

Title: Is your gospel powerful enough to save a Jihadist?
Text: Romans 1.16-17
Theme: The unstoppable power of the gospel
Occasion: Missions Fest, January 27, 2013 AM service
Prop Stmt: Sin is deep, but the gospel is deeper still.
Aim: I aim to increase my people's confidence in the power of the gospel rather than in their power to persuade.

Read Text:

The Egyptian empire ruled the known world for generations, until a small segment of its population, slaves, mind you, led by a stammering outcast, not only escaped from Egypt, but in their wake they left the world empire in a virtual state of ruin. How did they do this? Technology? Sophisticated weapons? Masterful organization? No. God worked his plan through outcasts and slaves to completely disassemble the greatest empire the world had seen up to that point in history. Egypt has never recovered.

About 500 years later, a young boy, trained to watch sheep, stood in the valley of Elah between the armies of Israel and the Philistines. This boy, not even a soldier in Israel's army was sent down into the valley to as their representative to fight the representative of the Philistines, a giant of a man who was raised and trained to kill. Upon the soldiers of these two combatants was the destiny of their countries. It was hardly a fair battle, but not the way that any observer would have thought. That day, the David carried the head of Goliath off the field of battle and gave it to the King of Israel. How did he do it? Strength? No. Intimidation? Hardly. Sophisticated weapons? No. God worked his plan through a shepherd boy to serve notice to the world that a dynasty had been born, but not like you would think. No, God does incredibly powerful things through people who appear to be weak.

1,000 years later, in the legal line of David, God came to earth in the weakness of a baby. The coming of this child was foreseen by the prophets, whose promises did not seem to fit with what people thought was the need. Isaiah spoke of the distress of the Jews and told his people that *"to us a child is born, to us a son is given...."* (9.6) The reaction would be predictable. A child?! We do not need a child! We need a man! We need a Warrior! We need a King! Later on, Isaiah spoke again about this promised one and described him as someone who *"had no form or majesty that we should look at him and no beauty that we should desire him."* (53.2b) Even the demonic underworld was taken by surprise as Paul wrote in 1 Cor. 2.8, *"None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory."* This baby, this seemingly insignificant baby, born to a poor and lowly couple who themselves were treated as outcasts in a nation that was enslaved by the mighty Roman empire, pulled off a stunning upset in a manner that no one saw coming. 1) God became man. No one saw that coming. 2) This God-man, Christ, did not conquer a nation, nor assemble an army. He conquered sin and death and assembled a church. In his weakness, he showed the strength of God. In his death, he

killed death by removing the sting of it for believers. He broke the weapon of accusation and shame that Satan could have held against us. My point is simply this: God does incredibly powerful things through people who appear to be weak, so that the glory of the victory goes to him. The vessels that God uses can be weak and fragile, because what goes in them is indestructible.

Today, our world is facing a number of different threats. One of them is the clear and present danger of the Islamic religion. In the name of Allah, followers of this religion have successfully taken over country after country. They now have a controlling presence in the Mideast, in the sub-Saharan continent of Africa, and a growing presence in Europe and in North America. Muhammad's vision of a united Arabian Peninsula has sort of been realized. Arabs are only united when they can find an enemy that is outside of them, in order to distract them from killing themselves. The growing influence of the Muslim religion is particularly acute to us. We have been told that the largest concentration of Muslims outside of the Mideast is in the Detroit area. Whether or not that is still true, I do not know. But there is much attention on this region. The Muslim religion has not historically been content to co-exist peacefully within the borders of countries whose governments it does not control. They are here to infiltrate, recruit, and eventually take over. Even the more peaceful ones, who seem to comprise many of the Muslims in our area are not able to stem the tide of the ones who are more zealous and hard core in their convictions. These "radicals" as they are called, can support their actions from the Qur'an and can justify their "radical" actions as being consistent with the teaching of Muhammad. Sharia law in our state? But, we have laws against such things. But laws are only effective if there are people who are willing to enforce them.

With what seems like weekly stories of kidnapping, terrorist attacks, threats, murder and assaults, the world is frankly intimidated by Muslims. Our soldiers in Afghanistan train men to be able to defend their own people, only to have some of the men they train and befriend turn and kill them. They appear to have no fear. They are able to successfully recruit people who are willing to die for their cause. How can they be stopped? And yet, many of you work with and do business with Muslims. The angry terrorist hiding behind a masked face does not fit the person that you know. And yet, some of you are not really certain how to relate to this person. This past week, you have been challenged to think of the Muslims in our area as an opportunity instead of a threat. I am not ignorant of the threat to our political structure, and to our way of life. But, we are followers of Christ. Our ultimate concern is not to protect the constitution, but to reach people with the gospel of Christ, for the kingdom of God. I know that we are in a war. This war is being played out on several levels. 1) There is a war for cultural values. The Muslim religion reacts against the public immorality and indecency of our culture. But the only thing it has to offer is law and threats. It cannot change hearts. And underneath the layers of secrecy in the Muslim context, there is much immorality and indecency that belies the fact that their laws are no match for their own sin. 2) There is a war for actual governmental control. Muslims, in that sense are patient. They are content to live in a land, and eventually take over, even if it done by out-populating everyone

else, like they are doing in Europe. 3) There is a war for mind-control. If you can get people to fear you, then you have mastery over them. So, what can we do? Realize this: We have a weapon that is unlike anything else in the world. This weapon cannot be defeated and will successfully, over time, dismantle and destroy every thing that is thrown against it. The weapon is not us. It is the gospel. The gospel reveals the power of God. The gospel is the means by which God changes the heart of a rebel into the heart of one of his followers. God has ordained from the beginning of time, to call out of this world, a people who will follow him. These are the people who will be rescued by him and for him because they believe the gospel. And these people who believe the gospel are placed into his family and made part of his kingdom and this kingdom is forever and ever and it cannot be stopped. No matter what! The gospel is the good news of what Jesus Christ has done for us. That is why the way that we fight in this battle is by announcing the good news of Christ's victory over sin by his death on the cross. That message is so compelling and so powerful and so captivating and liberating all at the same time, that every single person who understands and believes the gospel is taken by that message and changed from a rebel into a follower of Christ.

1. **Do you understand the calling that we have?** (14)

Our calling is to announce the good news of Christ to everyone, no matter what. Look at the descriptions that Paul uses in this verse. He contrasts the Greeks with the barbarians, and the wise with the foolish. He was using labels of his day that described in very general terms the two groups of people in the world as they were understood. The Greeks referred to the learned, the sophisticated, the cultured and couth ones. The barbarians were anything but. Greeks were intimidated by the brute strength of the barbarians and the barbarians were intimidated by the sophistication and culture of the Greeks. Paul said that he is obligated, he senses and indebtedness to both groups to bring them the gospel. They both need it. The person who appears to be educated and successful is just as empty and needy as the person who appears to be uncouth, angry and violent.

A friend of mine used to be a body builder. He had a little bit of success in some muscle competitions, all of which he spent a ridiculous amount of time in the gym. He was ripped. Ever see these guys? And now its some girls. They can be scary. One day, some guy in the gym struck up a conversation with him and told him about Christ. This ripped muscle-man, was cut to the heart. He trusted Christ right there on the weight bench in the middle of the gym.

Do you know what this verse is saying? Your atheistic college professor is no match for the gospel. Your uncle who spends every evening getting drunk because he is angry at the world is no match for the gospel. That co-worker who seems to have it in for you, is no match for the gospel. In fact, there is not a Jihadist on the face of this earth that is a match for the gospel and nor can stop the gospel.

2. **Do you understand what we are dealing with?** (16-17)

The gospel is the power of God. Paul is saying that it simply cannot be stopped by any power of man. In fact the gospel does not need man's sophistication, or technique or enhancement. That is why we do not "do" the gospel; we announce the gospel. The gospel stands on its own. Now, this would be particularly helpful to the believers who comprised the church in Rome. What were they in the shadows of the capital of the greatest empire the world had ever known at that time? Evidences of Roman might and domination were all around them. How could they compete with that? What did they have that would look impressive to people who were very accustomed to impressive displays of power? After all, they worshiped a man that the Romans put to death. But Paul knew that not even powerful Rome was a match for the gospel. So, five years later after he wrote this letter to the believers in Rome, and after he promised to come and visit them, he is in Rome, but not as he had hoped. Paul is in prison. As he writes a letter to a group of believers in the city of Philippi, he says, in essence that you are not going to believe this. Here I am in prison in Rome, and every day, they stick a couple of soldiers in here to guard me. So, I have been telling them about the gospel. Now, the entire Imperial Guard, that is the elite squadron of soldiers who provide security for the emperor all know about me and that I am in prison because of Christ. At the end of this letter to the Philippians he told them that all of the saints in Caesar's household pass on their greetings.

Now, this statement here in 1.16 tells us what the gospel does, but as of yet, in this letter, Paul has not spelled out what the gospel actually is. That is, in fact what this letter to the Romans is all about. It is a glorious book. However, the last time that I preached through it as a series on Sunday mornings, it took me 8-10 years. So, this morning, I will have to give you a summary of the gospel, if that is okay with you.

A. What is the gospel?

a. God

God created the universe, the world and everything in it. As the Creator, and Owner he has the right to rule, to make laws, and to do all things as he sees fit. But, he is also a joyful and loving Creator. So, he made man in order to relate to God and enjoy God. There is nothing that will satisfy the heart, the soul, the very being of a human than being known by and enjoying God. We were made for that and nothing but God can fill that desire. But, we didn't believe God.

b. Man

Man rebelled. The human race, represented by the very first man, Adam, made a choice for us. The fateful choice that he made has been repeated billions of times over since. Adam decided that he did not want to live under God's laws. He trusted his own insight believing that God was hiding something from him. Man distrusted God and instead of listening to the Word of God, listened to his own counsel. And when Adam disobeyed God, and rebelled against the right of God to rule his life,

Adam sinned. Sin came upon the human race that day. Sin came upon the world and the entire created order. When sin came, death came. Things started dying. Corruption, decay, chaos, conflict, war, murder, rape, anger, violence, bitterness, shame, guilt, betrayal, loneliness, isolation, doubt, greed, hopelessness, addiction, fear, sadness, loss all were born that day. Adam had been warned. He did not believe God. What could be done? The water had been spilled upon the ground, and there was no way to gather it back into the bottle. What was done, was done. It is, what it is. Death became part of our world. What could be done to address this? How could God express grace without compromising his justice? On what basis could God forgive sin? This is, admittedly, very difficult for us. We believe that it is God's job to cut everyone some slack.....(KK)

c. Christ

God sent himself in the person of Christ to the earth. The Son of God became a son of man. He came to this earth in order to live a life in our place. As God, he could do that for everyone who would believe in him because he was infinite. As man, he could do that in the place of man and as the representative of man. He lived a perfect life that became a perfect sacrifice that was offered up in our place when he died on the cross. His life provided the righteousness that I must have and his death provided the payment for my sin.

d. Response

What do we do with this? We agree with what God has said about our sin (repent) and we trust in what Christ has done for us. It is ours to believe! This rescue for sin is ours by faith alone in Christ alone, because what God did for us in Christ is by grace alone. When you trust in Christ, he takes your sin from off of your record (forgiveness) and he puts his righteousness on your account (justification). You are from that moment on, viewed as, counted as, a child of God, a member of the family of God and a joint-heir with Jesus Christ. You are His – forever. That is the gospel.

B. Why is it so powerful?

a. It rescues everyone who believes (16a)

i. It rescues Jews.

Is there anything that is any more terrifying than a person who has no fear of God? The only thing that I can imagine is a person who thinks that he has been given permission by God to be sinfully violent. Imagine a man who thinks that he is pleasing God by persecuting infidels. This man terrorizes Christians. He stalks them. He breaks into their meetings, he persecutes the people and executes the leaders. He imprisons dads, moms and separates families. He is relentless. He has spies, pretending to be believers who find out where the meetings are going to be, so that he can arrest the believers, and make a show of them. Do you think the gospel is

powerful enough to save a Jihadist? I have just described for you the man who became the apostle Paul. When Paul wrote this, the Jewish people were the religious ones, while the Greeks were the idolaters.

ii. Greeks

Here Paul is using the term Greek to speak of all non-Jews. The point being, it does not matter what your ethnicity is, it does not matter what your status is, it does not matter if you were raised in a religious tradition or with a religious label, in a structured, predictable, organized setting or raised in a godless, chaotic, dysfunctional mess. The gospel is so powerful that it will rescue everyone who believes.

Do you remember the prophet Jonah? God told Jonah to go to Nineveh, the capital city the Assyrians (north-west corner of Iraq). The Assyrians were the enemies of Israel. We all know how cruel and ruthless they were. Seriously, this would be like going to N. Korea, or Mecca, Saudi Arabia and start preaching about the gospel on a street corner. But, when God tells Jonah to go and preach, Jonah does not rebel because he is afraid of how they will treat him, Jonah rebels because he knows how powerful God's word is, and how powerful God is to save people. Jonah tries to run the other way because he knows God will save people and Jonah doesn't want to see that. Of course, that is exactly what happened in Nineveh. Jonah preached and the people, including the king, repented and believed.

How does that happen? Jesus spoke about this to Nicodemus and later to his disciples. Jesus said that faith comes from hearing and hearing from the Word of God. God uses His Word as the means by which the Holy Spirit opens the eyes of people both to the truth of the gospel and to their personal need to trust in the gospel. That is called regeneration, or being born again. Being born again is not what you do, it is what the Spirit does. The Spirit gives a person spiritual sight and they see their true condition and see what Christ has done. When the Spirit of God does this in a person's life, He changes the heart. He changes the affections. He changes the desires. Now, this person wants to believe. We tell people about the gospel because God uses that to awaken people to Christ, but it is not because we are so skilled and slick in our presentation, it is because God is so powerful, that he can break through the most stubborn of hearts. God has never needed powerfully skilled people with exceptional talents. He uses common people like us, who simply believe.

b. It reveals the righteousness of God.

The gospel reveals that God is absolutely righteous because the gospel puts Christ on display. Christ lived a perfectly righteous life. He is perfectly, infinitely righteous and he lived perfectly and infinitely righteous. He said, "I always do what pleased him." John 8.29 He asked his accusers (John 8.46) if they could prove him guilty of sin. They were speechless. Now, here is why this is so very important. We tend to look at people and think how much of a challenge it would be for some people to

become Christians because they are SO bad. Every single person is in need of the same amount of grace as anyone else. Before you trusted Christ, you had no righteousness. When you trusted Christ, you were credited with the righteousness of Christ. It does not matter how needy the other person is, there is enough righteousness for them to be saved. And, (this is so very important to grasp) when you trust in Christ, you are viewed by God, in that moment as being as righteous as you will ever be. In your standing before God, you will never be more righteous than you are right now. That is why Paul says, it “is revealed from faith for faith.” We are saved by faith which launches us into the Christian life which is lived by faith.

c. It saves us by faith to faith.

Faith in what? Faith in what God has done for me through Christ. Faith in the promises of God that he will keep me and preserve me. Faith that his work in me through Christ is enough and that there is nothing left for me to pay. This is incredible freedom. This truth is the most liberating truth that any person, any Jew, Muslim, Buddhist, “Christian”, Hindu could ever hear. And we get to share this with people who are in bondage.

3. **Do you see the opportunity that is before you?** (15)

We get to tell people this news. We get to tell them what God has done for them. And the gospel is so powerful that many who hear, believe. All of the laws, the cultural traditions, the secrecy of Muslim life does not give them any hope. Behind the veils, and the walls of the Mosques are people trapped in meaningless lives, surrounded by people who sin against them, and struggling with their own emptiness and failure. Christ alone is their hope. And we get to share Him. If the persecution of the early church led to the first movement for world missions and a harvest of souls for the gospel, then perhaps the growing presence of Muslims in our neighborhoods will be an opportunity to expose them to a truth that they otherwise would not have the opportunity to hear. Oh no vs. Oh yea!