



Sermon Growth Guide

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The Case for Salvation | Romans 1:13-20

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Key Verse: “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.” (Romans 1:16)

Big Idea: The Gospel of Jesus Christ is not a message to be ashamed of, even though it does not fit well with worldly principles, because it alone carries the power of salvation to lost human beings who embrace its deep truths.

Foundations

Paul was under a divine obligation to preach the gospel (see 1 Cor. 9:16-18), which made him eager to get the message out to as many as possible. In v. 15, he highlights his desire to preach the gospel even in Rome, with the hope that the Roman church might help send him on mission to the far reaches of civilization (Iberian peninsula) where the gospel had not yet penetrated (see Romans 15:18-24, 28-29).

The gospel is “good news” because human beings face the reality of bad news: the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all human sin. Though God has given us ample proof of His glory through the created order, we have rejected Him and made other things our priorities in life.

In the end, we cannot escape the just wrath of God by our own efforts – the powers and accomplishments of this world cannot save us from judgment. Only the redemption found in Christ can rescue us, and this must be received as a gift of grace, by putting our trust in His work of salvation rather than turning to anything or anyone else.

Understanding God’s Word

Together read Romans 1:13-20.

Why might a pagan or even a Jew consider the message of the gospel something to be ashamed of? (Check out 1 Cor. 1:18-31)

The concept of the wrath of God is not in vogue today in many circles, even within the Church. Why does Paul consider the wrath of God so essential to understand?

How does righteousness come through faith? Is this a one-time event or a lifestyle choice?

Applying God’s Word

How does a deeper understanding of the wrath of God impact how you view the people around you? If all human beings are “without excuse” (1:20), whether Jew or Gentile, rich or poor, powerful or weak, male or female, then doesn’t that mean that all need the truth of the gospel? Why are we so hesitant to share it with others?

Witnessing God’s Word

Why is the gospel better “good news” than anything the world has to offer in comparison? Have you ever felt ashamed of or embarrassed by the gospel, so that you drew back from sharing it with others? Try to analyze why, in light of the needs of fallen human beings and of the redeeming love of God. What made Paul so eager to preach the gospel? How can we develop that same eagerness in the places to which God has called us?

Everything that happens in Times Square on New Years Eve is carefully choreographed ritual. The ball drops, the fireworks go off, the kiss, and the songs. Auld Lang Syne. Imagine, by John Lennon. New York, New York. What a Wonderful World. And eventually “My Way” by Frank Sinatra. “Regrets, I’ve had a few, but then again, too few to mention. I did what I had to do... there were times, I’m sure you knew, when I bit off more than I could chew, but through it all when there was doubt, I ate it up and spit it out. I faced it all and I stood tall and did it my way.” Sung at the top of lungs by hundreds of thousands of people wearing diapers, because if they leave to go to the bathroom they will never get back in!

“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.” (Romans 1:16) Your typical Roman would be ashamed to suggest they needed help. In an honor/shame society, strength and the indomitable spirit were what dignity was made of, what a man should be. I ate it up. I spit it out. I did it my way. We have a lot of that in us too, but we are kidding ourselves. Paul declares the good news. We have a Savior. In a world full of people trying to be their own gods, in a crowd of self-gods, Paul stands up to declare that there is good news. He makes The Case for Salvation. And he encourages the church in Rome, and so encourages us here today to receive it, to celebrate it and to share it without embarrassment.

Paul has been trying to get to Rome. He “planned many times to come” so he could tell them about the gospel, the news of what God has done to save us all and mend all things. People came to Rome with all kinds of ideas. How would Rome receive a small, simple, Jewish-Christian tentmaker from Tarsus telling them an itinerate rabbi from Judea, tried and executed by crucifixion, was actually their Savior? “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.” (Romans 1:16) The gospel has power. The message itself carries with it the power of God that brings salvation. The message itself contains the power of God for rebirth, new life, utter transformation of a person. “Salvation” means you don’t die and go to hell. It means you are forgiven for your sins, and they are not held against you by a righteous God. But it means much more than that. This gospel is a proclamation that God is fixing what is wrong in this world, God is mending what is ruptured, healing what is wounded, restoring what has been ruined. The ugliness will be beauty again by the power of God who sent a Savior.

Paul owed it to the Romans. He was the Apostle to the Gentiles. His mission was to reach out past Judaism to the rest of the world with the good news of Jesus, showing them that they too were included in the offer of salvation. “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.” (Romans 1:14-15) “I owe the gospel to you,” Paul says. Yes, it first came to the Jewish people. Jesus is the fulfillment of Jewish prophecy. Jesus was Jewish. But this is bigger. This is also Roman. This is also Greek. And, look how inclusive this is, it even goes beyond that to non-Greeks. The word is “barbaroi” where we get barbarians, the countless, unknown tribes and nations of the world. Paul owes them. He owes them. There are a few ways to owe someone. If I borrow \$1000 from you, I owe you \$1000. If I crash into your car and dent your bumper, I owe you \$1000. But also, if you gave me \$1000 and told me to give it to your sister in Arkansas, until I deliver that money to your sister in Arkansas, I owe you \$1000. That’s what has happened here. God gave Paul the gospel to give to all people. I owe. Do we feel that way? We owe the gospel to Colorado Springs. You owe the good news of Jesus to your kids and grandkids. “I owe. I owe. So off to work I go.”

“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.” (Romans 1:16) The gospel. What do we owe? The gospel is the message. It is the story of Jesus, the declaration that the events of the life of Jesus are actually the story of God entering the world to fix what has been broken, mend what has been ruptured, heal what has been wounded and bring the beauty back. It is the power of God that brings salvation. Paul says, “I’m here to tell you Romans, you Greeks, you everything else, what God did in Jesus is for your salvation.” “Well, help me here. Why do I need to be saved? I did it my way. I chewed it up and spit it out. I faced it all and I stood tall. I like to handle my own debts. You say I need to be saved?” Yes. I do. You need the power of God that brings salvation.

Two things are being revealed. As the gospel is spoken, as someone shares the story of Jesus—that there is a God in heaven, a God who made us, that this God is holy and almighty, that this God made the heavens and the earth, that this God desires relationship with us, and that this God came down in the flesh in Jesus, and that this God as Jesus we rejected and killed on a cross because we are selfish, we want to be our own gods, and that this death was actually more than a tragedy, this death was a self-sacrifice... (“A god can be killed by men?” This one can. He allowed it of himself. “Why?” So that he could die in our place the death that we deserved). Then he rose again from the dead. Crucifixion didn’t finish him. The body was gone. The tomb was empty. People saw him again alive after the Roman guard had killed him. Because of that, we now know, this was no mere mortal. This Jesus was God who came to do something cosmic, to change the course of history, to heal the world. Salvation. – As all that is spoken, something happens. The message has its own power from God; power to transform lives, save souls, and heal the world.

Two things are being revealed: the righteousness of God and the wrath of God. For years, Martin Luther believed they were the same thing. He grew up reading verse 17 in Latin. The righteousness of God was the *justitia Dei*, the justice of God, and it was coming for the believers and non-believers alike. So, you better be good. Jesus is coming, look busy. The Protestant Reformation happened when Martin Luther realized the righteousness of God is not God’s justice coming to punish us, not judgment, but the righteousness of God is our forgiveness, our salvation, given to us when we believe and receive by faith. “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.’” (Romans 1:17) The righteousness of God is not just a quality of God, a characteristic. That would be the holiness of God, God is holy; or the omnipotence of God, God is all-powerful. Righteousness is activity in relationship. That’s how Paul understood righteousness, from the long tradition of the Hebrew Scriptures. God’s righteousness is his way of keeping his promises, unwavering faithfulness, unfailing love. What is being revealed is that God has a plan to maintain covenant fidelity, God has a plan to hold on to us and save us even when our plan was to destroy ourselves. God has a way to forgive us, to justly forgive unjust people and still be a just God. That plan? Jesus dies in our place. The cross.

John Stott wrote, “Christ died on the cross for us sinners, becoming a curse for us. So the cross tells us some very unpalatable truths about ourselves, namely that we are sinners under the righteous curse of God’s law and we cannot save ourselves. Christ bore our sin and curse precisely because we could gain release from them in no other way. If we could have been forgiven by our own good works, by being circumcised and keeping the law, we may be quite sure that there would have been no cross. Every time we look at the cross Christ seems to say to us, ‘I am here because of you. It is your

sin I am bearing, your curse I am suffering, your debt I am paying, your death I am dying.' Nothing in history or in the universe cuts us down to size like the cross. All of us have inflated views of ourselves, especially in self-righteousness, until we have visited a place called Calvary. It is there, at the foot of the cross, that we shrink to our true size. And of course men do not like it. They resent the humiliation of seeing themselves as God sees them and as they really are. They prefer their comfortable illusions." That's the righteousness of God being revealed. The gospel. Christ died for us.

The second thing being revealed is the wrath of God. Now, when we hear wrath, we think of someone overwhelmed by anger, losing control of emotions, flying off the handle with rage and hatred. That is not the wrath of God. God's wrath is his settled intent to move against injustice, unrighteousness and all that causes us to hurt ourselves and destroy our world. "The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness." (Romans 1:18) When the truth starts to emerge, in our disobedience we suppress it. We flood the zone with more sin and more immorality. We turn up the music at the party. When our conscience is pricked, we double down on the bad behavior to drown it out. Then we do all we can to argue against the truth. Shout it down. Refuse to allow it to be spoken. Turn it off. The wrath of God is not so much to squash all that, as to let it happen and allow the disobedient to feel the consequences of their own actions.

In a world of people being their own gods, we don't want to hear that there is a God in heaven tracking us, watching us, setting the rules. I did it my way. We shut down the gospel and suppress the evangelist. "Don't tell me there is a God over me!" But the creation itself, nature itself declares the glory of God. "Since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since

the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse." (Romans 1:19-20) The beauty and order of creation bear witness to all people that there is a God and he is good. That's not enough information to be saved, though. You need the gospel.

How do we move from the wrath to the righteousness? How does the gospel help us? By faith. "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. 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.'" (Romans 1:16-17) It doesn't matter whether you have faith or not so much as where you place your faith. Faith by itself, "I wish I had faith," that is little more than gullible optimism. "I wish I was gullible and optimistic." No, you don't. The power of the gospel is that you have information to believe or reject. This is news. Jesus has done something. God has done something. Believe it or reject it. If you believe it, it is the power of God that brings salvation. I first believed at Young Life in the summer of 1986. I was presented the information. This is God. This is Jesus. This is what he did. Do you believe? When I said yes, God flooded the zone of my heart with grace and love, joy and peace. Salvation. Wholeness. Healing. "I did it my way." Okay. I prefer the gospel. He did it his way. Jesus did it. I believe. I am saved. Will you believe?