

The Power of God  
Romans 1:16-17

Good morning! You all look fresh today and fully awake. Just like me. Praise God! Say to your neighbor, “You’re looking fresh today. I’m glad to see you.” I hope you had a full breakfast this morning because now that there’s no church waiting after us, I don’t know how long this sermon will be and we could end up an hour after lunch. But don’t worry, I counted the number of pages I have this morning and it remains the same as in the past. I just noticed that this time it is single-spaced not double-spaced.

So, we’re on the third part of our series on “Power to Change”. We’re studying the Letter of Paul to the Romans, which is really a long one, but full of theological and practical implications for our lives today.

I have entitled today’s message, “The Power of God”, and I’m basing it on Romans 1:16-17, which is the theme passage of Romans, where it says, and let’s read together, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith.’”

I read about a pastor that was visiting some of his members. He stopped at a home, knocked on the door. No one came to the door although he could hear the TV and noticed the car was in the driveway. He finally left a note that read, "Revelation 3:20, 'Behold I stand at the door and knock; if any man hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him, and will dine with him, and he with me.'" The following Sunday, the member he visited dropped this note in the offering plate: "Genesis 3:10, 'And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.'"

All of us have had our embarrassing moments. A moment when we felt ashamed. Can you think of a time in your life like that? I remember a time I joined a spelling contest sponsored by Student Canteen. It was a widely popular noontime show in the Philippines before Eat Bulaga or Showtime. That was in the 70's. I was 12 or 13 years old and I felt confident because I topped the audition. The hosts were Eddie Ilarde, Coney Reyes, Bobby Ledesma, and Helen Vela. You remember them?

So, the contest was aired on TV, live. I was sitting together with 5 other contestants facing the audience. There were two rows and I was in front. It was the first round. The first two contestants were called and they made it through. The words were easy being the first round. Now, it was my turn. And suddenly, I saw the cameras were on me, and realizing I was on the spot, I became very nervous because I know everyone's eyes were on me. And people all over the Philippines were watching. I panicked and froze. So, when Eddie Ilarde said, "Your word is 'Amateur'", I had a mental block and I said, "A-M-A-T-U-R-E". The buzzer went off. I was so embarrassed and ashamed of misspelling that simple word. But you know what, somehow, I got back my composure after that and finished the whole contest and spelled all other words correctly but still lost because of one incorrect answer. Still, I was really ashamed because I was carrying the name of our school. In fact, I didn't want to come to school the next day. I did, but I kept quiet most of the time.

When we are ashamed or embarrassed, we don't want to talk to people, right? We just want to keep to ourselves. Somehow, some Christians have that kind of feeling when it comes to the gospel. They don't want to talk about it. But Paul was different. He said, "I am not ashamed of the gospel." In fact, that's the very reason he wanted to go to Rome. In verse 15 he says "I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are in Rome".

Gospel means good news. Gospel is the English word for the Greek euangelion which Paul used in his writings. **Euangelion** is a combination of Eu which means “good” and “angelia” which means “announcement” or “news”. In Latin, it is evangelion and that’s the root of evangelism and evangelist.

So now, we possess the good news. It is something that we should not be ashamed of. It is something we should be proud of. Not proud in the sense that we feel like we’re above all others and we are a part of a privileged group. No! It just means we should share it with others. It’s like if you discovered the medicine that will put an end to covid once-and-for-all wouldn’t you be proud of your discovery and want everyone to benefit from it? If you’re not proud then it means you’re not sure that you really have the cure, that you doubt the efficacy of your medicine and you don’t want to be shamed because of it. And so, you hesitate to share it with others.

Folks, there’s no doubt that we possess the good news, in fact, the best news that people need to hear. Many may not want to hear it but once they hear it, they would realize that they are doomed to die and only this good news will save their lives.

Paul says that he is not ashamed of the gospel **“because it is the power of God that brings salvation.”**

Now, let’s look at this Power of God, the gospel. Why is the Gospel the Power of God?

First, what is the gospel? What is the good news of God? We find the simple answer in 1 Cor. 15:1-2a where Paul says, **“Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved.”** Then, in verse 3, **“For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day**

according to the Scriptures.” In short, the gospel can be summarized as “The good news of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.” That is why you’ll see all these three aspects in the life of Jesus included in every gospel presentation.

So now, let’s look at this Power of God, the gospel. **Why is the Gospel the Power of God?** First,

**1. Because it brings salvation.**

v. 16, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.”

What does the gospel do? It saves sinners. What else will save sinners? Not science, not education, not religion, not moral reformation, not fame and fortune. The gospel, and only the gospel, saves sinners. Sometimes when we see the word “salvation,” we think only in the past tense. But here Paul is thinking of salvation in all three tenses—past, present and future. The gospel has the power to forgive sins (our past), impart new life (our present), and admit into heaven (our future). No other power on earth can do that!

Some of us may be going through a tough time. You’re not sure what you’ll do in your situation. Maybe finances are tight, you’re in deep debt, you have a problem child or spouse or you’re sick or relationships are not going well. Let me tell you that when Jesus saved you, he has saved you from all these troubles. I’m not saying that you won’t experience any of these or they will go away in an instant, but Jesus promises peace in the midst of trouble. He says, **“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”** (John 16:33) That’s the benefit of being a follower of Jesus. He is always beside you and gives you comfort and gives you peace that passes understanding. And the bonus is, he can do a miracle in your situation. But the best thing of all is that because you are saved, you’re looking forward to be with Jesus in heaven.

The Bible says in heaven, “He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” (Revelation 21:4)

Second, why the gospel is the power of God is

2. Because it saves those who believe.

Paul now explains how this gospel saves sinners. “it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes...”

The word “believe” means to make a personal commitment, to trust by an act of the will. That means that the gospel always demands a personal response. It’s never enough simply to hear the gospel; eventually you have to respond to it one way or the other.

Let us suppose that you aren’t feeling well so you decide to go to the doctor for a check-up. He says, “Let’s run a few tests and see what we can find.”

When the results come back, the doctor says, “I’m sorry, but I’ve got some very bad news. You’ve contracted a very rare disease—the Blueberry Cheesecake Virus. You evidently got hold of a bad batch of cheesecake. Unfortunately, the disease is fatal. There is one cure. This medicine has just been developed but you have to take it immediately to have any chance of surviving.” You agree and take the medicine from the doctor. Then you go home, put the bottle on the shelf and promptly forget about it. Because you like Blueberry Cheesecake.

What will happen to you? Before you answer, consider this: You’re sick, you’re dying, and you know it. The medicine will cure you. All you have to do is take it. You’ve got the medicine in your own cabinet. The healing power is only a few inches from your lips. What will happen if you don’t take the medicine? You will surely die. The medicine by itself does you no good. It’s not even good enough to personally own the medicine.

It's not good enough to think to yourself, "I'll take that medicine someday." You've got to personally take the medicine now. If you don't, we'll be having your funeral in just a few days.

It is the same with the gospel of Christ. You are sick with the disease of sin. You've been sick for a long time, and maybe you didn't even know it. The gospel of Christ is the medicine you need. It has the power to save you from sin. But what good will it do if you never "take the medicine?" What hope is there for you? Answer: There is no hope at all! For the gospel has the power to save you, and that power is found nowhere else but in the gospel.

Third,

### 3. Because it saves without discrimination.

"First to the Jew, then to the Gentile."

The last phrase introduces the universal dimension of the gospel. Now, as we learned last week, in the Jewish mind, there are only two races, the Jews and the non-Jews. They call non-Jews Gentiles and Paul was writing from that perspective. Here, he is saying that salvation is available to all people. But why did he prioritize the Jews?

There are a few reasons why Paul wrote this. Paul was an Old Testament scholar and he knew Scripture like the palm of his hand and so he was aware of the role that Jews play in the plan and purpose of God. There are at least 6 reasons, according to John Piper, but let me give you just three **why to the Jews first**:

#### a. The Jews are the Chosen People of God.

In Genesis 12, God chooses Abraham and his descendants freely from all the peoples of the world to bless with his covenant and promise. **Nehemiah 9:7 says,** "God . . . chose Abram and brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans." Then Deuteronomy 14:2 says about the whole Jewish people, **"Out of all the peoples on the face of the earth, the Lord has chosen you to be his treasured possession."**

So, the Jews have a priority over the Gentiles because of their special role as God's elect or chosen people. He set his favor on them and set them apart from all the peoples. Not because of any virtue or special value in them, but simply on the basis of his free choice: "The Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath he swore to your ancestors." (Deut. 7:7-8a) Another reason,

b. The Jews are the guardians of God's special revelation, the Old Testament Scriptures.

In Romans 3:1, Paul asks: "What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew, or what value is there in circumcision?" And he answers in verse 2, "Much in every way! First of all, the Jews have been entrusted with the very words of God." In other words, God gave his special revelation and promises to Israel by Moses and the prophets. Then, in Romans 9:4, he says, "Theirs (referring to the Jews) is the adoption to sonship; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises." And third,

c. Jesus Christ came first as a Jew to the Jews.

In Romans 9:5, Paul brings his list of privileges to a climax with these words: "Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of the Messiah." The Messiah, Jesus, was a Jew. And he focused his earthly ministry on the Jews. They had a priority in his work. In Matthew 10:5-6, Jesus said to the twelve apostles as he sent them out during his life, "Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel." And in Matthew 15:24, Jesus said, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." So during his earthly life, Jesus was focused on the Jews. They had priority in his ministry.

So, the Jews were God's chosen people. And yet, they needed to be saved, too. They have no advantage over the Gentiles in this regard. Like the Gentiles, they need a Savior. That's why Paul wasn't ashamed to preach the gospel in Rome. He knew it had the power to save anyone who would believe it.

That's why God plays no favorites. If he did, he would have brought every Jew to heaven without being saved by the gospel. In fact, there are Christians who teach that. That is not true. It is clear that the only way to get to heaven is by believing in Jesus Christ.

This impacts your life today because it means God accepts you for who you are. Whatever your past is, whatever your background is. He cares for you deeply. He wants you to experience the new life in Jesus.

As we come to verse 17, we see additional reasons why the gospel is the power of God. BTW, this is the verse that changed Martin Luther's life. **"For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith.'"**

**4. It reveals a righteousness which comes only by faith.**

The key word is righteousness, which means to have a right standing in God's eyes. It's a legal term taken from the courtrooms of the ancient world. It means to declare "not guilty" and to declare "innocent of all charges."

The one who is righteous in God's eyes is the one who can stand before him and be declared "not guilty."

Here is where the greatness of the gospel is clearly seen. It provides for us what we could never provide for ourselves. On our own merits we all stand condemned before the Almighty. Who is there who would dare to say, "I am good enough to go to heaven." As someone has said, "A clear conscience is the result of a poor memory." The only people who think they are good enough to go to heaven are the people who don't know how bad they really are!



Righteousness is what we need but do not have. Therefore God, knowing that we could never be righteous on our own, has provided a righteousness which comes down to us from heaven above. It's not earned or deserved but is given to us by God as a free gift. Since it is a free gift, it is received only by faith.

Going back to our verse, it says "...a righteousness that is by faith from first to last..."

The key word here is faith. "Faith from first to last." Not faith plus good works, faith plus religion, faith plus baptism. No! Everyone who is saved, is saved the same way: By faith. It is faith alone and faith always.

This answers the great question: How can I be right with God? The answer is simple: By receiving the righteousness of God that comes only by faith.

In one of his sermons Dr. Barnhouse discusses how unfair it would be if God set a condition for entrance into heaven that could only be met by a small portion of the human race. Let me quote him: "If God demanded a certain degree of intelligence, it would be unfair to morons. If he demanded wealth, it would be unfair to paupers." End of quote. That may sound encouraging but wait till you hear the rest of the story. God demands perfection and he will not accept anything less. If you want to go to heaven, you've got to be perfect. If you think about that, you'll soon realize it basically rules out the entire human race.

If you want to go to heaven, learn this lesson: God Doesn't Make Deals With Sinners. You can come to God on the basis of your own limited righteousness, in which case you will be turned away because you miss the mark of 100% perfection. Or you can come to God on the basis of the 100% righteousness provided by the Lord Jesus Christ, in which case you will be accepted.

Finally, why is the gospel the power of God?

5. Because it declares men and women righteous in the eyes of God.

To prove his point Paul includes a quotation from Habakkuk 2:4, “The righteous will live by faith.” It was this text from Habakkuk that ultimately shook Martin Luther to the core and brought him to saving faith in Jesus Christ. On this point, I quote from a letter by Dr. Paul Luther, the reformer’s youngest son:

“In the year 1544, my late dearest father, in the presence of us all, narrated the whole story of his journey to Rome. He acknowledged with great joy that, in that city, through the Spirit of Jesus Christ, he had come into the knowledge of the truth of the everlasting gospel. It happened this way. As he repeated his prayers on the Lateran staircase, the words of the prophet Habakkuk came suddenly to his mind, “The just shall live by faith.” Thereupon he ceased his prayers, returned to Wittenberg, and took this as the chief foundation of all his doctrine.” (Quoted in A Bunch of Everlastings, by Frank Boreham, pp. 19-20.)

It is by faith alone we are declared righteous. What does it mean to have “faith alone” in this sense? If you know what it means to believe a doctor when he says, “You need surgery,” you know what it means to have faith. If you know what it means to step into an airplane entrusting your safety to the captain in the cockpit, you know what it means to have faith. If you know what it means to ask a lawyer to plead your case in court, you know what it means to have faith.

Faith is complete reliance upon another person to do that which you could never do for yourself.

How much faith does it take to go to heaven? It depends. The answer is not much and all you’ve got. If you are willing to trust Jesus Christ with as much faith as you happen to have, you can be saved. But if you’re holding anything back, thinking that maybe you need to do something to help save yourself, forget it! Saving faith is putting your trust in Jesus Christ and him alone. In order to do that you have to stop trying to save yourself.

Let me say it as plainly as I can. There is good news and bad news from this text. The bad news first: You have no other hope of heaven outside of Jesus Christ. Good works cannot save you. Church membership cannot save you. Baptism cannot save you. Giving money cannot save you. Keeping the Ten Commandments cannot save you. Nothing you can do will make the least bit of difference concerning your eternal salvation. If you are trusting in your good life or in your religion to get you to heaven, someday you will be sadly (and eternally) disappointed.

Now for the good news. Those who put their trust in Jesus Christ alone are saved forever. Simple as that.

Would you like to receive the righteousness of God? You can. The righteousness of God is wrapped up in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

That leads me to a very simple conclusion: Never be ashamed of the gospel. Don't be ashamed to preach it, to teach it, to share it with those you meet. It alone has the power to meet the deepest needs of mankind. It can do what mere philosophy can never do. It has the power to wipe away the darkest stain of sin. No one is beyond the reach of the life-changing gospel of Jesus Christ.

Would you like to go to heaven? You can. There are three things you need to know: You are a sinner. Christ died for you and rose on the third day. You can be saved by trusting in Christ alone.

I am not ashamed to tell you this because I know the gospel can do for you what it has done for millions of people across the centuries. What happened to Martin Luther can happen to you. Those who trust in Christ alone will never be put to shame, not in this life or in the life to come.