

lincolnberean

DATE: February 8, 2026
SERIES: The Gospel Is
MESSAGE: God's Power to Save
PASSAGE: Romans 1:1-17
SPEAKER: Ryan Harmon

What is wrong with the world? I'm betting you have found yourself asking that question. What's wrong with the world? It doesn't take very long of watching the news, seeing all that's happening around the globe, before that is a very natural question to ask. In fact, I would venture to say that every single human being alive has asked themselves that question, at some point. What's wrong with the world?

I believe also that every person has an answer to that question. But it's important that we believe and that we acknowledge the Bible has a very clear answer to that question. And the Bible's answer can be summed up in one word: sin. Sin is what is wrong with the world. Sin is why our world is like it is.

Now, if that's the case, then the next question that every heart asks is, how do you solve a problem like sin? And the Bible also has a very clear answer to that question, and it can be summed up in one word: gospel. The gospel is the solution for sin. The gospel is God's answer, God's response, to what is wrong with the world. Now, if that's the case, that makes the gospel worthy of all of our reflection, all of our focused meditation. It is God's response to our broken world.

And so that's just what we're going to do, starting today, and for the next three and a half months, and then again in the fall. We are going to dive deeply into the heart of the gospel as Paul lays it out in the book of Romans. So I'd invite you to open your Bibles with me to Romans chapter 1. We're going to be in the first 17 verses this morning.

Now, as you turn there, I want to invite you as we begin this series, it's going to take us with a break in the summer all the way through Christmas. I want to invite you, I want to encourage you, to walk through this study with great expectations. Expecting God to do much in our church, but also in each one of our individual lives, because God always uses his word. He always uses the proclamation of his word, but there's something that he has done over and over again throughout church history with this book with the book of Romans. He changes lives through the study of this book. So Romans 1.

Now, a quick, just a warning, we are going to move pretty briskly this morning. We're doing baptisms this morning, which is just a great celebration of what we are about to study, but because we're doing baptisms, we have to have a little bit more of abbreviated time in the word. And so I'm going to move pretty quickly through the first 15 verses, and then we're going to camp a little longer in verses 16 and 17. That's my goal. I failed last night, I went way too long. Romans 1, verse 1:

- *1 Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as 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 born of a descendant of David according to the flesh, 4 who was declared the son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord, 5 through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for his name's*



lincolnberean

sake, 6 among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ; 7 to all who are beloved of God in Rome, called as saints: grace to you, and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now that is a very long introduction from Paul to open this letter. It's a very unusual introduction. If you're familiar with Paul's letters, you know that most often he just says something like, Paul, a servant of God, to the saints in Colossae or Philippi or something like that, but here, that's not what he does. Here he goes into rich detail, and he loads on theological depth in this introduction. And of course, the question is, why does he do that in this letter? There's a clear answer, an easy answer that we can certainly focus on, and that is that we know that Paul had never visited Rome. This wasn't a church that he planted. They had never met him before. And so this really was his first introduction to them, so it makes sense that he would go into greater detail about who he was and what he proclaimed. In the same way, if we had someone up here knew that was preaching, it'd be a little odd if they just stepped up onto the stage and just started preaching. We'd all wonder who is this person? So it makes perfect sense that Paul went into more detail. He was a bit more thorough.

There's a second reason, however, and it might come as a surprise to us because we so cherish Paul and his writing and the depth of what he helps us understand about who God is. But in the first century, Paul was often resisted. Paul often had conflict about who he was and the content of his message. There was resistance to him. There was skepticism about him and his message. And it certainly seems that here in the book of Romans, there were some Christians in the church in Rome that were a little skeptical about who he was and what he proclaimed. And so right from the get go in this introduction, he makes it very clear. He lays out his resume, here's who I am, here's what I proclaim.

So what's he say? Well, he starts in verse one by making it very clear, he was not his own. He wasn't working on his own initiative. He belonged to someone else. He belonged to Jesus Christ. He says, I am a bond servant. In other words, Jesus is in charge, I take my marching orders from him. He's the boss and I do what he says. Jesus had given Paul a mission, because Jesus was the boss. Jesus was in charge. Jesus is on the throne of Paul's life. He's the king. Because of that, it's completely appropriate that then Jesus would place a call upon Paul's life and set him apart to proclaim God's good news. God's good news. That's what the word gospel means, literally, it's good news. Paul was set apart to proclaim it.

So the question is, what is the good news? And that's what he unpacks then very briefly in verses 2 through 6. As we think about the good news, about the gospel, it's helpful for us to remember that the gospel is really the story of God saving his creation that was broken. Begins on the very first page of the Bible, and it goes all the way to the last page of the Bible. It's the gospel story, and where Paul begins in verse 2 is, he makes it very clear that God is a God that keeps his promises.

This was promised beforehand, he says, the gospel of God, promised beforehand through the prophets and the holy scriptures. This isn't some brand new scheme of God. This is what God has always planned, that gospel, that good news concerns his son, the one that he sent in the flesh. Born of a descendant of David, according to the flesh, Jesus took on flesh, walked among us, ministered and lived right here upon this world. God's anointed one, God's Messiah. And Jesus then went to the cross, was crucified, dead, was buried, but then he rose again, rose again.

And through his resurrection from the dead, Paul said, he was announced, he was declared to be the son of God with power. In other words, he is in charge. He possesses all the power, he is no longer dead, he will never die again. He has been living ever since that day, and he reigns now, which is why Paul can say in the present tense, Jesus gave me these orders. Jesus gave me these orders.



lincolnberean

Now, Paul, as he continues, makes it very clear that part of his ministry was not only to proclaim the gospel, but then help people see that the gospel produces results in the life of those who receive it. In verse 5, he says, his ministry was aimed at bringing about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles. That phrase "obedience of faith" simply means the obedience that arises or that comes from faith. Faith is the starting point, what the gospel is all about. But when you believe, God begins to bring about something different in you that leads you to be someone more inclined to obey Jesus, holding on to his very words. We grow in obedience, the obedience of faith. That's the message. That's the gospel story in summary.

So Paul is laying it all out there for Rome, wants them to be very clear on what he proclaims, and he's going to spend the rest of the book unpacking it. Now as he continues, he turns as he always does in his letters to a word of greeting, a word of encouragement to the believers in Rome.

Verse 8, I'll read all the way through 15:

- *8 First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world. 9 For God, whom I serve in my spirit in the preaching of the gospel of his son, is my witness as to how unceasingly I make mention of you, 10 always in my prayers making request, if perhaps now at last by the will of God I may succeed in coming to you. 11 For I long to see you so that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established; 12 that is, that I may be encouraged together with you while among you, each of us by the other's faith, both yours and mine. 13 I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that often I have planned to come to you (and have been prevented so far) so that I may obtain some fruit among you also, even as among the rest of the Gentiles. 14 I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. 15 So, from my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.*

Now there is no question, in these first 15 verses, there is a lot of theology packed in, and throughout this letter, there is an awful lot of theology, and we're going to have to dig in in the weeks to come. There's no question about it. I think so many of us are a little intimidated by the book of Romans, because it does have such great theological depth, but what we can't miss is that Romans is a letter from pastor Paul to people that he loves and he has great affection for. But he also, we need to remember, has never met them. And isn't that astounding? Never met these people, yet you can hear in his words and his tone, he just longs to be with them. He longs to see them. He has great affection for them. He's so proud of them. He's seen that the gospel has produced results in them, such that the whole world is talking about their faith. They've grasped the gospel, and now he longs to come to them that he might bless them, encourage them, establish them, but also that they might encourage him.

And that tells us something very profound and true about the gospel. See, God through the gospel creates a brand new people, a brand new community, a new family of God. And in that family, the mark of relationship is affection. To love between people that were once strangers, but now, because of the grace of God and because of the gospel, they now are related to one another, they have kinship with one another. That's brought about by the gospel. God creates a brand new people, a brand new family.

So with Paul's resume in place, his introduction and this expression of how much he longs to come, how he wishes he could have come already, he continues, and he explains how he is so eager to preach the gospel. That's what he said in verse 15, I'm so eager. So now, why would Paul be so eager? Why would he relish? Why would he be so excited about this opportunity to preach the



lincolnberean

gospel? Well, that's what we find in verses 16 and 17. These two verses that really serve as the theme for the entire letter to the Romans. Verse 16, he says:

- *16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel...*

Why?

- *16...for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes...*

Paul is eager, not ashamed. Now make no mistake, there were people in Paul's world, the powers of evil were at work to make Paul feel ashamed about the gospel. People consistently told him, don't preach that. He tells us other places that it was foolishness to the Greeks, they were trying to make him feel ashamed that the heart of the gospel is the historical fact of the crucifixion of Jesus. And there's no question, in ancient world there was no more shameful way to die than crucifixion. Paul said despite all of that, he wasn't ashamed of the gospel in the least. He was eager to proclaim it.

I think even in our day, each of us faces a pressure to feel ashamed of the gospel. It looks different than it did in Paul's day. Now it might just be a dismissiveness about the gospel, or perhaps it'd be someone saying, "that sounds like a little fairy tale. It's make believe." Seeking to make us feel ashamed. But I have no doubt that if Paul were here ministering in our context, in our world, he would stand before us, and he would say, I am not ashamed of the gospel. Proud of it. I boast in it. Zealous for it. Why? Well, he says "for it is the power of God for salvation."

The power of God. The gospel is power. Power is a word that is translated from a Greek word that is the same word from which we get our word dynamite. Power. It has an effect. It leaves an impact. It changes things. It packs a punch. Dynamite.

When I lived in Missouri, I'd drive through these hills, and, you know, we'd drive right through a hillside, and you look on either side, and there'd be these great walls of limestone. You say, how did they get through all that? And the answer is dynamite. They blew it all up. Dynamite has the ability, it packs the power to break up cold, hard stone. And in the same way, the gospel has the ability, the power to break up our cold, hard, callous hearts, and bring about something completely different. The gospel is the power of God. It acts upon. Leaves an impact. It changes you.

Specifically it's God's power for salvation. It's his power to save. That is, through the gospel, through the proclamation and the receiving of the gospel, God accomplishes salvation. That's why it's good news. We, left to ourselves, are lost. We have hearts of stone. We are rebellious people, and the gospel is God's way, God's mechanism of saving us, of changing us, of bringing him back to our to himself, that we might live with him now, that we might live with him forever. The gospel is God's power to save, to break through the hardness of our hearts. Bring us back to himself. His power to save.

So the question is, how does that happen? How must we be saved? And the answer is so simple, it almost is mind blowing. The answer is, believe. Believe. God's power for salvation to everyone who believes. When we believe, God unleashes power, he does something in us that we can never do for ourselves. Talking to a friend once and he was asking, "how do I, how might I be saved?" And I said, believe. And he said, "it can't be that simple." And the answer is, the truth is, it is that simple. God unleashes the explosive power of the gospel in our life when we believe. To everyone who believes. That is good news. That is good news. That's how anyone who will be saved must be saved through an expression of faith, clinging to Jesus in belief.



lincolnberean

Now, as we finish verse 16, Paul outlines the two groups that make up what he says when he says everyone. He says:

- *16...to the Jew first and also to the Greek.*

The Jew and the Greek or the Gentile in Paul's world meant everyone. Those were the two groups of people. Now they also believed there was a subset of the Greek or the Gentile, the barbarian, and they were really bad. But they were still Gentiles. Everyone. Everyone comes to experience the saving power of God through belief. Everyone.

So the question is, how exactly does the gospel do this? How does the gospel reveal God's power to save? What exactly happens? That's what we're going to find in verse 17. Paul says:

- *17 For in it [that is, in the gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, but the righteous man shall live by faith.*

The gospel reveals the righteousness of God. Now, that is a very rich phrase. And in Romans, Paul's going to use it eight times, the most he ever uses it in his letters. There's a lot of debate about exactly what it means, but there are three aspects of that phrase that I want to convey to you to help us understand exactly why the gospel is the power of God.

The first sense of the righteousness of God is referring to him and who he is. He is absolutely righteous, meaning he is always right. Absolutely holy, perfect in every way, righteous in character, without blemish, without flaw. He is absolutely just, and as a just judge, he executes judgment perfectly. Perfectly. Now that, if you think about it very long, that raises up a problem. And here's the problem: we are not perfect people. We go astray, we rebel, we get caught in sin. And if we have a righteous God who is absolutely just and executes justice perfectly, then we are in big trouble. Because we have gone wrong. And someone who executes justice perfectly is bound by the confines of justice to ensure that we receive the just punishment for our rebellion.

That is a problem. The gospel has within it a little sense of bad news to start. God is righteous, but that's not the end of the understanding of his righteousness. No, the righteousness of God also means that because he is righteous, he is compelled to save. In his righteousness, he is willing, willing to bring about salvation, even to those that are not deserving of it. His righteousness certainly demands that justice be done, but his righteousness also compels him forward to save those who don't deserve it.

So the question is, how exactly does he do that? This is the final aspect of his righteousness. God in his righteousness, demanding righteousness, grants us righteousness through the obedience of Jesus Christ. He imparts to us that which we could never do on our own. He makes us who are unrighteous, righteous. We stand before him in the court of law, the perfect judge. We stand guilty, and he, based on the merits of Jesus, says innocent. Innocent. Driven by his very righteousness, he justifies us. He does that all on his own. We contribute absolutely nothing. He, driven by his righteousness, restores us to himself that we might live with him forever, and he does that for everyone who believes.

That's the power of God. Everyone who believes. That's why Paul says, from faith, to faith. In other words, it is faith from top to bottom, from beginning to end, it is all about faith. Salvation by faith is how God has always operated. And that's why Paul, as he closes verse 17, refers back to an Old Testament prophecy from the book of Habakkuk. In Habakkuk, it says, the righteous man shall live by faith. It is believing, it is faith, that receives the gospel, that unleashes the dramatic, explosive power of God to save us, to turn us from people who are cold as stone into people that are soft,



lincolnberean

have hearts that are soft, that are hearts of flesh, that are warm towards him, that can live with him, standing in Christ's righteousness now and forever.

Paul was not ashamed of the gospel. He boasted in it, because the gospel is God's power to save. God's power to save.

What is the greatest problem? What is wrong with the world? Sin. What is God's response? The gospel. The gospel is God's power to save. And we live, we walk, we work, we move around in a world that is in desperate need of saving, there's no question. But it's not only true out there. That's true for each individual life, each one of us. Each one of us stands before God, and we have gone astray and we need his grace to do for us that which we can never do for ourselves.

And the question is, how do we do that? How do we receive that grace? And the answer is faith. Believe. Perhaps even this morning, that would be something you would do. And if that's something that you have already done, then let this morning be a reflection, to let this entire study be a reflection, on the extensive and explosive power of the gospel. That we might understand with more depth, with more breadth, how glorious the gospel is that we might never take it for granted. That we might relish it, that we might meditate on it. And even that we might become so proud of it, and proud of God for doing it, that we might proclaim it, that we might say with Paul, "we are not ashamed of the gospel. It is God's power to save."

Our Father, we thank you that through Jesus Christ that you did for us what we could never do for ourselves. You unleashed your saving power. Lord, we pray that we would never minimize that, we would never forsake that. Lord, I ask that you will help us as people understand that when we reach out in faith to you, you do something explosive and dramatic. You change us, you save us, and we are grateful for that, and we praise you. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

The gospel is God's power to save, and that is exactly what we celebrate when we baptize. When we baptize, we remember what God did through Jesus Christ for us, he took us from death to life. We were dead in our transgressions and sins but he, while we were yet sinners, died for us, that we might live with him now and forever. When we baptize, we often say something like, buried with Christ in baptism, raised to newness of life. New life unleashed in the power of God to save. Let's watch these stories and remember what God has done.

*Scripture taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE
Copyright 1960, 1962, 1963, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1987, 1988, 1995
The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.*

Copyright 2026 Lincoln Berean Church. All rights reserved.

