

The Gospel is the Power of God

Last time we studied the background of the writing of Romans, Paul's calling and the holy congregation. The most important thing I want you to remember is that the gospel is Jesus Christ Himself. And God desires that we obediently believe this truth that we can be saved by believing in Jesus Christ. Today, I would like to focus on the main theme of the book of Romans, chapter 1, verses 16 and 17. Today, we will be discussing the very important gospel, faith, salvation, God's righteousness, and sin. These important concepts that we must understand in Christianity. I pray that the Holy Spirit will deepen our understanding today.

1. The gospel is the power of God

Now look at verse 16. "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jews, then for the Gentile." Here Paul declares that he is not ashamed of the gospel. Before he met Jesus, Paul persecuted Christians because he thought the gospel of Jesus was a Jewish heresy. But after he met Jesus, he was converted and was doing his best to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ.

What is the reason for this? Because the gospel is the power of God that brings salvation to those who believe. For example, what is the definition of a good doctor? It is an expert who can heal many patients. And patients from all over the world come to this great doctor. It is the same with religions. All religions introduce salvation, but is there really any power in that salvation? If the truth does not give salvation to human beings, it cannot be called truth. The truth of Jesus Christ taught in Christianity has the ability to solve the problem of people's death, lead them to the place where God is, and give them eternal life.

Thus, truth must have the power to change people. Buddhism and many other religions teach that salvation is attained through our sufferings and deeds. However, the God we believe in is God Himself who came to us and died for us. The subject of salvation is God Himself. It is unilateral love and grace from God. God is the one who planned salvation from the beginning and will complete it to the end (Genesis 3:15, the original gospel).

The 'power' here is the Greek word 'dunamis'. The gospel has the power to shatter people's ego and sin, just as the word 'dynamite' means to destroy or blow up. And like 'dynamo' meaning generator, the gospel has the creative power to rebirth new life. Finally, there is 'dynamic' meaning full of activity, the gospel empowers believers to live a breakthrough and powerful life.

Saul persecuted Christians to the point of going to Damascus to get and kill them (Acts 9). But Saul encountered Jesus Christ at that time and his life was completely transformed. The gospel had the power to transform the persecutor Saul into the apostle Paul. If you listen to the testimonies of many other Christians, you will find countless others who have had their lives transformed into wonderful lives after believing in Jesus.

2. Salvation from sin

Next, what is the 'salvation' that is offered to us? First of all, when considering salvation, we must firmly understand that if there is no 'salvation' there is 'destruction'. I did not read verses 18-32 in today's Bible because they are long. But they speak nakedly of the seriousness of humanity's sin and the Bible says that sinners are under God's wrath because of their sins. This state of sin is driving people to death.

In fact, even God's people Israel had to offer animals every time for thousands of years to have God redeem them. But even Israel, God's people, could not attain the righteousness of the holy God by human deeds. The more we read in the Old Testament, the more we realize that people could not keep God's law perfectly.

Severity of Sin

1. Destruction of relationship with God:

Knowing God (e.g., natural revelation),
not glorifying God as God (not returning glory to God),
not giving thanks (vv.21-22).

2. Idolatry : Exchanging God's glory into creatures and worshipping them.

(animals, atheism, humanism, etc.) (vv. 23-25)

3. Sexual promiscuity: homosexuality, etc. (vv.26-27)

4. Spiritual downfall: thoughts have become vain (depraved mind)

Ignorant mind darkened (senseless, heartless)

Became a fool, saying he is a man of knowledge (boast, foolishness)
(vv.28-31)

God's wrath was laid on this sinful humanity, see verse 18, "The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of [those] who suppress the truth by their wickedness." Here is where 'God's wrath' comes in. This wrath is not like a tantrum or emotional anger. God's wrath represents a 'righteous God'. Human beings are created in the image of God, so they are similar to the righteous God. We come to be angry when we see injustice. During the Corona-19 period, there were demonstrations by people in Hong Kong and Myanmar demanding democracy. When people are oppressed and faced with evil that threatens their freedom and lives, everyone wants to be angry. Please watch the Japanese movie, 'The Newspaper Reporter (Shimbun kisyu), 2019' starring Tori Matsuzaka. It is a good representation of how much human beings want to be right and eager to get righteousness.

After all, humanity is condemned to death from the sin of Adam and Eve, as we see in Genesis chapter 3, see verse 32. "Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them." They also know that when people sin, they will die, yet they encourage others to sin. This speaks to the seriousness of sin, doesn't it? That is exactly why humans are crashing to destruction. Hebrews 9:27, also say, "Just mortals are destined to die once, and after that to face judgement." We all die once for our sins. And after that, we all stand before the righteous God to be judged. This worldview is very important. If we do not understand this judgment well, the truth of the entire Bible will be shaken.

3. God is Righteous

By the way, how can a God of love execute judgment? That is too miserable. Shouldn't God also do anger management and fix his character? But we need to understand well the character of God. God's righteousness is not just one aspect of God. It is the essence and nature of God. Exodus 34:6, 7 show God's nature very well. In the Bible, when sinful human beings saw God's face, they all died immediately. Therefore, no one could see God's face. God did not show His face even to Moses, whom He loved. And as He passed by him, God Himself introduced Himself. "And He passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, 'The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness (6), maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation.'"

The Nature of God

God is righteous and judges sin.

God is loving and merciful.

God forgives sin, disobedience and saves people.

This righteousness of God is best manifested in the cross of Jesus Christ. Look at verse 17: "For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed." God allowed His only beloved Son Jesus to be crucified in order to fulfill God's two essentials of love and his righteousness and to provide complete salvation for people. Jesus, the son of God was judged by God on the cross on the sin of human beings. But the sinless Jesus conquered death and resurrected. And through the grace of the cross of Jesus, we who believe in Him have received eternal life (John 3:16). Therefore, in the cross of Jesus, "God's righteousness" that loves people and God who does not accept sin was manifested. The cross, in which God's righteousness was manifested, is God's power to give us salvation.

4. The abundance of salvation

What then is the salvation we receive? When I evangelize, many people say, "I don't need to go to heaven. I am happy enough now, so I don't need to believe in Jesus." And surprisingly, as Christians, we may also have an understanding of "salvation narrowly. I had a poor understanding of the gospel and the salvation too. But when I studied all over the Bible, I found that the meaning of "salvation" is very deep.

Salvation.

Believe in Jesus Christ and be saved from our sins.

At the final judgment, we will be acquitted and enter heaven.

To gain eternal life.

Sanctification while living in the world by the Holy Spirit.

The believer becomes a child of God and inherits the blessings of the Kingdom of God.

We will be completed to glorification.

As mentioned above, we Christians need to expand the concept of "salvation" and understand it correctly. All these are given to those who believe in Jesus Christ. This is a story about a Korean student who went to the United States to study in the 1960s. His parents sold their entire house and gave the money to their son to pay for his airfare. However, he was very hungry and drank only water on the plane for three days until he arrived in the United States. By the time he arrived in the U.S., he was starving

to death and exhausted. Because he didn't know that in-flight meals were free, so he didn't get to eat a single meal. Perhaps our life of faith as Christians may be like this. This is a hard life of faith that will be painful until we get to heaven. Now we know we can enjoy both beefsteak and French food on the plane to America. Like this, we know that Jesus paid all expenses for our salvation, so we can enjoy it during this life. If we don't enjoy our salvation, we will lose out. It is very sorry when we get to heaven and will say, "Jesus! I'm hungry!" Let us enjoy our salvation in our lives now.

Paul prays in Ephesians 1:17-19. "I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation so that you may know him better (17). I pray also that the eyes of your hearts may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints (18), and his incomparably great power for us who believe. The power is like the working of his mighty strength (19). As we believe in Jesus, the Holy Spirit accomplishes our salvation with a different menu every day. Please pray that our salvation will be abundant.

5. Live by faith

We have been saved simply by believing in the gospel of Jesus Christ. However, we Christians are faced with the problem of how to live in the present. It is an American joke of Christians. A Christian who was blessed with many blessings at the Christian conference felt as if he was going up to heaven. Then he said, "Oh, my Lord! I want to be in a car accident right out of the church gates." A joke that is not funny, wanting to go to heaven right away on the blessed day. After all, even Christians have constant suffering in this life. But this depressing way of life is not recommended. Read the second half of verse 17: "a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith.'"

So what does 'the righteous will live by faith' mean? We are recognized by God as 'the righteous' through faith in Jesus Christ. All of us here are righteous. However, as we saw earlier with the MRI of sin (vv.18-32), it is not so easy to live in this sinful world. Even if we are blessed in church, once we step out, we suffer from our own sins and the sins of others. We suffer from family discord, and we may be treated unfairly at work or school. We suffer from illness, natural disasters, accidents, and wars. Even though in this sinful world, God tells us to 'live by faith'.

I was very troubled as I prepared today's message because I was not sure if the power of God was really working in my life now. Last year, I graduated from the JTI seminary and was spiritually satisfied. I was relatively healthy spiritually. However, I was panicking because my computer suddenly malfunctioned, and I couldn't sleep when I thought about my mother being left alone because my sister was moving to Toronto. Oh, I was lamenting the fact that the "divine power of the gospel" didn't seem to be working in my life right now. And I was pondering what it would mean to live by faith.

As I was sad for this, I heard a wonderful testimony. Helen Roseveare (1925-2016), a brilliant British physician, went to Congo as a missionary. She built a leprosy hospital in Congo and worked there. However, she was persecuted during the 1964 Congolese Civil War. At that time, missionaries were brutally murdered. She was severely tortured, raped, and locked in prison. At that time, she was filled with sorrow and prayed to God. "Why me, God? I came here to do good, but I don't understand how this could happen to me." In her deep prayer, Missionary Helen heard God's voice. "Can't you thank me?" And

Helen answered, "God Father, how can I be thankful in this situation?" Then God said again, "Helen, I trust in you. Can't you be thankful that I have trust in you?" During this exchange with God, Helen shed tears. She was amazed that God trusted and believed in her. She realized that God wants a deep loving relationship with her. After this, she was released and returned to England, but she went to Congo again as a missionary and finished her life as a missionary.

Through the testimony of Missionary Helen, I realized that God has first trusted us before we trust God. Hebrews 12:2, "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." The author of faith is Jesus Christ. Faith was initiated first by Jesus Christ. Jesus had His hope and trust in us; even Peter, who betrayed Jesus three times, Jesus believed in him to the end and entrusted His "sheep" to him.

And Jesus, who has helped us begin to live by faith, will lead us to the end of our salvation as believers in Him. Philippians 1:6, "being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." Living by faith does not mean holding on to my strength and earnestness. It means to relax and leave my salvation in God's hands. It is to leave everything in God's hands. This is living by faith. We are to walk daily with hope until Jesus Christ's coming again and the complete restoration of this sinful world.

I pray that our life of faith will be enriched by this profound grace of "living by faith. I would like to conclude by reading verses 16 and 17. "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jews, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."

Let's pray together.

Loving Father our God. Thank you for your word today. Thank you for this grace that we have received in believing in Jesus Christ. I pray that we may walk by faith and the power of the gospel of God may appear in our daily life. Oh Holy Spirit, please strengthen our faith in every moment. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Reference

1. Study Bible, New Common Translation, Japan Bible Society, 2014.
(The Learning Bible Contemporary English Version, American Bible Society, 2000)
2. Colloquial Translation of the Bible, printed by Japan Bible Society, 2002.
3. New Japanese Bible, Inochi no Kotobunsha Publishing Company, 2009
4. Romans (Revised Edition), Dr. Yoshihiro Kishi, JTJ Missionary Seminary, 2014
5. Romans, The Bible Reading Group(Seisyo wo Yomu kai),
Shinsei Mission Publishers, 2018
6. Essential Bible Dictionary, Noboru Yamaguchi,
Inochi no Kotobunsha Publishing, 2002
7. Bible Theological Dictionary of the Old and New Testaments, edited by Riki Koshio
and Shogo Yamatani, published by Shinkyō Shuppansha, 2004.
8. Roman, Akira Izuta, Inochinokotobasya publishing, 2005