

“Not Ashamed”

Romans Wasn't Read in a Day – part #1

Romans 1:1-17

[49-fishing] Two retired pastors invite a third colleague fresh out of seminary on a fishing trip at a secluded cabin by a lake. Early in the morning, the three men take the boat out to the middle of the lake and fish for a couple of hours. Eventually, one of the older ministers says, “Well, it’s about time for lunch. I’m going to head into shore.” He packs up his gear, steps out of the boat, and, to the amazement of the young preacher, walks on the water back to shore. A few minutes later, the second elderly pastor speaks up: “I’m going to go in, too. I’ll see you in a bit.” The second man walks away on the water. The young man is left alone, astounded that these two saints have enough faith to walk on water. He thinks, “Certainly I have that faith, too!” He steps out of the boat and immediately sinks in the water. Coughing, he rises to the surface and shouts to shore, “Help!” A voice responds, “Did we forgot to tell you about the stepping stones?”

When someone we have faith in proves trustworthy, it’s a great feeling. But when someone we trusted in lets us down, it’s lousy.

[50-Trustworthy vs. Untrustworthy] I want to start by having us make two lists this morning. One: the people and things we trust, and the second, those we don’t. Let’s write them down. *(use easel)*

[51-Money] Some people find it strange that our money in the USA has the phrase “In God We Trust” stamped on it. To be sure, many of us do trust in God, but there are many who don’t. And there are many who have lost their trust in God because of a personal experience.

My goal today is to help you understand that Jesus can be trusted. But I don’t want you to just take my word for it. Rather, I want you to hear from someone whose experience with Jesus never him let down.

[52-Paul and Rome] I’m talking about apostle Paul. Today we are beginning a series called, “Romans Wasn’t Read in a Day.” The book of Romans is the longest and most thoughtful letter Paul ever wrote, and it deserves a close look, not just for historical appreciation, but for answering the question, why can

we trust the gospel Jesus? We won't answer that question in just one message, but over the course of the summer, we will examine Paul's view of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Romans has had the most significant impact on Christianity of all the letters of the New Testament. Even John Wesley was reading Martin Luther's notes on Romans when Wesley had a significant spiritual experience at Aldersgate.

Before we consider the content of Paul's letter, a little background is helpful. Romans was written before Paul's first visit to Jerusalem, and after Paul had experienced his dramatic conversion on the road to Damascus in which he personally encountered Jesus in a vision. Paul has also recently changed the focus of his ministry, preaching not only to his fellow Jews, but all to the Gentiles, the non-Jewish believers. Both groups would have been present in the Roman church, but we expect there were more Gentiles than, for instance, Jerusalem. So Paul had the opportunity to preach to those whose knowledge of the Hebrew scriptures was fresh and recent. Thus, Romans takes a basic, comprehensive view of Christian faith.

If we are going to be certain of the gospel we stand on today, reading Romans is a good way to shore up our faith.

[53-Romans 1:1] So what does Paul write? His excitement for the gospel is evident even in his opening greeting. “Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus.” (Romans 1:1) Not, “Paul, the great apostle, former Pharisee, trained by the best teachers in Israel, who saw Christ personally on the road to Damascus.” Just, Paul, a servant, a slave of Christ. Nothing else matters to him.

[54-Romans 1:2-5] Paul mentions the gospel was revealed through the prophets and given to all people. It's almost like he forgets himself, and then remembers, “O yeah, I'm writing a letter.” Then he addresses the people:

[55-Romans 1:6-7] “To all who are in Rome, loved by God, called as saints. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Paul's excitement is already overflowing, and he just barely finished the preamble.

[56-Romans 1:8-10] Next, Paul tells the Romans how he thanks God for them “because the news of your faith is being reported in all the world.” (1:8)

Wouldn't that be something, for our church's faith to be known throughout the world? Even though Paul has never met these Christians, he has been praying constantly for them. That's one way a church can be known around the world – when we take our prayers seriously.

[57-Romans 1:13-15] Verses 13-15 reveal the deeper motive that would bring Paul to Rome. He was eager to see a harvest, to see fruitful ministry. Paul couldn't wait to start telling these people about Jesus.

[58-Romans 1:16-17] Then we hit the main thesis of the letter, Paul's magnum opus. “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is God's power for salvation to everyone who believes, first to the Jew, and also to the Greek. For in it God's righteousness is revealed from faith to faith, just as it is written: The righteous will live by faith.” (Romans 1:16-17)

I want to pause on this thought for a while. “Not ashamed”? Why would someone be ashamed of the gospel? At first glance, this sounds odd to us.

[59-Capitol riot] I remember being very alarmed, and honestly, ashamed on January 6th, 2021. Here is a quote from Wikipedia: “Christian imagery and rhetoric were prevalent, with rioters carrying crosses and signs saying, “Jesus Saves”, and “Jesus 2020”. On the National Mall, rioters chanted, “Christ is king”. One rioter carried a Christian flag.”

Like many of us, I lost a piece of confidence in my faith that day, a piece of confidence in our nation, really. In my heart, I knew this mob did not represent the Jesus I loved and worshiped, and yet, they were using his name publicly.

[60-62-Matthew 26:47-56] Contrast that image with the account of Jesus being arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane according to Matthew 26:47-56.

“While Jesus was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived, accompanied by a large crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests and elders of the people....

Then the men stepped forward, seized Jesus, and arrested Him. At this, one of Jesus' companions drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear.

“Put your sword back in its place,” Jesus said to him. “For all who draw the sword will die by the sword. Are you not aware that I can call on My Father,

and He will at once put at My disposal more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen this way?”

At that time Jesus said to the crowd, “Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest Me as you would an outlaw? Every day I sat teaching in the temple courts, and you did not arrest Me. But this has all happened so that the writings of the prophets would be fulfilled.”

Then all the disciples deserted Him and fled.

The Jesus I know, the Jesus Paul preached, never glorified violence. His ministry was that of humility, of servanthood, of ultimately sacrificing himself to save us.

[63-Romans 1:16] So what does Paul mean by “not ashamed of the gospel”? It’s helpful to read some other translations to get a better idea. “I am proud of the good news.” (CEV). “I have complete confidence in the gospel.” (GNT) In other words, Paul stakes his life on the message that Jesus comes to save.

Paul is so high on the gospel of Jesus, he is ready to risk it all and go to Rome, the economic, social, and political center of the empire. Paul wants to talk to people who have not yet heard the gospel of Jesus Christ. And he knows from previous experience that the power of Jesus, the power of the message of the gospel, will not fail him. What about us? Do we have that same eagerness and energy?

[64-coffee] If I were to get a cup of coffee with you, or better yet, ice cream, as we sat and ate, we’d find lots of things to talk about: our families, our jobs, our hopes and dreams. So, how often would our conversation go something like this?:

“Wow, I really cannot wait to preach on Sunday morning. In fact, I’d love to go downtown and just invite people to our church right now. That would be so exciting. What if we went to downtown Detroit and just starting helping people in the name of Jesus? Wow, I can’t wait.”

Why is that not likely to be part of our conversation?

[65-women talking] Sharing the gospel takes us out of our comfort zone. But the reality is, everyone in here, right now, knows at least one person who doesn't know the gospel, and God is expecting us to share it. We don't have to be Pauls or Paulines. God may not be asking you to start a new church in a town you've never been, but what about just a one-on-one conversation? Would you open yourself up to a meaningful relationship and let the joy of Christ overflow naturally? Some of us have bottled up our faith for so long, it seems like letting any of it out is just going to freak somebody out. Will they look at us like we are making some sort of statement? It depends on whether we are trusting in Jesus, or in ourselves.

There are times when I do feel awkward about being a Christian. As a pastor, I feel the pressure to know all the answers, to know exactly what to say to bring someone to Christ. The reality is many people do reject Christ, yet we can offer the gospel anyway. Paul anticipated a harvest in Rome. What expectations do we have for our community?

[66-Cross at Lake Louise] Last summer, I was talking with a youth named Corbin, who was really struggling to understand the gospel. He said something like, “I know about God. I've read the Bible. I even go to church. But the whole committing to Jesus thing is tough for me. I'm just not sure I'm ready.” We talked some more, and I finally asked, “What are you waiting for?” He answered, “I'm not sure.” I thought, “I know what you're waiting for. Someone to ask you, ‘Would you like to receive Jesus as your Lord and Savior?’” Are those words too preachy? What about: “Would you like to know that God forgives you? Would you like to know Jesus personally, and all he has to offer you?” Whatever words you choose, we should intentionally invite someone to receive the gospel.

The gospel of Jesus Christ can be trusted. You can have a lot of faith in thin ice, and you'll be in a lot of trouble. You can have a little faith in thick ice, and you'll be fine. The gospel is thick, strong, reliable, and trustworthy. That is what motivated Paul, and what can motivate all of us, too.

[67-title slide] Each of us, myself included, needs to realize our fears and confess our embarrassment, which has really been a denial of the power of the gospel. It's simple. We need to ask God to forgive us. And we need to pray,

every day, that God will give us a new opportunity to share Jesus in a meaningful way.

Let us focus on the power of Christ to save us, to lift us up from our doubt and fear, and let us proclaim with Paul, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is God's power for salvation to everyone who believes."

Would you pray with me?

Memory Verse:

Romans 1:16 - "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes."

Reflection Questions:

1. Recall an experience when you felt ashamed. What was happening, who was there, and how did you react?
2. Why are the emotions of fear, shame and guilt so powerful? How do we overcome them?
3. Why was Paul so proud of the gospel of Jesus? How did this show in his life?
4. How has our society tried to make Christians ashamed of our faith? How do we resist those feelings?
5. How do you understand the gospel? What has Jesus saved us from?