

The Amazing Gospel #2 -- Not Ashamed of the Gospel

By Rev. Dr. Marcel Lamb

During a violent winter storm, a passenger train stalled in a remote mountain valley. The engine was dead. Snow kept rising around the cars and the temperature kept falling. Their radio could receive messages, but it could not transmit. The rescue crews had an idea that the train was somewhere in the valley, but had no idea exactly where it was. As it happened, several miles down the track there was a station with an emergency telephone. So a young railway worker named Daniel took inventory of people on the train.

There's nothing to make heat. There's nothing to generate electricity. And metal boxes do not stay warm very well when they're metal and glass in those kind of conditions. There were elderly passengers wrapped in blankets, and some had even found their luggage and began putting on extra clothes. Parents held frightened children. Many prayed and others worked to help keep others calm or distracted. The conductor said, "Unless someone reaches that telephone, the rescuers may not find us in time." So Daniel pulled on every layer of clothing he could find that would fit and stepped out into that storm.

The wind nearly knocked him over. Snow covered the tracks. He had to posthole his way every step. If you know what I mean by that, it's like you take a step and you sink three feet. You take a step and you sink three feet. And more than once he wanted to turn back, but he kept thinking about the people on that train who might well die. If rescue did not get there in time, and after a very long time, and probably some severe risk if not some frostbite, he found the telephone. His heart leapt when a voice answered, "Rescue station."

Daniel quickly gave the train number and the exact location they were in. The dispatcher replied, "We really needed this call. We've dispatched help, but they're searching; don't know where you are now. We can come directly to you." Daniel hadn't created the rescue. He had not powered the engines that would clear the tracks and reach the people. He was simply a messenger that worked to connect a desperate people with the power that could save them, and that's the spirit of the apostle Paul in Romans chapter one. Today we're in Romans one eight through seventeen, where Paul says first.

I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world. God, whom I serve in my spirit in preaching the gospel of His Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you in my prayers at all times. And I pray that now at last by God's, will the way may be opened for me to come to you. I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong. That is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith.

I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that I planned many times to come to you, but have been prevented from doing so until now. In order that I might have a harvest among you, just as I have had among the other Gentiles. I am obligated to the Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish. That's why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are in Rome. For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes. First to the Jew, then to the Gentile. For in the gospel, the righteousness of God is revealed—a

righteousness that is by faith from first to last.

Just as it is written, the righteous will live by faith. Paul didn't invent the gospel, and he couldn't himself save a single soul. But Jesus Christ had entrusted him with the message of the amazing gospel, and Paul grasped with a particular clarity the urgency and necessity of sharing the gospel because Paul had the gospel made real to him when he encountered Jesus in a vision on the road to Damascus. The good news, the gospel is Jesus Christ, and the message is what Jesus has done to save us, but it is more than a message.

Because in the gospel, God is at work. The gospel is word from God that introduces us to God personally and relationally in Jesus Christ. This tells us that the gospel is the very will, word, and act of God. Exerting awesome divine power to save us from sin, death, and hell. And because it is the power plan and person of God at work, when the gospel is shared, we can and should expect powerful things to happen. But I would be remiss if I did not warn you because the gospel is the power of God at work.

We should also prepare in prayer and spiritual discipline because the enemy, Satan, will oppose it. When Paul wrote the book of Romans, he had never visited their church. He had always wanted to go and God kept keeping him from going. And then when he got to go, he got an all-expense-paid government trip. With shipwrecks and armed guard and chains, nevertheless he rejoiced that God got him there. Now he had not planted the church in Rome, and he couldn't take credit for it. Yet when he heard that their faith was flourishing, he thanked God. He recognized the results he'd heard.

There is clear evidence of a mighty saving God at work. Not only is the gospel God's power at work, but the faithful ways that the people who received it live are evidence that God did this.

Now notice what was being reported about these Roman Christians. Not their numbers, not the stellar sermons they might have heard, not their choir or musicians if they had such, not even their privations, their suffering and their persecution. Their faith. Their ability to trust God in the very center of, at that time, Satan's most powerful stronghold in the world—Rome, where the emperor was worshipped as a god; Rome, where slavery was harsh and cruel.

Rome, where peace was the Pax Romana, was effectively a place where you would have peace at the end of a Roman sword. Because Rome was authority, Rome was about wealth and influence and military strength. It was about political finagling. It was about all the things that made it an evil place. And yet in that imperial city was a community being known for trusting a risen Savior who had been killed on a cross, a Roman cross. The Roman people who believed in Jesus had a faith that shined.

On display in their worship, their decisions, their relationships, their generosity, and their courage. Suppose someone traveled through our community and later said, 'I heard about that amazing grace church in Imley City.' What would you hope that they heard? Would you hope that they heard that the people genuinely love Jesus and each other, that they believe in the Scriptures, that they pray when life is hard, and they pray still when life is easy, that they welcome people who feel forgotten, that they speak the truth with grace and holy love, and that they do not merely attend church but they live by faith.

Why, that's what we would hope they would hear. The goal is not to become famous. The goal is to be faithful in ways that make Jesus visible. And making Jesus visible by our obedience is our part of gospel work because our testimony will not be received if we are not living in ways that make Jesus visible. Paul says, "I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong." Paul is an apostle and he has seen the risen Christ. He's planted churches, he's endured persecution and proclaimed the gospel across cultures. Yet he does not say, "I have everything to give and you have nothing to offer."

He says, "Your faith will encourage me, and my faith will encourage you because there are no unnecessary members in the body of Christ. That mature Christian that you think of as a saint still has days when they need encouragement. The pastor needs edification and encouragement." The person who appears strong may be carrying a burden no one else can see. That person who's always helping may need help. That person who's always generous won't tell you when they have a need. We need the fellowship of other believers, and sometimes your testimony arrives just when.

Another believer is wondering whether God is still faithful. Sometimes your prayer becomes the support beneath someone else's weakness, and sometimes your quiet obedience and example gives another Christian courage to keep going. Our Christian faith is personal, but it is never merely private.

That is the lie. Our culture wants us to live and buy into the idea that your faith is a personal matter and shouldn't be brought out into regular things. But that's not how it is. Christ saves us, and we become the called-together community of God. He joins us to brothers and sisters whose faith is intended to strengthen ours and whose burdens become partly our responsibility. The people of God work, study, pray and serve together for a harvest among the people that we are sent to. The other part of the harvest we look for is to strengthen one another, to see ourselves matured in our discipleship.

And oh, the joy to see new people brought to a vital faith in Jesus Christ. Way back in the beginning, God spoke and His word created the entire cosmos. But see, the Bible makes it clear that God's word is personified in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus is God's Word made flesh, and in Jesus exists the principle of life itself. Indeed, more than the life we have here as creatures on earth, His is the everlasting abundant life. The Gospel is God's express will made full alive.

And accessible through Jesus Christ, and given to any who trust in Jesus through the new birth that the Holy Spirit brings. The gospel is the power of God that is greater than all of creation. Sometimes we look at things and think they're too hard, and we're afraid to ask God. But how many of your prayer requests actually asking for something that would only have to happen in creation, as opposed to something that's greater than creation. Our God can do that. In this passage, then Paul's language becomes quite urgent. We see his heart: I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish. That's why I am so eager to preach the gospel.

Paul had a sense of ought, a debt because Christ had entrusted him with something important and intended for the people he was to preach to. Let's suppose someone comes to your house and puts a package in your hands and says, 'This belongs to the family at the end of your road. It contains medicine

that will save their sick child.' Will you take it to them? The family itself didn't give you the medicine, but once it's placed in your hands, you're obligated to deliver it. And since it's a sick child, you're obligated to urgency. There are people out there worse than sick—unto physical death.

They are spiritually dead and on their way, without God's intervention and their accepting the gospel of Jesus Christ, to an eternity of torment. Paul understood that the gospel had been put in his hands to be shared with the world he could reach. He understood that he had received mercy.

When the risen Christ had confronted him who persecuted believers, when the risen Christ, uh, the risen Christ, the risen Christ, the risen Christ forgave him and gave him mercy, when the risen Christ did not write him off but called him and entrusted him with the most important thing God has ever given to human beings to do.

It's another thing we need to remember when we think about our amazing gospel. There is nothing we have to do today or tomorrow more important than the work of making the gospel available to other people. Almost everything else you will do today will be gone tomorrow or when the world ends, but what we do to share the gospel has the potential for eternal impact. Paul knew he could never repay Jesus for grace. But because Paul was so bowled over by the power of salvation, he knew that he owed it to pass it along to others.

No one has outgrown their need for Jesus Christ, and no one may be ignored by the church. Now notice that Paul didn't say, 'I am hesitant, reluctant, and well just generally don't want to,' but I suppose I must preach. He says, 'I am eager.' Some days that smacks me right in the face like eager.

I am a nervous wreck up here, people. Have been ever since the first time I had to do this. But he's eager. He knows something I need to learn. He's tapped into something greater than himself. And if the gospel were merely our own opinion, we might keep it private. If it were merely advice for respectable living, the world could get advice somewhere else. But the gospel is what God has done in Jesus Christ: forgiveness, reconciliation, new birth, holiness in this life and eternal life. All sorrows redressed, all grievances made better.

God calls us through Jesus Christ to repent, believe, and follow. You know, like, I think that's a good point. Yeah, and it's not something we should carry with embarrassment. It is a treasure we deliver with gratitude. Now think of the thing you own that is your greatest jewel. Whatever, maybe it was handed down in your family. It's beautiful; it's costlier than you could ever afford it. Perhaps now, how many of you would then always wear that thing? The gospel is a treasure that outlasts all things, and that's why.

We need to share it, showing our gratitude and showing how much we value what Christ has done for us. Paul said, 'I am not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes.' There were lots of things Paul could have been ashamed about, and in the Roman capital. A message centered on a Jewish Messiah executed on a Roman cross. That's not the kind of thing that gets trumpeted in the streets by the powerful, the wealthy and the influential. Crucifixion was designed to humiliate as well as kill, and so for many people, even hearing about someone who was crucified, whether or not they're supposed to be a savior.

Sounded weak and foolish. Paul himself had been mocked, beaten, imprisoned, and driven from cities because he preached Christ. Now he wanted to proclaim that same gospel in Rome, the center of imperial confidence and arrogance. Rome understood power; it was the military dominant force in the world at that time, political intrigue well Rome probably wrote the book on it. Economic power, the power to put a man on a cross. But Paul knew a power Rome did not possess. Rome could take a life, but it couldn't raise the dead. Rome could crush with laws.

But it could not cleanse a guilty conscience. Rome could conquer nations, but it could not save the world. Well, I think the gospel could do what Rome or any other government can never do because the gospel carries the saving power of God. Now we might be nervous about sharing the gospel. We might fear rejection. We may worry about saying the wrong thing. We may not know how someone will respond. And so I need to say that courage isn't the absence of being nervous. It's the assurance that God's power is at work and will bring results. Courage is deciding that the gospel is more important than our discomfort.

And Paul's confidence is not confidence in himself. He does not say, 'I am not ashamed because I am a brilliant speaker.' In fact, in some of the other epistles, people have said he wasn't. He does not say, 'I can answer every objection.' He does not say everyone responds favorably. I think the scars he bore would show quite good evidence of that. Paul's confidence rests in the gospel, being the power of God. So the things that make us nervous are us focusing on us. But the power of the gospel is not in our polish, our personality, our intellect, our ability to persuade. The power belongs to God.

And that removes both pride and fear from evangelism. Another person's salvation does not depend upon our brilliance. I should hear an 'Amen' into that, so we need not be paralyzed. Our responsibility is to be faithful witnesses, to be known by our faith. God will supply the power, and Paul says that. The salvation God offers is to everyone who believes, first to the Jew and then to the Gentile. The gospel did not appear without a history. God made promises to Israel, and Jesus first and foremost is the fulfillment of those promises as the Messiah of Israel. And through him, God's saving promise reaches the nations.

Not only is the gospel the power of God, but it's rooted in the faithfulness of God, and its invitation is extended with the generosity of God. Faith is the open hand that receives what grace gives. We can't earn this righteousness; we can't achieve it through good intentions or purchase it through religious activity, and we certainly can't repair our past well enough to make ourselves acceptable to God. Now let's return to that stranded train and people who could not rescue themselves, and there was a saving power somewhere beyond the storm. But they had no way, if they stayed on that train, to connect to it, except for a man willing to carry a message.

Daniel didn't create the rescue. He didn't power the engine, and he certainly didn't clear the tracks. He carried the message: 'Church, we're not the savior; Jesus is.' We did not die for the sins of the world, rise from the grave, convict hearts, forgive sin, or give eternal life. But the gospel of Jesus Christ has been entrusted to us. That means we have an obligation to the people beside us, family members, neighbors, coworkers, children. The successful, the wounded people we understand and people we do not. People we like and people we don't. They are hearing messages every day that say possessions will satisfy them.

Sin will free them. Failure defines them.

Drugs with more side effects than anything else will make them healthy. And yet, for them, death has the final word. We have been entrusted with a better message: God loves sinners. Christ died for our sins. Christ is risen. The guilty can be forgiven. The lost can come home and the dead can live. So do not be ashamed of that message. Hide it not behind vague religious language, and do not assume someone else will deliver it. Pray for the person God has placed on your heart. Listen to their story. Love them without treating them as a project, and when God opens the door, speak plainly about Jesus.

Not only do you not need to know everything, no one here does. Paul didn't. We're to tell them what Christ has done and what His grace has meant to us. Invite them to trust Jesus and then to worship Him and then to come home to God. Of course, some will refuse, delay, or misunderstand. But their response belongs to them, not you. The saving power belongs to God, but carrying and sharing that life-giving message has been given to us. The searching question today is not only are you ashamed of the gospel?

Which we hope we all say no. But rather, what are we doing to make sure someone else hears it? Oh Lord, thank you for the gift of Jesus Christ and a salvation so great that it cannot be told by all the tongues that ever lived or ever will in its fullness. Grant to us, Lord, that faith that will have an impact for Christ. In Jesus' name, Amen.