

The Church's First Priority

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[0 : 00] I think we just need to pray. You hear those? I get teared up every time that song comes on. Man, Clay, that was hard, man. Got to preach after that? Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Gracious Heavenly Father, thank you for your word through your servant Paul, as we're about to read. Help us now by grace through faith in Christ who is worthy.

Help us through the power of your Holy Spirit to receive the word that you have for us today. What we know not, teach us. What we have not, give us.

What we are not, make us. We pray in Jesus' name, in the name of the one who is worthy. Amen. Amen.

Well, it's a privilege to be here before you this morning. Like many of you, all of you, I hope, we've been so blessed as a family to hear from God's word from this pulpit.

[1 : 06] So it really is a humbling and so it's a mortifying honor to have the privilege to share this. So thank you, Pastor Matt and the elders for allowing me this privilege to share God's word with you.

Because like you, sometimes life just gets a little crazy. We moved here in the middle of a pandemic. We're supposed to be here for three months or so. And we're on, I think, what, month 18?

Through it all. And it's a blessing to come and to be pointed back to Christ. And in fact, that's precisely what we find happening today in 1 Corinthians 15.

If you're familiar with the church at Corinth, they're messed up. Life in their city was a crazy thing. They had all different kinds of ideologies, occupations, a thousand reasons to not follow Christ. And as you see through the pages of 1 Corinthians and into 2 Corinthians, there's even letters that Paul wrote to them that we don't have.

[2 : 18] It was that messed up in Corinth. And here in 1 Corinthians 15, Paul reorients them to keep their priorities straight.

It wasn't about spiritual gifts. It wasn't about who your favorite Bible teacher was. It wasn't about anything else but the good news about Jesus Christ.

And so I invite you, turn with me to 1 Corinthians 15 if you don't have it open already. And I want us to read about the priority of the gospel. And Paul's going to tell us two simple things.

We need to, as Christians, we need to be, we need to receive the gospel and we need to proclaim the gospel. Two simple things. That's where we're going with this today.

So join me in 1 Corinthians 15. I want to read verses 1 through 11 because this Christ who is worthy is at the center of what it means to be a Christ follower, to be a Christian, at the center of who we are as a church.

[3 : 19] 1 Corinthians 15. Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preach to you, which you received and which you stand and by which you're being saved if you hold fast to the word I preach to you, unless you believed in vain.

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas and then to the twelve.

Then he appeared to more than 500 brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, but some have fallen asleep. And then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles.

Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

But by the grace of God, I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.

[4 : 41] Whether then it was I or they, so we preach, and so you believed. The verb tenses here are really important throughout these first couple verses, through this opening section, because Paul is trying to tenderly, but firmly remind them, y'all are crazy.

Y'all forgot who you are. You forgot your first priority, and it's our first priority Christian, it's our first priority church, to receive the gospel.

They had received it, right? Look with me there in chapter, back in verse one, I would remind you brothers, he's reminding them, this is not new territory for Corinth. It's probably not new territory for a lot of us.

If you're like me, a church kid, you hear the gospel, you think, oh, here we go again. But Paul's like, no, no, no, no. The reason all your crazy's been going on is because that's your attitude.

You think you've graduated from the gospel. You think you've been promoted beyond. No. Spiritual gifts, speaking in tongues, all that other stuff that in the first 14 chapters here of 1 Corinthians, the problem with those problems are because you forgot.

[6 : 06] You let something else become the first priority Christian. You let something else become your first priority church. So Paul has to remind them that you received something Christian.

You received the gospel. And you forget that to your detriment. Paul, in fact, points out just how awkward and difficult the danger is as we move in verse 2.

It's an awkward phrase. This, if you hold fast to the right approach to you unless you believed in vain. What is Paul talking about there?

He's warning them about two alternatives, really, to what you can do with the gospel. You can choose to believe the right thing insincerely.

A fancy word. You could be a hypocrite at its worst. Or you could just be sincerely indifferent.

[7 : 16] Yeah, I go to church on Sunday. Yeah, I heard the preacher. I took killer sermon notes. I mean, it's like, he could preach from that. Or, you know, yeah, I aced the Sunday school lesson.

I knew the answers before the teacher told me. But, but, Monday morning, Thursday afternoon, Wednesday night, how's that working out?

You see, our practice betrays our doctrine. Our practice betrays what we truly believe. And our priorities throughout that week betray what's really our first priority in this life.

and Paul's trying to remind them, hey, you gotta keep the gospel your first priority. Otherwise, maybe, maybe you don't believe what you think.

You use that word, Christian, but I don't think that word means what you think it means. Because I'm looking at your life and I'm not seeing how they don't add up.

[8 : 24] There's another alternative that Paul is suggesting of this idea of believed, by believing in vain. It's also the idea that, well, maybe, just maybe, you believe the wrong thing sincerely.

And so, Paul's wanting to remind them, make sure it's crystal clear. We'll see this in verses 3 and following here in a few moments. He wants them to be crystal clear that what they believe, what they receive, is in point, in fact, what Paul gave them in the first place.

So he's reminding them because their salvation, as Paul even says himself, is God's grace to them. It's nothing you do. It's nothing you performed.

He does it for you. He does it to you. That's good news. It doesn't matter how much Bible you know.

As long as you know the gospel, as long as you remember it and don't forget about it, Christian.

You see, Paul even punches it even further down at us that the gospel is the message that we stand upon in verse 1. It's the message in which you stand upon.

[9 : 36] It's the grounds for all that you do, Christian. And notice again, verse 2. And it's the gospel that which you're being saved by.

Now, I don't mean to overwhelm with grammar here for a second, but did you notice that that's like a present tense verb? Right? I'm being saved.

Present perfect for those who want to get into it a little bit. But Paul's trying to help us understand, Christian. It's not, you don't graduate from the gospel, you're sanctified by the gospel, and you're saved by the gospel.

And that's good news. Until you forget about it. And then it's not good news because you've forgotten and you've gone off and done all these other crazy things. Like, picked a Bible teacher that you really love and that's all you care about is what he said and how they said it.

Christ saved you. Not that. I mean, praise God for a good Bible teacher. I'm not trying to, but it's a mis, your priority's in the wrong spot. It's about Christ and what he's done for you in this good news

gospel message for you.

[10 : 53] And it produces, and when we, excuse me, when we receive this good news, it produces fruit in our lives. On the one hand, that act of salvation where we receive Christ and become Christians, we become Christ followers, but then that ongoing, secondly, this idea of receiving also has that ongoing idea of internalizing God's word.

How do I live gospely? If I could say it that way. Paul's trying to get us to remember that we need to not just receive it to believe, but we need to receive it to live.

What about your life, Christian, is gospely? What about your life reflects good news that Christ died for sinners?

What is it about your life, Christian? What is it about the heart attitudes that you have that is formed and transformed by the gospel? We need to be reminded of this gospel, not just save from it and graduate on to other things.

And what's striking to me is that, and I'm saying all this, it's almost as if the gospel is this thing over here and it has to be delivered to me.

[12 : 18] Not just in the act of salvation, but daily as I grow in my walk with the Lord. And so Paul has a lot to say about that too as we look at the rest of verse 3 and into verse 11 because Paul isn't just concerned that we receive the gospel, he's also concerned about what the gospel is and our first priority to proclaim the gospel together.

We receive it and we proclaim it. Two very simple points Paul has here and along the way he wants to make sure you know what that gospel is because, again, I'm not wanting to split hairs too much here, but it's interesting that Paul's choice of vocabulary here in verse 1, I preach to you the message you received, it's a little more, if we were to take this a little more woodenly, it's I gospelsed the gospel to you.

He's not using the usual word for preach here in verse 1. He's using the verb gospel to talk about the subject gospel. I want to remind you, brothers, of the gospel, I gospelsed to you.

Someone had to tell you, Christian, so that you could be a Christ follower, just like someone had to tell the person that told you, that told you, that told you, that we go all the way back to Paul and the apostles who got it from Jesus, who got it from the Father himself who was sent.

And glory of all glories, it was written down for us, inspired by the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, like Pastor Matt taught us last week, guiding us and shaping us and helping us to think gospely.

[14 : 08] That's the good, that's part, that's the good news applied to your life, Christian.

Remember, Paul wants us to remember it, but he wants us to also proclaim it.

It's not enough to know it and to remember it, it's a message that we're to proclaim because how else is your neighbor going to hear the good news about Christ?

You were told, someone proclaimed it to you, what about the person sitting next to you?

What about that girl across the office way from you? What about the student two desks down from you? What about, Paul says in Romans 10, how will they hear if no one preaches?

It's on us, church, it's on us, Christian, to remember the gospel, to receive it, and to proclaim it, to get it out. But, perhaps, perhaps you're like the church at Corinth, or one of the Christians, probably not everybody was this way, but maybe that's just it.

[15 : 25] You're not sure what the gospel is. Could you, if I had you come up here right now, what's the gospel, Christian? What would you say?

Paul gives us four simple statements about what the, that comprise the gospel message. the bare bones, the most, if you could only say this, what would you say?

Paul tells us here in verses 3 through 10. Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures. He was buried. He was raised from the dead on the third day according to the scriptures.

And he was seen. Four simple things. That's it. That's the message that saves. Not my testimony about how I received the gospel.

That's important. But how Timothy Hine heard the good news about Jesus and placed his trust, that's not the good news. The good news is Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures.

[16 : 34] He was buried. He was raised from the dead on the third day according to the scriptures. And he was seen by his followers. That's the good news. We could say more, couldn't we?

I mean, what about the virgin birth? He was fully God. He was fully man. He was raised from the dead.

Notice the passive tense of that verb there. Someone raised. He was raised. He didn't raise himself. He was raised from the dead. Doctrine of the Trinity, God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. According to the scriptures, which scriptures? Isaiah 52 and 53 like we read earlier. All the prophets, all the law. Paul says elsewhere that the whole law and prophets point to the coming of Christ.

We could talk about those things, but if we think about it, that's really just meat on the bones, isn't it? The gospel, the message that saves is decidedly simple.

[17 : 41] Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures. He was buried. He was raised on the third day according to the scriptures. He was seen. That's the message that saves. And when we, when we get too far on a rabbit trail from that, Paul's trying to warn us it can lead to some scary place.

It can lead to some weird messed up places. You see, you can't take away from the gospel. You also can't add to it.

Let me do a little gospel math if you will. If you can, I'm not a mathematician so forgive me here if I get dangerous. But the gospel is actually, it's so simple, it's scary in a sense.

The gospel plus something else, it's not the gospel. It's not good news. Jesus died and rose again for our sins according to the scriptures plus you praying super hard.

That's not the gospel. Christ died and rose again for our sins according to the scriptures and you show up every Sunday early.

[18 : 52] Not the gospel. Conversely, the gospel minus something is also not the gospel.

What if Jesus wasn't really God? He was just an angel who took on flesh. Even in the first century people were saying that.

Even today people say that. It takes away from the gospel. Well, maybe, maybe he was fully God but was he really human?

I mean, maybe he was just like God in a man's suit. You know, he just came down and zipped up the tuxedo of human flesh and he looked like God. Again, a problem the church dealt with back in the first and second centuries and yet, you hear that today, don't you?

It's not the gospel. You can't take anything away from this without changing the gospel message. Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures. He was buried.

[19 : 58] He was raised from the dead on the third day according to the scriptures and he was seen by his followers. That's the message. That's the good news that saves and everything flows out of that. Christ was crucified because he claimed to die on the cross.

He claimed that his death was atoning for sin. He was crucified because he said he was God's son. He was crucified because he claimed to be king of kings and lord of lords.

Martyrs, blood flowed for this message. Christians, so let's be careful to remember what this gospel is because it's not a lot of things that we oftentimes want to add to the gospel but if we really want to pray, if we really want to split that hair, we're really talking about the gospel and the effects of the gospel, how it flows into other facets of our life, how it permeates and how we internalize it as a people, as individuals, how we wish society would absorb that gospel message, that good news.

I mean, strictly speaking, even some of our, I'm all for penal substitutionary atonement and justification and these things but those are all, those are the, that's the outflowing of the gospel. That's the gospel applied, isn't it? That I receive the good, that God changes me so that I receive the good news and I'm made right before him.

[21 : 38] That's the result of this gospel, bare bones, gospel message and that's good news. But maybe you're like, maybe you've met that person before who maybe forgets that sometimes and they know more about what this theologian or that theologian said than what the good news itself is.

Or maybe you've met that person person who's so hung up on certain theological themes. These are all good things. But they're not the gospel.

They're not the good, they're not the first priority. And just like the church at Corinth, we can look at them 2,000 years removed and think, oh, silly kids.

They didn't know what they're doing. We've got, we've grown up, we've matured. No, we still have the same sinful heart. We still live in a city much like theirs that was prone to find all different kinds of ways to do things that offend God.

And but for His grace we would do the same just as well. But when our priority is first and foremost fixed on Christ and His good news, the effects, it changes everything.

[23 : 00] It should change everything. If it doesn't change everything for you, what did you receive? Because the gospel changes everything.

Maybe not everything all at once. It takes time. I'm still lazy. The gospel's still working on me on that. What's the gospel working on for you still, Christian?

Is it working on you? No? No? The gospel can and does transform people and society. But even social change and social justice aren't the gospel message itself.

It's a result of the gospel. It's fruit of the gospel. And that's good news too. We have to keep the gospel our first priority.

We keep it the first priority by receiving it. We keep it the first priority by proclaiming it. When our message changes to something other than Christ crucified and resurrected, we've moved the chains.

[24 : 16] We've changed the target. We've confused our priorities. And history tells the story of many a church, many a Christian who has lost sight of this and fallen away.

We can think of institutions that were built to train ministers that now don't even acknowledge the good news about Christ.

We can think of numerous friends, maybe you have friends or family who said they were Christians, followed Christ for a season, and then...

And now, look at them. Their priorities are all over the place. But not... Not here. Not centered on Christ. It's God's grace that...

It's because of God's grace, Paul says in verse 10, that He is what He is, and you are what you are, Christian. Let's not add or take away from that.

[25 : 25] Now, receiving the salvation, receiving the gospel... I come at this as a church kid.

You have to forgive me. I've heard this a million times. You've heard this a million times too, church kids, right? Growing up in the church, and you say to yourself, so what am I supposed to do?

What... Jesus did it all. He paid it all. He's the foundation I stand on. He's what I received. I can't affect... I can't change my status before God.

He does that. But how do I... How do I live this out? What do I do? How do I live different? Do I need to go be that guy on the corner with the sign and the, you know, the Lord is coming?

No, that's not what Paul's saying here. What Paul's saying here is we need to order our lives around the gospel. And it begins even with our proclamation of the gospel.

[26 : 28] Before you preach the gospel to someone else, Christian, do you preach the gospel to yourself? daily. Reminding yourself, I...

He died for our sins, Paul says in verse 3. My sins. And it was according to God's plan.

He was... The Son of God was buried in a tomb for three days because of my sin. He was raised to life just like God promised according to scriptures three days later.

What great news, Christian. You have a hope. You're not dead in your trespasses and sins anymore. So why was that a temptation again?

Why... What was that thing that was teasing you, flirting with you? Take five minutes each morning.

[27 : 37] Preach the gospel to yourself. I can't tell you how much gospel good it'll do you. It's... It's the best news your soul could ever receive that day, today. And this is why, like, I think it was Pastor Nick a couple weeks back, abiding in Christ.

Spending time in God's word and prayer. Reminding yourself of the gospel. Reading it. Reading his promises in the Old Testament. Reading the promise, how he fulfills those promises in the New.

Oh, it's words of life. It's not just... Oh, here we go. If that's your heart attitude, Christian, what did you receive again?

What did you receive again? What... What... What are you standing on again? Maybe for some of us, Paul's exhortation here about proclaiming the gospel is our problem.

Maybe you're a little stale in your faith because you've not talked to anyone about it in a while. You haven't talked to yourself about it. You haven't preached it to yourself. You haven't preached it to anybody. You haven't proclaimed it. You haven't delivered a message to anybody, including yourself.

[28 : 52] Maybe you're at that place in your spiritual journey, in your walk with Christ, Christian, where part of the... of your walk with the Lord is you've not...

you've not... you don't know how to articulate the gospel and what a great way to work that out than to tell... share with somebody. Proclaim the message.

Deliver the message, the good news that saved you. It's what you stand on. Hopefully it's what you bleed when life presses in on you. Can you articulate it?

Tell somebody. Try it out. It might be an epic fail. That's fine. That's fine. God's word never returns void. But are you doing what God's called you to do?

Receive it. Proclaim it. Maybe along the way, if I need... I need help with this. That's the beauty of the church. We do this together. It's not about how awesome she is at this and he is at that and she's...

[29 : 58] We're here together to help each other, to grow in Christ. That's all the more reason to talk to someone about the gospel. If you're nervous to tell someone who doesn't know, talk with someone who does. Hey, am I getting...

Am I missing something here? We're... We're not all called to be PhDs in New Testament and that's okay. That's a good thing. Most of you shouldn't do that. Please don't. But maybe you are called to that.

Praise God. Do it and help us all figure this stuff out. You don't need a PhD to share the gospel. You don't even need a primary school degree. You don't even need a high school diploma.

You just need the gospel message itself. It preaches. Do you know it? Tell somebody.

Talk to another Christian about it and help them... Help each other get better at talking about the gospel and then go tell others who don't know the good news. Maybe you've been doing it for a while and you just need a fresh perspective.

[31 : 03] That's where great Christian books can be so helpful. There's a thousand... There's thousands of them today. There's no reason not to get into that broader conversation that's so accessible.

So ask me afterwards. We can talk about more of those. But the good news is that not only can we receive the gospel, we can grow in our understanding of it and we have each other to do it with.

What great news for a life caught up in a pandemic where we're isolated from each other. These are the good news. These are the results of our good news, Christian.

But I want to close... I want to close by asking and talking for a moment to those who don't follow Christ.

Maybe you're here seeking God. You're seeking for something. You're still trying to figure it out. I got great... It's all right here. It is super simple.

[32 : 04] Now I know even Paul faces if you go back and read 1 Corinthians 1, it sounds foolish. It's a stumbling... It's foolish for the sophisticated. At least that's how it can sound sometimes.

And maybe you come from another religious tradition and you think it just doesn't... It doesn't add up. It doesn't match my tradition that I grew up with. Precisely.

Look, friend. God exists and He spoke. And He spoke good news of life because He promised to deal with the one thing you and I can't solve on our own.

The fact that we're lost in seeking. What you're looking for is how to be made right with God. You may not be able to... It doesn't...

Maybe it's not that way in your head but what Scripture is trying to help us see is that is what you're missing. You are not right with God because there's stuff separating you from God.

[33 : 09] Stuff inside you, stuff in your life. The Bible uses a big word called sin to describe that. And the... And that's the... That's the bad news, admittedly.

We're separated from God from our sin. But the good news is He did something about while we were still seeking. While we were still hostile. While we were still alien and foreign to Him, He, because of His great love with which He loved us, sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to die on the cross for our sins according to the Scriptures.

It really happened. He really died. He really rose again. And people saw it and wrote it down. And it's the best news, my friend. It's what you're looking for.

It's what you need. It's what saves. It's what gives us hope for this life no matter what comes.

In fact, that's what the rest of 1 Corinthians tells us. 1 Corinthians 15 talks about is the hope that we have in Christ because of this gospel. It's not about what you do.

[34 : 24] It's about what Jesus has done and what He's going to do. And that's... That's good news. It's the best news if we would but receive it by repentance and faith.

I don't know about you, friend, but I want to invite you to receive that gift. And Christian, brothers and sisters, this is our good news.

Don't forget it. Don't let something else take first priority. because it's only just good news. It's the best news. Let's pray.

Gracious Heavenly Father, thank You for the good news that Christ died on the cross for us. Thank You for the good news that our one foundation is not how much I know about Your Word.

It's not how spiritual I perform. It's about Christ dying on the cross for our sins according to the Scriptures.

[35 : 29] And it's a hope that we have for this life and for the life to come. It's also our first priority to order our life, to identify ourselves by so that we might please You in all that we say and do.

Help us, Lord, we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.