

## **The Resurrected Gospel: Bringing the Message and our Passion for the Good News Back to Life (Part 1 of 4)**

### Applying the Gospel

Romans 1:14-17

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*"I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. 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. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."'" (Romans 1:14–17, ESV)*

Today we begin a four-part series on the subject of personal evangelism. This is part of a broader effort in 2013 to live out a vision for maturity that includes an intentional focus in three key areas:

- **Discipleship** – striving to fulfill Colossians 1:28 – “to present everyone mature in Christ” by meeting regularly with another person around the Word and prayer
- **Multiplication** – examining and planning what “College Park Next” looks like in terms of church planting through a multi-campus strategy
- **Evangelism** – igniting a renewed passion for personal evangelism so that followers of Jesus seize God-given opportunities to share their faith

The aim of our Elders is to be sure that as we grow into what it means to be a large church, we do not neglect the basics of the Christian life. Our desire is not just to be a mega-church with all the trappings of success, but to be good shepherds of your souls by calling all of us to what the church is really all about: spiritual maturity.

We believe that a renewed focus on evangelism could have a dramatic effect on our entire church. We are hoping that over the next four weeks, you'll leave motivated to embrace God's purpose in your life when it comes to sharing your faith. In fact, I'm hoping that you'll join me in praying this prayer:

**Lord, would you:**

**Open a door  
Open my mouth  
Open their heart**

Our plan over the next four weeks is to look at the following:

- Applying the Gospel
- Living the Gospel
- Sharing the Gospel
- Celebrating the Gospel

The final week is timed with Easter Sunday. Our hope is that you will use that Sunday as an opportunity to invite someone who is searching spiritually to join you. On Easter we will celebrate the way in which the Resurrected Gospel changes everything. It will be the culmination of these three weeks of learning about the Gospel.

Our subject this morning is applying the Gospel, and I hope to show you a different motivation for evangelism than perhaps what you are used to. My guess is that there are a number of you who heard this subject announced, and you immediately groaned because you've heard many sermons about evangelism that tried to motivate you to share your faith by loading guilt on you. That is not where we are going.

Our text is Romans 1:14-17, and it includes two very winsome parts. First, Paul simply tells the believers in Rome that he cannot wait to get to Rome so that he can preach the Gospel to them. Second, tells them why he loves the Gospel so much.

I think the key is this: rooting evangelism in our love for the Good News. And I think the way we do this is by regularly – daily – applying the Gospel to our lives.

### **Preaching the Gospel to Believers?**

The first chapter of Romans gives us a window into the heart of the Apostle Paul. He was writing to a group of believers whom he had never actually visited, and it is clear that he longs to make a trip to minister to them. Paul had heard about their faith (1:8), prayed for them regularly (1:9-10), earnestly desired to visit them (1:10), wanted to encourage them in their faith (1:12), and had tried previously to make a trip to Rome (1:13). Clearly, Paul's heart was in Rome.

You can see his goal in verse 13: *"...that I may reap some harvest among you as well as among the rest of the Gentiles."* Paul's mission in life was to take the Gospel to beyond the borders of the nation of Israel, and Rome was the capital of the Roman Empire. It was a strategic location to reach the world.

But Paul's motivation was not just related to Rome's strategic influence. He believed he had an obligation to reach everyone with the Good News. His vision for the advancement of the Gospel included people from all walks of life. Therefore, he felt an obligation *"both to the Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and the unwise"* (Rom. 1:14). The term "barbarians" was a blanket term that referred to non-Greek speakers or other nations.

When Paul says in verse 14 that "he is eager to preach the Gospel to you who are in Rome," he certainly has in mind people who had never heard the Gospel message. That is always on his heart. But he has more in mind. Paul intends to preach the Gospel to those who have not heard it

and to those who have heard it. So talking about the Gospel is not limited to those who have never heard. Unbelievers need to know the Gospel, but believers need to rehearse the Gospel.

This was an epiphany for me about ten years ago. You see, I used to think (even as a pastor) that the Gospel was simply something that unsaved people needed to hear and believe. And once you were “saved,” you moved beyond the Gospel. So in my mind I saw a hard and fast line between justification (having your sins forgiven) and sanctification (growing in spiritual maturity). The problem was that I did not really understand how the Gospel applied to my life or my ministry beyond knowing that I was going to heaven. Part of this was a reaction against a model of church that was only interested in “getting people saved” and talking about the same thing every Sunday. So I thought that the Gospel was the starting point. While this is true, it is not complete.

The Bible’s understanding of salvation is much more holistic and the Gospel is much more transformative. Paul had experienced that amazing transformation on the road to Damascus (see Acts 9). But he had also seen the way it completely transformed his life, and in Romans 1:5 we see that Paul’s goal was not just converts, but converted people who embraced “the obedience of faith.” In other words, the Good News was only the starting point. It was not that Paul never needed to hear about the Gospel again. On the contrary, rehearsing the Gospel – even for believers – was a vital part of his life and his ministry. Believers need to apply the Gospel.

### **Three Reasons to Preach the Gospel to Yourself and Others**

Verses 16-17 provide us a window into Paul’s soul as to why he is so passionate about the Gospel and his desire to preach it in Rome. The word “for” is used three times in this text, and it helps to dig a bit deeper into Paul’s motivation and our own.

#### **1. “I’m not ashamed”**

Paul states unequivocally that part of the reason for his desire to preach the Gospel is that he is not ashamed of it. The word “shame” means what Paul would feel if he were involved in a worthless cause or following a dubious person. He states it negatively here, but you could read it another way. Paul is really saying that he loves the Gospel. He is saying that he is proud of the Gospel. Paul has a big heart for the Gospel, and the result is that it isn’t hard for him to talk about it.

What do I mean by the Gospel? I mean the message of the Bible that involves the following fundamental truths:

1. **I’m imperfect** – I’ve sinned many, many times.
2. **I’m powerless** – I cannot fix my own heart.
3. **I’m loved** – Jesus died for me and accepted me.
4. **I’m forgiven** – God has cleansed me.
5. **I’m changed** – Receiving Christ and repenting fundamentally changes who I am – from the inside out.
6. **I have hope** – Real life change comes from His power
7. **I have a future** – I am forever marked by Jesus’ transforming work

This is good news! It is amazing news...the kind of news that you cannot help but share with people. It is an unbelievable message!

## 2. "It is powerful"

The second reason Paul gives for his passion for the Gospel is the reality of its power. He says, *"It is the power of God for salvation for everyone who believes..."* Paul understood the power of the Gospel to save people from their sins, and to radically change their lives. He knew what the Gospel had done in his life, and he knew what it accomplished in the lives of others.

There is power in the Gospel.

Paul knew of the Gospel's ability to transcend and transform people and cultures. It was amazing to see the way in which the Gospel brought meaning, purpose, and mission to people's lives. The Gospel gave people a new identity, motivation, and actions. A relationship with Jesus Christ brought together Jews and Gentiles, slaves and masters, husbands and wives, parents and children, wealthy and poor, and the young and old. Paul knew about the transformative effects of the Gospel.

When you are marked by these truths, it changes everything – not just knowing where you are going to go when you die. So the Gospel is not just about a person's eternal destiny; the Gospel is about a person's daily reality. You live in the Gospel every day. You apply the Gospel every day.

Let me show you two places where Paul does this. In both cases he applies the Gospel to his life. He is a man marked by the Gospel:

*<sup>12</sup>I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, <sup>13</sup>though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, <sup>14</sup>and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. <sup>15</sup>The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. <sup>16</sup>But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life. <sup>17</sup>To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen (1 Timothy 1:12-17)*

*<sup>8</sup>Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. <sup>9</sup>For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. <sup>10</sup>But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me (1 Corinthians 15:8-10).*

Paul never could forget his past. He couldn't change who he was before. But he could eclipse it with the beautiful reality of the Gospel. Jesus had become his Savior and Lord. He was saved from his sins. But even more, he was saved from himself. The Good News is more than just a future hope. It is what you live in and through and by every single day. The Gospel is what you hear, receive, and believe. But it is also what you apply every day.

It is powerful once. But it is also powerful every single day.

### 3. “It reveals righteousness by faith”

Verse 17 is as scandalous as it is glorious. It clearly shows us the plan of God and the path of salvation. The text says, “*the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith...*” This means there is something shown to us about God’s righteousness and how we can be made right with him. The means by which we are made right with God is “by faith.” This is scandalous because no human being deserves this and no one can earn it. A human being is saved by trusting in someone else – namely, Jesus.

Then Paul links this message to the entire Bible by saying “from faith for faith” and by quoting a famous passage from Habakkuk 2:4, “*The righteous shall live by faith.*” This is a powerful statement! It means that righteousness comes to those who believe, who trust, and who put their faith in something other than themselves. It means you believe that even though you are imperfect and powerless, you are still loved, forgiven, changed, and have hope and a future all because of Jesus.

The Gospel is what a person believes by faith once, but it is also something you believe and apply every single day of your life. It is a life of faith and by faith. Let me give you a few examples:

- When it comes to your eternal destiny, you believe that what God has said is true. If you have confessed with your mouth and believed in your heart that Jesus is Lord, you will be saved (Rom. 10:9-10). It means that you believe. And as you get closer to death or when a health scare comes your way, you still believe.
- When you think about your sense of identity and purpose, you apply the Gospel by remembering that your worth doesn’t come from what you do but from what Jesus did for you. It means that purpose in life is not defined by your performance, but by the promise of God’s love over you.
- When you fail miserably, you apply the Gospel by being reminded that God loved you even in your imperfect condition. He knows the nakedness of who you really are. Yet He still loved you and forgave you of all your sins.
- When you are afraid and filled with worry, you apply the Gospel by being reminded that God is sovereign over all events in life. While some events may not make sense or may be very alarming, we can rest knowing God is able to give you grace for whatever you need.
- When you get up and face a normal day, you apply the Gospel by being reminded that everything you do is for the glory of God. You are not just working or raising kids or studying at school or cleaning your bedroom (you’re welcome, moms!) or obeying your parents; you are doing these things for the glory of the one who loved you, saved you, and is keeping you.

Do you see how transformative the Gospel really is? It is not just your eternal destiny; it is how you live daily.

The Gospel in this respect is a bit like marriage. When I pledged my vows to Sarah on June 25, 1993, everything changed. While I was the same person, I entered into a new relationship that touched every aspect of my life and the core of my being. From that moment on, I needed to see life through a different lens, and I had to apply our vows to areas that had previously been exclusive to myself. From that moment on everything was touched by my “oneness” with her –

from decisions to dishes, from finances to friends, from child-rearing to communication, from dreams to diapers, from worship to wallpapering, and from affirmation to affection. Marriage touches everything.

And I have found that the more often I apply my vows, the better and more godly husband I am. Applying my vows to every area of my life is central to what it means to be married – to be one flesh. In fact, marriage has impacted my life in ways that I could have never imagined. I have found that marriage is a great mystery, and the more you apply yourself to the “one-flesh” relationship, the greater and more glorious it becomes.

The same thing is true for the Gospel, but in infinitely more glorious ways. Understanding the Gospel is one thing, but it is an entirely different matter to apply the Gospel. When you apply the Gospel every day, it becomes your identity, your hope, your passion, and your joy.

How does this relate to evangelism? I hope it is obvious! The motivation to share your faith doesn't come from obligation alone. Sure there is an aspect of obligation. But I think that the greater motivation is to be captured with the beauty of the Gospel by applying it all the time. People who share their faith eclipse the fear of rejection and offense because they are convinced that the good news they have to share is the greatest news in all the world.

Believers need to rehearse the Gospel so they will apply the Gospel and so they'll share the Gospel. We should never get over the beautiful implications of these seven truths:

1. **I'm imperfect**
2. **I'm powerless**
3. **I'm loved**
4. **I'm forgiven**
5. **I'm changed**
6. **I have hope**
7. **I have a future**

This is glorious news, and the more we apply it to our lives, the more likely we'll share it. If we are going to be passionate about evangelism, then it has to start with it working within us. We need to have hearts that are captured with the beauty of what the Gospel is all about and what it does.

So here is what I'm asking you to do today with the Gospel:

1. **Know it.** Be sure you really know what the Gospel is all about. Be sure you are in a right relationship with God today. Be sure you really know the Gospel and that you've believed it.
2. **Rehearse it.** Once you know the Gospel, rehearse it, preach it, and re-state it to yourself. Preach the Gospel to yourself. Remind your heart what is really true about you.
3. **Rejoice in it.** This is more than just facts. The Gospel is something to be celebrated. So mediate on it, pray over it, sing about it, and rejoice over it. Don't get over the Gospel.

4. **Talk about it.** When the Gospel grabs your heart and it affects you deeply, people will notice. And when they do – tell them why! Help them see that the Gospel is not just something we believe; it is something that really works. It changes you. It changes everything about you.

You see, applying the Gospel helps us get our motivations for evangelism in the right place by getting our affections in the right place.

We're praying the following prayer this week:

**Lord, would you:**

**Open a door**

**Open my mouth**

**Open their heart**

And being ready for the answer to that prayer starts with learning how to apply the Gospel.

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