

VOC July 17, 2016

Not Ashamed of The Gospel

Hello Listeners;

Deep in the heart of the Virginia Mountains stands an ancient stone church. In the stone over the portals of the building are cut these words, “ This church was built by God-fearing inhabitants of this place as a token of their love for the Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. ¹

These are the words of Clarence E. Macartney, a Presbyterian minister in the U.S.A. about a century ago.

What he said about the building of that mountain church is no doubt true of many church buildings erected through the ages. People did want to show their love for the gospel by building a place where they could hear that gospel proclaimed to them.

The apostle Paul certainly showed his love for the gospel of Jesus Christ on his many journeys throughout Asia Minor.

One day he picked up his quill and addressed a letter to “ All those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints” (Romans 1:7). It could be that because of his frequent failures to get to Rome there were some who thought he was reluctant to come to Rome to preach the gospel there.

¹ Quoted in C.E. Macartney's The Greatest Texts of the Bible p. 49

So the apostle hastened to write them this letter where we find our text for today. These words:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. Rom. 1:16

I'm happy to see some translations include that title word "*For*" at the beginning of our text. It gives us Paul's reason as to why he took great joy in the gospel, the very good and glad tidings of the Word of God.

"No" says Paul, "*I'm certainly not reluctant to come to you*", for, as he said in the verse prior, "*I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks..... That's why I'm eager to preach the gospel also to you who are at Rome.*" Paul had reminded his readers right at the beginning of his letter that God had "set him apart for the gospel of God" (Romans 1:1) So he was eager as he'd also said, "*To reap some harvest*" among them.

In saying "*I am not ashamed of the gospel*" Paul wasn't just stating a cold hard fact. he was breaking out in song and praise. Praise for the glory of the gospel. Praise for the wonder of God's living Word.

That word "gospel" was well-known in Paul's days. Did the emperor win some important battle? Was he about to hold a procession with the victorious general at the head of his troops? Heralds, messengers, would go out to announce the news of that victory and that procession. That news was called *gospel*.

Yet Paul wasn't speaking about any gospel but *the* gospel, the very glad tidings about the victory of God's Son. His victory over sin and death on Calvary's cross and His resurrection from the dead. It was that message which Paul was commissioned to bring to the nations, including Rome.

So why was he not ashamed of this good news? It was, he says because it is “ *the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.*”

That's a very strong reason even as that word he used for “power” is a very strong word. It speaks of spiritual power and energy, It is the word from which our English words dynamic and dynamite are derived. That energy has equipped people throughout the years for service to God and to one's fellow human beings. With that kind of service which is pleasing to God and is rewarded by Him.

But can a word or words really have such power? Can they inspire, motivate and direct people's lives? O yes! Think of how the late president John F. Kennedy's words, “ *Ask not what the country can do for you but ask what you can do for your country*” resonated in the hearts and lives of many citizens. Think of the words of those news broadcasters back on June 6, 1944, announcing, “ *The Allies have landed.*” It was reason for bountiful optimism and for dancing in the streets for hearing those words many said, “ Surely this signals the end of the war.”

Yet there have been other statements, other announcements which have had a wonderful, spiritual effect on people. I think of those statements that the reformer Martin Luther once nailed on the door of

the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany, a door that did double duty as a bulletin board . Many of those statements had to do with the indulgences that Rome was peddling then. One of Luther's statements said,

The true treasure of the church is the Most Holy Gospel of the glory and the grace of God

Luther was instrumental in God's work of returning the church to its foundation , the Gospel of Jesus Christ. For people's lives had been caught in a seemingly never ending snare of rituals and superstitions, while the bible lay unknown and unused since it could only be read by those who knew Latin.

Paul, however proclaimed that gospel *far and near*. For it testified to the righteousness of God. That is His right and His claim to the lives of those who by grace, through faith believed in Him. Luther, like Paul, had learned to know that grace which is nothing else but God's gift of undeserved, and amazing favor.

This gospel, which I pray will not be sitting on your bookshelf unused, is far more reliable, far more powerful, than the most prominent words and promises of mere mortal human beings. *It is the power of God*. It is, like the prophet Jeremiah once wrote, "*Like a hammer that breaks a rock*" (ch. 23:29) It can break through the most hardened opposition.

But not only that. It is a most powerful light on one's path (Psalm 119: 105). That's wonderful for there is a lot of darkness in the world and

there are all kinds of pitfalls and obstacles. God's Word doesn't only show us how to avoid these pitfalls and boulders but it directs us to Jesus Christ, the Only Saviour. It is the Word of the Living God who "*Gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.*" (Romans 4: 17).

That gospel is resistant to decay. It is not tainted and unreliable. For God doesn't speak out of both sides of His mouth. His Word doesn't lie. It is true gold and not fools gold!

Talk about an effective word! "*It is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes*" It broadcasts *salvation*, which includes the forgiveness of your sins and mine. So it is a life-giving, life-sustaining Word. It spells peace and joy. It is hope, sure hope for today and tomorrow.

Paul says in effect, "*How could anyone be ashamed of this gospel?*" He says, "*I'm not ashamed how He took hold of me, with that Gospel. Though I was once His sworn enemy, breathing slaughter, murder after Christ's followers.*"

Paul had come to know Christ as God's own Son. The only Saviour who gave His life as a ransom for many. He'd come to rejoice in His great love for straying sinners, for sceptics, doubters, and self-sufficient people who think they can make it on their own. He knew and wanted others to know, that if you believe in Him and His Word you will never have to go and hide your head in shame because you do believe.

Dear listeners, what a power the gospel is. With it Christ cast out legions of demons! With it He brought whole cities to their knees. It is His Word, His tidings with which he tractors people out of what is the kingdom of darkness, the devil's domain, and plants them into His, (Christ's) kingdom of light!

It is universal good news, “ *To everyone who believes.*” Yes, it was intended first for the Jews for they were God's special covenant people. Yet long before God had promised it was also intended to go out to the nations.

Let us then believe. Believe the Gospel and put it into practice in your personal lives. In speaking, and educating your children as well as in your business dealings. You will surely be blessed if you do. Do not be ashamed to declare God's Name and His fame to others. And so rejoice, in Him and His Word, always!

Amen and thanks for listening today.