**The Gospel: the Power of God for Salvation**

 July 4. 2021 Romans 1:8-17 Key Verse 1:16 “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.”

Last week, we learned that every believer who receives grace receives apostleship also through Jesus Christ. Without the grace of God, we cannot carry the apostleship for God. Without apostleship for God, we cannot say that we received the true grace of God. They always go together inseparably. Today we are going to learn Paul’s broken shepherd heart toward all people on earth, namely the world mission vision originated from his deep sense of obligation (sense of debt) to Jesus’ grace. His deep sense of debt to Jesus’ grace motivated and compelled him constantly to pray for them to find an open door to come to them to preach the gospel truth and eventually to reach to the end of the earth. Most of all, I want to focus today’s message on two verses; verses 16 and 17 which are the main key verses of the entire passage of Romans so that we may learn why we should not be ashamed of the gospel, why everyone needs the gospel, and ***why the gospel is the*** ***power of God*** and what the righteousness of God means. May the Holy Spirit help us to understand the deep meaning of the gospel so that we may experience ***the power of God*** and we may have a great harvest of the gospel. I pray in Jesus’ name. Amen!

1. **Paul’s longing to visit Rome (1:8-14)**

Look at verses 8-10. “First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world. God, whom I serve in my spirit in preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you in my prayers at all times; and I pray that now at last by God’s will the way may be opened for me to come to you.” Paul begins these verses from thanksgiving to God for the faith of the believers in Rome. The reason why Paul was so thankful to God for all the believers in Rome was because their faith was being reported all over the world. Paul knew that it was not easy to keep their pure gospel faith in Rome the capital city of Roman Empire which was the center of Emperor worship and full of all kinds of idol worship and severe social pressure of sexually immoral life styles and activities which was prevailing in Rome. Despite such challenging difficulties, when they kept their pure gospel faith, Paul could not but give thanks to God and he constantly remembered them in his prayers asking God for opening the way for him to come to them. Then what was the reason that he had such an eager desire to go to and see them?

Look at verses 11-13. “I long to see you so that I may impart to you some *spiritual gift* to make you *strong* – that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith. I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that I planned many times to come to you (but have been prevented from doing so until now) in order that I might have a harvest among you, just as I have had among the other Gentiles.” Paul longed to come to see them because he wanted to impart to them some ***spiritual gift*** to make them ***strong*** so that mutually they might be encouraged by each other’s faith and might also have a harvest of the gospel among them, just as he had among the other Gentiles. When we see the entire passages of Romans, we come to understand what Paul meant when he said, “***some spiritual gift to make them strong***.” It is generally believed that the believers in Rome already became Christians before any apostle visited them. So even though their faith was reported to all over the world, most likely they had no chance to be taught yet about the original apostolic teaching about the gospel truth which can give them more systematic understanding of the gospel truth. And like any other gentile churches, the believer in Rome also had some problems such as tension between Jewish believers and gentile believers and some other issues. So they needed to hear Paul’s systematic and solid teachings of the gospel truth. That solid understanding of the gospel would make them strong enough to endure all hardships and overcome all kinds of evil. Likewise, we who are living in postmodern ideology and facing rapidly changing environment in Covid 19 pandemic situation desperately need to hear Paul’s never-changing message of the gospel truth so that each of us may be strong enough to overcome all the evil power in our generation and endure all kinds of hardship.

Look at verses 14-15. “I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish. That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are in Rome.” In these verses Paul shares his sense of obligation to all people; the Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish. Here, in another versions, “I am obligated” is translated as, “I am a debtor.” To whom did Paul become a debtor? As we learned in last week’s message, Paul was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, even killing God’s people including Stephen. When he came to know his sin, he knew that he could not escape from God’s righteous judgment for all he had done in his spiritual ignorance and unbelief. But what an amazing grace! Jesus called him as his apostle forgiving all his sins by his one-sided grace. According to Jesus’ Parable of the Unforgiving (Unmerciful) Servant based on Matthew 18:23-35, it was like canceling the debt of 10000 talents of gold which he could never pay back in his life – the value of 60 Million denarii – 60 Million days of work. When he realized this amazing grace of God, he could not confess that he was the worst sinner among all the sinners. This deep sense of debt toward Jesus compelled him to embrace all people on earth whom Jesus loves. Last week as Pastor Henry explained why grace and apostleship go together inseparably, whoever has been forgiven much loves much and whoever has been forgiven little loves little.” (Luke 7:47) This is the same reason of how Paul could have sense of obligation (sense of debt) to all people whom Jesus loves and cares. This is why Paul was so eager to preach the gospel also to the people who are in Rome. So, if we don’t have the sense of debtor toward anyone in Christ, we must examine our heart whether I really know the grace of God or not.

1. **Gospel is the power of God for salvation (16-17)**

Look at verse 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.” After he shared his eager sense of debt toward all people on earth because of the unpayable grace of Jesus, now he declares a very clear and decisive statement about the reason why he is not ashamed of the gospel. Then let’s think about Why people of the world or sometimes even we Christians are also ashamed of the gospel? First of all, it is because of different value system. People of the world value power and outward success, achievement, and fame. In Paul’s time, Roman people really worshiped a god of power and they boasted their powerful empire achieved by political and military power. People living in these days are not different. On the other hand, the gospel of Jesus Christ advocates weakness and values humbleness and serving like a servant. Jesus himself was crucified on the cross while he claimed that he was and is the King of the kings. To them this was ridiculous and totally unacceptable non-sense. If they are asked to believe such thing, it hurts and offends their pride and self-glory seeking mentality. So they don’t want to accept the gospel. Now a days another reason is because Christianity is becoming relatively minority in the world. People or even Christians sometimes feel afraid of believing or revealing their faith because they are afraid of being labeled as if they are a kind of cult like Jesus freak. In such Christian-unfriendly atmosphere, how then could Paul clearly and boldly say, “I am not ashamed of the gospel…” Because he had clear assurance that Gospel is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.

Here the word, “power” Paul used in this verse originates from the Greek word, **dunamis**. It is the same word Jesus used in Acts 1:8, “But you will receive ***power*** when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” The English words, “**dynamic**, and **dynamite**” are also derived from this word **dunamis**. Here dunamis teaches two different kinds of power. Dynamite shows the explosive power of Gospel that brings salvation to everyone who believes. This power is the power to change a person dramatically and explosively like dynamite in Paul’s example. But not everyone experiences such dynamite-like power of the gospel. The other type of power that the gospel has is dynamic power. It is more like slow, sometimes unnoticeable, gradual change in our inner character. Bible scholars tell Timothy’s case as an example of this dynamic change and most of believers experience such dynamic power to change their life slowly and gradually in their daily life. Anyway, the clear reason why Paul is not ashamed of the gospel is that it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes.

We often underestimate the raw power of the gospel especially when we meet a difficult person who has the most hardened heart. We think we need to add to it, gloss it over or even complicate it. But we have to believe that the gospel is the power of God which brings salvation to everyone who believes. Gospel is the power of God, not human power. Here salvation includes many things such as grace of forgiveness of sin, justification, the change of identity before God, healing, transformation and reshaping of our inner character, and ultimate glorification. We must remember that the Gospel is never an ideology nor idea or theory but it is the power of God that saves and changes our inner person. In next verse; verse 17, this power of God in the gospel is explained in another aspect. The gospel clothes us with the righteousness of God.

Let’s look at verse 17. “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.’” In the Bible, “righteousness” means “right relationship with God.” It is our inner state with which God is well pleased. Since the first man Adam fell, man’s fundamental problem has been his broken relationship with God because of man’s sin of disobedience to God. As a result, men had to live under God’s righteous wrath. Men’s problem is that they don’t have power to overcome the power of sin. In Romans 3:10-12, Paul declares, “As it is written: there is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.” In Romans 3:23, Paul declares again, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Because men are totally powerless and helpless in restoring their right relationship with God, men are totally hopeless and destined to perish eternally in the place prepared for disobeying people. But to such hopeless sinners, good news from God was given. The good news is Jesus the promised Messiah who saves people from their sin. Jesus the promised Messiah died for our sins in our place to fulfill the righteousness that any man could not fulfill. Because Jesus died for our sins in our place to pay the penalty of our sin, God’s righteous wrath was satisfied in his sacrificial death. This righteousness for men was not planned by any men nor achieved by men. From the beginning to the end, it was God who prepared and achieved this righteousness for fallen mankind. That is why we call this righteousness the righteousness of God which means the righteousness planned by God, prepared by God, initiated by God and achieved by God. There is zero contribution of human efforts or achievement in this righteousness of God in the Gospel. This righteousness of God is given only by faith from first to last. It excludes completely any human boast or righteousness. This righteousness of God is perfectly and purely attributed to God’s grace alone 100%. This righteousness of God obtained by faith alone has its original model in the Old Testament: Habakkuk 2:4 says, “See the enemy is puffed up; his desires are not upright-but the righteous person will live by his faithfulness (or faith).” In the time of prophet Habakkuk, the evil and wicked people prevailed and became prosperous while the righteous people suffer. So Habakkuk complained to God asking what he was doing toward evil people. God’s answer is that though God’s judgment looks slow, ‘wait for it’; their end will certainly come. Though the enemy is puffed up (temporarily), the righteous person will live by his faithfulness (or faith).”

As I was preparing today’s message, I realized newly how much I did not know the depth of God’s grace of the forgiveness of sins resulting in how much I could not live life of apostleship, how much I did not know the depth of my sinfulness, how much I did not know the dynamic power of gospel; how much I did not know the righteousness of God that is only by faith from first to last. This September I turn 60. Since I started my life of faith and mission, 40 years has passed. As I reach God’s final day closer and closer, I feel that all I must do is just to repent, repent, and repent and believe, believe, and believe in the gospel. After all, all my life should be about maintaining right relationship with God by faith alone, grace alone, Christ alone, Scripture alone, glory of God alone to the end. May God help me to live life acceptable to God and worthy of his grace of sacrifice!

In conclusion, gospel is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes. Our right relationship with God is achieved only by faith in Christ alone from first to last.

Big Idea: Gospel is the power of God for salvation and righteousness.