

ROMANS SERIES FOUR

THE JESUS NEWS

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Rom. 1:16-17; I Cor. 2:14; Matt. 6:31-33

Romans 1:16-17 says, “¹⁶For 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 to the Greek. ¹⁷For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "but the righteous man shall live by faith."

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel...” Have you ever been some place and you were embarrassed for someone else? Parents, have you ever been embarrassed by the way your teen was dressed? You know they are embarrassed by the way you dress.

When I was a teen, we were getting ready to go somewhere, and I remember my sister saying, “Mom, you’re not going to let dad go out like that, are you?” Every Christian faces moments where you have to ask the questions: Does this make sense? Am I a nut for trusting in this whole Jesus thing?

I went to a midnight showing of Star Wars Episode 3 . People were dressed up like Darth Vader and Obi-Wan Kenobi. They were walking around like it was normal. I wanted to say, “Does this not seem a little weird? You’re a grown man!” In a weird way, as the night went on, it became contagious. After two hours of sitting on the floor outside the theater doors they let us in with only an hour and a half remaining before the movie started.

Five young men were dressed in full Jedi wear, right down to their capes and light sabers. They started re-enacting scenes from past episodes. It was not long before people started cheering for their favorite Jedi. Hundreds of people were cheering as these five young men were spinning, twirling, and leaping through the air with the glow of light sabers clashing and flashing.

Then a member of the theater staff came in with his flashlight and announced that all light saber fighting must halt. Well, you would have thought he said the movie was canceled. They booed him down. These five guys who were almost laughed out of the theater were now being applauded and celebrated for their enthusiasm and Star Wars spirit. There was a change of perspective. These five guys won us over. They won me over.

Paul says “I am not ashamed of the gospel!” Paul does not make this statement in a vacuum. He was chased out of Thessalonica, considered a fool in Corinth, and laughed out of Athens. He understood that, to the world, abandonment to an invisible God to become a student of this guy, Jesus, has a certain foolishness to it. 1 Corinthians 2:14 says, “The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him...” The essence of the Christian life is to abandon the life we would choose for ourselves and live according to the passions and desires of Jesus. That’s foolishness to this world. That’s okay! From a spiritual perspective, “The Jesus News” is the best news ever! Perspectives change. Some people who think Christianity is foolish now will someday become fully devoted followers of Jesus.

Paul says don't be ashamed. "... because it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes." (Romans 1:16) Paul wants us to know "the Jesus News" is a big deal! Salvation is living in the power and presence of Jesus. Jesus said He gives us whose joy? Whose peace? He said, I give you whose love? It is the process of being transformed into a spiritual mother or father. My concern is this: I believe millions of believers have missed the essence of "the Jesus News." They do not put it in these words but it is what they carry around in their minds. The gospel is the minimal entrance requirement for entry into heaven.

In Monty Python and the Holy Grail, King Arthur and his knights try to cross over a bridge and the gatekeeper asks them, "What's your name? What's your favorite color? What's the air speed velocity of a coconut-laden swallow?" For too many Christians, the gospel is the correct secret answer. It is just the minimal entrance requirement for entrance into heaven.

When people see the gospel incorrectly, it plays out in strange ways that, quite frankly, Jesus never intended to have it play out. One tendency is to be overpowering with it. As if, "I've got to make up for its oddity." Christians get all psyched up like an Olympic weightlifter. It is like they are saying, "Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa! Yeah...Hi, my name is Glenn and black is black, white is white, hell is hot, sin ain't right, and if you died tonight, where would you go?" God never asks us to power up on people. We are not asked to bash people into the loving arms of God.

Another tendency is to back off from our faith. We do not talk about it. We do not mention it. As if it's a private thing.

Friends, the next tendency is the one that concerns me most. Can we have a little pastor talk? Just the two of us? I hear Christians around here say, "I'm into discipleship and spiritual maturity, not into evangelism, or working with spiritually shallow stuff. As if reaching the lost is separate from the process of discipleship! This is pseudo-spiritual maturity. It is a mask for being ashamed of the gospel. Spiritual maturity will never lead you away from hurting for the lost or actively reaching the lost.

True spiritual maturity is about taking on the heart of Jesus. Discipleship is about being a student of Jesus, living as he would live, burning with the passions with which Christ burned. The "Way of Jesus" is one of reaching the lost.

Ancient Rabbis

For hundreds of years prior to Jesus's day, rabbis would have disciples. They were students who followed them around, learning the rabbis' way, how to correctly perceive the Torah, and the point was *always* to lead the disciples to action. How do I live the scriptures? When a student would fail to apply the scriptures correctly, the rabbi would say, "You have abolished the Torah." If the student seemed to grasp the application of Scripture and applied it rightly, the rabbi would say, "You have fulfilled the Torah."

Jesus comes along and makes this earth-shattering statement in Matthew 5:17, "I have not come to 'abolish' the Torah or Prophets, I have come to 'fulfill' the Torah." He says, "If you want to understand how to live what Scripture is teaching, just watch me. My life is a practical example of how to live."

It is not about us. Can you understand why so many religious leaders hated him? He was constantly hanging around the lost, and loving on sinners, inviting them to live in the power, presence, and reign of God, as if he actually liked them. All the while, he was saying, "I am fulfilling the Torah." In other words, this is how to live out Scripture. He was saying, I want you to live it with the constant desire to reach and love the lost into my father's kingdom. They didn't like that. They wanted it to be about them but Jesus was constantly showing that it is never about us.

Friends, we cannot let Casas become only about us. It is about God's kingdom, His white-hot passion for the lost should become our passion. Jesus gives us many practical example of this. "As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. ¹⁷"Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." (Mark 1:16-17) He said, "Come follow me. Be my disciples. Learn "the Jesus way." I will show you how to fulfill the Torah. He said, "...and I will make you" well behaved sailors? Enlightened monks living in seclusion? "The Jesus Way," when rightly understood, makes us fishers of men.

So many believers end up just dieseling through life. They are not white-hot with passion and pain for the lost. Instead, too many of us end up chasing the things of earth, asking, "What am I going to eat? What am I going to wear? What am I going to drive? Where will I work and live? What can I build? How beautiful can I be? Who will esteem me?" Everything is about my little kingdom but Jesus says, "So do not worry, saying, What shall we eat? or What shall we drink? or What shall we wear? For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his (Kingdom) and his (righteousness)..." (Matthew 6:31-33)

Coming full circle, Romans 1:17 says, "For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith." When our faith moves from person to person, faith to faith, generation to generation, from fisher of men to fisher of men...Paul says, every time you pass your faith on, every time you become so contagious that you fish another soul into heaven, the righteousness of God is revealed. Jesus, the greatest rabbi of all, would say, "You have fulfilled the Torah."

May we fulfill the scripture to burn with the love of "the Jesus News," reaching the lost. I want us to engage in worship and meditation, meditating on the power and beauty of God's salvation. (music cue) Praise him for being a God who invites us into His kingdom. Let the sound of the music carry you away to heaven. Leave all the troubles and cares of this world behind. The music invites us to actually peer into heaven to see what is going on. What if you could hear the sound of heaven? (song lyrics) "Turn your ear to heaven and hear the noise inside, the sound of angels' songs. Oh, the sound of salvation come, the sound of rescued ones." Because of the power of God's salvation, we will worship with angels. Image that! "Oh how infinitely sweet! This great love that has redeemed." This worship song invites us to worship as if heaven is a real place, where real people, rescued people, are already worshiping God. How would that change your passion to reach the lost?