

# Sermon Text for January 8, 2017

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

## *Judges 7:2-8, Romans 1:16-17*

### “Living by faith”

We are back into the book of Romans as we have left 2016 behind and have renewed our covenant before the Lord for 2017 with a dedication to spend 5 minutes in prayer every day and hopefully we are following along in the 150 Day Challenge where we are making our way through the Psalms. Every single one of us has an opportunity to increase our understanding of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. In the same way, every single one of us has an opportunity to increase our faith. Faith, we start today to get into some terms that we toss around and they almost mean nothing to us because we use them so frequently. Today we look at that term faith.

Today we find the Apostle Paul in the letter to the Romans telling us, encouraging us, at times even chastising us for not recognizing what it takes to live lives of faith. He tells us that we are not to be ashamed of the Gospel for it is the power of salvation for those who have faith. As a Christian you can't help but get focused and look forward to what lies ahead in our lives when you read these verses in Romans.

Today on this second Sunday of this new year we realize the ultimate sacrifice that Jesus made for us. He was not ashamed of us, in spite of our sinfulness. Our lives, our faith ought to reflect that we are not ashamed of him and that it is for Jesus Christ that we live and die, and nothing, absolutely nothing should be on the same level as Christ is in our lives. I pray we will leave the church today completely aware of what it means to live by faith and renew our dedication to live in such a way.

There are so many things in our lives of which we can be ashamed. Yesterday at our officer training we read the verses in I Timothy which go through the prerequisites of what it takes to be an elder and a deacon and we once again fully realized that not a single one of us ever lives up to that list. We all fall short and it is only by the grace of God, and not by our ability or might are we able to perform the responsibilities which you the congregation have entrusted the elected officers to do.

We may have certain skeletons in our closet that we are afraid might come out in the open. We may have current sin that we just can't get rid of and we live afraid of getting caught or just unsure of how to deal with this sin. We may be ashamed of our

tepid, luke-warm faith that we are trying to bolster and strengthen. If people only knew how we truly are struggling. We should be ashamed of all these things and sometimes shame and guilt go a long way to righting the wrong situation.

But Paul tells us that there is one thing of which we should never be afraid or ashamed. For I am not ashamed of the Gospel, he begins these verses. He faced many situations where it would have been easier to turn around and turn his back to the Gospel. In Acts 17:32 after he preached we read that people scoffed, they thought that it was ridiculous to believe in Jesus Christ. I Corinthians 1:23 we read about Paul who states that to the Jews the Gospel is a stumbling block and to the Gentiles it is foolishness. It is folly to believe in a crucified and resurrected Christ. If there are enough people believing that one can easily fall into being ashamed of the Gospel.

But Paul states that he is not ashamed of the Gospel because it is the power of salvation for those who have faith. Our faith gives us a certain power that is found in our salvation through God. If you can be assured of that then from that everything else should follow. Because we are not ashamed of the Gospel then we ought to live our lives as a reflection of that Gospel, or as Paul states in righteousness. If we live our lives in faith then righteousness ought to follow. Our actions ought to be dictated by our faith.

A perfect example of that is seen in James 2 where we read that faith without works is dead. You can believe in God, you can say that you believe in God but unless you follow that up with acts that are consonant with your belief, acts of righteousness, then your faith is dead. Isn't it nice that we have also studied James and we see that our acts are not a response for us to try to win our salvation but rather a response of gratitude for our salvation.

Hebrews 11:1 tells us that faith is the assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things not seen. Isn't that foolish and silly? We are supposed to live our lives based upon faith, a principle that tells us to live by what we hope will happen but we really have no proof by which to convince others. How shameful. How in the world can God expect us to believe that? Ask Ken and Beth Neumann, Beth had a heart attack this past week. She is young, very young, there is no history in her family, it was not what they were planning on, but she was in the right place and the right time in order to be treated and taken care of by the awesome staff at LGH.

So, it wasn't her faith that saved her, but having come through that experience, talk to Ken and Beth and see what has become of their faith, how much stronger they are

today in turning things over to God because they realize, as all of us should realize, that ultimately it is up to God. It takes a certain amount of faith to offer your life over to God because any day, not to sound trite, but any day we may have a heart attack and come face to face with the realization that my life is not up to me. I'm trying to avoid all of us having to have a heart attack to come to that realization, Paul is trying to give us an opportunity to say: I will live by faith and turn my life over to the Lord.

But if we are not ashamed to live that way, in faith, then we will be different, we will stand out. I don't mean we are called to roadside evangelism but I do mean that we are to be confident in Christ which will lead us to righteous living and not being ashamed of the Gospel. You see all if it is tied together. It is not a buffet where you can pick and choose your religious devotion for the day. In our covenant renewal service we said: we will be all or we will be nothing.

If we are not to be ashamed of the Gospel because it is the power of salvation for those who have faith, and if our faith should dictate how we live our lives and those lives ought to be lives of righteousness, then what does our faith tell us about certain real life situations that we are faced with daily?

In our first Scripture we read about Gideon, a man who again lived according to his faith. Gideon's story serves as a reminder to us that the ones with the most soldiers don't always win, but rather the one who gives God the glory for victory does. I'm comfortable in taking that lesson metaphorically. But Gideon with 300 men and armed with pots and trumpets sent 120,000 men running to the hillsides. It just doesn't make sense. But after it was all said and done Gideon tells his troops and the people of Israel, "I will not rule over you, my son will not rule over you, the Lord will rule over you." What it took Gideon to get to 300 troops was an act of faith and it was risky. But the act of faith comes from knowing that God will be the one who rules over us and when we allow God to rule over us we can even allow God to direct us in ways that seem contrary to common sense.

Do not be ashamed of the Gospel or what the Gospel may tell you to do even if at times it is folly and ridiculous. Because it is there where the power of God resides and our salvation finds its meaning and demands that we live by faith. Amen.