

**Our Church – *Who We Still Are***  
**Gospel Centeredness**  
**Lesson 1 1 Corinthians 15:1-4**  
**041121**

- 1 This morning we are beginning a new series that will run through the fourth Sunday in May. The series is called “**Our Church**” with the subtitle, “*Who We Still Are.*”
- 2 Every so often in the life of a church it is important to revisit what we believe, what we value and how that affects how we live out our faith as individual believers in Jesus and as a body of believers in Jesus.
  - a To accomplish this, next week we are going to start looking at our five core values. Those core values are 1) High view of Scripture, 2) Spirit-filled worship, 3) Spiritual family, 4) Whole-hearted serving and 5) Global missions.
  - b Overarching those five core values are our two ministry distinctives, Gospel-centeredness and Spirit-empowerment.
  - c So the plan is to share our five core values bookended by our two ministry distinctives. We will begin today with gospel-centeredness.

*Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. <sup>2</sup> By this gospel you are (being) saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. <sup>3</sup> For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup> that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:1–4).*

- 1 One word that you will often hear around Grace is the word gospel. This was not always the case. It’s was not because we viewed the gospel as unimportant or secondary ... but rather as introductory.
  - a We believed, like most Christians are taught that once you believe the gospel and are saved then you mature in your faith by learning to live according to biblical principles.
  - b However, what we discovered was that the gospel is not only the message of how we become believers but also how we grow as believers ... not only the message of how we believe in Jesus but also how we become more like Jesus.

- c The gospel is not only the message of salvation but also the message of transformation. The gospel is not only the means of justification (making us right with God) but also the means of sanctification (making us more like Jesus).
  - d Therefore, we believe the gospel to be saved and then mature in our faith by believing the gospel more deeply in order to be transformed in every part of our minds, hearts, and lives (Rom 12:1-2; Phil 1:6; 3:13-14).
- 2 This is why the gospel is at the heart of Christianity and is the central message and theme of Scripture. The Bible is more than the gospel but the Bible cannot be properly understood without the lens of the gospel.
- b At the heart of all Christian truth is the gospel. If the Bible was a wheel, the hub in the wheel would be the gospel.
  - b Therefore, the gospel must not be understood as merely the elementary truth that you believe in order to become a Christian. Rather it is the central truth of Christianity through which we understand all other truths of Christianity.
  - c In other words, the gospel is not just the ABCs but the A to Z of the Christian life. Therefore, we are not only called to believe and share the gospel but to center our individual lives and our church around the gospel. Hence, gospel-centeredness. (6 points)

**[1] The gospel is good news.**

- 1 The word gospel is from the Greek word (eu-angelion) and was generally used in the ancient world of the “good news” delivered by a herald to a city or village that something had happened to rescue, save and deliver them from peril.
- 2 It is something like the front-page headlines of a major newspaper in the 20<sup>th</sup> century announcing the end of a war. With that in mind the gospel is the ultimate good news that God, in Christ has saved us from the power of sin, penalty of sin and ultimately the presence of sin. It is news not of what we must do but rather of what God has done.
- 3 This is not all that the gospel is but it is the most basic definition of the gospel and one that is expounded on by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15.

**[2] The gospel is centered on Jesus and what he has done.**

*Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup> that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day (v3b-4a).*

- 1 The title “Christ” which means anointed one is the Greek version of the Hebrew word Messiah who is revealed in Old Testament prophecies as being God himself who would, at a certain point in time enter the world as a man in order to die as a sacrifice for our sin.
  - a This is why Jesus said,
 

*I have not come to be served but to serve and give my life a ransom for many (Matthew 20:28).*
  - b Peter writes,
 

*For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit (1 Peter 3:18)*
- 2 After bearing the penalty of our sin (God’s judgment/wrath) he died and was buried after which he was raised from the dead on the third day therefore proving that his death was accepted by God as full payment for our sins.
- 3 So the gospel is centered on Christ, his death and his resurrection. Since Christ died for our sins ...

### **[3] The gospel assumes our need for salvation**

*Christ died for our sins (v3b).*

- 1 Ultimately sin is rebellion against God and the refusal to obey his law or commands. God says, ‘I’m your Creator and here is how I want you to live, here is what is pleasing to me and here is what is best for you.’
- 2 But we either reject God’s law because we don’t want anyone ruling over us or fall short of obeying God’s law. Romans 3 says, we all sin and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23) because there is none righteous, no not one (Romans 3:10).
- 3 Every one of us underestimates our level of sinfulness and therefore our need for the gospel and this ultimately robs us of joy in God and love for God (He who has been forgiven little loves little).
  - a The reason we underestimate our sinfulness is because we still believe in part that we are accepted by God on the basis of performance or our good behavior (legalism/moralism).
  - b This false belief makes it difficult to admit our sin or it compels us to maintain a very elementary view of what sin is. Sin is limited to the things that we can mostly avoid.

- c But whether we realize it or not each of us has transgressed the laws of God in our thoughts, words and deeds more times than we could ever imagine.
- Now if your self-worth is based upon your performance this crushes you. *With despair you say*, “I have sinned so much.”
  - But if your self-worth is based on the gospel of God’s grace the awareness of your sinfulness actually leads to worship and holiness. *With joy you say*, “I have sinned so much and yet he loves me, is transforming me and one day will perfect me”
  - The gospel does not downplay our sin, it exalts God’s grace.
- 4 Perhaps I still need to convince you how much you need the grace of the gospel. We don’t need to go any further to make the case than the First Commandment. “You shall have no other gods before me” (Exodus 20:3).
- a Before we became believers, we broke this commandment every minute of every day of our life for years.
- We gave no thought to the true and living God but had plenty of other substitute gods/idols that were more important to us like money, career, power, reputation, security, comfort, family, romance, social causes or a multitude of other things. They were what we lived for.
  - Even after we believe in Christ, we must battle the allure of these other gods in order to make Christ our greatest joy and greatest love.
- b The reason we have to battle is that usually our gods/idols are good things that we make into ultimate things. We believe the gospel but we try to get our value and worth from other things and the result is always a disguised form of slavery.
- c Everyone has to live for something, and if that something is not God, then we are driven by that thing we live for and essentially it controls us. We think we are free but really, we are enslaved.
- 5 This is why the Son of God, Jesus Christ, entered the world. He came into the world to keep the law we could never keep ... pay the penalty we could never pay ... and free us from the idolatry we could never see.
- a He perfectly kept God’s law for us, he completely bore the penalty of all our law breaking and he utterly freed us from slavery to false gods. He became our substitute and simultaneously our emancipator.

- b And when we believe in Christ his perfectly obedient life is credited to us as right-standing before God and his perfectly obedient death becomes our payment for sin.
- c This is why *Christ died for our sins*. The gospel is this: We were so sinful that Jesus had to die for us but so loved he was glad to die for us so we could be forgiven our sins and made right with God.
- d But the gospel's work doesn't end there. The gospel is not only the power that saves ...

**[4] The gospel is the power for transformation.**

<sup>1</sup> Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you *received* and on which you have **taken your stand**. <sup>2</sup> By this gospel you are (**being**) saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you.

- 1 I put parenthesis around the word “being” because the NIV does not include it but the ESV does because the Greek verb translated saved is in the present tense which means an ongoing action ... thus “being saved.”
  - a Paul says the gospel is something you receive, something upon which you take your stand (your foundation) *and* something by which you are being saved or transformed (sanctification).
- 2 So how does the gospel transform us? The answer is found in Galatians 2:14 where Paul lays down a powerful principle in dealing with Peter's hypocrisy and racial pride by declaring that Peter *was not walking in line with the truth of the gospel (Galatians 2:14a)*.
  - a This of course implies that the gospel is a set of truths that form a straight line to which we are to constantly realign our life. To “walk in line with the gospel” then is to draw out the implications of the gospel and live in conformity with that truth.
  - b For example, let's take Peter's case, the fear of man that led to hypocrisy and racial pride.
    - The gospel teaches that you are a sinner, deserving of divine judgment and nothing with which to commend yourself before God ... and everything you have is only by the sheer grace of God ... why would you ever feel superior? That's not in line with the gospel.
    - Therefore, Paul doesn't say to Peter your hypocrisy is wrong or your pride is wrong ... rather your hypocrisy and pride are not

inline with the gospel ... you have forgotten that you are a sinner saved by grace.

- c Now there are hundreds of ways to apply the gospel like this and they all underscore this principle: The way we overcome sinful behaviors and experience deep lasting transformation is by aligning *every part* of our lives to the gospel.
- 3 The reason most Christians experience little deep transformation after being a Christians for a few years is that we lead them to believe that being a Christian is outward conformity to certain behaviors rather than deep inward transformation in our heart.
  - a The gospel is not just something we believe once, it is also something that we align ourselves to daily and as we do, by faith, it releases the power of God to transform us.
  - b This is not an easy thing to do and it does not come naturally. It is much easier to abide by a moral code rather than have our inner desires transformed.
  - c This is why Paul says to the Corinthians, I want to remind you of the gospel. We must continually rediscover the implications of the gospel to overcome every sinful pattern in our lives.
- 4 For example when Paul addresses the lack of financial generosity of the Corinthians he does not say here is how much you have to give to please God. Nor does he does not assert his authority as an Apostle and pressure them to give. Nor does he promise to send them a gift if they give. Instead, he writes ...

*For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich (2 Corinthians 8:9).*

  - a He addresses their lack of generosity by reminding them of the gospel. In essence he says think about how costly grace is.
    - Think about how much it cost the Father to send the Son to die for your sins.
    - Think about the spiritual poverty Jesus bore on the cross to make you spiritually rich beyond comprehension. He took what you deserved for your sin and you get what he deserves for his obedience.

- b Let that soak into your hearts and as you do you will become generous with everything in your life, including your money. This is the blueprint for change you see throughout the New Testament.
- 5 Therefore, for deep transformation to happen you have to stay on the gospel road which means you have to avoid the ditches on both sides.
  - a On one side is the ditch of legalism and on the other side is the ditch of license. These two errors constantly seek to corrupt the message and steal away the power of the gospel and they are very powerful because they are the natural tendencies of the human heart.
  - b Legalism says I obey and therefore I am accepted. License says it doesn't matter if I obey because I'm accepted. The gospel says because I'm accepted, I *want* to obey.
  - c Legalism emphasizes the truth without grace. License emphasizes grace without truth. But the gospel says that Jesus was full of grace and truth (John 1:14).
    - Truth without grace is not really truth, and grace without truth is not really grace.
    - If you de-emphasize one or the other you'll end up in the ditch and not experience the joy and power of the gospel changing your inner desires.
  - d So, if we are going to experience deep change, we need to make a clear distinction between legalism, license and the gospel. And we can do that if we understand the gospel is this:
    - “I am more sinful and flawed than I ever dared to believe (I could never obey enough) ... but at the same time I am more accepted and loved by God than I could have ever hoped for (which makes me want to obey).
  - e The only way to be saved and to be transformed is through the gospel and that is why the gospel must be central in our lives and in our church.

## **[5] The gospel is central**

*For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance (v3)*

- 1 The gospel is central or of first importance. Unfortunately, sometimes it is not.
  - a The gospel is believed to be necessary to become a believer but it is not central in the life of a believer or of a church.

- b It is often placed in the background, buried in a statement of faith or treated as an afterthought rather than the centerpiece of all a church does and the centerpiece of how believers are to live their lives.
- 2 This has been the trend in American churches for 30+ years and has significantly weakened it.
- a It all began in the 80's with a desire to reach more people for Jesus in a culture that was becoming less and less interested in Jesus. So church leaders started thinking how can we get more interested in Jesus, i.e. how can we get more people into our churches?
  - b This question led to thinking of potential attenders as consumers that need to be attracted which meant the church had to adopt a business model and essentially become a dispenser of spiritual goods and services.
  - c In order to get people to consume your spiritual goods (ie. come to church) you have to make it attractive. This means that worship services must become exciting (i.e. entertaining) and Bible message must become relevant. So, church leaders began surveying their potential customers (aka seekers) and forming their sermons around they wanted to hear.
  - d This became known "felt needs" teaching which inevitably produced all kinds of pragmatic, three point "how to" messages ... how to have a great life, how to have a great marriage, how to be financially blessed. If you want this, do these three things. Essentially its legalism.
  - e Even if the sermons have some biblical principles, they do not lead people to love Christ more because fundamentally they are about the listener instead of the Lord.
- 3 The problem with this attractional model is that trying to attract people to Jesus through consumerism inevitably keeps them from truly treasuring Jesus as the ultimate Person in their life. Instead, he becomes a means to an end.
- a People become used to hearing more about themselves (what god wants for them) than Jesus and how glorious he is.
  - b In some churches today, you may not even hear Jesus mentioned or more than a single scripture quoted by the pastor who has essentially become the congregations "life coach" instead of the shepherd who leads the sheep to the rich, green grass of God's Word.

- c And even these pastors use a verse or two, there is a big difference between using scripture to teach and actually teaching the scriptures. Perhaps that is why Biblical illiteracy is the highest it's ever been in modern history.
- 4 Unfortunately, the attractional model continues to grow. But it is unsustainable because it will never produce the kind of disciples that will stand in the cultural tsunami that is quickly approaching. Soon it will cost you to be a true disciple of Jesus.
- 5 The remedy for all this is quite simple. Return to the gospel. That is difficult for the modern Christians because at the center of the gospel is a blood stained cross.
  - a Modern folks find it hard to conceive that I am so sinful nothing less than that sacrifice of God himself could save me and nothing less than that kind of love could ever satisfy me.
  - b This is why Paul said in cosmopolitan Rome, *I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes (Romans 1:16).*
  - c And to the Corinthians, *For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified (1 Corinthians 2:2). For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God (1 Corinthians 1:18)*
  - d And to the Galatians, *May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world (Galatians 6:14)*
- 6 The gospel. You can't find anything more interesting, more powerful, or more relevant than the gospel. The gospel is God's plan, always will be God's plan and it's been God's plan from the very beginning.

**[6] The gospel was God's plan from the beginning**

*Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup> that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures (v3b-4).*

- 1 Notice that the phrase "according to the Scriptures" is mentioned twice. That is intended to emphasize that both Christ's substitutionary death and his resurrection were foretold and revealed in the Old Testament scripture.

- 2 Following his resurrection Jesus said to the two dismayed disciples on the road to Emmaus ...
 

*“How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! <sup>26</sup> Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” <sup>27</sup> And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself (Luke 24:25–27).*
- 3 The gospel was God’s plan from the beginning, God’s plan for our lives, God’s plan for his people (the church) but also God’s plan for the whole creation. And therefore, the good news is not only for individuals but also for the whole of creation.
  - a The gospel is not only the message of how God saves me but also how God will restore his entire creation.
  - b The gospel not only answers the question, “how can I be saved” but also “what hope is there for the world?”
- 4 In one sense, the Bible teaches that the gospel is an event that took place at a specific point in history ... the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ for the redemption of sinners (1 Cor 15). But the Bible also teaches that the gospel is the overarching story of the redemption of all of God’s creation.
  - a This story throughout all Scripture begins with perfection in the Garden, which is marred by sin at the fall, which is reversed by the cross at Calvary and culminates in a restored and redeemed creation—a new heaven and new earth where sin, death, and suffering will never again plague humanity, and God’s people will live with Him forever.
  - b If we believe the gospel only answers the first question, “how can I be saved” and not the second, “what hope is there for the world” we will tend to think that salvation is just about what God is doing in me rather than seeing ourselves as a part of something bigger that God is doing in all of creation.
  - c The gospel is not just a wonderful plan for ‘my life’ but a wonderful plan for the world. We need to realize that we are a part of a story that is greater than our life, that we are on a journey, not alone, but with other brothers and sisters in Christ and that the ultimate destination is a new heaven and new earth.

## **Discussion Questions**

- 1 Briefly review the six main truths about the gospel from Sunday's message. Which truth(s) stuck out to you the most?
- 2 What does John mean when he says Jesus was full of both grace and truth (Jn 1:14) and how does that keep us centered on the gospel?
- 3 Why is it important to realize that the gospel not only answers the question, "how can I be saved" but also the question "what hope is there for the world"?
- 4 What did Paul mean when he told Peter he was not walking in line with the gospel?
- 5 How do you think the gospel can become more central (of first importance v3) in your life?