

## We are A Gospel-centered Church

***We exist to glorify God by joyfully making disciples of all nations with the gospel, in community, on mission, both locally and globally.***

If you are just joining us, we typically walk straight through books of the Bible as our primary diet, but right now we are right in the middle of a 5-part sermon series we are doing on the mission statement of Harvest. We are checking our compass, make sure we are aligned. The Church is not something we passively attend. It's something that we are, and as the church, we have a God-ordained purpose in the world. We want to resync ourselves in unity around what we believe is God's purpose for this church.

The first question is why do we exist? We exist to glorify God. Individually, and as a church, we don't exist for our own glory, we exist to glorify, to worship, to treasure, to make much of God.

The second question is how do we do that, how do we glorify God? We glorify God by joyfully making disciples. Drew covered this last week, that God is our greatest pleasure, and we are called to savor Him and share Him. The more we savor God the more we share, and the more we share the more we savor, and all this glorifies God.

So that's where we are at, we exist to make much of God by enjoying God and spreading that joy to others. The question we come to this week, is how? What is the mechanism? What's the means by which we do this? God we need help? And He gives it to us. The answer. The gospel of Jesus Christ. We are diving into the core, really the centerpiece of everything this morning.

Here's the overarching point: The gospel is the God-ordained means by which we enjoy God and glorify Him in all of life and ministry. And I have two main points to get us there, which I believe if we do, we will be a gospel-centered. 1. Savor the gospel. 2. apply the gospel to everything

### **1. A Gospel-Centered Church Savors the gospel**

**15:1 Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, 2 and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.**

**3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures,**

Before we can savor, we have to ask what is the gospel? Gospel literally means good news. It's news. No different from when you are watching TV and the little ticker goes across the screen with the latest headlines.

It's announcing something. What is that news? Paul gives us help here. v.1 He wants to remind them of the "gospel" he preached to them. And he clarifies the content of this gospel, v.3, what he delivered to them of first importance, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.

For good news to come for us, it presupposes that we are in a bad situation. This is what Paul has in mind here. We have to be awakened with the bad news before the good news is good. Just like a cancer patient must experience the shocking truth about their body before they can rejoice in a cure.

What's bad for us, the Scriptures tell us, our cancer is sin. Christ died for what? Our sin. You might say what's so bad about sin? Sin is the thing that destroyed our relationship with God, that has stripped us of joy and glory in Him. Instead, because of sin, we are on a path of death and judgment away from God.

This goes back to the very beginning, when God created the world, and it was good, and God created man to enjoy that world, but more so, so that man could enjoy God. This was Adam and Eve, our first parents, they were in paradise in the presence of God.

But something tragic happened, they sinned. Sin, in essence, they gave their worship to something else other than God. Choosing disobedience rather than obedience. And God, being holy and just, punished them by casting them from His presence. At that point, humanity was cursed. Pain and suffering and death was unleashed upon our race and upon this world. Paradise was gone. Our very nature became corrupt, we no longer desired God and had no ability to obey His commands. For all of us have fallen short of the glory of God. And this puts us in a terrifying spot.

### **Romans 1:18**

**For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men...**

### **Romans 2:5**

**But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.**

### **Romans 2:8**

**but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury.**

This is us. objects of wrath. The x-ray comes back positive. We have worshiped other gods. We have treasured our selves, sex, wealth, our careers. We have not loved God, we have despised God, we have hated him. We are armed. That's what Romans 8 says, we are hostile to God. We are so committed to our own kingdoms. He is a threat. And we deserve judgment. Sin produces wrath, intensely personal, eternal wrath, the just judgment from an infinitely holy God.

You might be saying, hold up, I'm not that bad. Maybe the Hitler's the child rapists deserve God's judgment, but not me. The problem is we use our own measuring rod of morality, make ourselves look good, compare ourselves to others. But we aren't graded on the holiness of man, we are graded against the holiness of God. Jesus shows us in Matthew, maybe you were here in our series, that God would equate anger towards someone as murder, a lustful thought as full blown adultery. We are guilty and deserving of judgment. It's the most horrific of all realities, and none of us will be able to stand... unless that is we have someone stand in our place. Unless we have a Savior. Jesus Christ is the Savior. And that is why Jesus Christ came to die for our sins. That's why Paul chooses to summarize the gospel by saying it this way.

### **Romans 3:23-25**

**23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, 25 whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.**

Propitiation means absorbed. God sends Jesus Christ, His son, the Holy One, to die on a cross as the means by which absorbed the wrath of God for sinners. Christ takes our place. He lived the life we could never live and died the death that we all deserved. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

*John Stott says, "For the essence of sin is man substituting himself for God [Gen. 3:1-7], while the essence of salvation is God substituting himself for man [2 Cor. 5:21]. Man asserts himself against God and puts himself where only God deserves to be; God sacrifices himself for man and puts himself where only man deserves to be."*

But it doesn't stop at the cross, as Paul will say later in 15, we are still in our sins. Christ had to be raised from the dead.

**“(Righteousness) will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, 25 who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.” Romans 4:24-25**

So it's not just that we are forgiven, and back to some moral neutrality, that would be incredible enough, but all the more, we are made righteous. This is what Martin Luther called the great exchange. We get Christ's righteousness, and He gets our sin. **“For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.” 2 Cor. 5:17**

Salvation for man is a gift to be received by faith. You don't do anything but believe in what's been done for you. We don't bring anything to our salvation. If we do, it's destroyed, it can no longer be by grace. If you want to add anything, you got to add the whole thing. God is serious about grace, because He's serious about His glory. How good is that God's glory is tied up in how gracious He is to us! Tim Keller reflects on the gospel, “I am more sinful and flawed than I ever dared believe, and I am more accepted and loved than I ever dared hope.” -Keller

Jl Packer sums up the NT in three words, adoption through propitiation. We get God through the death of Jesus. We will enjoy Him forever with His people in the new heavens and new earth, all made possible by the death and resurrection of Jesus.

The end of the gospel for us is eternal enjoyment of God. Listen to how John Piper articulates this...

*[The] saving events and all the saving blessings of the gospel are means of getting obstacles [like our sin and God's wrath] out of the way so that we might know and enjoy God most fully. Propitiation, redemption, forgiveness, imputation, sanctification, liberation, healing, heaven – none of these is good news except for one reason: they bring us to God for our everlasting enjoyment of him. If we believe all these things have happened to us, but do not embrace them for the sake of getting to God, they have not happened to us. 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. (47) - Piper*

Are you wanting God this morning? Are you finding joy in God? We have to know and embrace this gospel message. We can't begin, as a church, to even begin thinking about where the gospel fits in the life of our church until we first embrace and hold fast to this gospel. We have to constantly come back to this gospel. We tend toward two errors. Either legalism or license.

*So if this is the gospel, and we believe the gospel, what then? The question is, to what extent should the gospel shape our church? What we believe the Scriptures teach is that the gospel must be absolutely central in everything that we are and do. Can we do this? Will the Scriptures point us in this direction. Isn't it a little simplistic to think all you need is the gospel. Something else to give people.*

## **2. A Gospel-Centered Church applies the gospel to everything**

**15:3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures,**

Paul recounts that when he first came to the Corinthians he delivered to them what was of first importance. That is, there is a lot of things Paul could have told the Corinthians, but there was one thing, of first importance. What's most important, for people's eternal joy and the glory of God, is the gospel message.

This is what Paul received from Jesus Himself. Think of the olympic relay runners, he was given a baton, that baton was the gospel. He was to take it and deliver to others. What's most important for him, is not talking about the latest blog, or sports team, how to be more productive or have a better marriage, as good as those things might be, but sharing the gospel. Listen to how Paul articulates this in Acts 20...

**Acts 20:24, "But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God."**

I love that, an even tighter summary of the gospel. The good news of the grace of God. This is what Paul was told to pass on. Paul embraced the gospel and it set Him on fire for the glory of God. That's what causes him to roll up to the Corinthians and say, "**I resolved to know nothing among you except for Jesus Christ and Him crucified.**"

He's writing this letter to the church he started there. And they've gotten off the tracks. They are concerned with whose being baptized by who. They got demon worship going on. A man is sleeping with his father's wife. Spiritual gifts that are out of control. They forgot the gospel. That's why Paul says, I got to remind you of the gospel. Because the gospel affects everything. How quickly we want to step in with some program, accountability, or law. That's not what Paul does. The gospel.

It's not just of first importance in its sequence. Like learn the gospel, then start learning other stuff. No, the gospel is of first importance because it affects everything. *It's not just another app on our phone. It's the operating system, that gives shape to and informs every app.*

Interesting that he gives them this reminder right at the close of talking to them about supernatural and sensational gifts. He did even tell them to pursue the gifts of the Spirit. But then here it's a reminder, no matter how great your gifts are, your gifts are not your ministry, the gospel is your ministry. The gifts serve the gospel.

He says in v.11 **Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.** It doesn't matter who preached it, but we are all preaching the same message, the gospel of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and you believed.

**Look at how all encompassing it is.. back to v.1**

**15:1 "the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, 2 and by which you are being saved."**

We see here the past- the gospel you received, the present- the gospel in which you stand, and the future- the gospel by which you are being saved.

So the gospel of God in the gospel is not a doorway into something more exciting. It's everything. Or its as Tim Keller says, the gospel is not the ABC's of the Christian life, its the A to Z of the christian life.

We don't have near the time to dive into how the gospel to all of life, but we will grab some major categories.

1. apply to our justification

How are we born into the family of God. By hearing the gospel message. This is what we've been talking about. Why in the world would you stop preaching the gospel. It is the power of God for salvation for everyone who believes. This is what we think of when we think of evangelism. The gospel comes to us, and 1 Peter 1, born again by the word of God. We become new creations in Christ. This is our mission.

## 2. we must apply the gospel to our sanctification

This is where so many of us go wrong. We get into the family by grace alone, and then we think its up to us to grow in Christlikeness. We start out our christian journey with the joy of righteousness applied to us. And then slowly, bit by bit, we fall back into a religious mindset. And its no wonder that we find ourselves not growing, that we find ourselves lacking joy and frustrated. We become hypocrites, carrying the same message. We focus on Truth to the expense of grace. We pound people with the law.

We say we believe the gospel, but we look to different resources for growth and justification. Paul says to the Galatians, "**Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? 3 Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?**"

By flesh means our hope is not in the gospel, its in spiritual disciplines, increased accountability, more willpower, and more teaching, which are all good things, but without faith in the power of the Holy Spirit, they do nothing for us but Inflate our pride or drive us to despair. For the Corinthians, it was circumcision.

How do we grow? We grow by beholding the gospel.

**2 Cor. 3:17 Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. 18 And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit...**

The biblical principle that this holds out for us, is that we become what we behold. The thing we worship, is they thing we become. So we behold the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into that image. If we skip down to **4:4 2 Cor 4:4 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.**

So there it is, by beholding the gospel of the glory of Jesus Christ, we are transformed into the image of God. It's so backwards than what we would think. If we want holiness, give us more law, right? But law just makes us more sinful! There is no greater motivator to holiness than the grace of God.

So the life of the christian and the life of the church is saturated with the gospel. It's how we grow.

### We must Apply the gospel to moral failure

Every one of us is going to sin. The question is what do we do after the fact. There's always a follow up temptation, are you going to trust God or are you going to doubt Him. You have the enemy sitting there accusing you. How could you do that? You're a sinner. God doesn't love you any more, how could he! You will never be useful for the kingdom of God. In that moment, with everything you got, you run straight back to the gospel. That's your hope. You don't wait till you feel better to come back to God. **You say with the apostle Paul, "Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" You aren't trying harder to do, you're resting in what's already been done for you.**

### Apply the gospel to personal devotions

Make the aim of your devotions seeing and savoring the glory of God in the gospel. Through prayer, confession, worship, meet with God in the gospel. The entire Bible is about the gospel. If you don't make it to Jesus' death and resurrection, what did you come away with? Get the gospel transformation Bible, tells you how every text in the OT points to Jesus.

### How do we Apply the gospel to Bible reading?

Gospel centrality means we read the Scriptures with the gospel as the focus. We relate everything to the gospel. We are not looking for advice on how to become better. We are looking for Jesus that we might be led to worship. Your Bible is first a book about worship before its a book about anything else. It's designed for worship, that centers on the gospel. And when you go there looking for something other than Jesus. Coming away with something other than Jesus in the gospel. Than tragically, worship of something else is likely in view.

We aren't called to have faith like Abraham or lead like Moses, or slay giants like David, or govern like Solomon, we are called to receive how Jesus Christ, in our place, is these things for us. As these men pointed to Him. Jesus is the true and better Abraham, and Moses, and every other person in the Bible. You see the difference. In the first case I'm led to religious performance. I am to be like Abraham. That means I will ultimately be led to despair if I can't be like him, or pride if I find success. Religious performance never leads to worship of Christ. It leads to worship of self. Only the gospel leads to worship of Christ. Christ is the true Abraham who left His inheritance behind to follow God's commands. He's the Moses (Look up Tim Keller quote if you want to get into this).

On a corporate level, this means in our gatherings we want the gospel on full display. In our readings, in our singing, taking the Lord's Supper, and in our sermons. We are unashamed to preach the same message from a different text every Sunday. Why? Because we are serious about worship, transformation, and the mission of God.

### The gospel to community

*We will dive specifically in this next week. But the gospel does not save us as individuals. Me and Jesus is not the biblical pattern of christian living. God is saving a people for Himself. The gospel unites us together in His blood, and at the same time empowers* The gospel is the only thing that can give us unity with diversity.

### The gospel in specialized ministry

Tim Keller says, *"Because the gospel is endlessly rich, it can handle the burden of being the one "main thing" of a church. . . Every form of ministry is (then) empowered by the gospel, based on the gospel, and is a result of the gospel."* When that stops, we lose joy, our ministries lose power, and our church becomes disunited. Even worse, we've erected a idol and stopped worshiping the God of the Bible. We worship a moral ethic, a social cause, a pastor, or a program, none of which can save, all of which condemns.

This also goes for every ministry that we have our hands on, whether that's kids, college, men's or women's ministry, orphan care, hospitality, prayer ministry, local outreach, missions, whatever it is, the gospel drives it all.

### 3. To our glorification

The gospel is central to our past, our present, and to our future. 15:2 "by which you are being saved." This is our hope. The gospel seals us for eternity. In this hope we were saved. And nothing can separate us from the love of Christ. We are given the Spirit's seal as a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance.

The gospel is our justification, sanctification, and glorification. It influences everything about life and ministry. May we hold fast to the doctrine. Church, we must never become about anything else other than the gospel of Jesus Christ. For the sake of our eternal joy, the glory of God, and the salvation of the nations.