



The Power of the Gospel

Rom:1 8-17

Who's Who? is a very famous publication. When I was a student I occasionally used to have a trawl through it if I had some time to kill. If I was really bored, I'd have a look at Who was Who? In fact, directories were always important in finding out things about people and places when you do social research.

These days, the internet is the way to get quick information, although it often isn't particularly accurate and you need to look for the source of what you are reading. One of the things I used to do when I was looking at churches was to turn up their website as it told me something about the people I was going to meet. Sometimes I'd look up the Baptist Handbook which also gave me details.

In the letter to the Romans we see Paul writing to a set of people he has never met and he only knew by reputation. They needed to know about him to as he planned to meet them. So in many ways it's a kind of "how do you do" sort of letter which outlines what he teaches – which has left us with one of the clearest summaries of just what the Christian faith is about – the Letter to the Romans.

What pearls of wisdom does he pass on? In this early chapter I believe he passes on to us some pearls of wisdom which give us some vital information of how we should move forward as a church into our next century. In these verses I'd say there are four points all starting with an E

1. Enabling

Roma 1:8 (TEV) First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because the whole world is hearing about your faith.

9 God is my witness that what I say is true--the God whom I serve with all my heart by preaching the Good News about his Son. God knows that I remember you

10 every time I pray. I ask that God in his good will may at last make it possible for me to visit you now.

Paul starts with prayer, which is no surprise as prayer is the starting point as God's people. We need to be a people of prayer. It is the imperative for the future. Why? Because we are engaged in God's service. How often we think that we think that God's work relies on us and it doesn't. And we wonder why nothing ever happens.

Our Church -	God's Church
Our work -	God's work
Our town -	God's town
Our nation -	God's nation

Yet we see Paul here thanking God and recognising His authority as part of what he is praying on their behalf. Paul preaches the gospel of His Son! We must recognise that this is God's work, His Church,

His town. It is the Lord who enables us to do His work and it is through prayer we recognise what He is doing and it is through prayer we discern God's will.

As we move forward into the next 200 years (or until the Lord comes, whichever is sooner!), we need to start by bathing who we are as a church and everything we do in prayer. It is easy to do things our way, there's safety in following our traditions, what is common sense. I believe the Lord wants us to do a new thing in our land and in this town, but we need to open our hearts and minds to His will, rather than we believe we already know it because we've done it that way for years. We're going to learn new things, new ways, unlearn unprofitable things and re-learn things we have forgotten. It's fundamental principle of growing as a church – change is inevitable and we have to change as God changes the landscape we are in. He leads, we follow – we have to.

Prov 3:5 Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding, in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will direct your paths. (NIV)

2. Encouragement

*11 For I want very much to see you, in order to share a spiritual blessing with you to make you strong.
12 What I mean is that both you and I will be helped at the same time, you by my faith and I by yours.*

As we move forward, we need to encourage one another. Paul wasn't just the big chief imparting a message to the troops. He was there to bring encouragement and be encouraged. How could Paul have been encouraged by them? Look at Romans and you'll see Paul, the intellectual giant, the master theologian and one who had been given a unique insight into the things of God. How could they have taught and encouraged him?

One of the marks of Christian maturity I believe is the ability that God can use the humblest of people to teach us the loftiest of lessons. People who think they are too experienced or been Christians for so long that they can't learn anything new show themselves to be old Christians rather than mature ones. I find that the longer I continue to be a Christian and seek to follow Christ, I realise how little I know Him, because He just gets bigger and bigger and deeper and deeper.

And God calls us to share our spiritual blessings and encourage one another. One of the greatest destructive forces in a church are when God's people criticize one another, gossip about one another, judge one another, undermine one another and the rest of it. We are called to be encouragers – build one another up. Impart spiritual blessings. That's the challenge.

3. Expectation

Roma 1:13 (TEV) You must remember, my friends, that many times I have planned to visit you, but something has always kept me from doing so. I want to win converts among you also, as I have among other Gentiles.

14 For I have an obligation to all peoples, to the civilized and to the savage, to the educated and to the ignorant.

Expect that God is going to reap a harvest in Walton. I was reading the story about a young man who later went on to serve the Lord on the mission field. I don't remember his name. He had applied for a job and had an interview and was asked What is your ambition? The employer was shocked when he said " My ambitions is to go to heaven - and take as many people with me as possible!" What is our ambition?

But look at the passage again- the gospel is for everyone *14 For I have an obligation to all peoples, to the civilized and to the savage, to the educated and to the ignorant.* What was this obligation - it was an obligation to share words of life with those who were lost - to the Greeks and non-Greeks - the Barbarians - those who didn't talk and do things in the way cultured people do - the Gospel is for everyone - and we all have that change and obligation to be his witnesses - not just Peter - this id God's

town, you are God's people in this town - if you don't share words of life than who else will? This is the charge to us as a Church as much as to the Romans. And if God is as powerful as His word says He is then rather than continue to expect little progress or even defeat – expect a harvest.

If you follow football, you'll know Newcastle United had a bad run. They got a new manager, Kevin Keegan and not even he could make a difference. They got used to losing and they seemed to just throw games away. Then yesterday they won a match. They've got some great players and all they had to do was win something so that they could start believing in their abilities again.

We don't have to believe in our abilities – we should believe in God's power. But so often we don't. Let me share a testimony with you. - my first evangelical preach in Woodberry. There's a harvest to be reaped - the spiritual deadness in Felixstowe is huge - and we have the words of life. Have an expectancy. Is the arm of the Lord so short that He cannot save? What sort of God do we have. If He is the One who saves, then trust Him.

4. Everyone

16 I have complete confidence in the gospel; it is God's power to save all who believe, first the Jews and also the Gentiles. 17 For the gospel reveals how God puts people right with himself: it is through faith from beginning to end. As the scripture says, "The person who is put right with God through faith shall live."

If you didn't believe any of what I just said, Paul goes on to back all this up. We can have an expectation of harvest. The gospel is the power of God to salvation - it is the POWER of God. That's where for almost a generation of decline in our Churches in Britain I believe we as the people of God, good sound Bible-believing Christians have got it wrong. We forgot that the gospel is the power of God, and that righteousness doesn't come through the effort of people - it comes through faith.

You know I like the word GRACE. The gospel is all about God working through his love, mercy and grace in people's lives. It is by the power of the Holy Spirit that we see salvation a reality in people's lives.

We think it is something to do with our great Church traditions which we have all fought to keep, the great organisation we have, all our personal enthusiasm. In Paul we see a man surrendered to doing God's will, an enthusiasm to see people come to Jesus - because in the end that's all that really matters.

And that power of God to salvation is just as valid today as it ever was. And that is proved when we look at the way the gospel is spreading in Brazil, Colombia, Argentina, West Africa Korea. God hasn't changed - it's only his church.

And we as a Church are now charged to change - to prove in Felixstowe that the gospel is the power of God in the next century as we come to it. Our past has been a long and interesting one as a fellowship. Let's give God glory for it. But now there is only a present and a future - and that future I believe is that we should reap the harvest of people who desperately need Jesus.

So let's move forward with confidence. The gospel is the POWER of God for the salvation of men and women. Let's go for it!

Let's pray.

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