

The Gospel Takes Hold

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 08 October 2023

Preacher: Ife Ojetayo

[0:00] May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

! We've missed you all.

And I'm grateful for your work, all of you who have continued to labor in God's vineyard in my absence. Especially, I'm grateful for Bishop Dave and Brian for preaching in my absence and for Norm last week officiating the morning prayer service.

Isn't it amazing how God keeps His word to us, to be present with us when we gather to worship Him? When He, that is God, remains the object of our adoration and when our eyes are fixed on Him, when we truly believe that He has blessed His church, as Paul said in Corinthians, gracing His church, enriching her in all speech and knowledge, not lacking in any gift.

It's wonderful that, irrespective of anyone, God meets us every time we gather to meet with Him. What Paul says there in 1 Corinthians is true of every church of God in all time and space.

[1:39] In Christ, we lack nothing. And I give thanks to God that that is true of us at Holy Trinity. And as we get through this first chapter, this first quarter of 1 Corinthians, first letter, I think it's important to stand back a bit and ask ourselves, what are the key things Paul will have us see in this book?

Specifically, what are the biblical principles that Paul would have us weigh as we go on in the rest of the chapters?

And I think answering that question is especially significant for us because Paul was intentional. As he writes this letter, this first letter to the Corinthians, he was intentional in setting up these first four chapters.

And in these first four chapters, he set up the themes that he will later build on to get into particular issues of unhealthiness and dissension in the Corinthian church.

And he wants them, and he wants us as well, to hear God's apostolic messenger, that is Paul himself as God's apostolic messenger, to accept the authority of that apostolic messenger so that he can speak into our lives.

[3:11] So that's what I want us to do this morning. I know we read chapter 5, verse 1 to 13, but we're actually not going to get into those verses this one. We'll get into that next week. Probably because I want us to review that, but also because those are loaded, that's a loaded chapter, and it's worth waiting and pondering it as God's people over the week, meditating on it, and then coming back next week and looking at that and those 13 verses in chapter 5.

But this morning, I want us to do sort of like a 30,000, what is it called, above the forest view, and look back in the first four chapters, and look at the themes that we've been going through, and what Paul is saying to us, because I think if we do that, it would allow us then to have a proper mindset as we move on from chapter 5 to 16 of 1 Corinthians.

And we must do it, because we first must accept that this is God's word for us. Not just for the 1 Corinthians Church. And it is God's messenger, his authoritative apostolic messenger, Apostle Paul, speaking to us here at Holy Trinity, as well as he's speaking to the 1 Corinthians.

To the Corinthians, right? We must do the same. We must hear what Paul is saying in these chapters. Without it, without hearing him rightly, we will gain no benefit from the rest of the book. That's why I think it's helpful for us to look at these chapters. And the first thing I want us to look at is that, how the gospel takes hold in a climate like Corinth.

[4:49] The gospel, as it takes hold in a climate like Corinth, remember when we talked about the nature of the city of Corinth? It's a church, it's a city that is all the improprieties and the sins of our modern world.

It's contained in the city of Corinth. It was a big metropolis, there's trade, there was affluence, there was prosperity. And with all of that comes also, you know, Edenism and all the sin that human mind can think of.

But the gospel takes root in a place like Corinth. And we look at the Corinthian church as well, as the gospel takes root there. It's messy, isn't it?

It's very messy. And we haven't even gone to the half of it. We'll dive into that next week. But as the gospel takes root, it is a messy thing among them.

And it's so easy to make the Christian life about us. And that's what the Corinthians were doing. It's so easy to make the Christian life about us, instead of about what Jesus has done, and what he is doing in the world through his church.

[6:03] That's the great danger that every church and every parishioner faces. The Corinthian church evidently has made the church about them.

The church of which we, all of us, all of us, each individual, we are all important family members of this church.

We're not just of this church. We're important family members of the family of God, with God as our Father. The church is a place where we naturally should feel at home.

And we should feel valued. Why? Because we are children in the family. If indeed we are in Christ. But the church then should be a place where we feel at home, we feel valued.

It should be a place where we are able to lay hold of our clear identity as adopted children of God in Christ. But it's easy for that identity to become pride.

[7:12] Pride in what? We become prideful of our own abilities. We become prideful of our own distinctives, of our own specialness, of our own status.

And if we're honest, there is always a temptation to think like that. To think we are special. We're more special than those who have come before us.

There's something special and unique and important about us. For Paul will have us see here, in these first four chapters, that all such boasting is futile, and indeed foolish.

Because it is human wisdom. It is human pride. And human wisdom and human pride are destined for destruction.

That is what Paul has been telling us in this first chapter of 1 Corinthians, first and second chapter.

And Paul does not want us to use the powerful gospel of Christ crucified.

[8:21] He doesn't want us to use that powerful message, the powerful gospel, merely as a tool to boost our own worldly desires and worldly egos.

The gospel is not a means to an end of us feeling good and looking impressive. That's not what the gospel is for.

Rather, the gospel's end is to glorify and exalt the triune God, who alone redeems and who alone saves.

But that's the problem in the Corinthian church, and I think the problem in the modern church, is that we've inverted it. The gospel is now just a means to an end for us. And I think in areas where we've been prone to do this, in which at one stage and one point or another, we are all prone to do this, in these areas where we've been prone to do this, we must repent, and return to the main priority of establishing a gospel ministry, a gospel ministry that preaches Christ and elevates Christ and not human vessels.

So the main priority is to establish a gospel ministry among us. This is why Paul's appeal to us is that we will be united.

[9:48] Look there in chapter 1. By the way, turn with me to 1 Corinthians. I'm going to be alluding to some of those verses in 1 Corinthians. So 1 Corinthians chapter 1, verse 10, for example.

He says to them, I appeal to you. This is his appeal. By the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment.

Let there be no divisions among you. Let there be no quarreling based on human pride. Don't be divided over leaders who are merely laborers, table waiters, in God's household.

Rather, be united in Christ. Be united in Christ, the one who died for you on the cross, in whose name you were baptized.

Paul is saying, don't be impressed by human leaders. Human leaders like Paul. Human leaders like Apollos.

[10:57] Or Peter. Or insert any modern Christian leader that you want to insert here. Don't be impressed by them.

Don't be besotted by grunts. Because that's what Paul says he is. And all of them are. We're all just grunts.

Don't be impressed by grunts because that's all any gospel minister is. It is, after all, God himself who owns the church.

He himself gives the increase. And why is it important that we get this right? Because if we become enamored with human leaders, we will begin to focus less and less on the cross of Christ.

Where the will, wisdom, and the power of God lies. That's been Paul's point all along. If you focus on who your leader is and you get besotted with them, you will lose focus on the cross of Christ.

[12:10] And where does the power lie? Where does the wisdom lie? It is in Christ crucified. Not in Paul or Apollos or Peter or Dobbs or Bennett or any other leader.

So, this is the point that Paul is making. And he goes on in these first four chapters.

Actually, if you think about remember when we went to verse 18 to chapter 2 verse 5. He talks about the foolish appearance of the gospel message. The gospel message is foolish to the world.

The people the gospel have come to are foolish and weak to the world. The messenger of the gospel itself is foolish to the world. It is foolish to those who are perishing.

But there is a power to those who are being saved. There is a special authority that the gospel has in an unspiritual world. There is a special power that it has when the church accepts the gospel of Jesus and that it transforms a worldly people to a powerful spiritual Christ-focused Christ-focused Christ-exalting Holy Spirit-filled people.

[13:43] and God made it deliberately so. He made it deliberately so to show the futility of human cleverness.

The gospel repels every facet of human pride. Every facet of human pride is repelled by the gospel. We cannot try to make the gospel impressive to human minds.

Paul established that. We can't make the gospel impressive to human minds because it is innately foolish to human minds.

And when we try to do so, when we try to do the things that we sometimes do, the Corinthian church was doing it, we sometimes do it in our day, we try to make the gospel presentable.

And by doing that, we dress it up in the wisdom and the manners of the world around us. When we try to do that, all we end up doing is that we hinder the Holy Spirit working powerfully to bring God's word to people to save them.

[14:56] It's like we are veiling the power of the gospel with our own human cleverness. Rather, we must, here at Holy Trinity, be like Paul.

We must have that Pauline declaration here. We must say to one another, I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

That must be our declaration. Pray for me that that will be my declaration as your pastor. That should be our declaration in our Bible study. That should be our declaration as brothers and sisters to one another.

I will desire, I desire, I will decide to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. Imagine if we would say that to one another and hold to it.

How it would reshape the things we prioritize among us. Paul wants us to know that in these first chapters before he goes on in his letter.

[16:06] He goes on actually in the rest of chapter 2 to say the work, this gospel, although foolishness to the world, this gospel is an exalted work.

Gospel ministry is an exalted work. Why is it exalted? Because it is God's work. It is God's work. That's what makes it such a lofty and exalted thing.

Look there in chapter 2 of 1 Corinthians in verse 6 to 9, Paul says to them, yet among the mature we do impart wisdom. Yet it is actual wisdom, this gospel.

It's not the wisdom of the world, but it is true wisdom. Although it is not wisdom of this age, of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass. But we, the we there, is the apostles.

The apostles, Paul, and the apostolic band. But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory.

[17:09] None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But it is written, where no eye has seen, and nor hear, heard, nor the

heart of man, imagined.

God has prepared for those who love him. That's us. That's you and I, who are in Christ. What no eye has seen, nor hear, heard, beyond human imaginings.

God, God, has prepared, prepared for those who love him. That's you and I.

It is God's work of power in you that has made you a Christian, not human pride or your human cleverness. The true wisdom of which Paul speaks of is only available for those who have laid down whole human pride.

Think about how you came to Christ, if you are indeed in Christ. Is it because you lay old on something that you think, oh, I am, yeah, I know, I have clued in to the secret.

[18 : 33] I have studied well, I have got my degrees in theology and philosophy, or is it because you felt like, oh, I have been in church for decades now.

It is none of those things. All of those things are futile in God's economy. It is God's power and wisdom and he brings that to you when you have laid old of him and let go of all human pride.

We will talk more about that because it is important actually to think about that, you know, we think that what's the problem with the world is people don't acknowledge God. You know, atheism, you know, that is the problem with the world.

That is the problem with people not coming to knowing God. Actually, I do not think that is the main problem in the world. Many people acknowledge there is a God. Many people even pay lip service to the God of the Bible.

the wall that keeps people away from coming to Christ ultimately is prideful arrogance.

[19 : 45] That's the biggest stumbling block to Christ. Prideful arrogance. When you think in and of yourself, you can run your way, or you deserve, or you can lay claim of anything before God not knowing that you are a beggar, a sinner who needs mercy.

But when you let go of that, then you can lay hold of the cross of Christ and gain the wisdom therein. And that's what Paul is trying to remind the Corinthians of, because they are in fact believers.

They are in Christ. He started his letter by calling them saints. the problem with them is that they have forgotten how they came in to Christ. And the problem for us is that we can forget how we have come in to lay hold of Christ.

And so he goes on in the rest of chapter 2 and he says, believers, your access to this wisdom, he outlines it to them.

He says the apostles themselves are imparted God's wisdom to us in their teaching and in their writing of Holy Scripture. And we, all of us, are able to grasp this wisdom by what means?

[21 : 08] Through the help of the Holy Spirit. Yes. It is God, the Holy Spirit himself, that helps us to grasp it.

And what we grasp is nothing less than the mind of God, our Creator. That's what we grasp when we grasp the gospel.

So you see here that the gospel is exalted. It is important, highly exalted work. But he goes on in the rest of chapter 3, really, to talk about the stupidity.

He sort of doubles down on the stupidity of boasting in human leaders and human flesh. He calls it infantile. Let's look there in the beginning of chapter 3.

He says, I do not address you, brothers, as spiritual people, but as people of flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for solid food.

[22 : 14] And you are still not ready for solid food, for you are still of the flesh. This is the problem that Paul is painting. Fleshly, maybe this is an invention of our English word, fleshliness, worldliness, those are synonymous, is immaturity in the family of God.

When we display worldliness, we are showing that we are actually immature, we are still infants spiritually. and how is this seen among the Corinthians?

For them it is seen by the way they divide into factions and divisions. So Paul says, you are still infantile, you are still boasting human leaders.

But then he says, what then are these people you are boasting in? Apollos? Paul? Paul? Who are we? We are manual laborers. that is how he describes himself in Apollos.

How does he see himself? How does Paul see himself in this gospel ministry? I am just a manual laborer. And then he goes on and he says, any work that I do, in fact, any work that you do in the family of God will be judged and evaluated on the last day.

[23 : 36] Then we will see him, the work survives. There are three things that will happen. The work verse 14 of chapter 3, the work will survive.

We'll see if the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. So for those whose work survived, they will get a reward, because how is it that their work will survive? Because they've built with durable and worthwhile materials.

Gold, silver, things that will go through fire and be refined, and endure the refining fire, which is the judgment of God. And there will be others whose work will not survive, because they're built with worthless materials.

Verse 15, but they themselves will be saved, because salvation is not dependent on human works, but on God's mercy and grace. So they will be saved, but their work, under judgment, will burn up, because it's wheat and chaff, and hay.

But then in those verses, verse 16 and 17, there's a warning to a third group of people, anyone who actively damages God's temple.

[24 : 59] What's the warning there? And by the way, who are God's temple? It's God's people, we. This church is God's temple. And so, Paul is saying in verse 16 and 17, there's a warning for anyone who actively damages God's temple.

The warning is that they will be destroyed, to die a warning. Verse 16 and 17, do you not know that you are God's temple and God's spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroy God's temple, God will destroy him.

For God's temple is holy and you are that temple. So, Paul is saying here, Christian leadership is not based on human wisdom, therefore, Christian leaders should not be judged, judged by human wisdom or human standards.

How are you to think about ministers of the gospel? How are you to think of ministers of the gospel and gospel ministry here at Holy Trinity?

You have to think of ministers of the gospel as stewards of the things of God. And stewards are caretakers. That's what stewards are. Stewards don't own. They have no ownership in and of themselves.

[26 : 08] Stewards must give an account of their stewardship. And who do they give their account to? To the owner. Not to the fellow workers.

To the owner. That's what Paul is saying here when he's describing his gospel ministry. So, we must think about this as we do gospel ministry together in the God's household.

Who are you giving an account to? Are you giving an account to your brother and sister, your fellow worker on your right and your left? Are you looking to God and working and standing before him and thinking self-consciously that it is to him who hones the church, who grows the church, who keeps the church, to whom you must give an account to?

If you think rightly in that matter, how will that shape your gospel ministry? Oftentimes, when we think about people and what people might say, how people might critique our work, this doesn't mean that we do things without consideration of our fellow brothers and sisters in the household of God.

That's not what Paul is saying here. But Paul says, we're not each other's judges in regards to our work. It is God the owner who will judge on that last day.

[27 : 40] He's the one who sees the heart and the motives of every human being. And it is to him, he's the one who will bring to light all that is hidden in darkness, as Paul says in chapter 4 verse 5.

And so, if that is true then, it steals us, it inoculates us from human pride, it also inoculates us from fear of man.

When you know that it is only God you must give an account to, and it gives you a rightful fear of God. Those two things cannot exist together often, right?

Fear of man and fear of God do not exist together. You must rather, you will rather fear God or fear man. And so, that's the core condition.

So, as Paul goes on in the rest of chapter 4, and Brian so helpfully explained it to us in these verses last week, Paul then goes on to describe the way of the cross, and he uses himself as an example in these verses.

[28 : 54] First of all, he says in verse 6 and 7, don't be puffed up against one another. There's no room for pride, which is the underlying problem of the Corinthian church, and I think it's the underlying problem of the church today as well.

Christianity, your identity in Christ, is not a means of status boosting, a prideful self-pride. Your identity in Christ is meant to be a means by which you are in gratitude, give yourself to the Lord who has redeemed you, and devote your life and yourself to him. Give with abandon to him. And so Paul describes the way of the cross, and he uses these words, the way of the cross is weak, the way of the cross is poor, the way of the cross is helpless, the way of the cross is unimpressive.

And he uses those words to describe his own ministry. Look there in verse 8 of chapter 4. He says to them, already you have all you want.

[30:12] He's talking to the Corinthians, he has been sarcastic there. Already you have all you want, already you've become rich. Because this is all the things you're boasting in. Without you, without us, you have become kings.

And will that you did reign, so that we might share the world with you. But he says, in contrast to you, who are worldly, look at us. He's talking about himself and the rest of his apostles. Apostolic band, we have become last of all, like men sentenced to death. We've become a spectacle to the world, to angels and to men.

We are fools for Christ's sake. Are you willing to describe yourself as that? Fools for Christ's sake. It's not a very comfortable way of describing oneself, but that's how Paul describes himself, gladly. Because the way of the cross is weak, poor, helpless, and unimpressive to the world. But he goes on in verse 14 and 21, he says, I'm not saying this so that you may feel bad about yourself, but I'm saying it so that you may be warned.

[31:32] You are my beloved children, I want to warn you to follow the way of the cross. I think Brian effortfully gives us a picture of it. I listened to a sermon last week.

Jesus is the great primary preeminent example of this. Isn't he? The way of the cross is the way of humiliation.

And we in Christ want exaltation. We will. Actually, this is the promise of the gospel. Don't you see, brothers and sisters, if you're in Christ, you have, you've been exalted.

Paul says in Ephesians, you are at the right hand of God, in Christ. Your future has been written. You are redeemed.

You're being sanctified. You've been justified. You will be glorified. crucified. That's the promise of the gospel. But the way to that is the way of the cross.

[32:35] You must not bypass it. That's why Paul keeps telling the Corinthians, he's telling you, I will know nothing among you except Christ and crucified. This is the way of the cross.

This is the way of the people of the cross. And that's who we are. And so he's saying to us, be imitators. Jesus is a preeminent example of this. Paul himself is a great example of this.

And that's why he can say in verse 16, be imitators of me. I heard you. And would that we would imitate Paul, Apostle Paul, in gospel ministry.

And then he gives Timothy, so he says, you are my children, but you are not behaving as faithful children. And he says, look to Timothy, another child of mine, who is faithful.

That's how he describes Timothy. Timothy, Timothy, my faithful child, I'm sending him to you, so that he may show you the way of the cross. And then he says, he says to them again, this is a clear, it's kind of an imploring, stop your insecure boasting.

[33:42] Stop it. Remember the gospel of your salvation. Get back to an effective gospel ministry in the church of Christ.

That is a word for us here at Holy Trinity as well. What are we inviting our friends to when we invite them to church? What do we think we gather to when we come to church?

Do we gather to hear a brilliant speaker? I'm sorry to disappoint you in that account. Do we gather to be among a loving and acceptable people?

Yes, yes, we do gather for that because I'm grateful that that's what this church is. But it's only a loving and acceptable church when that love and acceptance is steeped in God's truth.

So that out of love for one another as brothers and sisters in Christ we call one another to humility and holiness of living. That's what the church of Christ is meant to be.

[34:56] That's how love is made real among us. And Paul is trying to say to us here, in the midst of the world like the Corinthian church, they were beset by the world and its foolish pride.

We are beset when we look around us. But he says, true confidence actually is in the gospel. true gospel confidence is there. He reminds us we are God's temple after all.

We are God's temple. What a great, lofty, high honor to be God's temple. We are suitable, he's also telling us, we are suitable for the work of the ministry.

not in of ourselves, not because we're special. What makes us suitable is that we have given ourselves to be used by God. We left to ourselves are average, unimpressive.

Remember what Paul says, not many among you are wise, not many of you are rich, not many of you, that's probably true of us, it's very true of us here at Only Trinity as well. But those are the kinds of people that God actually prefers to use.

[36 : 06] those who don't think highly of themselves, but think highly of their Savior. Those are the kind of people God uses in his work.

So Paul wants to impress on us, the gospel is impressive, the gospel is powerful, the gospel is wise, and the God who calls us by his gospel message is the God who equips us for that gospel ministry.

So, brothers and sisters, the work is hard. Paul has showed us here in chapter 4, he's an example of it, the work is sometimes painful.

There's no rosy colored view of the work of gospel ministry. Look at the way he described himself, we are a spectacle to the world, and to men, and to angels.

We look like dead men, really, that's what it means to be a spectacle. The experience sometimes of gospel ministry can be unrewarding, at least in human terms.

[37 : 21] The practice of gospel ministry, of being an example, the practice can be hard to work out among each other.

God going to judge us on the last day. When our creator and redeemer comes to judge, he's not going to judge us on how many people feel the church, how elaborate we can preach the gospel, how much pizzazz we possess.

Those are things that will burn up in the refining fire of God. What are the things that will last as we do this gospel ministry? It is our faithfulness, our love for one another, and for Jesus Christ our Savior, our commitment to the gospel of Jesus Christ, Christ and him crucified.

That will last, and that will earn us a reward. May God keep us and uphold us until that day, and may God help us as we work in his vineyard to be steadfast, to be faithful, to rely on him and on ourselves, on our own wisdom, to depend on the power of the Holy Spirit, and to know nothing among us except Christ and him crucified.

In the name of God the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.