

Paul's Sermon About The Grace Of God

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Date: 08 November 1987

Preacher: Harry Robinson

[0 : 00] And now, I'll preach the sermon. Bow your heads.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. And the sermon is taken from Acts chapter 13, verse 13.

And if you look it up in your pew Bible, it's on page 125. And there is the story of Paul preaching a sermon.

And this, so that the text for my sermon is today. Today is, and you will find it subsequently as you read through the passage.

But to continue in the grace of God. So my business will be to urge you to continue in the grace of God. And the purpose of the sermon then will be to tell you about the grace of God.

[1 : 10] And you hearing about the grace of God with the ears of faith will continue in that grace of God.

See how simple it's all going to be? In order to do that, I want to preach a sermon, about a sermon, to tell you what a sermon is.

You know, what it is that you're being exposed to at the moment. I used the words in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit at the beginning, not simply for its brevity, but also because a sermon is, by definition, a statement under oath.

And I think that that little prayer at the beginning of the sermon is the vestigial remains of sort of standing in the witness box in a courtroom and saying, I promise to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me God.

And so that's what a sermon means. Even though I don't like the word sermon, most people don't. It's subject to considerable ridicule. But that's what it means.

[2 : 23] There are three kinds of sermons. One's called didactic because it's teaching and it teaches you something about the faith. One is called exhortatory because it encourages you in the faith.

And a third is called charismatic, which I hope is a new word to all of you, because I have to assume that you don't all know what it means or even how it's spelled, but that I'll tell you over coffee if you're very interested.

The word is charismatic, and what it means is that it declares or announces something. So to hear a sermon, you have to do three things.

You need to be taught, you need to be encouraged, and you need to hear a message which is being declared to you. Now in Acts chapter 13, the setting for the sermon that Paul preaches is a synagogue.

I am happy to tell you that one of the important members of this congregation, of which there are no other, that is, they're all important, having been brought up in a Jewish synagogue, a member of a Jewish family, comes to St. John's because he finds it among the churches of Vancouver, most like a synagogue.

[3 : 48] And that is a great mark of esteem, and I wish that that were truer almost weekly. In the synagogue, there is, as in the church, the reading of the law, the reading of the prophets, the reading of the Psalms, the 18 blessings, and the Shema, which is that, you know, the thing that we say almost always at the beginning of the communion service when you say, what is it you say at the beginning of the communion service?

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy mind, and with all thy strength. And so like the synagogue, we read the scriptures and the Psalms, we pray, and we come, we listen very attentively.

The center is the reading of the word, and we're all to listen in great respect and great reverence and great silence, because this is the word of God being spoken to us.

And that's how the whole service is organized, so that you will hear the word of God. It's my intention at the moment just to ask you to do one thing.

You remember that we've talked about people having a God-shaped vacuum in their hearts. Try and take one minute of quiet just to think about what it is in your life at this moment that you would like the word of God to address.

[5 : 31] That's a necessary preparation for a sermon, so I want to take one minute to do that. So will you just be quiet for one minute while you think about that? Today, then, you are here to hear the word of God, and that the whole of your being, your mind and heart and soul should be like one of those great dishes that you see on the top of mountains, sweeping around to pick up that word of God, which in his grace and omnipotence, he has for you.

Tomorrow, you go back to being doctors and patients, consultants and lawyers, shopkeepers and chief executive officers, developers, nurses, teachers, truckers, builders and social workers, but today you come under the word of God.

Together you listen to it, and you seek to absorb it in order that tomorrow you might take it into all those places.

Now, remember, it's difficult to get people to listen to you teach tomorrow. It's difficult, perhaps, for you to have a ministry of encouragement to people tomorrow, but that could be part of it.

But one of the simplest things that you have to do and one of the most clearly commanded things that you have to do is to take the message. Now, I don't like the word sermon, as I said, and I don't like the word preach, and I most of all don't like the word evangelical.

[7 : 11] But nevertheless, I think it's a very important word, and I would consider it a great honor to be thought of as being evangelical. But with words, we have to rescue words that have had a kind of prodigal son experience.

They've gone out from their true home into the world, and there they have been preyed upon and taken advantage of and got themselves into all sorts of difficult situations, and the word has to be brought home to its true place of belonging, even as the prodigal son was brought home, in order that you can understand it.

And the word evangelical refers to the gospel, which is the good news, which is to be preached. It's good news, and it's to be declared or announced to people.

To be evangelical means that the central function of the church is to declare the good news of Jesus Christ, to be didactic in your teaching, yes, to be exhorting and encouraging, yes, but most of all to be charismatic, that is, in announcing the good news of God.

As in the synagogue, so in this congregation, we have the order of hymns, prayers, readings, and a coffee hour, and they're all designed to create that encounter which follows the hearing of the word of God, that you might be confirmed in your understanding of the word of God, that you might be encouraged by one another to understand the word of God, that you might be helped by one another to make application of the word of God in your life, or help someone to make it in theirs.

[9 : 07] So you may think that the coffee hour is just to refresh your drooping spirits, but in fact, it is the first opportunity you're going to have after encountering the word of God to go out and share it with somebody else.

I don't think that I think you're going to do it. I'm just telling you what it's there for. And what you do with it, of course, may take a while, but that's why it's there, so that as you go from the coffee hour out into the world, and by Monday are in buses, sky trains, you're on talk shows, in operating rooms, school rooms, counseling chambers, law courts, offices, sidewalks, and restaurants of the city, you might be in a position there to share the message which you have been able to take hold of and which has come to you from God as you have gathered here today.

And then, if you are wise, you will belong to a small group that on Tuesday or Wednesday or Thursday night, perhaps, will help you to be reminded of that word of God and so give you further teaching and encouragement as you seek to share it.

You will know that the Anglican Church has, in recent years, made the Holy Communion central to its worship. This is morning prayer this morning, and we don't have the Holy Communion.

Neither did the synagogues. But the point of it is that the Holy Communion is a kind of visual demonstration of what we anticipate, according to God's promise, is happening right now.

[10 : 48] You are, in effect, putting out your hands to receive the word of God. You are, in effect, claiming the blood of Christ by which you are forgiven so that the reality of what God is doing for us, we are, by faith, appropriating, even as we are gathered now around the word of God.

And it's been considered wise by those in authority that we should weekly have this demonstration of what it means. My fear, and the reason that I'm trying to stick to at least one service of morning prayer a month, is that I don't want you to be confused about what communion means or to allow it to become an end in itself.

It's a demonstration of the appropriation of the word of God into your heart and life to help you to understand it and to share in that way.

Well, look at Paul. This is the sermon that he preached in Acts 13. He went into a synagogue on the Sabbath day. While he was in the synagogue on the Sabbath day, the Jews of the diaspora were there.

They had scattered all through the Mediterranean world. There had joined them the God-fearers. They weren't really members of the group, but they were God-fearers, and so they were there as well.

[12 : 22] And there were, we find out later on, proselytes, those who, though Gentile by birth, were Jewish by commitment and circumcision, and they were also there to hear Paul when he came.

Now, the way it actually happened was that the scriptures were read, and then the microphone was held up and said, do any of you have a word of exhortation? Which is really how this should happen.

You know, that we should walk up and down the aisles with a microphone and give each of you a chance. My problem is that some of you are too hesitant and too shy to do it, and others of you are far too eager to do it.

And I don't know how we get a compromise between the two. But that's how Paul got it, and when he got that invitation, his hand went up and he stood up and he said, man of Israel, and you who fear God.

And then he told them the good news. They asked him to give them some word of encouragement or exhortation, but he took the opportunity to be thoroughly charismatic and took them quickly through their history and said, you went into captivity, God led you out.

[13 : 45] God gave you judges, you preferred kings. You got a king, it was a disaster. So God gave you a king who would show you what it meant really to be a king and introduce you to his kingdom.

And that was David. David was a model of God's king. And he was a type of the king that God would send. So that David was both a model of the king and the ancestor of the king who would come as the son of David.

And that king who was to come has come and before him has come John the Baptist and John the Baptist has gone to the people and said, be ready because it's coming and you need to be ready to hear it.

Because God knew that the biggest difficulty with the evangel or the good news is people don't hear it. And God goes to extraordinary lengths to help people to hear it.

and John the Baptist was one of those whom God sent to prepare people to hear it. And so what the evangel was was that God in Egypt rescued them.

[15 : 02] God brought them out of captivity. God led them through the wilderness. God destroyed seven nations to make a home for them. God gave them their land.

God gave them their king when they bitched about it long enough. God raised up David for them. God then raised up Jesus Christ whom they crucified.

What God had written he had fulfilled. What God had promised he had delivered. What God offered he gave them. And Paul said, this is good news and you want to hear it.

God has been active in the face in the face of your obstinacy, in the face of your waywardness, in the face of your constantly turning away from him.

God has delivered, God has raised up, God has rescued, and the grace of God is going on and the fulfillment of that grace has come when he sent his son and you crucified him on a tree.

[16 : 06] God raised him up. Now, do you hear who it is that's at work in our world? It's God by his grace working among us. Can you hear that?

That's the operative thing in our world. It's not the attainment of virtue by you and me. It's not the religious observation that marks our days. It's not the grasp we have of philosophical principles

concerning the transcendent world.

It's the fact that God has been at work and God has consistently been at work and God was at work in raising Jesus Christ up and God is still at work right here, right now with our hard, disobedient hearts.

That's what Paul said to them and told them that that's the way it was. He told them that they weren't good at hearing scriptures.

He said to that synagogue congregation, as he might say to many congregations in churches like this, every Sunday you went or every Sabbath you went and you heard the scriptures read over and over and over again and you may have sat there longing, isn't there something new that preacher can say?

[17 : 30] Do we always have to be brought back to that? And what it says is yes, you always have to be brought back to that. Because the newness doesn't come from what the preacher is saying.

He's been talking about Egypt and the Exodus and Saul and David for centuries. The new thing comes when you hear in it and recognize for the first time the activity of the grace of God which has been the drum by which the whole of history has progressed and that drum of God's grace is still beating and you are encouraged to get in step with it, to hear it.

And Paul said to that congregation, you have heard it and you have even fulfilled the scriptures because the scriptures said you had crucified the Son of God and you've done it just like the scriptures said.

Do you get the message? I think it's a little bit like reading the Surgeon General's warning on the package of cigarettes. There's a kind of double message there, isn't there?

Saying this is the coolest smoke you'll ever have and it'll kill you. But we only hear what we want to hear and Paul says you've only heard what you wanted to hear.

[19 : 00] Well now I want you to hear something new. And he quotes Habakkuk and Habakkuk says God is doing in your day something that you would tremble if you knew it.

And God says to them and God is doing something in your day that you would burst with joy if you knew it. Because God in his grace has acted in love as he always has, as he consistently has, and as he always will.

And your purpose is to hear that grace of God as it has been portrayed to you in the foolishness of preaching and hearing that grace of God you are to continue in that grace.

and the foolishness. Well, that's what, that's the sermon. It was a good sermon.

It's considered a model sermon. It's a sermon to a Jewish congregation. And I say Jews and Anglicans have a lot in common in the way they think and the way they relate and the way they don't hear the scriptures.

[20 : 02] There's a, it's, it's, that's human nature I guess. The result of the sermon was quite fabulous because, and by the next Sabbath, they begged Paul to come back the next Sabbath.

By the next Sabbath, the whole city was there. Now, I don't want that to happen here. So don't tell anybody.

The whole city was there and because the whole city was there, the Jewish authorities, we listened to Don Lewis talk about the Anglican authorities dealing with the Methodists and it's exactly the same as the Jewish authorities dealing with Paul and out of jealousy they turned against Paul and Paul said to them simply, you don't want to hear it?

Then I'll go and tell the people who do. And of course, that's the problem is that we can reject the news of the grace of God.

We don't want to hear it and I'm sure that once we've made that clear, we won't be bothered with it again. It'll be given to those who do want to hear it.

[21 : 28] And that's what a sermon is. That kind of consistent, daily, weekly confrontation with the Word of God, the good news that God has acted, God is acting, and God will continue to act in love towards a rebellious, obstinate, sinful, self-centered people.

God will continue to act in His grace and love towards them. And the gracious invitation He gives to us is, will you continue in the grace of God?

That's what Paul and Barnabas said to the people who followed them out of the synagogue that week. Will you continue in the grace of God? And as you hear the message, it's a solemn thing to hear the message of the gospel, the evangelism, because there is such a terrible spirit of rejection and cynicism.

Paul quoted the Psalms and said, you scoffed at this. But hearing it, we are encouraged and I think enabled, I know enabled, by God's grace and by His power to continue in that grace.

And may all of us, as we hear the word of God, as we are taught by it, as we are encouraged by it, as the message is declared to us, the message of God's goodness and grace in Christ.

[23 : 16] May we continue in that grace. Amen. Now we sing our offertory hymn number 386.

Amen. ZANG ENGINE Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

[27 : 16] Amen. All the world has now come to us. Amen. Gracious God, your word to us is food indeed.

Receive all we offer you this day. And let your loving kindness be our comfort for the sake of Jesus Christ, your living life.