

Text: Romans 1:13-17 *Now I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that I often planned to come to you (but was hindered until now), that I might have some fruit among you also, just as among the other Gentiles. I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise. So, as much as in me, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also. 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."*

Theme: RIGHTEOUSNESS REVEALED

Dear beloved of God, called to be saints, fellow redeemed,

As best we can estimate the Apostle Paul wrote this letter to the congregations in Rome in the winter of year 56 to 57 while in the city of Corinth. This would have been a little less than 30 years after Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension. And it would have been just under 25 years since Jesus appeared to the then Saul on the road to Damascus and converted him. By the time Paul wrote this letter he had already completed his first and second missionary journeys and was now in the midst of his third missionary journey.

As Paul writes this letter he wants to make sure that the Roman congregations did not think he was avoiding them. *"I often planned to come to you."* For some time Paul had planned to come to Rome and strengthen the Christians that were there. Later on in Romans we hear that the reason Paul had not yet come to them was because of his policy of not building on the foundations of other men. If another Christian had come to Rome and founded a Christian church there, that city was not a priority for Paul on his missionary journeys. Paul's priority was to take the Gospel to cities where Christ had not yet been preached, or at least had not taken hold.

He continues in our text, *"As much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also."* In less than three years Paul would get his chance to go to Rome, but it would be in chains. Arrested in Jerusalem for preaching the Gospel, Paul appealed to appear before Caesar - as was his right as a Roman citizen. And so in the spring of the year 60 Paul was able to meet these Christians in Rome, albeit as a prisoner of the Roman government.

Though unable to go to Rome it did not prevent him from preaching the gospel of Christ to those Christians. Led by the Holy Spirit, Paul writes this letter to the Romans chalk full of Christian doctrine. Martin Luther comments: *"This Epistle is really the chief part of the New Testament and the very purest Gospel, and is worthy not only that every Christian should know it word for word, by heart, but occupy himself with it every day, as the daily bread of the soul. It can never be read or pondered too much, and the more it is dealt with the more precious it becomes, and the better it tastes."*

In this letter Paul deals with the very heart and soul of our salvation: are we able to save ourselves by our works, that is able to earn heaven for ourselves? Or are we saved by the works of another? In the last two verses of our text we find an answer to that question in Paul's theme for this entire letter. Let us therefore consider this morning the theme of Paul's letter to the Romans: "RIGHTEOUSNESS REVEALED." May the Holy Spirit increase our faith through His word!

Can you think of the last time you were ashamed of someone or something? Maybe your brother or sister did something very foolish and you were ashamed that you had the same last name. Maybe our nation has done something and you ashamed to be called an American. Or maybe there was something you did when you heard those crushing words from your parents, "I'm so ashamed of you." But can you ever imagine being ashamed of being a Christian? What would ever cause someone to be ashamed that they followed Christ?

The early days of the Christian church were not easy days. The devil was trying his hardest to silence the newly birthed Christian church. He had unbelieving Jews who would persecute and arrest Christians. The Roman government was opposed to the Christian movement in those early days because they did not worship Caesar as a god. As a Christian one could end up in jail or fed to the lions at the Coliseum in Rome. Most Romans and Greeks viewed the Christian faith as an "uncivilized" and "foolish" religion. Being a Christian might mean being disowned by family and losing friends. Being a Christian was not easy. There were no doubt many who were ashamed of being called a Christian because of what came with that label.

The Apostle Paul was not immune to this persecution as a Christian. He knew firsthand the physical and emotional toll of being a Christian. When Paul was converted to the Christian faith Jesus said of him, "***I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake.***" (Acts 9:16) And suffer for Christ's name sake, Paul did. In 2 Corinthians 11 he records some of the hardships he suffered as an apostle of Jesus Christ. He writes of being beaten with rods three times, stoned, shipwrecked three times, lost at sea for a night and a day, and countless imprisonments. None of this would have happened to Paul if he had remained a Jewish Pharisee. But the minute he took on the name Christian the devil and the world began to attack him.

In spite of all this, the Apostle Paul lays out the theme for this letter, boldly proclaiming that he is not afraid to come to Rome and preach the gospel, "***For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation to everyone who believes.***" Simply defined the gospel is good news. As is the case today there would have been much news spread in those days. News about great military victories by the Roman Empire. Such news might have lifted spirits of the Roman people - for a time. But only for a time. How do you think you would feel if you heard the War on Terror had ended with a decisive victory? That would be good news! But how long do you suppose such news will keep us happy? It is news that's good, but it is news that really has no power with it. It is news that affects us, but does not change us.

Not so with the good news of Jesus Christ. The gospel of Christ is good news with power. Paul calls it "***the power of God to salvation to everyone who believes.***" It is not just news for the covenant people of God, the Jews, but also for the Greek - the Gentiles, those outside of the Abrahamic covenant. The gospel of Christ is the good news that the eternal, almighty Son of God was born of the seed of David, and He came into the world to save sinners. The Son of God came to live a life that was free of any blemish of sin. Jesus never talked-back to His earthly mother or His step-father. Jesus always looked forward to go to church. Jesus never joined in teasing. He always loved the LORD God with all of His heart, with all of His soul, and with all of His strength. Jesus always loved His neighbor as Himself. Jesus and Jesus alone lived a life of righteousness. And then the gospel tells us that the sinless Son of God laid down His life to save sinners. On the cross He shed His life-blood as the ransom price for us all.

That is what the news is about. And it is most certainly GOOD news. It is good news to hear all our sins have been atoned for by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. It is a message that ***is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.*** (1

Cor 1:18) God is at work in this good news. Through this message God is at work converting hearts to faith. Through the gospel God brings sinners from the darkness of unbelief into the light of life. The gospel of Christ is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes. God is at work in the gospel.

Paul continues to expound on the powerful gospel message, ***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 gospel of Christ the righteousness of God is revealed. A simple definition of righteousness might be "right-living." When we talk of righteousness and God we are talking primarily about living the right way as God requires. His law reveals to us how he wants us to live. His Ten Commandments are a summary of that law. *No other gods. Remembering the Sabbath day. Not killing. Not stealing. Not committing adultery. Not lying. Not coveting.* To obey these commandments perfectly - in word and in deed - to love God above all other things and to love neighbor as self - that could be considered right-living in God's sight.

But have we done that? Have we been perfectly righteous our entire life? Has God always been number one in our hearts? Have we loved every single neighbor - even our enemies - as ourselves? Righteousness requires not just an effort, but perfection. James writes in his epistle, ***For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all.*** (*Js 2:10*) If we strive to keep the law of God and yet get tripped up at just one point - maybe we didn't talk back to mom or dad but we sure did drag our feet when we had to clean our room - or maybe it was just a dirty thought that crossed our mind - stumbling in one point of the law, James says it is as though we had broken the whole law. When we sin in our thoughts or in our words or in our actions, we are breaking the first commandment to love the LORD our God with all of our heart, all of our soul, and with all of our strength.

In the first few chapters of Romans Paul clearly shows that we all are unrighteous. Whether Jew or Gentile we have not lived-right in the sight of the holy God. Where then is there hope for the unrighteous? Where can sinners turn for aid? Once again we see why Paul is not ashamed of the gospel of Christ. In that powerful message righteousness is revealed. In the gospel of Christ, the righteous, sin-free life that Jesus lived is credited to the believer. It is as though our lives were a credit card and we kept running up the bill by our sins. Though we are the ones that have run up the bill, Jesus is the one who paid the bill for us with His lifeblood as the price. And through faith in Christ the good credit that He had earned by His righteous living is credited to our account. As Prophet Jeremiah writes, Jesus is: ***THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS!*** (*Jer 23:6*)

This is the righteousness that is revealed. It is the righteousness of God that is given to all who believe in Jesus. The Apostle Paul quotes from Habakkuk 2 that this is no new message, but the same message proclaimed by the Old Testament prophets - ***as it is written, "The just shall live by faith."*** By faith in the promises of God, sinners are declared righteous. This is the theme of Paul's letter to the Romans, a theme which we will see continued as we go on in Romans over the coming months.

May we ever love and cherish the powerful news of the Gospel and never be ashamed of it. It is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes. In it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith. May God be praised for revealing His righteousness to us in Jesus Christ. Amen.