

I Am Not Ashamed Of The Gospel

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[0 : 00] Our Father, in the confusion of the times in which we live, we would seek the order which can come to our hearts and minds through your word.

So we ask that you will grant us to listen to your word, to share the things we receive with one another, and to be willing to receive from one another the things that others have to share with us. Our God, we very much need a word from you, in the personal circumstances of our lives, as well as in the circumstances of our life as a parish.

So as we wait upon you, we ask that you will speak to us. In Jesus' name, Amen. Amen. Several people, many of them significant to me in a personal way, and many of them significant to this congregation, have told me that this congregation is too big.

And it's too hard to find a place in this congregation. And two people told me that as they announced they were leaving for other congregations.

[1 : 40] Little did they know the secret plan that we were sending them there as missionaries. They thought it was their idea. Oh, no. That's how I console myself.

I, um, the, uh, it is, it is a problem. I think it's acutely a problem when we lose the sense of mission that we have as a parish.

And, uh, over the course of the next four Sundays, we want to build a preaching around the Great Commission to go into all the world and preach the gospel.

And, uh, I want to begin with, um, really where we started last week, that our primary responsibility is to worship God.

If that isn't the center of your life, then going into all the world to preach the gospel will not be a very satisfactory experience.

[2 : 51] Secondly, uh, before you choose on some unsuspecting part of the world to which you are prepared to go, um, it would be well if you dealt with the more immediate problem of loving your neighbor.

So that there is a priority of worship, and remember we talked about Romans 12, 1 and following, then there is the problem of your neighbor, and then there is the commission to go into all the world. And we'll get to that next week. Right now, I want to talk about your neighbor. And, uh, to do that, I want to talk about Romans chapter 1, verse 16, which says, I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.

I expect that at the end of this sermon you will be very impressed with what an intellectual fellow I am. I want to tell you that I'm leaning very heavily on William Temple and Karl Barth.

And so if you see any intellectual brilliance, you'll know that the source of it is only that I was able to find it in a book. Paul is writing to the Romans and he says, I am not ashamed of the gospel.

[4 : 23] He was writing to the great imperial city. He was writing to the place where all the great men, all the great wealth, all the power brokers, all the military leaders, all the politicians, all the highest aristocratic people gathered in the city of Rome and Paul talked to the people of Rome and said, I'm not ashamed of the gospel.

Now in Rome at that time it's presumable that Paul was comparatively unknown. Who was this fellow from this backward province?

And the great and mighty men were far too big and important to pay any attention to Paul and Paul wasn't going to impose himself on them anyway.

It's helpful to me to be reminded that the great and mighty men of his day can only be found in some obscure dictionary of the ancient world.

while St. Paul has more influence now than any of them from the emperor down ever had in their own day. So it's important to listen to what Paul said.

[5 : 48] And what he said was that I am not ashamed. Now I have a lot of things about which I am ashamed and you have a lot of things about which you are ashamed.

And we both have things probably about which we should be ashamed. But one of the things not to be ashamed of is the gospel.

And as Paul contemplated the gospel going to the central city of the whole world and the glamour and the glitter and the pomp and the pageantry and all the power that was vested in Rome and Paul said in that setting I am not ashamed of the gospel.

And the reason is that he recognized that the gospel is the superpower.

superpower. We talk about the superpowers now and we talk about Russia and the United States as the superpowers. But long before we concocted that Paul declared that the superpower is the gospel and he is not ashamed of it.

[7 : 13] I have been anxious to share this little quotation with you from the Manchester Guardian about it was called A Requiem for an Ideology and it talks about the fall of Marxism and Russia and it says a bitter bewildered country is once again discovering a few broad humanist values and one or two very simple truths.

First that you cannot force happiness on people against their will. It goes on to say no ideology and this one was both a science and a religion has raised such high expectations or caused so much heartache as Marxism.

No system has produced so much suffering at least for such a long time as communism. no guiding light of nations has so thoroughly dazzled hundreds and millions of human beings.

Do you see what profound repentance belongs to the whole of the Christian church because through the whole of this century in the light of this powerful guiding light ideology which has affected millions upon millions of people Christians have been ashamed of the gospel and had forgotten that ideologies come and go but the reason we're not to be ashamed of the gospel is that it is not some powerful ideology it is the power of God.

Well let me remind you what is this gospel that has such power? Well the God who created us and redeemed us the God of Abraham the God of Moses the God of wisdom and might this God has acted in history and this is what he did now this is William Temple listen the central event of all human history is an event which supplies a standard of judgment for all that has gone before and after the central event of all human history is what he's talking about which by its mere occurrence being the kind of event that it is supplies a standard for all the process in all its parts and then every part can be interpreted by its relationship to this single event and then what

[10 : 22] Temple is arguing about there is that the interpretation of the history of the whole world is to be seen in the light of a single central event and the proclamation of that single central event is the business of the church.

William Temple says that there are other possibilities that we consider. He says things at last return to the same condition from which they've started, you know, that things go round and round.

And most of us live in a world where we tend to go round and round and you spin off and something else takes up and life goes round and round, not going anywhere in particular.

Contrast that with the gospel, which is the single event, the single event by which the whole span of history is to be measured.

He again contrasts it with progress. And he says if progress merely means something different every day, which is what most of us experience as progress, then there is no reason to regard that as progress.

[11 : 47] All that is is novelty, perpetual novelty, which keeps us moving but doesn't say anything. It doesn't lead anywhere. And when you become bitter, old, and jaundiced like me, you say I've seen it all before.

And it's not moving in any direction. Progress is a view that has to be taken as a defiance of the law, which science has proclaimed that in an apparent running down, that there is an apparent running down of the forces of energy, that is power.

Powers are fading. And those powers that constitute the universe are fading, but into that situation comes the gospel, which is the power of God.

Now, the difficulty that you and I and our culture and our society has with the gospel is one thing.

One thing that makes the gospel hard for us is that it takes each human individual and gives to that human individual eternal dimensions.

[13 : 13] Now, if God wants to do that for me, I could understand that. But for the rest of you, I have questions. And so that's the stumbling block that's at the middle.

Why, in one sense, we appreciate the gospel, but we can't believe that God means that gospel to give eternal worth to every soul on this planet.

No matter what color, what religion, doesn't matter what, God wants to give to that person, and the good news is essentially concerned with communicating to that individual the reality that he is of eternal worth in the light of the central event of the whole of human history, which is the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

That's why Paul says, I will go to the imperial city, and I will tell them of the great central event, the power of God, and how that power is demonstrated in the gospel.

We look, I mean, that's why I told you this church is getting too big, because when something gets too big, the value of the individual gets smaller and smaller and smaller.

[14 : 43] And the danger for me is that in our relationship, we will tend to, you know, the only person that will know you and the only person that will have any pastoral concern for you will be the computer and in the office next door.

It knows all about you. But that we will lose the sense of the eternal dimensions of the individual person in the light of the power of God, which is demonstrated in the central event of history, which is Jesus Christ.

So that what happens, I think, is this, that you have to recognize that you are a missionary because God wants every individual in every part of the universe to know that they are of eternal worth.

And the only way they could ever recognize that they were of eternal worth is if somebody went and told them about the central event of history by which their life finds meaning, and that central event of history is the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

That is what your life is all about. What you do for a living is only incidental by comparison. That is what your life is about.

[16 : 23] And that is why we are involved in mission. But the mission is primarily, the primary mission is to love your neighbor.

And that is to regard your neighbor in the light of the central event of history. No matter who he is, what his religion, what his color, whatever he is, you are to regard him in the light of the central event of history.

So, that's your mission. That's what you're to become involved in. Now, I have one other thing that I want to share with you which I found very helpful.

And it's, it was something which William Temple said, and it's this. If we will only follow the lead that our Lord so constantly gave us of looking for the activity of God, not chiefly in what is exceptional and otherwise inexplicable, but precisely in the ordinary, the reliable, the predictable, then we shall be set free.

What that means is that we are capable of attributing to God a horrendous airline crash. We are capable of attributing to God a volcano blowing up or a flood devastating a plane.

[18 : 01] We are capable of seeing God in thunderstorms and in lightning. But what Jesus told us to do was to see God primarily in the relationship you have to your neighbor.

That's where you're to see him. You may even see him in the relationship you have to yourself and your understanding of yourself. That's where you're to see God.

And you are much more liable to see God in the face of somebody that you're talking with, perhaps studying with, perhaps praying with, perhaps encouraging or counseling.

You're much more liable to see God in that situation than to hope that God will give a magnificent thunderstorm later this afternoon to clear away all this weather.

You see what it means? Somehow, God wants to work. God is at work.

[19 : 09] And he is powerfully at work. And we have to recognize that. Not in the great and dramatic and exceptional things, but God is at work in our relationship to one another.

And we need to communicate to one another the work that God wants to do in our individual lives. We have got to be missionaries one to another so that we can help one another relate to the central event of all history and find the meaning of our life in that.

So anything else that you're called upon to do in the course of your life, and you've been called upon to do many and magnificent things of great importance to our society and to our culture, but the central thing is that you are a missionary from God who is a missionary to bring people under

the hearing of the gospel.

You have your imperial city where you bow in profound humility about yourself and in the midst of which you may feel ashamed of your own personal inadequacy.

[20 : 43] And that's entirely permissible and probably in most cases justifiable, but you are not to be ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God.

And Paul says, as he approaches Rome, I'm not ashamed of the gospel. And we have to ask ourselves as we approach the power structures within which we have to live our lives, the neighbors we have to work with and live with, we may have reason to be ashamed of ourselves.

We have no reason to be ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Amen.