

PROGRAM #: SERIES 106 (Side B)

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EVENT

THEME: The Power of the Gospel

TEXT: Romans 1:13 .

Reference

Now, let us bow our heads as we ask the Holy Spirit to throw His light of elimination so that we may profit from the word. Let us pray.

Prayer: Our God and father we give thanks this morning that you have given us the opportunity of coming to worship and to learn at your feet. Now we ask the presence of the Holy Spirit to be with us as we look at the word of life. Do come and encourage us and illumine our understanding that we may see the Lord Jesus Himself. For His sake we pray. Amen.

I want to bring greetings to you and also to tell you how glad I am to be here again, it is a home-coming to me because I am not a stranger here. I want also to tell you that we do have a team in our ministry which is expanding all the time, appreciate you and particularly as you continue to support us with your prayers and in every way. And as I said this morning, a church, a group of people in supporting through prayer and giving, it's not a question of condescending help, it is that there is a compelling command, it is the command of love, and it makes you and it makes me, no longer interested parties, but rather participating members.

You see, because of what Christ has done, none of us can remain as spectators. Immediately we are caught in that love which liberates men and women, we become participants instead of spectators. So we praise God for your participation in the ministry. You may not be there physically but in every way you are there because you see, being in Christ makes you there. As soon as a person is in Christ wherever the interests of Christ's kingdom are, you are there as a participant in the affairs of that kingdom. So, we praise God for your prayers and I bring you greetings from Uganda, from East Africa, and from other areas where we have seen the Lord at work.

So now we move onto the word and the word I want to share with you is

taken from the testimony of St. Paul in his letter to the Romans, chapter 1, there are these words. He is writing to these dear Christian brothers and remember these are not his converts, but he is writing to an already existing church, believers at Rome the headquarters of the empire, and this is how he writes in Romans 1:13.

'I want you to know brethren that I have often intended to come to you, but thus far I have been prevented.' And the purpose of his coming, 'In that, but you see by tradition I was a pharisee. Which means the most conservative order that I may reap some harvest among you as well as among the rest of the gentiles.' Then verse 14 in particular. 'I am a debtor,' or 'I am only that,' he says, 'I was very zealous, a real enthusiast when it came to the faith according to the Jews.'

and to the foolish. For, because of that I am eager to preach the gospel

also to you who are in Rome, the headquarters of the empire.' Verse 16, 'For I am not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God for the salvation to everyone who has faith or who believes, or who has his confidence in Christ and what He has done.' Whether that one who has faith is a Jew first and also a Greek, for in this wonderful gospel of which I am not ashamed, the righteousness of God is revealed through faith, as it is written, He who has faith, or he who through faith is righteous shall live, for the righteous shall live by faith."

Now, here is Paul writing these wonderful words. Actually, the center

of what I want to share with you this morning is that wonderful word he uses after he has written when he says to the Roman Christian brethren, "I have become a debtor to all men." J.B. Phillips puts it, "I owe a universal debt to all men, to the Greek and to the non-Greek. To the sophisticated and those who are not sophisticated. To the highly polished and to those who have not had any polish at all." Now, who is writing here? The writer, of course, is St. Paul, and when you look at the background, when you see what

man that he completely forgets every other thing? You see, he says, "This good news is the center of this good news, God has acted." How? God has taken the initiative to bring men and women hostile to Him back into friendship with himself through Jesus Christ. That is the center, the essence of the good news and that's what it means here. In the good news a new relationship, what Paul calls, "It is in that good news that the righteousness of God has been demonstrated."

What is this righteousness? Of course, most of us think whenever we hear the word righteousness, immediately we think of a moral code with a long catalogue of good things you must do in order to go to heaven. That is not the idea of righteousness in the New Testament. The idea of righteousness particularly in Paul and in the rest of the gospel, is bringing men and women into a right relationship with God. That's righteousness. Righteousness is not do not do that, do not do the other, be this be the other. No, no, no. A moral code can never make a man dance in right relationship with God. It may make a man sit up and feel guilty. It may open a man's eyes to see, I have failed here, I have failed over there, I am not right over there, that's right. But when it comes to bringing a man into a right relationship with God, a man who was an enemy becomes a friend of God, a man who was a stranger becomes a child of God, no moral code anywhere in the world can produce that it's impossible.

It can be produced only by a person, you see? If it is a person relatedness, no words, no laws, no rules can bring it, it can only be brought when a person comes in, and that's why Jesus Christ becomes the good news. When God acted to bring us into right relationship with Him, He came in the person of Jesus Christ, not in a moral code, Jesus came. God so loved this world of shattered human beings, of tired lives, of embittered experiences,

that He gave His beloved Son. Not that He gave a moral code, He gave His beloved Son, a person so that you and I desiring to be brought into a right relationship with God may meet Jesus Christ, and in Jesus Christ we are introduced into a right relationship. Jesus

Jesus said, "Come unto me and I will give you rest." You see, come unto me as a person, not come to my teaching, not come to my miracles. Many people have got tremendous amounts of hang-ups about miracles. You talk about the uniqueness of Jesus, they think when He raised Lazarus from the dead that was important, but that was not the main point of the ministry because after all Lazarus did die later, he is not here. The uniqueness of Jesus Christ was not the miracles, those came accompanying the King of Life. The uniqueness of Jesus was that he brought men and women into a new relationship with God. He took them from the relationship of fear, trembling, hating God, hating themselves, hating one another, scared of death, scared of the future. Why? Because when I am estranged from my God life becomes a stranger. When my relationship with God is out there not inside the love of God, everything is a very, very difficult experience. Even my friends are strangers, that's why you find in the world in which we live, young people are strangers to old people, old people are strangers to young people. White people are strangers to black people, black people are strangers to white people. Oh, what a confusion.

In my country of Africa, tribes are strangers to tribes, clans are strangers to clans, it goes on. Educated people are strangers to uneducated people. You know, Greeks, the Greeks and their philosophers, if you did not speak polished Greek they called you 'barbarian' and Plato said, "A barbarian by nature is an enemy to Greeks." Imagine! Simply because they don't speak a polished language they become your enemy. Why? Because you see this

they are not sophisticated at all, young or old, whether they speak a language of the Greeks or they are barbarians, which means non-Greek speakers, I owe a debt to them." What sort of debt? Well he told us what the debt was. He told us what the debt was and that will help us.

He says, "I am under this tremendous obligation, I am ready to preach the good news. I want to preach the good news," verse 15, "I am very eager. I am excited I want to come to Rome and preach the good news to you as I have preached in other areas." So which means, the debt he owed this society was the good news of God.

What is this good news? What is it that so excited him that he forgot he was a Jew, he forgot he was a pharisee, he forgot he was a Roman citizen, he simply looked at every human being as to one ^{to} whom he owed a debt, and the debt being to preach the good news to him. Now what is the center of this good news which excites him so much? It is written for us here, verse 16. You see he says, "I am not ashamed of the good news." Why? "Because it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes or who has faith." To the Jew first because he knew, and also to the Greek who knew later. And also to the African who knew much, much later. And also to anyone in the present age in 1972. Paul says, "I am not ashamed of the good news," because you see it is the power of God which rescues men and women from what? Of course, we know very well and we can say from sin, but if you read here, if you read here he tells us why the good news. What was the good news?

Let me read it because then we know what the good news was. "It is the power of God," he says, "unto salvation." How? Verse 17. "For in that good news of which I am not ashamed, the righteousness of God has been revealed through faith. As it says, the righteous shall live by faith." Now what does that mean? Why should that be the good news which excites a

estrangement which Paul is writing about here. If you read from where I stepped you will be amazed. The kind of community, the kind of people Paul says, "I am a debtor to them," you read. You've never seen a more confused group. Talk about 1972, the 1970's being areas of confusion. Confusion in every part. Men victims of their desires. Men seeking God from their lust. You read that chapter when you've got time, you'll be amazed. You'll think you are either in New York or London. Why? Because human beings remain the same whether the sins are publicized now and written up in papers, and photographed to bring them out, don't you think that the sins are new. These sins have been with us all along.

Apart from Christ, my life is just bits and pieces scattered all over the place, and all the time I am trying to gather them, all the time. I am using modern gadgets, you know, to bring these pieces together. Using money, education, books, reading, understanding each other, you know? United Nations, gather them together, gather them together, and they keep falling apart because as St. Paul puts it, "In Him all things hold together, apart from Him all things keep falling apart." That is Colossians. In Him all things hold together, my life can only be together in Him, apart from Him it just falls apart. I mean, humanly speaking I gather the pieces all the time, I am working on it and you are working on it, that's why we are human beings. Working on it and producing wholeness in life are two different things.

But what is Paul saying? He says, this broken society, these men and women to whom he was writing, and we are part of this society because being human, all disintegrated, broken up, worshipping themselves, broken-up they have become victims of their lust, he says. They have put the creature in the place of the creator, more confusion, more confusion. The arena is full of bones. Then he says, "I am a debtor and I have got the debt," and

what is the debt? "I have good news." What is the good news? God has taken the initiative, God has taken steps to love these unlovable characters. God is busy in the wounded hands of His Son putting the pieces together, producing out of those broken human beings new men, new boys, new girls, new Africans, new Chinese. Good news. Where there was disintergration now there is intergration. No wonder you find people bitter. Oh, our age is an age of bitterness. Life has become so embittered that the people don't know what to do with it, it just has become one experience of frustration here, frustration over there, men frustrate each other, races are the same, husbands frustrate their wives, wives frustrate their husbands, children frustrate their parents, parents are just big frustrations to their children, we simply don't know what to do with each other. The whole spectrum is just a big confusion.

So, Jesus comes, and what does Jesus come as? He did not come as a dutiful kind of God way, way there. He stepped into that mess and He did it so realistically that He bled doing it. It needed blood. It was so violent when men's hearts are ^{breaking} broken, when wounds are being incurred all the time, what sort of God would you expect to be realistic? It is a bleeding God of love who can enter into that kind of society, messed up, tired, hating themselves, hating each other, strangers because they are estranged. Oh, He came, and you know when Paul caught the vision? How? You follow Paul from Jerusalem very bitter dragging women, men and women, children who are called christians, he is filling the prisons with them. Some of them he is killing because they love Jesus. Ever ~~met~~ a more embittered man? He just hated life. Furious in the name of God.

Then round the corner as he was travelling to Damascus to do his horrible business, who should meet him? The amazing God of love. What a strategy.

Just waited until that man was absolutely just seething with hatred then love met him, bleeding love. In that Holy Spirit light it shone around Saul. What did he see? Jesus Christ and Him crucified. What does that mean? Him loving to the point of death. And then the vision cleared and then Paul said, "Oh my, I never knew. I never knew that when that one died He embraced every human being bad as I am. I never knew that when He bled He was bleeding in order to heal the bleeding hearts of men. I never knew that in His utter loneliness on Calvary He entered into the loneliness of other men. I never knew that in His nakedness He was covering the naked spiritually." It was a tremendous discovery and Paul said, "I am a debtor, I am a debtor. When I see men I want to tell them." Tell them what? "He loves them, He died for them, He embraces them. This is the message." And Paul was excited he had a message.

I am a debtor. Are you a debtor? What debt did he owe? At first he owed every man a debt of despising. He segregated them, 'You are not a Jew so keep out. You are a Gentile keep out. You are not a Roman citizen you can't come near.' Everyone, he was pushing them out. Now what is he doing? "The love of Christ controls me," said Paul in 2 Cor 5:14, "I have come to the conclusion^{that} because Christ died for all, all must have died. And He died for them so that now anyone among us who is living should no longer live for himself or herself, but for Him Christ who died and rose again for us." So he says that, "When a man is in that love of Christ, that man can never be the same, he becomes an entirely new creature."

Our old way of looking at things, the old way of relationships, the old way of values has completely gone and behold, everything has become fresh. Christianity is a remarkable faith. Especially when christians are caught by the Holy Spirit in that vision. This is the center, the uniqueness of Jesus Christ is that wherever men are He brings them back home as the friends of God. But Christians have suffered. Many christians sit there expecting

God to be happy simply because they have fulfilled twenty five ^{rules} ~~and~~ and commandments, and of course, you will never do it. No one can ever fulfill even one commandment to the satisfaction of God. You are imperfect, I am imperfect, I can never, never satisfy Him who is perfect. Only grace which picks my pieces together and gave me this message for you this morning.

May I tell you that in the light of what I'm saying the world has opened up tremendously. I'm just coming from the Solomon Islands where I have seen miracles of grace in [?] Nanyu, thousands of people young and old flocking to hear this message for three weeks non-stop. Every day three meetings each day. Not because it was created by the preacher, not at all, no preacher can create that. This is the ~~the~~ outcome of the love of God on the cross. He is inviting men into a new relationship with Himself, to heal their wounds, to break their barriers, to introduce them to God and to one another. This is the new life, we are all excited about it, good news for bad people.

And then I came to Indonesia, a country predominantly Moslem, you know that in that country now there are thousands of Moslems who are becoming christians. Drawn by what? By the magnetism of God's love on the cross. That which they could not find in Islam, in the Koran, I am not saying that the Koran has not got good teaching, it has good teaching, good moral teaching, but it is not morality which a broken man needs. A broken man needs a God who can put him together. And that's what they are finding now. Oh, I wish I could tell you story after story of these Moslems coming with a beaming face and saying, "A few months ago I was a fanatic Moslem." One of them said shaking my hand, he said, "If you came six months ago I would have killed you if you told me you were a christian. I hated christianity then, I was a staunch Moslem." Then I asked him what had happened? And then

he told me one of those amazing stories, he said, "Sleeping in my house, in my Moslem village, at midnight in a vision somebody said, 'I am Jesus, I want you to believe in me.' I said, 'But I am a Moslem, I am not a christian.' 'Yes I know, but I want you to believe in me.' 'How can I know you?' 'Tomorrow get up, six miles away you will find a christian who will tell you.'"

This man got up in the morning, six miles he went and he found a christian, and the christian opened the word and told him about the living saviour who had come to him by night. This Moslem with tears in his eyes, right there he said to the christian, "I have accepted Him for I saw Him last night in my house." And he said that he went home and told every villager, and he said, "Now my village and the next, and the other one are christian." Straight just like that. Not because he was a famous preacher, simply because he was a sharer. He went back to the village excited. "Oh, my dear Moslem friends," he said, "Jesus loves you."

That is happening in Indonesia. Another fellow whom I told the other congregation about this morning, a young man who gave me his own story and he said that in December last year, he was telling me this in January we were driving together. A gifted young teacher and a politician, who drank all his money and gambled the rest, his life became so miserable that he couldn't support his wife and two lovely children. The burden, the guilt, the shame kept weighing heavily and his broken pieces were being broken more and more, and one night he quietly rose from the bedroom and went to the next room, put a rope around his neck to end it all. His dear wife was unsure, awakened by God knowing all was not well with him. She came running and found him hanging on the rope and cried. The neighbour came and cut his rope. He showed me the bruises around his neck.

Then the police took him under protective custody, and as he sat in the cell, he said to me, "I couldn't see. My world was pitch dark." He said, "I wept and wept and wept seeking means by which I could end my miserable life and I had no means. I was in a cell." And he said, "My world was a lonely world. Lonely as the grave. As I was sitting in that room alone, I put my hand in my pocket." A christian man had put a New Testament in the pocket of this fellow, in his coat. And he took it out and he begun to open just because he did not know what to do, he had nothing else to do. And he said, "I had hardly finished three sentences when the Lord of that New Testament came into the cell."

This man was a nominal christian. A member of the Dutch Reformed Church, Indonesia, and he said, "The Lord came into the gloom and my heart experienced a completely new atmosphere, and the dungeon was flooded with his light. I begun to cry for joy, and I begun to shout and sing. The policeman came and to see whether now I had gone completely mad." And he said, "He couldn't believe it, he saw me jumping about, singing, laughing, crying, and this man went away waiting to see what would happen next." And he said, "They kept me in the custody for another day to make sure. After another day they realised that the abnormal was normal, had been made normal by grace." And so they dismissed him, there was no more need to protect him against himself. Jesus had come and loved Him, and in loving him He had liberated him to live, and that man is so excited. He couldn't stop, he was seeking. When I met him he was going to a Bible institute seeking to go in and train and go into the full-time ministry, within one month of that experience. He has good news to tell Indonesia.

"I am not ashamed of the good news," says Paul, "For it is the power of God which brings rescue to every man who believes, because in that men find

right relationships with God. In that men are put together, because God puts the pieces together, they can then be related to each other."

This is the exciting ministry for which you were praying just before I came here to bring you up to date. Two of us have been conducting a mission, an evangelistic mission, taking this wonderful good news to the soldiers of Uganda. We have been visiting every barrack of the country. We received the government's permission and the government authority, from who? From the President. What is he? He is a Moslem. The president of Uganda is a Moslem, General Idi Amin. So, we went trembling in with our vision, in our hearts wondering whether we would ever be permitted to go, and this Moslem man really gave us his 'amen' and he gave us an army jeep to accompany us all around the barracks. And wherever we went all the soldiers Catholic, Moslem, non-religious, they came by order, and I want to tell you they really enjoyed hearing about the love which can put men right. A number of them did respond to the message. It's wonderful.

I remember a commander, a Moslem commanding officer who came after we had spoken with tears in his eyes, a staunch Moslem and he said to us, "I have never heard anything like this. Would you be willing to come again each month?" We said, "We can't. We can't come each month, we can't even come every six months. The demands on the team are so many, we may not be here again until perhaps another year." You know what he said, "We are going to ask the authorities, to ask your team to put the armed forces on your program each year." Pray that that permission may be granted, they are hungry.

I am not ashamed of the good news for it is the power of God unto salvation for anyone who believes. And I want to finish here by saying, you realise you are a debtor? Do you know the kind of debt you owe? Do you

know who made you a debt? It is the cross which makes us all debtors. If God loved like that then you and I are debtors. You can't run away from it unless you run away from yourself. If you did not see the vision then ask the Holy Spirit to put the anointing grace on your eyes that you may see for it is exciting. You know the reason why I am a bit excited, it's because when He met me I was a broken up young man, completely given to over drinking, an agnostic, wondering in empty circles of life at the age of 19, and He ended that emptiness and He met me through another young African who had the fire of God in his heart having accepted the Lord three hours before he met me. And God fired that young fellow to share what he had. You may say it wasn't much, much? What do you mean? He had Christ and when you have Christ you have got complete Christ.

It always makes me rather angry when I hear Christians say they have a half Christ. Once you have Christ you have the whole Christ, the only difference is that because we are hard and rebellious we hinder the presence, but we don't have a half Christ we have a whole. That young African helped me see. He was a debtor that afternoon to his friend. Are you a debtor? And are you paying your debt by sharing the love of God with other people? In your own words, I mean, we don't have to go long sentences because love is not words, love came through a person.

So, may God bless you as you expose your life to Jesus Christ and as you participate in the world ministry of making men and women free starting in America because America is a mission field. Here you have got your broken men and women, you have got people messed up, you have got lonely people, you've got embittered people, therefore, the message is just relevant here in this locality as it is relevant in my country Uganda, and you are the apostles all of you here. Every christian is a missionary, a

debtor, may God help you and bless you as you pray for us and particularly as you begin to share right here. Even in a congregation at Kenmoore Presbyterian Church, there can be lonely people in the congregation, it is not a strange thing at all. There can be broken-hearted people in the church, homes break in a church because we are human and sinful, we need that fresh touch of God.

May God bless you. Let us pray.

Prayer: Oh God, thank you that you have brought us into this new relationship by faith, thank you that in Jesus Christ we see Him in whom men and women can be rescued from death and brought into life, from darkness into light, from emptiness into fullness. Oh Lord thank you for this wonderful message of life which you brought to us. Now bless these precious people in this lovely church that wherever they are in their homes, in their business, in the schools, each and everyone may know and hear the spirit saying, "You are a debtor, a debtor for Jesus died for these people."

Amen.