

Remember

Notebook: Sermons

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1 Corinthians 15:1-4

Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached 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,

Introduction

What do you think is the most dangerous place for a Christian to be?

Perhaps it's in a country that's hostile to the gospel like North Korea or Iran. Yet, God's word encourages us to not fear man, even though they may seek to kill us.

Perhaps it's living in the midst of a sinful, immoral and amoral culture. But God's word is full of guidance on how to live in the midst of such a culture and the examples of both Jesus and the early church would actually encourage us go and seek this type of opportunity.

Perhaps it's living with our own sin and apathy. Even here, we are exhorted by Scripture to turn and find life. To return like the prodigal son. To plead for mercy like the tax collector. To say I'm undone like Isaiah.

I would submit to you that the most dangerous place for a Christian to be is in a religious system. Consider the Pharisees. They had Jesus killed to protect their system. Consider the parade of kings in Israel's history. How many started well, trusting in God yet to crash and burn as they began trusting in themselves? Consider Paul. Even he was given a thorn in the flesh to remind him that God's grace is made perfect in weakness.

And, consider the Corinthian church. They had it made. They were the mega church of their day. If they could have, they would have done multi site, written their own curriculum, maybe hosted a pastors conference. They had everything a church of their day needed. Except they were in grave danger. They were in danger of losing the gospel.

Tonight brothers and sisters we face a very similar danger. We are at the apex of the church calendar. Palm Sunday through Easter, Holy Week as it were, is the centerpiece of why any church exists. Christmas leads to Easter. Every Sunday service points to Jesus' death and resurrection. Communion proclaims what Jesus accomplished for us. All of this is designed to worship the God of glory and to remind us of who he is, what he's done and what he continues to do.

And yet, if we are not careful, we too could be in danger. We could be in the danger of familiarity. In the danger of "I've heard that, what's next". In danger of losing the awe of Christ and the

gospel. In danger of falling into the trap of thinking we're really not that bad, are we?

So, as Paul comes to the end of his first letter to the church in Corinth he sees this danger and he needs to remind them of what is truly important and essential as they continue to grow and serve the living God. He has written about leadership. He has written about wisdom. He written about giving up their rights for the sake of others. He has written about the grace gifts lavished on church by the Spirit. And, he has written about true, agape love. With all of that, he concludes by saying, I need you to focus on something really important. I need to remind you of the gospel.

What's the gospel?

Well, that begs a question, doesn't it? What exactly is the gospel? It seems we are all pretty good at throwing terms around without defining what we mean. We do this at work. We do this at home. We do this a lot on social media. And the result? There are a whole bunch of people talking past each other.

Now, we can't address every definitional problem tonight, be we can tackle one. What exactly is the gospel? Some of you might want to say "it's the good news", which in fact it is. But in reality, in doing that aren't we just trading one assumed term for another? So what is this gospel? What is this good news?

It starts with a couple of facts. The first is this: God created everything good. The plants and animals, mountains, rivers and oceans. Man and woman. Everything was good. And God and his people lived together, face to face.

The second fact is this: the first man, Adam, chose to disobey God in an attempt to be God himself. That disobedience fractured everything. Sin entered the world, and to make things even worse, because of this fracturing, everything in God's good, perfect world was now subject to decay and death. What was once a personal, intimate relationship with God was torn apart and ruined.

What makes this fractured and ruined relationship with God so incredibly tragic is that we each have faint memories of "the good old days". Something inside of us says this can't be all there is. But we are blind to the way out, of the way back. We are, in every sense of the word, lost.

But God decided, even before Adam rebelled and fractured all of creation, that out of the overflow of his love and grace and mercy he would rescue a people for himself. His dilemma, of course, was that the rebellion and sin, both conscious and subconscious really occurred and really needed to be paid for. It's like my Discover bill. Somebody simply saying "it's paid for" doesn't actually pay for it. Somebody has to write the check.

And it's more than that. Paying the bill is a huge thing, because our debt is infinite. But paying the bill doesn't fix the heart of the problem. How can I, a broken, rebellious sinner be reunited with my pure, holy, loving Father? Nothing can bridge that gap, can it?

Enter the hero: Jesus. He is our good news. He is our sin bearer. Whatever debt we owe God and whatever debt we continue to accumulate along the way, Jesus paid it all. And on top of that, he has restored us to a right relationship with our Heavenly Father. Each of us was at one time were far away from God. But through Jesus we have been brought near. Not only that, he has also begun repairing and restoring us, giving us a new heart, new motives and a new reason to live.

What is our hope?

Notice that Paul's emphasis on reminding the Corinthians of the gospel was not simply for a history lesson. He saw the danger we all face of isolating our salvation to a point in time event. Let me be clear, it is crucial that we remember and continue to praise God for what Jesus has done for us at Calvary two millennia ago. It is huge. It is significant. But it is not the complete picture. Our salvation is not simply a historic, point in time salvation. There is a future dimension to it as well.

Some day, each of us will stand before God. There will be no hiding on that day. As Moses got a glimpse, as Job got a glimpse, as Isaiah got a glimpse, as John got glimpse, standing before God is a terrifying thing. On that day, who will be your advocate? On that day, who will save you from the pure holiness of God? What hope, what confidence, what assurance do you have that you will be able to spend even a moment with God, much less an eternity?

Once again we look to our hero Jesus. As Paul says here and elsewhere, Jesus not only paid for all our sins, past, present and future. Not only did he destroy the wall of hostility and alienation between us and God. But he also secured for us an eternal redemption. When he says in Rom 8:38-39 that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Jesus, he's looking from today forward. Jesus will keep us. Jesus will save us. As the author of Jude says so eloquently: "Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen."

What about today?

And that leaves us with today. March 24, 2016. Jesus has saved us from our sins. He has restored us to the family of God. He will deliver us safe into God's presence one day. But what about today? What about difficult marriages? What about cancer or Alzheimer's? What about job loss? What about wayward children or unsaved parents? What about terrorist attacks? What the loss of infant children? What about the next curve ball life throws at us? What then? Between trusting Christ and being ushered into God's presence are we left to ourselves?

The reason Paul wanted the Corinthians to remember the gospel is precisely for these questions. Since Jesus really is our hero, he is walking with us in the midst of each of these things. He walking with us in our marriages, in our health concerns, in our job situations, as we deal with children or parents or siblings, as we grieve for love ones who have died, whatever their age. And while we don't know what tomorrow holds, Jesus does. Even now he is preparing us for what's coming next. Jesus said that he would never leave us nor would he forsake us. Brothers and sisters hear me, Jesus keeps his promises.

In Romans 8, Paul states that Jesus is interceding for us. Think about that. Right now, whatever you may be dealing with, as big as it is, as bad as it is, Jesus knows, Jesus cares and Jesus is pleading for you personally before the throne of our Father. Think of Peter in the hours before the crucifixion. He boasted of his willingness to die with Jesus. Jesus told Peter that Satan had asked to sift Peter like wheat. (That's a scary thought). Jesus' reassurance to Peter was not that Jesus would forbid Satan, but rather that he had prayed for Peter. That is what delivered Peter through to the other side. Jesus prayed for him. And Jesus our hero, is personally praying for each one of his brothers and sisters, even now.

Conclusion

Since this is a message on remembering the gospel, I would like to conclude with just a couple of questions. The first one is this: what effect does the gospel have in your own life? Not the life of your spouse or your kids or your neighbors. What difference does Jesus make to you? We all know that there are some things that have no affect, no pertinence to our lives. But the gospel is not one of those things. Gospel truths are make or break. Black or white. In or out. So for you, deep in your heart of hearts, what difference does any of this make to you?

My second question is this: how will you respond? Not to my words, but to God's Word. This is where the danger is. If we have enough religion, we can intellectually acknowledge everything that's been said and yet miss the point. The Pharisees were Old Testament experts, yet they missed the point. When God says come to me that you may have life, will you come? When Jesus says whoever believes in me will have eternal life, will you believe? When the Word says all those who seek me I will never cast out, will you seek Christ?

If you have trusted in Christ, this the gospel is an incredible picture of what Jesus did for you. But, if you have yet to take that step of faith, you are in the greatest danger. No ritual of this day or this weekend can rescue you. No amount of good works or wishful thinking can get you home again.

Only Jesus can do this. Only Jesus can save. What better day than today to trust in Jesus as your savior and begin to follow him as your Lord, to stop trying to save yourself or assuming your good works will outweigh your bad ones. Spiritually speaking, we are all in the same boat. We all desperately need a savior, a sustainer and someone to take us home. Jesus is the one who conquered sin, death and the grave. I plead with you, trust him today with your life.

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