

# Guest Preacher Mr Philip Pickett

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, if you could turn back with me to Romans, if you've got that passage open, we're going to be looking specifically at verses 16 and 17. Let me read them again for us. Paul says, for I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also the Greek.

For in it, the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith. As it is written, the righteous shall live by faith. Well, this morning we're going to look at these well-known verses, especially verse 16. And one theologian said, you can't understand the book of Romans without first understanding these verses, which is quite a claim. I think we could say that's, and that's because these verses are packed full of truth and doctrine that is really at the heart of Paul's letter to the Romans. It's not only at the heart of this letter to the Romans, but it's at the heart of the Christian faith. Now, Paul, just for a bit of background, Paul had never been to the church in Rome. You'd have seen that from the beginning of the letter.

He's saying he's eager to go and preach there. And we might wonder, if there's already a church in Rome, why was Paul so keen to get there? Well, if you were to read through the letter to the Romans, you'd see that Paul's ambition ultimately was to go on to Spain and preach the gospel there, where the gospel hadn't yet reached.

[ 1 : 22 ] And Paul was hoping that by going to Rome, they would become a staging post, the mother church, the sending church, as it were, for him to then go on to bring the gospel to Spain.

But for that to happen, Paul knew that the church in Rome needed to become as persuaded about the necessity and power and glory of the gospel as he was, so that they would support him and so they would be excited to share the gospel themselves and support him in his missionary efforts to get to Spain.

Now, of course, it takes Paul's whole letter to encourage the Romans in the gospel. His aim in the letter really is to get them excited about the gospel so that they'll want to share it and support it and believe it.

And he takes a whole letter to do that. But really, verses 16 and 17 is a pretty good summary of his argument. And not only that, though, these verses are incredibly relevant to us today.

You might have been surprised that Paul started verse 16 with the words, I'm not ashamed. However, if we think about it, what's one of the biggest reasons why we might not be excited to share the gospel, keen to support the gospel, gospel efforts, and believe it?

[ 2 : 41 ] I won't be surprised if part of that is that we can easily be ashamed of the gospel. When I was preparing this, I got out a blank sheet of paper and I started writing down reasons why I might be tempted to be ashamed of the gospel.

Reasons I knew why other people had said they were tempted to be ashamed of the gospel. I wonder if any of these ring true for you. I wrote, I'm not always hopeful that people will believe the gospel.

Do you ever find that? Is this actually going to land? Are people actually going to believe this? Maybe we're not always convinced that Christians will be changed by the gospel.

It just seems to flow in one ear and out the other. Maybe you're anxious. Maybe we're anxious sometimes that when we share the gospel, people will think we're deluded. Or that the gospel will sound foolish.

Maybe we're worried that in this day and age, that if we speak about the gospel, people think we're intolerant. And now they'll think that we're hateful. Or that they'll think all kinds of things.

[ 3 : 45 ] And it's easy to duck. It's easy to feel ashamed. I wonder if you've ever felt those things. I wonder if what you'd add. Maybe you're not convinced the gospel's true. Maybe you're worried that you won't be able to keep up following Jesus.

There's all kinds, all number of reasons why you might feel ashamed of the gospel. But how do we answer those fears? How do we overcome that temptation to duck? That temptation to not be excited in the power of the gospel?

Well, one of the main things that I found helpful is coming back again and again to this verse. Where Paul speaks about why he's not ashamed. I'm not ashamed of the gospel, he says. For it is the power of God for the salvation to everyone who believes. To the Jew first and also for the Greek. That's why Paul isn't ashamed. And Paul is telling the Romans then and us now. So that we can be strengthened to believe. Strengthened to support. Strengthened to share the gospel. Let's dig into this verses then.

[ 4 : 47 ] The first point is that the gospel is not foolish, but good news. I know it's easy to fear that when we speak about the gospel, we'll sound foolish. That when we speak of Jesus Christ, people will think we're deluded.

Whether you're 16, 36 or 60, you can worry that being public about Jesus and about saying that you follow Jesus or saying that you're a Christian is like the equivalent of wearing a t-shirt that says, I believe the world is flat.

That people will look at you and think, do you understand anything? They'll look at you and think you're unscientific. They'll think you're deluded. You're ignorant. And maybe you're just looking into the things of the gospel and you're looking into Christianity and that's actually how you see the gospel.

You look at it and you think, this all sounds foolish. Or maybe you're a Christian and you've had that experience when you try to tell your friends or your family about Jesus.

And they look at you like, what planet are you on? Or they give you the kind of, that's good for you, dear. I'm glad you're happy. I'm glad that you have your faith.

[ 5 : 56 ] Maybe people are just completely amazed that you believe this stuff. Are Christians then fools to be pitied? There's a lot that could be said. I want to argue that the gospel is not foolish, but it is good news.

The word gospel means good news. When an army, let's say a Roman army, had gone out on campaign and when they had won a battle, they might send back news that they had won. And that news was called a gospel, called good news. It was news of victory. And the New Testament writers use that word gospel to speak about something great that has been done. But also in a much narrow way. This isn't just a broadly good news like a battle has won. This is a specific good news. Paul says, I'm not ashamed of the gospel.

There is a specific packet of information, you might say, that he is not ashamed of. It's a good news of a person, of Jesus Christ. And we see that from the very beginning, from the first verses of Romans chapter 1.

[ 6 : 56 ] From verse 2, you see, Paul says that the gospel is a message that was promised through the prophets in the Holy Scriptures. The gospel isn't some newfangled idea. The gospel is part and parcel in line with the plan of God from the very beginning.

The gospel isn't something new. It's right in line with God's plans. Verse 3, though, is where it becomes really important. We see it's concerning his son, who is descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the son of God in power according to the spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead.

In other words, at the center of the gospel is a person. The God-man Jesus Christ. Descended from David, fully man. Shown and proved to be divine in his resurrection from the dead.

At the center of the gospel is Jesus. Take away Jesus and you take away the gospel. Let me just push that further, though. We can say true things about God.

You can say true things about God's character, about God's law. However, if you don't bring those things back to Christ, we're not speaking the gospel. Equally, you can speak of God's love for a person.

[ 8 : 13 ] You can speak of the forgiveness of sins. However, if we don't bring that eventually back to the personal work of Jesus, we're not declaring the gospel. Jesus is the center. He's the fulcrum. He's the foundation.

He is the inescapable and unavoidable heart of the gospel. And that's good news. That's why the gospel is good news.

At the heart of Christianity, when we're telling people, come to Jesus, when we're holding out the gospel to them, we're not holding out five pillars of Islam that they need to keep, five standards they need to obey.

We're not holding out a series of rituals that they have to perform in order to be right with God.

We're not even holding out ten commandments that they have to obey.

What we're holding out is a person, Jesus Christ. The God who is holy, who is righteous, who is just, who is merciful. He walked the earth.

[ 9 : 10 ] He revealed all those perfect qualities in the person and work of Jesus Christ. As Jesus brushed shoulders with humanity, as he wept, as he ate, as he celebrated, God's character was shown.

The law of God is perfectly embodied in Jesus. Jesus perfectly demonstrates God's heart to us. If we just point people to God's law, we're falling short because the law is perfectly fulfilled in Christ. Jesus is where Jesus shows us. The law shows us our sin. Jesus shows us how we can come to God. The love of God is perfectly defined in Christ.

John says in his letter, In this is love, not that we have loved God, but that he has loved us. Jesus defines love, God's love. The forgiveness of God is seen and is won through Jesus' death on the cross and resurrection.

The gospel is not foolish because it is good news about Jesus, the son of God who lived, who died, who rose again to save people like you and me. There's nothing to be ashamed of there.

[ 10 : 22 ] Jesus didn't have any awkward skeletons in his closet or any embarrassing, embarrassing moments. His enemies did all they could to find anything that was wrong in him. And at the end of the day, even his enemies had to declare that he was innocent.

His work wasn't dodgy. It was perfect, as we'll see. If the gospel was a list of rules and rituals, we'd have something to maybe be ashamed of. Because we'd be handing some people something that isn't good news, but it's something they could never keep.

The gospel is good news because we're putting before people Jesus Christ. It's not foolish, it's good news. Second, the gospel is not powerless, but it's dynamite.

Have you ever lost hope that the gospel works? Have you ever been worried that the gospel works? I know many of you, I imagine many of you have loved ones, whether children or spouses or parents or neighbors.

And many of them have heard the gospel, but they haven't responded. They haven't believed in Jesus. They might be hostile.

[ 11 : 35 ] They might be questioning. They might just be ambivalent. They might just not really care. But when you've been praying and persevering and sharing the gospel with people, you can sometimes and easily feel, is this really going to work?

Will the gospel ever get through to them? We might not describe that as being ashamed of the gospel. We could easily say that we lose hope in the power of the gospel. They may have heard the gospel, we think, but maybe they need something else.

We think, well, you know what they need? They need some life or death situation to wake them up. To make them think, okay, I've got to, now I've got to believe in Jesus. And we think, okay, well, maybe what they need is some special experience.

Some vision, some dream that will make them see, oh, okay, now I need to believe in Jesus. Maybe you think, oh, they need to hear a really impressive testimony. Or they need to hear a sports personality or someone, a great intellectual, give their testimony about why they trust in Jesus.

Or maybe you've, you know, maybe you're sitting here and you've heard the gospel many times and you're thinking, you know, I would believe in Jesus if. There's just something else I need.

[ 12 : 44 ] Well, the gospel isn't weak. The gospel is sufficient and it's powerful. Paul says, I'm not ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of God for salvation.

The gospel is a message about Jesus, but it is also, but it's more than that. It's not just a message about Jesus and the salvation he brings.

It's not just the message of salvation. It's the means of salvation. Let me explain the difference.

Many of you have probably been on the ferry. I mean, probably all of you must have been on the ferry coming from Ullapool to Stornway.

And you'll have seen, you may have seen the Coast Guard do some exercises, maybe just flying behind the ferry or sometimes lowering down a man onto the back of the ferry. That's the coolest

when that happens.

But imagine you are, imagine you need the Coast Guard. Imagine you're adrift in a boat. Maybe the engine is cut out and you're just going further and further out into the Atlantic. And the Coast Guard comes along.

[13:46] Now, if I was in the helicopter and if I dropped down a message saying a guy is going to come down a rope and rescue you, that would be a message of salvation.

If a guy dropped down, that would be the means of salvation. The gospel is both the message and the means. It not only announces that Christ saves, the very gospel being proclaimed saves people. Paul says, I'm not ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of God. He doesn't just say it's about the power of God. The very gospel is the power of God. Theologians say that the gospel doesn't just make the gospel known, it affects salvation.

In other words, the gospel itself does the saving. The words themselves have power. And we know that, we see that in other areas of life. For example, when someone gets married and the minister says, I now pronounce you man and wife.

At that moment, their words have power. At that moment, when the words are said, those people do become one. And that's also something we see throughout the Bible.

[14:52] Words having power is a common theme. When God created the world, he didn't say, let there be light. And then he did something and then there was light. When he said the words, let there be light, there was light.

Psalms 33 verse 6 says, By the word of the Lord, the heavens were made. By the breath of his mouth, all their host. God's words are powerful. And when God speaks, things happen.

And God says he promises. God speaks through the gospel. God speaks whenever the gospel is faithfully proclaimed. When the words of the gospel go out, God is speaking.

The gospel has the power to save. Because God is speaking. The writer to the Hebrews says, For the word of God is living and active, sharper than a two-edged sword.

The gospel isn't powerless. It's like a surgeon's scalpel that, you could say, it's like dynamite. It blasts people apart and reshapes them around Jesus Christ.

[15:53] And if that sounds radical, then that's good. If you start following Jesus, your life will never be the same. God will use the gospel to completely transform you.

Not take away your personality, but perfect who you are after how he created you. To make you like his son. Let me just give some implications of that, though.

First, be careful about hearing the gospel. If you don't want your life to change, then don't listen. Don't listen to another word of this sermon.

And certainly don't listen to anything in here. Don't listen to anything in God's word. Because God's word is powerful. It's like dynamite. And God promises that when he speaks, his words won't return to him empty.

And if you're someone who's waiting for a special experience to bring you to Christ, can I just ask, why are you doing that?

[16:54] While it's not impossible for God to work through a special experience, he never promises to do that. He does, however, promise to work through his word, through his powerful word of the gospel.

Second, those of you who are Christians, don't lose hope. Trust in the gospel. Trust in God's word to do God's work. I want to mention this.

I want to emphasize that God's words have power. Because sometimes we can think it's optional.

You may have heard the quote that's attributed to St. Francis of Assisi that says, preach the gospel at all times.

Use words if necessary. And while it's often used to remind people of the importance that the Christian life has to match, the words that we speak have to be matched by our lives, we can't be hypocrites, which is important to emphasize.

We must live the gospel as well as speak it. But there's two problems there. First, St. Francis never actually said this quote. It's attributed to him, but not actually found in his writings. That doesn't mean it's not true. But what's important, though, is that words are necessary.

[18:01] Jesus used words. Paul used words. Paul knew words were necessary for people to come to faith. The Apostle Paul, yes, he cared about how the Romans lived.

He goes on later in the letter to give them extensive instructions how to live out the gospel. However, that doesn't change the fact that the gospel is fundamentally a verbal message that adequately can't be communicated without words.

We can show someone love. We must show people love. But we have to then go on and explain why we love them in some way for them to hear the gospel.

We have to explain that we love them because they're made in the image of God. That we love them because God has first loved us. And his love is displayed in Christ Jesus.

And that they can know God's love, not just as creator, but as father if they trust in him. The gospel should be accompanied by Christ-like lives. But the gospel cannot be communicated without words.

[ 19 : 03 ] And you know what? That's fine. That's good, in fact. God could have decided that his chosen way of saving people was just snapping his fingers and they'd be saved.

He could have chosen, he could have decided that his chosen way was, I don't know, by saving people through dreams or visions. But the God who spoke light into darkness.

The God who made all things with the breath of his mouth. God has decided to continue to save people through words. And amazingly, he chooses to save people not just through him speaking directly, but primarily through us.

Speaking through our words as we speak the gospel. In 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, sorry, Paul speaks, describes Christians like jars of clay.

You could think of the equivalent of a coffee cup, a disposable coffee cup or a Tesco bag. Something that is disposable, something that is weak. We often feel like that.

[ 20 : 04 ] We're not very impressive. And yet Paul says it's through us. It's through vessels, through these vessels of clay that God puts the treasure of the gospel. And that's how he makes his words go forth and bring people from death to life.

Through our words that we feel are weak. That when we speak, we think our words feel foolish. We think our words don't impact those who are listening. And yet God promises that he will speak as we faithfully proclaim the gospel.

And he'll speak to do what? To save. That's our third point. The gospel is not unnecessary, but it's life-giving. Paul says that the gospel is the power of God for salvation.

And just a short point really, but I just want to underline how good the good news of the gospel is. The gospel saves. Just let that sink in for a moment.

The gospel doesn't just give us information. The gospel brings people who are spiritually dead to life. The gospel brought the apostle Paul, the most vehement enemy of the gospel, and saved him and transformed him into one of the greatest missionaries who's ever lived.

[ 21 : 23 ] That's the power of the gospel. That's what the power of the gospel saving someone looks like. And he regularly makes a business of bringing rebels and turning them into sons and daughters.

Each one of you here who is trusting in Jesus is a living example of the power of the gospel to save. Each one of you is a living example of the gospel does save.

That it is the power of God. We have no need to be ashamed of the gospel because it accomplishes what nothing else ever can or ever will. The gospel of Jesus Christ repairs the damage of sin. It unites us with God. It restores us into the relationship we are created for. How does it do it? Well, we need to glance briefly at verse 17 to see that.

That for at the beginning of verse 17 tells us that verse 17 is giving us the reason. Verse 17 is the reason for verse 16. The gospel is the power of God to save.

[ 22 : 25 ] For in it the righteousness of God is revealed. And thinking about salvation in terms of the righteousness of God helps us to see and remember how comprehensive God's salvation is.

We all want, if you buy insurance for your car, you want it to be comprehensive insurance. You don't want to be stuck in the middle of nowhere and you find out that actually you're only insured if, I don't know, a tree falls in your car or something minor and insignificant like that.

You want comprehensive insurance. And you want the gospel to be comprehensive as well. And it's comprehensive. First, the first aspect of salvation is that the righteousness of God is revealed as a gift.

God declares people righteous. In other words, he declares them morally perfect in his sight. That's referred to as justification often. God's righteousness stamped on someone so that they stand morally perfect in the law court of heaven so they're righteous in his sight.

Naturally, of course, we're unrighteous. We're sinners deserving God's wrath. But what does God do through Jesus Christ? There's a great exchange where God places his righteousness on us and Jesus takes our sin.

[ 23 : 39 ] It's that great exchange in which God's righteousness is demonstrated and declared. The gospel wouldn't be good news if it was about our righteousness being offered to God.

Because we would all have nothing to offer. The gospel is good news because it's about God's righteousness gifted to us. But salvation doesn't stop there.

We aren't started down the road to the celestial city, as it were, and then just told, you can do it. Off you go. God saved you. Now the rest is up to you.

Salvation is comprehensive. We're not only declared righteous, but God then transforms us to make us more and more like Christ. God's righteousness is revealed in that ongoing process of sanctification where he makes rebels who are declared righteous live more and more like the sons and daughters that we have been saved to be.

Salvation is fully comprehensive. Later on, Paul will go on in Romans 8 to say, those he justified, he also glorified. When you trust in Christ, you are saved from first to last.

[ 24 : 50 ] And I don't know about you, but I mean, I know some people are worried that if they trust in Jesus, if they become a Christian, they think, well, how can I keep it up? Well, here's the answer.

That as surely as Jesus justifies someone, he will continue to sanctify them. It's up. God will keep. You don't need to keep it up in some ways because God, it's through God and through his strength that as surely as he saves you, he will keep you going.

He will preserve you. The gospel is life-giving. It's comprehensive. Nothing is left out. Finally, we don't need to be ashamed because the gospel is not intolerant, but inclusive.

Look at that last part of the verse there. Paul says, I'm not ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. For the Jew first and also for the Greek. Christianity and Christians are often accused of being intolerant, aren't they? Or excluding. The message of the gospel isn't intolerant. The gospel demands change, yes, but it demands change from everyone.

[ 25 : 58 ] And the invitation and the command to come to Christ and let God change you goes out to everyone. Regardless of the person, who the person is, regardless of the person's race or gender or sexual orientation or what job they do or where they're from.

Every person, the offer to come to God and be changed and be saved is held out to everyone. It's for everyone who believes. Everyone who believes.

That means it's a gospel not to be ashamed of, but to boast in. The gospel has the power to save everyone. Not just people who are a little bit bad, if anyone actually thinks that.

But even to save the worst of sinners. So Paul calls himself. The gospel is more powerful than your greatest sin.

If you think you're too bad to save. Well, then you don't understand the gospel. Because the gospel is more powerful than our greatest sin. And the invitation of that gospel is held out to all.

[ 27 : 02 ] It's held out to you this morning. If you don't believe in the gospel, the gospel is being held out to you. Will you believe? Believe in what? Believe in Christ. Christ is being held out before you.

In all his perfection. In all his beauty. In all his glory. And when we believe in Christ, we trust that by his death, his righteousness is placed on us.

He takes our sin. But believing is more than just a mind exercise. Believing is about... Well, let me explain. Let me illustrate what believing is.

It's one thing to know that Christ died for your sins. It's another to place your life in his hands. You may have heard of the Scottish missionary John Payton. Who traveled to the Pacific Islands of the New Hebrides.

And when he was there, he was translating the Bible into the local language. And he was struggling to find an equivalent word for faith. And one day after he had been trekking through the jungle with his translator.

[ 27 : 59 ] And they arrived back at the camp. His translator collapsed into a hammock. And suddenly it was like a light bulb had gone off in Payton's head. And he said, tell me what you've done. And the translator explained.

Told him the word for what he'd just done. And John Payton explained how faith is just like that. It's just like collapsing in a hammock. And that's the expression that Payton then used to translate the

words for faith and believe.

Which is the same word in the Greek. To collapse all our weight on God. Trust wholly in the finished work of Christ. That's what it means to believe. To collapse fully on Jesus.

That he has done everything. To give ourselves completely to him and hold nothing back. And the gospel is the power of salvation. For everyone who believes.

For everyone who just collapses on Jesus. You don't need any qualifications to collapse onto Jesus. I think it's Spurgeon who speaks about the only qualification you need.

[ 29 : 01 ] Is that you're a sinner. And that's all of us. We're all perfectly qualified as it were. To collapse onto Jesus. Have you believed?

If not, why not? All you have to do is rest your full weight on Jesus Christ. Nothing else. He's done everything else. And if you have believed.

Then keep on believing. We start the Christian life in faith. We continue in faith. It's not suddenly something new that we have to do. Paul says in verse 17. For the righteous shall live by faith.

We begin in faith. We continue in faith. We begin by collapsing on Jesus. We continue by collapsing and resting in Jesus. By his strength. By his power. Following Jesus is about resting in him from beginning to end.

The gospel then is truly good news. If you speak about the gospel. You might be accused of being intolerant. You might. People might look at you like you're ignorant.

[ 30 : 03 ] You might feel foolish. You might experience closed doors and closed conversations. But you don't ever need to be ashamed. This isn't our gospel ultimately.

This is the gospel of Christ. Our Lord and Savior who lived. Who died. Who rose again. Who is now seated at God's right hand. And who continues to speak.

To continue to speak through the wonderful words of the gospel. To speak of himself by the spirit. That he sends forth in this world. It's his breath of power. To bring life from the dead.

To everyone who believes. So there's no need to be ashamed. Let me read this verse again. And then we'll pray. For I'm not ashamed of the gospel.

For it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. Let's pray. Heavenly Father we give you thanks that the gospel is good news.

[ 31 : 00 ] We thank you that the message you are holding out into the world. Isn't something that we have to be ashamed of. Isn't a person that we have to be ashamed of. Isn't a list of rules or rituals.

We thank you that it is Christ. That he is perfect. That he is beautiful. And we pray that you would fill us in a greater and greater awe and love for Christ.

So that we are eager to hold him out to the world. Please encourage us in the power of the gospel. Where we're faced with situations. Where there's friends, family, loved ones who don't trust in Jesus.

Lord help us to trust that the gospel can penetrate. Even the heart that is most closed. Most stony. Towards him.

So Lord we pray that you save people by the gospel. Even this very day. Please strengthen us. We pray to believe. To support. To share the gospel. In Jesus name. Amen. We're going to close now by singing.

[ 32 : 01 ] Psalm 118. Verses 8 to 14. And sing Psalm. Psalm 118. You'll find that on page 155.

In sing Psalm. Psalm 118. We'll sing verses 8 to 14. Not 8 to 14.

I originally wrote down 8 to 14. I think I meant. Where is it? I think I meant 1 to 7.

That's fine. I don't know why I wrote 8 to 14. 118 verses 1 to 7. Page 155 in sing Psalms. 118 verses 1 to 7.

Let's stand and sing to God's praise. O thank the Lord for he is good.

[ 33 : 02 ] He's steadfast. He's steadfast love and usual ways. Now let the house of Israel say, His love will last through endless days.

And let the high sovereignty His love forever will endure Let those who fear the Lord declare His love will stand forever sure I cried in anguish to the Lord He answered me and set me free

The Lord is with me I'll not fear What harm can people do to me?

The Lord is with me constantly He is the one who gives me aid I'll look and fly upon my cause I will not need to be afraid And now may the God of peace Who brought again from the dead Our Lord Jesus Christ The great shepherd of the sheep By the blood of the eternal covenant Equip you with

everything good That you may do His will Working in us That which is pleasing to His sight Through  
Jesus Christ  
To whom be glory forever and ever Amen