

Preaching the Gospel

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[0 : 00] 1 Corinthians chapter 1. I'm beginning to read there at verse 17. 1 Corinthians 1, 17.

For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the cleverness of the clever I will thwart.

But where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom. It pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For the Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom. But we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews, and a folly to Gentiles. But to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. Amen. May the Lord bless us that reading. Before we come to the message, we'll sing again, Who Can Cheer the Heart Like Jesus? The theme for this evening is on preaching the gospel.

But let me say something about this particular sermon. It's not part of what I did when I took you through the first four chapters of 1 Corinthians three years ago. Nor is it absolutely brand new. But there is a story, because when I lived in Birmingham, I was subject to a burglary, and the burglar went off with all the manuscripts of my sermons. He did me a great favor. Because when I moved to Southampton to be with Charlotte, not having a great deal to do, but still having all these great texts in my mind, I rewrote the lot. So he did me a great favor. This is new.

[2 : 50] That's the story behind this sermon. When we look at the first four chapters, the concentration on 1 Corinthians is indeed about the preaching in the church. Because the church had split into several camps. And so he says in the 12th verse of the first chapter, what I mean is that each one of you says, I belong to Paul, or I belong to Apollos, or I belong to Cephas, meaning Peter, or I belong to Christ. So what he's talking about here is the growth of fan clubs.

The fan club of Paul had risen around his particular way of delivering sermons. Some people said, we like the way he defines the faith. Sometimes, as Peter would say in 2 Peter, it's somewhat hard to understand. But we like it. So there's a fan club for Paul. There's a fan club for Apollos. Because he was known to be a very eloquent preacher. There's a fan club for Peter. His sermons are simple and down to the point. And what Paul is stressing about in these chapters is one simple fact, which is that who the preachers of the gospel are is totally unimportant. What is important is the place of preaching in the church? And at the end of the day, it is only God that can give growth through the ministry of the word. Think first, the primacy of preaching. Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel. That's true of him. It's also true of us. Our calling, despite the fact that we are an adult Baptist church, is not to baptize. But our calling is to preach the gospel. And the word that he uses in the original means to bring the good news, to preach the good news. And if ever was a day that people needed good news, it's now. So what the apostle sees himself in this act of preaching the good news, he sees himself literally like a street crier that used to exist in the medieval period. So in Acts 9, we read, following his conversion, for several days he was with the disciples at Damascus, and in the synagogues immediately he proclaimed Jesus, saying, he is the Son of God. Now he uses a different verb here, which means to make known, proclaim, pro-preach. There's a noun that comes from it, which means preacher or herald. So here we have Paul in the synagogues in the synagogues in Damascus, following his conversion. He's received no formal training for this calling. Oh yes, he had received training to be a rabbi, but that's not this. This is different. So how does he tell us about it? In Galatians 1, he says, When he who set me apart before I was born and had called me through his grace was pleased to reveal his Son in me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles.

What's he talking about here? He's saying that before he was even born, God chose him to do this very thing.

[7 : 25] And he often talks about it, often over and over again, perhaps even more than some of the other writers to the church.

For example, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In other words, dear people, God has chosen Paul and you and me to be holy, to be different, to stand out from the crowd.

And this calling, he says, took place in three different bits. First of all, he tells us that he was set apart for this before his mother's womb.

Second, he was called by the grace of God in that he heard and responded to an audible call of the gospel. And last Sunday, I spoke about this interaction between Jesus and the people who listened to him, having a personal encounter with Jesus Christ.

And that is what Paul is saying here. He's saying that the thing that made the difference to me is nothing that I learned on the way to being a rabbi.

[8 : 55] What made the difference is I had this personal encounter with Jesus Christ. And as a result of this encounter, God has revealed his son to him.

Does that happen to you? Have you seen the Lord Jesus Christ? Have you had that encounter? Have you appreciated who he is?

this was the lot of the people who were there in the first century who followed Jesus. Peter tells us in 2 Peter 1, we were with him on the holy mountain and we heard such a voice.

This is my beloved son whom I am well pleased. What's that? That's a testimony of the grace of God.

We saw him for ourselves. Because of this revelation, because of what's happened, he relates in Ephesians 3, of this gospel, I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace which was given me by the working of his power.

[10 : 32] And if you read 2 Timothy chapter 1, he writes to Timothy to tell people, I acted ignorantly in unbelief.

This is why I was a persecutor and someone who insulted the gospel. I was there, I was, it was like me being in a fog, I couldn't see the way forward.

I acted ignorantly in unbelief. But God stepped into his life and gave him this personal relationship with his son in spite of the fact of what he'd done.

and what he'd done, he'd been there agreeing to the death of Stephen, the first martyr. He's got this personal relationship that gives him something to talk about.

When we come to the second bit which is the content of preaching, we preach Christ crucified. this is the message.

[11 : 56] The message has not changed in 2000 years nor will it change. It is on the person of the son of God who died in your place and in mine and demonstrated to us the great love of God.

This is what he said in Galatians 2.20. This is the faith I live by. I live by faith in the son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.

The problem in Corinth was that this was a divided congregation. So he says in verse 11, it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you my brothers and sisters. believers. Now when we think of this message, this message of Christ crucified, it's all important to the people in Corinth because it unites.

It focuses your attention on the greatness of God's act in Christ. Christ. Take a look at Matthew chapter 27.

[13 : 19] Jesus hanging on the cross and all around is dark. He cries out, quoting Psalm 22 1, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

And there's no answer to that. But the why is God forsook him in his great love for you and for me. And looking down from the cross, Jesus can see the jeering of the scribes, the Pharisees, the high priests, and so on. How does he react to this?

Father, forgive them. They do not understand what they are doing. So when we think of the abandonment and dereliction of Jesus on the cross, it causes us to feel totally unimportant.

And it unites us around the humility that we see in the cross. But we're also told that this message of the cross actually saves.

[14:42] I want to use three words that Paul uses in his letters to explain what Jesus did on the cross. God says, and the first word is the word redemption.

In Ephesians 1, 7 we read, in him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace.

Now the word redemption means a liberation or a setting free. It is the hymn writer who wrote, he breaks the power of cancelled sin.

He sets the prisoner free. his blood can make the foulest clean. His blood veiled for me. And right through society today, there are people who are in bondage to one thing or another.

And if we could go into their houses in the quiet place, you would find many of them crying out, oh God, I wish I was free of this. What does Jesus say?

[16:03] Whom the Son of Man sets free is free indeed. The second word is the word reconciliation. 2 Corinthians 5, 19 God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusted to us the message of reconciliation.

reconciliation. The verb here, which is translated reconcile, means to put someone into friendship with God.

That's what it means. Because prior to the cross, prior to our experience of grace, we were enemies of the gospel.

gospel, we were not God's sons or daughters prior to receiving the gospel. But Paul is telling us, by the use of this word, that if you accept into your heart and life the message of the cross, you are put into friendship with God.

God's love. The final word is the word propitiation. 1 John 2.2, he is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world.

[17:31] The word here means appeasement of satisfaction. Because in the cross, the wrath of God on sin was dealt with.

It was turned away. So this is the means by which our sins are forgiven. People in the world like to think that we talk about a God of love, and so we do.

But the God of love is also a God of justice. And what people forget is that by their lifestyle they have broken God's holy commandments and have opened themselves up to God's wrath.

But in the cross it's been turned away. So you're introduced into a new relationship. Finally, the effect of preaching.

It pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. Now, how do we get to that?

[18:51] Jesus said to his disciples, the words I have spoken to you are spirit and life. That is, what you find in the Bible is alive.

it lives. It directs. It speaks. So that when Paul writes to Timothy, he says, all scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction and training in righteousness.

And the word inspired literally means God breathed. and it's the only place in the entire Greek language that that word is used. The word of God is God breathed.

God speaks through it. He speaks through it by way of encouragement. He speaks through it by way of challenge.

And it's useful, says the apostle, for teaching, reproof and for correction. The apostle to the Hebrews comes into the same thought.

[20:07] Hebrews 4, verse 12. The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirits, of joints and marrow, and discerns the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

So the word of God is God breathed. But it's also acting as a critic and a judge. Why?

Because the word of God tells you and me that we are sinners. And outside of God's grace, we don't like it. And that is why many people have dedicated their lives to destroying the Bible.

It convicts of sin. something else we can say. And the power of this word is that it creates faith.

It gives you the power to believe in the impossible. In the ministry of Jesus, in Luke 5, we read on one of those days as he was teaching, there were Pharisees and teachers of the law sitting by who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and Jerusalem and the power of the Lord was present to heal.

[21:40] And I would submit to you tonight there's a very simple link between the teaching of Jesus and the power of God being present to save, to heal, to encourage, to commission.

The word of God creates faith. And so we read in Romans 10, faith comes from what is heard and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ.

Faith comes from what is heard and we by God's grace are listening to God's word and God speaks through it and he speaks to you and to me and as he does so he gives you faith.

Faith to turn away from your sins. Faith to believe that God loves you more than you could ever dream of.

God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life. Faith to believe in the good news.

[23 : 12] Faith to take it to your neighbor. It pleases God through the folly of what we preach to save those that believe. Acts 2 finishes like this.

And the Lord added to the number day by day those who are being saved. So Peter had preached a tremendous sermon on the day of Pentecost about the death and resurrection of Christ.

And what we find is that the word of God that was spoken and spoken directly convicted of sin.

They were all as the old version says pricked in the heart. Because that's still true today.

God convicts of sin. But it not only convicts of sin, it gives faith to believe that the one who has risen from the dead can be your savior and mine.

[24 : 27] this is the power of preaching the gospel. What a great power it is. What a great rejoicing we have.

It pleases God through the folly of what we preach to save those that believe. Shall we stand and sing?

Lord speak to me that I may speak.