

## A SECRET TO VITALITY

Romans 1:13-17

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March 5, 2017

Several weeks ago, Becky was on the internet reading about food supplements, and I leaned over her shoulder. I noticed a word used often on such websites. It's the word "vitality." It's one of those words mentioned a lot for describing the kind of life most people are looking for. Here are some common words that describe someone whose life possesses vitality: liveliness, life, energy, spirit, vivacity, exuberance, buoyancy, bounce, zest, sparkle, dynamism, passion, fire, and vigor. On the other side of the spectrum of vitality, antonyms are weariness, listlessness, lifelessness, gloom, and melancholy. I, for one, prefer to live a life marked by vitality, regardless of the circumstances that surround me, because I have good reason to. I know that God loves me! He's not embarrassed by me. Jesus came, died and rose again from the grave to forgive me and to change my life here on earth so that I'm prepared to enjoy eternity with Him. Therefore, regardless what comes, life is good!

But I have noticed that most people around me don't share that characteristic when sad or bad things happen. They struggle to cope with life's challenges, and for them vitality is missing. For instance, two weeks ago, I lost another one of my classmates from high school. There were only sixty-eight in my class. I didn't know Jesus then, and to my knowledge none of my classmates did. At present, I know of no other Christian from my class. None of them have demonstrated the hope, confidence, optimism, and courage of living today, because they don't know what is going to happen when this life is over. I'm not saying that they are all depressed, because they are not. Several are really fun and creative. But when a serious loss hits, such as a friend dying, they sorrow and grieve as those who have no hope. In my discussions with them, I find that most are finishing out their lives trying to ignore their own mortality, because it is unpleasant for them to think about it. Thus, when one comrade hits the dust, it's another reminder of what appears to them to be the futility of life.

Listen to just one of the dozen or more responses I have received in response to the loss of our latest comrade.

This is such a terrible stage of life. I hate it, frankly. After losing parents, you start losing other stars in your constellation, people who helped define you and your life, even famous people like Mary Tyler Moore or David Bowie, who you didn't realize occupied a spot in your constellation until they go dark. Then you start losing old friends.

Those are the words of a dear friend of mine whose fifty years of life post high school are like a drifting sail boat with no direction or port of call. I ache for him and so many others here in Grants Pass that I come in casual contact with, because they are living lives that are aimless and pointless.

And they don't have to be that way! They certainly were not for the Apostle Paul. Talk about vitality, passion, and fire, whether in jail, bobbing around in the ocean as a result of a shipwreck, or sitting at the dinner table of persons of political power. He had a few down days and trials to work through, but he was rarely down for long. He was vibrant.

At the time he penned this letter to the church at Rome, I estimate that Paul was sixty years old. He had maybe five to eight years left to live before he would be martyred for his faith. But he faced those years with enthusiasm, high energy, and hope, because he knew that as He walked with Jesus, those years would be some of the most productive of his life! He had no anxiety about living or dying. He continually looked ahead to new mission fields, places, and people who had never heard of Jesus. His next goal was to go to Rome, with plans to make that his headquarters from which he would reach out to Spain. For Paul, every day meant another opportunity to serve Jesus by telling others about the life he had found and the life they could have forever with Jesus!

When Paul died, he died with the heart of a teenager. Contrast that to some teenagers who are living today, whose lives reflect more dead men walking with no real sense of excitement for today or tomorrow. Paul was old, but he still had the fires burning hot for life. What was it that kept him young and drove him? What was at the center of living a meaningful life? Beginning

with **Romans 1:13**, we will see the motor that propelled this man's life. As we read this text, notice the words and expressions that expose Paul's heart for adventure and living with a purpose.

**<sup>13</sup>I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that often I have planned to come to you (and have been prevented so far) [a hint of disappointment!] so that I may obtain some fruit among you also, even as among the rest of the gentiles. <sup>14</sup>I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. <sup>15</sup>So, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. <sup>16</sup>For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.**

In these first sixteen verses of **Romans 1**, Paul is introducing what will prove to be the major theme of this book, the message of the Gospel and its all-important purpose for humanity. Paul uses three terms to describe his attitude toward his call to preach the gospel. In **verse 14**, he states he feels obligated. I believe he feels that way because of God's great mercy shown him. Paul feels obligated to others to tell them the truth that God has provided for them a way out.

In **verse 15**, his attitude is one of eagerness. There is no time to waste. He won't live forever, and he wants to give all he has that others might know and experience the life transforming power of the Gospel.

Then in **verse 16**, he states it in the negative, "**I am not ashamed**" of the message of the Gospel. Or to state it positively, Paul is saying, "I'm thrilled by the Gospel. I take great pleasure in the Gospel. I'm enchanted with the

Gospel. In no way is he embarrassed by the truth of the Gospel because first and foremost it led him to Jesus who has radically transformed his life.

So beginning with **verse 13**, Paul reveals the message that moved the apostle to fulfill his mission in life, to preach the Gospel. We see right away that Paul had gotten word that there was a misunderstanding about his lack of interest in the Roman Christians. They had heard of Paul and his ventures throughout Asia Minor and Greece, but there was no hint to the Roman Christians that he was interested at all in coming to them. They may have been thinking, “If this apostle really loved us and cared about us, why hasn’t he come to visit us sooner?” So, lest there be any more doubt that Paul’s love for them was genuine, he clearly spelled out why he had not yet come. Paul says, in **verse 13**:

**And I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that often I have planned to come to you (and have been prevented thus far) in order that I might obtain some fruit among you also, even as among the rest of the gentiles.**

Paul tells them, ‘Look, I haven’t come sooner, not because I didn’t want to, not because I wasn’t eager to, not because I was ashamed of the gospel, but rather because I was prevented from coming. I prayed about coming, (remember, he said that back in **verse 10**) but God said, ‘Not yet.’”

In **verse 14**, Paul reveals that the Gospel has so moved this former Jewish Pharisee that he held no prejudices against anyone, including the Greek, the barbarian, the wise, and the fool. The message of the gospel was universal in scope. It was for all people. In Paul’s day, these terms, “**Greeks**,” “**barbarians**,” “**wise**,” and “**foolish**” encompassed the standard manner of describing all races and classes of people in the Greek world. The Greek people spoke of anyone who did not speak the Greek language as a “**barbarian**.” “**Wise**” and “**foolish**” placed people into intellectual classes.

Again, I remind you that our readers are already Christians, and Paul still wants to preach the Gospel to them. Why? Because as he will show us

throughout **Romans**, the Gospel has much more to do with life than the initial step of trusting Christ and being born again. It is Paul's intention to educate those who are already in the boat of Christianity that they have a mission to get the message out to all people.

In **verse 16**, Paul tells us another reason he is so moved by the gospel. It is because there is nothing in its message or associated with it to cause shame and prevent him from proclaiming it.

Typically, there would have been two possible reasons for Paul to be embarrassed by the Gospel. The first could come from the One with whom it was associated. Jesus was known to have been a poor Jewish carpenter who was crucified as a criminal. Who in their right mind would want to be associated with that man, his message, or what He stood for? No one. You see, back then it was just like today--"it's not what you know but who you know that really counts." If you wanted someone to buy your product, whether it was an underarm deodorant or a brand of shoe or clothing line, you probably would not have wanted Jesus' name, a Jewish criminal, associated with your brand.

If you had wanted people to consider you intellectually brilliant, you would have wanted others to know your connections with first century philosophers such as Chrysostom or Plutarch, not some unschooled Jewish construction worker. So, Paul had to state right up front, that he wasn't ashamed or embarrassed in any way to be identified with a crucified Jewish carpenter. Paul was not ashamed or embarrassed in the slightest by the One upon whose life and work the Gospel is based.

Secondly, the Romans learned that they were powerless to change the stubborn, hostile, selfish, hateful hearts of people. We will find that Paul admits that simply having and knowing the Law against covetousness not only did not enable him to quit being covetous, but the Law stirred up and highlighted his powerlessness to uproot jealousy and covetousness from his heart. Paul knew that laws won't change people, because laws don't change the heart. If you are going to change people, you must change their hearts.

You are not going to change the morality of the people of a country by making the Ten Commandments the moral laws of the land. That didn't work

during the four-hundred year period in the Old Testament known as the period of the Judges, and it certainly won't transform the moral fiber of our country. The answer is not making moral laws. The only thing that can transform a person's moral life is something that has the power to transform the heart of the individual. And Paul knew from personal experience that the only thing that could do that was coming face to face with Jesus and the gospel, because he knew that the Gospel of Jesus Christ contained the power of God to make all who believe whole.

This is what Paul is driving at when he speaks of the Gospel as being the **"power of God for salvation."** The term **"salvation,"** as used in the book of **Romans** as well as throughout the Bible, is a broad concept. Depending upon the context, the term is used four different ways.

The first use of the term **"salvation"** points to that moment in time when a person trusts Christ as their Savior. Some refer to it as being born again. Theologians call it the moment of regeneration. It is the initial saving point in a Christian's life. Here are two passages where it is used in this manner.

**Romans 10:9-10, <sup>9</sup>That if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; <sup>10</sup>for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.**

In **2 Corinthians 6:2**, Paul quotes from **Isaiah** in the Old Testament. **"For He says, 'At the acceptable time I listened to you, and on the day of salvation I helped you.' Behold now in the acceptable time, behold now is the day of salvation."**

As you see, this use of salvation points to a specific moment in time.

The second use of the term **"salvation"** points to the ongoing process of life transformation that takes place while we are living out our days here on earth.

Theologians call this sanctification. This subject is what the core chapters of **Romans 3-8** concern. Here is an example of salvation being used in this manner. In **Philippians 2:12**, Paul is writing to people who are already saved. He is now pointing to the attitude they should have toward living for Christ today. He says, “<sup>12</sup>**So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling.**” Or more literally, “Keep it up, knowing that your transformed life here on earth depends upon it. Keep seeking Jesus and living in dependence upon Him that you might enjoy his transforming power in your life.”

The third use of the term “**salvation**” refers to the culmination of the process of being saved. You have finally arrived in heaven. You are not only with Christ, but Christ’s work of bringing you to full maturity is complete. This is what theologians call “**glorification**,” or the “**hope of glory**.” In **1Thessalonians 5:8-9**, “**salvation**” is used this way. Notice how the context refers to that which is future, or something to come. “**But since we are of the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation. For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.**” Can you see this is a future event? It refers to something these saved Christians can expect in the future.

In this next passage, the Apostle Peter is writing to believers. Again, the context is looking at something in the future. We read in **I Peter 1:5**, “**Who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.**” And then further down in **verse 9** he adds, “**Obtaining as the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.**”

So, when you read in Scripture, the term “**salvation**,” it can refer to the initial coming to faith in Christ, to the ongoing process of spiritual growth you experience while you walk with Christ here on earth, or finally, to the end product of your salvation--that one day you will be with Jesus in heaven and His work in transforming your life will be complete.

There is one final use of this term “**salvation**” in the New Testament. And this is the way it is used in our passage. The term salvation can be used to speak of the whole process of being saved, from the initial trusting of Jesus, to

the growth process here on earth, to the final piece of when we are in glory with Jesus, and his work in making us like himself is finished. Here are two other places this term is used in this manner. **Acts 4:12**, “**And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.**” And **2 Thessalonians 2:13**, “**But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth.**”

Paul is saying here that he is not ashamed of the Gospel; because from the beginning to the end, the Gospel is the only solution to the problem each of us face with sin and weaknesses and failure. It is the origin and difference maker that leads to vitality in our everyday lives, regardless of losses, setbacks, and sudden unwanted and undesirable events. This whole process, the Gospel, is founded upon what Christ has already done for us by His death and resurrection. Hence, it is critical that we first understand what Jesus has already accomplished for us and then believe it. Because when you understand it and show that you believe it by making it the lens through which you view yourself and others and make daily decisions, it will transform who you are.

Last week, our Bill Yehle stopped me to tell me what a difference the Gospel has been making in his life. For the first time, he really understands it. And each day he recites some of the truths of gospel that he needs to remember, and asks the Lord to help him see and live life that day by these truths. As a result, he told me that his thinking and attitudes about things have changed, how he treats people has changed, and how he invests his time each day has changed because of understanding, believing, and living the Gospel.

Bill is a living example of what Paul is talking about here concerning the Gospel as the power of God for salvation. The gospel is the power of God to completely restore a human being, not just to a pre-Fall condition, but to something even better! Paul is not ashamed to preach the Gospel cure. It is the power to change a stubborn, hostile, self-centered, hateful heart into one of serving others, being a peacemaker and a lover. It is the basis for turning a life of chaos and meaninglessness into a life of order, contentment in all things, hope, and purpose. In short, it is the power to make you whole! It is the secret to vitality.

In the interest of time, we are going to have to stop here, and look at **verse 17** next time. So, as it concerns your outlines, we will be holding off on point 3 and move to a point of personal application and an assignment.

We have been talking about growing in Christ, based on the gospel, so that we will experience true gospel-based vitality. So, let's ask and answer the following question: What is the secret to growth and vitality in the Christian life?

First, we must realize that all transformation of a life takes place over time. It is not something done overnight. It is a process. So, what is the process that leads to Gospel-powered transformation? It's simple: Keep seeking to learn more about Jesus and what He has already done in your life.

Many think that when Jesus died, all that He did for us was to get our sins forgiven and punch our ticket to heaven. But **Romans** will expose you to what Paul later writes about in another letter, that you now possess present riches that will bring more vitality, growth, confidence, and purpose than you ever imagined. Sadly, because of ignorance, most Christians have never experienced the benefits of these riches, because they have never learned about them. If you want to learn about what Christ has done and how it matters, you need to keep reading your Bible daily and asking God to teach you as you do, so that you can experience the transforming power of the Gospel in your life, like Bill Yehle.

So here's your assignment, for the next six weeks, if you want to get the most out of our study of this book, invest some time reading ahead and thinking deeply about what Paul has coming up next. I'll give you some help. In **Romans 1:18-3:20**, Paul lays out for you the problem of sin. His purpose is to explain why no human being has a snowball's chance in hell of ever being saved or having his life transformed based on his/her own merit or abilities. Left to himself, every human being is doomed to live a meaningless life here on earth, headed to everlasting separation from God--hell. This is quite a problem, wouldn't you say?

In **Romans 3:21-8:39**, Paul lays out the solution to sin. The "soulution" is the Gospel, properly understood and applied to life. Read these passages over and

over, praying as you do. Keep a pen and paper nearby. Note the questions and problems you have with what you are reading. Write down those things that surprise you. Ask the Spirit of God to instruct you and to help you understand. When we return to **Romans**, you will be ready for the ride of your life!