

Hello Everyone

Romans 1:16-18 – I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes ... 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.’

Figures of speech bring colour and character to the English language. ‘Litotes’ is a figure of speech meaning ironic understatement. An example would be ‘to swim the English Channel is *no small* achievement.’ It might be just as easy to say ‘to swim the English Channel is a *great* achievement,’ but somehow the figure of speech brings more drama to the statement. The Apostle Paul uses this figure of speech when he writes that he is ‘not ashamed of the gospel.’ It would have been easy for him to say, ‘I glory in the gospel,’ but the fact that he says he is *not ashamed* of it set me to wondering why anyone would be ashamed of the gospel.

The gospel is about a person, Jesus. Paul was writing to imperial Rome. In the eyes of Rome, Jesus was a mere Jew from the province of Judea, a remote part of the empire from its capital. More than that, Jesus was a Nazarene – even the Jews looked down on Nazareth, a remote backwater, thinking that nothing good could ever come from there. More than that, in an age of acute propriety about the circumstances of one’s birth, there had been a scandal about Jesus’ birth – had he been born ‘illegitimate’? The circumstances of his birth are nothing, however, to the circumstances of his death. Having been betrayed by one of his followers, Jesus died dishonourably by crucifixion. The Romans only crucified foreigners – it was too disgusting a way to die even for a condemned Roman citizen. The Jews thought that anyone who was executed by being hung on a tree was cursed by God. It’s not so difficult to see why Paul might have been ashamed of Jesus but Paul states emphatically that he is not ashamed of Jesus for in his death a righteousness that is from God is revealed. It is not such a popular notion these days but when Jesus had the sins of the world laid upon him, he not only secured our forgiveness but he satisfied God’s justice and appeased God’s anger. The gospel is about a person, Jesus, and his death. Paul was not ashamed of Jesus or his cross.

Power was a great source of pride to Rome. Rome demonstrated this in its great army, its buildings and its civil engineering. Paul did not have much power and by human reckoning neither did the crucified Jesus. Yet Paul was not ashamed of the gospel and its power. There are two words in the New Testament that are often translated ‘power.’ One is *exousia* from which we get the English word ‘executive’. Another is *dunamis* from which we get the English word ‘dynamite’. The word used here is dynamite-power. The gospel is explosive and powerful good news for it has the power to change lives. The Apostle Paul could testify to that himself. In his younger days, he had done everything he could to oppose the gospel-message but, by a personal encounter with the risen Lord Jesus Christ, he became convinced of the truth of the gospel and went on trial before the authorities because of his belief in the resurrection. In another place, Paul writes, ‘Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures.’ What an amazing statement! But nonetheless true. A traditional Methodist understanding has emphasised the personal nature of faith in Jesus Christ. ‘Christ died for *our* sins’ – true enough. But the believer wants to add, ‘Christ died for *my* sins.’ But the story does not end there. Easter is not only about the death of Jesus Christ but also about his resurrection – that after he was dead and buried, he was raised to life again and that he appeared on several occasions before returning to heaven. The power of the gospel, God’s dynamite, is in the death of Christ which makes salvation (forgiveness for the past, life in the present and hope for the future) possible, and in his resurrection which makes salvation available. Of this Paul was not ashamed.

Paul was not ashamed of the gospel because it was a message that people needed to hear. Like us Paul lived in a cosmopolitan world with many ideas. The gospel of Jesus Christ and salvation by faith in him was strangely intolerant and exclusive. The spirit of the present age rejects the seriousness of sin (rebellion against God, unbelief and disobedience), that everyone is a sinner and that our situation without the death of Jesus for us is hopeless. Paul’s good news was that although all need to be saved from sin and death, from the tyranny of sin

and from God's wrath, the resurrection of Jesus is the good news which brings light to shine and life to bring hope in the darkness of sin and death.

The unbeliever is ashamed of the gospel for it is about Jesus in whom the unbeliever does not believe, his righteousness in which we cannot stand, his mercy which we cannot earn, his grace which we cannot deserve, his love which we cannot comprehend.

The gospel message brings hope to the hopeless. God desires for us not wrath, alienation and futility but life, salvation and blessing. These are ours when we believe the gospel – for it is a righteousness that is by faith from first to last. It is about a person, Jesus, and his power for salvation. It is good news for everyone who believes. We need not a new leaf but a new life - which is the gift of God to all who believe.

I am delighted that *Tuesdays Together* is becoming established as a vital part of the life of Goodrington Methodist Church and the Methodist Churches in Paignton. We need something regular where we can learn, pray, encourage one another and group in our faith. The regular programme has variety built into it but the underlying emphasis of worship, learning, fellowship and prayer continues. If you have not made *Tuesdays Together* a part of your regular devotional pattern yet, I hope that you will do so soon. Everyone is welcome.

John

John Haley
Minister