

How to Preach the Gospel to Yourself

INTRODUCTION

Over the last six months we have been diving deep into the Gospel as we have sought to understand this great letter the Apostle Paul wrote to the southern churches of Galatia, seeking to clarify their confusion as to what the Gospel is and what it isn't. In doing so, we have uncovered certain convictions through this letter which have resulted in some real and profound change in our thinking of who Christ is, what He's done, and who we are as sons and daughters of our Father.

Learning about the person and work of Christ has also brought us to other convictions which many of us had not previously considered when thinking about the Gospel. These important Gospel truths show us that:

As we've lingered on some of these truths, I've said on many occasions that we need to become skilled in the art of preaching the Gospel to ourselves. Some have had great success in times of trial, temptation, or emotional suffering, by preaching the Gospel to yourself. Others, as Borat says, "not so much."

Since many of you have asked questions about what this means and how we actually do it, I thought we'd take a break from Galatians and discuss how to preach the Gospel to yourself.

My hope from this message is that we become equipped and motivated to preach the Gospel to ourselves. From this I pray we learn more about the Gospel and, as a church, discover more of its power to see deep personal transformation.

WHY IS THIS SO IMPORTANT?

In the letter to the Corinthian church, Paul wrote: "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" (1 Corinthians 15:1-4).

Paul recognizes that in order to see this jacked up church in Corinth changed, he must remind them of the most important thing which they have forgotten: the Gospel that he preached, that they received, and by which they stand and are being saved.

The problem with this church is the same problem that plagues each of us: we tend to forget what is most important. We all have a "center" which we live for. It's what brings us comfort, pleasure, and a sense of meaning. It's the ultimate to us. But when it comes to our lives according to God's will, and finding lasting change and satisfaction, there is really only one thing which should be at the very center of our being. Paul says it's the Gospel, the main thing, the thing of "first importance."

This truth defines who we are and how we perceive this world and the God who made it. Of all the things we might do in God's Kingdom for His glory, only one thing motivates everything we do in this life: Christ died for our sins, He was buried, He was raised on the third day!

Every day we are faced with temptations that draw us away from what is most important; every day we hear competing stories and news that vie for our allegiance and affection. At times it can feel like this incredible center of our lives slips right out of our heart and hands.

But what we value and cherish most, we make time for. Eventually what we value most will form habits and patterns which change us. More and more, what we cherish dominates and shapes who we are. This is very important to remember since this message is nothing more than an attempt to form and shape our patterns of thinking and habits after that which Paul considers of "first importance" to us.

By preaching the Gospel to ourselves, what we are doing is taking the most important news in the world and finding ways to plunge our hearts in it each and every day, with no days off. It needs to become what we meditate upon moment by moment.

It is a developed skill, it is an art, and therefore it takes time to hone in and sharpen. There is no need for us to sit back passively and listen to false gospels, which Paul has said are no gospels at all. You wouldn't allow a friend to sit under false preaching, yet when it comes to our own thinking we allow false messages dominate us and steal from us the joy which the Gospel brings. We are not spectators in our own minds; we are active participants and because of this truth, because we have the true Gospel we now have the ability to push the false prophet out of the pulpit of our minds, take the Gospel and thunder it to our own conscience.

Listen to David preach to Himself in the midst of feeling abandoned by God and in great turmoil and despair:

Psalms 43:5 "Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God."

What is David doing? He's grabbing his attention and speaking to his soul. He's preaching the Gospel of God's salvation, reminding himself of the hope of his God which leads him to desire to praise God.

David is an incredible example of preaching the Gospel to yourself. He knew quite a bit about suffering, turmoil, persecution, being treated unfairly, being pursued, and simply being a victim of someone's madness, the madness of King Saul.

But many years later, David takes the throne and becomes King. Instead of remembering that which was of first importance, David begins to trust in himself. He begins to trust in the idol of self-reliance and instead of going off to war, as he was supposed to, he took ease and relaxed in his arrogance. This set the stage for sin as we read that he peered down from His house and lusted after the beautiful Bathsheba. Through all of this, David broke about almost every

commandment you could. He worshipped another god, he made an idol in his heart, he coveted his neighbor's wife, he committed idolatry, he lied, he committed murder, he failed to honor his father and mother, he despised God's glory and name, he stole another man's wife, and though he may not have broken the Sabbath, he certainly perverted what it was intended for, the resting worship of God alone.

In this sad story of David, we get a glimpse into the heart of a man that God loved in spite of his actions. Psalm 51 shows us the kind of repentant heart David had, and it acts in many ways as a model for you and me as we set about preaching the Gospel to ourselves.

Psalms 51:1-19 "To the choirmaster. A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet went to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba. Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. 2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! 3 For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. 4 Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment. 5 Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me. 6 Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart. 7 Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. 8 Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have broken rejoice. 9 Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. 10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. 11 Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. 12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit. 13 Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you. 14 Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness. 15 O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. 16 For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering. 17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. 18 Do good to Zion in your good pleasure; build up the walls of Jerusalem; 19 then will you delight in right sacrifices, in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings; then bulls will be offered on your altar."

So, let's look at how David preached the Gospel to himself and how we can follow this broken man to a place of restoration and joy.

I. DOWN THE SLOPE OF REPENTANCE

a. See and own your sin

Psalms 51:2-3: "Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! 3 For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me."

- i. Examine yourself in the mirror of God's Word: negative thinking, feeling, our negative emotions and attitudes, how people respond to us.

David uses words like iniquity, sin and transgressions which gives us a fuller picture of how he viewed what he had done. He says essentially that he's revolted, rebelled, trespassed, and offended God, brought misery and affliction upon himself and others. David saw and owned his sin and recognized the true depth of what he had done.

- ii. Guard yourself against sin's deceitfulness: the tendency to water down God's standard, comparing ourselves to others, shifting blame.

This is what we must do: instead of shifting blame to circumstance or others, we need to see the depth of our sin in the light of God's word and own it as our own. We must come to a place where we are able to recognize the weight and feel genuine sorrow for any sin against God.

Often we compare our sins to others and find that we aren't as bad as they are. This is nothing more than the cunning deception of sin which assumes that by pointing out of the sins of others, we're excused from our own. The standard is

not one another, but God's perfect Son, who kept the whole law without exception or fail. When put up to that standard we should begin to feel how far we've fallen.

- iii. Look out for self-reliance: the tendency to just trying harder by either working only on our will power or by working only on our emotions. This will lead to either a feeling of superiority or a feeling of inferiority.

By seeing and owning our sin, we must not jump to work on our will power to fix the sin. Often we say to God, "I'll never do that again," and then we try and try to keep ourselves from that sin until we find ourselves failing again. Sin deceives us into believing that we can fix the problem ourselves. Sin moves us quickly away from the true horror of our sin to offer us quick fixes and tips to work on your will power to stop in your own strength. This is cheap and never lasts. Even if it does, it only creates Pharisees and hypocrites.

- b. See the sin beneath your sin

Psalms 51:4: "Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment."

David realized that his sin wasn't primarily adultery with Bathsheba against Uriah, but adultery and idolatry against His God. David first committed sin spiritually in His heart against the God who loved him. It was first in the heart before it was worked out in action. He had already slept with Bathsheba in his heart on the roof, and he had already murdered Uriah in his heart before he wrote the orders to have delivered.

It isn't just sin in general, as some abstract law David broke, it is against God Himself. So it is with each of us. We don't just sin against some

Law out there, we sin against the one who gave the Law. We sin and offend God Himself. We do this in our heart first.

- i. Ask the “why?” questions until you find what you are looking to other than Jesus for meaning and sweetness of life.

We have to ask “why” we have sinned and get specific. Why did David sin? Because his heart loved sex more than God. David arrived at his conclusion that he sinned against God alone by seeing that his actions were more than just the pain he brought to himself and to Uriah and Bathsheba. It was much more profound. This is how he could address God in the way that he did, he knew this was against God. As Nathan said that David utterly despised God and His word. God doesn't consider it a little mistake, but an active despising of Him when we sin against Him.

- ii. Don't jump too quickly to confess your sin until this work has been done.

We can't feel some tinge of pain and then quickly move to confess our sin unless this work is done. Otherwise we end with cheap, meaningless repentance, weakened faith, and therefore cheap grace. The only way we can come to God with a broken and contrite spirit is by digging deep and asking these questions. We have to ask what it is that we are looking to other than Jesus for our satisfaction and meaning of life.

- c. Expose the Idols/false lovers of your heart

David was worshipping another god. He had to first break commandments one and two before he could ever break all the others. David's sin was a shackle of slavery which chained him to an idol that he was worshipping. His idol was arrogance and self-reliance. He began to think because he was favored by God that he could rely on

himself. I'm sure he flirted with the idea before that day, and as he did, the idol grew more powerful. He began to think of it more and more, until one day, worship of this idol of self became so strong that he was willing to turn his back on his God and despise Him for the sake of his own pleasure.

This idol had David's worship, and when we bow down to them in sin, we do the very same thing. But let's make no mistake, it isn't just going after bad things with an over-desire that makes something our idol, it can be going after good things with an over-desire, a hyper-desire that can make them idols. Slowly but surely these idols began to replace Jesus as our Messiah. They become false lovers of our heart and seek to displace the one who should be our one true love above all other loves.

In Ezekiel 16, God says that these idols cause our hearts to be "lovesick." We long for them, we seek after them, and they become, without effort, that which we fantasize, desire, serve, and pursue with our imagination, energy, time and money.

We have to expose these false messiahs/false lovers of our hearts. We have to see that they are

- i. They are weak

Psalms 115:4-7: "Their idols are silver and gold, the work of human hands. (5) They have mouths, but do not speak; eyes, but do not see. (6) They have ears, but do not hear; noses, but do not smell. (7) They have hands, but do not feel; feet, but do not walk; and they do not make a sound in their throat."

We need to call them out for what they are—weak! They have no power other than that which we relinquish to them.

Moreover;

1. They can't deliver when you succeed; they can only raise the bar.

They will only make it more difficult for you to find your satisfaction in them because you can never rest in getting enough. You'll always need more of whatever it is. They only raise the bar so that you are just out of reach of what they promise.

2. They can't forgive when you fail; they will only condemn you.

When you fail to live up or get your idol or what they promise, you'll feel utterly crushed as a failure. They do not comfort you when you fail, they'll only take you into misery and condemnation. Instead of peace and joy, they can only deliver shame and guilt.

- ii. They are harmful to you and to others.

1. They hurt you spiritually, emotionally and physically.

David's sin against God, which sprang from his heart, didn't just hurt his reputation, it hurt him spiritually as he grieved the holy Spirit and sensed the Spirit withdrawing from him. It hurt him emotionally as he was in great depression and tumult of the soul. It hurt him physically as he threw himself to the ground and would not dare eat a thing.

So it is with you and me. When we sin, we think it is just something we do spiritually, not realizing that we are made as spiritual and physical beings which are so interconnected that the physical body can not live without the Spirit in it. So when we sin we don't just affect our spirit, we affect all of who we are. We sin

against God body and soul and therefore the effects ripple into every part of our human frame.

2. They hurt others by undermining your ability to love.

Did David sin in isolation or did his sin affect all those around him? It effected the Kingdom!! He caused Bathsheba the pain of the loss of her own honor and husband. She experienced the pain of bearing a child only to see it die because of this sin. David's sin tempted Uriah to dishonor his king by coaxing him to go be with his wife when his honor would not allow him. Since Uriah would not sin against David or his God, his reward was more of David's madness to have him murdered on the front lines.

David's kingdom and family from this story on would never be the same. Though forgiven by God, the ripple effect of his sin affected the whole land.

What is most harmful, is that David's sin was grievous to God. David committed adultery against God and loved something other than Him and sought it for His true happiness.

iii. They are grievous to God

1. By pursuing this idol you are saying to God, "Jesus is not enough. I also need _____ to be happy."

By pursuing this idol, David was saying to God, "God thank you for your favor and grace, but you're not enough to make me truly happy. I need to have sex with a woman I don't know before I'll feel satisfied."

Let's not kid ourselves, every sin, since every sin is ultimately worshipping another god, is essentially saying the same thing to God. David's sin, though terrible, is a glimpse into our own hearts.

So what's the point of making such a big deal out of sin?: So you can say with truth that you are a far bigger sinner than you could have ever imagined. You are a worthy recipient of God's judgment. This is what David meant when he said, "you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment" (verse 4b). David knew he deserved whatever judgment God would bring. As David was, so we are helpless and hopeless in our own strength and resources. BUT there is One...

After David utterly hated his sins and repented of them, he confessed his sin to God- not because he wanted a mere pardon from the pain or the judgment, but because he wanted God Himself. He saw that God was enough for Him to bring Him joy and to cause His heart to soar. Only God would cause his heart to rejoice.

David wanted to be with God, close to God, be loved by God, have God, with nothing in the way of his communion with his God. God was his pursuit in his confession. He dove to the depths of his sin, and looked inward at the wickedness of being born as a sinner and sinning against his God, to raising his head in faith to look towards God with faith that God would bring him close again. Why did David repent, why do we repent? David turned to God in faith for the mere pleasure of having God. David wanted to be clean and white as snow so that he could be in the presence of God.

We see this in when David says in Psalms 51:7-12 "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. (8) Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have broken rejoice. (9) Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. (10) Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. (11) Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. (12) Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit."

It takes faith to pray this. David was exercising his faith by crying out to God in this way. Cleanse me, wash me, bring me joy and gladness, cause me to rejoice, blot out my iniquities, change my heart, refresh my spirit, keep close to me, restore me to joy in your salvation, and change me in such a way that I might have a willing spirit.

These are tremendous requests from David. But David knew God could answer his prayer. As a matter of fact, David had confidence God would answer his prayer: Psalms 51:17: "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. David knew that God would not turn away from him if his heart was truly broken over his sin. God never turns away a truly contrite sinner who has true repentance. He delights in it!"

So up the slope of faith we go, looking towards God and preaching the same requests to ourselves:

II. UP THE SLOPE OF FAITH

Both of these first two are preaching ourselves the beauty of double imputation. God not only died in my place and suffered the punishment my sins deserved so that I could be forgiven, He also lived for me and built a perfect righteous record before God that is given to me.

I don't simply have a clean slate, I have a righteous record. I have God's forgiveness and righteousness.

- a. Jesus lived for you (Romans 8:3-4)
 - i. Think about and give thanks for the specific ways Jesus has lived obediently where you have failed.

Jesus didn't come to live as an example for you, He came to live in your place so that wherever you may have failed, wherever you may fail today or tomorrow, because of Christ's perfect righteousness, we can never truly fail. When we have

sinned and failed, we look at where Christ was faithful and succeeded and we preach that to ourselves.

- b. Jesus Died for you (Romans 5:8)
 - i. Think about Jesus' death on the cross for your specific sins and idolatry. Thank God that your sin has been punished once and for all in Christ.

These last two preach to us the union we have in Christ.

- c. God sees you in Jesus (Colossians 3:3)
 - i. Think about how God sees you in Jesus, clothed with His perfect righteousness.
 - ii. Thank Him specifically for how He provides for you in Christ everything that your idols/false lovers promised but couldn't deliver.

If we are struggling with being a good husband, preach to yourself that Christ is the perfect groom who loves His bride perfectly and has never failed, that God sees you as already perfect in His sight. You are not a failure because Christ did not fail.

If you struggling with lust, know that Christ never had an adulterous heart and never lusted. He kept God's law perfectly and therefore you are counted as perfectly righteous in Christ. His record has become your record and God sees you as righteous now!

Thank God, that unlike David who committed adultery because he worshipped a false lover, God was always Jesus' first love and He never failed to love God and live faithfully to Him. He perfectly pleases the Father and because you are in Jesus, God sees you in the same way. He delights in you. He is blessed by you. He wants to commune with you as He desires to commune with His own Son. As He says to Jesus,

“this is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased,” so He says to us, “this is my beloved son and daughter _____, in whom I am well pleased.”

Thank Him for how He sees you, and thank Him for how He alone can give what all the false messiahs and lovers only promise but never deliver.

- d. Jesus lives in you (Romans 8:9)
 - i. Thank God that He does not leave you to live the Christian life on your own, but the Spirit of Christ now dwells in you.

John 14:26: “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.”

Philippians 1:19: “for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance”

- ii. Ask Him to live His righteous life through you, specifically in the areas where you have confessed your sin.

You are not an orphan, you are a child of the Father and He has not left you alone, but has given you a helper, the very Spirit of Christ, to live in you. You’re not only in Christ, He’s in you. This empowers you to turn from your despair, temptation, hopelessness, depression, anger, bitterness, hardness, and be warmed by the Gospel through the Spirit of Christ so that you no longer have to stay the same.

We are to come to Him and ask Him to live His righteous life through us. We can come to Him and ask Him to work through where we have failed and sinned before Him.

Psalms 51:12-15: "Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit. 13 Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you. 14 Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness. 15 O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise."

After seeing and owning his sin, after naming his sin, after recognizing the sin beneath the sin, after looking to God and trusting God that He would forgive him, David begins to tell what he would do. He says that with a restored joy, with a willing spirit, he would go and teach other sinners His ways so that they would return to Him. It brought David to a place where he desired to cry out to God in songs of praise and sing aloud!

This is what the Gospel does. It deals with us honestly so that we can be before God in humble confidence, courageous humility and declare His mercy, His greatness, His wonder and His Gospel to all those who do not know Him.

I pray that as we have been given the practical tools to begin preaching the Gospel to ourselves, we begin to experience the power of the Gospel in our lives and the lives of those around us.

If you have failed, if you are in a crisis, if you are grappling with feelings and emotions that have seemed to grip you, come to Him this morning seeing your sin, owning yours, calling it what it is, telling him of your idolatry and trust that this merciful God is seeking broken and contrite hearts to change with the wonders of Christ living for you, dying for you, wrapping you in Him and giving His very Spirit to dwell in you. This is the Gospel we must preach today and every day so that like David, we can have our joy restored to us for His glory.

Originally created by Richard P. Kaufmann at Harbor Presbyterian Church. Kaleo Church is responsible for any modification from the original.