

Gospel Preaching – What is it?

An Essay By Earl Jackson

Lost people, have only one hope...Christ. And Christians have only one one message for the lost...the gospel. Trying to pretend that we can say anything meaningful to them, is ridiculous. Their only hope, as far as we are concerned, is for us to faithfully deliver the gospel message to them, which is “The power of God unto salvation”.

Romans 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

This article is about the What is the Gospel? and “How to preach it?”

Without the gospel they will remain lost and ignorant, despite all the arguments, reasoning, disputations and logic of apologetics. Apologetics saves no one, but the gospel, saves all who come to Christ by it. So when confronted by unbelievers, or when confronting them, apologetics will always net a zero return for effort expended, and the gospel will always have unlimited potential return depending on the will of the Holy Spirit. One effort is futile, and the other is actually sowing seeds, that might possibly increase the kingdom of God.

Two possible outcomes happen when the gospel is preached to sinners.

1). Christ will use it to enlighten them, bring life to them, awaken them, call them, and draw them to Christ. That’s what the gospel does.

Or,

2). It will drive them further from God, and God will use it to harden their heart, and confirm that they are reprobates. That’s also what the gospel does.

These are the only two effects of the gospel. Either men believe it, and submit to its demands; or they reject it, and its demands turn them farther away from God, and further away from truth. If they believe it, its operation in their soul will lead them to repentance and faith, and will confirm that they are God’s elect and that God has regenerated them. If they reject it, they will continue on in the darkness of their soul, confirming that they are non-elect, and God will use it to actively harden them so they cannot believe. Either way, God’s perfect will and work is always done when the gospel is preached. That’s exactly why our response to sinners must always be the proclamation of the gospel.

Being Lost is Unreasonable!

The Gospel is our only message to the lost and dying world. As followers of Christ we have nothing else to say to them. It's not about winning arguments or debates with them, because they have no reason for unbelief. There is none. There is nothing to debate. Being lost and remaining lost is unreasonable, because God has shined a great light into the world. Jesus is “the light of the world” for that reason. That men might see the light, even when they sit in the region of darkness, and might flee to it and follow it and embrace it. It is unreasonable for anyone to remain in darkness, when God has already shined “the light of the world” in their hearts Jesus Christ is “The true light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world” (John 1:9). “The light, that all men might believe through Him” (John 1:7).

John 12:46 I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness.

The gospel is our only message to sinners. Christ is the only Savior of sinners. His light is the only light of the world. If they have not already embraced the light that He has already given them, then the gospel will condemn them, if it does not save them. That's how it works, and that's why we must faithfully deliver the gospel message, and nothing but the gospel message when we are talking to sinners. They need to think about nothing else but why they have not trusted Christ (?) and have not fled toward the light which He has given to every man which comes into the world? Why are ye "yet in your sins" when Christ has raised from the dead (1Cor. 15:17)?

There is no reason and no excuse for unbelief, because all men have sufficient light. All men have the light of the world. It lighteth every man that cometh into the world. It does so, with one purpose, and for one reason... that every man, might see it and believe. All men see it, and unbelief is a choice men make without hearing any message at all from you or me. If they are not believers, they have already made a choice to sin against the light God has given them. Calvinism is a false gospel, for the simple reason that it denies that Christ is the Light of the world which lightens every man that comes into the world. In their system, only the elect receive any light. That's patently false, and it keeps them from witnessing to the lost properly. They assume that the non-elect have no light, and that they cannot have any. The non-elect will forever be in complete darkness according to Calvinism. What a horrible doctrine? This contradicts all these wonderful passages in John which say that Christ is the light shining in the darkness so that all men might see and believe and be taken out of darkness.

John 12:46 I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness.

That verse does not exist in a Calvinistic Bible. It can't exist there because it is contrary to their entire system. It is utterly explained away, so that they can cling to their idea, that Christ did not actually die for the ungodly, but He died instead only for the elect who will automatically be saved and swept away into heaven by a decision-less form of Sovereign Grace, where God does all the believing, and choosing, of and for the elect.

The true gospel, however, confronts people in their true state. If men already have sufficient light to believe, and they have not done so (?) they have already made the choice to stay in darkness. Our message is designed to rescue them from that bad choice which is their greatest sin. Unbelief is the only sin which keeps any man from God. All other sins have already been atoned for. The problem with all unbelievers, and the only reason they are lost, is because of their own sin of not believing the light which God has already given them. The lost remain lost, by the choice not to believe the light which God has already given them. The saved, become saved by the choice to believe the light which God has already given. In both cases God is the initiator. Either salvation by faith through grace (?) or damnation through rejection of the light and the choice to not believe it (?) both options are initiated by God because God has sent the light of the world to all men. The light that saves men, also damns them. God initiates both, salvation and damnation, but men are responsible for their own actions, and God is faultless in all His actions. Believe and Be saved, is the message of grace, and there is no reason to preach anything else to lost sinners. That's it... Acts 16:31.

The Gospel is not a Bunch of Doctrines!

The Gospel in this context that we have been discussing, falls within certain parameters. One of the misunderstandings that people have about the gospel, is that it always has to include certain points, or certain key elements. Many people have the false idea that the gospel has many “essential requirements” as far as content, in order to qualify as “the gospel”. This is quite false, because people have been saved, when any or all of these supposed key elements appear to be missing. The true gospel, on the other hand is a living message, which is always individually adapted by the Holy Spirit to the particular needs of the individual to whom it is being addressed. The only requirement for the gospel to be good news is that it introduces people to the Savior. He does the rest! The gospel, is a tool to create belief, and nothing more. There are no minimum requirements of doctrine, because the gospel is not a doctrine. The gospel does not educate people, it saves them. No minimum education required. People already have enough education to believe, because Christ has already shined in their hearts. They just need to respond with faith. Believing is the only requirement. Faith saves all who come to Christ. An unbelief damns all who do not come.

The woman Taken in Adultery

A woman taken in adultery, was saved when Christ wrote some mysterious words on the ground as He was dealing with her accuser's sins. His message of forgiveness to her, did not include anything at all about the atonement, about the death burial and resurrection of Christ, or about her own acts of adultery. Here is the true gospel that she heard. She heard it and was saved.

John 8:10-11 When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee? 11 She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.

Jesus' words to her were quite simple: “Where are your accusers? Neither do I condemn thee. Go and sin no more!” The content of the gospel seems very sparse here. There are no complex explanations about the death burial and resurrection. There was no verses on 'knowing that you are a sinner'. There was no declaration that Jesus is the only way to save sinners. If you try to judge it by the so-called “essential requirements” which many teachers attempt to place on it, the salvation of this women contained practically no doctrinal content at all. This is important to grasp. Salvation is not about what you know, it's about who you meet. And this woman obviously met Christ and found the salvation from her unbelief that she needed.

The true gospel is not about presenting a bunch of doctrines, it is about bringing Christ near to sinners where He can call them and forgive them on His own terms, according to their own needs. When you take Christ out of the gospel, and try to boil it down to a bunch of propositions, you have no gospel at all. The true gospel, brings Christ near to sinners, and says to them, here He is, Meet Him! Here He is...Flee to Him! Here He is, the person about whom the Bible is all about...touch the hem of His garment. Here He is, the person, who defines all of Christianity...Make your peace with God. Here He is...Repent and believe. For Paul on Mars hill, the gospel was: “Him whom you ignorantly worship...Him I declare unto you...MEET HIM! HERE HE IS!”

I know this sounds very different from anything you've probably ever heard before. You've probably been taught that the gospel is a specific message centered around specific doctrines, like: sin, redemption, atonement, resurrection, repentance, faith, the blood of Christ etc. And it is certainly true that these doctrines do come into play sometimes when the gospel is preached. But you can preach a set of doctrines till your blue in the face, and the dead will never be called to life. Bare facts about Christ, are not the gospel. In fact no facts about Him are the gospel. The gospel is the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16). The gospel, is the presentation of the Lord Himself, to the mind and heart of the sinner, in a way that brings the sinner to life from death, and places him into God's kingdom of truth, life, righteousness. The Gospel is a living message, because it is the presentation of a living Savior to a dead and dying sinner. When the gospel is preached, the sinner hears the voice of Christ calling Him. The gospel calls men toward the light which they have already received by sovereign grace. The gospel is not the presentation of a set of doctrines, it is the presentation of Jesus Christ Himself. This important distinction is actually the difference between the true gospel and no gospel at all. People are confused by this, because they listen to human teachers more than they read their Bibles. When you read your Bible you will find all kinds of people being saved, by all kinds of different gospel presentations, but in all cases the true gospel is preached, and the true gospel always brings Christ to them, and them to Christ. Almost every Biblical account of sinners being called into the saving life of Christ is different. There is no set "one way" for sinners to be saved, accept the "one way" that brings them to the "one door" to the sheepfold. Jesus is the way. But there are as many different saving presentations of Him, as there are sinners to be saved. The good news is always tailored to the lost sinner, whom Christ is calling. It is His voice to them. It is His call to them. It is His saving words to them. In the case of the woman taken in adultery it was simply "Where are your accusers? Neither do I condemn thee. Go and sin no more!" That was the gospel for her. It was perfect for her. It was tailored to her. She met Christ and found His infinite love and forgiveness in that moment when she heard Him and believed what He said. She trusted Him the moment she quite her unbelief.

The Gospel is about True Preaching

The Bible calls gospel preaching "Preaching Christ". Notice:

Acts 5:42 And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.

Acts 17:3 Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ.

Rom 16:25 Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began,

1Cor 1:23 But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness;

2Cor 4:5 For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake.

2Cor 10:14 For we stretch not ourselves beyond *our measure*, as though we reached not unto you: for we are come as far as to you also in preaching the gospel of Christ:

Eph 3:8 Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ;

Php 1:15-18 Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will: **16** The one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds: **17** But the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defence of the gospel. **18** What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice.

Col 1:27-28 To whom God would make known what *is* the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory: **28** Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus:

Now there are other things also called the gospel, such as “the gospel of the kingdom of God”. But for all intents and purposes the Christian gospel, the true gospel which we are to carry into all the world according to the great commission, is the gospel of Jesus Christ. Our gospel is the gospel of a person...Our Savior and Our Lord, Jesus Christ. That's who we preach. He is the content of our message. This is so very important, because many people, who are indeed Christians, who have indeed had a genuine encounter with the Life-changing Lord, still do not really know what the gospel is. This probably explains why so many Christians do not know how to preach it, and do not know how to present a verbal witness to their neighbors and friends. We seem trapped in this false notion that the gospel, is a certain number of essential doctrines that must be presented when we are witnessing or preaching. That is absolutely not the case. Essential doctrines save no one. Only Jesus saves.

In fact, that mistake (that the gospel is a set of doctrinal propositions, which must be intellectually grasped and believed) is one of the most damaging influences upon the modern church. It keeps far more people from Christ, than it brings to Him. It is absolute falsehood, and it is one of the most prevalent heresies of our time. People criticize me for making the gospel too easy. But I criticize them for making it too hard. Whats so hard about 'believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved'? I don't get it. Why do we need to make it harder than introducing someone to Jesus? Unbelief keeps men from Christ. Belief brings them to Him. What's so hard about that? The whole Bible is full of accounts of just that thing. The gospel is not about doctrines, and hoops that lost sinners must jump through. It's about quitting unbelief and starting to believe. It's about going from faith-less-ness to Faith. Why complicate it? The simplicity of grace is that it is the complete absence of anything that men do. Salvation is “by grace through faith” that it might not be of works lest any man could boast (Eph. 2:8-9). Preaching the gospel, therefore is about getting men to believe what God has already shown them. It is not about delivering new information to them. They already have enough light so that if they do not believe they are “without excuse” (Rom. 1:20). The gospel is not about preaching what men do not know, it is about pointing them to the person they need to know, if they will ever be saved.

Because of this, most great preaching has virtually disappeared from the world. In days gone by, before television, computers, the internet, and mobile communications, God stationed great preachers of Christ, throughout history, all over the world. Their job was to

preach Christ, and introduce Him to men, and men to Him. They preached not a set of doctrines, but a living person. They brought him to church on Sunday with them when they mounted the pulpit, and they served as His mouthpiece to speak to the crowds that would hear this great preaching. And when the people listened, the Holy Spirit would come in great power and activate the preacher's words, and Christ Himself would speak through the preacher directly to the people. I'm not speaking metaphorically here. I'm speaking quite literally. Spurgeon was an example of a man like this. There are hundreds of other examples as well. Whitfield, Wesley, Edwards, Moody, these men preached Christ and men were saved. They all held different doctrinal positions, but through them men were saved, in spite of their doctrines. I'm not saying that doctrine is not important. I'm saying that it is not important to the gospel. The gospel is about Grace, not about what persuasion of theology you hold to.

Just study the history of the great revivals, and you will know what I am talking about. I'm speaking here, as though this were a thing of the past, and I fear that it largely is. There are still, Spirit-animated preachers here and there. God's voice of preaching has not totally died out. Christ will never be silenced. But I see theologically, apologetically, and ecclesiastically, that today; when someone speaks about the true gospel, as I have done, and shows people that it is preaching a person and not a dogma, people become confused, and cannot seem to relate to what I am saying. It seems like I am preaching heresy. The truth is that people have become so accustomed to hearing what is actually not the gospel, that they do not recognize the gospel when they hear it. Complexity has replaced simplicity in the message our churches proclaim. No wonder we do not see revival. Our message has been tampered with by the doctrinaire dogmaticians, and now people no longer understand that believing in Jesus is all it takes. That seems too simple, and it seems too weird for our educated minds to grasp. But Jesus even saves complete morons, and that's why educational components are no part of the gospel.

Today the gospel is often not recognized, because we expect it to have complicated bells and whistles. This is a serious sign and symptom of a perilous and dangerous ill in the church. I know this, that the farther the church drifts away from true gospel preaching, the fewer Christians, fewer Christian churches, and fewer genuine evangelical institutions there will be. The evangel is Christ. And if we continue to think that it is programs, and orchestration, technology, and inventions, we will shrivel and die spiritually, and drift far from our Divine calling and purpose. The church exists to magnify Christ. It's primary and only authorized means of doing this is through preaching the gospel. I pray daily, that God will raise up true and faithful preachers. This is the most pressing need in the 21st century church...preachers who preach Christ. Christ is the gospel, and apart from Him, there is no gospel.

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