

SALVATION AND THE POWER OF GOD
Romans 1:16

Intro: It is thought that at the time of the Apostle Paul's ministry the city of Rome had a population of a million people. It was the center of the Roman Empire, and was ruled over by the Caesars. Augustus was the first of the Caesars, and he began his reign about 30 years before Christ. He was followed by Tiberius, who was the Caesar when our Lord was born. He was followed Claudius. It was during his reign that Paul ministered.

It was a very idolatrous city. It was a city given to pleasure. There were very wealthy people there with their beautiful homes, but there were the tenements too where most of the people lived. In Nelson's Bible Dictionary we have this comment about Paul and his acquaintance with Rome:

The apostle Paul's first known connection with Rome was when he met Aquila and Priscilla at Corinth (Acts 18:2). They had left Rome when Claudius expelled all the Jews from the city. Some few years after meeting Aquila and Priscilla, Paul decided that he "must also see Rome" (Acts 19:21). When he wrote his letter to the Christians at Rome, his plan was to visit friends in the city on his way to Spain (Rom. 15:24).

When Paul wrote his epistle to "all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints," the Gospel had, of course, been preached there. Paul did not speak of the believers as a church, but there must have been some regular fellowship that the people had. But it is clear from what Paul wrote in verse 11 that the people there needed to be established in their faith. But he also anticipated that a visit with them would be a great encouragement for him.

Even though Paul was a Christian, he was a Jew--and Jews were not welcome in Rome. Besides, the people there had their own religions, their own temples. Those who could afford it were pleasure-loving. They were very much like people in America today, self-satisfied, self-confident, and certainly not looking for any expansion of the Christian faith. Probably most of the people in Rome were not even aware of the believers who were there. Rome was a classic example of a city that did not want the Gospel; they were satisfied with their way of life.

But the Apostle Paul, remembering the words of the Lord recorded for us in Acts 1:8, felt particularly called to preach the Gospel where Christ had not been named. He wanted

to go to Rome. He was eager to preach the Gospel to them. But he also felt that going to Rome would probably be used by the Lord to open the way into other areas where the Gospel had not gone. Paul knew that the city officials would not be there to welcome him. And he certainly did not know how he would eventually go to Rome--as a prisoner of Rome. God's ways are not always our ways, but it is clear that the Lord had put a burden in Paul's heart to take the Gospel to Rome so that the believers there might be established, and that others might be saved. The first chapter of Romans would have been very condemning of the Roman way of life. The rest of the epistle shows how greatly the believers there needed to be grounded in the truth of salvation.

Actually verses 14 through 17 go together, and express the great burden which was on the heart of the Apostle Paul. Notice the three I am's. (Read.)

Notice from verse 15 that we learn that it is important to preach the Gospel to believers as well as to unbelievers. Preaching the Gospel to believers is basic to their being established in the faith.

Paul felt an obligation to go to Rome. He was eager to go, even though he was well aware of the dangers which he might face. But the part that I want to call your attention to tonight is his statement in verse 16, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ." In most of the more recent translations you will find this statement as simply, I am not ashamed of the Gospel. But Paul had made it very clear in the first four verses of the chapter that the Gospel had to do with Christ.

Let us look at this verse a little in detail, and pray as we do, that something of the attitude that led Paul to write this verse will be placed in our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

First, then, let me ask,

I. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE ASHAMED--TO BE ASHAMED OF ANY THING?

It can mean a number of things. It can mean that a person is afraid of something. Or it can mean that he has a sense of guilt about something. It can also mean that he has a feeling that he might be proven to be wrong. It could mean embarrassment. It might mean that a person fears personal danger, the loss of friends, and so on. It expresses a reluctance to be associated with something.

But let us go on to ask,

II. WHAT DID PAUL MEAN WHEN HE USED THIS WORD?

Well, this is our task--to explain the meaning of the Scriptures. We can't always know exactly how a person feels when he makes a statement like this, but, from we know of the Apostle Paul let us see if we can determine what he meant?

Perhaps I can illustrate a sense of shame connected with fear by one of the passages that I used this morning from the Gospel of John. I was speaking about our Lord's appearances to His disciples after He was raised from the dead. The two appearance to them, a week and a day apart, found them behind closed (and we would assume, locked) doors, as John explained, "for fear of the Jews" (John 20:19). There was evidently a fear in their hearts that the Jews and Romans, having killed the Lord, would be intent on finishing the job by killing His disciples.

Peter must have had this feeling in his heart when he denied with oaths and curses that he even knew the Lord. He was ashamed to be associated with the Lord. He was fearful of what it could mean to him.

No such fear was in the heart of the Apostle Paul as he contemplated the possibility of preaching the Gospel in Rome. He felt bound to go, but he was eager to go. He counted it the highest privilege to be able to go anywhere to tell people about the Lord Jesus Christ. He did not hesitate for a moment to have his name associated with the Lord Jesus Christ. He consider that a high honor. And these three verses, 14, 15, and 16 indicate that when Paul went to Rome, it was not for the purpose of sightseeing; he would have had one purpose in mind, and that was to preach the Gospel. He had suffered for the sake of the Gospel in other places, and he was ready to do it again for the privilege of preaching the Gospel in the very heart of the Roman Empire. There was much behind those words: "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ."

Let's go on, and let me ask another question:

III. WHAT DOES THIS QUESTION SUGGEST?

It suggests that for one reason or another, this is a very real problem to all of us as the people of God. I don't mean to indicate for a moment that there had never been a time when it had not been a problem to Paul. He was made of the same kind of flesh that we have. Self-preservation is very strong in all of us. Perhaps initially it was one of the greatest surprises of Paul's life to find out how intensely people were opposed to the Gospel. He had been opposed to it

at one time, but he may have explained it on the basis of his ignorance of what the Gospel really was.

But let us face this question for ourselves. We love to get together to talk about Christ and the Gospel. We never get tired of hearing the Gospel over and over and over again. And I have absolutely no hesitation, no fear, no feeling of shame, to stand before you to proclaim the Gospel, and to tell you that I believe the Gospel, and that the Lord Jesus Christ is my Savior. I can truthfully say here tonight, and you can too, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ."

However, when we leave here, or when we leave the comfort and security of our homes, and step out into the world, what do our actions indicate? What kind of a message do we give to people who do not share our love for Christ and the Gospel? It is a different thing, then, isn't it? It seems that we can talk about any and everything better and more comfortably than we can talk about the Gospel. Somehow we don't show that eagerness which the Apostle Paul said that he had in Romans 1:15, and we don't show that we feel any obligation to tell others about Christ. The reason I know about this is because I feel that same way. What a difference it would make in our ministry here if each one of us could say, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ."

Perhaps you have heard the story of the little boy who went to camp one summer (not a Christian camp). When he got home his mother asked him how he had gotten along. He responded by saying that he got along just fine because nobody found out that he was a Christian. We can laugh at that, but it expresses the feeling that we all have even though we know that it is wrong.

Now a final question:

IV. WHY WAS PAUL NOT ASHAMED OF THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST?

We have the answer to that question in his own words: "For it is the power of the God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek."

Let me break that down a little so that we can be brought under the power of that statement ourselves.

I believe that several things were in the heart of Paul when he made that statement.

- A. First, Paul felt a deep obligation in his heart to tell others about the Lord Jesus because of what the Lord had done for him.

This was no professional work that Paul was doing. He knew by what the Lord had done in his heart that he wanted to tell others about the Savior. It was a debt of love which he owed to the Lord, and he had devoted his life to his Savior.

- B. Second, he was not ashamed of the Gospel because He knew that the Lord had commissioned every believer to take the Gospel to the world.

The epistles of Paul tell us without any question that whatever God wanted him to do held the greatest priority with him. This was greater than any presentation of human need. It was the greatest motivation in his life. He clearly knew that he could not really be obedient to the Lord in the fullest sense of the word unless he was actually telling people about the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul was not just like this about witnessing; he was this way about everything. You can see it everywhere in his epistles as well as what we know about the history of his ministry. It made no difference what happened to him; he wanted above everything else to be obedient to the Lord.

When Paul met with the elders of Ephesus on his way to Jerusalem, do you remember what he said to them. Let me read his own words to you. You will find them in Acts 20, verses 17-27. (Read.)

What does this mean? It means that the Lord Jesus had given him a ministry, and that he loved the Lord Jesus so much that he would rather die than fail to do what the Lord had called him to do.

This is the main reason for Paul's joy in preaching the Gospel.

But let me give you another reason:

- C. Paul knew that everybody, whether Jew or Gentile, in the city of Rome, needed Christ.

— If the Gospel is to be preached to every creature, it is because every creature needs the Gospel. All are sinners and all need a Savior. Many of the Romans were very wealthy, but if they didn't have the Lord, they really didn't have anything. And even those who didn't have much in the way of this world's good, probably felt "lucky" (if I can use the word) that they lived in Rome. But Paul knew that Roman citizenship didn't qualify you for heaven. He knew that money could not buy salvation. In fact, he knew that money and religion (and they had plenty of religion in Rome) can

only blind us even more to our need of salvation.

Let us bring this down to where we live. Every person we will see this week needs the Lord Jesus Christ--everybody, Jew or Gentile or whatever other distinction you want to make. Any person who does not know the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior, needs to know Him. Nobody can do for us what Jesus Christ can do because of His death on the Cross. Should we, then, be ashamed of the Gospel message?

There are undoubtedly many other things that I could mention tonight about what kept Paul from being ashamed of the Gospel, but let me mention one more.

- D. Paul was not ashamed of the Gospel because it was not a message of what man needed to do for God, but a message of what God had done for sinners.

Rome was filled with religions which told people how to appease their gods, but the end for everyone who followed those ways was death--ETERNAL DEATH!

Paul's Gospel was not a message where God had done part of what was necessary, leaving the rest up to us. It was not even a message saying that God had done most of what He required, leaving just the faith up to us. Paul's message was a message of "the power of God unto salvation"! God convicts, and God gives repentance, and along with that faith. Salvation belongs to those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Many conscientious souls try to do their best here in this life, hoping that God will be pleased when they stand before Him. But that is man's way which only leads to death. Paul not only felt an obligation of love, and an eagerness, but also an urgency to tell others about the Savior. He knew that it was his place to tell people the good news and to urge them to receive Christ. He felt constrained to pray for them. But he knew that God is the One Who saves, and that He has the power to transform the worst sinner into the greatest saint.

Concl: Rome eventually burned. The glory of Rome is no more. But the needs in the hearts of people remains the same. I wonder how many of us have anything like the same kind of a burden for our country that Paul had for the Roman Empire--and the rest of the world.

I mentioned to my family this morning as we were talking about the terrible storm that hit Dallas this past week, that it is another warning from the Lord. But people are not listening to God. The average American feels exactly about the Gospel like the average Roman did. Paul didn't change

the course of history for Rome, and we can't change the course of history for our nation. But there are three things we can do:

- 1) We can pray for our nation.
- 2) We can, by God's grace, live lives that are pleasing to God.
- 3) We can tell others about our Savior and what He has done to save sinners from the sins. We never know how the Lord is going to use our testimony; that is not our business. Our business is to tell others about the Savior, and trust Him to use the Gospel for the accomplishment of His purposes in the lives of people who hear about Christ.

Let us pray that something of the determination which motivated Paul will be given to us, that in these terrible days in which we live, we may snatch men from the burning of the judgment of God which is certain to fall eternally upon all who do not know our Savior.