

# Romans 1:8-17

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Preacher: John McIntosh

[ 0 : 00 ] Would you turn the three for a while this evening to the chapter we read in Romans, a passage we read, Romans chapter 1, and in particular, verses 8 to 17.

Verses 8 to 17. Now, I might perhaps just at the very beginning say a word to the young people, to the boys and girls. You remember this morning I was talking about that cartoon character Snoopy, Snoopy the dog, and I was saying to him, saying to you rather, that one of the cartoons had him chasing sticks.

And he said something like, I want people to have more to say about me than just he was a nice guy, he chased sticks. Well, I think in this passage, these verses 8 to 16, we have, if you like, the development of that sort of idea.

This passage that we read is about, well, it's a big word I want to use, motivation. What makes us do things? You know, if you're at school, there may be things that really motivate you, that make you want to do things.

It might be because you really like doing your maths, your arithmetic, or it might be history, or it might be PE, that you really like, gym, something like that.

[ 1 : 27 ] And if you know you're doing it, you're motivated to get up and go to school because you know that's what you're going to do. When you look at your whole life, that's a more difficult thing, isn't it?

What's going to motivate you in your whole life? And as we gather here in church tonight, at the last Sunday of the year, we might think about the subject of what's going to motivate us, what's going to make us want to do the right things, the things that God wants in 2008.

Perhaps you feel you haven't been quite as good as you could have been, perhaps you haven't done quite as much of what you know pleases God as you could have, and you want to do better next year.

Well, in verses 8 to 17 of Romans chapter 1, while they're difficult verses for you to understand, I think there's lots of interesting and important clues as to how we all should be, not just you young people, but the rest of us as well, those of us who are older, not just you, me too.

And we have to remember, of course, that because the Gospel changes lives, we must concentrate, therefore, on what's really very important, what's most important.

[ 2 : 38 ] So here we have Paul at the beginning of the Epistle to the Romans. He's never been to Rome. He's wanted to go to Rome because of all the things he's heard about the Christians in Rome. That's a thought for us all, how many people want to come to Aberdeen or Edinburgh or wherever it is because of what they've heard about the Lord's people there.

But Paul has been making unceasing requests to get there. And now, although he hasn't been able to manage it up till now, he thinks he can see that the Lord has it in mind that he will go to Rome.

And he wants to tell the Romans, really, why he wants to get there and what he wants to do when he does get there. And on this last Sunday of the year, I want to seek to use these to throw some, why, to give some ideas, perhaps, about our own motivation in 2008.

So first of all, well, he basically talks about three types of motivation. First of all, from verses 11 to 12, he talks about his motivation in order to get mutual encouragement both from the Christians in Rome and to the Christians in Rome.

Motivation from mutually encouraging each other in their life and in their faith. Verses 14 to 15, he talks about motivation from a sense of obligation.

[ 3 : 57 ] That's another big word for you young people, obligation. You'll come to it, I'll explain it when we get to it. And then finally, he talks about his motivation in verses 16 to 17, his motivation from his confidence in the power of the gospel.

Motivation from mutual encouragement, motivation from a sense of obligation, and motivation from confidence in the power of the gospel. And I hope, as we go through, that even you young people will be able to see things that you can understand from what Paul is saying to the Christians in Rome.

Well then, let's look at verses 11 and 12. I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong. That is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith.

So to begin with, the Apostle Paul simply, I suppose you could say, is telling them that he wants to be with them. He hasn't seen them yet, but he wants to be with them.

And because he hasn't been with them yet, he hasn't been to Rome yet, he's not sure what gift or what gifts, what spiritual gifts he might be able to give them. Never been in Rome before, doesn't know them individually, but he's heard about them and he's heard about their life and witness, and he's heard about how some of them are actually in Caesar's palace.

[ 5 : 13 ] They're important official people, perhaps they're servants at the palace. He knows that probably most of them are just slaves. And he's probably heard about one or two names of leaders of the church and things like that.

So he doesn't know quite what he wants to give them when he gets there, but he wants to give them something. And he basically says that he simply wants to enhance their spirituality.

He wants to increase their spiritual understanding. And he also says, and this is really very important, that he's not in it just for what he could do for himself.

He's not there because he wants to do this or he wants to do that specifically for himself. He's there for what he could do for them. And that's very important. In the lives of the Lord's people, one of the things that must always be motivating them is what they can do for each other.

What they can do for their fellow believers, what they can do also for their fellow men and women. Because the obligations and responsibilities of the Lord's people to encourage others, it's not a narrow thing, it's expansive.

[ 6 : 20 ] It's expansive. Remember there's a story. Here's one for the young people. You might be able to remember this. I'm sure you can. Man who founded the Salvation Army. You see the Salvation Army at this time of year, they're out playing Christmas carols on the streets in their brass bands and things like that.

But the man who founded the Salvation Army, I'm sure some of you know this already, the older people I'm sure you do, was a man called William Booth. And he became, he was given the title of General, General of the Salvation Army.

But he started off in London, in the east end of London, doing the sorts of things that we would now call social work. Helping people who are homeless. Helping people who are destitute.

Helping people who are ill and not able to pay for medical treatment. All that sorts of things. And he got this tremendous reputation. Such a reputation indeed, that Queen Victoria paid a special visit to General Booth.

And she said to him, in the course of the time that she spent talking to him, something like, tell me General Booth, what has motivated you, there's that word again, motivated you to do all these things.

[ 7 : 26 ] And General Booth replied, your majesty, some people's passion is money. And some people's passion is fame. But my passion has been men and women.

He explained in that single sentence to the Queen, Queen Victoria, what had led him to found the Salvation Army, what had led him to go out and to speak to people and to live with people and work with people who were the outcasts of society in London and try to help them.

It's people. And he wanted to encourage them. And I think we're all called to be just like that. We're called to encourage the Lord's people and we're also encouraged to, we're also told, sorry, to encourage those outwith the church.

We all have that sort of responsible, and that should motivate us. And it's in order that there'll be mutual encouragement.

You know, there's an interesting parallel passage at the very, at the beginning of the first epistle of John. 1 John chapter 1 and in verses 3 and 4.

[ 8 : 47 ] And I want you to notice, before we read that, that Paul says that in verse 12 that he wants to impart, to see them in Rome so that he can impart to them some spiritual gift to make you strong.

That, and then he says that, that is that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith. There's Paul, the great apostle, saying to these people he doesn't know yet, he knows of them, I want you to be encouraged by my faith and I want myself to be encouraged by your faith.

It's mutual. The apostle John says something very similar in 1 John chapter 1. I had 1 Peter open there, sorry. 1 John chapter 1.

Well, perhaps we should just read from the beginning. That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched, this we proclaim concerning the word of life. The life appeared, we have seen it and testified to it and we proclaim to you the eternal life which is with the Father and has appeared to us.

Now listen. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.

[ 10 : 08 ] Then verse 4. We write this to make not your joy complete, but our joy complete. There's the apostle John seeing that this joy that he's talking about is a mutual thing.

It's not him giving it to the people he's writing to. It's two-way. Paul said the same thing in verse 12 in Romans 1. Now you might expect James and John, rather, and Paul to have talked about your joy, but no, no.

These are men of spiritual experience. These are men who are humble as well and the great apostles Paul and John are happy to say, ah, a two-way thing.

Now, that's the way it should be with us. That's the way it should be with us. This mutuality, can I use that word?

Mutuality. It goes two ways. Everybody's involved, both sides. That's one of the great motivations, one of the great underlying motivations for the Christian life and for the Christian ministry.

[ 11 : 14 ] Now, John knew and Paul knew and we knew too if we think about it, that there are few things that will strengthen and encourage an older believer than seeing the vibrant face of a new believer.

It's true. You know, sometimes the Lord's work, the life and witness of a congregation, the life and work of a minister preaching the word, sometimes it can be a hard business, requires perseverance, but isn't it the case that when you see somebody being converted, makes it all worthwhile?

And that's a two-way thing. I don't know how many of you have been converted in the course of 2007, but let me tell you this as there are any. You putting your faith in the Lord Jesus has encouraged all the older believers in this congregation.

When believers hear about new believers coming to faith in the Lord Jesus, it's hugely encouraging. Nothing better, in fact. Makes it all worthwhile. It's a two-way thing.

You encourage them and by the same token, they encourage you. And that requires this mutual expression. It has to be two ways. You have to talk to each other about it.

[ 12 : 39 ] And that's what Paul was talking about. That's what John was talking about. They were talking about being encouraged by coming and having fellowship with the believers in Rome. And that was going to encourage them just as much as the apostles being in Rome was going to encourage the Roman believers.

Paul, I think, expected to be encouraged by the Romans' faith. And that's a challenge, I think, for us. Especially at the end of the year, beginning of a new year.

Are we doing that for other Christians? For other believers? You must ask yourselves as a congregation, are you encouraging each other?

And you can do more. We all know this. But it's not just a matter of being in church on a Sunday. That's encouraging. But you need to be able to talk and have fellowship with each other. One of the great things, I think, that I always notice when I come to Aberdeen after the service, most people go down for a cup of tea or coffee and they talk to each other.

I don't know what you all talk about. But I'll tell you one thing, though, and this perhaps by way of exhortation, at least some of that conversation should be about spiritual things, you know, because it's an opportunity for building each other's faith.

[ 13 : 55 ] Not just finding out about what's been happening to each other in the course of the last week. It should be a spiritual dimension to it. Can I say something by way of encouraging the ministers who come to preach to you?

And the preachers, I know they're not all ministers, who come to preach to you week by week. It's great to be told that you've appreciated the sermon. But if there's something which particularly you appreciated, which was particularly helpful to yourselves or particularly struck you, tell them what it was.

There are few things that encourage a preacher more than being told exactly what it was that somebody's found helpful. Much more encouraging really than being told in general that enjoy the sermon. Not saying don't do that.

But if there's something which particularly helped, then it strengthens, it builds up, it encourages the minister by knowing the preacher that there's been something particularly which has helped.

But do it with each other. That's the crucial thing. The Christian life is to be a mutual life. And the mutuality, that's a difficult word for you young people. I know that. It means doing things together.

[ 14 : 58 ] The Christian life is a mutual one and we are to be motivated and we are motivated from or by our mutual encouragement.

And that's what Paul was looking for in Rome. That's the first thing. The Lord's people are to be motivated by this mutual encouragement. But he moves on from that.

He says something new in verses 14 and 15. I am bound both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish.

That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are at Rome. Paul is motivated, secondly, by a sense of obligation.

He's got an obligation. Now, he's making quite a general point here. We all know that Paul had been given a special commission to be the apostle to the Gentiles, to the people who weren't Jews, to everybody who wasn't a Jew.

[ 16 : 01 ] That was what the Jews referred to as the Gentiles, the people of the nations, the nations other than Israel. So, you young people, when you see the word Gentile in the Bible, think, ah, that means everybody who's not a Jew.

Okay? Always remember, that's what Gentile means, everybody who wasn't a Jew. It comes from a Greek word which means just the nations, the peoples, the nations of the world, the peoples of the world.

That's what Gentile means. And Paul says, he's saying here, that he has an obligation to the Lord Jesus who died on the cross to do things for the people who hear about it.

He's got an obligation to the Lord Jesus to bring the gospel and to encourage the Lord's people, the people for whom the Lord Jesus died.

Putting it another way, Paul's saying, well, he says here, I am bound, I think if I remember correctly, the authorised version says I'm a debtor both to the Greeks and the non-Greeks, the Greeks and the Jews.

[ 17 : 09 ] He's a debtor, he owes something to all the peoples of the ancient world, the Greeks and the non-Greeks, all the people.

Because of the kindness which the Lord Jesus had shown him, because of the fruit of his preaching which the Lord had given him, and it's really interesting and he says that he's also a debtor because he has an obligation to preach to them.

You see, the gospel imposed a debt on Paul and the gospel imposes a debt on all of us who hear it, all of us who receive it, and it's a debt which we need to repay.

It calls for repayment. And the way you repay the debt which you owe to the Lord for the gospel and the salvation which he's brought to in Christ Jesus, you pay that debt by passing the gospel on to someone else.

That's what Paul's talking about. The Lord Jesus has done so much for me that I have an absolute obligation to pass this gospel and its fruits on to other people too.

[ 18 : 27 ] And he says, I've got an obligation to pass that on to the Greeks and the non-Greeks. The culture, the culture of the day was the Greek culture. It extended all over the Mediterranean world.

You had Jews and you had Romans and you had people in Spain and you had Egyptians and people like that. But the dominant culture was a Greek culture. Everybody spoke Greek in addition to their own native language.

Just like all over the world today people speak English as well as their own native languages. And it was these people who could speak Greek and who took part in that Greek culture, they saw themselves as a cut above the barbarians, the people who didn't really have that in the same sort of way.

And Paul says, whether people are cultured or whether they're uncultured, I've got a debt to them. I've got an obligation to them. I've got a debt, an obligation to people who see themselves as being wise in the terms of this world.

And to those who don't see themselves as wise at all, people who see them as ignorant, I've got a debt to them both. And he's saying, all these people, whatever their situations, they've got value and I've got a debt to them to tell them about the death of the Lord Jesus and how you can have salvation through trusting in his work on the cross through faith in his name.

[ 19 : 45 ] It's not only when people use the wisdom, it's only when people use the wisdom of the world to reject divine wisdom that worldly wisdom has been condemned.

Paul is not saying, I'm only going to speak to the barbarians, I'm happy to speak to the Greeks, I'm happy to speak to the elite, I'm happy to speak to the slaves, I'm willing to give the gospel.

I want to give the gospel to absolutely everybody. There's no limits. The Lord's people have called on to be like that as well. So Paul says, really, I can't rest, if you like, I think one of the commentators said, till every gospel pound is paid to every Gentile creditor.

That's why he's going on to Spain after he's been to Rome. So, that's the way it is. Paul's debt is to God, but his payment is to be made to men.

And that's why he wants to be in Rome, because he realises he's got an obligation to God to tell more of the gospel, more of the Lord Jesus to the people in Rome.

[ 20 : 54 ] Can I tell the boys and girls another story? Have you heard of the name of Hudson Taylor? Hudson Taylor was a man who lived in the 19th century. I haven't heard his name yet, but you've heard it now.

And he went to China, the first missionary from Europe in modern times to China. He founded a famous missionary society called the China Inland Mission.

It's the one that's called the Overseas Missionary Fellowship, OMF now. Hudson Taylor in the Lord's purposes became not just a very successful missionary, lots of people in China were converted, he became a very famous man.

And he used to come back to this country and he would have meetings, missionary meetings up and down Britain. Hugely popular, people travelled big distances to hear him. One day he was somebody, he was being interviewed and somebody suggested to him, Mr. Taylor, you seem to have given your life to the East, to the Orient, the people who lived in the East because you loved the Chinese.

And Hudson Taylor replied to this man who was interviewing, no, not because I loved the Chinese, but because I loved God. His, the sacrifices he's made, the difficult life he'd led for year after year in China.

[ 22 : 18 ] The Chinese didn't like people who weren't Chinese, didn't want anything to do with them. And here's Hudson Taylor, one man trying to bring the gospel to a nation of millions, hard, hard going.

And he said that I did it not because I loved the Chinese, but because I loved God. And he realised, you see, that he had that obligation to go and preach the gospel to the Chinese.

That was what the Lord was calling him to do. So you see, that's the way it's to be for every one of us who loves the Lord Jesus and who trusts him. We are great debtors to God.

Everyone who's saved by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ owes a great debt to God. And that debt he wants us to pay to our friends, to our neighbours, to our relatives, to our communities.

And at the end of a year, beginning of a new year, we must all ask ourselves, I must ask myself, are we willing to risk appearing to be foolish by telling a poor sinner who may be very respectable in our communities, we'll pray for you.

[ 23 : 50 ] That's what we're called on to do. We have an obligation to risk being embarrassed, to risk being laughed at, to risk indeed making sacrifices if need be.

And the Lord doesn't ask people in this country to make all that many sacrifices, usually, compared to what he asks many to do. But he does ask us, are we willing to do things like that, to pass on the gospel to others who don't know its benefits yet?

And everyone who trusts the Lord Jesus has this weighty responsibility on them, it's on me, it's on you yourselves, it's on you young people too, if you're trusting in the Lord Jesus to save you from your sins, if you love him, well, you know, that's something you can do even at school.

Your friends might laugh at you, the people in the class, but let them know that you go to church, let them know that you're trusting Jesus. Young people can do that every bit as well as older people do.

But Paul says, I'm motivated because I have this sense of obligation to God which he wants me to pay to people, to men and women, as a result of what he's done for me.

[ 25 : 15 ] I want to go to Rome, he says, in order to preach the gospel and to encourage you and to be encouraged by you, I can only do that by being there and talking with you.

So that's the second thing. He's got, first of all, this sense of motivation from mutual encouragement, that's what he wants to do, mutually encourage the Roman Christians, him to be encouraged to.

He has this sense of obligation, he knows that he's got a debt to God because the Lord Jesus died for his sins, this debt, this responsibility to tell other people about it. And then finally in verse 16 he moves on to talk about how he's motivated by his confidence in the power of the gospel.

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. 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.

Verses 16 and 17, you know, have an importance out of all proportion to their name. Romans 1 are two of the most powerful verses in the whole Bible.

[ 26 : 39 ] I think they're as important as powerful as that. They in fact summarize the whole argument of the whole epistle to the Romans. And they go right to the very heart of Paul's motivation.

I think you can put it this way, perhaps the theme of Romans, the epistle to the Romans, is God. The whole epistle really is a book about God.

But these two verses, if you like, give the thesis of the epistle. They sum it up, and they sum up for us what God has done to bring us salvation.

That's what verses 16 and 17 are, and that's why Paul's not ashamed of the gospel. Elsewhere, remember, he tells us that he boasts in the cross of Christ. That's just a different way of saying the same thing.

He's not ashamed of the gospel. Why? Because it's the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes. For in the gospel, a righteousness from God is revealed. Righteousness is by faith from first to last, just as written, the righteous will live by faith.

[ 27 : 50 ] Paul declares his adherence to the gospel, which he's already said is God's in verse 1 of chapter 1, and he points out that God's power is at work in the gospel.

It's the revelation of God's righteousness. And in verse 16, he basically stands by his message. Now, just think about what's gone before at this point.

He'd been imprisoned in Philippi. He'd been chased out of Thessalonica. He'd been smuggled, I suppose, out of Berea. He'd been laughed out in Athens on the Areopagus, remember, on Mars Hill.

He preached in Corinth. In Corinth, they found his message was foolishness to the Greeks and a stumbling block to the Jews. But he still declares that he's proud of the gospel.

Are we proud of the gospel? Am I proud of the gospel? Paul says the gospel has proved adequate for the needs of both himself and everyone who's heard it and is not ashamed of it.

[ 29 : 00 ] Now, the foolishness of the gospel's message, that might tempt Christians anywhere to be ashamed of it. It's probably tempted all of us at times to be ashamed of it or embarrassed by it.

Paul's not ashamed of it. No way. Why wasn't he ashamed of it? Because it's the power of God for salvation.

Gospel's not advice to people. Gospel doesn't suggest they lift themselves up. It's power. It lifts them up.

That's what the gospel does. That's what happens when a person's converted. They're lifted up. Lifted up from their sins. Lives changed. It's power. Paul doesn't say that the gospel brings power.

What he says here is that it is power. God's power at that. When the gospel is preached, it's not just so many words being spoken from a pulpit, for example.

[ 30 : 07 ] It's the power of God at work. God's power of God works in the life and soul of a human being. Well, when the gospel enters anybody's life, it's as if the very fire of God has come down upon them and entered them, and there's warmth and there's light.

Lives are changed. One of the early church fathers, I don't know whether this is a helpful illustration or I've got to give it to you because I think it's got something that's some help in it.

A man called Theodore said that the power of the gospel is like pepper. It just transforms you. It takes your breath away. It has all sorts of physical impacts on you.

Well, there's something of truth in that, isn't there? The power of the gospel is like that when it enters a person's soul. You know, when they go down onto their knees a sinner and they confess their sins, when they get up they're changed, transformed.

Happens in all sorts of different ways. I remember as I was leading a Bible class years and years and years ago, doesn't matter where, and a woman at it was converted. And she told us all afterwards that when she walked home she'd heard the birds singing like she'd never heard before.

[ 31 : 32 ] I know a man who's a minister in the free church, same sort of experience. That's the power of the gospel. That's what Paul's doing. It just has that sort of impact. It changes people's lives. And they can't but be aware of it, not just in a spiritual sense, but in a physical sense.

Power of God brings salvation. It issues in salvation, it results in salvation, doesn't matter how you put it, that's what happens. Now, salvation, well you can describe salvation in all sorts of ways, can't you?

It's a very positive thing, it brings such a rich variety of blessings. Every single believer who's put their faith in the Lord Jesus will tell you that salvation has brought them different sorts of things.



Some of the things will be the same, some of the things will be quite different and unique to themselves. It's just such a positive, life-changing thing. But there's a, I was going to say, there's negative aspects to salvation too, that's not really quite the right way to put it, but the gospel saves from God's wrath.

People who are saved are not the objects of the anger of God anymore. It saves them from hostility to God, saves them from alienation from him, saves them from sin, saves them from being lost, saves them from lives which are futile, saves them from a yoke of slavery as Paul puts it, doesn't he, in Galatians.

[ 33 : 02 ] It's hardly right to call those things negative, but you know, it's the sort of difference I would trust that I'm trying to make there. And remember too, and Paul says this, the gospel, it's universal.

It's open to everyone. I'm not ashamed of the gospel because it's the power of God for salvation of everyone who believes, first for the Jew and then for the Gentile, for everyone.

The gospel is there available, it's offered to everyone, open to everybody. There's a restriction of course, and Paul makes the restriction to everyone who believes.

This powerful salvation of which Paul is talking about in these verses, you know, it's not the possession of any unbeliever at all.

people. Some people think that the Lord Jesus died and everybody's saved because of that. That's not what Paul's saying. He's saying it's for those who believe.

[ 34 : 08 ] Believing, that word believe, one of the most important words in the whole scripture. That word believe. Crucially important. And Paul is saying that this salvation is not the possession of anybody who's not a believer.

Each person must make it his own by his own act of faith. Now, you young people, you can understand that.

I think, ask God to save you, to give you faith in the Lord Jesus. Because it's not something you do yourself, it's something which God gives you.

I've got a feeling that perhaps it's years ago now, I told you an easy way to understand what the word grace means. I think I did this. Grace.

You spell it G-R-A-C-E and you remember it by saying G for gift, R for received, A for at, C for Christ's, and E for expense.

[ 35 : 13 ] Gift received or good received at Christ's expense. It comes to you because of what the Lord Jesus did. That's God's grace. Though faith comes by God's grace.

He gives it. It's not our faith that gives the gospel its power, it's the power of the gospel that makes it possible for people to believe. And Paul's not saying that people achieve power by their own believing effort.

He's saying that the power of God is at work in the gospel. That's what he's saying. The power of God brings salvation. Well, one last question can I ask and try to answer.

How does belief in the gospel of Christ bring salvation? Well, verse 17, verse 17, one of the most important statements in scripture. 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 or the just shall live by faith.

What does that mean? What does verse 17 mean? Well, I think it means this. It's true to say, first of all, that in the gospel it's revealed that God is a righteous God.

[ 36 : 25 ] God doesn't do anything that's wrong. God doesn't do anything that's unjust. God doesn't do anything that's bad in any sense of the word at all. It's also true to say that in the gospel it's revealed that people get a right standing or a status of being right in God's sight from God himself.

This righteousness, Paul says, is revealed. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed. It's not known naturally. People can't find it out for themselves.

Unless God makes it known to them, they will never discover it. That's why it's so important to tell people about the gospel. That's why it's so important for missionaries to go out to the deep parts of the Amazon jungle and try to get into Islamic countries and try to get into China, which is still in the hole by and large of a godless atheistic communism.

If people don't hear the gospel, if they don't hear how it's revealed in the scripture, they'll never discover it. And they'll never be in heaven. That's the sad thing. And so many people these days, they recoil against that and they say how outrageous that is.

Why should it be the case that we have to go and bring Christianity to people who have perfectly valid cultures and perfectly valid belief systems and they have their own religion?

[ 37 : 52 ] Why should we come? Well, it's here in that verse. It's revealed. It's revealed. Righteousness from God is revealed. God's righteousness, God is a matter of faith, faith first, faith last, faith through and through.

Paul is stressing the primacy, the importance of faith. God's righteousness, says Paul, is shown in the gospel.

That gospel which tells us that people must come to God in faith or they won't have their sins forgiven. He who is just by faith, who is made righteous by faith, will live.

That's what Paul is saying. Will live eternally. It's by faith that God saves people, not by how they live.

By faith. No faith, no eternal life. It's as simple as that. And Paul says the gospel is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.

[ 39 : 16 ] It's all a matter of faith. So there is a question for us all. I was at a communion once. And there was a lady at the communion who on the Monday of the Thanksgiving service said, I think this is one of the most desperate sentences I've ever heard in my whole life.

She said, another communion and we are still not saved. Faith, you see. Faith. I don't know why that woman wasn't saved. It doesn't really matter. Point was, she was confessing that she didn't have faith.

So, there's been another year. Some of you, I assume, are not yet believers. Seek that the Lord will give you that faith.

You young people, it's not too, you're not too young to put your trust in the Lord Jesus, you know. Lord Jesus himself that said, let the little children come to me for, of such as the kingdom of heaven.

Kingdom of heaven belongs to people who come like young people, come like children, come like boys and girls. Then they put their trust in Jesus and they say, I'll trust you to save me from my sins.

[ 40 : 34 ] That's faith. That's faith. That's what all of us over the world have to do as well. Put our trust simply in the Lord Jesus and the power of the gospel will save us.

What does 2008 hold for those of you who haven't yet come to faith? Is eternity opening before you yet? Or is it something which is still closed?

Those of us who do have faith, do we see how important it is to do what we can to bring the gospel to those who haven't heard it or who don't understand it yet?

So there's three things from Paul. Paul says, I want to go to Rome to be mutually encouraged. All the Lord's people must want that.

Should be striving for that. That's great motivation. We need to remember that every one of us who trusts the Lord Jesus has a debt and the debt's to be repaid by telling others about the salvation of the gospel.

[ 41 : 44 ] And then we need to remember, sometimes we forget or let it slip to the backs of our minds, that there's power in the gospel. And we must have confidence, not in our ability and what we see and not in our sensitivity and things like that, but in the power of God, which is there embedded in the gospel.

And surely a prayer for us all for this time of year is that our motivation will be more and more like Paul's. May it be so by each and every one of us. Let us pray.

Oh Lord, our God, we confess and acknowledge that our confidence in you has not been what it should be. It should have been absolute and so often it's qualified and so often it's uncertain and so often we're just plain scared and apprehensive about telling others about the Lord Jesus.

We pray, Lord, that we might be less and less so as the days go by in your providence. And we pray, Lord, that the motivation of Paul and the motivation of John and the motivation of all your servants, whether they've been famous missionaries or unknown Christians in small places of the earth, we pray that it might be the case that our motivation is transformed by you and that you would enable us to be men and women and young people too who are strong in the power of the Lord Jesus and of great faith in the saving power of his gospel.

We seek, Lord, then that you would transform the lives of all of us, transform them progressively, that we too might be more and more like those who have gone before us and who have been strong in the faith and who, by grace, have done mighty things in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[ 43 : 31 ] And we look forward, O Lord, to the days that will surely come when all nations and peoples and kingdoms will acknowledge that the Lord Jesus is indeed the Saviour and that he indeed has all the power and is the king over this world and the one who has the keys, as it were, to the next one too.

Be with us then, O Lord, we pray. Continue with us in this week. Guide us all. Keep us all safely. And may we know your saving power and your sanctifying grace as the days go by.

These things we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.