

**The Power of the Gospel**

Romans 1:8-17

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***Thanksgiving***

This time of a year gives us an opportunity to look back, evaluate our past and based on what we learned from the year we then plan for the coming year. One of the important things you ought to do in this time is to offer thanksgiving to God. Paul always spent a good chunk of time in thanksgiving at the beginning of his every letter. Here, he says in verse 8:

*“First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed throughout the world.” Romans 1:8*

So, here’s how Paul thanked God, and I think this is a great model we can follow. First, he thanked God; God was the object of his thanksgiving. He knew all his thanksgiving and praise should eventually go to our God the Father.

God should be the one who receives our praise and thanksgiving, because our Father is the one who wills a good purpose and who provides everything that makes his good will fulfilled. Paul in Philippians says:

*“I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ.” Philippians 1:6*

It’s this confidence Paul had that filled him with gratitude and praise.

***The Power of the Gospel***

This thanksgiving Paul gives is through Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ stands in the gap between God and us and acts as a mediator. It’s through our Lord Christ Jesus that God’s grace is available to us, and it’s through our Lord Christ Jesus that we bring our praise and thanksgiving to God the Father. Paul says in 2 Corinthians:

*“All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us.” 2 Corinthians 5:18-19*

There is a union with God through Jesus Christ; this is why Jesus came two thousand years ago in the name of Emmanuel, meaning God-with-us. God wants to bring the world to himself, and the good

news is that it is available through our Lord Jesus Christ. It's this message, so-called gospel, we have been entrusted with.

Paul is not ashamed of this gospel; he is not ashamed of God's grace found in this good news. He says:

*"For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith."* Romans 1:16

He is not ashamed of the width and depth of grace he has received from God. For instance, he does not hesitate to admit his dark past history and even use it to boast about God's grace given to him (c.f. Galatians 1:13-16).

*"You have heard, no doubt, of my earlier life in Judaism. I was violently persecuting the church of God and was trying to destroy it. I advanced in Judaism beyond many among my people of the same age, for I was far more zealous for the traditions of my ancestors. But when God, who had set me apart before I was born and called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, so that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles."* Galatians 1:13-16

During our Christmas community dinner, I sat with a wonderful gentleman from Teen Challenge Farm. In our conversation, he wasn't hesitant to share his past filled with drug and alcohol addiction. But since his surrender and commitment to Jesus Christ, he shared how his life has been transformed by God's grace, restoring his marriage, family and life. He's now ready to go to a Bible college in the near future and he wants to give his rest of life to serve the Lord by helping the people who are struggling with drug and alcohol addictions like him. Sisters and brothers in Christ, the gospel we have received is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith.

## **Prayer**

This Apostle, who knows what an amazing God we serve and who isn't afraid of sharing the good news of God's Son with others, isn't afraid of praying to God boldly. He says,

*"For God, whom I serve with my spirit by announcing the gospel of his Son, is my witness that without ceasing I remember you always in my prayers."* Romans 1:9

He knows God has always been faithful to his own promises, and he wants to access the power and wisdom of God through Jesus Christ. He accesses them by prayers. For instance, Ephesians 6:18-20 says,

*"Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints. Pray also for me, so that when I speak, a message may be given to me to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it boldly, as I must speak."* Ephesians 6:18-20

This is from someone who firmly believes that the prayers of God's saints do make difference. This is a statement of faith that sees God as the one who hears and answers our prayers according to his good purpose.

### **Can You Pray?**

Do you know your prayer makes a difference? For someone who often senses this strength coming from prayers, I urge you to pray for our church and ministries. There are some Sunday mornings I stand here, feeling weak and vulnerable; then I stand here to preach, I sometimes literally feel the gust of rushing wind on my back and all the sudden I feel this confidence and boldness inside me to preach. My parents never imagined me standing here to speak in front of many people, because I always cried when I stood in front of the class in childhood. I still feel very nervous. But, I know God enables me through the prayers of saints like you.

What do you hope for in the year 2016 for your life? Your career? Your family? Your church? Why don't you pray and make them known to our God? It works. Just caution: be careful what you wish for; you just might get it. Paul here asks God in prayer "by God's will [he] may somehow at last succeed in coming to [Rome]" (vs. 10). Now, did he know at this time he would end up going to Rome in chains to stand before Caesar? When I was in teenager, I went to this Christian camp in Washington. There I prayed on my knees, rededicating my life to Christ Jesus. There, I said, I would commit myself to become a praise team leader; I didn't know what I was thinking. I did not even know how to play a single instrument and I wasn't even a good singer. But, after a few years, I found myself standing in front of the congregation as a praise team leader. Now I'm glad I had the guts to pray for something like that.

We really urge you to pray, and we are going to dedicate our next few Sunday sermons to the topic of prayer. LifeQuest team is launching a prayer initiative at our church, flaming the fire of prayer in the church. When we pray, the power of the gospel will give us God's grace and strength to overcome all things. May all of you be filled with gratitude towards God's faithfulness and also be filled with boldness to ask in prayer for the church in the year 2016. Amen.