

## INTRO:

My aim in today's message is three-fold:

1. I want to lay out what I believe is the single greatest truth in all of the Bible, and therefore the single greatest truth period, from which all other truths flow and get their meaning.
2. I want to make the case that we need to work hard to preserve and prioritize this truth in practice and in principle in both our private and our public walks of faith.
3. I want to show that If we do this:
  1. God will be glorified
  2. The lost will be saved
  3. God's children will be made strong and fearless and happy

## PART ONE:

There is a singular, ultimately important reality in the universe under which all other realities fall and from which all other realities flow. If we understand and embrace this reality everything else in life will make sense.

I could show it to you from countless passages (and I would LOVE to do that), but for the sake of time this morning let's look at one:

Psalm 113:1-6

*Praise the LORD!  
Praise, O servants of the LORD,  
praise the name of the LORD!  
Blessed be the name of the LORD  
from this time forth and forevermore!  
**From the rising of the sun to its setting,  
the name of the LORD is to be praised!**  
The LORD is high above all nations,  
and his glory above the heavens!  
Who is like the LORD our God,  
who is seated on high,  
who looks far down  
on the heavens and the earth?*

Do you see the key that I'm talking about? It has two parts - let me show you:

- A. There is no greater, no higher, no stronger, no sweeter, no more satisfying reality in all the universe than the greatness and goodness of the person of God.
- B. AND there is nothing that is more needful in the universe than for this awesome reality of who God is to be seen and savored and shared.

God is not just good and great TO US. He IS good and great in the manifold perfections of his own character. Before anything else existed, God was glorious and completely happy and self-sufficient in every imaginable way. God did not create the universe because he was bored or because he was hoping to get something from it that he did not already have.

*The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.*  
(Acts 17:24–25)

So God is in himself infinitely great and good.

AND God's greatness and goodness MUST be seen and savored and shared. I'm not saying "MUST" as in "has to" but as in "NEEDS TO"! God's glory being seen and celebrated is the greatest NECESSITY in the universe and for it NOT to be would be the greatest TRAVESTY in the universe - nothing could be worse!

The thing we need to FEEL here isn't just that God is good and great, but we need to feel the absolute NEED for God's goodness and greatness to be clearly and boldly shown forth. There are things of such beauty and worth and majesty that their very existence calls for them to be known and enjoyed and shared with others.

— — —>This is why national parks and museums and funny pet videos exist. The heart behind it is: "People NEED to see this!"

The greater the beauty and worth and majesty of something the greater the necessity for it to be made known. Since God's greatness and goodness is infinite, so is the need for his greatness and goodness to be made known. Which is why there is no greater thing than the displaying of God's greatness and goodness and why it is the ultimate reason behind everything God does.

Think of what I'm saying: From the creation of the world until today NOTHING has been needed more than God showing his goodness and greatness and his creatures seeing, savoring and sharing it.

That's a huge statement! NOTHING is needed more than that?

- What about preventing wars or famines or tsunamis?
- What about eradicating disease and poverty?
- What about preventing the murder of millions of people by Hitler and millions more by Stalin or the murdering of 56 million babies in the womb every year by abortion that is still going on to this day?
- NOTHING is more important?!

*For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name will be great among the nations, and in every place incense will be offered to my name, and a pure offering. For my name will be great among the nations, says the LORD of hosts...For I am a great King, says the LORD of hosts, and my name will be feared among the nations.* (Malachi 1:11, 14b)

“Missions exists because worship doesn’t. Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man. When this age is over, and the countless millions of the redeemed fall on their faces before the throne of God, missions will be no more.” (John Piper, Let the Nations Be Glad)

God tells us that NOTHING is more important than his goodness and greatness being put on display because it is the greatest treasure that exists.

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And WE NEED GOD.

Our singular need as humans is to be able to see and savor and share the goodness and greatness of God.

WE NEED GOD! WE NEED HIM! He is everything we need. He is life and light and peace and joy and love.

*Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.* (Psalm 73:25–26)

But we’ve rebelled against our great King! We’ve cursed and spurned the source of life and have walked away from him. We’ve rejected the universe’s supreme treasure and the great need of our souls and have compounded the offense by going after worthless things.

*Be appalled, O heavens, at this; be shocked, be utterly desolate, declares the LORD, for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.* (Jeremiah 2:12–13)

So now we find ourselves lost without him - empty and desolate and walking in darkness and death.

But...into this horrible situation comes a message of GOOD NEWS!:

*You, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him,* (Colossians 1:21–22)

*For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God* (1 Peter 3:18)

THIS is the gospel story. That God, instead of justly leaving us separated from him in outer darkness, has undertaken, at enormous cost to himself, to bring us back to himself where we can again enjoy life in him.

The GREAT GOOD of the Gospel is that God DOES NOT give us what we deserve - complete separation from him, the source of all good; but instead he gives us what we most need and desire - He gives us himself, in all his fullness.

## PART TWO

What impossibly glorious good news! That God would undertake the worst and hardest thing imaginable to give the thing most needful to those who are the most undeserving! What a treasure this gospel is!

We would never let go of such riches, would we? We would never abandon a thing of such worth through lack of vigilance and neglect! It would be unthinkable to squander such a treasure by letting go of the truth that the greatness and goodness of God is the highest good in the universe? Right?

*Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.* (1 Timothy 4:16)

*...we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.* (Hebrews 2:1)

What I want to suggest is that in some ways we Evangelicals have started to drift away from a gospel message where God's greatness and goodness is at the center to one where humans are at the center. And I want to suggest that by doing this we have begun to embrace a gospel that

1. Does not give God the glory he deserves,
2. Does not have the power to save the lost and
3. Is not able to make God's children strong and fearless and happy

### **A Marriage of Love vs. A Mercenary Marriage:**

The difference between the Bible's God-centered gospel where God himself is the greatest treasure and the man-centered gospel is similar to the difference between a marriage of love and a mercenary marriage.

In a marriage of love two people get married because they have great affection for one another and can't imagine living without each other. In a mercenary marriage a person marries someone, not because he loves that person and wants to be with them, but because of something else that he can get as a result of being married. People enter a mercenary marriage for lots of reasons: to obtain citizenship in a different country, to secure a favorable tax status or health insurance benefits, to get the other person's wealth or property, or to gain status in society.

The key difference is that in a marriage of love a person marries another person because he desperately wants to be with that PERSON! Any other benefits are secondary. In fact, a person will enter into a marriage of love despite lots of other costs. It often doesn't seem to make sense to those who are thinking rationally.

But in a mercenary marriage a person marries another person NOT because he wants that person herself (in fact, he may be entirely indifferent or worse towards her as a person) but because he wants something he can only get if he is married to her. He wants the benefits the marriage can give, but not his spouse herself.

Do you see how this relates to how we understand and present the gospel?

In a marriage of love the thing that is honored as of great worth is the beloved spouse. Similarly, in the God-centered gospel the thing that is glorified as of great worth is God himself, our great treasure.

In a mercenary marriage the thing that is valued is NOT the spouse, but the thing that the person gets as a result of being married. Similarly, in the man-centered gospel the thing that is valued is NOT God himself as our goal and treasure, but other self-centered things that we are told we can get if we come to God.

A prime way we see this today is how we appeal to people in our evangelism. In the man-centered gospel people are lured to "come to Christ" or to "give their lives to God" or to "believe in Jesus" not to get God himself as their supreme treasure, but to get other things that they treasure instead:

- freedom from a guilty conscience,
- a get-out-of-Hell-free card,
- a supernatural fix for their relationships or financial situation,
- release from fear and anxiety,
- deliverance from bad habits,
- God's favor & blessing on their life, etc.

Do you see the problems with this? We mentioned them earlier:

1. God is not honored as the Greatest Good that we all need. Instead of seeing these things as the means and effect of the main goal of the gospel - bringing us back to treasuring God above all - he is seen as a MEANS to get things other than himself that we want. God is not LOVED by people following this gospel and therefore he is not GLORIFIED by them.
2. Lost people are not rescued by this gospel.

In the absence of this biblical gospel message who is it that is filling up our churches? It could be that our churches are filling up with people who have embraced a 'gospel' which is no gospel at all.

*“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’” (Matthew 7:21–23)*

*“Christ did not die to forgive sinners who go on treasuring anything above seeing and savoring God. And people who would be happy in heaven if Christ were not there, will not be there. The gospel is not a way to get people to **heaven**; it is a way to get people to **God**. It’s a way of overcoming every obstacle to everlasting joy in God. If we don’t want God above all things, we have not been converted by the gospel.” (John Piper, God is the Gospel)*

A person does not have to be born again to accept a gospel where he uses God the way pagans use idols to get things they think he will give them if they meet some religious requirements. When we preach a gospel that unregenerate people can embrace we will not see spiritually dead people come alive in faith. It is only in preaching the simple, impossible, offensive, foolish Gospel of the Bible that God does the impossible in people’s lives and grants spiritual sight to the blind.

3. Christians are not built up to be strong, fearless and happy by this gospel. We as Christians NEED to be regularly feeding on the truth that God himself is the supreme treasure that our souls need and long for and that nothing else can deeply and lastingly satisfy our hearts! If we aren’t, and if we are seeking our strength and security and happiness in anything else:
  1. We will NOT be able to ...*be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might...that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil...that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm.* (Ephesians 6:10–13)
  2. We will NOT have an unshakable boldness that declares, *“This I know, that God is for me. In God, whose word I praise, in the LORD, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I shall not be afraid. What can man do to me?”* (Psalm 56:9–11) AND *If God is for us, who can be against us?* (Romans 8:31)
  3. We will NOT have a rock solid happiness that proclaims, *Lift up the light of your face upon us, O LORD! You have put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine abound.* (Psalm 4:6b–7) and *You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.* (Psalm 16:11)

CONCLUSION:

I know that, in some ways, I have probably raised more questions than I have answered today. I encourage you to come back next December so we can answer some of those questions.

But as we start to wind this message down, I want to turn and say three very positive, hopeful and practical things:

1. If being saved requires the spiritually dead to be born again, the spiritually blind to be granted sight and haters of God to be enabled to love him, then, as Jesus disciples asked in astonishment, *“Who then can be saved?”* The answer today is the same as when Jesus gave it 2000 years ago: *But Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”* (Matthew 19:25-26).

In some ways it is disconcerting that a person cannot simply “decide” to be saved, that it is God who must do the saving. We prefer to think that we are in control.

But at the same time it is amazingly encouraging that what we cannot do for ourselves God DOES! As we preach this gospel, God grants sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf

*Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. [2] But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. [3] And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. [4] In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. [5] For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. [6] For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. (2 Corinthians 4:1–6)*

2. “I believe! Help my unbelief!”

There are some (maybe many) who need to look in their hearts and realize that though they have counted themselves Christians, there really is no love for Christ in their hearts - that they have only loved what they hoped Christ could do for them. As we preach a God-centered gospel God confronts people who have a false assurance of salvation with their lost state and their need for him.

Yet it can be discouraging to a sensitive Christian heart to hear that believing in Christ means loving him and treasuring him above all else. It can be discouraging because they think, “My love for God is so weak and so inconstant! Am I really be saved?” The important thing for that person to hear

is the truth in the phrase, “I believe! Help my unbelief” (Mark 9:24). Another (I think appropriate) way to say that is, “I love you! Help my lack of love!”

For those of you who have loved Christ, don't let the often weak and faltering nature of that love make you feel as if you are not one of his sheep.

3. *Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.* (1 Timothy 4:16)

We need to keep watch on how we live and what teaching we embrace because we do not want to drift into a life where we are seeking and treasuring the things (even good things) that cannot satisfy us rather than drinking deeply from the river of God's delights the way we are meant to do.

I love that he says to keep a close watch both on “yourself” and on “the teaching”. This is how we stay close to Jesus - by making sure we are practically, in real-life seeking to be happy in God above all, and by making sure we are not letting the sound teaching of Scripture get pushed out by the constant noise of the world.

God is graciously calling us to enter in to the most secure and satisfying life of seeing, savoring and sharing in his goodness and greatness. In this God is glorified as the all-satisfying treasure of the universe as does everything that is needed for us to become deeply and lastingly happy in him. Let's strive to enter in to this blessing!