

Threads: The Gospel and Personal Evangelism

The Gospel and Personal Evangelism

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THE GOSPEL AND PERSONAL EVANGELISM Romans 1:1-17

If you have a Bible and I hope you do, let me invite you to open with me to Romans 1, and when you find Romans 1, I want us to make a shift from where we've been the last six to eight weeks. I've said the last two weeks, the beginning of each of those messages on the gospel and divorce and the gospel and homosexuality that there was an uneasiness in me when approaching those issues. I think in some ways the shoe might be on the other foot tonight as we talk about the gospel and personal evangelism. I realize that as soon as that word evangelism comes out that it sends a chill down many Christian spines in this room as you start to think about this idea of throwing up our faith on unsuspecting passersby and you think, "That's not me, I'm not into that." I want to assure you from the beginning tonight that I'm not into that either. I'm not into throwing up our faith on unsuspecting passersby. But I do think there's a picture in personal evangelism that we need to rediscover. I want to challenge maybe some of your preexisting ideas about personal evangelism.

I want to start by taking you on a journey with me to a city in the Middle East and I want you to imagine with me standing on a mountaintop overlooking a city of 1.2 million people in the heart of the Middle East and you are surrounded by rolling hills with homes scattered throughout those hills and in your panoramic view of this city you can literally see 1.2 million people before you, and most of them—and by most of them I mean 80-90% of them—have never personally heard the gospel before. Not only have they not heard, but what's worse is if you tried to share the gospel with them, you could be arrested. It's illegal for you to share the gospel with them and even if you took that risk and they came to faith in Christ, then they could be killed in this particular city. So the question is how do you spread the gospel in a city like that?

We were working there just a few months ago with an incredible group of Christ followers who have a business there in this particular country, and this is the way they described how they were making the gospel known all across this city. They said, "We go everyday from shop to shop, from market to market, from house to house, interacting with Muslim people everywhere." They said, "We want to sew threads of the kingdom in front of Muslims every single day. We want to sew threads of kindness, the gentleness of the kingdom, the compassion of the kingdom, the love of the kingdom, the mercy of the kingdom of God. We want to sew threads of the kingdom before them, different colors, different shades, in our different interactions with Muslims on a day by day basis and we are praying that as we live out the kingdom in front of these Muslims, as we are not able to share verbally the gospel, as we live out the kingdom in front of them that there will come a day," and especially in the people they work with closely they're praying that God will open their eyes to see one day the beauty of all of these colors and shades and threads coming together in a beautiful quilt of the kingdom, a picture of the gospel and they'll have an opportunity to bring that picture together and share the gospel. It's happening.

I met with one family and a lady in this particular family had seen the kingdom, the threads of the kingdom sewn in front of her day after day after day and she had begun to ask questions and a long story short, she had come to faith in Christ, at great risk to her, for if her family found out then she would undoubtedly be killed by her family. But her eyes were opened to see the beauty of Christ in the middle of that culture as she had seen threads of the kingdom sewn in front of her every day.

So here's what I want us to do. Let's take that picture, let's travel back over here to Birmingham where we have a city, metro Birmingham, about the same number of people as that particular city, and I want you to imagine with me 4,000 people from The Church at Brook Hills gathered here today, scattered throughout this city, metro Birmingham, radically abandoned to personal evangelism all week long, not personal evangelism in that we're all loaded with tracts or incredible acrostics in our head, but we are radically abandoned to looking for opportunities with our kids, with our neighbors, with our coworkers to sew threads of the gospel in front of them, day after day after day, not trying to find those opportunities where we can just pounce on someone and share an hour presentation of the gospel. Instead, how can we use daily conversations to point people to pictures of the gospel. Simple ways in normal conversation, and along the way be very intentional about praying that God will open coworkers' eyes, neighbor's eyes, children's eyes, parents' eyes, to see the beauty of the gospel in front of them, that God would give us opportunities then to bring those colors and those shades together in the gospel and introduce people to the beauty of Christ for the first time. That's the picture I'd like to get in our minds as we start this series. It's going to be a short four-week series. I want us to be a faith family that cares about introducing people to Christ, that is serious about giving our lives to introduce people to the beauty and the glory of Christ.

Here's how we're going to do this. Over the next four weeks I want us to start in Romans and what I want us to do over the next four weeks is I want us to look, and we're going to look at five primary gospel threads, so to speak, threads of the gospel that weave together all throughout the book of Romans, that can be woven in the fabric of our conversations, that can be woven in the fabric of our thoughts on a daily basis, in an effort and a prayer that God will use these threads, so to speak, to be before those in Birmingham who don't know Christ on a day by day basis and pray that God will use these threads in our lives from our mouths to introduce people to Christ. We're going to start in Romans 1 by looking at what I am convinced is the starting point for any discussion of personal evangelism and that's the heart. Before we even get into these threads and how that looks and the way we talk and the way we live, we're going to dive into that the next three weeks. I want us to just pause tonight at the start of this series and I want us to think about our hearts. I want you to know from the very beginning I don't think the most effective way to compel the church, followers of Christ, to do personal evangelism is to lay guilt trips on them. For those of you who have been a Christian very long, you know this is a primary means, primary motivation for evangelism. Just make them feel bad and they'll do it. That's not the goal tonight. Instead I want us to look at our hearts. John Stott, one of my favorite preachers, he said, "The greatest single hindrance to personal evangelism today is the secret poverty of our own spiritual experience." The greatest single hindrance to personal evangelism in our lives is the secret poverty of our own spiritual experience. In other words, there's a heart issue, and when that heart issue is compelled, when our heart's compelled by the gospel, then that radically affects our involvement in personal evangelism. So I want us to examine our hearts based on the heart of the Apostle Paul who wrote the book of Romans.

In the first half of chapter 1, he gives us an overview, kind of a microcosm of the entire book. I want us to start there this week and then in the weeks to come, unpack, especially

chapters 1-8 in Romans and I want us to see these gospel threads that are interwoven throughout.

Foundations for Personal Evangelism ...

The book of Romans, especially these first eight chapters is the most incredible theology of the gospel anywhere in Scripture. It is thick and I want us to start tonight by seeing why Paul was so compelled to claim the gospel. Follow along with me, Romans 1:1. I want you to hear what he writes to the church in Rome. Listen to his heart. I want you to get a feel for his heart in this passage.

Verse 1:

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God— the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord. Through him and for his name's sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith. And you also are among those who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.

To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

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 with my whole heart 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.

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, 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.

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 at Rome.

This is the thesis, these next two verses, of the entire book. Paul says, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith'" (Rom. 1:1-17). The heart of Paul, Romans 1:1-17. Based on that heart I want to show you four essential foundations before we get into any discussion of personal evangelism, before we even think about what personal evangelism looks like in our lives; heart issues. What are these foundations?

We Need to Remember Whose We Are

Foundation number one, we need to first and foremost, we need to remember whose we are, whose we are. On the surface, Romans 1, especially 1-7, is an introduction to Paul. It looks like he's kind of describing who he is, but really it's a lot deeper than that. When you look into it, you see that Paul's entire identity in Romans 1 is wrapped in who Christ is and what Christ has done in his life. Paul, a servant of Christ, called by Christ, set apart for Christ, through Him for His name's sake we received, all of these things that make up the person of Paul are dependent upon the person of Christ. Everything he has he has because of Christ. His entire description of himself in this introduction is based on the fact that he belongs to Christ. There are some reminders here. Even in just verse 1 we could spend the whole night here in verse 1. I want you to remember whose we are based on verse 1.

First, we are servants of the gospel. A servant of Christ Jesus is what Paul describes himself as. Now that doesn't seem like that big a phrase to us but you read this in first century Rome, this is a huge description of Paul for himself. That word, a servant, you might circle it with a little note out to the side, the word in the original language of the New Testament is a great word. It's called *doulos*, which means "slave".

You've got to picture this. In first century Rome you had millions of slaves. They were property. They belonged to an owner. They belonged to a master. I want you to catch the gravity of what Paul is saying here. When he calls himself a slave of Christ Jesus, what you had, put yourself in first century Rome eyes. You have a poor Jewish carpenter named Jesus down in this capital city of a country Romans conquered. This poor Jewish carpenter is crucified. He's killed on a cross, the most degrading, vile way to die, even the worst Roman citizen, worst Roman criminal would not die this way. This was the ultimate in shame. This poor Jewish carpenter is sentenced to die that way by a Roman governor named Pilate. So what you have is Paul coming on the scene writing a letter to Rome and he says that poor Jewish carpenter that died the most shameful death that you know about is alive and I am his slave. He owns me. He rules me. That's weird. It's delusional. I'm a slave to a guy who died on a cross, makes no sense.

But this is how Paul described himself. This is what he would say in the very next book, 1 Corinthians 6:19-20. He says, "[We] are not [our] own. [We] are bought with a price." 3:5 in 1 Corinthians uses a word that's translated "servants" in our Bibles, but the word is *diakonia*—literally means "one who waits on tables". That's how he describes himself, as one who waits on tables, in relation to Christ. You get to 4:1, you've got the word "servants" again but it's another word in the original language of the New Testament that literally means "under rowers", which, follow me here, under rowers were the slaves that worked in the bottom galley of a large Roman ship that would do the rowing down there. It was the most demeaning work a slave would do, the most dangerous work a slave would do. This was the lowest of the low, and Paul when he described himself is reaching into these terms that are shameful in that culture and saying, "I am a slave, I'm a servant, I'm like one who waits on tables, I'm like an under rower in relationship to Jesus Christ." We are servants of the gospel. It's a reminder to every single one of us in this room who is a follower of Christ.

Ladies and gentlemen you are not your own. You're not your own. You're owned by another. You are ruled by another. You've been bought with a price. You have, as a follower of Christ, sacrificed the right to determine the direction of your lives. Men, you do not determine where you go in your life, where your family goes. Christ determines these things. You do not chart your course, chart your plans. Christ charts your course, He charts your plans. There is absolutely no room in Scripture for calling this Jesus Savior and not submitting to this Jesus as the absolute Lord of your life. You're not your own. We are

servants of the gospel. Before we are moms or dads, before we are husbands or wives in this room, before we are teachers, before we are students, before we are lawyers, before we are accountants, before we are anything else, we are servants of the gospel. This is our identity. "Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle."

Second, we are sent out with the gospel. This word "apostle", now I want to be careful here because when Paul talks about being called to be an apostle, he's using a very specific term that refers to him and the twelve disciples, Judas excluded. Matthias, Acts 1, replaces Judas. What you had were thirteen apostles, twelve disciples, and then Paul, who were eyewitnesses to the resurrection of Christ, Paul in a different way than those twelve disciples, who had been chosen by Christ and sent out; that's what the word apostle literally means, "the one who was sent", sent out to lead the church. So when Paul talks about being called to be an apostle, then he's talking about this specific call that was on his life. Now here's why I think we're safe in applying this picture of being sent out with the gospel to us though. Fast forward with me to Romans 16. Go to the very last chapter in this book. The majority of times in the New Testament we see this word *apostolos*, the one who is sent out—apostles. The majority of times we see it it's referring to those thirteen guys but there are also times when it refers to a broader group of believers outside of those thirteen guys.

Let me show you this. Romans 16:7, listen to what he's doing. He's making some greetings to some different folks and I want you to hear how he describes these particular guys. Romans 16:7, "*Greet Andronicus and Junias, my relatives who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding among,*"—the who?—"Among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was." These two guys aren't a part of the twelve, they aren't Paul, but they are still called apostles here. Same picture when you go to Acts 14:14, Barnabas is called an apostle there. Philippians 2:25, Epaphroditus is referred to, the word in the original language of the New Testament, as an apostle; 2 Corinthians 8:23 talks about an unnamed group of apostles. What you have is this word, those who are sent out, applied most specifically to those thirteen but in a more generic way to every believer. This is the picture in the New Testament.

Acts 1:8 makes this a reality. The Spirit of God is on every single follower of Christ in this room. The Spirit of God is on us so that we might be what? Witnesses, witnesses to the gospel. We are all sent out with the gospel. People sometimes say things like, "When it comes to witnessing I just wait until the Holy Spirit leads me." We kind of have this idea that some weird chill is going to come over our body, we're going to get some kind of just weird feeling and it's like, "Okay I guess the Spirit is telling me to tell someone else about eternal life now." That's a ridiculous idea. We don't have to wait for the Spirit to lead us, because He's already led us. That's the whole reason He's in us. We've been sent out with the gospel. The Spirit is in us that we might be witnesses to the gospel. That's a given. So don't wonder if you don't have the feeling whether or not you're supposed to proclaim the gospel. Proclaim it because that's why the Spirit's in you in the first place. We are servants of the gospel, we are all sent out with the gospel, and here's where it gets really good, we are set apart for the gospel.

The last phrase he uses in Romans 1:1, "*Set apart for the gospel of God.*" The same thing is reiterated down in verse 7 when it says, "*To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints,*" that picture, saints are supposed to be set apart.

Now here's the cool thing. Back in the Old Testament, what you had was God setting things apart for specific purposes. You had God taking the tabernacle. He said this is set apart for His worship. God takes the temple and says this is set apart as a display of His glory. He

takes tithes and offerings. In the Old Testament they are set apart for certain purposes. That's the language that is used in the Old Testament for these different things.

The beauty of it is when you get to the New Testament, every believer in Christ is set apart, not these things, no tabernacle, no temple picture. Not even the same tithes and offerings picture. Instead you've got believers set apart for the gospel. Now this is absolutely huge, because I am convinced we have a dangerously Old Testament view of the spread of the gospel in the Church today.

I want you to follow with me here. In all of our church growth thinking, we actually believe, we have convinced ourselves, that the best way to advance the gospel is to invite people to church.

I was looking back over some notes in my journal from this time last year and I was reminded of a conversation with a leader of a well known church who told me that Brook Hills would not be effective engaging lost culture in Birmingham until we'd designed our worship service around lost people in Birmingham. This is the idea that you get great music and you get a great speaker and you put together a great environment, great programs and performances at the building, and you invite people to come to the building and you put all these things together and people will come to Christ. So, invite them to church.

What I want to say to you tonight is very simple. Do not invite people to church. Do not invite people to church. In fact, don't go to church yourself. Don't go to church, and don't invite them to church. You are the church! You don't have to bring them to a building to see the glory of God. You have the glory of God in you! Don't invite them to go somewhere, you're there! You don't have to invite them. They're right there. They have the church right in front of them. This is our lives. Our lives are the display of the gospel and the glory of Christ, not a building, not programs or performances that we can come up with. Do we really think that lost people in Birmingham are going to flock to this building?! The reality is the majority of lost people in Birmingham are not going to come to this building once a week. But lost people in Birmingham are going to rub shoulders with the Church all week long, with you all week long, with me all week long. This is the picture. It's one thing for me to be equipped or enabled or empowered to preach the gospel once a week. It's a whole other ball game when 4,000 people who gathered here today are equipped, enabled, and empowered to preach the gospel all week long. Which one's going to be more effective in spreading the gospel throughout Birmingham?

This is why we're not going to spend all of our resources on establishing the best programs and performances here to attract as many people to a building. This is why we're going to spend all of our resources on mobilizing the best people to go out from here into the city of Birmingham, and into all nations, equipped, empowered, and enabled to proclaim the gospel. Why? Because people, not programs, not performances, people are God's method for winning the world to Himself. I believe in the people of God. Scripture believes in the people of God, the power of the people of God, the power of the gospel at work in the people of God. Do not, ladies and gentlemen, do not let the institution of the church, the programs of the church, the performances of the church, rob you of what it means to be set apart for the gospel of God. This is a privilege we have as followers of Christ. We are servants of the gospel. We are sent out with the gospel and set out for the gospel.

Now you can invite people to worship with us; that's great. You can come to worship. That's a good thing too. But be the church. That's the picture, the New Testament picture of the gospel going out. Remember whose we are, servants of the gospel, sent out with the gospel, set apart with the gospel.

We Need to Recognize What We Believe

Second, we need to recognize what we believe. We need to recognize what we believe. In order to proclaim the gospel, it goes without saying we need to know the gospel. That's exactly what Paul does when you get to verse 2, 3, and 4. He gives us kind of a summary of the gospel. *"The gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord."*

That's a three-verse description, the gospel in a nutshell, Paul taking the gospel and putting it in the context of his readers there. This is big. This is why we did that life blood series a few months ago, because, and it's kind of set us on the course we find ourselves now, because I'm convicted that we have taken the gospel, the very life blood out of our faith. We've put Kool-Aid in its place. We've gotten this idea that pray this prayer and you get a ticket out of the line going to hell and you get a ticket in the line going to heaven and this is the gospel. There's so much more we're robbing ourselves of the gospel when we think of the gospel like that. So we dove into that series.

I don't know if you remember. We spent one week in Romans 3:21-26. We asked the question, "What is the gospel?" If you were here that day we turned our notes over and we wrote down on the back, "What is the gospel?" I'm convinced I want us as a faith family to know the gospel well. We need to know the gospel like the back of our hands, the center of our hearts. Now I want to be careful here because the goal is never to take the gospel and bring it down to this irreducible minimum. The goal is never to package the gospel as cleanly as possible so it's easy to sell. That's not the picture. But at the same time, we need to be able to do Romans 1:2-4 in every one of our lives. Here's the gospel. Here's what the gospel is. It's very core.

This is our faith. If we don't know the gospel then we are going to miss out on not only what it means to share the gospel but what it means to experience the grace of God on a daily basis as the gospel works out its implications in our daily lives.

So you've got in your notes there, I've put the summary of the gospel that we saw in Romans 3 just as a reminder, how we looked at it that day.

The gospel is the good news that the just and gracious God of the universe looked upon hopelessly sinful people and sent His Son, Jesus Christ, God in the flesh to bear His wrath against sin on the cross and to show His power over sin in the resurrection so that all who have faith in Him will be reconciled to God forever.

This is the picture of the gospel. What I want us to do over the next couple of weeks is I want us to take that picture of the gospel in Romans 3 and I want us to unpack these five different threads. I'm going to put them before you tonight and then we're going to unpack them in weeks to come. We're just going to kind of fly over them tonight to just give you a bit of a preview of where we're going.

Thread number one is the character of God. God is the starting point of the gospel. He is the ending point of the gospel. This is the gospel of God, who God is, how God acts, fundamental to understanding the gospel, His character.

Second, the sinfulness of man. Paul takes great pains throughout the book of Romans to show us a picture of man's depravity, man's sinfulness. This is the part of the gospel that we often gloss over in our day. We must be careful not to gloss over. The sinfulness of man is fundamental to understanding the gospel. We do not receive salvation until we understand sinfulness; can't bypass sinfulness. We've got to be careful in trying to sell the gospel to as many people as possible, make it as palatable to as many people as possible in our culture, that we don't make the mistake of thinking that the gospel soothes sin. It doesn't soothe sin. The gospel slays sin. The gospel confronts our pride in a harsh way. In a harsh way that overcomes sin but it directly attacks sin in our lives and that's a good thing. We need sin to be confronted in our lives.

Character of God, the sinfulness of man, and third, the sufficiency of Christ. Christ is the center of the gospel and by sufficiency of Christ I'm referring to both the person of Christ, and the work of Christ. The person of Christ you see in verse 3-4 in Romans 1. You see His humanity mentioned in verse 3. You see His divinity mentioned in verse 4. He is fully human, fully divine, His person and His work, His life, His death, His resurrection from the dead. The person and the work of Christ is fundamental to understanding the gospel. What was it about what happened at the cross that provides forgiveness of sin for all people in all human history? What was so significant about that moment? It's the character of God, sinfulness of man, sufficiency of Christ.

The fourth thread is the necessity of faith. This is all over the book of Romans, especially end of chapter 3, chapter 4, chapter 5. Faith is the means by which this gospel becomes a reality in our lives, by which this gospel is appropriated in our hearts. It says it right here, *"To the obedience that comes from faith."* It's not a faith that's some cold, intellectual, doctrinal belief in certain truths. It's different than that. It's a life. It's obedience that comes from faith. It's truth that flows out into experience, the necessity of faith.

Then fifth, the urgency of eternity. It's the last thread that we're going to look at. How this gospel has implications for every single one of our lives, not just now, but for all of eternity. The eternity of every man and woman not only in this room but in all of history is dependent on response to this gospel.

What I want us to consider over the next few weeks is how those five threads that are woven throughout the book of Romans, how they can be woven into the fabric of our lives in the way we parent, in the way we work, in the way we hang out with the guys on the weekend, in the way we interact with the people around us. How can those threads of the gospel become a natural part of our minds and our mouths, how can those threads of the gospel infiltrate our daily conversations? I'm not saying that you're going to be sitting around work table and just decide in the middle of the meeting to go off on the depravity of man. But there is a way to take these gospel threads and sew them every single day. That's what I want us to look at in the days to come. We can't do that though if we don't know these threads. We need to recognize what we believe. Remember whose we are, recognize what we believe.

We Need to Realize Why We're Here

Third, we need to realize why we're here. Now we're getting to the heart here. In verse 5, when Paul says, *"Through Him and for His name's sake, we received grace and apostleship,"* why? *"To call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith."* I want you to see this. Paul received the gospel but he knew that's not the end of the gospel. God's aim in showing Paul the gospel was not so that Paul would have it. Let me say that one more time. God's aim in giving Paul the gospel, showing Paul the gospel, opening Paul's eyes to the gospel was not so that Paul would have it. It's deeper than that.

In fact, flip over to the right. Go past 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians. Go to Galatians 1. Just three books over to the right. Galatians 1:15-16. If you don't have these verses underlined in your Bible I would encourage you to underline them. It's a picture of the purpose of God in the gospel as Paul describes it. I want you to listen to how he connects the grace of God with the purpose of God. Look at this. Galatians 1:15 listen to what Paul says. He's recounting what God has done in his life and he says these words, "*When God, who set me apart from birth and called me by His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son in me so that,*" here's the purpose, the purpose clause, "*so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles,*" or the nations. Now I want us to pause there.

Think about what he just said. "*God who...called me by His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach Him among the nations*" (Gal. 1:15). Paul, why did God show you Jesus? Why did He show you the gospel? Paul says, "He showed me the gospel so that I might do..." What? Sit back and enjoy a religious routine every Sunday? So that I might indulge in the pleasures of this world and have a get out of hell free card in the end of it? "He gave me the gospel for one reason, so that I would preach the gospel to the nations." The end of the gospel, the end of God's design for the gospel in Paul's life was not centered on him. It was centered on the nations. This is the picture.

Contrary to the popular songs or ideas we might feel, when Jesus died on that cross, He didn't die just for you and He didn't die just for me. He died, Luke 24:47-49, so that repentance and forgiveness of sins would be preached in all nations. The reason any one of us has the gospel in this room is so that we might proclaim that gospel. It's not a gospel that's intended for self-consumption. It's a gospel that's intended for global multiplication.

What does this mean? Why are we here? First of all we're here to exalt His name, for His name's sake. All revolves around God. God gives the gospel for His name's sake. He gives the gospel for Himself. God is radically committed to His glory in giving us the gospel. I want to remind us three truths we saw in *Lifeblood*, in that series that I want to bring back into the concept of evangelism here. I'm just going to run through them. But think about this with me. We talked about these things when we looked at Romans 3. Think about them in the context of personal evangelism.

First, God is the giver of the gospel. He's the one who gives the gospel. Not one of us can manufacture salvation. Not one of us can make ourselves righteous before God. God must declare us righteous. None of us takes the initiative in salvation in the gospel. The initiative in the gospel always belongs to God. He is the supreme actor in the gospel in bringing salvation to us. God is the giver of the gospel. Think about how that effects personal evangelism.

Who in here is good enough, smart enough, quick enough to lead people to Christ? Who of us has the intellectual prowess or the argumentative skill or the charismatic persuasive ability to bring someone to Christ? Contrary to popular evangelistic techniques that would actually teach us how to manipulate someone into making a decision, it's impossible. John 6:44, "No one comes to the Son unless the Father draws him." God is the giver of the gospel. He's the only one who can give it, and this is good news because that means that all of us who have deep inadequacy when it comes to personal evangelism, and if you don't, then you have a problem with pride, all of us have deep inadequacy when it comes to personal evangelism and it's a good thing because He's designed this whole thing so that He gives the gospel and only He gets the glory. He's the giver of the gospel.

Second, He's the gift of the gospel. Remember? We talked about what do we get in the gospel? We get God; the righteousness from God, the character of God is revealed in the gospel. We are reconciled to God. We saw that in that definition. We are reconciled to God forever. Now we have to be careful here in the way we think about this. God being the gift of the gospel, when we are calling people to Christ saying, "I want to urge you to come to faith in Christ." We've got to be careful not to say, "I want to invite you, urge you to come to faith in Christ so that you can get forgiveness, so that you can get heaven, you can get your best life. Come to Christ and you can get satisfaction and you can get success and you can get joy and you can get all your dreams fulfilled. You can get all these things if you come to the gospel."

Blasphemy! Personal evangelism is not saying, "Look at all the things you can get." Personal evangelism is saying, "You can get God. You want God. You need God." God help us, we have taken God Himself out of the gospel. We put His gifts in instead and we offer His gifts instead of God and we call it evangelism. That's not evangelism. No matter how many gifts we dangle before people and say you get all these things and they say, "Well I'll take those things," and the last thing on their mind is surrendering their hearts to God but they'll take these things. They'll pray the prayer, they'll sign the card, they'll walk the aisle. They'll take the things. The reality is no matter how many times they pray the prayer, no matter how many times they sign the card or no matter how many times they walk the aisle, they will not go to heaven if they don't want God. God is the gift of the gospel and when we proclaim the gospel, we proclaim Him: God in all of His beauty, in all of His glory. The whole gospel is centered around His name's sake.

He's the giver of the gospel, He's the gift of the gospel, and He's the goal of the gospel. Go over to Romans 15:8-9 and you'll find Paul gets to the end of this book and he says, "Christ came to give His life so that the nations might glorify God for His mercy." Jesus came so the nations might glorify God. Same picture in John 12:20-28 when Jesus is about to go to the cross, and he says, "*What shall I say? Father, save me from this hour? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour*" (John 12:27-28). What's your reason Jesus? Why did you come to this hour? He says these four words before going to the cross: "*Father, glorify Your name*" (John 12:28). What drove Jesus to the cross is the glory of the Father, honor of the Father, majesty of the Father, righteousness of the Father. That's why he went. God is the goal of the gospel. So when we think about proclaiming the gospel, we do this for his name's sake.

That's the reason why we're here, not only for His name's sake, to exalt His name, but we are here to penetrate the nations. Through Him and for His name's sake we receive grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles, all the nations, to the obedience that comes from faith, all the nations. This is why we're here.

To hear Paul writing this book, now we didn't even look at this, but you go to Romans 15 and you see why he's writing this book. He's writing this book to the Romans because he wants to get to Spain because they haven't heard the gospel there. He says, "My ambition is to make the gospel known where it's never been heard before. I need you to help me get there." It's why he's writing this book. It's a missionary support letter that Paul is saying, "I need you to help me get to Spain to make the gospel known there." The nations are on his mind, and what's so cool is when he begins to describe the people that he's never met before in Rome and he says, "I thank God and Jesus Christ for you because your faith is being reported all over the world." Isn't that a great picture? Paul has been traveling around on three – he's on his third missionary journey when he writes this. He's in Corinth. He's been traveling around planting churches. He's not been to Rome but when he goes to different cities and he's traveling on different roads he comes in contact with different

people who tell him about Christ based on what they have seen in Rome. Their faith in Rome was being reported all over the world. Isn't that a great picture?

I was going to read them to you but to be honest there is a pretty good stack. From the last two weeks, these are emails from Ecuador, Lebanon, Venezuela, Indonesia, Japan, and China, all church leaders in those countries emailing this pastor to talk about how the faith in this family is being reported all over the world, how leaders in these countries are being spurred on in the gospel by this faith family in Birmingham, Alabama. This is why we're here. This is why we're here. You're doing this, you're doing this, and this is why we're here. Not so that our faith is reported all over the world for our sake, but for His name's sake. Church leaders around the world are saying, "You're spurring us on in the gospel." Glory be to God for that.

We're here to penetrate the nations and listen to how Paul talks about it. He talks about how we have a responsibility to pray. He addresses these believers in Rome and he says, "I've been praying for you earnestly, repeatedly, continually keeping you in my prayers." He's never even met them and he's praying for them, that God would teach us how to pray like this. You realize we have the privilege, or you may not know church leaders in Ecuador or Lebanon, Venezuela, Indonesia, Japan, or China, but we have a responsibility to pray for church leaders there. One day when we do have the opportunity to interact with them, we join them, we embrace them, we say, "We've been praying for you." They say, "You don't even know us." "Yeah, we've been constantly keeping you in our prayers though, constantly, continually, repeatedly." What a picture. Praying for the Church in other places, praying for the Church in Birmingham, praying for the unreached and the lost around the world and in this city. We're praying like this.

We have a responsibility to pray and we have a debt to pay; this is where it gets really good. Verse 14 and Paul says, "*I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish.*" That's why I'm so eager to get to Rome. Paul is so excited about getting to Rome. Why? Because he has an obligation to go to Rome; he's got an obligation to Greeks and non-Greeks, to the wise and the foolish, literally he says, "I have a debt to pay." So this is the kind of debt, when you see a house on fire or you see someone drowning, that you don't have any other option. You're compelled. It's not an option to sit back. This is what Paul is saying. What an incredible picture. Because Christ owns him, he owes Christ to the world. Let me put it another way. I believe the picture here is very clear. Every saved person this side of heaven owes the gospel to every lost person this side of hell. Every saved person this side of heaven owes the gospel to every lost person this side of hell. We have an obligation. Ladies and gentlemen we have an obligation to hundreds of thousands of people in Birmingham, Alabama who do not know this gospel. We are in debt to them. This is deeper than any financial debt could ever be. We owe them the gospel. We don't have an option.

We owe the gospel to them, and not just them, but the 200 million people in our country who do not know the gospel. We owe the gospel to them and not just them, but to the 3,000 tribes in Africa following animistic religions that are completely devoid of God, we owe the gospel to every single one of them. The 350 million Buddhists in Japan and Laos and Vietnam who are following Buddhist rules and Buddhist regulations, we owe the gospel to every single one of them. 950 million Hindus in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Maldives, we owe every last one of them the gospel. The over a billion people in Communist nations like China and North Korea who have grown up in atheistic philosophies that completely deny the existence of any God, we owe the gospel to every single one of them and among the 1.3 billion Muslims who are fasting and giving alms and making holy pilgrimages to Mecca and praying five times a day to a false god, even though they are in

some of the hardest to reach places on this planet, we owe the gospel to every single one of them.

Do we believe this? Be careful because if we do, it radically changes the way we do church. It radically changes the way we lead our lives and our families. When we realize we are obligated to all people, regardless of ethnic or cultural orientation, we are obligated to take the gospel to all people. When we realize we have a debt to pay, then we spend our lives paying it. This is why we're here. This is why we're not in heaven right now because we're here to exalt His name and penetrate the nations and we have a responsibility to pray and a debt to pay. We need to. You see how this is so fundamental? Until these things grip our hearts, personal evangelism is just a thought out there. We need to remember whose we are, we need to recognize what we believe, we need to realize why we're here.

We Need to Resolve How We'll Live

Last foundation, we need to resolve how we're going to live, how we're going to live. This is where we get to the last two verses in the passage we read, verses 16-17. They are mammoth verses. There is absolutely no way we could unpack them tonight but I want you to just look at them in the context of this picture of Paul's heart. Think about his resolve for how he is going to live. When he says, "I am not ashamed of the gospel," let's be honest. Think about it. The gospel was identified with shame in the first century. We talked about it already. A poor Jewish carpenter crucified, nailed to a cross, killed on a cross, starts this sect of Judaism, not involving the intellectual elite by any means, think about it from the perspective of Roman philosophers, Roman philosophies and ideologies, and the power of Rome, seeing this little sect from Judaism talking about a carpenter who rose from the dead. These people, Christians, common people, sometimes, many times slaves. They were mistaken as cannibalistic peoples in the first century. That whole Lord's Supper thing really got them in trouble. Go around and start talking about eating flesh and drinking blood, it doesn't help your church growth billboards. It just doesn't bode well for people being drawn to this picture. Shame is what's associated with the gospel and Paul knew this. 1 Corinthians 1, "The gospel is foolishness" (1 Cor. 1:18). It's foolishness to the world. He knew this. He was not surprised by this.

But the reality is Paul, when he encountered Christ, when he encountered the gospel, got a radically different picture of shame because he realized for the first time that all the things the world has, that all the things he had lived his life for, to get and to do, he realized that all of that was evidence of rebellion against God and there was shame, eternal shame in that. He came face to face with Jesus, "I am Jesus, the one who you are persecuting," is what he said to Paul and he experienced the shame of his sin front and center in his life and Jesus covered over that shame. He went from being rejected by God to accepted by God, from dirty before God to clean before God, from guilty before God to innocent before God, from shamed before God to honored before God.

Now when that transformation happens in your life, no matter what this world says about your gospel, you are no longer ashamed. No matter how deep your sin is, no matter how dark your past is, ladies and gentlemen, I remind you, no matter how deep your sin is tonight, no matter how dark your past is tonight, Jesus Christ has taken all of our shame upon Himself and as a result, by the power of God for salvation you can stand and say, "I am nowhere near ashamed of this gospel." Resolve how we are going to live. We're going to live like there is absolutely nothing that can shame us, absolutely nothing. No philosophy, no ideology.

This hits at the core of witnessing, doesn't it? When we think about witnessing, we think, "I can't share the gospel. People will think I'm crazy. They won't believe this. They'll say

they've heard this before, they don't want that." All of these thoughts, we begin to think thoughts of shame. Paul says we're not ashamed. We have a different view of shame. Christ has covered over all of our shame. He is our partner. "We're not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes." Did you hear what he said there? Writing to this church in Rome, surrounded by all these powerful philosophies and ideologies, this powerful Roman Empire, and he says not one of those philosophies, not one of those ideologies has power to save people from sins, not one of them.

It's a good reminder to us today. No amount of work, no amount of good advice, no amount of self-help books, or self-help sermons, or self-help doctrine, all the philosophies or ideologies of our culture, no matter how tall, wide, thick they are, they all come crashing down when it comes to the gospel of Jesus Christ. It and it alone, the gospel alone is the power of God for salvation. There is nothing else. There is nothing else that can change people's hearts for all eternity but the gospel.

It means that we live like nothing can shame us, but also like nothing can stop us. I want to show you this. This is where it gets really good. Turn back one page to the end of the book of Acts, Acts 28, right before Romans 1. I want you to listen to this. Background here, the whole book of Acts from Acts 13 on is you've got Paul going out on missionary journeys. He goes into different cities. Oftentimes he'll go into a city, he'll preach in the synagogue, he'll get kicked out of the synagogues, he'll go out and he'll preach in the city, and people get mad and people kick him out of the city. That's kind of the way Paul's days go.

So he'll go into a city and things will be rough. They'll run him out of the city. He was stoned and left for dead at Lystra. He was imprisoned at Philippi. Riot breaks out in Thessalonica. There were times he'd have to be smuggled out at night. No matter what they did to Paul though, the gospel's advanced at Philippi. We've got a church there that's thriving in joy that we see later in the New Testament. No matter what they did at Thessalonica, you've got a church there. No matter how much they laughed at him in Athens, there were believers there. The gospel was going forward. No matter how difficult it was in Corinth where he wrote this book and the book of Romans from, the gospel is going forward. They're trying to stop Paul but they can't stop the gospel. It's spreading.

So what happens is Paul is writing the book of Romans from a city called Corinth. He writes this letter to them, seals it, sends it off and says, "I'm going down to Jerusalem to take an offering to the churches there and then I'm going to come to Rome and meet you there." So that's what he does. He goes down to Jerusalem. The only problem is when he gets there, he's accused as a blasphemer and a lawbreaker and he's arrested. Through this court process, it just so happens that he gets sentenced to go to Rome, of all places. So he finally gets to Rome but it wasn't quite under the circumstances Paul had planned. He comes in chains. What we've got in Acts 28 is Paul in Rome now where he wanted to get where he wrote this book. He's there but he's under house arrest.

So he's stuck in this house, this rented house under house arrest. But I want you to listen how the book of Acts ends. Acts 28:30, listen to this: *"For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him."* Listen to what he did. *"Boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ"* (Acts 28:31). You cannot stop the gospel in this man. What's really cool though is that verse 31, the last verse in the book of Acts, this whole story of the evangelism of the gospel, the last word in the original language in the book of Acts is not the Lord Jesus Christ, not even that phrase "taught about the Lord Jesus Christ." The last word in the original language of the New Testament is not the last word in most of our

English transitions. But the last word in the original language of the New Testament is that word that's translated "without hindrance". It literally means "unhindered". You might even circle it and put this little line to the end.

Get the picture here. The last word in the book about how the gospel is advancing to the nations is the gospel is being preached unhindered, period, close the book. Look, you can't stop this gospel, no matter how you try, not matter what the world does. You cannot stop this gospel. That's why we're not ashamed because, *"it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes"* (Rom. 1:16). There's no culture, no philosophy, no ideology that can stop the power of this gospel in the hearts of the church.

The Ultimate Question for Personal Evangelism ...

So that leads to the ultimate question for personal evangelism and it's this. Is the gospel going to stop with you, on a very personal level here, not the person beside you, in front of you, behind you, is this gospel going to stop? This gospel that is in your heart, in your life, is it going to stop with you or is it going to spread through you? This is the question we must, every follower of Christ, at the very core of our hearts, must answer. Is my life going to be lived for the spread of the gospel or is my life going to be lived for the self consumption of the gospel? These are our options. Where is our heart?

I'm going to invite these guys to come on stage with me and they're going to lead us in a song about taking our lives, the blessings of God, the greatness of God, the creation of the gospel, and asking that God would make much of His glory with the gospel He's given to us. What I want to invite you to do over the next few moments, followers of Christ in this room, is to examine your hearts. Are you living like you are a servant of the gospel, sent out with the gospel, set apart for the gospel? Do you need to remember whose you are? Do you know the gospel? Do you recognize that you believe? Do you realize why you are here? Why are you here in Birmingham? Why are you here in this seat tonight? Why do you live where you live? Why do you work where you work? To exalt His name, to penetrate the nations; what does that look like for you? We need to resolve how we're going to live. In our hearts are we going to live like we are not ashamed of this gospel and like nothing can stop this gospel in us? That is a boldness that we desperately need to Spirit of God to awaken us to in the church today. So, I'm going to pray for us and I want to invite you to pray, whether that's in your seats or here at the front. I want us to abandon our hearts to Christ and the gospel tonight at the very start of this series, as they sing over us about asking God to make much of Christ through our lives.

God we pray that you would take the gospel at the very root of our being, at the very core of our hearts, and that you would transform our hearts, God, that we would feel the weight of obligation, the debt we have to pay with this gospel, and God, help us we pray, we pray this for ourselves, we pray this for this faith family, help us to realize that it means for each of our lives to be set apart for the gospel of God. As we look over these truths we've seen, as we look over the heart that you gave Paul, the heart of Christ in Paul in Romans 1, we pray God that you would take our hearts in this moment, God, that you would fill the secret poverty of our own spiritual experience, God, that you would compel our hearts to say, "I don't know how it looks. I need to learn how it looks but I want to weave the gospel into my everyday interactions with people in this city. I want to be a servant of the gospel." We pray that you would make much of Jesus in our lives.

You continue to pray, look over these truths, feel free to come and spend some time in prayer on your knees if you like and listen to these words as we think about what it means to make much of Christ in our lives.

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