

Power

- What comes to mind when you think of **POWER**?
 - when I was a teenager in the early 1980's the answer would have had something to do **nuclear weapons**; height of the Cold War; Greenham Common; terror of nuclear winter; the madness of **Mutually Assured Destruction!**
 - *power was to do with vast destruction, fear;*
 - still have some of that in the way countries brandish power: eg America, a "super-power", American task-force, Gulf War, response to Sept 11th in Afghanistan, aircraft carriers, etc?
 - though we are also all too painfully aware of the limits of such power, given the current situation in Iraq...
- But there are **other kinds of power too**:
 - power of electricity, batteries, nuclear power stations, gas, etc
 - power of ideas to influence the world: communism, conservatism, racism...
- *Power that people have on one another - sometimes for ill, sometimes for good:*
 - the power parents have to influence not only the immediate behaviour of their offspring but also their characters in the long term!
 - the power a manager or boss at work can wield over an employee
 - or the power, the ability some people have to defuse tension, bring peace, or joy, or hope into difficult situations.
- Power is a wide concept, a difficult word to pin down!
 - I suppose it all centres on the ability to make things happen!
 - *Power: "the capacity or ability to direct or influence the behaviour of others or the course of events" (OED)*

The Power of the Gospel

- Paul talks about **power, God's power**, in v.16:
 - and what is that power? **The Gospel**
 - the gospel, the "euangelion", the good news of Jesus Christ, crucified and risen....
 - this is Paul's grand theme throughout the letter - and the reason we'll be studying Romans through till near the end of the year
 - to grapple with God's power, the gospel message, in the fullest and most focused exposition of it in the Scriptures

Introduction to Romans

- Paul writing an introduction to himself to a church he hopes to work in partnership with:
 - see v.15, plans to come visit, and v.13, his past hopes for a visit
 - and in more detail in chapter 15...
 - *(15:23) But now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions, and since I have been longing for many years to see you, (15:24) I plan to do so when I go to Spain. I hope to visit you while passing through and to have you assist me on my journey there, after I have enjoyed your company for a while.*
- He is establishing common ground, and affirming shared priorities:
 - **like the blurb on the back of a book to tell you who the author is and why he or she has written this book;**
 - so precis of the gospel in vs.1-6...
 - he is properly a servant/slave, he is an apostle, he has been set apart for this kingdom work of proclaiming **God's** gospel
 - the gospel which was promised from of old in Scripture, ie always God's plan
 - focus of gospel, of God's plan, is Jesus Christ, fully human and also divine
 - through whom comes grace and call to pass grace to others
 - **all this** is the gospel we share in common!!

- After his digression into the core of the gospel (!), he comes back to introducing himself (vs.7ff):
 - and talking about his relationship with them - not met, prays for, thankful for them, bound together in Jesus Christ!
 - and his desire is to strengthen them, build them up in their understanding of, their appreciation of, their living in that relationship with Jesus Christ...
 - and to do that he is, v.15, eager to preach the gospel also to you who are at Rome...
- And here we come to our focus for this morning:
 - Paul's focus is the gospel, his whole letter - our book of Romans - is about the gospel

Why

- because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes!

The Power of the Gospel

- This is actually quite a startling statement about the gospel, and about the Cross which is the central point of the gospel as we shall see as we work through Romans
- *the gospel (rooted in the Cross) is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes*
- When we talk about God's power, we tend to think in terms of wind/waves/nature:
 - akin to the atom bomb or weapons of war images we started with - **raw power**
- That aspect of God's power is not what is in mind here.

Analogy: Focused Power

- welding torch, or even a gas cooker ring: there is power latent in the propane or butane or oxy-acetylene, but it needs applied, focused, directed to be useful
- God's power is applied through the cross to achieve a specific purpose:
 - purpose is salvation of all who believe;
 - notice: *"the gospel; IT is God's power..."*
 - nothing else mediates God's power to save, only the gospel/Cross
 - if you like, the cooker only has one ring!
- This is unpopular today, but clear in Scripture:
 - Muslims won't be saved, Buddhists won't be saved, atheists won't be saved, people's goodness won't save them, people's religious observance won't save them;
 - only those who believe, who place their trust in the Christ who died on the Cross for them, they alone will be saved.
- The other aspect of this statement worth highlighting here is that the achievement of the goal God has in mind (salvation) requires power!
 - it is hard to save people;
 - we are stuck deep in the mud of sin;
 - story: *Whithaugh Park, kid stuck in mud by swimming pool...*
 - required power of several people to get him out; we require power to get us out!
 - this is actually why the message of the Cross is so harsh in its uniqueness; no other way will save since no other has the power to conquer Satan, to break the power of death; no one else was ever both human and perfect, able to bear God's righteous judgement effectively on our behalf!

Power that Transforms

- Paul talking about his motivation in life, his purpose:
 - serves God with his whole heart (v.9), and prays continually
 - longs to help in seeing lives transformed, strengthened; (v.11-13)
 - senses an element of compulsion to preach this gospel (v.14,15)
 - is not ashamed of the gospel, but rather wears it proudly and openly! (v.16)
- In other words, the Cross has power to shape a life

- Paul's life is Cross shaped, gospel focused:
 - himself saved through what Jesus has done on the Cross, he follows the example of a Lord who gave up everything for others that they might know God through that self-same Cross!
- Are our lives Cross-shaped, Cross-inspired, Cross-empowered?
 - *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. (Rom 1:16)*