**THE GOSPEL: THE POWER OF GOD FOR SALVATION**

Romans 1:1-17

Key Verse: 1:16

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.”

God blessed us to complete Luke’s gospel Bible Study this past February. In Luke’s Gospel, we see Jesus - the Son of God - who came to seek and save the lost. Jesus, the son of man, walked through Galilee, Judea, and even Samaria, reaching out all kinds of sinners with divine love and truth as a humble servant. Yet, instead of being welcomed, he was rejected, and falsely accused by his own people. Ultimately, he was crucified by Gentiles and buried. But, God raised him from the dead and he appeared to many of his disciples. The gospel of Luke presents a powerful account based on the testimony of numerous eyewitnesses to Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. Jesus’ words and deeds give a good foundation for our faith.

Do you know what Jesus’ death and resurrection mean? How does Jesus’ death and resurrection save us? What does “I believe in Jesus” mean? What does it mean to live by faith in Jesus? To grow as a true Christian, we need a deep and profound understanding of the gospel of Jesus. Here Paul wrote this Romans in Corinth at the end of the third missionary journey. It was to impart some Spiritual Gift - the foundational truth of the gospel - so that believers in Rome might become strong in the truth.

Throughout History, the Romans has had a great impact on countless individuals, shaping them into prominent leaders such as Augustine, Martin Luther, John Wesley, and many more. Martin Luther (A.D. 1483-1546) was a Catholic monk. He wanted to be free from endless guilt and shame of sin through works of prayer, fasting, and other extreme practices. At one point, he even crawled the Holy Stairs (Scala Santa) with broken glasses on his knees. He made so many confessions that his chief monk finally told him “Don’t come back to me until you commit a real sin.” Despite all his efforts, he remained tormented by the burden of sin. But through Romans 1:17 “The righteous will live by faith,” he encountered God’s grace that truly set him free from all condemnations. He came to understand the deep meaning of the righteousness of God that comes from faith. This truth of the gospel set him free indeed, and empowered him to begin the reformation. Reflecting on the Romans, he wrote, “...the chief part of the New Testament, and truly...the purest gospel… it can never be read or pondered too much. The more it is dealt with, the more precious it becomes, and the better it tastes.”

Through the Romans’ Bible Study, we may also grasp this profound spiritual truth of the gospel and grow strong in our faith. This Romans bible study may deeply impact our lives, so that we may live by faith and lead gospel-centered lives.

**Part 1. Paul and the gospel (1-7)**

Verses 1-7 are Paul’s greetings. Here Paul introduced himself on the basis of his personal relationship with Jesus and his calling to the gospel. In verse 1, he says, “Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, and set apart for the gospel of God….” The word “servant” comes from the Greek word “doulos” which means slave. It refers to a person who was purchased on the slave market. According to first century Roman law, a slave’s life was not his own; the master had absolute ownership over the slave. They were treated as nothing but property. Normally when we introduce ourselves, we try to present ourselves in the best possible light. I will introduce myself. “I am Peter, a professionally trained and fully devoted biblical counselor, serving full time in the International Campus Evangelical Organization University Bible Fellowship, New Jersey Chapter.” (It means a full time staff.) Or, “I am a sanitary engineer.” (It means that he is a garbage collector.) Or, “I am an office system specialist.” (It means that he is a secretary.) We aim to make a good first impression and present ourselves in a positive and respectable way.

However, Paul identified himself as a “slave.” “I am a slave - a slave of Christ Jesus.” There is no negative connotation. Rather, it carries a deep sense of honor and pride of being a servant of Jesus Christ. Why? Because his Master is Jesus, the Lord who sacrificed himself for Paul; he bought his life with his own blood when Paul was a slave to sin; Jesus, his master, is the Son of God, the King of kings and the Lord of Lords. In calling himself “a servant of Christ Jesus” Paul expressed his sense of belonging, pride, and honor. He was happy that he belonged to Jesus.

Last year, 12 people confessed that Jesus is the Lord and were baptized. What does that mean? They acknowledged that Jesus bought them with his blood; they were united with Jesus in his death and in his resurrection. Since Jesus redeemed them, they belong to Jesus, the Lord. Though they are students, or sons, or daughters or employees, they belong to the master, Jesus. They are a servant of Jesus Christ. We must maintain our spiritual identity as a servant of Christ Jesus, a Bible Teacher and a shepherd. For Jesus redeemed us with his blood. If someone asks you, “who are you? what are you doing?” We may answer confidently, “I am a Bible Teacher, a Servant of Jesus.”

Paul said that he was “called to be an apostle.” While the word “servant” characterizes his relationship with Christ, the word “apostle” defines his mission to the world. He also said that he was “set apart for the gospel of God.” “Set apart” means to be specially dedicated to a particular task. Put simply, Jesus called Paul to be an apostle for the sake of the gospel of God. Here Paul emphasized that his identity - who he is - is rooted in God’s grace and his sovereignty over his life. Under the power of sin, he was lost. He tried to find identity by keeping Jewish laws and regulations. As a result, he became an enemy, a persecutor of the church. He knew that he deserved God’s wrath. Yet, he became an apostle. How? Only by God’s grace when the Risen Christ visited him personally on the road of Damascus. On his way to Damascus, Jesus arrested - captured - him, declaring, “This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.”(Acts 9:15-16) This calling was not accidental or a random chance. Paul’s life was part of God’s eternal plan of salvation. This calling enabled him to endure all kinds of trails and to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. He gave his entire life to proclaiming the gospel of Jesus. In fact, it is God’s calling that made him a great servant of God. In many of his letters, we can find Paul’s confession of God’s amazing grace that remolded him into a great servant of God. “For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am…”(1Cor 15:9-10) “I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who… appointed me to his service. Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man… acted in ignorance and unbelief. The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.” (1Ti1:12-14) In God’s grace and His calling, Paul found - defined who he is - himself as a servant of Christ Jesus. In verse 1, we have seen how Paul identifies himself as a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God. How do you identify yourself?

In verse 2-4, Paul briefly explained the gospel with 2 main points. First of all, the origin of the gospel is from God and second, the gospel is about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Since Adam’s fall, all people have lived as slaves of sin and Satan, with no power to free themselves. But in his great mercy, God made the plan to save all mankind. God called one man, Abram, with the promise to make him a source of blessing to nations. God promised to send a Savior; and finally God fulfilled all his promises by sending his Son, Jesus as the perfect sacrifice for the sins of the world. This gospel is not a man-made story. It was initiated by God and fulfilled by God through Jesus. This Jesus is the Son of God. He completed God’s redemptive plan by humbling himself, taking on human form, and becoming obedient to death - even death on a cross. But God raised him from the dead, declaring him to be the Son of God. (Php 2:6) Paul concluded that Jesus is Christ our Lord. Because only Jesus has defeated the power of death through his resurrection. So, he alone can give us the victory over sin and death and the living hope in the kingdom of God.

In verses 5-7 Paul spoke of his relationship with the believers in Rome and offered his greeting. Verse 5 says, “Through him we received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith for his name’s sake.” This reflects Paul’s conversion and mission. Then, why did he say “we” instead of “I”? Who is “We”? When we look at verse 6, we see that “We” includes “you.” - the believers in Rome. “We” refers to all who believe in Jesus, just as Paul does. By identifying himself with other believers, Paul shows that the grace and apostleship are given not only to him alone, but also to all other believers.

We, all who believe in Christ, are called to be God’s holy people; we are loved by God. What an amazing grace of God. Not only are we loved and saved, we are also called, together with Paul, to be servants of God - set apart and totally dedicated to him. We receive grace and apostleship!

Whenever we hear the dramatic story of Paul’s conversion on the road to Damascus, we are amazed by God’s divine love and sovereign authority. However, we must also remember. We, too, are saved and called by the same grace that saved and called Paul - Our Lord Jesus sacrificed himself on a cross for our sins. Paul’s story is amazing, but so is each of our own, as a testimony to how the Son of God loved a sinner. Just as God appointed Paul as His chosen instrument, he also calls each of us to live a new life in Christ - a radically different life, a holy life, a mission-centered life, a life of the obedience that comes from faith, a life of proclaiming the gospel to all nations. We are also saved and called by such amazing Grace of God!!!

Grace and apostleship cannot be separated. All believers have received grace. Once we receive God’s grace, we can no longer live as slaves to sin. We live for the glory of God; we live a new life in Jesus as servants of Christ Jesus. Apostleship is not something we earn, but something we receive as a result of God’s grace. Here, this apostleship is to call all the Gentiles; unbelievers - to the obedience that comes from faith. For this calling, Paul lived for Jesus’ name sake not for his worldly ambition. His mission was to call people, and help them obey God by faith.

In the 21 century, we are carrying on this apostleship through campus mission. We are called to witness Jesus through Bible Studies and Discipleship ministry. It is to call students to the obedience that comes from faith in Jesus. Though the work of God is slow, we must carry on our calling for campus mission in our generation. Why? For Only the gospel of Jesus is the power of God for salvation.

**Part II. The Gospel is the power of God for salvation (8-17).**

Paul began to share his passion and prayer topics for the believers. Firstly, he gave thanks for the believers in Rome because their faith was being reported all over the world (8). Why was this so significant? At that time, Rome was the center of the world, the capital of the Roman Empire. It was the centre of culture, business, architecture, education, politics, arts, wisdom, religion, and so on. It was full of idol worshipers - followers of Jupiter, Apollo, Diana, Venus. It was the center of Emperor worship. It was saturated with various philosophies, immorality. Yet, in the midst of such an atmosphere, the believers kept their faith. As Paul thought about this, he was very thankful to God. I am very thankful to God for the faithful Dream Team - campus students. In America, they are surrounded by all temptations and challenges 24/7. Yet, still they come for Bible Studies, and worship service. What an amazing faith! Let us thank God for their faith!

Look at verses 9-10. Paul wanted them to know that he constantly remembered them in his prayers; God was his witness. Paul longed to visit them, and prayed that at last, by God’s will, the way would be opened for him to come to them (10). Then, why did he want to visit Rome? Look at verse 11-13. He wanted to impart to them some spiritual gift to make them strong (11). The word “impart” means “share.” The spiritual gift was most likely the gospel truth - Paul’s deep insight into and understanding of the gospel. Paul wanted their faith to grow and to be strong. As a result, he wanted to have a harvest among them. Moreover, he wanted them to become his gospel partners to evangelize Rome and then the whole world even!

What inspired him to have such passion and vision for the Romans? Look at verses 14-15. “I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish. That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are in Rome.” “Obligation” means “debt” “Greeks” refer to those who spoke Greek and adapted to Greek culture. “Non-Greeks” meant barbarians. “Wise” refers to the educated, and “foolish” to the illiterate. Simply speaking, Paul meant he was indebted to all Gentiles.

How and Where did this sense of obligation come from? It came from the grace of Christ. Paul was a blasphemer, a persecutor and a violent man. But God had mercy on him. The grace of our Lord Jesus was poured out on him abundantly. The Grace of Jesus was not only to forgive him, but also to entrusted the gospel to him to preach to the Gentiles (1Th 2:4; Titus 1:3). His grace over him was so great that he could have a sense of obligation to all people. Should we have the same sense of obligation? Yes. Because of sin, we were destined to face God’s eternal judgment. We carried a heavy burden of sin on our shoulders. Out of his great mercy, God cancelled all our debts through our Lord Jesus. He enables us to serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness, before him all our days (Lk 1:74-75). Moreover, he gave us the great commission to “make disciples of all nations” (Mt 28:19). Based on Jesus’ grace and commission we too should have a sense of holy obligation. But it is not like credit card debt which causes anxiety, and reluctance. The obligation we have in Christ is entirely different. It comes from remembering what God has done for us. It leads us to share the grace of Jesus with others willingly and joyfully. This gives us strength to grow, bear fruit, and become a blessing to the world.

Paul gives another reason for his eagerness to preach the gospel in Rome. Let’s read verse 16: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.” Why might people feel ashamed of the gospel? Think of how the message of a crucified Savior contrasts with the glory of a Roman Emperor with military power or the Greek gods claiming authority to grant prosperity. Think of how Jesus’ teachings may have seemed weak or foolish next to the philosophies of Rome. The gospel of Jesus might appear insignificant in the eyes of the world.

But, Paul was not ashamed of the gospel. Why? Because Paul knew the power of the gospel. The gospel is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes. It is the power that destroys sin and death and sets us free. No philosophy, ideology or religion, no economy or military can do such a thing - only the gospel of Jesus can. It is the power that transforms sinners into God’s holy people, disciples of Jesus, Bible Teachers and shepherds. Not communism, Not capitalism, not man’s philosophy or religious group, not man’s wisdom or intellect, but only the gospel of Jesus brings salvation for everyone who believes in Jesus. This power transforms the proud into the humble, the bitter into the thankful and joyful, and the fearful and doubtful into the confident and courageous. Only the gospel of Jesus transforms the lives of sinners forever.

Paul tells why the gospel is the power of God in verse 17: “For 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.’” Here “the righteousness of God” is a right relationship with God. We cannot earn this righteousness with our own works. There is zero contribution of human efforts or achievement. This righteousness is given only by faith in Jesus from first to last. Under the power of sin, we were hopeless -destined for eternal punishment.

The only hope for us is this righteousness of God in the gospel. That is the only way of salvation for us - to believe in Jesus. To believe is not just a one-time transaction to obtain salvation.

It is a way of life. We must live by faith daily, from the beginning to the end.

In this introduction of the latter, Paul imparte us the wonderful spiritual gift that make us strong - “The gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.” “The righteous will live by faith from the first to last.” This spiritual gift has changed many lives throughout History. These are the central themes of the book of Romans. From now on, we will see How Paul proves this theme through various logical arguments.

The gospel of Jesus is the power of God that brings salvation. We no longer live in shame, but live by faith in Jesus. Not by trying harder to be holy, but by putting out faith in Jesus who suffered and died on the cross for all my sins - All my sins are washed away - once for all. Let’s pray that we may not be ashamed of the gospel, but live with full confidence in its power. We may experience the power of the gospel in our practical lives and witness Jesus Christ.