



Sermon – April 26, 2020  
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**Verses Covered This Week**

*Romans 1:16*

*Mark 8:38*

*2 Corinthians 5:21*

Let's open our Bibles together to the book of Romans, chapter 1. We're going to spend our time in Romans 1:16 this morning. What a joy to be with you. It's an exciting day in the life of the church. We're looking forward with expectation to all that God is going to do. And that's why we're coming to the Scriptures today. It's because we want our church to be rooted in God's word. So if you'll follow along with me, here's what the Apostle Paul says in Romans chapter 1 in verse 16.

*[<sup>16</sup>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.](#)*

Let's pray together.

Father, as we come to You in this time, we are coming with expectation. We long for You to awaken our hearts by the power of Your Spirit today. That You would unite us around the gospel that Paul speaks of here as we seek to honor Christ in all that we do. And it's in His name we pray. Amen.

I know a lot of us are doing more home cooking than we're used to and maybe you've encountered a situation just like our family's run into. Where you wanted to make a particular dish but as you begin to prepare it, you discover you don't have all the ingredients you need. So, for example, not long ago we were wanting to make some blueberry muffins. And we discovered in the process that we didn't have all the cooking oil we needed. And so instead, the closest thing we could find was butter. And we decided, "Ah, that's close enough. Let's go for it and see what happens." Well after we baked it and we brought it out of the oven, we realized soon thereafter that what we were looking at were not blueberry muffins, but more like blueberry muffin cookies. Now don't get me wrong, they tasted delicious, but they weren't the real thing. They didn't match the design of the recipe because we had used a substitute ingredient that wasn't part of what it was intended to be. Well, we can fall into the same danger when it comes

to the church. That we can think that we can substitute different things and that certain ingredients are not essential to what God has designed the church to be. But what we're going to notice this morning, is that Romans 1 lays out for us three key ingredients for the church that should shape every New Testament church and to set the trajectory for the life of Central during its next chapter.

Now think about what's happening here in the text. What you have here is Paul is writing to the church at Rome. He is longing to be with them. Desiring to come there and be amongst them. And he has not yet had that opportunity, but he is writing this letter to encourage and to challenge them spiritually. And what we're going to find as we look at this passage together this morning is that Romans 1:16 lays out three core foundations that should mark the New Testament church. We're going to see it talk about the gospel, the mission, and the community. And our heart this morning is that these realities which shape the next chapter of Central.

So notice the way the verse begins. At the start of verse 16 Paul says,

<sup>16</sup>For I am not ashamed of the gospel,

So the first foundation that Paul marks out for us here, for the church, is the gospel. That the gospel must be at the heart of what we do as a church. Now we live in a culture that is often motivated by shame. You think about what's going on right now with social distancing. One of the reasons that people have for why you should keep your distance from others is because we don't want to be riddled with the guilt that our contact with someone might have induced their sickness. Or maybe you've wrestled with that shame whenever you've needed to jump on a Zoom call and you don't think you're quite as presentable as you ought to be to turn the video camera on and you're worried what someone may think about you. That sense of shame is bound up in fallen human nature. And that's true, not just in 21<sup>st</sup> century America. We see that all the way back from the Garden of Eden itself. Because once Adam and Eve fall into sin, we see a pattern of shame emerge from that. They eat of the forbidden fruit and then what do they do in reaction to it? They hide from God. They seek to cover over their nakedness with fig leaves. They try to shift the blame onto one another for what has happened. Shame rips all of us. But when Paul speaks here being ashamed of the gospel, what does he mean by that? What does he have in mind? Well, it seems that if you look through the whole trajectory of Scripture, what it means to be ashamed of the gospel, is when the people of God reject the promises of God. And that happens first in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve. But it doesn't stop there. You can think about all sorts of ways this plays out. In the wilderness as God's people grumble against His provision and doubt that God knows what's good for them. Or maybe when Israel enters into the promised land and what do they start to do? They begin to clamber for a king just like the surrounding nations rather than trusting God. Or you think about the New Testament where you have situations like Peter denying Jesus three times just as Jesus foretold him. Or you see warnings even in the final book of the Bible in the book of Revelation to the church at Laodicea that we should be careful not to leave our first love. There is this ongoing pattern in Scripture of the people of God rejecting the promises of God that Paul speaks of here as being ashamed of the Gospel.

Now the question we should have before us though is, why would anyone think that Paul was ashamed of the gospel? I mean when we look at the New Testament, we see somebody like the

Apostle Paul and he seems as if he's a spiritual superhero. Like it's impossible to imagine that anyone would wonder if he was ashamed of the gospel. And yet it seems as if maybe there were questions about that in the church at Rome. Perhaps he had not come to them yet. Maybe it seemed to some of them like he was dodging that situation. But for whatever reason, he's addressing why he is not ashamed. But that would have been a new reality for Paul. Because if you look back in the book of Acts, we know there was a time in his life when, in fact, he was quite ashamed of the gospel to the point that he was a persecutor of the church. He was holding on to the coats as others stoned him. You remember the way that when he came to faith in Christ the early church was afraid of interacting with him because they remembered all of the things that he had done before he was unafraid of the gospel. Now he is unashamed of the gospel because Jesus changes everything. And we remember the way that Jesus talks about what it means to be unashamed of Him. If you look at Mark chapter 8, in verse 38. Jesus offers this warning to each of us. He says,

<sup>38</sup>“For whoever is ashamed of Me and of My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”

So Jesus is calling us to take up our cross, follow Him, to be unashamed in our commitment to the gospel. And so then the question that we need to ask ourselves as we look at Romans 1:16 is what is the gospel? And in the original language, that word gospel there when Paul says he's unashamed of the gospel, means good news. It was most often used as an announcement of victory. After a military defeated its enemies, they would come back and to report victory that had been achieved. Now I know a number of you were likely there or at least watched a couple of football seasons ago when Texas A&M knocked off LSU in seven overtimes. My family happened to be there and I would assume in your family of friends, there were people that were watching the game, it got late, they gave up hope, they went to bed assuming that the Aggies lost that game. And some of you had the chance to be the one the next morning when they woke up to break the news to them that instead of the defeat that they expected, that in fact, an unexpected and unbelievable victory had been won the night before. Now you remember the excitement, the bewilderment, they just couldn't believe that amazing news. The victory that had been declared by you to each one of them. Well how much more so is that true for us in the gospel of Jesus Christ? That it is this unexpected, unbelievable, amazing victory that God has provided for us through His Son Jesus who conquers satan, sin, and death. And we see the way that the Apostle Paul talks about the gospel throughout his letters in the New Testament. But one place in particular where he simply and succinctly captures the essence of the gospel is in 2 Corinthians chapter 5 in verse 21. And here's what it says.

<sup>21</sup>For our sake he made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.

Paul speaks here of, in a sense, a great exchange that happens where what happens on the cross is that Jesus takes on our sin and our judgment and the wages of sin which is death that we deserved. And in exchange for that, what does He do? For those of us that are found in Christ by faith, He gives us righteousness. He gives us justification before God. He makes us stand holy before Him. That is the good news of the gospel. It's our sin for His righteousness. Our suffering for His joy. You remember the first time you embraced the good news of the gospel?

My wife, Cami, grew up in West Texas, out in Abilene. And she grew up in a home where church wasn't a part of their life. But in elementary school, her parents started to send her to a Christian summer camp and so she got to hear about Jesus once a year. But what happened was her dad, during middle school, during her time in middle school went on a spiritual retreat and the Lord awakened his faith. And he called a family meeting one Christmas evening and he declared that they were going to start going to church. And so she began to go to church with her parents and she began to regularly hear more about Jesus. And it wasn't long after that that Jesus awakened her heart and that Cami came to Christ. She was the recipient of that great exchange. And who knows, there may be some of you sitting there right now watching this who are middle schoolers just like her. And the Spirit is at work in your heart calling you to faith in Christ. Maybe you're a dad who's not had your church, your family in church, and the Lord is prompting you to reengage in a way that helps you live out what Paul is speaking here of being unashamed of the gospel. That is the heart behind what Paul is describing in this verse. And the beautiful thing about this church is that being unashamed of the gospel has been at the centerpiece of who Central has been over the last generation. It's one of the things that I love about this church. Its commitment to expositional preaching. Its commitment to seeing the younger generation come to Christ. How many times we have kids come up here and receive survival kits who are taking steps toward baptism. The way that the gospel is part of our Life Groups and the way that we're serving those with special needs in this community. It's there at every aspect of what this church is about. If the Lord sees fit to bring me here as your next pastor, what I would want you to know is that we're going to continue to be unashamed of the gospel. We will be committed to the inerrancy of the Bible. We will be committed to declaring that Jesus is the only way of salvation. Because we know this. That what we believe shapes who we are and how we live. And so we see Paul speaking here of the need to be unashamed of the gospel. And what I want you to know is that you may have a different pastor in the future, but you will always have the same gospel. Because in the next chapter of this church, we will be committed to being just as Paul calls us to in Romans 1, unashamed of the gospel.

But notice with me a second foundation for the church right here in the middle of chapter 16. Here's what the text says.

[for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes,](#)

The second foundation of the church is the mission. So in other words, the gospel message should shape the gospel mission of the church. Throughout the New Testament, we see the church being called to a mission of discipleship. One of my friends was doing family devotions not long ago during this Coronavirus shut down, and when she asked her children, "What must we do to be saved?" The reaction from one of her small kids was, "To stay indoors." That feels about right, right now with all that's going on with Coronavirus. There's a sense in which for many people the mantra is, man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of Dr. Fauci. That seems as if it's the most likely means of being delivered from this challenge. But imagine if we fast forward several months into the future and a vaccine is finally discovered for this disease. And it is manufactured and shared. You can imagine the excitement. You can imagine the intensity with which that medicine would be delivered out to those who were in need. And there's a reason for that. Because right now there is no hope of deliverance from this virus. There is no way of escape. And once a vaccine is discovered, it is establishing a cure that changes everything. People would sacrifice anything and everything to

ensure that they had the opportunity to share this life-saving provision with other people. But how much more so is that true for us who embrace the gospel? Because God is giving us a mission in which we are to be unashamed. Why? Because we know the gospel is the power of God for salvation. It is the only means of deliverance from the disease of spiritual death. And that's why Paul speaks here of the mission of the church in Romans 1:16. He says that we are called to be ambassadors of the kingdom of God. That we are operating behind enemy lines on behalf of the gospel. And in several ways we are declaring and displaying the gospel so that people might experience this power of God for salvation. And this is exactly what Paul had encountered himself.

You remember he experienced the power of God for salvation on that road to Damascus. And now he was on mission to share that power with others. See as we looked at the life of the Apostle Paul, we see that he goes from persecution to proclamation. He first persecuted the gospel before he proclaimed it. And what we find there is God doesn't call somebody who is the perfect person to advance the gospel. Instead, He calls someone that He can then prepare to carry out that mission. That's why it's common to point out as you look through the Bible that God doesn't call the prepared. He prepares the called. He makes Paul ready for the gospel mission that He has assigned him to. And I believe that over the last 15 years of my ministry that the Lord has been at work in my life in unique ways. Perhaps even now to prepare me for this next calling on my life to become your senior pastor. And that He's at work corporately in our congregation even now to ready each one of you for the gospel mission that He has called us to. But notice the way the text goes on here. It talks about how this is a gospel mission for everyone who believes. There's a sense of a free offer of the gospel. That the gospel isn't just for some and not for others. That it is for everyone. That that will be continued to be proclaimed at this congregation. You know, you might even be watching this service today and you don't normally tune in to services here at Central. But you're curious about what's happening at this pastor transition and you're hearing about Jesus, perhaps for the first time. Or the first time in a long time. What we want you to know this morning is the gospel is for you. That what Paul speaks of here that it is the power of God for salvation. You can experience that salvation today. You can find rescue from your sins. What we notice here is that Paul is calling the church to a mission of discipleship. He speaks about the way that the church is to proclaim the gospel for everyone who believes. That we're not just called to reach others, but to teach them as well.

And that's why we invest so heavily in our Life Groups. To see discipleship happening. That's why we are reaching every age of the next generation from preschool all the way up to college. That's why we're serving at places like Mary Branch Elementary and going to the nations in Honduras. It's because we know that God has given us a mission and He has sent us out. At the start of the Coronavirus, when I was still up in Tennessee, I came across a story about a man who saw the Coronavirus coming to America and decided he would try to make some money off it. So he drove around a bunch of spots in Tennessee and Kentucky and he bought up all the hand sanitizer he could find. And the plan was to take it back to his place in east Tennessee and then begin to sell it on Amazon for huge profits. There was only one problem for him. Amazon caught on to him and others trying to do that and they shut down price gouging on things like hand sanitizer. Well he made the mistake of speaking to a media reporter and an article was written about him and not long after that some enterprising people online discovered not just who the guy was but where his stash was located. And not long after that, it was confiscated.

And the reason that took place is because somebody took something that was designed to serve others around him who were in need and instead used that for his own selfish benefit. The same danger faces the church as well. We've been given spiritual gifts by God. We've been given a calling to live on mission. And there can be a temptation to take what God has provided for us and to turn inward and to use it to serve ourselves instead of reaching those who are in need. But Paul gives us a different picture here. One where we are to take the power of God for salvation to the world around us. And I just want you to think with me for a minute. Image the types of people we can reach in the next chapter of this church. Right now there are single moms who are out of work in this community. Whose kids are home from school. Their budget is stretched thin. They don't know how they're going to make ends meet. There's a sense of desperation that might open them to the gospel. Right now there are students that have travelled home from A&M for Blinn who are going to be coming back to this campus in future semesters and they're going to be looking for answers that a textbook can't provide. There are middle school and high school students all around us who are passing away the time on their phone or playing games who are recognizing how dissatisfying and empty that makes them feel who are looking for significance beyond what everyday life can offer. And there are widows right now who are in nursing homes where no visitors are allowed. But it doesn't even feel any different for them because they don't have anyone that comes and visits them anyway. There are people in our community in need of Jesus. And what Paul was calling us to here in this second foundation of the church is to a gospel mission. To live out whatever Jesus has called us to in the Great Commission, that we would go and make disciples of all nations. So if the Lord is to bring me here as your next pastor, what I want you to know is that you may have a different pastor, but we are going to have the same mission.

But notice with me, finally, the way that this text ends. At the end of verse 16, we see a third New Testament foundation for the church and it's that of community. You see what the Apostle Paul says there. He says,

[To the Jew first and also to the Greek.](#)

So what Paul is showing us here is that the church's gospel mission brings together a gospel community. And we know how community is important in our culture. Especially in a moment where we feel it lost all around us. The isolation that all of us are experiencing right now. The separation of community has caused us to do things we would have never imagined; even a couple of months ago. So just this week, the Air Force Academy held a graduation on a gigantic field with cadets eight feet apart and parents watching on the livestream. Maybe even some of you have been part of funerals where you haven't been able to be there with the person who passed away in person. But had to watch it on a Facebook Live or something like that. There are situations like that where our normal connections to community have been severed. So there's a sense in which we've never been more connected and yet never been more confined. And that speaks to the heart of this third foundation that Paul talks about here. The need for community. The New Testament is clear. That the Christian life is not designed to be lived on its own. That's why throughout the New Testament you see the way that the Bible speaks about how the church has embodiment of different types of images that reflect the need for community. The church is described as a body made up of many parts. Or it's described as a temple made up of many stones. Or it's described as a family made up of many members. There's a sense of connectivity of community there. Of unity in the midst of diversity that comes to the heart of

what Paul is speaking about here in the end of Romans 1:16. Because he says there that the gospel came to the Jew first. And the question we should be asking is, "Why is that?" And Paul explains to that elsewhere in 2 Corinthians 1 when he talks about how all the promises of God find their "yes" in Jesus Christ. That He is the fulfillment of God's promise to His people, Israel. Promises that begin all the way back in Genesis chapter 12. When God chooses Abraham and tells him that He will raise up offspring that will exceed the number of stars in the sky or sand at the seashore or the number of times Coronavirus is mentioned in the news. It will surpass all of these things. And the number of people that will be a part of that people of God. And he speaks there of how it's coming to the Jew first. That's who the promises were for and they find their yes and amen in Jesus. But the shocking thing about Romans 1:16 is not that the promises of God go to the people of God, it's that the promises of God go beyond the original people of God. Because he speaks there about how it doesn't just go to the Jew first; but also to the Greek. That the Old Testament promises for the people of God were not limited to those who were physical descendants of Abraham but those who become spiritual descendants of him through their faith in Jesus. That the gospel is not just for the Jew, but also to the Gentile. This would have shocked the people of that time period who did not realize all that God intended for the world. And we know from reading our Bibles that there was deep divides between Jews and Greeks. There was more hostility there between than we see in other settings. There was more hostility between Jews and Greeks than Republicans and Democrats. Between Aggies and Longhorns. Maybe between those who love essential oils and those that don't. There's this sense in which there's a dividing wall of hostility between the two of them as Ephesians 2 talks about. But in the gospel, Jesus tears down that dividing wall. He takes apart what would naturally separate us and bonds us together in unity and community with those that we would otherwise have no common connection to. So what happens in the gospel is it turns competitors into community by turning hostility into humility. That's what we see happening right here in Romans 1:16 when Paul speaks about the life of the church.

Now I've loved the past several weeks as we've gotten the chance to get to know this congregation. Cami and I have had the chance to do over 30 Zoom calls with hundreds of you. I feel like I've been in your homes as I've looked across the screen even though it looks like the opening of a Brady Bunch where we're all in these small boxes looking around at each other on the video screens that are there. And there's, there's been great moments as part of that. It's helped you to get to know us. It's helped us to get to know you. But every one of us as we watch that interaction is not satisfied. Nobody sits there and thinks this is better than the real thing. There's something lesser about it because digital fellowship is no substitute for true community. And that's the type of community that Paul is speaking about here in Romans 1:16. That it's the type of community that gives us community to the Father so that we can have community with one another. And as we think about the next chapter of this church, what I would want you to hear my heart for is that we know the Christian life cannot be lived alone. And Central wants to walk through the Christian life with you in the next chapter. So if the Lord brings me here as your next pastor, you may have a different pastor, but we will have the same community grounded in the same mission rooted in the same gospel. I remember when I was a student at Texas A&M back in 2000 as a Freshman. And I began not long after I got here to come to Central. And as I settled in, yeah, it's typical in a new church when people meet you to say, "How long have you been going here?" And typically you give a date and time in which you began. But it seems like it was just as common back then to answer that question of how long you've been going here on the basis of what chapter Chris was preaching through the book



of Matthew in whenever you started coming here. So for me, that was Matthew 21. For the next several years, I watched him go verse by verse through the Bible in ways that fundamentally shaped who I am. What he did that was so helpful to every one of us is he showed the connection between how the next chapter fit into the grand story of the Bible. And what I would want you to hear from me this morning is that this next chapter that the Lord has in front of us is not some new direction where we're leaving behind where Central has been going all along. It's simply a new chapter where we get to be faithful to the gospel, the mission, and the community that Paul has called us to in Romans 1:16.

Let's close with a word of prayer.

Father, as we come to You in this time, we are coming in dependence upon You. Lord, Your word tells us that apart from You, we can do nothing. And I pray that as we prepare for this next chapter of what You've called us to that You would help us to fix our eyes on Jesus. That He would be at the center of all that we do in this church as we seek to keep the gospel central to this congregation. And we pray that You help us be faithful people who live on mission for the sake of Your kingdom and that we seek first all that You have designed for us as we live out our Christian lives in community that You've called us to. And we ask all these things in Christ's name. Amen.