

Introduction:

Shame. Do you know the feeling? It actually wasn't until a few years ago that I even understood what shame actually is. Many of us mix the feeling of shame with the feeling of guilt. Here is the difference. Guilt is the feeling that I have done something wrong. Shame is the feeling that I am something wrong. Do you catch the difference there? In fact, biblically speaking, to be ashamed is "to experience a painful feeling or sense of loss of status because of some particular event or activity."<sup>1</sup> Thus, when Paul says in **Romans 1:16**, "I am not ashamed of the gospel," it is a really big deal. According to **vs. 15**, Paul was eager to march into Rome and, with head held high, proclaim the gospel of his God and King Jesus the Christ. He was Unashamed. And starting today, that is exactly what we want to be in regards to the gospel. Unashamed. To our guests, you have come on a very special day for us. We begin our new annual theme today. It is anchored in this verse. Paul was Unashamed of the disciple-making gospel. As disciple-making disciples, that is our goal. By the end of this year (in fact, hopefully long before the 2018-2019 year is over) we want to not only know the gospel, we want to love the gospel, be excited about the gospel, and eager to share the gospel. Are you ready for that?

Our anchor passage is **Romans 1:16**. In this verse, Paul actually demonstrates five reasons he was eager to proclaim God's gospel, five reasons he was unashamed of this gospel. I just want to focus on the first. Paul was unashamed because the gospel is the power of God. That is, Paul was unashamed because he understood that God's gospel is unparalleled. Guys, this is a seismic shift in understanding for most people. There are many people so ashamed of the gospel that they never even try it. They reject it out of hand. There are others who surrender to it but are so ashamed of it that they don't proclaim it. But why does this happen? Because we don't understand this principle. The gospel is the power of God. We think the gospel is the power of man on behalf of God. By the time we are done today, I want to shift our outlook and understanding of the gospel. I want to make sure we are 100% clear that the gospel is not man's power to save himself, it is God's power to save us. The reality is when we are ashamed of the gospel, it is almost never because we are ashamed of God's actual gospel. It is because our view of the gospel is skewed. What we are ashamed of isn't the gospel at all. When we truly grasp the power of God in the gospel, we will not be ashamed of it. We will be excited about it. We will be eager to proclaim it.

Discussion:

I. The Gospel in Rome

- A. Until studying for this lesson, **Romans 1:15** was lost on me. "So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome." I didn't realize it, but I didn't understand the crux of Paul's claim here. If we step out of our modern worldview and step back into the worldview of ancient Rome, Paul's statement here takes on incredible meaning. To get that, we have to grasp "gospel" in the context of the Roman Empire.
- B. After 2000 years of church use, the term "gospel" has become a church word. Only people who go to church use it. Sometimes even we don't fully get it. If you are lost right now, wondering what on earth this word "gospel" means, don't feel alone. Some of us who think we know even need to be re-educated about it. Let me back up and lay the foundation of the gospel. The word itself, both in Greek and English, means very literally "good story" or "good news" or "good report" (not "God's story" as commonly asserted<sup>2</sup>).
- C. This may be a churchy word today, but when Paul wrote this letter to the Christians in Rome, saying he was eager to preach the gospel there, it was a well-known word and a shocking one to use in this context, considering its uses in that ancient culture.<sup>3</sup>
  1. First, since the Roman emperor, at that time Nero, was considered divine, any message he sent out was considered joyous news. "Gospel" was the word used to describe his messages. It was also the word used to describe the news of the future emperor's birth, coming of age, ascension to the throne.
  2. Second, consider you heard of an approaching foreign army wiping out everything in its path. You weren't sure what to do. Should you abandon your home, flee for your life, stand and fight? Then you see the Roman army marching out to meet the enemy horde. What will happen? Will the Emperor and his army

<sup>1</sup> Bauer, Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich (BDAG), *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, referenced in *BibleWorks*.

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.etymonline.com/word/gospel#etymonline\\_v\\_9072](https://www.etymonline.com/word/gospel#etymonline_v_9072)

<sup>3</sup> Kittel-Bromily, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (Abridged)*, referenced in *BibleWorks*.

win? Will you be saved by your Emperor or devastated by the enemy? So you worry and wait. And then a few days later you see a wisp of dust rise up on the trail. As you watch, a single rider appears. You strain to see what colors he displays. Is he an enemy scout or a friendly herald? He is a Roman. He rides into town and shouts "Victory! We're saved! Long live the Emperor!" That message was "gospel."

- D. Put yourself in Paul's shoes in the Roman Empire. "Gospel" is the word for the messages of the divine emperor. "Gospel" is the proclamation of the Emperor's victories over enemy kingdoms. You represent King Jesus. Your message is the victory of a different kingdom, the kingdom of Christ. And now, what you want to do is march into the capitol of the Empire, the dwelling place and the seat of power of the Emperor and proclaim not the Gospel of Caesar, but the Gospel of Jesus Christ? How eager would you be to knock on the Emperor's door and say, "I have a message for you from the one true King"? But that was Paul. He was eager. He was unashamed. Why? Because he knew something about Nero. Nero was just a man. But Jesus Christ is God. Nero's gospel was the power of men, maybe even the power of a huge army. But we serve a God who defeats armies. The power of God is unparalleled. God's gospel is unparalleled. Therefore, Paul was unashamed.

## II. God's gospel

- A. Paul's eagerness and lack of shame in God's gospel is even more profound when we consider what his message was. A Roman gospel went something like this: "The Emperor is born! The Emperor has come of age! The Emperor has come to the throne! The Emperor is victorious! Long live the Emperor!" Paul's gospel, on the other hand went something like this: "Our King is born! Our King has come of age! Our King has died on a cross like a common criminal! Long live our King!" Wait! What?
- B. That doesn't sound like good news at all. But it is. It is good news for two reasons. It is good news when we find out why our King died on the cross and when we find out what happened next.
- C. What happened next? See **Romans 1:4**
1. I imagine even the newest among us has heard what happened next. If not, wait until you hear this. Jesus was arrested. Jesus was put through a farce of a trial. Jesus was unlawfully condemned though innocent. Jesus was scourged, beaten like a common criminal. Jesus was nailed to a cross. Jesus did die. Jesus was buried. But be amazed.
  2. All of that happened on Friday. But on Sunday morning, a morning like this one nearly 2000 years ago. Some ladies went to His tomb to finish His burial rituals and discovered, He wasn't there. Jesus was raised from the dead. And let's face it, there is only one power in the universe that could accomplish such a feat. In our natural world, when someone dies, they stay dead. People don't come back to life. That could only happen by one power, but one supernatural power. By one power that goes beyond all that is created. It can only happen by the power of the Creator. It can only happen by the power of God. Jesus broke forth from the tomb.
  3. Think about this. Jesus didn't avoid death as we might expect the Messiah to do. He didn't evade death as we might expect God to do. Jesus faced death in one-on-one battle. Jesus took on the grave mano a mano (which doesn't mean "man to man" but "hand to hand"). And Jesus won! As Paul writes in **Romans 1:4**, that can mean only one thing. Nero didn't do that. Nero died in 68 AD. He stayed dead. He may have declared himself divine, but his death showed him to be nothing more than a man. Jesus died and then rose from the dead showing Himself to be the Son of God. He was what all the Roman emperors wanted to be. But He proved it by conquering death.
- D. Why Jesus died? See **Romans 5:6-11**
1. Think about this. When Nero was victorious in battle. What did that actually mean? Had Nero gone out and fought the enemy horde on behalf of his people so that his people would be safe? No. Not at all. Rather, Nero conscripted his people into an army that he sent out to fight on Nero's behalf. Nero's gospel meant a good number of Romans had died on Nero's behalf and for Nero's glory.
  2. However, the gospel of Jesus Christ is the exact opposite. Though we deserve to die, Jesus fought the enemy on our behalf. Jesus did battle for us. Jesus died for us. And He did it while we were actually His enemies. He did it while we were sinners. He did it while we were ungodly.
  3. Think about some powerful things we learn about Jesus, His death, and His gospel from **Romans 5:6-11**.
    - a) Jesus didn't die by execution; He died by self-sacrifice.
    - b) Jesus didn't die to pay for His sins and crimes; He died to pay for our sins and crimes.
    - c) Jesus didn't die in a failed attempt to defeat His enemies; He died to successfully accomplish the reconciliation of His enemies (that is us by the way).

- d) Jesus didn't die because He was too weak to save Himself; He died because we are too weak to save ourselves.

### III. The Unparalleled Gospel

- A. Brothers and sisters, friends and neighbors, do you see the difference between the Roman gospel and God's gospel? Do you see the unparalleled power of God?
- B. The Roman gospel said if you try really, really hard. If you enlist in the army and train and struggle and fight really, really hard, you might just win the victory for your Emperor and the glory of Rome. God's gospel says, your King has fought on your behalf. Your King has died on your behalf. Your King has been victorious on your behalf. Your King conquered death and the grave on your behalf. He has done all this on your behalf, because you can't.
- C. Do you see how **Romans 5:6** demonstrates our need for God's gospel? "While we were still weak," Paul says. That is why Paul is unashamed of the gospel, because the gospel is the power of God for salvation (**Romans 1:16**). It is not our power for salvation. We are weak. We don't have power. God's power is unparalleled so God's gospel is unparalleled.
- D. You see, here is the sad part. Most people, including many Christians, don't understand the true power of God's gospel. Do you know what most people believe the gospel is?
1. Most people believe the gospel is "I am a rotten sinner. But Jesus died so that if I try really, really hard to change my ways; if I try really, really hard to get rid of all my sins; if I try really, really hard to obey God from now on out; if I go to church three times per week; if I pray long enough and hard enough every day; if I give lots of money to the church; if I straighten up my home life; if I get my work ethic in line; if I raise good kids; if I understand all the right theology; if I get all the doctrines correct; if I dress properly, listen to the right music, watch the right TV shows, read the right books, go to the right church, maybe, just maybe in the end I will have glorified the King enough and He might just forgive me and let me into heaven." Now does that sound like good news to you?
  2. No wonder so many people reject the gospel. No wonder so many people put off obeying the gospel. No wonder so many Christians give up on the gospel. They aren't rejecting God's gospel, putting off obeying God's gospel, or giving up on God's gospel. Actually, they actually are rejecting, putting off, and giving up on their misunderstanding of the gospel. That is a Roman gospel. That is a gospel of man's power to save. The real gospel is about God's power to save. The real gospel is I have already sinned too much. I cannot obey enough. I cannot be good enough. I am too weak to save myself. I need a greater power than me to save me. I need God's power. And that power is His gospel. That power is Jesus Christ crucified and resurrected and living in me by faith and His Holy Spirit empowering me in my inner being.
  3. Now, please don't run to an opposite extreme that says the gospel is God saving me by Jesus Christ while I ignore His will and run my own life in whatever way I please. Salvation is not just getting me to heaven despite my behavior. Salvation is helping me be more like Jesus by setting me free from sin. But that is for another sermon.

#### Conclusion:

Here's my question for you. Have you rejected the gospel because you thought it was your power to save yourself? Are you putting off surrendering to and obeying the gospel because you have feared you can't be good enough to measure up to the gospel? Are you thinking about abandoning the gospel because you think you just can't keep it going for the rest of your life? Don't. That isn't the gospel. Turn to the gospel because it is the unparalleled power of God to save you despite how weak you are. Put your faith in God, not you. Paul points the way in **Romans 6:1-4**. By the power of God, we can die to sin. By the power of God, we can follow in Jesus's footsteps in victory over death and the grave. You can experience that power when you are baptized into the death of Jesus, that is, when you are immersed in water, buried in a watery grave and raised up to victorious life. There is no need to be ashamed of the gospel. The gospel is God's power to overcome your shame. It is the unparalleled power of God. Put your faith in that and be saved.