : 14] We might get a clue if we look at Paul's experience as he travelled throughout the Roman Empire preaching the gospel because he was not always welcomed with open arms.

Now, for example, let's turn to Acts chapter 16. Let's turn to Acts chapter 16 and Kirtmure Hill, when I say let's turn to a passage, I'm deafened by the sound of leaves being turned and it would be great to be able to tell him that that happened in Stornoway as well.

Acts chapter 16, the apostle Paul is in Philippi and he is repeatedly being accosted by a slave girl who is possessed by a demon which enables her to read fortunes and in verse 18 we read that Paul was so troubled by this that in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ he commanded the spirit to leave her and it did.

It did. You see the gospel of Jesus Christ will not allow us to ignore the plight of those who are distressed. The gospel is a liberating gospel.

It frees people from the power of evil but this has consequences. This has consequences. The slave girls owners realized that their money making scheme was over and they hauled Paul and his friend Silas before the magistrates and they complained.

[7 : 42] Look at verse 20 and when they had brought them to the magistrates they said these men are Jews and they are disturbing our city. They advocate customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to accept or practice.

And as a result Paul and Silas were thrown into jail. Now you see preach the gospel and you might get thrown into jail. preach the gospel and you might lose your liberty.

Well most respectable people do not want to be associated with criminals. Most respectable people do not want to be associated with those who are accused of stirring up trouble.

Paul's readers in Rome might have been worried that being actively engaged in evangelism could land them in prison. And that would be shameful in any society.

Now let's just continue the journey let's go to Athens and this time to Acts chapter 17 where Paul is addressing the philosophers and the intellectuals on the Areopagus. And they listen politely Acts chapter 17 they listen politely as he speaks generally about God and creation.

[9 : 01] but when he begins to speak about repentance and judgment and Christ's death and resurrection the atmosphere changes.

Look at verse 32. When they heard about the resurrection of the dead some of them sneered. Some of them sneered. And who can blame them?

Because everybody knows that when you're dead you're dead. But here is a man speaking about someone who rose from the dead. It's ridiculous. It's nonsense. It's unbelievable.

It's silly isn't it? To believe that a person's salvation should be tied up about what they think about one particular individual who lived 2,000 years ago.

It's silly isn't it? To believe that an innocent person can die as a sacrifice for others. How can anybody living in the 21st century believe that Jesus literally rose from the dead?

[10 : 05] It's a myth. Then we move on to chapter 19. And we find Paul in Ephesus preaching the gospel.

And people are being converted. But again this is having a knock-on effect. It's having a knock-on effect on the incomes of the craftsmen who made the tiny little statues of the goddess Artemis.

And the leader Demetrius says it's verse 26 of Acts 19. And you see and hear how this fellow Paul has convinced and led astray large numbers of people here in Ephesus and in practically the whole province of Asia.

He says that man-made gods are not gods at all. And the next thing there's a riot. And they're baying for Paul's blood. The gospel claims exclusive rights over the truth. It tells us that other gods are man-made gods. That they are not gods at all. It says that other religions are false religions.

[11 : 21] and that those who follow them are deceived. The gospel rejects the multi-faith, all roads lead to God approach that is so fashionable these days.

And in modern Britain, there is hardly anything more shameful than to be called intolerant. Intolerant.

the gospel challenges our long held dearly cherished beliefs. When somebody becomes a Christian in another country where another religion is dominant, it's as if they are turning their back on their culture, on their nation.

It brings shame on their family. In some cultures, the only way to lift the shame is to kill the convert. In other cultures, they hold a funeral service.

Because to them, the convert is dead. Friends, it should come to us as no surprise that the apostle feels the need to state, I am not ashamed of the gospel.

[12 : 41] He says something very similar to the Corinthians. 1 Corinthians 1 verse 18, for the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God.

The gospel is the message of the cross, the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. These Christians believed in a crucified God. Like to the ancient mind, nothing was more absurd.

Crucifixion was the worst kind of death, and not just because it was painful, but because it was shameful. It was not an honourable death.

That's why in Hebrews chapter 12 in verse 2, the writer to the Hebrews says of our Lord Jesus, that who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross scorning its shame.

Its shame. The gospel is a message that is centred on a person, on the Lord Jesus Christ and what he did upon the cross of Calvary.

[13 : 50] The gospel tells us that we are sinners, that none of us give to almighty God the honour and the respect and the obedience that he is due.

The gospel tells us that our relationship with God is all wrong, and therefore, our relationship with one another is all wrong as well. we do not love God as we ought.

We do not love our neighbour as we ought. And as the apostle Paul goes on to explain in the rest of Romans chapter 1, this has terrifying consequences.

Terrifying consequences. Look at verse 18. verse 18. For the wrath of God, the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all the ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

And at the end of the chapter, at the end of the chapter, he describes the world in which he lived. It could have been written yesterday. Look at verse 29.

[15 : 05] They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossip, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.

Now he's not saying that everybody is guilty of each and every single one of these vices all the time. But hey, hands up if you have never been guilty of one of these.

That's why God is angry. That's why his wrath is being revealed. Well, don't you get angry? Don't you get angry when you are on the receiving end of malice and deceit?

Don't you personally get angry when you are the subject of gossip and slander? Don't you get angry when you are confronted with someone who is insolent and arrogant and boastful?

Don't you get angry with children who disobey their parents? So why should not Almighty God our Creator get angry too? And angry at us when we are the guilty party when we are the guilty party the gospel tells us the ugly truth about ourselves.

[16 : 37] It will not allow us to distance ourselves from criminals from those who are on the most wanted list. It will not allow us to point to them and say ah but we are not like them.

They are monsters. Notice how that in the newspapers they always describe these worst of criminals as monsters. They are not human they are monsters. Because we don't want to be associated with people like that.

We are good people they are monsters. The gospel contradicts that sense that we have of our own innate goodness.

The gospel holds up a light and it shines it right into those nooks and crannies where we have swept away the dirt that we don't want anybody else to see.

And so it's no surprise my friends that the gospel upsets people. The gospel upsets people. It tells us we're not quite as good as we think we are.

[17 : 46] Now it's all very well for me to declare this from the safety of the pulpit. What about when I'm face to face with somebody? What about when we are explaining the Christian faith to someone who doesn't know it?

Oh it's great being able to speak about the love of God. It's great to be able to talk to them about forgiveness and acceptance. That's wonderful but it's only half a gospel.

That's only half the gospel. Do you think the apostle Paul would have been hounded from town to town? Would have been flogged? Would have been tossed into jail?

If the man's message was simply God loves you just the way you are. Look there he is. There he is. He's just outside one of those towns and outside the walls of the town.

And he's been beaten and he's been stoned and he's been left for dead. And his clothes are torn. And the blood is caked to his skin. And he can hardly lift his head. And there's a passerby.

[18 : 53] And he goes over to this man. And he says what's happened to you? What did you do to deserve such a beating? Can you imagine the apostle Paul looking up at this guy and saying I don't know.

All I did was ask them to be nice to each other. That's not the gospel message. It's ridiculous. The good news, the gospel is only good news because first of all there's bad news.

And because we are such nice people we don't like to offend anybody. And the danger is my friends that we will be ashamed of the gospel.

We will be ashamed of the whole gospel. We're reluctant. We're reluctant to tell others the whole gospel.

Well the problem with half a gospel is that it's no gospel. It's no gospel. Why should we not be ashamed of the gospel?

[20 : 00] Why should we not be ashamed of the gospel? Well look what Paul says. Verse 16 of Romans 1. 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 to the Greek.

The gospel is the power of God. This message, this news, that when Jesus Christ was dying upon the cross, he was dying as saviour.

This message, this gospel, has power in it. Has God's power in it. This is God's way of saving sinful men and women.

Saving them from his anger. And it is God's chosen way precisely precisely because it confounds all our ideas of how we could save ourselves from our predicament.

Now nobody disputes that there is a problem. Nobody disputes that the world is in a mess. Nobody disputes that. Whether the problem, whether it's a disaster, an ecological disaster like the disappearance of the rainforests, or whether it's financial like the banking crisis, or whether it's social, like the breakdown of the family unit, or whether it's political so that our faith in our political leaders, representatives, is at an all-time low.

[21 : 44] Whatever the problem is that leaves us wondering about our future, the root cause is our greed, our selfishness, our pride.

every playground fight, every argument around the kitchen table, every workplace dispute, it's caused by our inability to love our neighbour as ourselves. Now nobody's going to dispute that, but what's the solution?

Ah well, over the years innumerable solutions have been proposed. Better education, better sex education, better housing, better diet, better government. Human solutions.

Yeah, okay, they improve our living conditions, they maybe improve our health, they improve our opportunities, they never improve us. I grew up in a huge post-war council scheme on the outskirts of Glasgow.

And during the 1980s, the property had become so dilapidated that the council was forced to do widespread renovations. And when the work was done, the place was transformed.

[22 : 59] It really did look beautiful. But you know what? It was the same people living in them as before. So the same gardens were neglected and the same neighbour disputes continued.

Councils and governments can never deal with the root problem. The only solution is the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Why? Because it's God's solution. Isn't that how Paul starts the letter? Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God. The gospel of God.

It's a solution that human beings would never have invented. It is, as he says in verse 17, it's revealed to us. Who would ever have associated the solution to the human problem with a man from the outer edges of the Roman Empire who was crucified as a rebel and a rabble rouser. To Jewish ears, it was unthinkable, unthinkable that the Lord God Jehovah would allow a holy man to suffer such a fate. And to Roman ears, it was preposterous, preposterous to worship someone who died in such ignominy.

[24 : 22] And still today, the gospel is resisted. Some people resist it because they won't admit that they themselves are guilty of anything, guilty of any sins.

Others resist it because they cannot admit that they are powerless to reform themselves. You see, the gospel humbles us. It says that salvation has nothing to do with us. It's all to do with Jesus. It's all to do with Jesus. Paul says he is not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God, the power of the God for the salvation of everyone who believes. salvation. The act of saving. You're drowning and somebody rescues you.

You're in prison and somebody releases you. You're in trouble and somebody bails you out.

Salvation. salvation. What danger does the gospel save us from?

[25 : 40] It saves us from the danger of God's wrath, from the danger of eternal separation from God's love, from the danger of hell.

That's what the gospel saves us from. And as if that weren't enough, the gospel saves us for so many blessings.

It's like the parable of a good Samaritan. You know, the good Samaritan did not just tend to the wounds of the poor man who had been assaulted by the bandits and then just leave him to find his own way home.

No, the Samaritan took him to an inn and paid for his keep until he was better. The gospel doesn't just clean us up as it were and then leave us to get on with it.

The gospel brings us into a new and wonderful relationship with God. This is what Paul is thinking about in verse 17 where he says, for in the gospel, in it, the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith.

[26 : 55] And it's most basic to be righteous. It just means to be in the right. just to be in the right. A righteous person is someone who behaves in the right way.

It's someone who does the right thing. Now, one of the ways that the Bible describes what sin has done to us is that we are unrighteous.

Unrighteous. We are not right in God's sight. We are not in a right relationship with him. Everything between us and God is wrong. wrong. But you see, in the gospel, says Paul, in the gospel, a righteousness from God is revealed.

The gospel reveals to us how we can be righteous, how we can be right with God. It tells us how the lost can be found.

It tells us how strangers can become family. It tells us how enemies can become friends. it tells us how the guilty can be declared innocent. And how?

[28 : 02] How if it's not something we can do for ourselves? If it's not by following a strict moral code, if it's not by making costly sacrifices, then how? But again, the apostle tells us, verse 16, it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.

Verse 17, for in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith. Everyone who believes from faith for faith, believe, faith.

Okay, two different words in English, but in Greek, the same word. To believe is to exercise faith. to have faith is to believe.

Same word in Greek. Believe what? Friend, believe everything I've been telling you tonight. Believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Believe that when he died upon the cross of Calvary, he wasn't dying for his own sins, for he had none, but for yours.

Believe that he died as your substitute, that he was absorbing within himself the full force of God's wrath for you. God's wrath at your sin, so that you might live.

[29 : 30] Believe. It's as simple and as difficult as that. Let me just illustrate this with a story from the Old Testament before we finish 2 Kings chapter 5.

Let's turn to 2 Kings chapter 5. It's the story of Naaman. It gives us a perfect illustration of what God requires of us. It's page 372.

Now you know the story, the story of Naaman, the commander of the Aramean army, a rich man, a powerful man, a brave man, but as the scriptures tell us, he was a mighty man of valor, but he was a leper.

He had leprosy. That was something that his wealth and his power and his courage could do nothing about. Now his wife's servant girl was from Israel.

She'd been captured in a raid. And she tells her mistress about the prophet Elisha. We can see it in verse three. She said to her mistress, would that my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria, he would cure him of his leprosy.

[30 : 59] So off Naaman sets, laden with gifts, and he arrives at Elisha's house, and of course he expects to be treated as a VIP, but instead Elisha just sends out his messenger, his servant, and he tells Naaman, go and wash in the river Jordan seven times, do that and you'll be healed.

And Naaman is insulted, and this is what I want to get across to you, look at verse 11. But Naaman was angry and went away saying, behold, I thought he would surely come out to me and stand and call upon the name of the Lord his God and wave his hand over the place and cure the leper.

Are not Abana and Parpar, the rivers of Damascus, far better than all the waters of Israel, could I not wash in them and be clean? So he turned and went away in a rage.

Naaman is looking for spectacle. He is looking for ceremony. Washing in the Jordan is humiliating. It's undignified. shameful. Now his servants are wiser than their master.

[32 : 13] Look what they say in verse 13. But the servants came near and said to him, my father, it is a great word the prophet has spoken to you. Will you not do it? Has he actually said to you, wash and be clean?

If the prophet had told him to do something brave and bold, he would have done it. But all that's required of him is to wash and be clean.

To believe, to believe Elisha, to believe that Elisha is telling him the truth, that when he washes in the river Jordan seven times, he'll be clean. So what does he do? He acts on his belief.

He acts on it. He washes and he is made clean. This is a perfect picture of what God expects of us. The gospel is the power of God for everyone who believes. It doesn't matter who you are or where you're from or what you've done.

[33 : 22] It is the power of God for everyone who believes. If you believe, act on it.

Act on it. Friends, I am not ashamed of the gospel. The world that we live in tells me I should be. I should be ashamed of the gospel.

It's too simple. It's too naïve. It's too narrow. It's too condemning. It's intolerant.

But you see, I know that the gospel is the power of God. I've seen it in action. I've seen it in action in my own life and in the lives of others.

God's love. And if we are preparing to participate in the sacrament on the Lord's day, we need to listen.

[34 : 23] We need to listen. We need to listen to what the sacrament is saying to us. Because the sacrament is preaching the gospel message, isn't it? It's telling us that it's a message of grace, not works.

It's telling us that it's a message that humbles, but also a message that lifts up. So don't be ashamed of the gospel.

Don't be ashamed to share the gospel. Don't be ashamed to believe the gospel. It is the power of God for everyone who believes.

We'll bow our heads and we'll pray together. Our loving God, our Father in heaven, we marvel at your grace that you should reveal to us something that no human being could ever invent.

Because here is a message that humbles us. Here is a message that leaves us in no uncertain terms that we are sinners who are lost and who are in danger of eternal separation from your love.

[35 : 49] This is not a message that massages our egos. This is a message that tells us the truth. But it is also a message that speaks to us of love, of costly love, love, of sacrificial love.

It speaks to us of your love. It speaks to us, Heavenly Father, of salvation and of righteousness, a righteousness from God.

Lord, O Heavenly Father, tonight in this place there may well be some people who are struggling tonight, struggling with faith, struggling with belief.

They know it in their head. O, they know it in their head. But can they take that step? can they go to Jesus to be washed, to be cleansed?

Lord God, how we pray that you will show yourself this weekend once again to be a God who loves to save sinners.

[37 : 11] O, Father God, help us, we pray. Lord, I believe help thou my unbelief. We thank you for the gospel.

We thank you for its power. Lord God, there are many people here tonight who know that power and we rejoice in that power. We thank you, Lord, that we are a before and after people.

Lord, for everybody here tonight who can say there was a time I was not a Christian and who can now say, ah, but tonight I am.

that now there is no condemnation. Lord God, we rejoice in that. We rejoice and give you thanks and praise. Yes, the gospel is your power.

And no matter what the world says to us, we're not ashamed of the gospel. We're not ashamed of it. In Jesus' holy name we pray. Amen.

[38 : 12] Amen. Amen. That's ■■■ E.