

Introduction

My father grew up in Budapest, the capital of Hungary. His grandparents lived in a town out in the country. My Dad told the story of one time when his grandfather came into the city to visit the family. He was such a shy, timid man that he did not even have the boldness to ring the doorbell! He waited outside on the street— I never heard how long he waited— but he waited outside until a member of the household just happened to come out the front door and found him waiting there! Imagine all the people in the household— the family and their servants— going about their normal tasks... enjoying their day... doing whatever they were doing— life is going on inside the house— and this poor timid man is outside, not even having the confidence to let them know he was there!

Here's my reason for telling you that story: these days it can feel like our secular community, our world is all those people inside the house— life is going on... all kinds of things are happening... that's where the action is... And we Christians can be like the shy, timid man standing outside on the street. It can be that we're too timid to even knock on the door and say, "We want to come in; we have something to contribute." It can be that we lack confidence in our faith... we lack the confidence to speak up for our faith and our Saviour...

How striking it is that we read the words of the apostle Paul: "***I am not ashamed of the gospel...***" Even writing to Christians in Rome, the great capital city of the great empire. He was not at all intimidated by that thought. He said, "***I am eager to preach the gospel to you in Rome...***" How come he was so bold and confident? Do you and I have

good reasons to be confident like that? Let's see what he says in this little section.

1. God's power to save!

What a bold statement that is! ***"I am not ashamed of the gospel."*** Sometimes we are ashamed or embarrassed about it. A message about a Lord who dies the humiliating death of a criminal. A message that many voices around us say is foolish, unreasonable, irrelevant. Why is the apostle so confident about this message? His answer is right there— ***"I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for... salvation..."***. This is my first heading.

Have you ever taken part in one of those surveys about a product you've bought, or maybe an online service that you've used? Often there's a question: "Would you recommend this to your family and friends?" Sure, I'll recommend it if the service was good... if the product works well. I won't recommend it if the product does not work as it was meant to. The apostle is confidently, boldly recommending this 'product'— because it works! It is power from God to bring people to salvation! Let's pause on some questions.

He says, "I am not ashamed of the gospel." What is this 'gospel'? I wouldn't be surprised if you've already talked about this as you started reading this letter to the Romans. Let me just point you back to the start of the letter.

Romans 1:2-4 'the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures 3 regarding his Son, who as to his earthly life was a descendant of David, 4 and who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.'

The gospel is the message about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Truly human— descended from King David. Raised from the dead, and Lord. Incidentally, your testimony— your story of God’s work in your life— is very precious, and a great thing to share with people. But it’s not the gospel. It’s great for people to hear your story; but they also need to hear Jesus’ story.

Another question here... Paul says the gospel is the power of God for salvation. What is ‘salvation’? Salvation is a big idea. But very briefly... Salvation means being saved, rescued, delivered— especially rescued from being under God’s judgement and condemnation. ...and therefore brought into eternal freedom and security with God.

So Paul says the gospel “*is the power of God for salvation...*” How does he mean that exactly? I don’t think he means there’s some kind of magic in the words. Could I put it like this... The gospel is a promise from God to bring you to salvation if you put your faith in Jesus. It’s powerful because the God who promises is powerful, and he keeps his promises!

One other question before we move on... If the gospel is so great and powerful, how come so often it does not seem to work? How come there are many people who hear the gospel but don’t believe it and put their faith in Jesus? I notice Paul does not say, “It is the power of God for the salvation of everyone.” No, it’s the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.

If you’re swimming at the beach and you hear an announcement: “A shark has been sighted; all swimmers get out of the water”— what makes you safe is not just hearing the message, but hearing it, trusting it, acting on

it. The gospel message is powerful; but it calls for a response of faith.

Here's something to take from what I've said so far: if you long for people that you care about to find salvation in Jesus Christ, then seek to get more and more familiar with this message which is God's powerful way of bringing people to salvation.

Check out in your Bible how Jesus himself and his first followers presented the gospel. Many Christians have found it helpful to learn a simple gospel outline. "Two ways to live" is a well-known one. I'm sure Steve would love it if you ask him to help you learn a gospel outline.

Something more here: If this is the message by which God brings people to salvation, then let's be careful not to twist the message. It's tempting to hope the message might be more acceptable if we don't talk about the challenging things— Jesus' claim to be Lord... or that people need forgiveness from God... Yes, we want to be sensitive and respectful with people and their concerns and questions. But let's be careful not to try to 'improve' on the message which is God's power for salvation!

2. Faith and only faith

Now the next phrase in Paul's letter here tells us another wonderful thing about the gospel— another great reason not to be ashamed of it. "***I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who***" ... lives a good life... does lots of religious things... has never made a mess of their life? That's not what he says, is it? The gospel brings salvation to everyone ***who believes***.

Here's my second heading. How do you take hold of this glorious salvation? Not by doing lots of good things. Not by

doing religious ceremonies. Not by being respectable. The way to take hold of salvation is by believing. Believing, faith is the opposite of trying hard to be good enough. Faith says: “I can’t do it; I’m not good enough. I put my hope on God and his promises.” And believing is the way to embrace salvation, no matter who you are or where you come from or how religious you have or haven’t been.

“...first for the Jew, then for the Gentile”

Behind those few words we recognise the special history of the Jewish people described in the Old Testament.

Nevertheless, Paul declares faith is the way to embrace salvation, no matter whether your history with God goes back a thousand years or five minutes.

I am so thankful that it’s not all about how good you’ve been! What would be the “pass mark” of goodness in order to gain salvation? Would my good points actually outweigh my bad points? What could I do about bad things in my past that I cannot make right? No, believing, faith means putting your hope on God and his promises, not yourself or your goodness or your achievements. “Nothing in my hand I bring; simply to your cross I cling. Naked, come to you for dress; helpless, look to you for grace; stained by sin, to you I cry: ‘Wash me, Saviour, or I die.’ ”

This is good news for you if you are very aware of what’s not right in your life... you know you’ve messed up... you know you don’t deserve God’s favour. This gospel of Jesus Christ is God’s powerful way of bringing salvation to everyone who believes.

3. God’s righteous way

The next verse adds another link in Paul’s careful chain of reasoning. He says: ***I’m not ashamed of the gospel.*** Why are you not ashamed of it? Because it’s the power of God

for salvation. And how come it's powerful to bring salvation? Because, '*...in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."*

This gospel is powerful to bring salvation because in it a righteousness from God is revealed. Here's my third heading. So what does this "righteousness from God" mean? It's hard to be sure exactly what Paul is getting at here. But this is a wonderful thing: the gift of righteousness from God is revealed in the gospel.

The scholars tell us 'righteousness' in the Bible is not some kind of abstract or solitary goodness—like a saint living alone in a monastery who never puts a foot wrong but never meets another human being. Righteousness is all to do with relationships. A righteous person is someone whose relationships are good and healthy and loving and faithful and truthful.

The problem for us imperfect human beings is that we're not righteous before God. Left to ourselves, our relationships with him are not right! But the gospel of Jesus Christ reveals a righteousness from God. It reveals how your relationship with God can be put right. It's a gift from God; you take hold of it by faith. Your relationship with God is put right when he forgives you and welcomes you home. And that's all possible because of Jesus Christ.

So indeed, as Paul says, the gospel is God's power to save people—because it reveals this righteousness from God. It reveals God's gift of putting people right with him.

And just in case you missed it before, it's all about faith.

'a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith"'. This

great truth that you're saved by faith— this is not something invented by Paul. The vital importance of faith was taught in the Old Testament— as he shows with these words taken from the little book of the prophet Habakkuk.

Conclusion

I want to finish now. Here's something for you if you don't yet believe. Here is a great invitation for you. You can be right with God; you can be rescued, saved from judgement and condemnation, so you're secure with God forever. This gospel message calls you to put your trust in Jesus Christ, the living Son of God.

Here's something for you if you do already believe. Take hold of the assurance that you can be confident in the gospel. This is the part of this message that I most need to take to heart myself. Often I find myself listening to the voices that say the gospel is weak, foolish, unreasonable, irrelevant... the voices that would tell us not to speak about Jesus.

I believe a famous preacher of the past said being embarrassed or ashamed or defensive about the Bible and the gospel would be like feeling embarrassed or ashamed or defensive about a lion! Why be ashamed or embarrassed about a message that is God's power to save people... God's power to bring people from death to life... God's power to put people right with him?