

PROUD OF THE GOSPEL

ROMANS 1:16-17

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.

For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “The just shall live by faith.”

In the early 1980s a cowboy from Tulsa, Oklahoma moved to the big city of Chicago to refine his boxing skills, and compete for a heavy-weight championship.

James “*Quick*” Tillis was 6’2” and weighed 210 pounds. His nickname came from his lightning-fast jab.

Tillis remembers getting off the bus, carrying two cheap suitcases, and walking past the Sears Tower in downtown Chicago. Proud of himself and his decision to follow his dreams, Tillis sat his suitcases down on the sidewalk, looked up at the giant tower, and vowed to himself, “I’m going to conquer Chicago.”

But when James reached back down to pick up his suitcases they were gone. They’d been *stolen right out from under him*. The moral of the story is that sometimes pride can get a person into trouble.

But not all pride is bad... There’s a *good kind of pride*, and then there is a *bad kind of pride*.

There’s a **self-centered pride** - a pride that shines the spotlight on us - on our talents, our achievements, our intelligence, our appearance, our possessions.

Whereas, there's also a **noble kind of pride**... *The beaming face of a young dad cradling in his arms his newborn son, admiring a special gift from God... Or a young lady giddy over her engagement, showing her friends the diamond on her finger, the token of her fiancée's love... or a parent watching a child walk the aisle to receive a diploma, feeling a mixture of gratitude to God and the satisfaction of a job well done!...*

If you've been to the doctor lately you know there are two types of cholesterol. There's the good kind of cholesterol, the high density, the HDL. Then there's the bad, clogging kind of cholesterol, the low density, LDL.

The LDL is gooey and sticky and clings to the walls of your arteries hindering the flow of blood. While the HDL is solid and firm and flows through the bloodstream, keeping the pathways cleared.

And likewise there is a *pernicious kind of pride* that sticks to a person's spiritual arteries. It hinders the flow of God's blessing and cuts off our joy... But there's also a *proper kind of pride*. It rejoices in it what God is doing. It savors His grace, and directs the glory to God. A proper pride actually accentuates the work of God.

And here in these two verses Paul exhibits a proper kind of pride! **He is not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ** - *this is high density pride!* Paul never blushed or backed down when it came to sharing the Gospel.

His love for and loyalty to the Gospel was unfettered.

Paul was honored to have been entrusted with such glorious news. He wore the Gospel on *the lapel of his life* like a badge of honor. To Paul, the Gospel was more a source of pride than a Master's Green Jacket, or a World Series ring, or an Olympic Gold Medal!

Paul boasted in the message of the Gospel.

Remember all Paul experienced: he was forced to *sneak out* of Damascus - was *stoned* and left for dead in Lystra - was *stripped and beaten* in Philippi - *stalked and chased out* of Thessalonica - He was *snickered at* in Athens - *scorned* in Corinth - he *stirred up* a riot in Ephesus - and he was nearly *strangled* in Jerusalem.

Because of the Gospel, Paul suffered *physical pain, false accusations, emotional turmoil, spiritual heartache, social isolation, and public humiliation* - yet nothing dampened his enthusiasm for the Gospel!

Paul was proud of the message that had cost him so much! He gloried in the Gospel of Jesus Christ!

Understand, Paul was more than a *persuasive salesman* he was definitely a *satisfied customer*. He had experienced firsthand the effects of the Gospel.

At one time he was a Jewish rabbi who hated all things Jesus. Paul was a killer of Christians, who had taken his show on the road, when the message of the Gospel came to Paul in a shining light. It blinded him physically, but opened his spiritual eyes. On *the road to Damascus* Paul was introduced to *the road to Heaven*.

In light of the Gospel all the rabbi's well-reasoned religion was suddenly reduced to straw. Ideas Paul had taken seriously were transformed into spiritual slapstick. The Gospel cleared away the objections that had kept Paul blind to God's love and to His Son.

This morning our road has intersected with Paul's. I want to speak to you about the message that changed his life, and that he couldn't stop sharing with others.

This past week I had another birthday. And as each year rolls by I re-evaluate how I'm living my life. *What are my priorities?* Life is a gift. *How am I using mine?*

And I always return to the same reality. If I had vast resources of wealth and know-how, and could tackle any of the challenges facing our world today... *clean water, poverty and famine, Ebola and Zika, human trafficking, safe energy, women's rights, illiteracy, etc...*

There is still nothing more deserving of my time and energy than the spread of the Gospel! The truth of Jesus continues to have the potential to do the most good for the most people. In fact, it's really the key to lasting change in all the other dilemmas that we face.

When a human is reconciled to their Creator a love for others, and a heart for good, is born in them. Not to mention, **people last forever.** Of what your eyes will see today, all that's eternal are the people around you.

Its been said, "The Gospel is neither a discussion or a debate, but an announcement." And it's true!

I've got *Good News* for you today... God is not angry with you, as you might've supposed. You don't need to hide from Him any longer. God loves you. He wants to forgive you - and in Christ He's been *dying to prove it!*

Not too long ago, I went to the doctor and I was told I had too much of the wrong kind of cholesterol, and too little of the right kind. And I'm afraid the same diagnosis probably fits many a Christian's spiritual condition.

Their spiritual bloodstream is too full of the wrong kind of pride, and too empty of the right kind of pride.

In fact, let me shock you! You've probably never had a pastor tell you this... **many of you are not proud enough!** Yes, you might possess some *self-centered* pride, but what you lack is *Christ-centered* pride!

Are you proud of the Gospel?

Does it surface in your daily discussions?

*Are you always on the look-out for an opportunity to share it?... Does your **heart swell** when your **mind dwells** on the Gospel?... Does your chest inflate with holy pride when you hear the wonders of the Gospel?*

Over the next few Sundays at Calvary Chapel, leading up to Easter Sunday, we'll be focusing on **evangelism - how to share the Gospel with others.**

But here's step one... You'll never get over your own fears, and modern society's objections, and the devil's intimidation - unless you become proud of the Gospel.

You need the right kind of pride!

Former chaplain of the United States Senate, Lloyd John Ogilvie, once said the average Christian today suffers from what he called, "reverse hypocrisy."

Ogilvie explains the term, "This is not the hypocrisy of trying to be more than we are; it is the hypocrisy of trying to be less than we are. Hypocrites of the old order paraded their faith before men, while hypocrites of the new order deny their faith before men. We are so sensitive to being placed in a category, so aware of the criticism and ridicule of our contemporaries, that we refuse to talk about the central hope of our lives."

In other words, *we believe the Gospel - we've been changed by the Gospel - but we're ashamed or fearful to share it. **We're not proud enough of the Gospel.***

If Paul were wearing a vest when he wrote verses 16 and 17 in Romans 1 I'm sure he popped a few buttons!

Paul was proud of the Gospel!

In these two verses he answers four questions about the Gospel that we want to probe into this morning...

First, **why it restores.** Second, **who it reaches.** Third, **when it registers.** Fourth, **what it reveals.**

First, **why it restores.** How can the Gospel restore the broken, fractured, splintered relationship that exists between God and man - then man and his fellow men?

The word "**gospel**" means "**good news,**" but the *Good News* starts with some *bad news*. The reason people are out of

touch with God, and need to be reconciled to Him, is that sin has created a rift in the relationship.

We've gone our own way. Done our own thing.

Imagine, *twisting and crushing* a co-axil cable - don't be surprised when your television gets bad reception.

Contort the wire in ways that were never intended by the manufacturer, and you're eventually disconnected.

And this is what our sin does. God created us for His purposes - to live in ways designed by Him. Violate His will and you cause a disconnect that God has to repair.

This is the bad news... but don't get bummed out, the Gospel is the way God restores the connection!

Paul tells us the Gospel is the power of God.

Apply the Gospel... It's new wiring. It reattaches man to God, and man to his fellow man - it gets the current of God's Spirit, life, love, joy, strength flowing again.

The world we live in is suffering a massive black out. The Gospel is the only way to turn the lights back on. As Paul says, *"it is the power of God to salvation."*

Paul sums up the Good News of the Gospel in one short, succinct statement found in 1 Corinthians 15. He writes, "I declare to you the Gospel which I preached to you... that Christ died for your sins according to the Scriptures, and was buried, and rose again the third day..." This was Paul's announcement. Jesus was crucified - then buried - and then rose from the dead.

The Gospel is not some *philosophical idea*, or a *subjective opinion*, or a *moral code*. It never needs upgrades, or modifications, or revisions. It's based on objective facts, cemented in the annals of history.

The Christian Gospel is not a passing fancy. It has stood the test of time. There are persecuted Christians in the world today who are as sold out to the Gospel as the first Christians who saw the resurrected Christ.

And the reason is simple... *Jesus is still alive!* He reveals Himself to every new generation of believers.

Paul recognized that the work of Jesus - His death and resurrection - was the power of God to salvation.

The Greek word translated "*power*" is "*dunamis*," from which we get out words, "*dynamic and dynamite*."

The simple truth of the Gospel is a capsule which contains awesome, unharnessed, supernatural power.

The Gospel is an extra-strength pain reliever!

Swallow it - absorb it into your system - and it *grips the mind, stabs the conscience, warms the heart, saves the soul, transforms the life, propels the person*.

The Gospel sobers the drug addict and dries out the drunk. It restores virtue to the prostitute and humbles the stiff-necked hypocrite. The Gospel purifies the lips of a liar and makes the perverted man walk straight.

Its been said, "*The Gospel faithfully preached meddles with everything else on earth*." A simple truth is the unbridled, awesome power of God - to salvation.

And this term “*salvation*” is also an interesting word.

It means “to rescue, to set free.” In the Greek translation of the OT this word was used to describe the liberation of a nation. The Jews were considered “saved” when they returned from exile in Babylon.

Salvation in the biblical sense is the abolition of spiritual slavery. It’s the shattering of a people’s chains.

Salvation is a fresh start - a beginning - a new year. It results in confetti and celebration in the streets. It’s all about joy, freedom, forgiveness, and great jubilation.

It reminds me of the man who's name was accidentally listed in the obituaries. He called the paper to complain. The editor apologized, but the man persisted. The newspaper’s mistake had *cause him humiliation* and probably *cost him some business*.

Finally, the editor told him, “Hey, I’m sorry your name was in the obituaries today. Tomorrow we’ll put it under the birth announcements and you can have a whole new start.” *Don’t you wish a new start was that easy?*

At the time of Paul's writing, people all over the world were looking for salvation. Observant men recognized that Rome was facing a ethical and spiritual crisis. Sin held the populous in a *vice-grip!* People were drowning in a sea of moral anarchy and emotional despair.

Wealthy Romans were known to eat and eat; then purge themselves - or throw up, so they could return for more. Exits in the Roman theater were referred to as *vomitoriums*. After the show people would vomit out.

It's sort of what folks do today at the all-you-can eat buffet. It was an ancient version of Ryan's Steakhouse.

In the ancient world neither Greek logic or Roman law could do anything to arrest the awful corruption that had taken hold of the empire. It appeared as if nothing could rescue Rome from its downward spiral.

The philosopher, Seneca - who was a contemporary of Paul - taught that all men were looking "ad salutem" or "toward salvation." Seneca Himself commented that man's only hope was "a hand let down to lift us up!"

And amazing, that my friends, is exactly what the Gospel provided - **a hand let down to lift us up!**

Paul was no backwoods preacher - no provincial wanderer. He was a cosmopolitan, cultured man.

The Apostle had traveled from east to west - from Arabia to Athens - and he'd seen the world's problems, (*the same problems that befuddle us today*), and Paul was very familiar all the proposed solutions.

Yet, he knew there was only one hope! God had vested His power in only one solution. It's been said, "The world has many religions, but only one Gospel."

Paul was proud of Jesus and His Gospel. It alone was the answer for what the world was searching.

I love the analogy of the man who fell into the pit.

Moses walks by and says, "If you had kept my commandments you wouldn't be in that pit." Buddha walks by and says to the guy, "If you'll come up here, I'll help you."

Muhammed walks by and tells him, "If you don't get out of that pit you'll become my enemy."

Finally, Jesus Christ walks by the pit, He sees the hole the man is in - He jumps in - and helps him out!

Tragically, humans today spend too much time on symptoms, whereas the Gospel addresses the root problem. Psychologists and sociologists try to clean up the stream by skimming off the trash. But the Gospel heads straight to the source of the pollution - it deals with the fountainhead- it shuts off the spigot called sin.

A new beginning is not a pipe dream - its not a pie-in-the-sky promise. It can commence this morning!

God wants to rescue sinful men from the darkness of their sin and bring them into the light of His love and forgiveness - and there is a power present to get it done - *it's the Gospel*. All you have to do is receive!

There were people in the ancient world that scoffed at the Gospel. They mocked, "*how could the death of an obscure, outlaw Jew in Palestine save the world?*"

While excavating the ruins of Rome archeologists found a mural. It was a blasphemous sketch of a slave bowing before a cross, and on the cross the pagan painter had hung a jackass. The caption at the bottom of the drawing read, "*Alexamenos worships his god.*"

Another pompous Roman, a philosopher named Celsus, wrote in the late second century, "*If any man is ignorant, if any is lacking in sense and culture, if any is a fool, let him come boldly (to Christianity).*"

Yet Paul wasn't discouraged or intimidated by these insults. He knew this would happen. He understood God had deliberately chosen to redeem the world in a way that would challenge its wisdom and its values.

In 1 Corinthians 1 Paul explains God's method, "The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent... For it please God through the foolishness of the message... to save those who believe.'"

God used what the Greeks and Romans interpreted as a defeat to mock the world's wisdom. It was the ultimate irony - one man's death - and a *bloody, brutal, barbaric* one at that - brought salvation to all men!

For the sophisticated Greek, unwilling to humble his intellect - clinging to his own logic - this was too much to stomach. For the Roman who admired Conquering Generals, why would God use a victim of crucifixion?

God was deliberately throwing the world a curve.

To the Greeks the cross looked foolish - and to the Romans it was weak. But to the believing heart, Jesus is *God's wisdom* and *God's power*. And *in choosing the cross as a means to salvation, God made sure the first step toward our receiving it was to step over our pride.*

This insured that only people with a simple faith, and open mind, and repentant heart would come to Him.

Realize, sometimes things are not as they seem.

In High School I knew a guy who drove a modest, unassuming, unsuspecting-looking sedan. No vented hood, no wide tires, no dual exhaust, no hot rod stuff...

Yet he'd roll up to an intersection, next to a souped up muscle car - and bait the other driver. The driver and passengers would laugh and mock, until the light turned. They didn't realize that under his hood was the baddest engine in the county. Nobody outran him...

But you never knew it until the *pedal hit the medal*.

And this is why I'm pleading - please, don't misjudge the Gospel. Don't think, "*Oh, this won't work for me. I need something more. I'm looking for something else.*"

Paul was proud of the Gospel because he knew what was under the hood! Compared to the ornate Temples of Roman idols, the cross was unimpressive.

The bread and wine looked meager compared to the lavish pagan ceremonies. Yet Paul wasn't intimidated. He knew what was under the hood of the Gospel.

When the pedal hit the medal - at crunch time - the Gospel of Jesus blew them all away! It was powerful.

That's *why the Gospel restores* - but notice too, **who it reaches**. This too made Paul proud of the Gospel.

He says, "*It is the power of God to everyone who believes...*" The Gospel is for everyone! Young and old, rich and poor, black and white the Gospel is for you.

I really have a tough time buying clothes for my wife.

If I buy too small... *she thinks I think* she should be that small and I'm sending her a subliminal message...

If I buy clothes that are too big for her... *she thinks I think* she's looks fat, and I wish she was skinnier...

The problem is, *she thinks more than I do*... I'm just trying to buy my girl some clothes I think she'll like.

This has gotten so frustrating over the years I've stopped trying to purchase clothes for my wife, **unless** the tag says the magical words, "one size fits all." See the words "one size fits all" and you can't go wrong!

And when you look closely at the tag on the Gospel you'll also find those same words, "one size fits all!"

The same Gospel is as suited for the College professor as for the High School drop-out. It fits as well on the emotional, as it does on the intellectual. It works equally well on child or adult... on man or on woman...

The same Gospel works regardless of your *circumstances*, or *culture*, or *climate*. It's exactly what the factory worker in Russia needs - the natives in Australia need - the barkeeper in Ireland needs - the rabbi in Israel needs - the housewife in Atlanta needs...

It doesn't matter your IQ, language, background, appearance, diet, taste in music, even your college football team preference - **the Gospel is for you!**

I'll never forget the night when my five year-old daughter, knelt in my home office with tears streaming down her face and was changed by the Gospel...

And it was the same Gospel that had transformed the life of a fifty year-old truck driver, I once led to Christ while we were sitting on top of a tractor-trailer.

The Gospel is what the boss needs, the neighbor needs, the friend needs, the teenager needs. The Gospel is the power of God *to everyone* who believes!

But there's a third question Paul answers here, **when does it register.** At what moment does the Gospel take effect in a person's life? What is required for the Gospel to be received? And again, notice God's love of simplicity - it's for **"everyone who believes."**

That's all it takes is faith - a moment of belief.

In the movie, **"We Bought A Zoo,"** Matt Damon plays a bereaved husband who quits his job, takes his kids, and buys a 18 acre, run-down wildlife park. He wants to do something memorable with his kids. Their zoo becomes an adventure that bonds the family together.

At one point in the movie, Damon gets asked why he did it. He says, **"Sometimes all you need is twenty seconds of insane courage. Just literally twenty seconds of embarrassing bravery. And I promise you, something great will come of it."** Imagine, twenty seconds of **insane courage** can transform your life.

But this is true of the Gospel. It doesn't take years of labor, or days of introspection, or hours of struggle...

All it takes to receive the Gospel is to hear it, and allow it to excite your heart, and believe it'll do what it promises, then

embrace it for yourself... Just twenty seconds of *“embarrassing bravery”* and it can happen.

Its sad, how people and churches have complicated the Gospel. Rather than *Good News*, some churches preach **good wishes** - *learn to think positively... visualize what you can be... have faith in your faith...*

Other churches preach **good wisdom**. *Get into a support group so you can talk about life and be accountable... or find a "how to" book on the subject...*

Still other churches preach **good works**. They'll tell you what you need to do - *the twelve steps, or seven principles. Follow the formula, man - that's the ticket.*

But the Gospel isn't *good wishes* or *good wisdom* or *good works*, it's *Good News*. Not *self-help*, it's *Christ-help*. It's not your ingenuity, or effort, or kind deeds, or good conduct, or moral purity - its the power of God!

What people don't need today is another course, or a new counseling technique. We don't need *behavior modification* we need *spiritual transformation*. We need the power of a person - the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

What Paul preached was not a *principle*, or a *philosophy* - but a *person* who died in our place and rose from the dead!... If you've got a technique, or a formula, or 12-step program - and you can take Jesus out of it without altering its effectiveness, you might have *good advice*, but you don't have the *Good News*.

The Good News is God's *one step approach*. Jesus has done it all. **It is finished.** We need to trust Him.

Christianity is not a *way to behave* it's a *fact to believe*. When it comes to our forgiveness, all that needed to be done has been done on the cross. And now if you ask Him, God will forgive your sins and fill your heart with power, and peace, and His presence.

A friend of mine once walked into a Kingdom Hall. After the meeting everyone approached him trying to indoctrinate him in Jehovah Witness' doctrine.

He answered them with a single question, "If I had just one hour to live what must I do to be saved?" They mumbled for awhile, but never gave a straight answer.

One hour didn't give him time to go through their indoctrination, or peddle their magazines - there was no time to earn his place in their kingdom. Thus, they offered him no hope. That is NOT the Gospel!

Seconds before he died the thief on the cross put his faith in Jesus. In twenty seconds of "insane courage" and "embarrassing bravery," he said, "Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom." And Jesus answered, "Today, you will be with Me in Paradise."

It doesn't take six month's orientation - or a month's probation - or a week-long plan of memorization - or a day's indoctrination... *all you need is a heart of faith.*

Ephesians 2:8-9 settles it, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast."

And finally, Paul answers one more question about the Gospel, **what it reveals**. Verse 17 tells us the Christian Gospel reveals *“the righteousness of God.”*

This is a key word in Paul's letter to the Romans. It occurs 35 times in this one book. In a narrow sense *“righteousness”* means **“conformity to what's right.”** It's the combining of purity, goodness, justice, kindness. A righteous person does what's right in every situation.

Yet in a broader way the word *“righteousness”* refers to **“a right standing with God.”** And in this sense, righteousness should be the bottomline in all religion.

Gaining and maintaining a right standing with God is what religion is all about. If a religion can't resolve the issue of sin - if it can't obtain for you a pardon - if it can't produce some goodness in you - *its worthless!*

Yet the mistake of all religions except Christianity is assuming that the righteous person is the one who somehow makes himself righteous - *that's not true.*

Here Paul quotes Habakkuk 2:4, **“the just shall live by faith.”** The man or woman who enjoys living in a right standing with God - didn't get there by being *“righteous”* or *“just”* themselves - it took living by faith.

You don't have to grind out some goodness to earn your way to God - to prove you deserve His blessing.

Try that tactic and you'll never measure up! Salvation is not what you *achieve*, its what you *receive* by faith.

Martin Luther once said, "If salvation could be attained only by working hard, then surely horses and donkeys would be in heaven." *Just not any humans.*

How is a man *made right* with God, and how does he *stay right* with God? The answer is a life of faith!

Speaking of Martin Luther he discovered this truth while on a pilgrimage to Rome. In Rome there is a cathedral containing a famous staircase - supposedly the stairs from Pilate's Judgment Hall. Legend has it the staircase was dismantled and brought to Rome from Jerusalem during the period of the Crusades.

Even today remorseful sinners come to Rome from all over the world to climb the staircase on their knees, stopping on each step to pray. The stones are hard on a person's knees. This ordeal was the penance Luther felt was necessary to make himself a righteous man.

Yet half way up the staircase, suddenly this verse, Romans 1:17, penetrated his thoughts. It hit him, the just man doesn't make himself just, he receives that status by faith! Luther rose up from his knees, now free and forgiven, and returned to Germany a new man.

He wrote of his experience later, "When, by the Spirit of God, I understood those words - 'the just shall live by faith!' - I felt born again like a new man; I entered through the open doors into the very Paradise of God."

The Gospel of Christ is more than *good wishes*, or *good wisdom*, or *good works* - it is the *Good News*.

And it can change the hardest of men - and the most jaded of women. It's the most powerful change agent on Earth. It's our needy world's most desperate need.

For each of us the Gospel is just twenty seconds of embarrassing bravery, but it can change a life - it can impact a family or nation - it can alter an entire destiny!

Are you proud of the Gospel?

Proud enough to let it have its full effect on you?

Proud enough to proclaim it to others?

Jesus was not ashamed to go to the cross for you. Let's not be ashamed to share the Gospel with others.

Over the next few weeks we'll be talking about the vital task of sharing our faith with the people around us.

But we'll never take that first step - we'll never even open our mouth - unless we're proud of the Gospel!