

# Share the Gospel

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Date: 19 May 2019

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[ 0 : 00 ] Father, we give you thanks and praise that you know our hearts better than we know our own hearts. And you know how easily we flatter ourselves and deceive ourselves.

And Father, you know how we slightly or maybe even in a very big way turn from some of the very hard things you say to us because it offends our pride.

So, Father, we ask that you would pour the Holy Spirit upon us at this time and grip us with the gospel. And as you grip us with the gospel, may your word come and minister to us at the very deep level of who we are.

And this we ask in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen. Please be seated. I was going to say this earlier, but I forgot.

I thought this is the place that we worship regularly on a Sunday morning at Church of the Messiah. We never, every five weeks, there's a different stage up front. This is the beginning of the stage for the next play.

[ 1 : 03 ] So, Charlie and I and others had to sort of try to figure out how the service was going to work. There was some discussion about pulling the curtain across to hide the stage.

But I wanted to keep the stage as it is because, you know, at the end of the day, Jonathan and Daniel and Daniel aren't being ordained to just like live in a little tiny church ghetto where we're not in the world.

Like, we gather in worship and we gather to receive from Christ and the Father and the Holy Spirit grace. But we do that to live in the world and to share the gospel.

And in some ways, this stage always reminds us that while we're here to worship, we worship amidst cars going by and condos and business and in a very theater where other things have gone on.

And that's the world that we live in to represent Jesus and to proclaim the gospel. So that's why we left the stage as it is. There was a feature article on CBC just a short while ago.

[ 2 : 09 ] It was, I think it was just two months ago, and it was a report. It was covering a report by a major heritage organization in Canada that said that within the next five to ten years, 9,000 churches in Canada will close.

9,000 churches in Canada will close. That's one-third of all churches that own buildings will close. That's their estimate within the next five to ten years.

I just recently became aware of a private set of work about what the attendance is like in the Anglican Church of Canada. We're part of a worldwide Anglican body and a North American-wide body, but we're not part of the Anglican Church of Canada.

But the point is, the statistic is that between 2007 and 2017, the average Sunday attendance in the Anglican Church of Canada dropped by 50% at the same time that the average age in attendance on Sunday morning went up.

In Ottawa, the last time there was a census that talked about religious affiliation, there are now more people in Ottawa who identify themselves as having no religion than there are Protestants in the city of Ottawa.

[ 3 : 25 ] More people who are called nuns, N-O-N-E. More people in Ottawa who are nuns than are Protestants. And we all know that we live in a culture where for very many people, maybe the majority of people, they'll do anything to get help other than go to Christianity.

Maybe they'll try yoga, they'll try all sorts of different spiritualities, but the very last on the list will be trying Christianity. Because I think for many people in our culture, especially in elite culture and in entertainment world, Christianity and the Christian heritage of the country is what causes trouble.

To be a Christian is to be a part of the enemy, part of the problem that has to be rectified by something else. So now that I've cheered up Daniel and Jonathan and Daniel, in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, amen, and we'll continue on with the service.

I mean, that's the world that we live in, you know, isn't it? And so it's very, very easy to be discouraged and to lose heart in today's world. And it's not just the fact that we're, you know, as a pastor, I'm very conscious that I'm the away team.

I'm on part of the away team. You know, that means if you watch playoff hockey or basketball, like when you're in the other stadium, they're all waving the towels and stuff like that, and the sound system's all cranked up to help the other team.

[ 4 : 57 ] And it's not cranked up to help me at all. And that's the culture, that's the world we live in. And it's very easy to get discouraged. And that's on top, of course, the normal things that can discourage us about just getting tired or being sick.

But we live in a time and an age in Canada where it's very, very easy to be discouraged. And what I'd like to do in a few minutes is just to press into this.

Because one of the things which is so fantastic about the Bible, it's very counterintuitive. When I try to talk about things with my non-Christian friends, I have to keep telling them that it's very counterintuitive that the Bible is regularly pressing into issues.

In fact, the big problem for Christians is we get those type of stats and we just want to shut down. We want to think about something else. We want to have a few happy thoughts. We don't actually want to press into the issue.

And we don't want to press in to the state of our heart. But the Bible actually, if we follow the Bible, if we listen to the Bible, the Bible will press into those issues. It'll say, let's look at those issues. Let's go a little bit deeper into them.

[ 6 : 00 ] And that's what we're going to look at today. There's a passage in the Bible. It was the passage that Alexander read that presses into this. So if you have your Bibles with you, if you would turn in your Bibles to, it would help if I had the right text open, 2 Corinthians 4, verses 1 to 6.

2 Corinthians 4, verses 1 to 6. And we're going to look at that text of Scripture because the Scripture deals with losing heart.

It deals with discouragement. And at first glance, it might seem that reading something like this, this text is written to a group of Christians in a place in what we now know of as Greece.

And it was written in the late 50s. That's the 0000 50s. So it's almost 2,000 years ago. And yet, it might seem very, very odd to go to a text like this.

We, of course, as Christians go to it because at the end of the day, we believe that Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead. And when he rose from the dead, he triumphed over sin and death and all hostile spiritual powers.

[ 7 : 02 ] And he was vindicated as the one who reveals God. He is vindicated as the one who can connect us to God. And so we as Christians, we just believe Jesus.

And Jesus believes the Bible, so I believe the Bible. It's as simple as that. I'm a very, very, very simple-minded guy. Jesus told me to believe and trust the Bible, so I believe and trust the Bible. But even apart from that, for those of us who haven't quite figured out that stuff, it actually makes a lot of sense in some odd way to go to look to such an ancient text.

Because if you think about it for a second, I mean, one of the things that we Christians feel badly, especially those of us who are over a certain age, an age which I will not specify.

You can specify it yourself. We remember a time when we weren't the away team all the time, where there'd be at least some type of grudging respect towards the church and towards Christian things.

[ 8 : 05 ] But this letter is written at a time when there was no... I mean, Paul was writing to a group of people who were definitely the away team. And it was a very, very similar situation.

Like, you know, in our culture, all the smart people know that Christianity is wrong. I mean, in fact, that would almost be a criteria to be a smart person is to know that Christianity is wrong.

And that's exactly what was going on in Corinth. Like, all the smart people knew that there were many gods, not one. Like, that's what all the smart people knew. And all the smart people knew that for men of means, well, you had to have a wife, of course, for reasons of inheritance.

But, gosh, you can't hold a man down to one woman, so you'd have to have probably a concubine on the side. And when the man is on a military campaign, a young man, a young boy, for your

sexual satisfaction, that's what all the smart people knew.

That's what, in a sense, the Globe and Mail, the National Post, the CBC, University of Ottawa, Toronto, McGill, politicians. That's what everybody knew. That's just the smart way to live.

[ 9 : 10 ] Christians are weird. And so we hear these words from Paul in actually a very funny way, in a very similar type of cultural context to us.

And here's what Paul says. He's just finished talking about what he calls New Covenant ministry, the type of ministry that comes from the fact that Jesus has created a new people, a new way of following, of being connected to God, to have God be your king.

And so in verse 1 of chapter 4, he says, And just want to pause right there, because I just want to pause there.

That's a really, really, really important way that this begins. It begins by the Bible recognizing that we lose heart. That's what it's saying. Paul knows the people there, and he knows that there are many times that they lose heart.

Another way to translate it is that they are discouraged. Some of your Bible translations might say that you are in despair. And the Bible, Paul, God, ultimately, who's the ultimate author of this, he knows that you and I, many times, have to deal with discouragement and losing heart.

[ 10 : 27 ] And the thing which is so wonderful about this, especially when it's going to be about, in the context about being a Christian in such a world, well, actually, if you could put up the first point, Andrew, that would be very, very handy. The Lord knows the true state of your heart better than you do.

The Lord knows the true state of your heart better than you do. So, pray with openness and honesty. I mean, on one level, I would say this to a non-Christian, because as you know, I mean, I think it was the Pew Research Center that, a few years ago, they did a statistic.

And I'm not saying people shouldn't laugh at this, but it's very interesting, that a third of atheists pray regularly. And in fact, the fact of the matter is, is if you actually press in to get to know some of your non-Christian friends very well, you might, to your shock, discover that they pray more than, those of us who are Christians, you might discover, to your shock, that your non-Christian friends pray more than you do.

It's very counterintuitive to us. And I would encourage a non-Christian, if they ask me for advice, just to pray openly and honestly to God. Obviously, it's a very different thing to pray to a God, whatever that means, than it is to pray to your Father in Heaven.

But for those of us who are Christians, this text is a very important reminder to just pray. To be honest, that you're discouraged, that you're downhearted. And in terms of the original, in the original language, however this is captured, losing your heart or discouragement or despair, the opposite of it is courage.

[ 11 : 59 ] The Lord knows that there's all sorts of things in your time, there's all sorts of times in your life and long seasons of your life where you're lacking in courage to live as a Christian. So just pray about it. Now, I could end my sermon right here.

And, but part of the problem is, is that that almost sounds like a bit of a truism. And it actually, in some small way, like, it's almost like a platitude. I mean, it's very true. I don't mean it as a platitude. And the Bible's very serious, but it's a little bit of a platitude, you know, almost that, oh yeah, okay, fire off a little prayer and go on. But you know what? It doesn't really get at what's going on in the world. And it doesn't really get at what actually causes us to lose courage.

And so the Bible presses in to talk about some very, very, very uncomfortable truths connected to our pride. And it doesn't just sort of say, okay, just fire off some prayers to God because he knows you're discouraged.

Have a good day. God loves you. God is good all the time. No, it says, okay, okay, you can, whoa, whoa, you can do that. Good. But let's press in a little bit more because there's other things going on at the very center of whom you are that God wants to deal with.

[ 13 : 07 ] So what Paul does very next is, after that, he starts to give us some, to get at this heart issue of pride, he starts to give us some instructions, first by telling us what not to do and then telling us what to do.

If you look at verse two, here's how the Bible continues. But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word.

But by the open statement of the truth, we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. Now, just sort of pause here for a second. One of the big problems is, as you all know, or maybe it's just, I'm probably just vastly more wicked than most of you here.

But one of the big problems I have regularly when I read the Bible is I think about how this applies to other people other than me. I'm very, very, very good at seeing specks in other people's eyes while I walk around with a log in my own eye.

And, you know, I can't remember what psalm it is. Charlie would know what the psalm is. But there's a very powerful psalm that people should meditate on. I think it's either 12 or 13, how we flatter ourselves too much to detect or hate our own sin.

[ 14 : 26 ] And one of the things which we often do when we're discouraged is we flatter ourselves. Legends in our own mind. While functionally we act without courage.

But what this text is saying here, the first couple of ideas about we refuse to, we have renounced disgraceful and underhanded ways. And that's a very, very good translation.

A very, very literal translation of it is the secret things of shame. That we either, we refuse to act out of the secret things of shame or we refuse to do those things, the secret things of shame.

That's sort of a more literal type of translation. And the thing which is very interesting about this, you see, is it actually presses in for us to recognize that one of the things that we have to struggle with when we're discouraged is shame.

You see, if you're in a room and you're the only person who thinks one thing and everybody else, if they knew what you thought, would say that it was wicked, it's easy to start to have a sense of shame. And it's, and a lot of really bad behavior flows out of us not dealing with shame.

[ 15 : 37 ] In fact, a lot of times the people who are the best at making condemning statements and looking like they have puffed out chests and are really strong, often it doesn't come out of a firm belief in the gospel, but because they have a deeply hidden sense of shame that leads them to bravido.

But of course, other things of shame can make us very, very timid. The next two things, because all of us would say, well, who on earth would ever want to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word? But the idea behind cunning is actually the end justifies the means.

And that's, of course, a very, very powerful problem in the church. I mean, if I can just sort of use some music or use the service or some other types of things to manipulate you, that's all right, because if you give your life to Jesus, the end justifies the means.

And tampering with God's word is the same basic idea as paring it down, to water it down, to hide certain things. It's like saying, let's not talk about the different things in the Old Testament because there's all sorts of things in the Old Testament which are very offensive to people.

Don't talk about certain things about sexuality or about money or about forgiveness because that's going to offend people. If you talk about things like that, you're going to offend people. And so you don't want to talk about those things.

[ 17 : 03 ] You water it down. You hide it. You don't bring it up. You stick on very safe topics. And those are all very, very, very powerful forces that when we organize our worship services in our small groups that we just avoid lots of topics.

We water things down. We smooth things over. We pretend certain things aren't there. We talk about sins that everybody agrees are sins like slavery, but we don't talk about things like abortion where we're going to say some very, very different things than the rest of our culture.

Because we, in fact, have things which are eating away at the courage of our lives. And so what the Bible says here, that was the first bit, but he says, what do you do in the opposite?

Look at verse 2 again. We have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. That's the things which come out of shame. We refuse to practice cunning, that is, where the end justifies the means, or to tamper with God's word.

Another way to put it is to be God's spin doctor or to water things down. But instead, by the open statement of the truth, we would commend, it says here ourselves, what it means is our message, ourselves as God's messengers.

[ 18 : 15 ] We open statement of the truth to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. And I think to my non-Christian friends, they'd be very surprised to see that the Bible's advice is that you always respect the integrity of human beings, and even those who disagree with you very strongly, and you respect their conscience, you respect the integrity of who they are, and you don't manipulate, you don't hide things, you don't do things that are coming out of shame, you act in a

way which is clear and straightforward and public.

And I think many of my non-Christian friends, I know they'd be surprised at that because it's not how they experience Christians, whether rightly or wrongly, it's not how they often experience this. But that's actually what the Bible is saying.

But for people who are very tempted to say, well, you know, George, you don't talk about this and this and this and this in church because you want to attract seekers, you want to attract, you want to make the gospel attractive to people, and by making the gospel attractive to people in a very, very compelling format, and who Jesus is, not the church, and there's all these different things that we say and we say, that's the way you go.

You don't talk about these awkward things like the very, very next things which are going to be said because, in fact, it would be a very, you know, about a year ago, there was a young woman that I'd shared the gospel with several times and out of the blue, when I was talking to her, she asked me if I thought she was going to go to hell.

And I have to confess I wasn't prepared for the question. And I sure hope I didn't look like a deer in the headlights just before it gets hit when I tried to answer that question.

[ 20 : 03 ] But I did the best I did. I didn't deny it. I didn't say, no, no, I don't think you're going to go to hell. I tried to deal with this hard truth. But these very next things that Paul does, the Bible takes us in a very, very hard direction almost immediately.

It's almost as if, okay, we're all agreed we're not going to water things down. Yes, we're all agreed we're not going to be spin doctors. Yes, we all agreed that we're not going to live out of shame. Yes, aha, okay, then look at verse 3. And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In this case, it means that they're already, unless something happens from outside, they're going to perish eternally.

Verse 4, in that case, the God of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ who is the image of God. And I could just imagine, I was just sharing the gospel with this fellow named Mark on Saturday.

Got in the way of me actually working on my sermon for today. And I can just imagine if I said to him that passage and he'd say, you actually think, George, that when you talk about certain types of things that I can't see it or I can't understand it, that my mind can't grasp it?

[ 21 : 27 ] And are you actually saying, George, that there is like a demon that's making my mind blind so that my mind is dark?

And I could just picture so many of my friends they'd smile and say, George, I'm way smarter than you. And I see the crappy car you drive. I'm obviously vastly more successful than you. I'm way better at making money. I'm way better at managing money. And I'm way smarter than you. And you actually think that there's things my mind can't grasp and that my mind is darkened and blinded by a demon?

And I think what I would say to my friend is, before I answer that question, can we look at the next two verses? And then can I just share with you what I think they mean?

And because they're my friend, they'd probably give me the time. And if you look at the next two verses, there's something very, very glorious but very humbling which is said.

[ 22 : 46 ] Verse 5, for what we proclaim, for what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.

Notice this, what we proclaim, what I am to proclaim is Jesus Christ is Lord. I am to proclaim that there was a man in history by the name of Jesus. It was one of the most popular Jewish names for boys at the time that Jesus was born.

But in the case of Jesus, his name literally is true because Jesus means God saves and it literally is true. This man named God saves is the man who will save us.

And this man who lived in history, who lived a perfect life and died upon the cross and was buried and on the third day rose and then ascended into heaven. This very same man, he is the Christ. And what does that mean? That means that all of the overarching story of the Bible, it means that for a thousand years of all of the prophetic writings and all of the Psalms and all of the laws, that every law finds its fulfillment in him.

[ 23 : 54 ] Every type finds its fulfillment in him. Every promise finds its fulfillment in him. Every hero finds its true hero in him. Every riddle which the Bible poses to human beings that do not seem to be able to be answered, he is the answer to every riddle.

Every promise, prophecy type, everything in the Bible all finds their fulfillment in him. And when he died upon the cross, when he lived his sinless life and died upon the cross, he did everything that needed to be done to make me right with God.

He did everything that needed to be done. Every wrong, every shame, every accusation, he dealt with it in his person, taking it in my place. And after he had not only taken all of those terrible things away from me, I couldn't stand before God because I haven't done very many good things in my life.

You might think I've done a few good things in my life, but I haven't done that many good things in my life. But Jesus not only takes all the bad things away, I am clothed with his perfect life of obedience and I stand before God not because of anything I have done, can do, or will do, but all because of him.

He is the Lamb of God who dies and is in my place. And by his rising from the dead, that is why we know that he is Lord.

[ 25 : 19 ] He is God with us and I am here to proclaim that. And here's, and they might say, okay, George, that doesn't deal with the demon thing and that doesn't deal with what you think about my mind, but the next bit does.

You see, this is the weird thing about God. This is the important thing about the text. One of the main reasons I get discouraged is I think it's about me. One of the main reasons I get discouraged is I think it's about us.

I think if I could just be, if I could just be more winsome, if I could be more scholarly, if I could pray more, if I was just more effective in communication, if I could listen better, if I just could listen to the Holy Spirit better, if I, if I, if I, if I, but the Bible here cuts the ground completely out from under me, but not in a way that completely destroys me.

What it says is, George, all God is asking you to do is stand on your hind legs and say what you just said, that there's this man Jesus, that he really did live, that all of the promises for over a thousand years find their fulfillment in him, that he is the one that God has provided, his life is for you, he has done this, he is Lord, you just tell people that, and when you tell people that, sometimes what happens is this, verse six, for God who said, let light shine out of darkness has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

What does that mean? I'm going to call you Charlie, is that all right? Charlie, you're a smart guy. Most people here don't know he has a math degree from UBC. You have to be smart. You can't just sort of guess the answers to do that, okay?

[ 27 : 02 ] And you were in, like, last years of high school or was it university when you became a Christian? Second year university. Second year university. Charlie, I have terrible news to tell you. You did not become a Christian because you were smart.

You did not become a Christian because you were holy. You did not become a Christian because you engaged on a spiritual quest and you figured those things out. You know, Charlie, you are like me. Before, one day, as somebody was saying to you, to Jesus Christ as Lord, God said to Charlie the same thing he said on the first day of creation when he said, let there be light.

And God the Father said to Charlie, let there be light. And light from God pierced the veil and pierced the darkness and came into your heart and into your mind.

And Jesus Christ became your Savior and Lord and it had nothing to do with your smarts, with your ability. And it's the same thing that happened to me. And if any of you here are Christians, there is nothing at all that you can be proud about or boast in because it had nothing to do with your smartness or your wisdom or your seeking or your searching.

Some simple Christian pronounced and shared with you that Jesus Christ is Lord and God does a miracle in you that you cannot do for yourself.

[ 28 : 33 ] God said, let there be light. And light from God pierced the veil and pierced your darkness and pierced your blindness. So what would I say for my friend?

Am I saying these things about you? You know what? They this was a darkened mind and I didn't think myself out of it. God did a miracle.

And if you feel any stirring within you, that's a sign that the light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ is shining into your heart.

Brothers and sisters, this Daniel, Jonathan and Daniel, I just gave you the great news that a third of all the churches in the country are going to close within the next five to ten years. But here's what I want to tell you.

God is still on his throne. He is still sustaining everything that we see. He has everything under his control. There are people in Ottawa that are just waiting for some duffer like you or you or you or you or you or you to share that Jesus Christ is Lord.

[ 29 : 41 ] And you do it and God does a miracle. Because only he can save. You can do nothing. Isn't that good news?

The pressure is off. And he knows how discouraged you get. He knows how you can share and share and share and share and that nothing seems to happen.

But you know what he says is just continue to proclaim that Jesus Christ is Lord as clearly, as honestly, as humbly as you possibly can. If you could put up the final point to summarize this. It's a prayer. Lord, make real to my heart that it is only your gospel and only your power that makes me yours. And as God makes it real to our heart, so help me to pray for the perishing and share the gospel with humility, clarity, and courage.

that all I can do is to share that with you and with each of us here. Could you please stand?

[ 30 : 53 ] Let's just bow our heads in prayer. Actually, could you all, I'm going to pray, could you all pray this with me? If the Lord has put it on your heart to pray this with me, could you pray what is above on the screen with me if it is with you?

And then I'll just say a closing prayer and then Bishop Charlie will get up and we're going to make these guys deacons. So let's pray. Lord, make real to my heart that it is only your gospel and only your power that makes me yours.

And so help me to pray for the perishing and share the gospel with humility, clarity, and courage.

Father, pour out the Holy Spirit upon us. If there are any here who do not yet know Jesus, may this be the time.

Father, shine. Just may they know Jesus as Lord. Reveal Jesus as Savior and Lord to them. And Father, thank you that you know our hearts. Thank you that you know how easily we get sidetracked as if it's all up to us.

Thank you, Father, so much that at the same time that you humble us that it's nothing about us, you reassure us of your great love for us and your great power.

[ 32 : 02 ] So Father, we ask that you would make us disciples of Jesus who are gripped by the gospel, learning to live day by day for your glory in this city and to the ends of the earth.

And all God's people said, Amen.