

## **I am Not Ashamed – Romans 1: 8-17**

This morning we gather as the people of God and we declare with the Apostle Paul. “I am not ashamed of the Gospel!”

In many ways the act of baptism is a declaration to God, to the church and to the community: “I am not ashamed of the Gospel.”

People will stand up in a crowd and declare what they believe in: ecology, women’s rights, rights of the unborn, Palestinian rights, the rights of Israel to defend itself, the right to be free from mandates, Peace for Ukraine, no pipelines, yes to pipelines, and on and on it goes. There are some very good causes to stand for, but none is greater than the Gospel message.

If I could stand for one issue and only one issue, it would be the Gospel message. I would declare as the Apostle Paul did in verse 9, “God, whom I serve in my spirit in preaching the Gospel of his Son, is my witness...” I am not ashamed of the Gospel.

Paul says in verse 15, he wants to go to Rome and preach the Gospel there. Imagine, wanting to go to Rome to preach. Rome was not only the head of the Roman Empire and the seat of the Emperor, it was also the cesspool of all evils and vices. It was known in Paul’s day as the “Capital of the world,” and decisions that were made in the Roman Senate would affect the whole Western world. It would be easy for Paul to say, “In the face of all that power and might, I should just remain quiet.”

But he says, “NO! I am not ashamed of the Gospel!”

In Paul’s day Romans identified the Christian message with a poor Jewish carpenter who was crucified. That was not good news to them! Romans hated Jews. Romans despised the cross, the execution tool for the worst political enemies of the state. So where is the “Good news” (which is what Gospel means) in a story of a crucified Jew? Rome had her own philosophers and teachers and scholars and religions. Who needs to follow a dead Jew?

Romans might have accepted Christians if they would just accept the Roman gods along with their God, but Christians said, “No way! We serve but One God, the God who sent His Son, Jesus, to be our Saviour, and we will have no other gods.” So the Romans called the early Christians “Atheos” – atheists – not because they had no god but because they refused to worship Rome’s gods.

Paul says, “I want to go there and declare the Gospel – the Good News about Jesus.”

The Romans did not understand the Christian faith at all, and what do people do with things they do not understand? They fear them, and in that fear they ridicule them and paint them in as bad a light as they can. The Romans of Paul’s day accused the Christians of being cannibals, because they spoke of eating the body and drinking the blood of Jesus. Paul wants to set the record straight and declare to the people of Rome the truth of the Gospel.

Today people still do not understand the Gospel so in their ignorance and fear, they criticize. The easiest place to find fault is in the church, for in the over 2000 years of church history there has been much done that was not of God. So they attack the church, and Christians, and often Christians go silent. Non-Christians despise a message that declares they are sinners and need a Saviour, which wounds their pride, and so they attack the messenger, saying that Christians are judgemental and critical and hypocritical. And the church goes silent.

Paul could have went that way. Indeed, as we noted over the past few weeks in our study of 2 Timothy, Paul suffered much for the sake of the Gospel – stoning and imprisonment, beatings and mob violence, starvation and sickness. It would be easy for him to want to back away and say, “Someone else go to Rome!”

But he says, I want to go to Rome and preach the Gospel. I am not ashamed!

So maybe we need to look again at what Paul wants to proclaim and why.

First the “what.” What is the Gospel?

The Gospel from beginning to end is about Jesus. He is not simply a Jewish carpenter who was crucified on a Roman cross. He is the Messiah, the long awaited One who would bring salvation to a lost and enslaved people. God promised Jesus would come, and wrote it down and gave his people so they would be ready when he arrived. We call the written message from God the Old Testament.

If Jesus is a Saviour, who did he come to save and from what?

Jesus came to save every man and woman, every boy and girl. “God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16) Jesus came to make salvation available to everybody.

Salvation from what? In the Old Testament God’s people needed to be saved from the Egyptians, then the Babylonians and the Assyrians. Did Jesus come to save the people from the Romans?

No, there is a far worse enemy than any political entity, any army or any empire. That enemy is sin – our bent away from God that leads us to rebellion against the laws of God and instead we proudly live as masters of our own destiny. Sadly, that choice only leads to destruction, for the wages of sin is death.

Naturally we desire to serve something, so many false gods fill the void that should be filled by the one true God revealed in Jesus. People turn to false religions, or the pursuit of happiness through fame or riches or notoriety. Some let their careers, their possessions, sex, drugs, or simply doing what is right in their own eyes become their god. Without God in our lives we make choices that violate the true God’s will and purposes for our lives. Sin is also rebellion, disobedience, and pride that says we know better than God does how we should live.

Sin is like a cruel taskmaster that wraps chains around us, taking us further and further from God. It often leads to destructive behaviours, including addictions of all kinds. Sin keeps us focused on ourselves. Sin destroys.

So Jesus came to free us from the curse of sin. Only he could do that, because he was not just a Jewish carpenter who died on a cross. He is the Son of God, God who put on flesh and blood and come to us to be our Saviour. To free every man, woman, boy and girl would require a price no person could ever pay – only God could pay that price. And that is what Jesus did for us when he went to the cross of Calvary. The wages of our sin was death but he paid it for us, each and every single one of us.

Yet we are not saved because Jesus died. We are saved because we look to Jesus for salvation. We must put our faith in Jesus, and his death on our behalf, repenting of our sin and seeking the forgiveness of God. We must truly be sorry for our sin and humbly seek God's forgiveness.

And here we find the good news of the Gospel – "If we confess our sin he is faithful and just to forgive us our sin, and will cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9)

Rome was powerful. She held countless nations in her grip through the power of the greatest army of that day. Kings shuddered when the Roman Emperor was upset. When Caesar Augustus took a census of the whole Roman world, everyone scrambled to get to their hometown, like Mary and Joseph did the day Jesus was born. And in that census Rome discovered she ruled over 55 million people. Rome was powerful.

But Rome was powerless to change the heart of one person. Rome could not offer a way to be forgiven of sin and gain eternal life. Rome could not set people free from the chains of sin. Only the Gospel could – only Jesus can do that.

So Paul boldly declares, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God unto salvation."

The Gospel leads to salvation. It changes lives. Each person being baptised is testifying to the fact that they have been saved from sin and now have received the gift of eternal life. How? By being good? By being baptised? By joining a church? No, none of these things can earn us salvation. Salvation is a gift received by faith.

"For it is by grace are we saved through faith, and this not of yourselves, it is the gift of God. Not by works lest any man should boast." (Ephesians 2:8-9)

I heard a pastor online this week say that he received a letter from a prison from a man named David Berkowitz. That meant nothing to me until he explained that this man is also known as the "Son of Sam," a serial killer from the Bronx. He is serving a life sentence for killing at least eight people. But David Berkowitz had written to tell the pastor that he had been listening to this pastors messages on the radio and he had given his life to Christ. The pastor visited David in the prison and marvelled at what God had done in his life. The man said, "I will spend the rest

of my life in jail – I deserve it. But I will also tell every inmate I can how they can get to heaven.” This is the power of the Gospel.

Today we celebrate with six people who want to declare – “We are not ashamed of the Gospel. It is the power of God unto salvation – we too have been saved by Jesus and it is good news. We want the world to know!”

Jesus led the way to the waters of baptism. He had no sin, but he knew we were filled with sin. He alone would be able to cleanse us and give us a fresh start in life. To celebrate that new life Jesus said, “Follow me” which included following him into the waters of baptism.

There, God would say through the Apostle Paul, you show that you have died to your old life of sin as you go under the water, and you are raised up to new life in Christ. What a powerful symbol of what happens in the life of the believer – the old life is buried, and the believer is raised up to a new life.

Fortunately baptism is in water, not dirt. Water was also used in cleansing rituals, and so baptism represents the cleansing that takes place in our lives because of Jesus. Jesus not only forgives our sin, he removes it. “Though your sins be as scarlet, you shall be white as snow.” (Isaiah 1:8) As we used to sing,

Would you be whiter, much whiter than snow?  
There’s pow’r in the blood, pow’r in the blood;  
Sin-stains are lost in its life-giving flow;  
There’s wonderful pow’r in the blood.

Praise God that our sins are not covered up but cleansed from our lives. As Paul wrote to the Corinthian church, “But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.” (1 Corinthians 6:11) Baptism symbolizes this cleansing of our lives.

Are you ashamed of the Gospel? Remember, Gospel means good news – so are you afraid to share good news? This week God rescued John Roach from death – literally. This is good news. I am sure he has told his story many times already.

So has Jeffrey, and Angela, and Roeli, and Shai, and Sherry, and Jireh Nisha. Each has a story to tell of how God reached out to them and drew them to Himself, and they turned to Jesus for salvation. They believed the Gospel message – Christ came to save! And they are not ashamed of the Gospel, and today will witness that fact through baptism.

May they continue to carry that boldness in their hearts and desire to share the Gospel with others. May we all, as God’s people, take our stand for the Gospel of Christ.

We are not ashamed... Amen?