

1st Principle of Mission

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[0 : 0 0] Now, the Book of Romans is a great book, and it's a book about God, and it's a book about what God has done.

So it's a book about the Gospel, Paul's theme through the Book of Romans is the Gospel. And so it's a book about mission, because the Gospel is the mission of God.

God determines to save his people by the work of Jesus Christ. He sends his son, who dies on the cross to be the Savior for his people. That is the mission that we read of, that is the Gospel.

And that's at the heart of this book, and it's absolutely at the heart of this chapter. It's a really, really enthusiastic chapter, because it's a chapter about mission.

And Paul is so enthusiastic as he writes about the Gospel in this chapter. But we also get a sense, as we read through the chapter, of just how enthusiastic Paul is himself as a missionary, as one who has the Gospel, who believes in Jesus, and who wants to take that and tell other people.

[1 : 1 4] We sometimes feel cool about mission, because it can be scary, and we don't know what to say. And so this is a chapter, I think, that helps us.

It gives us the core of the Gospel message, and it gives us some really key principles about mission. I don't want to bring that out as we look at it tonight. What Paul says about the Gospel and the mission of the Gospel, and how we can learn from that.

So, the first thing that I want to focus on is Paul himself, and the way that he, as he writes to the Romans about himself, wanting to come to them and be amongst them, gives us this incredible sense of enthusiasm.

It just pours out. He writes to them as people who have been changed by the Gospel. He writes to them, he says in verse 7, to all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints.

So he recognizes that the Gospel is something that's at work amongst them. It's changing them. It's important to them.

[2 : 1 8] They're loved by God, and they're called to be saints. We see that also in the verse before that, in verse 6, you also are among those who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.

There's that great sense in which the Gospel isn't just this sort of static idea that sits there waiting for people to judge it and see whether they think it's interesting or not. The Gospel is a living thing, and in their case, he says you are called to follow to this person Jesus Christ.

And he himself is one who is a messenger of the Gospel, who we'll call. So the Gospel's at work amongst them. And he, look at verse 8, he's enthusiastic and he's joyful because of their faith.

First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you because your faith is being reported all over the world. So in other words, this dynamic message of salvation has come to them and changed them, and that is having an effect because other people are hearing about it.

And so there's this great sense. You read about the Gospel. You read about something that's alive and that is progressive. It's changing people and it's moving on to change other people because it's God's mission to reach people and to save them.

[3 : 3 9] So he recognizes that the Gospel, Paul recognizes the Gospel that work amongst them, but he also says that he himself wants to come to them. He loves teaching about Jesus and he wants to be amongst them and to do that with them also.

So then at verse 10, he says, I remember you in my prayers. I pray that now at last by God's will, various things had stopped him for particular reasons, at particular times from going to be amongst them.

He says, now at last I pray that by God's will the way may be open for me to come to you. Now, what he goes on to say then is interesting.

Because he says in verse 11, I long to see you so I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong. Now, these are people who have heard the Gospel and if you think about the Christian believers, they've accepted Christ.

They're believers in the Gospel and yet he says that the Gospel still is relevant to them as he wants to come and as he puts it some spiritual gift to strengthen you so that they're not standing still in their faith or regressing, but that he wants to be a part of that process of encouraging them and moving them on.

[5 : 02] And as he brings the teaching of the Gospel, so they are encouraged and so they go on in their faith. So that helps us see that the Gospel, if you're a Christian tonight, isn't a static thing in your heart.

You know, it's not something that happened to you a while ago and it's just kind of there in the background. You're to be strengthened and to go on listening to the Gospel and being built up. But he doesn't say in this kind of condescending way where he sees himself as the teacher who comes and imparts his knowledge and his wisdom and in a kind of humanly hierarchical way. So in other words, he's the great benefactor, he gets nothing in return because what he says next is in the next verse 12, that is that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith. That's what a gracious verse that is. Paul the great apostle says, I long to come and preach the Gospel to you and to strengthen you dear people. And then he says, so that I will be encouraged by you being encouraged and that he's not saying I can't get anything from you.

[6 : 16] I'm perfect. I'm a cut above. They will encourage him as he brings the Gospel to them. So there's this wonderful, wonderful enthusiasm that he has in the Gospel, but he sees it as a dynamic thing that is at work in an ongoing way amongst them.

So let's not forget that the way that the Gospel changes our sinful hearts once and for all from darkness to light and then goes on changing us.

And we encourage one another. The Gospel as it is alive amongst the congregation is a living thing which daily speaks into everybody's life situations.

So the best thing we can do for each other, often we need to help each other in many practical ways, but the best thing that we can do is speak the Gospel. If we don't ever speak the Gospel to each other, then we're hugely lacking.

We're missing that great opportunity. Paul says, first of all, then to these believers, but he also goes on to say how he just wants to come and preach the Gospel. And you get a sense in which he's saying to all people.

[7 : 27] Because first of all, he says in verse 14, I'm bound both to Greeks and non-Greeks. So in other words, he's saying, I'm coming to speak to all peoples, all nationalities, all races, all cultures.

It doesn't matter to me. And this is the great revelation, if you like, in the Bible, wasn't it that the Gospel wasn't just for a certain type of people, a certain subculture, but that Gospel was to go to all peoples?

And we're familiar with that. And I think that is something that as we take it and apply it to ourselves now, we're probably okay with that, aren't we? Multicultural level.

It's an accepted thing in our society and in our media, multiculturalism. And we don't, at least I hope, we don't have barriers between races in our community.

And so the thought of the Gospel as being something that is for some people, but not for others, for some nations, but not for other nations, well, that's not what the Bible teaches.

[8 : 35] So Paul highlights that here. He was one who came and spoke first to his own people, to the Jews, but then to all people, to all he would hear.

But then he goes on and says something which is interesting. And I think it maybe challenges us more at our level.

So he says, I'm bound both to Greeks and non-Greeks, and then he says both to the wise and the foolish. Now what does he mean by saying the wise and the foolish?

He's speaking about all kinds of people where they are at. People who are educated, people who are not educated, people who appear sophisticated, or people who we might think if we were to look at somebody and judge them not sophisticated.

You know what I'm talking about here. And he's really saying that the Gospel is for all nations, but it's also just for everybody where they're at.

[9 : 38] Now one writer puts it this way. He says by contrast to the wise people, the foolish are those without understanding. They're not schooled in philosophical debate, but that doesn't mean that Paul owes them nothing.

He's in debt to all people. He's in debt to all people. Now is it maybe more of a challenge for us when we think about our lives, the people that we meet, and the kind of community that we are, that we make absolutely sure that we don't say that we mix with certain people but not others, that we communicate or speak with certain people but not others.

Do you ever find yourself thinking, well, that person would never understand what I'm trying to talk about. We never understand the Gospel. Paul's saying here that his desire is to preach the Gospel to all people regardless of race and regardless of what seems like understanding, what seems like their education.

So it's no good if we become a culturally elitist church. And it's no good either if we become culturally elitist people.

Wherever we meet, wherever we go, whatever kinds of people we speak to are the kinds of people that can be reached by the Gospel. And it's really important for us to remember that so that we don't decide who are the kind of people that we should be relating the Gospel to.

[11 : 16] So that's just an interesting thing that he brings out there as he's speaking to them about his desire to come and preach the Gospel. And this overarching sense of enthusiasm then has been spilling out of this passage.

But again, the question I think is there for us when we think, when you think about the week ahead and the people that you'll meet and the relationships you have.

And we think about the mission of the Gospel. And you sometimes think, well, I don't, certainly at the moment I don't have that enthusiasm for mission or I fear mission.

I don't really want to speak about my faith or I feel like I've got to a dead end with the people that I know and I can't, I can't see how I could possibly share the Gospel with them, how I could possibly take it further.

How can we have the same kind of zeal, if you like, enthusiasm that Paul does when he writes this? Now, where he's building up to as he's moving through this passage here is verses 16 and 17.

[12 : 27] Because in verse 16 and 17 we get, if you like, a little encapsulation of his great theme, the theme that we'll be running throughout the whole book. And it is the Gospel itself.

And what he says in verse 16, as he just introduced his subject and he's been writing to them about how excited he is about coming to them with the Gospel, then he says this thing as he introduces the theme.

He says, I'm not ashamed of the Gospel. I'm not ashamed of the Gospel. Now, why would Paul say that, do you think?

He's already said that he loves the Gospel. He's already said that the people he's speaking to have received the Gospel. But then he says, I'm not ashamed of the Gospel.

Well, if you think about the culture that he was speaking to, they were in Rome. So he was writing to people who were right at the heart of the power base of the world, the sophisticated capital of the world.

[13 : 34] All the movers and shakers were there, all the great people, all the clever people. He was writing to a culture which valued human might and power and strength, even a raw sense, a military strength.

Sure, they had the great pantheon of gods in the Roman culture, but it was a culture based on power, political power and military power and impressive people.

And he comes with a message of a savior who died on a cross, which is the most shameful thing in that culture to hear of.

And so it's clear how somebody could say that that was an unimpressive thing to bring. If you're thinking about a human level, to go to Rome and to preach about somebody who really came from no great background and was our travelling preacher and who eventually died on a cross, isn't an impressive message to bring.

So Paul wants to emphasise to these people that that being the case, he isn't ashamed. And he's not ashamed because Paul the Apostle knew fine well from his own experience, from his own personal experience and from seeing as a preacher of the Gospel the effect of this message on people as it transformed their lives, as it took them from darkness to light.

[15 : 03] But Jesus who died on a cross was the Son of God and he was the one in whom people had to put their trust. So Paul wants to re-emphasise that he was not ashamed of the Gospel.

And he does that and as we go through these next couple of verses, there are three things I want to bring out. This for him not being ashamed.

Number one, I'm not ashamed of the Gospel because it's the power of God. That's the first thing. It's the power of God.

Now, we said, I was saying that the Gospel isn't just like an idea. It's not philosophy. It's not a man-made thing. So it's not just this idea that sits there and we can judge it.

It is itself the activity of God. God sent his Son who came in the likeness of a man who died and was raised again.

[16 : 03] It's a definitive historical act of God completed and Jesus is now at the right hand of God and so it is the power of God. It is this active thing, this definitive thing and it's the activity of God in mission.

So we, a lot of people nowadays will try and change their lives. They'll think, well, how can I be better? How can I have a better life?

How can I manipulate things so that things go better for me? And I think a lot of people will turn into books or teachers online or whatever, really, who are essentially self-help gurus, lifestyle gurus.

And what these people will do is they'll have a particular idea, say. And their input into somebody's life is to give advice, to point them towards this idea and to say, this is the way you could go.

But really what a lot of them do, interestingly, is they say ultimately the strength must come from yourself. So here's a great philosophy for life. But really what it's doing is it's putting you back to yourself to find the strength that you have inside of yourself to overcome, to be better, to be stronger or whatever it is.

[17 : 21] Now, another writer, I found this an interesting statement. He says this, the gospel is not advice to people. The gospel is not advice suggesting that they lift themselves up.

It's power. It lifts them up. And we have to remember that as Christians. You know, we're not pointing people towards an idea that they can try nervously wondering whether it will work.

It is the power of God. It is the mission of God to save people. And so Paul wants to stress this. So that means that for every one of us who are confronted with the gospel and for people who we speak to, humility is a key thing.

Because each one of us are taught that we can't do it. We can't save ourselves. We must bow before the Lord and say, Lord, save me.

And it is the power of God to save sinners. The second thing that I want to point out is the scope.

[18 : 24] The scope of the gospel. He goes on to say, it's the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes. Everyone who believes. So that phrase there, everyone who believes.

This is a gospel that we receive by faith and we believe in Jesus Christ. But the scope there, again, it goes back to that thing of what he was talking about, about the kinds of people, all kinds of people.

And then he talks about, well, who can believe? Anyone who believes. So anyone who hears the gospel and who believes the gospel will be saved.

So we can't say tonight, well, I've told God that I believe in him, but I still don't know whether or not he saved me. Those who confess his name and trust in Jesus are saved because it's based on the promise and the power of God to fulfill that promise of what he has done in his son paying the price for our sin.

And so he's able to say anyone, anyone who believes, anyone who believes. Now what this does for us, when we think about these two initial points, both the power and the scope of the gospel is it challenges the way that we can limit our expectations of the gospel.

[19 : 46] You think about the way you approach mission, the people that you witness to, the people that you want to witness to, the gospel conversations you hope you're going to have this week.

So often we can find ourselves having either low expectations or just dodging the issue because we don't think people will respond. And what this says here in this chapter is that what we have in the gospel is the power of God.

So it's not the power of your reasoning, Paul said elsewhere that he didn't go to them with as it were wise or impressive words. Although of course it's helpful to know what you're talking about and how

to explain things, but it's the power of God.

And so the gospel, as you explain it, even as poorly as you feel like you are, is his word and it's his work. And that is what you put your trust in as you witness.

And the scope, I don't know if you know anybody who you feel you've been witnessing to for a long time and you think they're not taking it in and maybe they're just not going to.

[20 : 59] So I'm just not going to speak to them anymore. Now how and when we speak to people is of course very personal and we need to be wise and gracious in the way we do that.

But you don't know who the gospel is going to work in and when the Lord will choose to do that.

That's the simple application that we can take from this. We just don't know and we just don't get to decide.

And that is good news. That means that we can go on in whatever opportunity we get. However small an opportunity you may feel this week you have to speak the gospel.

You can share that word and you leave it with the Lord because anyone who believes will be saved because it is the power of God.

So the power and the scope of the third thing, the third reason that Paul says that he's not ashamed of the gospel is because in verse 17 it describes the riches of the gospel.

[22 : 01] Great riches for those who believe. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that's by faith from first to last.

In the gospel that means people who are utterly lost and who can't save themselves, who are spiritually nowhere, which is the truth for everyone if they don't have Christ as I say here, are found and are lifted up by the Lord and are brought into fellowship with him, united with him in Christ, are saved, lost people are found because of what he does.

And this verse is a hugely in some ways a complex, it's a massive verse, but in other ways also it's very simple. It describes the saving work of God.

He makes those who as it were were so poor, rich in the gospel. That phrase remember the chapter we were looking at this morning.

Those who are his people, those who are his children will be sons of the most high, sons and daughters of the most high. So if you're a believer that's your status tonight.

[23 : 20] So you're very rich because of what the gospel has worked in you. And now if we're thinking about the righteousness from God, don't switch off when you hear words like righteousness.

It sounds like an old fashioned word and I don't even know what it means. Righteousness link that with the word salvation in verse 16. See that word?

I'm not ashamed of the gospel because it's the power of God for the salvation, for the saving of everyone. And then he goes on in verse 17 in the gospel, a righteousness from God.

There are lots of different nuances of different people who say exactly what that word refers to, but think of it as the work of God to save his people.

And as his people are saved, they're brought into a new standing before him so that they're no longer lost and cut off and alienated.

[24 : 15] But they're loved by him and they're saved. And this is what is promised by God for his people throughout the Bible.

Let me read a verse from Psalm 98. I'll just turn there and read this. Some 98 begins like this, sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things.

His right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him. The Lord has made his salvation known and revealed his righteousness to the nations.

He's remembered his love and his faithfulness. Now that's speaking in promise language, speaking within a context of people who knew the Lord as the one who had promised to be their God.

But it's speaking of the way in which he, in his righteousness and in his holiness and in his mercy, saves a people to himself and makes them rich in the gospel and makes them rich so that they have as a rule when we were praying every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms.

[25 : 24] And that's what we have in the gospel. Now that's why Paul's not ashamed of it. Seems we say, of course we're not ashamed of the gospel, we're Christians. But why are we not ashamed of the gospel?

It's because it's the power of the God. It's because it has huge scope and the Lord can save anyone and it's because of his great riches.

We're ashamed of things you and I, for different reasons. I don't know what you're embarrassed about. But we can be ashamed of things for, well I think mainly because we're ashamed of something if it doesn't work.

Or if we think it's inferior to something. So if you think about children, kids often feel embarrassed about what they wear maybe if they're, you know, like dressed down day at school.

A lot of kids, when I was a teacher, a lot of kids can actually find that quite stressful because they felt that their clothes weren't as cool as somebody else's. So they felt inferior so they were ashamed.

[26 : 29] And we also feel ashamed, as I said, sometimes if we think something doesn't work. It makes sense to be ashamed of something that doesn't work. So for example, if you went down to the car park and you saw that something by the wind had been blown onto your windscreen and the windscreen was cracked.

And I heard about this and I came along and I said, I can help, I'm going to come and help you. I've got a great idea and I brought out a roll of masking tape. I said, how do I fix your window with this masking tape?

Here, stick it on. That would be kind of embarrassing. You'd be a bit embarrassed because my solution is rubbish. It wouldn't work, it wouldn't fix your window.

And it's a bit awkward, isn't it? You're going to have to find some sort of sensitive way of telling me what a rubbish idea is. Now you and I as Christians have the gospel.

And we don't need to be ashamed because it's neither inferior nor ineffective. It's the power of God to save people.

[27 : 34] And so this chapter, I suppose this sermon, what we're talking about tonight, isn't that kind of how to exactly what to say and how to explain the gospel and all the different defeat or beliefs that there are out there at the moment.

But I think when we read a chapter like this and when we catch on to the enthusiasm that Paul has and what he's talking about, we see that the principle of mission is this, to be convinced of the problem facing people and to be convinced of the solution.

I was thinking about Parliament. So elections, the race to elections is beginning. And that means the campaign trail starts here or near here at least.

Now if you listen, I don't know if you feel the same as me, but if you listen to debates in Parliament, what I feel at least anyway, what seems apparent is that there's a lot of people talking about the same problem, but putting forward very different solutions.

And who's got the right solution? Who's got the right interpretation of the problem? And who's, say it's economics, whose economic idea will fix the economic problem?

[28 : 56] We often just don't know. What we feel like we don't know, we feel powerless. So the issue for us as Christians, when we think about mission, you yourself this week as you go to work or uni or whatever you go, and us as a collective, as a congregation of God's people, as we consider as a body the whole issue of how we testify to what God has done or whether we do testify to what God has done.

I think what this is saying is that we need to be, first of all, totally convinced of the problem that faces all people. Maybe seems too obvious to say that, but I think it needs saying nonetheless. Everybody has the same issue. Everybody is estranged from the Lord by themselves. That's the real issue facing people.

And I suppose maybe if we have an opportunity to share the gospel, but we choose not to take it, what we're saying is that that person doesn't need the gospel at that moment.

Now that may be because we just don't know how to express what we're talking about. Maybe because we're afraid. But if we think about it, if the problem is so gaping before people that they so desperately need their souls to be healed and for themselves to know the Lord, and we have that, then we must at every moment know that that is their problem.

[30 : 25] That should be acutely on our minds so that we're prepared. And the second part, of course, is that the solution that we have, this isn't our solution, but it's the Lord's solution, which is the gospel, is effective.

Now people reject the gospel, but for those who hear and believe it is effective and it saves utterly those who are perishing.

Those who were perishing and who were lost will be saved by the gospel. And I suppose that's the key principle. When we think about mission, you think about that personally, and as we think about it as a congregation, is that something that we go on being convinced of every day of our lives, that in the gospel we have a message from the Lord which is powerful and which is mighty to save.

And if that's our conviction as a congregation, if that's what we believe, then other things that I said that we didn't talk about tonight, things like how do you explain the gospel?

How can we relate the gospel to a community of people who've maybe got no idea what we're talking about? These are the kinds of questions and conversations that we will then start to have and will then be going on amongst us in our small groups, in our friendship groups as we live out our daily lives, because we want to think about how we can relate this great good news we have to the people that we live amongst and the people who so desperately need to hear the gospel.

[32 : 03] And we pray that the Lord will help us because it isn't easy because many people don't share our convictions and think it's stupid. And so we do need to pray that the Lord will convict us again of the power of the gospel and be with us as we go out with that word.

So I'll finish with that and I'll just pray. Let's pray. Lord yours is such a great word to us, thank you for the Apostle Paul who as we saw this morning, even though he could say he was the chief of sinners, he worked so greatly in his life to change him and to make him an advocate for the gospel. May we be so acutely aware of the gospel in our own lives, Lord Jesus, that we would live and breathe to think about you and all that you've done in our lives.

We'd be excited to talk about it with each other. We think about mission and the privilege that we have that we're given this privilege to be those who hold the testimony about Jesus.

And help us then to know the need that people have, but be convinced that yours is the gospel, the power to save them.

[33 : 20] Be with us as we seek in our own maybe quiet, maybe timid ways to minister to people, but help us to minister to people we ask.

In Jesus' name, amen.