

Sunday, February 3, 2013

HOPE RISING FROM THE TRIUMPH OF THE GOSPEL

Romans 1:16-17

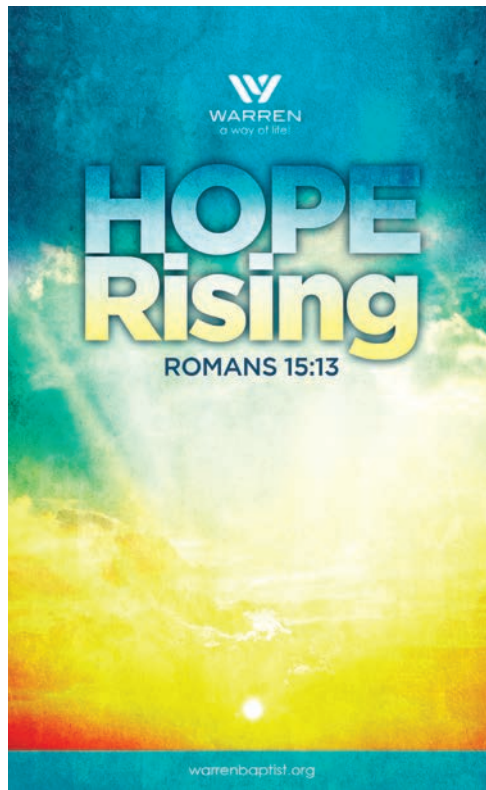
Few life experiences cut deeper and last longer than that of being shamed. Right now, you can probably remember a time when you were shamed—how it happened, when it happened, what you felt. Maybe you were shamed due to one of the following reasons:

(1) **Exaggeration.** Our mouths can get ahead of our minds and make us ashamed. We may even exaggerate the re-telling of a circumstance or boast about a particular ability that later proved untrue. Have you ever been overconfident and outspoken when discussing the outcome of a game? When your team lost, were you shamed, embarrassed, and had to “eat crow”?

(2) **Exposure.** Is there something hidden in the privacy of your heart and life that others do not know?... a hidden hurt?... something that happened in your family? Sometimes people are shamed because something hidden was exposed and made them feel vulnerable. Oftentimes it is because of a hidden fault: cheating on a test, lying, stealing, etc. When that kind of fault is exposed, shame follows.

I don't like to admit this, but when I was a young person, I was caught shoplifting. I remember how embarrassed I was. Now before you get all pious on me, how many of you have ever cheated?... told a lie?... took something that didn't belong to you? From my vantage point, it looks like you are sitting among liars, cheats and thieves today. There are hidden things in all our lives.

(3) **Expectation.** Do you remember when you thought something was going to be one way and it turned out to be the opposite? Have you ever been invited to an event and arrived over dressed? ... under dressed? Were you shamed and embarrassed?



(4) **Embarrassment.** None of us likes to be embarrassed, especially in public. Have you ever tripped and fallen, and then jumped up like it never happened? What about forgetting your words in a play or performance? If a famous artist forgets the lyrics to a song like the National Anthem, it is in the news for days and days and days.

Our faults may never be exposed on the national level, but we all know what it feels like to be ashamed. Frankly, shame is among the most raw and disturbing of all emotions.

The opposite of shame is *confidence* and *conviction*. Others around you may not affirm what you say or do or believe. They may even try to make you ashamed for your faith. However, you can have confidence and conviction because of the truth of the gospel.

In the book of Romans, we have the recorded testimony of one of the greatest men in history, the Apostle Paul. In the opening chapter, we learn of Paul's commitment and conviction that takes him beyond shame in his life.

“I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some harvest among you as well as

among the rest of the Gentiles. I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome” (Romans 1:13-15 ESV).

Paul felt a tremendous compulsion, obligation and burden to go to the great city of Rome to preach and proclaim the gospel. Why? Here's the motivation:

“For 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. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, ‘The righteous shall live by faith’” (Romans 1:16-17 ESV).

For all the shame and suffering Paul experienced because of the gospel, he still proclaimed loud and clear that he was not ashamed of the gospel.

Paul was almost 60 years of age at the time he penned this letter. Frankly his life and experiences up to this point were ones of incredible pain, pressure and resistance because of his commitment to the gospel. But instead of having a fading disillusionment with his commitment to Christ, Paul had vision, vigor, and vitality. Paul was going forward as a spiritual champion, walking in victory because of the gospel rather than letting himself be identified as a loser because of his faith.

“It may be true that wise young believers are rare. But it is no less true that zealous old believers are very rare also.” —J.C. Ryle

Some people have a tendency to fade, faint and fail as they face resistance to their faith in the gospel of Christ. I encounter far more people who stand, sing and praise in church, but are quickly shamed in the marketplace for what they believe.

While Paul never knew what it was like to stand in an arena as big as that of the Super Bowl and to hoist a Vince Lombardi trophy, Paul does take us to his trophy room:

“Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches” (2 Corinthians 11:25-28 ESV).

When Paul says, “A night and a day I was adrift at sea,” Paul was literally holding onto something in order to stay afloat.

Talk about a man whose life had been transformed by a grace-awakening! No matter the burden or struggle Paul felt, no matter how deep the bruises on his body, Paul was not ashamed of the gospel. Paul had an obligation, a debt to grace. As a result, he never quit preaching and teaching the gospel.

I can't help but look at the contrast of another story we find in Scripture. We all know and love Peter. We identify with him because of his personality and impulsiveness. But who can ever forget when Peter denied Christ? Peter walked with Jesus, saw the miracles and heard His messages. Peter even drew his sword in the Garden of Gethsemane to cut off the ear of one of those who came to arrest Jesus. But that same night, Peter was recognized by a servant girl who said, “This man was with Jesus of Nazareth” (Matthew 26:69 ESV).

How did Peter respond? “I do not know the man” (Matthew 26:72 ESV).

We sometimes do the same thing, don't we? “I kind of go to church ...”

Paul said, “...I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes...” (Romans 1:16 ESV).

If you know the gospel and have experienced the grace of God, you

are not a loser; you are a winner! You walk in the triumph of the gospel. You have absolutely nothing of which to be ashamed. The power of God is in the gospel!

Is the gospel offensive to those who do not believe? Yes. But to those of us who are being saved, it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. The gospel wins!

The Gospel Wins Because It is Wholly Based on the Work of God and Not the Merit of Man

The gospel wins because of the Supremacy of its source. The gospel did not come from man to man; it came from God to each one of us. And the power of the gospel was declared throughout history:

“Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord...” (Romans 1:1-4 ESV).

In the book of Galatians, Paul writes:

“For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it... But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone...” (Galatians 1:11-13, 15-16 ESV).

Paul goes on and talks about how he went forward to boldly preach the gospel. Why? Because the gospel

didn't start with Paul; it started with God. The gospel was not one man's suggestion to another man's need. The gospel *was* and *is* the work of God for us. It flows from the love of God, taking initiative to meet us at our deepest point of need, brokenness and fault. We stand not ashamed of the gospel, but amazed by the gospel.

*How deep the Father's love for us,
How vast beyond all measure
That He should give His only Son
To make a wretch His treasure.
How great the pain of searing loss,
The Father turns His face away
As wounds which mar the chosen One,
Bring many sons to glory.*

*I will not boast in anything
No gifts, no power, no wisdom
But I will boast in Jesus Christ
His death and resurrection.
Why should I gain from His reward?
I cannot give an answer
But this I know with all my heart
His wounds have paid my ransom.
—Stuart Townend*

*My chains are gone, I've been set free
My God, my Savior has ransomed me.
—Chris Tomlin*

Amazing grace. How amazed we are at the work of God for us! When you are *amazed* by the gospel, you will never be *ashamed* of the gospel.

As a pastor and teacher, I have to remind myself I am not here to entertain you. Do I want you to like me? Do I want you to be engaged as I speak? Yes. But my job is not to try to be a hip, cool and relevant guy that has a unique handle on life. The only relevant thing I have to offer is the gospel of Jesus Christ.

I don't have to make the gospel relevant; the gospel *is* relevant! Why? Because of its Source, its Supremacy. It came *from* God *to* man. Since God is Creator, His word is the “maintenance manual” that tells us about life. We are all “totaled” in need of a “Power Source” that is different from anything anyone else can provide. We need the gospel.

The Gospel Wins Because It Effectively Displays the Power of God Over the Persuasion of Man

"...I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes..." (Romans 1:16 ESV, *underline added for emphasis*).

In terms of ballgames, most of the world watches the Super Bowl. Right? There is not a bigger media event than the Super Bowl. One of the reasons people watch the Super Bowl has nothing to do with the game; it has to do with the commercials.

Sponsors spend millions of dollars on commercial spots because they have the largest single audience at their disposal. If they can put the right dollar in the right moment to persuade the right people to move and use their product, it translates into profits. Advertisers know and believe in the power of persuasion and they use persuasion to get your attention.

Philosophers, educators and public speakers also know the importance of connection and persuasion. Years ago, my pastor taught me a simple guideline to follow each time I speak: "Hey you, look, do." *Hey you*, I need your attention! *Look*, this is what you need to see and know. And now go, *do* something about it! We need to be "doers of the word, and not hearers only" (James 1:22 ESV). It is what you *do* that matters.

However, I am not here to simply persuade you. That's not what we are about. Anything I can talk you into, someone else can talk you out of. That is why it will never do for the church just to be hip, cool and relevant. If you don't know the power of the gospel, it doesn't matter what you experience at church. Once you leave here, the world can sway you in a different direction if you do not know the power of the gospel. The gospel is not the power of *men*; "it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes..." (Romans 1:16 ESV, *underline added for emphasis*).

The gospel is the necessary and sufficient message for everyone. Human power can coerce, manipulate and direct, but only the work of God through the gospel can change us from the inside out. It is an internal change, not an external conformity.

Listen to Anne Smith as she tells her story.

"My life before Jesus got hold of me was all about me. It was 100% about me—what I wanted, what I needed, how I felt. Nobody else counted. If I needed to use you for money, I did that. If I needed to use you emotionally, I would do that. I didn't care. If you read Romans 1:28-31, that was me. Every single word—don't be nice about, don't leave anything out—that was me.

"I was faithless. I was heartless and senseless. I was very much a child of Satan. I know that's really blunt and really hard to say to somebody, but when the Bible says you're a child of Satan, if you are not a child of God, you are. That's why when they say that God has to change your heart, He really has to change your heart. He has to give you sight to see for you won't be able to see.

"I started working at this restaurant. I was a host. There was another girl who was hired on as a host. She was a Christian and I hated Christians. With every fiber of my being, I hated Christians so much. I loved to get hold of them and try to talk them out of their faith. I couldn't stand their peace or their niceness or any of that. And she had so much of that. She was so nice to me. This poor, sweet girl would come up to me and say, 'You seem really unhappy. You seem really violent and angry. Do you go to church?' And I would just tear into her. I would rip her apart. She didn't give up. She would keep trying, keep trying.

"One day, she gave me something like a beginner apologetics book. I read the book and thought, 'Okay, that was really dumb,' and I threw it in the trash. That was it. But then I got it out of the trash and I read it again. It made even more sense and I thought, 'Okay,' and

I threw it away. I got it back out again and I thought, 'Okay, I'm just going to keep it in the closet.'

"I was just so frustrated going back and forth. I got in the car to go downtown. I thought I would drink a whole lot of beer and take a walk and forget about all this.

"There is a light on the corner where I live. If I go right, I could go downtown or I could turn left which leads up to Warren (I didn't know that at the time). But for some reason, I just turned left. I don't know why. I knew that wasn't the way I was suppose to be driving, but I just turned left.

"I kept driving and I saw the church. I thought, 'Oh, well, I guess I'll go in there.'

"I drove into the parking lot. I was just sitting there thinking, 'What am I going to say to these people that I hate and now I've got to ask their help.'

"I went in and everyone was in there eating dinner. I walked in and talked to a couple of people. I said, 'I don't know what I am suppose to do. I'm not a Christian; I'm just here.'

"They were so loving and that blew me away. It really just took me off guard. I had actually found a Bible at the back of my closet and I had been reading it, and it had been very deeply disturbing me.

"God changes you. He changes everything about you. When the Bible says that you are born again, that is a literal statement. That really does happen. The whole world changes.

"Now I am very aware of my thought processes in comparison to who Jesus is. He reached down into that pit and He pulled me out when I was not looking for Him. I did not want Him. I hated Him. And He came and got me anyway. I had never, ever viewed God in a light where He would look at someone who everyone in the whole world would have ever reason to be disgusted with, and say, 'It's okay.' That's really, really... awesome."

Although Anne never met the Apostle Paul, their testimonies are the same, "...I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes..." (Romans 1:16 ESV).

There are people all around us like Anne. They pass this big red brick building where we meet and they have no clue what goes on behind the doors, except to assume they probably would not like it. They might assume they would be put down or afraid or ashamed of where they had been and how they had lived. They might think Christians are the very people who want to shame them, and so they live with anger, fear, skepticism and stubbornness.

Yet, when one of these people meets a believer who is not ashamed of the gospel, suddenly all the preconceived notions and ideas crumble at their feet. When people hear the gospel and learn who God is—the power of His love and what Christ has done—they begin to understand all their shame can be removed and it can be replaced with amazement because of the love of God and the wonder of the gospel.

The Gospel Wins Because It Positively Affirms the Promise of God to All Who Believe

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes..." (Romans 1:16 ESV, *underline added for emphasis*).

The gospel is the answer to the need of everyone. All who believe are ultimately changed and transformed by the power of the gospel.

When asked what God expects, most people would respond with one word: *behave*. Everything will be okay if they can just fix or change their behavior. But nowhere in the Bible does it say God wants us to behave; He knows we can't behave. We are rebels and stubborn. We are in sin and sin offends God. God is not pleased with behavior because He says, "... all righteousnesses are like filthy rags [in My site]" (Isaiah 64:6 NKJV).

Instead of focusing on behavior, God tells us to believe on the One, the only One, Who is able to take away the stain and shame of sin—Jesus Christ.

Are you ashamed by the gospel because of your behavior? Are you trying to behave? Even though your behavior may be better than most, you cannot get to heaven by comparing your behavior with others.

You must believe on the name of Jesus Christ and experience the power of the gospel. The gospel transforms! The gospel changes everything about you.

The gospel addresses pride in the hearts of those who think they don't need to be saved. It confronts us, meets us, tears us down and shows us that we are desperate and needy for a Savior. And the same gospel penetrates the heart of a person who is broken, in poverty and shamed into thinking they cannot be saved. God reaches down, God reaches in, and God changes them forever.

"...it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes..." (Romans 1:16 ESV).

It hasn't been too long ago when the world tried to shame Christians because Christians believed the gospel. Today, the world tries to shame us because we say the gospel is the only answer. Words like *bigot* and *prejudice* are inserted into the conversation. Their view is that Christians think better of themselves; they have the truth and all others are in error. Since we live in a world where there is "no truth," should we be surprised when we are confronted with the argument that "no one can really be right"?

The Bible *is* the revelation of God's work for us. It is the Bible, the Word of God, that speaks to us and yes, brings shame, but of which we must never be ashamed.

It is a message that says, "... there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12 ESV).

There is only one way to be saved; it is in the person of Jesus Christ. Christ alone demonstrates the power of God to all who are broken, condemned and in need of a Savior. We are saved by the power of the gospel.

We are not losers; we are champions because the gospel wins! We are not champions because of what we have done, but because of who Christ is and what He has done.

"...in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us" (Romans 8:37 ESV).

I was a loser. I was defeated. I was shamed in sin. But Jesus came, died, rose from the dead and saved me. Now I am a champion through Christ.

During my teenage years in the 1970's, a group came across the ocean from Great Britain. Although they are not exactly known for being writers of great gospel music, the music of Queen is heard at almost every major sporting event:

*We are the champions, my friends,
And we'll keep on fighting till the end.
We are the champions,
We are the champions,
No time for losers
'Cause we are the champions
of the world.
—Freddie Mercury
Recorded by Queen*

The gospel wins and as a result, you win because of the triumph of the gospel of Jesus Christ in you.

Father, today I thank you for the power of the gospel. I pray that we would not live unconvinced, but God, because of the reality of grace at work in us and because of the power of Christ to change us from the inside out, I pray we would never be ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Father, I pray for those who may shame us—a person in our workplace, a family member who blows us off, a friend who thinks we are crazy to have this faith in Christ. I pray You would help us to stand in the face of shame, skepticism and cynicism, and say,

"I am not ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes."

Father, I pray in this moment people will step from the shame of the past, the shame of their confusion, the shame and condemnation of life without Christ, and that Father, today they will leave this place unashamed of the power of the gospel. In Jesus' name. Amen.

David H. McKinley is Pastor-Teacher of Warren Baptist Church in Augusta, Georgia. This message has been edited for print purposes. You may listen or watch this message in its entirety by visiting warrenbaptist.org.

Credit must be given and noted in the following way when excerpts are printed or used: David H. McKinley, Pastor-Teacher; Warren Baptist Church, Augusta, GA.

Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

