

The Good News

Romans 1:14-17

Pastor John Miller

Let's read this text. I'll read it, you follow with me beginning in verse 14. Paul says, "I am a debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise. 15 So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach..." and here's the theme, "...the gospel to you that are at Rome also. 16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek," or to the Gentiles, "...17 For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written..." and he's quoting from the Old Testament book of Habakkuk 2:4, "...The just shall live by faith." This text that I've just read is, no doubt, one of the greatest in all of the Word of God. In this text, the entire book of Romans is summarized. Many great Bible scholars believe that from this text, especially the quote from Habakkuk, Paul is actually expounding this in the rest of the book of Romans. So, he comes to the end of the preface, the introduction to the whole book; and all the way through, from the beginning to the end, it's been about the gospel, the gospel, the gospel. It was promised in the Old Testament by the fathers, centered in Christ, came from God, and it's received by faith. All through the preface we've been honing in on the gospel, and so Paul comes back to that and restates his theme about the gospel, or the good news of Jesus Christ.

Now, I want you to note verse 15. In verse 15 he says, "So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel." Then he mentions it again in verse 16, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel." We see three strong personal statements that Paul makes about the gospel. If you're taking notes, you can write them down. First, we see Paul's burden to preach the gospel; he said I am a debtor. I want you to notice that in verse 14. "I am a debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise." Basically, Paul is describing his desire, his zeal, his commitment to preach the gospel. What we are going to find here, that totally relates to every one of us tonight, is what the gospel is and the reasons we should preach that gospel. A lot of times as Christians we're content with, "Well, I've believed in Jesus Christ. I'm saved. I'm going to heaven, and I'm not an evangelist. Let someone else do that." I believe that tonight we're going to learn that we all should see ourselves as in "debt" to others who don't know Christ, and we have an obligation to take to them what we have, that is, the gospel of Jesus Christ. Notice that Paul says, "I am a debtor." What does Paul mean by this phrase, "I am a debtor?" It does not mean that Paul has chalked up credit on his Visa or MasterCard, or that he's gone on a shopping spree and that he's in debt. Shame on some of you tonight that have done that. You say, "Oh my! Why did I come?" You say, "I'm a debtor too! Paul's in debt, I guess it's okay, you know, it's spiritual. If the apostle Paul was in debt, it's okay for me to be in debt." That's not the kind of debt that Paul is talking about. I like the idea of also seeing this word "debtor" as, I have an obligation. I think we understand that concept.

There are a couple of ways to be in debt. One of them is when you borrow a bunch of money and then you need to pay it back. Another way to be in debt, and this is the debt that Paul is talking about, is that someone gives you money, entrusting you with that money, to give to

someone else. That's happened to all of us. Someone comes up to you, "Hey, I need to give this money to so and so, and I won't see them but I know you are going to see them tonight." They give you the money. "Will you give it to them?" It's kind of like, "You're trusting me with this money? I don't know if it's going to go from me to them." What they've done is entrusted you to give to that person that money. In a sense then, you become a debtor. You have an obligation. Someone gives you money, trusting you to give someone else the money. You have an obligation to do what? To give them the money. Some of you are looking at me like, "I don't know...go on a spending spree?" No. You give them the money. That's the idea that Paul has when he says here, "I am a debtor." God has given something to me just as God has given something to you. That something is the gospel. That something is the salvation by His grace. You are to give it to someone else. You are to share that gospel, and you're to see it as a sacred duty or a sacred obligation or that you are in debt to other people. Some people go through all their lives thinking that the world owes them something. Do you know people like that? They have this idea that everybody owes me. Everybody ought to give to me. Everybody help me. Everybody ought to get out of my way, and they go through life thinking, "I have no responsibility to anyone else." Not so as a Christian. I hope that this truth grabs ahold of you tonight. You have an obligation. You have a responsibility. You and I as Christians are debtors to others to share the gospel with them. We as Christians are in debt because God has entrusted us with the gospel, so I am under obligation, as one translation has that. As Christians, we have an obligation.

Now notice to whom. He says, "To the Greeks, and to the barbarians..." verse 14, "...both to the wise, and to the unwise." I believe, and I may be wrong, that the Greeks are the wise and the barbarians are the unwise. There's really just two groups here, and he uses these two terms to describe them. There are the Greeks, who are considered wise. There are the barbarians, who are considered unwise. At this time in the world, the world had been what is called "Hellenized" by Alexander the Great. That means that the whole world had come under the influence of Greek culture. Everyone spoke Greek. Greek is a marvelous language, a beautiful language, far greater than our English language actually. In the culture at that time, if you did not speak the Greek language, you were viewed as barbaric. You were viewed as a barbarian. The word barbarian (this is a little footnote) is actually a kind of transliteration of that word which comes from the sound that they thought people made when they talked and didn't speak Greek. Have you ever heard someone speak in a foreign language and it just sounded like gibberish? I'm sorry, I don't know what they're saying. I have a son right now who is in China learning Mandarin. There's no way I could ever learn Mandarin. I just, don't take offense to this if you are Chinese and you speak Mandarin, but I can't even begin to make out any words there. It is just really difficult for me. So the Greeks would actually say that when they were not speaking Greek, that it was "barbar." It's "barbar." It's barbaric. That's where the word barbarian comes from. They were speaking languages that just sounded like "barbar" or gibberish. So, it's the cultured and the uncultured, the Greeks and the barbarians, both of which would fall under the category of being Gentiles. To the Greeks, there were only two kinds of people. There were those who spoke Greek, followed Greek culture, and the other kind of people were the barbarians. Now to the Jews, who lived at that time, there were only two kinds of people—the Jews and the Gentiles. The world was divided into Jew and Gentile. In God's

mind or God's economy, there are only two kinds of people—saved and lost. That's how we should view them as Christians. We don't view them as cultured or uncultured. We don't categorize them by their ethnicity or the color of their skin or the nation they are from. They are either saved or unsaved. They are either born again or they are not. They are either children of God or they are not children of God. The Bible says in 1 John 5:12, "He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life." Here's the application: We are debtors to everyone. We're debtors to the Greeks, to the barbarians, so to speak, to the wise and to the unwise, to the Jew and to the Gentile, which the majority of us, I am assuming tonight, fall into that category. So Jesus said, "You go into all the world and you preach the gospel to every creature." We have a universal message that doesn't change. It doesn't change. Now, you take it to different cultures, it's still the same message. There may be a translation issue and a challenge to communicate it, but the message doesn't change, the gospel of Jesus Christ.

I love what Vance Havner said. He said, "The gospel is not a secret to be hoarded, but a story to be heralded. Too many Christians are stuffing themselves with gospel blessings while millions have never had a taste." We gather tonight in this sanctuary, most of us saved, and we study the gospel, we hear the gospel, we know the gospel. We leave here and we go out into a mission field where there are hundreds of thousands of people who don't know the gospel of Jesus Christ. They think you get to heaven by being good. They think all religions are the same. They may not believe in God. You are a missionary. You are an ambassador for Jesus Christ. You need to know the gospel. You need to be ready to give to every man a reason for the hope that lies in you and to do that with meekness and fear. Someone said, "We're like beggars telling other beggars where we have found bread." I love that illustration. The reality is when I go to the grocery store and while being checked out I'm thinking while waiting in line, "Well, does this person know the gospel?" "Do they know the gospel," as I strike up a conversation. "Do they know about Jesus Christ?" Everyone we meet, we have a debt to. I have a debt to share with them what they perhaps may not know, and that's the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Secondly, notice Paul's boldness. Paul's boldness is found in verse 15 in this phrase, "I am ready." So, first he said, "I am a debtor." Then in verse 15 he said, "I am ready." "So as much as in me is, I am ready." The word "ready" there means that I am eager. It doesn't mean that I am prepared, which we should be, but the word actually has the idea of "eager." Are you eager to share the gospel? Do you get up in the morning and go, "Lord, I just pray that You'll lead me to someone today that I can share with." I've noticed that whenever I've prayed that prayer, God always opens up the door and gives me that opportunity, and I need to be eager and ready to step into it. So, "...I'm "eager" to preach the gospel to you that are in Rome also." Paul was eager to pay his debt by preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Now, exactly what is the gospel? The word gospel literally means, "good news." It's not good views. It's not about a creed. It's not a code of conduct. It's not a message about a ceremony. It's not about being baptized. It's not about taking communion. It's not about confirmation. It's about a Person. So, we're just basically giving them the news. Did you know that God sent His Son to die for you on the cross? Did you know that your sins were placed upon Him and that

He paid the penalty of your sins? Did you know that He died and three days later He rose from the grave, that He lives today to forgive your sins, and that you can be forgiven and have the hope of eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ? That's the gospel. You can learn that, you can know that, and you can present that. You don't have to be a theologian, a Bible scholar, or an evangelist. I believe that we are all called to share the good news of Jesus Christ with others.

In 1 Corinthians 15:1-4, Paul breaks down this gospel that we should be ready or eager to preach to people that we have a debt to. He says in verses 1-4, "I declare unto you the gospel... that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day." There are three elements in this statement about the gospel. If you're going to be sharing the gospel and communicating the gospel, you need to get them. First, Christ died for our sins. Write that down. You say, "John, this is so basic and it's so elementary." But, it's so essential. Christ died for our sins. A lot of times when we witness it's like, "Hey, you wanna go to heaven?" or "Hey, you want joy, you want peace?" or "Hey, you wanna be happy?" or "Hey, do you want Jesus to fix your marriage?" or "Hey, you wanna be off drugs?" or "Hey, you wanna be delivered from alcohol?" Those things are all fine. That's not really the gospel. The gospel is that Jesus died for you. That's the good news. You're not going to see your need of the gospel unless you include, s-i-n. A little three-letter word, sin. In our culture today, that little word is abhorred. We don't call people sinners. We don't talk about sin. We don't mention sin. Without sin, there is no need for the gospel. You eliminate sin, you eliminate the need for a savior. You want to be effective in sharing the gospel with people? Somewhere, sometime, somehow you need to get to the idea that all have sinned, all have fallen short of the glory of God, that there is no one righteous, no not one. Sin is basically missing the mark. Have you ever lied? You've sinned. Have you ever had covetousness in your heart? You've sinned. Have you ever stolen anything? You've sinned. Do you have pride? You're a sinner. Do you rebel against God? That's sin. If you commit adultery, that's sin. If you commit fornication, that's sin. Do you have other things before God? That's sin. So, we need to make sure we communicate that the reason Jesus died was for sin. He didn't die just to give us an example of the love of God. He didn't just die as a great leader sacrifices for his cause. He actually died for our sin. It was our sin that was placed upon Him who was sinless, and He paid the penalty for our sins. That's the gospel. I believe that when we share that gospel, the Holy Spirit will use that to convict of sin and of righteousness and of judgment.

Why does Paul say that He was buried? Isn't that kind of to be taken for granted that He died and He was buried? The fact that it says, "...and that he was buried..." is to reinforce the idea that He literally, actually died. He actually died. He didn't swoon. He didn't just pass out. He didn't just wake up. He didn't just get revived. He actually died, and He was laid in the grave as a dead person. Three days later that same body that died on the cross, and was laid in the tomb, was resurrected. It was resurrected, and He had a new body. When they went in on Easter Sunday, they saw the tomb was empty, and the grave clothes were still lying there in the shape of a body. Jesus had just passed right through them. The stone was rolled away not so Jesus could get out, but so that they could get in and see that Jesus Christ has risen. So, here's the gospel: Jesus died on the cross for our sins; Jesus rose again from the dead. The

gospel has to have that content. He rose again from the dead, the resurrection. He rose from the dead. So, He died for our sins. He actually died. He was buried, and three days later Christ rose again according to the scriptures. Paul was eager to preach not a plan, not a philosophy, but a Person, and that Person is Jesus Christ.

I want you to notice the third aspect of Paul's relationship to the gospel. Not only was he a debtor, verse 14, not only was he an "eager" individual to preach the gospel, but we also see that he was not ashamed. He was not ashamed. This is Paul's belief, verses 16-17, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek," so, to the Jew and to the Gentile. For it's in the gospel, verse 17, "For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith." Now, Paul says, "I am not ashamed." Isn't this the very thing that keeps so many of us from sharing the gospel? We're ashamed. I was thinking about this today as I sat in my study, and I thought, "Lord, help me to never ever ever ever be ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Help me to never be ashamed of You." If the gospel is about a Person, then to be ashamed of the gospel is to be ashamed of Jesus. Do you ever start to witness to somebody and think, "Well, what if they laugh at me?" or "What if I don't know what to say?" or "They'll think I'm stupid." or "They'll think I'm dumb." or "They won't like me anymore." or "They're going to ostracize me." or "They won't invite me to their parties," or whatever it might be. Paul says, "Look. I am not ashamed of this gospel message." Now, as you look at this text, Paul gives to us the reasons why he would not be ashamed. By the way, the Bible says in 1 Corinthians 1 that the preaching of the gospel is foolishness to those who perish. Those who are unregenerated, those who literally are on their way to hell, they think the gospel is foolishness, the idea that God would give His Son to die for our sins. Paul says, "We preach Christ crucified to the Jews and they stumble. We preach to the Greeks, and they laugh. They think it's foolishness. But unto us, which are saved, it is the power of God."

I want you to notice why Paul was unashamed. Look at it very carefully because these are reasons why we should not be ashamed of the gospel and be willing to share the gospel with others. First of all, the source. It is the gospel of God. It is the power of God. Notice that in verse 16. We already touched on this earlier in the first part of the chapter. Go back with me to Romans 1:1-2. "Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God. 2 (Which he had promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures,)" notice it's the gospel of God. This message actually has as its source, God Himself. I want you to notice the second reason Paul was not ashamed of the gospel, because of its nature is power, verse 16, "...for it is the power of God." The Romans were into power, but sinful man has not the power to save himself. The gospel is the one message that has the power to change men's hearts. I love that! That's one of the things that motivates me to preach the gospel. I know that if somebody who is bound by sin comes to faith in Jesus Christ and trusts in Him, they hear the gospel and they believe in Jesus Christ, I know that person's life can be absolutely changed! Completely changed. Many of you here tonight have been changed by the gospel. Amen? I think of the power of the gospel to change a life—to take somebody that's bound by alcohol and set them free, bound by drugs and set them free, selfish, just living for themselves, destroying their marriage, self-indulgent, living a promiscuous life, and they get saved—their life completely

changes! I know that the world looks on and thinks, "Awww, that's really sad."

I remember when I got saved. I just graduated from high school, I'm 18 years old. I've been partying with my friends. I get saved, and they all thought, "Oh man, that's really sad. Did you hear what happened to John Miller? He got saved. He got religious." I don't know where I'd be right now if I hadn't gotten saved. How God takes your life, He changes your heart, He changes your outlook, He changes your desires and sets you free. The power of the gospel is that it changes lives and that should motivate us.

The word "power" there is a Greek word, *dynamis*, where we get our word dynamic or dynamo or dynamite. In 2 Corinthians 5:17, for many of us a favorite verse, "If any man be in Christ, he is..." what? "...a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." Isn't that awesome! Science can't do that. Politics can't do that. Before I was converted, I actually have to shamefully admit I used to think that if everyone smoked marijuana the world would be an utopian society. I know that's hard for you to imagine, but don't think too deeply about that. How absolutely foolish! Which, by the way, is where we're headed as a culture today. The only way that men can be changed is by the power of the gospel. You can reform them. You can give them a haircut, put a suit on them, take them to church, stick them in a pew, get them baptized. So what do you have? You have a good-looking, baptized, sitting-in-the-pew sinner. The Bible even uses the illustration of a pig. You take a pig out of the pen, wash it and put a suit on it, give it a bow tie, and put a little perfume on it. What do you have? You have a good-looking, good-smelling pig! It's not a sheep. You can't change the nature. Only God can change. We have that in the gospel. We actually have what can change lives and change our culture and change our world! That's why Paul says, "I'm a debtor." That's why Paul says, "I'm ready!" That's why Paul says, "I'm eager!" So, we should have the same kind of motivation, ready and eager to go out and share the gospel.

Notice the gospel's purpose. It's from God, it's His power, and it's unto salvation, verse 16. It means He can deliver us and save us from sin's past penalties. As we break bread tonight, as we drink this cup, as we celebrate communion, remember this. You have been forgiven and set free from sin's past penalty, which is death. You've also been forgiven and set free from sin's present power, the power of sin; and you have been saved from the future presence of sin, one day when you go to heaven you will be without sin. So, we're set free from Satan, from self, and from the second death, which is hell. We can be saved and we can know it.

Fourthly, I want you to notice about the gospel in verse 16, its scope. It's to everyone. Notice that little phrase there, "...to every one." The gospel is for everyone, rich people, poor people, old people, young people, every color, every race, every creed, educated people, uneducated people, barbarians and, in the text he doesn't use the phrase, but there's a phrase used in the New Testament quite often, the word Scythian. Have you ever seen that in the New Testament? There is the Jew, the Greek, barbarian and the Scythian. Do you know what Scythians were? Scythians were people who migrated from North of the Caucasus Mountains. That area is where we get the word caucasian from. In that time of the world and in that culture, the most barbaric, wicked, wretched, radical, crazy, flipped-out, low-lifers (have I said

enough?) on planet earth were the caucasians. I just thought I'd encourage you. Any idea that white skin is the superior race is just foolishness. The Scythians were just as vile and wicked and pagan and cruel as any culture could ever be, and that's the origin of the caucasian race. The gospel is for everybody. We need to go to all the world, and we need to preach this gospel. We need to pray, we need to give, we need to go and support missions, evangelism and outreach.

Notice again, Paul breaks it down for us in verse 14, to the wise or the Greeks, to the unwise or the barbarians, and then again now in verse 16, to religious people, the Jews...Do you know that there are a lot of religious people that we need to tell about Jesus? I remember witnessing to a guy once. He says, "I don't need Jesus. I'm a Baptist." Another person actually said, "I don't need Christ. I'm a Roman Catholic." We all need Jesus Christ. It's not about your denomination or your religious affiliation, Jesus died for every one of us, even the Jews. Nicodemus was a religious Jew, and Jesus told him, "Nicodemus, you have to be born again to see the kingdom of God." To everyone, also to the Greek as well as the Jew, notice that in verse 16. In the New Testament, you see the demoniac of Gadera get saved. Can you imagine witnessing to somebody. You're out hiking in the hills around Menifee or Murrieta and a demon-possessed guy jumps out of a cave, "Arghh!" "Did you know God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life? And, please don't eat me?" This guy was running around naked with chains on, terrorizing people. Until Jesus came, his life was just a horror. When Jesus came, he was set free, and the Bible says, "He was clothed, and he was seated, and he was in his right mind." Isn't it awesome what Jesus can do? Amen? Well, there may not be too many demoniacs around here, but there are some pretty messed up people, and we need to take the gospel to them. Zacchaeus the rich tax collector needed Jesus. The rich young ruler needed Jesus. The sinful woman of Samaria needed Jesus. The whole world needs Jesus Christ.

The reception of the gospel is in verse 16, the word believeth. It's not behave, it's believe. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever..." what? "... believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." So the gospel is received by faith. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast."

Last but not least, I want you to notice in verse 17, it's revelation. What does the gospel of God reveal? It says in verse 17, "For therein..." or in this gospel, in this message, this good news about Jesus Christ, "...is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just..." or those that are declared righteous, those who are justified before God, "...shall live by faith." This is the verse that took hold of Martin Luther and started the Protestant Reformation. "The just shall live by faith." Martin Luther was a Catholic monk, very devout and very devoted to his religion, but he wasn't saved. He wasn't born again. He lived with this terror, this horror, that he would go to hell. Finally, he heard the gospel for the first time. A monk in the Roman Catholic church unsaved, needing to hear the gospel and finally he came to understand it's not crawling up steps on my knees, it's not praying prayers of repentance, it's not confession, it's not baptism, it's not these things, it's faith in Jesus Christ. That's what started it all. When he just realized that it's by grace through faith; grace alone by faith alone in Christ

alone. And, what happens when a person believes by faith in Jesus Christ? This is going to be the doctrine that's going to be unfolded all the way through the book of Romans. So, you're just getting the tip of the iceberg right now. What God does for that person that repents and believes, He gives to that person righteousness. God is able to take the unrighteous and give them righteousness. He is able to do that in a righteous way. I wrote it down like this: In the gospel we learn how a righteous God makes unrighteous men righteous in a way that is righteous. You got that? In the gospel, a righteous God makes unrighteous men righteous in a way that is righteous. He doesn't just forgive us.

I actually heard Christopher Hitchens on YouTube the other day. Yes, I sit around and listen to atheists on the internet. This so-called intelligent, brilliant man says, "Why did God have to send His Son to die for....how barbaric, how foolish can that be!" The preaching of the cross is foolishness to them that perish. And then he said this, "Couldn't a God of love just forgiven everybody?" You say, "Wow! That's good! That's pretty good!" The answer is no, because He is also a holy God and a righteous God and a just God. If I got arrested for speeding, God forbid that I did. Sometimes I'm late for church...I'm always imagining the scenario. A cop pulls me over and I say, "I'm the pastor of Revival Christian Fellowship. I've gotta get there on time. Please write your ticket quick and let me go so that I can preach." So either pray that I slow down or don't get busted, one or the other or something like that. I'm kidding. This is just hypothetical, okay? It's hypothetical. I've only had one ticket in my whole life, so I'm doing pretty good. Anyway, I'm brought before the judge and the judge says, "John Miller, were you going north on Menifee Street at 80 miles an hour?" This is hypothetical. "Yes, Sir, I was and I'm guilty." "Okay. The fine is going to be \$1000, you know and you're going to have to go to traffic school." Or, when I went up the judge says, "Oh, I understand that you're the pastor at Revival Christian Fellowship." "Yes, I am. Yes, yes I am." He says, "Well, then I'll just let you go." You say, "Whoa! That's not fair!" Now, I might think that's a pretty good judge. The one thing he's not, and that's fair or righteous. He might say, "Well, I think you're a nice guy and I'm sorry to do this, but I am going to uphold the law, because I am a good judge, and I am a righteous judge, and I'm here to uphold the law, so the law has to be paid." But if that judge were, so to speak, to come off the bench, take off his robe, come around to the front of the bench, take out his wallet and pay my fine, then he can declare that the penalty has been paid, and he could dismiss me and I'm free to go, right? Now, that's just a small picture, there's a lot lacking in that picture, but God being righteous and just cannot just willy-nilly forgive everybody. The Bible says, the soul that sins will surely die. Here's the dilemma God had, and we're going to delve deeply into it for the next several weeks. The dilemma God had is that He does love us. He is a God of love, and He wants to forgive us. He's also righteous. God has to be consistent with His nature, and God's law has been violated. So, in order to be just and the justifier of them that believe, God sent His Son, who also came willingly and voluntarily, and He died on a cross to pay for our sins so that the penalty could be paid and God could be propitiated, or satisfied, and thus He could then forgive the guilty sinner and we can be righteous or justified. That's how God does it. So the whole book of Romans is explaining how God can be just in justifying the unjust; how God can be righteous in making unrighteous people righteous.

As you take this bread and you drink this cup tonight, I want you to remember that. We are all sinners. We are all guilty. We all were standing in line for the judgement of God, and God in His righteousness provided a substitute. It was Jesus Christ. The bread symbolizes His body, and the cup symbolizes His blood. Jesus died in your place so God could be just in justifying the unjust. We didn't deserve to be forgiven. God could still maintain His righteousness in that the penalty has been paid, but on the other hand, He could impute righteousness to us. Amen? Let's pray.