

Not Ashamed

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[0:00] Folks, turn back with me in your Bibles to Romans and chapter 1 for a short time this morning. And with the Lord's help, let's see what we might glean from it.

If you'll permit me, let me begin by asking a question, particularly perhaps to those of you who would profess Jesus as Lord. How many people have you spoken to about Jesus this week? Not how many church services have you attended, not how many podcasts have you listened to, not how many Bible verses or passages have you read, but how many people have you shared the gospel with this week?

How many people have you articulated your faith or the truth about Jesus to in the past number of days? I'm sure, like me, for many of us, that question makes us uncomfortable.

Because we know the gospel and we love the gospel. We know that the gospel has changed our lives and transformed our experiences.

[1:12] And yet so often, when the opportunity arises, we struggle to take up these opportunities. Why? Well, for a variety of reasons.

We might think that the scenario in which we find ourselves isn't conducive to sharing or articulating our faith. Maybe we're afraid of saying the wrong thing or tripping over our words or being questioned for the things that we say.

Perhaps we're worried about what people may think. They might think that we're narrow-minded or bigoted or old-fashioned or maybe just simply strange.

We live in a culture where faith is often expected to remain a private faith, a personal and a private faith.

And we're speaking openly of Christ Jesus and the great hope that is ours in and through his gospel comes at great cost to ourselves.

[2:18] And therefore, it's easy or becomes easy for us to remain silent. Now, the remarkable thing about that is that it's not a new struggle.

It's not a struggle that is confined to modern-day Scotland. Paul, as we've just been reading, is preparing, longing to come to preach the gospel in Rome, in the heart of the greatest and strongest, most powerful empire on the earth.

Now, what do we know of Rome? We know that Rome celebrated power and wealth and status and philosophy and military might. So, the message of a crucified Jewish savior might sound a little weak, perhaps a little foolish, maybe even offensive to the power of Rome.

If anybody had good reason to remain silent, it's surely Paul as he enters into that arena. And yet, as we read in verse 16 of Romans chapter 1, after he's alluded to the fact that he longs to come to the people in Rome, he 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.

An amazing statement, a bold statement for Paul to make, made all the more amazing when we consider the experience that Paul himself has had up until this point.

[4:01] When Paul was first saved and taken to Damascus, he had to sneak over the wall to escape persecution because of the gospel. He was stoned and left for dead in the town of Lystra because he preached the gospel.

Later, he was jailed in the city of Philippi because he preached the gospel. He was chased out of Thessalonica for preaching the gospel.

He was laughed at in Athens for preaching the gospel. He was assaulted and arrested in Jerusalem for preaching the gospel.

And so when we consider all of these encounters, all of these realities for the apostle Paul, it would be very easy for Paul to say, Well, I'm going to Rome and after all that I've experienced and all of

these hardships that I've survived, is it wise of me to preach the gospel?

But it's unambiguous for Paul. He says, Listen, I'm not ashamed of the gospel regardless of what has come to pass, regardless of the experiences that I've had, good, bad, and ugly.

[5:19] I am not ashamed of the gospel because of a number of things. It's quite a statement. So Paul's coming to this great superpower of the world, unashamedly longing to proclaim the unsearchable riches of Jesus Christ.

Nothing intimidated him. Whether it was Herod Agrippa, Governor Festus, Governor Felix in Caesarea, Nero in Rome, These were, let's make no mistake, strong, powerful, brutal, power-hungry leaders, but they didn't intimidate Paul.

Why? Because Paul feared the Lord. Paul feared the Lord. And we know that Scripture reminds us that the fear of the Lord is not only the beginning of wisdom, but also a great source of confidence. The basis of Paul's confidence was his fear of the Lord. Elsewhere, he reminds us that his boast, his only boast, is in Christ.

That was the source of his confidence. That's what gave him such confidence as he entered into this intimidating arena. And he reminds us today that the gospel is good news and it's worth standing for unashamedly, even when we're faced with great power, authority, and influence from worldly leaders or those before us.

[6:59] And so I'd like to just look this morning for a few moments with the Lord's help at some reasons why we, like Paul, can say, I am not ashamed of the gospel because it's good news.

It's God's power and it's given freely. It's good news. It's God's power. It's given freely. Firstly, then, it's good news.

Summed up by the word itself, gospel. That's literally what it means. It is good news. And, you know, from a rational point of view, we say, well, how could anybody be ashamed of good news? Good news is to be shared. Good news is to be disseminated. It's to be celebrated. It's to be rejoiced in. Well, let me give you a couple of reasons why somebody might be ashamed of the gospel, especially in somewhere like Rome.

Rome would have been a terribly intimidating place 2,000 years ago. If you were to travel to Rome back then and look around, you would have thought, wow, Rome has it all together.

[8:10] These people want for nothing. They have everything that they need. Out of all of the places on the earth, Rome, well, it has it all. And in ancient times, Rome wasn't just another European capital.

It was the center of everything. The nickname for Rome back then was Caput Mundi, which literally means the capital of the world. It was the center of civilization.

It was the seat of influence and power. The Roman Senate there in Rome would make laws that affected the entire world. And therefore, it would have been an inspiring and yet intimidating place. Certainly somewhere that you might think twice of bringing a message of challenge. You might be ashamed of the gospel because not everybody in Rome saw that the gospel was good news or that they had any need for the gospel.

In fact, they might think, well, that actually sounds like bad news, not good news. Because the gospel comes along and says, listen, you're not all together and you haven't arrived and you're not eternally secure, but you can be.

[9:23] You can be not through your wealth, not through your power, not through your prestige or your status, but through Jesus Christ, the one who has died in your place, the one who has shed his blood, that you may be free.

They say, really? Look at us here. Sophisticated, advanced, affluent, wealthy, comfortable.

We could translate that into the modern day, couldn't we? The same arguments, the same reasoning can be put forward by those who live today. I have no need of Jesus.

I have everything that I need. It's the great lie of the secular world, isn't it? Just a little bit more. If I have these things, then, well, I'll be secure and I'll be fine.

But of course, that's not the case, is it? Because without Christ, we are without hope and without God in the world. To many in Rome and to many in the modern day, if you go out into the street in Stornoway or Ullipool or anywhere else, and you tell them about the wonder of the gospel, they will find it offensive.

[10:35] What do you mean I'm not good enough? What do you mean my good deeds don't warrant reward? What do you mean by that? We say the gospel exposes the pride of the human

heart.

The gospel unmasks the condition of the unbeliever. The gospel strikes a blow to the heart of people's ego.

And as a result, people react. React often negatively towards the gospel. And as a result, Christians often become embarrassed or shrink back as a result of that.

Often we become timid and silent. But you know, the truth is, the gospel still changes lives. The gospel still changes hearts.

Jesus still saves people. His story is a story of hope and meaning and inspiration and transformation. It's good news.

[11 : 43] So why would we be ashamed of good news? There are many things in life that we share with people. The arrival of a child or a grandchild. The news of an engagement.

There's one in your intimations today for Aaron and Eve. We rejoice in these things and we share these good news stories. Surely the greatest message, the greatest news of all, is though we are sinful, for all sin and fall short of the glory of God, there is no one who is righteous, not even one.

No one who seeks God, Paul says elsewhere. Surely the good news then is that there is provision and that there is a hope and that there is an answer to the greatest need of the human heart.

Because for as much as we amass and as much as we succeed in and as much as we achieve and as much as we own, we know that, that there's still a yearning, a gnawing.

There's something not quite. There's something missing. We may have made it in business. We might have secured our retirement. We may have our funds in place. We may have all of these things.

[12 : 52] But without Christ, we have no hope of eternity. The gospel is good news. Part of that good news is exposing the waywardness of the human heart, which is often something that is intimidating for us to do.

But the gospel doesn't just expose. The gospel also clothes. It points to the righteousness and that's here later in this verse as well.

We have the best news, the greatest news, the greatest hope that this world can ever know in Christ Jesus. That's why we share it.

That's why we're unashamed. Because it is the best news that meets the greatest need of the human heart. Paul says, listen, Rome or Judea, doesn't matter.

I am unashamed of the gospel because it's good news. Secondly, he's unashamed of the gospel because it's God's power.

[13 : 55] I am not ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of God for salvation. It's the power of God for salvation.

Now, Paul's coming to Rome and Rome loved power. They boasted about their power. They were a nation of conquerors. They had the power of the Roman legions that were legendary.

They had the best trained armies in the world. They had access to the best weapons in the world. They stationed their military might all over the conquered world to keep the peace.

Rome was so powerful that Caesar Augustus could order a census, remember, to be taken that forced people to go to their homes towns to register across the entire empire.

Such was the influence. Such was the power that the Roman emperor held. And the truth is, when a Roman emperor became agitated, everybody got nervous.

[15 : 02] Because if the king was mad, everybody else was on edge. You know, if mum's not happy at home, then tread carefully. Kind of amplify that for a dictator that's seated on his throne.

If Caesar's not happy, nobody's at ease, nobody's at rest. And yet, for all of this power, for all of this influence, Rome were powerless, Rome was powerless, to change a single life from the inside.

All of that Roman power could not morally fix a person. It couldn't change a life. Because though Rome and the Romans were outwardly powerful, militarily strong, they were morally bankrupt.

And that was well known. A couple of Roman writers mentioned that, well, Seneca the Younger wrote, Rome is a cesspool of iniquity. Juvenal wrote, it's a filthy sewer into which the dregs of the empire flood.

And here's the apostle Paul saying, I long to go there. I long to go to Rome. And I want to preach the gospel because I'm not ashamed of it. Because it's good news and it's God's power.

[16 : 27] I've seen the gospel working powerfully, Paul could say. I've seen it work in Corinth. I've watched it flourish in Ephesus. I've been to Thessalonica. It's happened in Philippi. Philippi.

Imagine what would happen if God's spirit came in power in Rome. Imagine the influence. Imagine the fallout in the positive sense of that, the positive impact that it would have in the world. It's God's power into salvation. Now, notice how he speaks about that. He speaks about the gospel being the power.

Not that it had power. But it was itself the power. The word of God. The good news. Who is the word? Jesus. In the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God in the beginning was the word.

Verse 14, John 1, the word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. The word of God, Jesus, the living word. He is the one who has the power to transform a life because he is the one who has brought everything that we know into being.

[17 : 35] He is the one who holds all things together. There is no worldly power that comes close to his power. He is the one who has all dominion, all power, all authority.

He is the one who can change people. Rome couldn't change people. But Jesus can. Jesus saved Paul. Paul was an antagonist of the gospel.

He was a persecutor of Christians, sworn enemy of the church on his way to persecute people further when Jesus arrests him and convicts him and converts him and saves him on the road to Damascus.

Transformed through an encounter with the living Jesus Christ, the one who has risen and is ascended and is seated at the right hand of God in the throne room of heaven.

The gospel preached, God's word expounded by Peter was powerful enough to save 3,000 people in the day of Pentecost and thousands since every day more were added to their number.

[18 : 50] That's the power of the gospel. Not to win a war or conquer a nation here or there but to change the human heart to give us a new heart and a new hope and a new direction of travel and an internal inheritance that cannot be matched.

It's the gospel that changes people. Ask Billy Graham, the great evangelist, the numbers, they say 2.2 million people under his preaching came to know the Lord. Was it his opinion?

Was it his gravitas? Was it his engagement? No, it was the gospel. It was the truth of the Lord Jesus Christ that he preached that changed people as the Spirit of God moved within them.

The gospel is powerful. We know not what it will do. D.L. Moody said that the world has yet to see what the Lord can do through somebody who is totally devoted to him and the preaching of his word.

The gospel is powerful enough to save Paul, Augustine, Martin Luther, C.S. Lewis, atheists, investigative journalists, whoever they may be, you and I.

[20 : 03] The gospel is God's power. It is a power that is unmatched. It is unrivaled and it is the only one that can save a soul from death.

The gospel is good news. The gospel is God's power and the gospel is freely given. The third reason that Paul is not ashamed of the gospel is because it's freely given.

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

Now he's talking chronologically there. First it came to the Jews. Of course it did. Jesus. It came through Jesus. Jesus and his line. It came to the Jews but now it is to the Gentiles.

Indeed if you go back a couple of verses to verse 14 you'll read Paul writing there I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians both to the wise and to the foolish.

[21 : 09] Now the Jews divided the world into two groups. The Jews and everybody else. You were either a Jew or you were a Gentile. You were one of the everybody else.

Indeed strict Jews back then used to hate everyone who wasn't a Jew. Rabbis even said that God used the Gentiles to stoke the fires of hell which was pretty grim.

But Paul said yes the message did come to Jews first but it has also come to Gentiles to Greeks and to the whole world. There's a chronology here that he is speaking.

The Greeks also divided the world into two groups the Greeks and everybody else and that's been something that has been characteristic of people groups down through the generations.

But Paul says here I am under obligation to both Greeks and barbarians. The AV captures it slightly better I am debtor it says to both the Greeks and their barbarians both to the wise and the unwise.

[22 : 11] That is why so therefore I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. Now a barbarian was somebody who simply hadn't been swayed by Greek influence they hadn't

been Hellenized or they weren't under the Greek culture.

So what Paul is saying by using the terminology that he's implying here as he writes to Rome is that the gospel is non-discriminatory. It's non-discriminatory it is universal in its scope.

It's freely given. It's an offer that is extended an invitation that is given to the Greeks and to the barbarians to the wise to the unwise to the Jew to the Gentile to the high class to the low class and so on.

It's good if you studied Socrates it's good if you can't even pronounce Socrates. It's good if you're down and out it's good if you're on the up. But notice he says I am under obligation I am a debtor he says.

What does he mean? Well there are two ways in which we can be in debt. Number one we can borrow from somebody and be in their debt until we pay that back. But number two we can be in debt if we are given something entrusted with something to pass on to a third party.

[23:33] Some people might say that's money laundering but we're not going down that route. But say we're entrusted with something to pass on to somebody it's not ours to keep but it is to pass on we are in debt to that person and indeed to the giver until we have fulfilled the obligation that we have been given and we are freed from that debt.

That's what Paul means when he speaks of being a debtor. He's not in debt because he borrowed anything from the Romans or the Greeks or the barbarians. He's a debtor because he has been entrusted with the gospel of Jesus Christ and until he has shared that with everyone he has the opportunity to he is a debtor to the gospel.

That which is freely given becomes a liability if it stops with us. And that's a challenge isn't it? Are we debtors to those around about us? Are we debtors to our family? Are we debtors to our colleagues? Are we debtors to our communities?

Because we have taken the good news and we're hoarding it to ourselves. Holding it to ourselves. Ashamed. Frightened.

[24:51] to share it with those around about us. The gospel is good news. Indeed as the angel said right at the beginning good news of great joy for all people.

The Lord will use us if we are willing. What was it that Augustine said? God demand whatever you will for you will supply whatever you demand.

How much confidence do we have in the Lord the one who can provide? So why is Paul unashamed of the gospel? Because he recognizes that it's good news.

He understands that it's God's power and he affirms that it is freely offered to everyone. I wonder if we would agree this morning.

Do we see it as good news? God's power and a gracious and free universal invitation. We don't know who will take it up.

[25:59] We don't know who will reject it. But by the same token we don't know who will accept it. We don't know what ground has been cultivated in preparation for us to come and speak that there might be a rich harvest.

You see the Lord doesn't ask people to behave. to be saved. He asks us to believe to be saved. And who do we believe?

In Jesus. And how can they believe if they have not heard? And how can they hear if nobody speaks? And how can they hear if nobody goes to them? the gospel of grace is good news but it requires articulating.

You know there's that saying you know preach the gospel use words if necessary. It's nonsense. Of course words are necessary. We must hear that doesn't mean to say that we shouldn't demonstrate or cultivate a lifestyle that demonstrates or that bolsters or that is in harmony with the faith that we profess with our lips.

Of course we should. But we should be a people who delight with the apostle Paul in the gospel because we're unashamed of it. Not ashamed because we recognize it as the power of God and to salvation for all who will believe.

[27:19] Religion will never set us free. Ceremony will never set us free. Morality will never set us free. But Jesus will.

Jesus will. And that's good news because it's God's power in his living word and is offered and given to us freely.

Let me conclude with a short story about Fritz Kreisler. I'm sure some of you may have heard of him. He was a well-known violin player. And the story goes that he came across a violin, a Stradivarius violin, that he thought I must have it.

But he didn't have the funds to purchase it at the time. So he went away and he played at different concerts and he saved money and he came back to buy that violin but it had been bought. It had been bought by a great and wealthy collector.

Well, he found out who the collector was and he went to visit the man. He said to him, I saw the violin, I wanted to buy it. The man said, no, I have bought it. It's part of my collection.

[28:25] It's prize of place now. I have it in this beautiful cabinet. Would you like to come in and see it? Fritz goes in, he has a look and he turns to leave, sad that this man will not sell it to him.

And he says, before I go, may I play it? May I play the instrument just once? So he takes out the case and Fritz tunes it up and he plays.

And this beautiful melodious music sings from this instrument under the talent of this man who is playing. And the collector has moved to tears. And he says to him, I have no right to consign this instrument to silence.

The world needs to hear the beauty of its music. Take it, play it, let people hear it. Jesus says the same to us.

When he says, go into all the nation and make disciples, tell people, about the goodness of God in the gospel of grace.

[29:31] Be not ashamed, for the gospel is the power of God and to salvation for everyone who believes. May the Lord empower us.

Let's pray. God, our Father, we thank you for your word and for its instruction and for its challenge and inspiration. And we pray that we would indeed be challenged and inspired and that we would recognize the great wonder of the gospel of Jesus, that it is the one thing that can change a heart from the inside out.

Lord, may we be bold as we proclaim unashamedly the gospel of grace, which is the power of God, and to salvation for all who will believe.

We ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Folks, we're going to conclude by singing to God's praise from Psalm 107 in the Scottish Psalter.

Psalm 107 on page 382 of your psalm books. Psalm 107 on page 382, and we're going to sing the verses marked 1 to 7 to God's praise.

[30:51] Praise God, for he is good, for still his mercy's lasting be. Let God's redeemed say, so whom he from the enemy's hand did free. Verses 1 to 7 to God's praise.

If we're able, let's stand and sing together. praise God, for he is good, for still his mercy's lasting be. Let God's redeemed say over me from enemies counted free and gather them of the lands from north south east and west they streamed in desert pathless with no city unto rest for first God hung in them face their soul rest is tempest they cry unto the

Lord and he then preached from their dishes they fall in a way to war that might deep defy that they might do a city go where in they might die time and now to him who is able to do more abundantly than all we ask or think according to the power that is at work within us to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations forever and ever and all God's people say amen amen to