

Introduction. What gets you up in the morning? And I don't mean that wretched alarm clock that goes off in your ear; what I mean is more "what are you passionate about?" "what is the one thing you would hate to stop doing?" It may be your job, or some sort of sport, or perhaps it is gardening or teaching or hunting or fishing, or something less energetic like quilting or cooking. For some unique individuals it could even be chemistry! Beverly and I were in England last month and visited a house with a beautifully made model railway that was the life work of one man who devoted his spare time to building it; it must have got him up in the morning!

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Well, each of you can think through your own motivations, but today I want to talk to you about one special person, the apostle Paul. We come today to the last message in our series on Paul's letter to the church at Rome, as we look at Paul's ministry in Romans 15:14-33 and briefly at his greetings in Romans 16, and we seek to answer the question "What got Paul up in the morning?"

Title slide

By way of a brief review for those of you who have not been with us for the entire series, and by way of a reminder for those of us who have, the letter can be divided into three major sections. In the first section of Romans 1-8, after a brief introduction Paul lays out God's plan of salvation in chapters 1-8, In the second section in chapters 9-11 Paul wrestles with the problem that most of God's chosen people, the Jews, rejected His Son and His gracious salvation, and he shows that this is part of God's plan to show kindness to non-Jews, or Gentiles.

And then in the third section, chapters 12-15:13, Paul answers the question "How now shall we live?" And so in chapters 12 – 15:13 Paul lays out the practical realities of living Christianly; using the spiritual gifts God has given us for the good of the whole church; living in love; living in obedience to those in authority, looking for Christ's return, not judging our fellow Christians over disputable things. And he ends this third section with this prayer:

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Rom 15:13 May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

And then in a sort of epilogue that relates back to the beginning of the letter, Paul talks about himself and his ministry to the Gentiles, and he tells us what motivated him in his ministry. Let us hear his words:

Romans 15:14-33

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14 I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another. 15 I have written you quite boldly on some points, as if to remind you of them again, because of the grace God gave me 16 to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles with the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

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17 Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God. 18 I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done— 19 by the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Spirit. So from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ. 20 It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation. 21 Rather, as it is written:

"Those who were not told about him will see, and those who have not heard will understand."

22 This is why I have often been hindered from coming to you.

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23 But now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions, and since I have been longing for many years to see you, 24 I plan to do so when I go to Spain. I hope to visit you while passing through and to have

you assist me on my journey there, after I have enjoyed your company for a while. 25 Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the saints there. 26 For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. 27 They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews' spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings.

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28 So after I have completed this task and have made sure that they have received this fruit, I will go to Spain and visit you on the way. 29 I know that when I come to you, I will come in the full measure of the blessing of Christ.

30 I urge you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me. 31 Pray that I may be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea and that my service in Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints there, 32 so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and together with you be refreshed. 33 The God of peace be with you all. Amen.

Dark slide. Prayer

In these verses we get a glimpse of Paul the man and his heart for God. So I have titled this message “What got Paul up in the morning?” There is a lot in this section, but I want to focus on five truths that we can chew on and make part of our lives.

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1. The gospel Paul preached
2. The courage Paul displayed
3. The power Paul had
4. The helpers Paul had
5. The gift Paul was bringing

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The apostle Paul is a towering figure in the early church. He and the apostle Peter were the two men that God used the most in establishing His church; Peter the apostle to the Jews, and Paul the apostle to the Gentiles. As we just read, he fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, he preached the gospel where Christ was not known, and he founded many churches. He also suffered enormously, and he had to run for his life more than once, and he was beaten, stoned, and shipwrecked. You can see the ground he covered in this map:

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His travels took him over most of the Roman world east of Italy, and many of the cities shown on the map contained churches that had been founded by Paul and his companions.

And that is a real problem for us, and especially for me as the preacher, because you are may be thinking something like this “I am not Paul! He was an especially gifted and chosen man, and I am just an ordinary Christian. I don’t have Paul’s gifts, I don’t have Paul’s specific calling, and I certainly don’t have Paul’s courage. So you can’t expect me to be another Paul, and so I don’t expect I will learn anything from this message. Maybe I will start to think about what I am going to do this afternoon.”

So how can we look at Paul’s ministry in a way that is relevant to us today? Let us start by looking at the gospel Paul preached and see what has not changed and understand how Paul’s example is very relevant for us today.

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1. The gospel Paul preached

Paul preached and taught the *gospel* as the heart and center of his message. The word *gospel*, by the way, originated as the Greek word *euangelion*, or good news. This ended up in Old English as *good spel*, with *spel* meaning news or story, and this was eventually contracted to *gospel*. So the *gospel* is simply God’s good news for mankind.

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And the content of the gospel was the good news about Jesus Christ

Rom 15:19 So from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed *the gospel of Christ*.

Rom 15:20 It has always been my ambition to preach *the gospel* where Christ was not known.

In other words Paul's message was the simple good news that he lays out in detail in chapters 1-8; the good news that starts with the bad news that we are all hopelessly broken by sin

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The bad news

Rom 3:22-24 There is no difference, 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, And continues with the worse news that we are all under God's judgement as a result

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The worse news

Rom 1:18-20

18 The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, 19 since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. 20 For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities — his eternal power and divine nature — have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

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But then goes on to proclaim the amazingly good news that Jesus Christ has paid the penalty for our sin

Rom 3:21-25

22 This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. 25 God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood.

So this is the gospel that Paul preached, and it has not changed in 2000 years; it is still the glorious and astounding truth that God loves us and He himself paid the awful price to bring us to Himself.

Application

How well do we know this gospel? Do we know how can we share it with others?

1A. Sidebar

Let me add a sidebar here, because it is one of the ironies of the New Testament that this simple and lovely good news of the love of God through Jesus Christ was vigorously opposed and vilified, and its followers were and still are persecuted around the world. There are various reasons for this, but one of the fundamental ones is that the gospel forces us to confront our own sin and our own lack of ability to save ourselves. It forces us to admit that we are rotten sinners, and nothing we can do can change this. And we do not like this; we like to think of ourselves as Professor Henry Higgins thinks of men in "My Fair Lady"

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Man's view

One man in a million may shout a bit.

Now and then, there's one with slight defects.

One perhaps whose truthfulness you doubt a bit,

But by and large we are a marvelous sex!

But God sees us very differently, just as He did the church at Laodicea:

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God's view

Rev 3:17

17 You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.

And some of us may have rejected the gospel because it does not allow us to earn our salvation in any way. We cannot earn salvation by doing good things, by the sweat of our brow;

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"Salvation is not by your sweat but by His blood"

Application

So if you are here this morning and you are conscious that you have not committed your life to Jesus Christ and accepted His forgiveness for your sins, please understand that God loves you and wants to adopt you into His family. Please see me or another Christian after the service and find out how you can get right with God.

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b. The courage Paul displayed

In these last chapters of Romans Paul returns to the theme he began with in Romans 1:1-17, of wanting to visit the church in Rome. He concludes this introductory section with these words:

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Rom 1:16-17

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 Jew, then for the Gentile. 17 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."

I was privileged to hear the great English preacher and teacher John Stott speak on Romans 1 at a message he gave at Cambridge University when I was a student there, and I can still remember him saying something like this when he got to these verses "the only reason to say that you are not ashamed of the gospel is because you have been tempted to be ashamed of it." And I found that thought very encouraging, because I and perhaps many of you have been tempted at one time or another to be ashamed of the gospel. And Paul may also have been tempted to be ashamed of it, but you would never know it from reading his life in the book of Acts; he was a man of enormous courage and persistence, enduring beatings and stonings and rejection and imprisonment for the sake of the gospel.

So let us all take heart from Paul; he overcame whatever temptations he had to be ashamed of the gospel, and we have the same Lord and the same Holy Spirit that Paul did.

Application

We will probably be tempted, as Paul was, to be ashamed of the gospel or of our faith at some time or other. Let us ask God give us a holy boldness to share our faith with others, and not to be ashamed of our Lord!

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c. The power Paul had

But if we are thinking that Paul's courage and his success came from his own efforts, we are greatly mistaken. Paul himself makes it clear that all he accomplished was done through Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit

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Rom 15:17-19

Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God. 18 I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done— 19 by the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Spirit.

So we see here that Paul's preaching was not done in his own strength, but through the power of the Holy Spirit. And that power was clearly shown in Paul's ministry, as for example when he confronted the sorcerer Elymas in Crete. Elymas was opposing the gospel, so

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Acts 13:9-11

9 Then Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elymas and said, 10 "You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord? 11 Now the hand of the Lord is against you. You are going to be blind, and for a time you will be unable to see the light of the sun."

So Paul's message was authenticated by the power of the Holy Spirit. And the good news is that God has not changed. The Holy Spirit has not taken a vacation. He is as available to us today as He was to Paul and to Christian believers through the ages.

Does that mean that we should be expecting the same miraculous confirmation of our witnessing today? The Holy Spirit has not changed! This question is one that has sadly divided Christians, with some claiming that

God withdrew the miraculous gifts of the Spirit after the early church had become established, with others claiming that the miraculous gifts of the Spirit are still available today. This is too big a question to discuss today, so let me simply quote John Piper who had these wise words to say in a sermon he preached on this passage

“Now what about today? Should we be expecting the same miraculous confirmations of our witnessing today? My answer is yes, but not in the same measure that the apostles experienced this miraculous power. The reason I say yes is that I don’t see any compelling reason given in the New Testament that God has declared a moratorium on miracles. But I do see lists of miraculous gifts for the church (not just apostles) in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10. So I think God intends to bless his word and his people with miracles in our day—extraordinary works of divine power that go beyond the laws of nature.

But the reason I say, probably not in the same measure that the apostles experienced this miraculous power, is that there is good evidence that miracles were especially prominent in the early days to vindicate the deity of Christ and the authority of the apostles as they laid the foundation of the church.” (John Piper)

So as Christian believers we have the assurance that our witnessing is not just in our own words, but in the power of the Holy Spirit. On some special occasions this witnessing may be accompanied by miracles of healing or of some other nature, but in all cases we are assured that our perhaps feeble words are used by the Holy Spirit to bring about His purposes. Jesus’ words to his disciples are true in all situations where we are called on to witness for Him:

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Matt. 10:19-20 “But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, 20 for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.”

Application

So we can speak with confidence to our friends and neighbors about the Lord, knowing that our words are empowered by the Holy Spirit for the glory of God. We should of course be prepared to explain our faith

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1 Peter 3:15

Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But we can also trust the Holy Spirit to take our words and speak through us to our listeners

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4. The helpers Paul had

Because it was Paul who wrote much of the New Testament, and because Paul is the focus of the second half of Dr. Luke’s account of the early church in the book of Acts, we can mistakenly get the impression that Paul was a sort of lone ranger, forging ahead through thick and thin and emerging victorious on the other side. But nothing could be further from the truth! To begin with, he always traveled with at least one other companion; first Barnabas and then Silas, who was soon joined by Timothy. But Romans 16 shows how much Paul depended on the support and help of other brothers and sisters in Christ. We do not have time to look at this chapter in detail, but we can look at a few selected examples of the foot soldiers who constitute the nuts and bolts of the church.

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Rom 16:1-2 I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church in Cenchrea. 2 I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been a great help to many people, including me.

Phoebe was obviously a leading figure in the church at Cenchrea, a seaport on the other side of the isthmus of Corinth where a church had been established. In some translations she is called a deacon (the Greek word diakonon can mean servant or minister or deacon), but whatever her title she is obviously an important person in the church and probably the person entrusted with carrying the letter to the Roman church. And specifically Paul tells us that she has been a great help to many people, including himself.

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Rom 16:3-4 Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus. 4 They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them.

This couple had met Paul in Corinth and then had moved to Ephesus, where they had been instrumental in serving the church there, specifically in teaching Apollos the full truth about Jesus. Paul tells us that they risked their lives for him, in one of the many stories that Luke does not record for us.

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Rom 16:7 Greet Andronicus and Junias, my relatives who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was.

Rom 16:13 Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother, who has been a mother to me, too.

Rom 16:23 Gaius, whose hospitality I and the whole church here enjoy, sends you his greetings.

Here we see five more people who had helped Paul: Andronicus and Junias, who no doubt were an encouragement to Paul when he was in prison in another unrecorded episode in his eventful life:

Rufus and his mother, who had been a mother to Paul too

And Gaius, who had shown great hospitality.

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Rom 16:23 Erastus, who is the city's director of public works, and our brother Quartus send you their greetings. Although Erastus is not singled out for special mention, he is of interest because a stone dating from about 50 AD was discovered bearing the name Erastus

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We do not know if it is the same Erastus who became the city's director of public works and also became a Christian, but is quite likely that it is.

So what can we learn from this list of names? Two lessons stand out:

a. First, Paul was definitely not the "lone ranger" type; he depended on a network of friends and relatives to support him in his ministry. So if a man like Paul needed this level of support, how much more do we need it! So let me ask you; who in your life is playing the role that Phoebe and Priscilla and Aquila and Gaius and many others played in Paul's life? Are you involved in any close relationships with fellow believers, as in a house group or fellowship group of some kind? If you are, you know the value of these relationships. If you are not, let me urge you in the strongest terms to get involved in a small group of some kind so that you too can enjoy the benefits of Christian support and encouragement.

b. Paul made glad and grateful use of the ministry and support of many women. Women such as Phoebe and Priscilla played important roles in the early church, and Paul was grateful for their help. Although he limited the role of eldership to men, he was no misogynist, and he valued the ministry of women in the church.

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5. The gift Paul was bringing

Rom 15:25-28 Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the saints there. 26 For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. 27 They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews' spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings.

These verses teach us about Paul's deep concern for unity within the church and for the poor in Jerusalem. As we heard from Paul's teaching in Romans 14 and the first part of chapter 15, the church in Rome was struggling with potential conflicts between Jewish and Gentile Christians, who differed on things such as eating meat offered to idols and honoring special days. This mirrored the tension between the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem and the mostly Gentile Christians in Macedonia and Greece. In addition to this, there had been a famine in Judea, and the church in Jerusalem was suffering from its effects. So Paul, always eager to bridge gaps between Jews and Gentiles, had hit upon the idea of the Gentiles contributing financially to the mother church in Jerusalem.

Just one thought on this passage. It highlights Paul's concern for unity in the church, and in particular unity between two groups with different ethnic backgrounds. We too should have this same concern, and welcome believers and seekers from all races and all ethnicities. Remember that in heaven those around God's throne sing this song to the lamb:

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Rev 5:9

“You are worthy to take the scroll
and to open its seals,
because you were slain,
and with your blood you purchased men for God
from every tribe and language and people and nation.”

So may BCF continue to be and increasingly be a church where men and women from every tribe and language and people and nation are welcomed and valued and loved. And that means that we as BCFers must individually play our part in welcoming and loving folk from every tribe and language and people and nation.

Conclusion

We have been with Paul and the book of Romans for the best part of 2 years. Let us leave it with Paul’s prayer
Rom 16:25-27

25 Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, 26 but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him— 27 to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.