

**Circuit song festival 11 September 2016, Moorleigh**  
**Romans 1 v 16 - For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the**  
**power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes**  
**Denn ich schäme mich des Evangeliums von Christus nicht; denn es**  
**ist eine Kraft Gottes, die da selig macht alle, die daran glauben**

Dear sisters and brothers,

**The power of God**

I hold in my hand a little book - about the same size as my hand. It fits into my back pocket, easily slides into the car's glove compartment without taking much space. But that which is between these covers has changed the world, and right at this moment is changing the world.

On this day (today!) more than a billion people will be hearing passages from this book in more than 1334 different languages. I estimate that at least two hundred thousand will on this day be hearing it for the very first time.

Between these two covers we find what Paul calls "the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes".

When Paul wrote these lines almost 2000 years ago, this book did not exist yet. In fact, his own letters would later form a significant portion of this book, this letter to the Romans being the climax of his theological reflection on this power of God.

**The unique position of Paul**

By the time that Paul wrote these words, he had been a Christian for about twenty years. For ten years he had been travelling through parts of Asia and Europe, visiting towns and cities in the Greek speaking parts of the Roman empire. Wherever he came he would tell the story of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. In most cases, in most towns, this would be the first time that the people heard the message. Many laughed him off as just another idiot with strange ideas. Others would see him as a threat to their religion and warn against him. Yet others would realise that he was a threat to national security, undermining the authority of the emperor, who was worshipped as Kyrios, Lord, God, throughout the Roman empire.

As a result, countless times Paul had to hastily flee from towns after spending

a few days of sharing this message of Jesus. Quite a few times he was forcefully removed, twice even executed by stoning and left for dead. And, oh so many times, he ended up in prison, locked away under circumstances that today would be described as "crime against humanity".

The amazing thing is that in all these circumstances Paul time and again witnessed the life transforming power of the gospel. He could tell stories of brutal prison wardens, who ended up personally washing and cleansing his wounds. He could tell of hardened Roman officers who had become best friends and brothers. He could tell of masters and slaves that ended up forming the nucleus of new congregations, where slaves could become elders.

When Paul calls this gospel "power of God" he knew what he was speaking about. This message was indeed dynamite! (The Greek word used in Romans 1 is DYNAMIS)

For him it all started off when Paul himself fell "victim" to this dynamite. When Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus, he was literally blown off his feet. All his convictions, life goals and ideals were torn apart, blown up by this dynamite, and a changed human being entered Damascus. "The old has gone, the new has come" he would later write in another letter (2 Cor 5,17) After a long period of learning, listening, guidance from other Christians Paul then was sent out to share this dynamite, this life changing message with the people.

Now, in this letter, he expresses his wish to also go to Rome, the heart of the Roman Empire, the centre of Caesar worship. "I am ready and eager to come to Rome and preach the gospel there" he writes in v14,15.

Of course it is dangerous, of course again he will be seen as undermining state authority. Of course he will be seen as a threat by the large Jewish community living in Rome. But he is eager to go - because he knows that this Dynamite will transform the people in the heart of the empire!

**The Power is still active - but stored away?**

Two thousand years have since lapsed. The Roman empire is long gone. As are many, many nations and kingdoms since then. The letters of Paul, together with the gospels and some other writings, have been compiled into this little booklet, and millions, millions of people have been transformed when reading in it, hearing from it, sharing in it.

Somehow, however, it seems that we have lost the excitement about this

message. Over the last few years I have travelled to Europe a few times, visited cities where more than 90% of the population are non Christians, many never having heard the gospel. Although in many of these cities the people speak German, and I can communicate with them without problems, not once did I share the gospel with any one, except in Church services or Church events. I have no problems sharing about South Africa and our issues and challenges. But the dynamite of the Gospel is locked away, stays hidden between the covers of this book.

Why is that? It seems as if the excitement about this Power of God is gone. I pray that the Holy Spirit will work in me, will create a new excitement about this power of the gospel, this message that transforms lives, so that I will start sharing it again.

I pray that Christians around me will become excited again - not to fight other Christians and argue as to who's dynamite is the best, but to join other Christians in spreading this life-transforming message also in our country.

Not everybody is called to be a Paul. But each of us Christians is challenged to live out the life-transforming gospel in our Family, at work, in our community. The way in which we interact with another is the most powerful messenger. The reason why the gospel spread so rapidly during the first few decades was not only due to preachers like Paul, but mainly due to changed lives of new Christians that got the attention of their fellow human beings.

The power of God is ready to transform the lives of criminals and murderers, ready to stop them in their track and give them new purpose in life. It is ready to transform the lives of corrupt politicians and turn them into public servants. It is ready to transform me and you and make us living examples of Christ's love and care.

Lord, help me not to be ashamed to be a witness to this power. Make me excited in stead, so that the life transforming Power of God can change many, many more!

Amen

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