

A PASTORAL CHARGE FROM ROMANS 1:16
AT THE INSTALLATION/ORDINATION OF NICK ROEN
AS A PASTOR AT SOJOURNERS CHURCH

June 15, 2015

Jason S. DeRouchie, PhD

Associate Professor of Old Testament and Biblical Theology
Bethlehem College & Seminary

I am honored and delighted that Pastor Nick requested that I provide a personal charge to him on this morning of his installation and ordination as a pastor at Sojourners Church. Paul urged Timothy to “not be hasty in the laying on of hands” (1 Tim 5:22), but the elders of Sojourners have carefully interviewed and prayerfully examined Nick and affirmed his calling to this pastoral role. My prayer this morning as I stand affirming their evaluation is that as the elders lay their hands upon you, God would, as he did with Timothy, grant you a special spiritual gift for this task to which he has called you (2 Tim 1:6).

Pastor Nick, my charge to you this morning is this: *Stay plugged into the power, or the light will not be on!* I ask that you all to open your Bibles to the book of Romans, chapter 1 verse 16. It’s a very familiar text that provides the thesis statement for this entire letter. Paul writes, “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.” Nick, like Paul, you have been set apart for the gospel of God, the good news that God reigns, saves, and satisfies through Jesus, the divine, crucified, and resurrected Messiah.

Nick, my first observation from our passage is that you are a sinner in need of a great savior. You can’t save yourself, and the good news is that there is one who can. I did not simply say that you are one who needed a savior. I said you are one who needs one now and who will need one tomorrow. Salvation for the apostle Paul does not only mean conversion; salvation covers all of life, past, present, and future. Those who have surrendered their lives to Christ as Savior, Sovereign, and Satisfier have been saved, are being saved, and will be saved. Paul says in Ephesians 2:8, “By grace you *have been saved* through faith.” But he asserts in 1 Corinthians 1:18, “The word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who *are being saved* it is the power of God.” Then back in Romans 5:9, he asserts, “Since . . . we have now been justified by his blood, much more *shall we be saved* by him from the wrath of God.” In Philippians 2:12 Paul says that our “salvation” is something that we are to “work out . . . with fear and with trembling.” And in our passage—Romans 1:16—he declares that “the gospel is the power of God for salvation—past, present, and future—to everyone who believes.”

Nick, for you to be a pastor who pushes people to prize the perfections of Christ, you must ever remember that you have been, are being, and will be saved from your own sinfulness, the curse, and the certainty of God's just wrath against sin only through the good news of Jesus. You are not good by yourself. You need his goodness to save you out of your own neediness. God is a just judge, which means he must punish the sinner or choose to pour his wrath on a substitute. In love, Jesus became the substitute, taking upon himself at the cross God's wrath against every sinner who believes. "For our sake [God] made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor 5:21).

Pastor Nick, this world is dark, and there are many enemies against your faith and that of your people. Temptations to compromise are present with every click of the mouse and with every step through the checkout line, with every bill that you pay and every commercial that you watch—temptations. But the potential for dishonoring God with our lives goes even deeper, for "*all things* are from him, through him, and *to* him" (Rom 11:36). All of life is about worship. Even a spoon of oatmeal or a drink of orange juice is about God, for "whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor 10:31). No closets of our lives can be left uncleaned, for every bit of us, every bit of you, is to declare, "There is only one God, and I love him with all" (Deut 6:4–5).

Pride and prejudice, bitterness and blame, laziness and lust, apathy and resentment, doubt and deceit—all these are enemies that Jesus defeated at the cross, and they are to be our enemies. In this broken world filled with broken people, what can rescue a man from pornography's entrapment or preserve a mother's faith through miscarriage? What can reconcile an estranged father and son or overcome the plague of racism or sexism in the soul? What can defeat the arrogance of the human heart or move one into the messy and beautiful world of adoption? What can make a person take the radical step of leaving family, friends, and the comforts of the West to go abroad as a missionary for the fame of God's name? The good news of Jesus Christ alone is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, and it is given without partiality to both Jew and non-Jew. Pastor Nick, may you work closely with the other leaders to make this ministry at Sojourners, every song and every service, all the preaching and all the programming, centered on and saturated with the gospel. If you are not plugged in, the light of Christ will not be on. The power of God that saves you and that will save others in this community is only the gospel. Only when you remember that you are a person who needs to be saved will you be in a position to point others to the savior.

But how does this work? How is it that the gospel is the power to save us past, present, and future?

The power of the cross and resurrection comes to us first through blood-bought *pardon*. For the Christian, every step toward glory is built on the mercy of the cross that God is already 100% for us in Christ. In our walk with God, the only sins that we can conquer are sins that have already been pardoned. You need blood-bought power to pursue holiness. As believers, we do not work to make God for us; rather we rest today, trusting that he is wholly for us already in Jesus. There is power in this kind of blood-bought freedom. “No condemnation now I dread.” We face opposition and confront temptation knowing that in Jesus all authority in heaven and on earth is working for us and is present with us, because wrath has *already* been removed, mercy has *already* been secured, sin has *already* been conquered, hope has *already* been gained, and present power is real. “If God is for us, who can be against us? ³¹He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?” (Rom 8:31–32).

The gospel is the power of God for salvation. Nick, if you need to be saved from pride, creating a ministry focused on the cross will remind you daily of your own sinfulness and neediness and crush all self-exalting boasting. If you struggle with discouragement, as many ministers do, being a pastor or friend who focuses on the cross will remind you regularly of God’s amazing love and therefore will provide the antidote for battling despondency. The cross defeats fear of man, fear of failure, fear of loss, fear of lack, because at the cross the greatest enemy has been defeated and the Victor is our helper forevermore. Being a cross-centered minister will remind you of how God’s wrath-overcoming love conquered your own rebellion and hardness, and it will therefore fuel your love for the broken, the marginalized, and those just plain difficult to love. There will be times when even the people of Sojourners Church will be difficult to love, and in such moments you need power. Pastor Nick, the reality of blood-bought pardon becomes an amazing power for your own salvation and for the salvation of your people. So be a gospel-centered minister.

But the power of the gospel comes also because pardon secures blood-bought *promises*. I am simply reminding you of what you already know. We live between the poles of past grace of pardon and future grace of promise. It wasn’t too long ago that my wife Teresa had to do something she had never done before—write a “good bye” letter to a dear Christian friend in her 40s. She had terminal cancer, four children, and a loving husband, and she was given just a couple of more weeks before she would see Jesus face-to-face. What held her faith strong through her battle was her belief “that [God] exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him” (Heb 11:6), her belief that even through suffering God is on the throne, that Christ is worth her trust, that he had prepared a place for her, and that he would take care of her family when she was gone. This good news, purchased for her in Jesus, was the power that

preserved her through every stage of her salvation up until she entered into glory in the presence of the reigning Son of God where she is today.

What you hope for tomorrow changes who you are today. “[God] has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of corrupt desire” (2 Pet 1:4). Blood-bought promises provide power, and every promise is already Yes in Christ (2 Cor 1:20). We wage war against lust, because “the pure in heart . . . shall see God” (Matt 5:8). We overcome bitterness in our soul and love those who have hurt us, because we are confident in God’s promise, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay” (Rom 12:19). We fight covetousness and nurture contentment, because the Lord says, “I will never leave you nor forsake you” (Heb 13:5). And when we lose our job or face massive loss, we hold fast to the hope “my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus” (Phil 2:19). Finally, when death’s shadow draws near, we declare, “To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Phil 1:21), and “The LORD is my shepherd . . . [and] even though I walk through valley of the shadow of death, I will not fear, for you are with me” (Ps 23:1, 4).

The gospel is God’s power to save—past, present, and future. The gospel is power because of blood-bought *pardon* and blood-bought *promises*. Pastor Nick, in the presence of these leaders and other members of Sojourners Church, I charge you in the name of the resurrected Son of God to stay plugged into his power, so that the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ may shine in your life and into this community, giving hope and help to you and to others. Amen.