
The Proclamation of the Gospel

Romans 1:16, 17

Tim Nixon

In July 1505 a young lawyer entered an Augustinian monastery. This was a place isolated from the ills of the outside world. God was intended to be the only focus, every waking moment of every day. Yet this young man, even in the safety of the monastery, was tormented. He did not feel worthy to be in God's presences. He was anxious and desperate for an escape from his sins. He greatly feared the coming wrath of God.

The young monk would confess to his confessor for hours and still be deeply troubled that he may have forgotten something. He knew even one sin would damn him to hell. The monk would shake with fright when taking communion. He was terrified all the time. Confession, escaping the sinful world, serving as monk, and meditating on God seemed unable to offer him any peace or salvation.

Seeing the monk's agony, his confessor believed the monk might find relief if he were to go to the academy. At the academy he would have greater access to the Bible and he might have an opportunity to study God's Word more deeply. The monk was Martin Luther.

In Romans 1:17, Luther finally understood that man holds no righteousness of his own. He has none (which is supported by the remainder of Romans 1). Any righteousness he may receive can only come from God. But God does indeed reveal and even grant his righteousness to his creation. More amazing, is that there is not one thing apart from faith that man can do for salvation. No work can earn this righteousness. Salvation comes by faith alone, in Christ alone.

Luther was liberated! His effort to earn his salvation through his own 'righteous' works now looked silly, futile. It was possible that in this moment, Martin Luther became a regenerate, born-again Christian. And it was most likely that God used this discovery to launch Luther into the ministry that reformed the world. Luther's discovery brought the focus back to faith in God rather than working and striving to save ourselves.

And this is the gospel that we proclaim at Clearcreek Chapel!

Some of the audience to whom Paul wrote may have been ashamed and discouraged in their faith. And why wouldn't they be? Here they are in Rome, these little Christians who were not among the elite of the Roman Empire, but were common people, many even slaves. In Rome, known for their great philosophers and their far-reaching philosophies; why pay any attention to a fable about a Jew who rose from the dead.

And then there's Paul. This Jewish tent maker who is trying to come to Rome to preach this message. Yet in boldness and encouraging confidence, Paul wrote "I am not ashamed of the gospel."

And at Clearcreek Chapel, neither are we!

Though the world ridicules the teachings of Christ and calls those who believe foolish, our faith is a fact, not a philosophy.

And why are we not ashamed of the gospel at Clearcreek Chapel?

First, because of its origin. **It is the gospel of Jesus Christ.** Look back at how he is described in verses one through four.

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, 2 which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, 3 concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh 4 and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord,

One author writes, "Any message that was handed down from Caesar would immediately get the attention of the Romans. But the message of the gospel is from and about the very son of God! In his opening sentence, Paul called this message "the gospel of God". How could Paul be ashamed of such a message, when it came from God and centered in his son, Jesus Christ?"¹

Second, we see the operation of the gospel. The gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. Why would we be ashamed of power? That same author continued:

Power is the one thing that Rome boasted of the most. Greece might have its philosophy, but Rome had its power. The fear of Rome hovered over the Empire like a cloud. Were they not the conquerors? Were not Roman legions stationed all over the known world? But with all her military power, Rome was still a weak nation. The philosopher Seneca called the city of Rome "a cesspool of iniquity"; and the writer Juvenal called it a "filthy sewer into which the dregs of the Empire flood."

No wonder Paul is not ashamed: he was taking to sinful Rome the one message that had the power to change men's lives! He had seen the gospel work in other wicked cities such as Corinth and Ephesus; and he was confident that it would work in Rome. It had transformed his own life, and he knew it could transform the lives of others.²

¹ Warren Wiersbe, *Be Right*, page 15

² IBID

And look what this power produces. It is the power of God for salvation. The gospel delivers sinners from the penalty and power of sin. If you and I are to be saved, it must be through faith in Jesus Christ as proclaimed in the gospel.

And to whom do we proclaim it? To everyone. This is not an exclusive message for the friends and neighbors and coworkers of Clearcreek Chapel. It is for everyone because everyone needs to be saved. How fantastic it is for those of us sitting here today to have a message of power that can be taken to everyone we know.

And then we get to possibly the key verse of the entire letter of Romans. Verse 17. "For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."

God's righteousness is revealed in the gospel; for in the death and resurrection of Christ, God revealed his righteousness by punishing sin; and in the resurrection of Christ, he revealed his righteousness by making salvation available to the sinner who believes.

And that faith is revealed from faith for faith, implying transformation over a long period of time as the believer becomes more and more conformed to the image of Christ.

The gospel reveals a righteousness that is by faith. Here Paul refers back to Habakkuk 2:4, "the righteous shall live by faith."

In its context in Habakkuk we could say, " Wicked men trust themselves alone as these heathens do and fail; but the righteous man trusts in God and lives'.

Ans so there are only two possible attitudes in this life: faith or unbelief.

- You either believe God or you don't believe Him.
- You either have faith in Him or you don't have faith in Him.

What happens when we don't live by faith?

- When we don't live by faith, we fixate on the moment.
- When we don't live by faith, we don't see the big picture.

Our series is on how Clearcreek Chapel carries out God's mission specifically. What does this look like for us as you and I reach out to the neighborhoods?

Well, maybe a bit differently than one might expect, but based on what we have seen from God's Word regarding the gospel here in these two verses, it looks like this:

We want to mobilize the members of Clearcreek Chapel for creative, courageous, compassionate, Christ-reliant outreach and gospel expansion through equipping you through teaching and training so that each Chapel member is biblically viewing and boldly doing evangelism through individual and community effort and lifestyle.

Our vision is to **see everyone on every day in every way** making visible the invisible Christ through showing what the gospel does and telling what the gospel is.

At this point I want to clarify what we mean by in every way. At the Chapel we define every way, based on these 2 short verses like this:

“Every way” is understood as including good deeds (or works), which are a *means* through which an audience for the gospel can be gained and the goodness of God demonstrated and shared.

Means, however, should not be confused with the gospel itself. The gospel can only come by the proclamation of Christ through His Word. Deeds may function as a “bridge” over which you cross to proclaim the gospel. In no way, shape, or form should deeds ever be separated from the proclamation of the gospel. Deeds done by the church, apart from the gospel, function as a social gospel.

Therefore, we observe the following principles:

- (1) The use of deeds in ministry will always occur in an evangelistic context.
- (2) Deeds shall be done from an overflow of the church's belief that our God is compassionate, generous, and longsuffering to even those who do not know him, that they might see his goodness and glorify him.
- (3) Wisdom will be used to limit the extent of deeds in evangelistic ministry.
- (4) Deeds shall not be continued when they are no longer serving as an aide to the effective communication of the gospel.
- (5) Deeds are to be used judiciously, giving careful attention to not develop a dependency in the unbeliever upon the deeds.
- (6) Keeping in mind that what we win unbelievers with is what we win them to, vigilant guard will be maintained against the tendency of deeds to crowd out the gospel and become the focus in evangelistic ministries.

Now I know that that is a mouthful. And because of our environment this morning it may be a bit harder to follow – so go to the church website and review the sermon transcript for this morning. But let me try and put this in a nutshell.

There is nothing wrong with you as an individual or family giving your time and money to social causes that benefit people in the world. That is your prerogative and if that is something you enjoy doing, then by all means.

But when it comes to proclaiming the gospel at Clearcreek Chapel, simply doing social, caring, and kind things is exhibiting that we do not believe that the gospel is the power for God for salvation. It indicates we put power in the means.

And so, we limit our corporate outreach efforts to things that specifically give us an opportunity to speak one-on-one with the lost. There are many fun things we can do like hand out

cold water to cars stopped at traffic lights. We could drop dollar bills with Chapel business attached on the floor at the mall. But these things do not give us the opportunity to share the gospel. A bottle of water with a church connection card wrapped around it may advertise for the church but is not a proclamation of the gospel.

Here is another example. We could give away donuts to cars stopped at traffic lights. Or we could supply donuts to an elementary school for their teachers where our children attend and the parents know some of the teachers – and where the donuts provide a means for present and future conversations.

And so, some things we have done in the past include: last summer's soccer camp, adopting police officers, going out into the community and helping with physical tasks to those who need help, delivering healthy snacks to firefighters at the firehouse, cooking breakfast for elementary schools teachers, cooking breakfast for school bus drivers, etc. all promote the opportunity to speak with people one on one.

We encourage you to reach out to your neighbors, friends, coworkers, family and a variety of ways as well. Over the past few years, we have had multiple classes on personal evangelism to help give you tools to proclaim the gospel with those lost souls whom God has brought into your life, we had a contest to encourage you to come up with family outreach ideas, we have encouraged you to have neighbors over for a driveway cookout.

I realize this is not as glitzy as some might like, but it really is true that what you win them with you must continue to do to keep them. We are committed to the fact that it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes and, that it is the gospel of Jesus Christ that saves that sanctifies that transforms our lives and so that is the key, and that is our focus.

It's no secret; our generation looks to institutions to solve the problems that plague us. When it comes to the needs of mankind or problems of society, we expect to find institutional solutions. When it comes to the work of Christ, Christians often expect the church to do it. This causes us to believe that such an important work must naturally fall to the church or missions organizations, rather than individuals.

Yet the church is not involved in your sphere of influence. Only you can reach the people into whose lives God has placed you.

That means 5th graders reaching 5th graders, high school students reaching other high school students, young adults reaching young adults, senior citizens reaching senior citizens, teachers reaching teachers, police officers reaching police officers... Can you sense the potential for penetrating an entire generation together?

I used to live in the Settlers Walk neighborhood near our church. Thinking through my responsibility to share the gospel, my neighbors became my friends. We held Bible studies in our home. We invited neighbors to dinner and other events where we could talk about Christ. It was not my pastor's job to share the gospel with those neighbors, it was my

responsibility and privilege. My pastor did not live in that neighborhood, I did. My pastor did not know the needs they had in their lives, but I did. And the primary vehicle God used to reach someone for Christ in my neighborhood was me. And God saved many through it.

Reflect and Respond

- Who are the people God has brought into your life who don't know Christ?
- In 1 Thessalonians 2:8 Paul writes, "We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us." Maybe this simple sentence is the profound strategy that helps us sense the beauty of Christ in a very personal way as it relates to others. It is a lifestyle. Is it a lifestyle for you?
- Do you have a few non-Christian friends with whom you are building redemptive relationships? Are you looking for or creating ways to expose them to Christ, the church, and Christians in a positive way?
- And have you prioritized the people with whom you are investing your life, sharing the lessons of ministry and outreach you have learned? Do you regularly discuss with others the things God has taught you about reaching your peers? Have you tried teaming up together to reach out to unbelieving peers?