



“Let’s Value Gospel Preaching”
I Corinthians 2:1-5
June 20, 2021

This morning we continue our series, O Church, Arise. It is my prayer that today our hearts will be resolved together as a family of believers in Christ Jesus to cling to the old, rugged cross of our Lord and our Savior.

As we think about Gospel ministry and how it is the heart and soul of the church of God, I pray that we will value it. I pray that in knowing the glory of the cross, we will know that we must not adjust or try in any way to alter the message of Christ in order to make it a little bit more palatable to the taste of the age that we live in.

I pray that we will know that we need not try to stylize it or sophisticate it. There is power in the message of Christ Jesus crucified and risen from the grave. This morning we are going to rejoice in that power as the Spirit of God moves among us.

I want to move us into the book of I Corinthians this morning. We are going to be encouraged in these things as we see yet another letter written by the Apostle Paul, our brother in the Lord, from the First Century.

We are going to see how Paul was resolve in his heart as he entered into one of the notorious cities of the First Century Greco-Roman world. The city of Corinth in the First Century has been described as a mixture between Los Angeles, California, Las Vegas, Nevada, and Manhattan in New York.

For one thing, the city of Corinth was a very wealthy city. It was a center of international trade with its prominent port and its booming marketplace. The center of the city was filled with all kinds of exotic merchandise that would be the thrill of the heart of any shop alcoholic, even from the Twenty-First Century world.

Not only was it a wealthy city, but it was a very sensual city. There was pagan ritualistic worship taking place everywhere. It is estimated that there may have been close to a thousand different temples and shrines peppered throughout the city. The two most prominent pagan temples would have been the temple to Apollos, a gleaming marble structure right in the heart of the city of Corinth.

Perhaps even more prominent and even more notorious would have been the temple of the goddess Aphrodite, which was perched atop the Acrocorinth mountain that overshadowed the city. That temple with its vestal priestesses were known to come down into the city at night seeking to lure the residents and visitors alike.

Corinth was a wealthy city. It was a sensual city. In addition to that, it was also a very learned city. It was a major center of sophistry in the First Century world. They had men who had such gifts of oratory that they could woo and wow those who listened to them speak.

Here into this context came the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Here into this context came the proclamation of the crucified Messiah, slain for sin and raised from the dead. Praise the Lord, the church was planted and the people of God were being formed.

However, with the passing of time, after Paul had been away from them for a while, the temptations began entering into the thinking of some of the church members of Corinth. They felt they needed to supplement the Gospel message a little bit.

Maybe they needed to just dress it up with some of the styles of the speakers of their city so that it would be more appealing to the people that they were trying to reach. So there was the temptation to want to go that way with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

So Paul wrote to them to dissuade them from any such notion. He spoke to them with reverence and emphasis about how he approached them in the first place, and how the Gospel came with simplicity, yet with power to bring people to life in Christ.

This is so important for us to take in because there are so many similarities between the Corinthian culture and the California culture that we live in today. So let's read what Paul said and see how he spoke to them in I Corinthians Chapter 2 and Verses 1 through 5:

¹And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. ²For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. ³And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, ⁴and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, ⁵so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

In this portion of Scripture we are given a glimpse of the ministry of the Apostle Paul in that First Century Greco-Roman world, particularly in the city of Corinth. Let us understand that what we have written here is not simply a flashback or a replay of how Paul went about things when he was in that city.

What we have here is a paradigm for how all Gospel work is to take place. The things that characterized Paul as captured here in this paragraph must characterize Gospel work everywhere. Back then and today! There across the globe and here in our neck of the woods. This is a picture of how followers of Jesus and how churches must submit and posture themselves to the glory of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and let it do its work.

Something that is very interesting in this text is that it comes in two parts. It describes how Paul entered into the city of Corinth and how he dwelled there among them. There are two different Greek words that are used. One Greek word is speaking about the entry in. The other Greek

word speaks of Paul's state of being while he was among them for the eighteen months that he stayed in Corinth as defined in the book of Acts.

This was Paul describing how he was going about things, and what we find here is that the message of the cross was at the center of it all. Paul was absolutely resolved, saying, this is going to be my message. I am determined that while I am here my message is Christ Jesus and Christ Jesus crucified. That is what I am going to be talking about.

The reason why Paul was so resolved is because the Gospel, the Good News that Christ Jesus has come into the world to save sinners from the penalty and power of sin, is the message on which the church is built and this is the message with which it grows in health and in Christlikeness. This is the center of it all.

Brothers and sisters, this message about Jesus and all that He has come to do for us is not just the milk of the Christian life, it is the meat and the nourishment throughout. Let us understand that the Gospel of Christ is not just the entryway by which we enter into the Christian life, it is the dwelling place. It is the home in which we live.

So a church rising up in the power of the Spirit is going to be a church that is constantly talking about the redeeming work of Jesus Christ, which has more power than even light structures here in Bellflower, California.

This morning I want to draw a couple of characteristics of Gospel ministry from this portion of Scripture. I want to talk from this passage of Scripture in our Gospel Ministry about how: We must hold fast to the gravity of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, and about how we must depend on the Holy Spirit's power to bring the result and the fruit of the ministry of the Gospel.

As we look into this, let's pray that the Spirit of God will bring these things into our hearts and bear fruit from these truths in our lives and in our church. The first emphasis of this passage of Scripture in our Gospel ministry:

1. Let's hold fast to the gravity of the crucifixion (2:1-2)

Let us always be willing and joyful in our proclamation that Christ Jesus died for sinners as a great work of grace to save us from our sins. Let us retain the gravity of the crucifixion.

Let's see how Paul said this once again in Verses 2 and 3—how this is portrayed in his example.

¹And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. ²For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

If we are going to understand what is going on here with Paul and all of his use of lofty language and wisdom in his message, we really must dig into the historical context that he was ministering to at that time.

In the Greco-Roman world, there were men known as sophists. Sophia is the Greek word for wisdom and sophistry is the practice of dispensing wisdom. These men would go throughout the different cities of the Roman Empire, wowing people with the concepts that they taught and the words that they taught those concepts with.

Those men were kind of like the pop culture philosophers of their day. I think the more heavy duty philosophers would have been a little bit west of Corinth at the Acropolis in Athens. But many of the philosophers of the First Century world, they realized that there was livelihood to be gained when they would take concept cookies on a lower shelf, if you know what I mean.

They could go and speak to the people and the people would get roused when words were put together with skill. So these men, they would come into cities and be like great concert orators. As they spoke about the social and political issues of the day, they would use irony and storytelling.

They would use humor and they would use sarcasm to speak to the people, because, of course, who does not like a little bit of sarcasm, especially when it is directed at somebody else and not you in particular.

They would come and they would speak to all the people that would come and listen. A typical performance of a sophist took place in a theater or a music hall. Once a person entered onto the stage, they would typically ask those who had gathered, What do you want me to speak about? You name a topic.

So the people could name the topic of their choice, be it the topic of the Caesar in Rome or the flowers of the fields or the games of the Olympiad. Then the sophist would go away and gather himself for a few minutes and then they would come back and deliver the message, doing so with lofty words in a vocabulary that was amazing.

The sophists would do this all together in such a way that they would entertain the people. That is what was so popular in Corinth. The people of that city, they loved that kind of thing. Into this context, came the Apostle Paul with the message of a crucified Messiah.

Understand that in the Greek world you didn't even talk about crucifixion among polite society. It was considered offensive. Yet, this is what Paul wanted to talk about. This is what he was resolved to talk about. While the orators were trying to woo and to wow everybody and get a rise out them, Paul was doing the exact opposite.

Paul was seeking to introduce gravity into the situation. He was seeking to help people to understand that there is one Living God and that their lives were lived under His gaze, and they were accountable to Him. Paul was seeking to do the exact opposite of what they were used to.

Did you notice how this was confirmed in Verse 1?

¹And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom.

Paul was speaking about the testimony of God. This is courtroom language. Throughout the pages of Scripture, this language of God being the judge is everywhere.

A couple of years back, I was summoned to jury duty. I had to report to the Governor George Deukmejian Courthouse in down town Long Beach, a very impressive building and not just one courtroom.

I got called out of the waiting area and into an actual courtroom. With a number of other people, I was going to be considered to be a juror on a particular trial. The judge introduced herself and welcomed all of us. Then she informed us that we were being considered as potential jurors for a murder trial.

I remember feeling the weight of that in my stomach. I was not even a juror yet and I certainly was not the one who was the defendant for the charge of murder. Yet, the weightiness and the gravity of it all was pressing down upon me. Brothers and sisters, all throughout the pages of Scripture, beginning in the Old Testament and going all the way through the New Testament, God emphatically reveals Himself as judge.

He is holy, holy, holy. He is pure. He is perfect. He is good in every way, and He does in fact have a moral law by which He governs the universe. Men and women, boys and girls, each and every single last one of us have sinned and transgressed God's Law. No exceptions! We all have.

The fact of the matter is, we have done so deliberately, repeatedly. Beginning with the attitudes of the heart and the mind, issuing forth with the words that we speak. The kind of humor that we use. The ways that we speak to people, tearing down rather than building up. There are so many different ways that we sin. This issues forth in how we behave and how we practice various aspects of life. We are all sinners against the Moral Law of the Living God.

Do you know that when Paul was in Corinth that is when he most likely wrote the book of Romans. If you want to have a clear picture of the testimony of God concerning the human race, you read those initial three chapters of the book of Romans. There you will see the guilt of every last one of us before the Lord.

Paul described the sin of the pagan world and the Jewish world. Then he culminated it all in Romans Chapter 3 with a whole string of Scriptures which begins with saying, There is no one righteous. No not one.

I want each person to know that the greatest need that you have in this life is righteousness before the Living God, and you don't have your own! This is the testimony of Scripture. This is God speaking through His prophets to us all.

Paul was following Christ His Messiah who said, The world hates me because I testify that it's deeds are evil. That includes all of us. We are all guilty before the court of the holiness of Heaven. But, praise God, Scripture does not just take us into the courtroom.

Brothers and sisters, there is another place that the Word of God brings us. Scripture also brings us to a place that is called Calvary. Calvary is Latin for the place of the skull. That is the place where Christ Jesus was crucified. This is such a glorious, weighty, wonderous message because in Christ, you have the Eternal One, the Son of God.

You have the Second Person of the Trinity—God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit. You have Christ coming into the world robing and manifesting Himself as a human being. He lived thirty-three-years of absolute purity and holiness and perfection as a gift for His people.

Then at the end of those thirty-three-years, He was nailed to an old rugged, wooden Roman cross. While He was on that cross, our sin was imputed to Him. He paid the price for our sin, that the justice of the holiness of God could be satisfied.

The holiness of God was satisfied so that those who look to Christ with contrite faith rising up as they recognize they are a sinner in need of a Savior and trust in Him, they are then declared innocent based on the merits of Christ Jesus that are transferred to them as a gift.

Imagine in that courtroom that I was in. I was not called to be on the jury, but imagine I was and the jury rendered the guilty verdict of the one who was accused of murder. It was very clear that this person committed the crime. Could that judge just say, Maybe it wasn't so bad. I'm just going to let you go.

No! Neither can our guilt go without its proper punishment, its proper justice being served. Here is the glorious news. Justice was served at the cross. Jesus bore our sins in His body on the tree. He paid for our sins, and He brings the message of new life into us. When we come to faith in Him, we are born again. We are cleansed of sin and covered in righteousness.

Jesus gives us contrite hearts. He puts this within us to start walking in newness of life so that we are born again. Brothers and sisters, there is so much more to the Gospel of Jesus Christ but this is the message and what Paul was so resolved to center himself on and speak about day in and day out—this multifaceted jewel of saving grace.

Paul kept preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He was not going to try to adorn it and stylize it in the sophistry of his day. He was just going to come and bring the message and let the Holy Spirit work according to the will of the Holy Spirit. It is a beautiful thing.

This is a pattern for us as we think about this. As we continue together as a church, let us, by the work of the Spirit in us, always hold fast to the gravity of the crucifixion; to be willing to speak forth this message here and wherever we go, because this is the center piece. This is where our salvation was achieved by our Messiah.

This is something for us to really consider and rejoice in. Let this add to our worship on this Father's Day. Let us recall that here in this work of salvation that took place, it was not simply judge and atoning sacrifice. Although those are real pictures of what happened in what Christ has done for us.

Christ was slain for our sin and remember that we are dealing with Eternal Father, Son, and Spirit. Three distinct Persons sharing one essence, one God in Three, in this eternal relationship of love. As we gather on Father's Day, let us give praise and thanks to our Father in Heaven who gave His Son this way, that we might be set free.

³¹What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³²He who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? ³³Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies,. ³⁴Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. (Romans 8:31-34)

So let us praise the Lord for all that has been given to us in Christ Jesus.

As we move forward, we want to be those who, by the work of the Spirit within us, are retaining and holding fast to this message of the cross. In addition to that, we see in Paul an example of what it is to be totally depended on the power of the Holy Spirit to be getting this message across to people.

This is the second part of what is here in this text.

2. Let's depend upon the power of the Spirit's power (2:3-5)

It is interesting because there in Corinth with all the orators that were there in that context, how you said something mattered more than what you actually said. Pick a topic. Any topic. Let me dazzle you with the words that I say about any topic of your choice.

How you said things mattered more than what you said. With Paul it was the exact opposite. What you said mattered more than how you said it, because the Gospel of Jesus was coming with a power of its own. That is what Paul got to next. Verse 9:

³And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, ⁴and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, ⁵so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

Twice Paul spoke of the power that comes with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This power is the power of the Holy Spirit. Paul would have been a man acquainted with the Holy Spirit in Scripture and in personal experience.

Paul was a rabbi among rabbis. He would have been one who was thoroughly acquainted with the glorious way in which the pages of Scripture begin. There in Genesis Chapter 1 and Verse 1 was the Spirit of God.

¹In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. ²The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

The Eternal Spirit was there present over the darkness of the earth at the dawn of creation and He is there with the omnipotent power of God, so that when God said:

³...“Let there be light,” and there was light

This power is applied and there is light. Later when God said let there be life, the power is applied and there is life. Paul knew this power. He depended upon this power. He gloried in his weakness because through his weakness, the power of God would all the more be displayed in the results.

Paul was familiar with all of the Old Testament history. Paul would have known how the Spirit was also hovering over ancient Israel during the day of small things, after that period of Babylonian captivity when Israel needed to be purged of its idolatry.

God was there preserving His remnant. He brought His remnant back into Israel, giving them the task to rebuild. They had to lay the foundation. Rebuild the temple. Rebuild the city. Rebuild the nation. Led by a brother in the Lord with the wonderful name of Zerubbabel, some of them including that man was asking how was it going to be done.

Do you remember the encouragement that was given to Zerubbabel through Zechariah the prophet? Zechariah 4:6-7

⁶Then he said to me, “This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts. ⁷Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain. And he shall bring forward the top stone amid shouts of ‘Grace, grace to it!’”

Not by might. Not by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord. There are so many examples of the Spirit working throughout the pages of Scripture. Paul having all of these things in his heart and mind through his study of the Living Word, there he was in Corinth, a darkened society.

Yet he came with the knowledge that the Holy Spirit is present there too with His power. The Holy Spirit comes through the Gospel of Jesus Christ to bring light into darkened hearts; to bring life into the souls of dead sinners.

The Holy Spirit is the only One who can bring this kind of life. Paul knew he wasn't capable of it. The Holy Spirit does this work through the ministry of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Where there was so much sophistry and so much skill and so much ability in rousing people with well crafted words, Paul said, No, I'm not going to approach this in that way. He was not going to follow the sophisticated orators of the Greek world.

It is not that Paul was not smart enough. Understand that he was. Paul was a brilliant man. He was one of the prominent minds of his day. He was learned and he could speak, but he said that he was resolved—I'm weak. I have been beat up. I might get beat up again. I have fear and trembling, and I'm not going to try to manufacture anything. I am just going to come and bring the gravity of this awesome message and let the Holy Spirit do His work.

It is such a beautiful and wonderful picture that we see as Paul was setting the example. He saw no place for tricks. He was not trying to back people into intellectual corners. He was not trying to tug the strings of their hearts. He was not trying to manipulate anything.

Rather, Paul just brought the message of a slain Messiah on a bloody cross, saying, In this picture your sin is atoned for. Confess your sin and turn and trust in the One who died in this way for sinners like us. This is the heart and soul of it.

Brothers and sisters, I pray that we will glory in, delight in, rejoice in, and that we will revere this and that it will be like this among us until King Jesus comes back, and that we will only become more and more resolved and more and more clear in our ability to present it. Let's rise as a church that sees the unsearchable value of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Let this be our centerpiece now and always. This is what it is all about.

Now a word to the dad's among us on Father's Day, to those that are brothers in the Lord: when a man has been born again and that man has children of his own, there rises up the desire put in his heart by the Spirit that his children know the Lord Jesus Christ too.

The Lord calls us to instruct our children in the ways of the Lord; to lead them to the foot of the cross; to bring the testimony of the Judge, and bring the foot of the cross to the people in our families. We have a heart for our children.

Pray that the Lord would cause this to well up in you more and more and more and more. But in the desire that they grow in the ways of the Lord, know that you cannot create faith in them. You cannot force them to become a Christian. Don't manipulate it! But share it.

So often it will be your weakness and your fear and trembling and your own humility before the Lord that the Spirit is producing in your heart that is going to get their attention. Humility is such a powerful force in the Kingdom of God.

Men, brothers, listen to me. Do not hold back from confessing your sins to your family, especially when you have sinned against them with harsh words or with angry attitudes. Let them know you are a sinner in need of a Savior.

These kind of moments are powerful in Christian homes. So, brothers, yes we are seeking to lead our families to the foot of the cross, and it is the work of the Holy Spirit to cause the Gospel to bare fruit and sprout in them.

We also might be concerned for our children as they are going to be released into a cultural context that seems to be as dark as Corinth itself. We wonder if they are going to be okay in this

world. Understand something, there is Someone who is a lot more powerful than you. He is the Holy Spirit.

We need to pray that our children will be filled the power of the Holy Spirit, that He will be the One providing the substance and the ability to have joyful endurance in the faith in a society that may be coming against it. The Spirit is still going to be here when you are long gone, men, and He has the power to bring people to life and He has the power to see them through this life and all that it holds.

In conclusion, I have one more principle and then a few questions. Let us depend upon the power of the Holy Spirit in the ministry of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Understand that this is the case through the whole of the Christian life.

We don't need the power of the Lord just in the moment of salvation only. Rather, we need the Gospel and its power throughout the totality of the Christian life. Not only for that moment when we are delivered from the penalty of sin, but in an ongoing way as are saved from the power of sin.

We need the Gospel truths of redemption and forgiveness and freedom in the Lord to be applied by the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives. So, I wonder if any of you have faced anything that has been discouraging because we are all still battling sin. Its power has been severed but its presence lingers.

I wonder how many of you can identify with any of these thoughts. I'm supposed to be kind-hearted and gentle but it feels so much better to just bark at the foolish people in my life. Being honest, I wonder how many of you might think:

I know I'm supposed to be one gives preference to others, but I like having things my way.

I have tried to break that addiction to that drink and/or that drug, but the way it feels has its hold on me and sometimes I just think it's no use.

I know I'm suppose to and want to live a life free of sexual impurity, but the pleasure of that screen seems stronger than gravity.

I know I should stand for my convictions but it is so much easier to clam up, so sometimes I just give in to that tendency.

I know that I should be content with what I have, but my lot in life is unfair and I want more than I've got.

So we still have all of these passions that can surge up within us, and there are many more than the ones that I have just mentioned by way of example. It is the power of the cross of Jesus Christ that not only delivers us from the penalty of sin, but gives us ongoing and increasing victory over the power of sin.

So, brothers and sisters, let us pray to the Lord that He would do a work within us that daily we would be clinging to the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ, clinging even more to the One who was upon that cross. And we think that we are clinging to Him, when He is actually the One who is clinging to us.

He is the One who is upholding us. He is the One who is giving ongoing grace to us. We have a merciful Savior whose heart is filled with tenderness for us in our struggle with sin. So let's be active in the Spirit and linger in the presence of our Messiah, falling upon Him and asking Him for victory over the power of sin to His glory and for our good.

By the grace of God, let's keep the Gospel at the center. Let's close in a word of prayer