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August 4, 2019
Sermon Text: Romans 1:16-17
Series: Church: A Disciple-Making Community
Week 1: Setting Our Sights

Introduction:

I started doing youth ministry in 1997 and that same year a dating book was written called *I Kissed Dating Goodbye*. It made quite a splash in Christian circles as it advocated for intentional courtship aimed at marriage instead of commonplace dating which often has no aim in view. The author of this book is named Joshua Harris and he went on to write other books and serve in ministry and pastor a church. About two years ago he apologized for writing his first book for some reasons that were legitimate and some that weren't. This week he announced that he and his wife are getting a divorce and that he no longer considers himself a Christian. He is quoted as saying "By all the measurements that I have for defining a Christian, I am not a Christian...". This wasn't some theologically liberal pastor, but actually a very conservative one. He was someone that took his faith very serious, serious enough to write several books and serve in full time vocational ministry. But this is where he is now and by the grace of God, he will repent and be caught up in the God's grace once again.

I have no desire to try to diagnose his faith failure or falling away, but rather see how this is a warning to us. That we must have an active faith and keep our sights set on growing in deep enjoyment of God through Christ and bearing the fruit of that relationship.

Let's read our text – Romans 1:16-17

One theologian that finished well was Francis Schaeffer, and a time of re-evaluating everything about what he believed was sparked by this passage and what he described as a lack of power, or fruitfulness, in the life of the average Bible-believing Christian and a lack of enjoyment in their relationship with God through Christ. Retired pastor, John Piper says it this way, "There are only two ultimate concerns in life. One is how to display God in our lives. The other is how to be happy in God forever."

Over the past few months our church leadership has been praying, discussing, planning, and preparing to move forward with a much more strategic and focused discipleship pathway. At the heart of all of that is this great desire to see Christ-followers that call Elmont their home grow in their enjoyment of God in their lives and grow in displaying the power of God to the world. That we would never be satisfied with keeping a few rules of cultural Christianity, but never truly enjoy Jesus. That our faith would never be tied to being politically obnoxious on social media, but rather transformed to love our enemies and pray for God to transform their hearts. That words like discipleship would never seem dry or boring, but always be linked to phrases like “joyful in God” and “power of God”. As the Church we do not get to define what we will be about. That has already been defined for us in the Scriptures. We are a disciple-making community, and we decide whether we are going to be obedient or disobedient to that call. Over the next few weeks we will look at different parts of what it means to be a disciple-making community, and today is a level-set kind of day where we understand that experiencing enjoyment in God and displaying the power of God is our aim as a community of Christ-followers. And we need to understand that we cannot see that happen as a community unless each of us makes that our aim as individual Christ-followers.

Romans begins with this incredible statement about the gospel – it is power to make us eternally joyful in God (that’s salvation) and how it displays the righteousness of God to all of creation through our faith, and the rest of the book of Romans builds on this truth. The words “believe” and “revealed” are continuous action verbs, so we could read these verses as saying, “The gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who continues to believe, because in that gospel the righteousness of God continues to be revealed.”

As Christ-followers each of us should...

- **Display the power of God** – this means experiencing fruitfulness in our lives that is consistent with transformation. And having been transformed and now bearing fruit (of the Spirit) our lives and words impact others to salvation and transformation.

- **Deeply enjoy God** – this means that we are defined by a new identity of being loved, chosen, and welcomed by a heavenly Father and pursuing Him with all our grace-enabled strength. We are not defined by a few rules of things we don't do, and never define others by our rules.

Francis Schaeffer describes two things that must happen if we are going to experience power and enjoyment.

We do this by growing in...

- **Purity**
 - **In our teaching** – we must be Biblical and not allow the culture to creep in and soften where the Word is severe, nor be severe where the Word is soft (allows for personal conviction). We must raise up a generation of Bible readers, not just Bible quoters. It is not enough to be a people that believe the Bible, we must be a people that read the Bible.
 - **In our lives** – purity isn't as much about the rules we like and keep externally, but about the condition of our heart internally. There are definitely things we should keep away from, but its more about what we are running towards, than what we are running from. Romans 14:17 tells us that, *"For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit."*
 - **In our church** – those that teach false things and pursue blatantly sinful things should be held accountable within the community of the redeemed with the hope and goal of repentance. If we are each pursuing purity in our personal lives, then purity in the body will be the natural result and those who seek to lead others away from the Truth will be much more obvious.

In any of these areas, compromising on purity will directly diminish the power of God on display in our lives and church and our personal enjoyment of God through Christ.

- **Love**
 - **Love God enough to be contented** – evidenced by thanksgiving for what He does and gives and even withholds, and trusting Him enough to obey where He chooses to place us in the battle. Loving God is not evidenced by how you sing on Sunday morning, but how thankful you are on

Monday morning. Thankfulness and contentment are great indicators of a heart that is loving and trusting God.

- **Ephesians 5:3-4** – But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but *instead let there be thanksgiving*.
 - **Ephesians 5:20** – *giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,*
 - **Philippians 4:6** – do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication *with thanksgiving* let your requests be made known to God.
 - **Colossians 2:7** – rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, *abounding in thanksgiving*.
 - **Colossians 3:15** – And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. *And be thankful*.
 - **Colossians 4:2** – Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it *with thanksgiving*.
 - **1 Thessalonians 5:18** – *give thanks in all circumstances;* for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.
 - **Romans 1:20** – For although they knew God, *they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him*, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.
- **Love people enough not to envy** – envy is an inward desire that overflows into outward actions. I am loving people better when I neither want what others have in position or possessions that keeps me from rejoicing with them in prosperity and weeping with them in loss. I would never lie not talk disparagingly about another person because of what they have in position or possession. Coveting is a big deal and destroys our capacity to love people in a transformed way.

Here's the great news in all of this. Read Romans 1:16-17. In this great Gospel the power of God for salvation is available to everyone who believes. Everything we need to know, love, and experience God's best were bought on the cross and won in the resurrection. Is the power of God in the gospel transforming you? Are you experiencing the power of God in your life? Are you enjoying God through Christ?