

Privilege of the Gospel***The Wonder***

Introduction: Today we launch a new six-week series: Privilege of the Gospel

- Seeking to explore what the Gospel is, what it does, how we are to handle it, and how it affects us.
 - It is a subject, that on the surface, may appear simple and even common-knowledge, but we hope to pull back some layers and see the profound nature and power of what we call “**The Gospel.**”
- A. **Setting the context of Paul’s words** (and the entire section of 1 Corinthians 3-7)
1. The letter itself is called 2nd Corinthians but likely the 3rd if not fourth communication
 2. In what we call the 1st letter he addresses many serious theological errors in the church at Corinth (sexual immorality, law suits, gift abuse, communion abuse)
 3. We know from 1Corinthians 5:11 that this was his second letter (I wrote before to you not to keep company with sexually immoral people but he qualifies, those who say they are believers)
 4. So, 2 Corinthians is at least 3rd letter
 5. Paul’s authority as an apostle is being questioned (super apostles were prevalent, more super-spiritual)-they were discrediting Paul and Paul’s reputation and he was being marred and hurt by his own itinerary change (had planned to go to Corinth but things had not worked out)
 6. **Paul’s credibility was challenged... He writes 2 Corinthians**
 - a. **To address his credibility problem (defend his apostleship)**
 - b. **Call out the false teachers**
 - c. **Explain his change in itinerary**
- B. **The specific context of 2 Corinthians 3 is also important**
1. The common practice of teachers bringing letters of recommendation to new communities
 - a. Paul charged with not having them
 - b. Could he be an authentic apostle without these letters
 - c. Paul’s response is bold!

“Do we begin again to commend ourselves? Or do we need, as some others, epistles of commendation to you or letters of commendation from you? You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men; clearly you are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart.” II Corinthians 3:1-3 NKJV

2. Paul said their changed lives were letters of recommendation enough and nothing else should be needed
3. But Paul is quick to give God ALL the credit

“And we have such trust through Christ toward God. Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.” II Corinthians 3:4-6 NKJV

- C. It is here that Paul first mentions the subject that will be our focus over the six weeks-The Gospel!
 - a. New Covenant is one of the terms he uses (as compared to the Old)
 - b. Old is the Law of Moses the New inaugurated at Last Supper
 - c. Letter (old law brings death) the Spirit (New Covenant brings life)
 - d. Ministry of Death vs. Ministry of the Spirit
 - e. Ministry of Condemnation vs. The Ministry of Righteousness

NOTE: All different ways of talking about the Gospel

D. What exactly is the Gospel, what does it entail, and what are we to do with it?

1. We throw the term “Gospel” around a lot
 - a. The Gospels (Matthew, Mark...)
 - b. The “Gospel truth”
 - c. But what specifically does Paul mean?
2. Paul’s testimony regarding the Gospel was clear
 - a. He was not ashamed of it (Romans 1:16)
 - b. Satan blinds peoples hearts so that the “Gospel of the glory of Christ cannot shine on them” (2 Corinthians 4:4)
 - c. Some want to pervert it (Galatians 1:7)
 - d. Paul knew he had been called to “minister the Gospel of God to the Gentiles” (Romans 15:16; Acts 15:7); and saw it as the ministry which he received from the Lord Jesus, “to testify to the gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20:24)
3. Jesus, too, said a great deal about the Gospel
 - a. Commanded the disciples to preach it

“And He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.” Mark 16:15 NKJV

b. Jesus spoke of the preciousness of the Gospel when He said...

“For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s will save it.” Mark 8:35 NKJV

c. It must be preached to all nations before Christ returns

“And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.” Matthew 24:14 NKJV

E. What did Paul, and Jesus, and other NT writers have in mind when they spoke of the “Gospel?”

1. Greek=euagellion (you-on-geleon)...where we get evangelism
2. Good news, glad tidings, a good message
3. 4 lepers and the day of good tidings in 2 Kings 7
4. This is the particular Gospel (Good News that the NT references)

“Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures,”
1 Corinthians 15:1-4 NKJV

- a. Christ (Messiah from God, anointed One)
- b. Died FOR our sins (took our place because death was our lot)-he became sin for us
- c. He was buried
- d. He rose again as the Word promised

The Gospel Summarized: *The Good News of God at work in Christ, taking on Himself the likeness of humanity, laying down His life on the cross in our stead, becoming sin for us and taking the penalty of death that was due us, then rising again to conquer forever sin and death for those who embrace and by faith receive that Good news as theirs.*

F. Sadly, the Gospel today is rare in our pulpits

1. Cannot be good news without the bad news that we are sinners, headed to an eternal death in Hell.
2. Human fixer-upper power is more often taught than the truth that death and burial is the only way to resurrection power

Harry Ironside: *“The Gospel is not good advice to be obeyed but good news to be believed.”*

John Scott: *“All around us we see Christians and churches relaxing their grasp on the Gospel, fumbling it and in danger of letting it drop from their hands altogether.”*

In this Series, we will once again explore and embrace the Gospel and the GREAT PRIVILEGE it brings to those who believe it, embrace it, and share it!

One of those privileges: Wonder

Wonder: *“A feeling of surprise mingled with admiration, caused by something beautiful, unexpected, unfamiliar, or inexplicable.”*

- God so loved the world
- Scarcely for a righteous would one die, yet perhaps for a good man
- But God commended His love to us while we were yet sinners He died
- He who knew no sin, became sin

The Wonder of the Gospel (Paul sets forth three great truths regarding the wonder of the Gospel)

I. The Gospel offers an ever-intensifying experience with the glory of God’s presence

“But if the ministry of death, written and engraved on stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of the glory of his countenance, which glory was passing away, how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious? For if the ministry of condemnation had glory, the ministry of righteousness exceeds much more in glory. For even what was made glorious had no glory in this respect, because of the glory that excels. For if what is passing away was glorious, what remains is much more glorious.” II Corinthians 3:7-11 NKJV

- A. Here the Gospel (New Covenant or Ministry of Righteousness) is being contrasted with the Old Covenant (Law)
- B. Moses had the ministry of mediating the Law (went to the top of Mt.Sinai)
 - 1. Called the ministry of death...why?
 - a. Nothing wrong within itself
 - b. It just couldn’t change the heart
 - c. Law was good...humanity was evil and so the law brought death

2. Had glory because it was from God

“Now it was so, when Moses came down from Mount Sinai (and the two tablets of the Testimony were in Moses’ hand when he came down from the mountain), that Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone while he talked with Him. So when Aaron and all the children of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come near him. Then Moses called to them, and Aaron and all the rulers of the congregation returned to him; and Moses talked with them. Afterward all the children of Israel came near, and he gave them as commandments all that the LORD had spoken with him on Mount Sinai. And when Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil on his face. But whenever Moses went in before the LORD to speak with Him, he would take the veil off until he came out; and he would come out and speak to the children of Israel whatever he had been commanded. And whenever the children of Israel saw the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses’ face shone, then Moses would put the veil on his face again, until he went in to speak with Him.” Exodus 34:29-35 NKJV

- a. The first tablets were destroyed in anger after the golden calf
- b. Second time—show me your glory, receives the law and comes down unaware that his face is shining with the Glory of God’s presence
- c. People ran, he coaxed Aaron and rulers back and then people got close enough to hear
- d. After a while he put the veil back on (when he went into God, veil off until done speaking with people, left on till went into the Lord again)
- e. The glory or radiating face was something that authenticated his leadership to the people (and as Moses could not see God face to face, so to a lesser degree he carried that glory and could not be looked on for long periods of time.)
- f. This was the reason for the veil—the law giver was forced to diminish the glory of God and hide His presence from the people (not only the inability for intimacy but the protection from judgment)

C. The Gospel reveals that Christ is the mediator of the new covenant which invites us to ever-intensifying access to God’s presence.

“You have come...to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel.” Hebrews 12:24 NKJV

“Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.” II Corinthians 3:16 NKJV

1. The Gospel (Good news) the veil is gone (also veil in temple rent at Calvary)
2. You don’t have to stand afar off, you can come boldly to his throne and experience God
3. Practical truth

- a. God can and will speak to you (through His Word and by His Spirit)
- b. Second hand experience with God is not the best we can do
- c. His presence can be felt, enjoyed, and known
- d. And as in Moses case, the glory was temporary (he died) but with Jesus it never fades away, we have ever-intensifying access to God's presence.

WonderFULL—FULL of wonder!

(Brogden) My Father, My King-47, 48

The Wonder of Access to God

II. The Gospel makes possible an emboldened witness to a broken world

“Therefore, since we have such hope, we use great boldness of speech—”II Corinthians 3:12 NKJV

- A. Because of the Gospel, the good news of access to God's presence, we are emboldened to proclaim this message
- B. This is contrast to Moses who veiled himself after he spoke and the people stood afar off-Paul proclaimed boldly this message and so can we.
 1. Every where he went he proclaimed in the synagogues
 2. In Athens at Mars Hill
 3. Before Agrippa and Festus

“Now as he thus made his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, “Paul, you are beside yourself! Much learning is driving you mad!” But he said, “I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak the words of truth and reason. For the king, before whom I also speak freely, knows these things; for I am convinced that none of these things escapes his attention, since this thing was not done in a corner. King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you do believe.” Then Agrippa said to Paul, “You almost persuade me to become a Christian.” And Paul said, “I would to God that not only you, but also all who hear me today, might become both almost and altogether such as I am, except for these chains.” When he had said these things, the king stood up, as well as the governor and Bernice and those who sat with them; and when they had gone aside, they talked among themselves, saying, “This man is doing nothing deserving of death or chains.” Acts 26:24-31 NKJV

- C. We too may be emboldened to speak of Christ
 1. His Word is powerful and can be trusted
 2. Christ is truth and will do what He has promised
 3. His Spirit is poured out in our hearts when we know Him

“Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.” Romans 5:1-5 NKJV

- a. Spirit compels us to love broken
- b. Spirit empowers us to proclaim
- c. The Gospel in us constrains us to tell others

“Either way, Christ’s love controls us. Since we believe that Christ died for all, we also believe that we have all died to our old life.” 2 Corinthians 5:14 NLT

The Gospel provides an emboldened witness...WONDER-FULL

(ILL) Francis Chan story

When the little woman met us at the airport in Kimberly, South Africa, she said, "Would you like to see the hole?"

I had no idea what she was talking about, but being terribly British, I said, "We would love to see the hole! Thank you so much!"

She said, "Would you like to see it before you see where you're going to stay, or afterwards?"

I said, "Could we please go right away?"

She said, "Of course."

And so we set off to see "the hole." She was obviously excited about this hole. She talked nonstop about it. "This hole," she said, "is the biggest man-made hole in the world." Dug with primitive implements, the hole was hundreds of feet deep and one mile in circumference at the top. People had come from all over the world to dig, and they suffered all kinds of deprivation: famine, murder, thievery. To my utter amazement, she said, "It used to be a hill, you know? It used to be a hill."

I still had no idea what we were talking about. Eventually we arrived at the hole: hundreds of feet deep, one mile in circumference, slimy green water in the bottom. In a nearby ramshackle hut, a display of photos showed all kinds of people with little leather buckets, using an intricate system of pulleys and ropes, digging furiously in the biggest man-made hole in the world. I asked, "Why would people come from all over the world to a place like Kimberly to turn a hill into the biggest man-made hole in the world?"

She answered, "One day some little boys were playing on the hill, throwing pebbles at each other. A gentlemen walking past noticed the sun glint on one of the pebbles. When he caught it, he recognized a diamond."

I guess that's how you get people to come from all over the world with primitive implements to turn a hill into the biggest man-made hole in the world! It's called motivation.

It's amazing how certain things will motivate certain people to incredible exploits. I'm convinced that motivation is important for the church of Jesus Christ. We spend a lot of time talking about methods and materials, money and manpower. Without motivation you don't have much at all.

When touched by the wonder of the Gospel, we have motivation to tell others!

III. The Gospel imparts an ongoing and transformative power

“But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.” II Corinthians 3:18 NKJV

- A. We all (not just one man like Moses) are all with no veil
- B. We can abide in His presence, beholding His glory (the veil is gone)
- C. As we behold Christ in the Gospel we are gazing into a mirror and beholding the glory of the Lord
- D. Continual beholding brings transformation in our lives (from glory to glory) into the image of God (restoring his image in us)
 - 1. Begins at conversion with work of life-giving Spirit
 - 2. Continues as we behold Him
 - 3. Complete at Christ's coming (1 John 3:2...doesn't yet appear what we shall be, but when He appears we will be like Him, for we shall see him as He is.)

(ILL) Does He Show Through?

One Sunday on their way home from church, a little girl turned to her mother and said, "Mommy, the preacher's sermon this morning confused me."

The mother said, "Oh? Why is that?"

The little girl replied, "Well, he said that God is bigger than we are. Is that true?" The mother replied, "Yes, that's true honey."

"And he also said that God lives in us? Is that true, Mommy?" Again the mother replied, "Yes."

"Well," said the little girl, "if God is bigger than us and He lives in us, wouldn't He show through?"

(ILL) The Wonder of the Gospel is that it transforms us

Mark Buchanan, in his book called, "Your Church is Too Safe."

Historian Daniel Boorstin documents a momentous shift that occurred in North America in the nineteenth century: we stopped calling people who went on trips travelers and started calling them tourists.

Traveler literally means "one who travails." He labors, suffers, endures... To get there, he immerses himself in a culture, learns the language and customs, lives with the locals, imitates the dress, eats what's set before him.

He takes risks, some enormous, and makes sacrifices, some extravagant. He has tight scrapes and narrow escapes. He is gone a long time. If ever he returns, he returns forever altered

A tourist, not so. Tourist means, literally, "one who goes in circles." He's just taking an exotic detour home. He's only passing through, sampling wares, acquiring souvenirs... He retreats each night to what's safe and familiar. He picks up a word here, a phrase there, but the language, and the world it's embedded in, remains opaque and cryptic, and vaguely menacing.

He spectates and consumes. He returns to where he's come from with an album of photos, a few mementos, and a cheap hat. He's happy to be back. He declares there's no place like home.

We've made a similar shift in the church. At some point we stopped calling Christians disciples and started calling them believers. A disciple is one who follows and imitates Jesus. He loses his life in order to find it. He dives into the language and culture of Christ until His Word and His world reshape his, redefines him, change inside out how he sees and thinks and dreams and, finally, lives

A believer, not so. He holds certain beliefs, but how deep down these go depends on the weather or his mood. He can get defensive, sometimes intensely so, about his beliefs, but in his honest moments he wonders why they've made such little difference

You can't be a disciple without being a believer. But—here's the rub—you can be a believer and not a disciple.

You can say all the right things, think all the right things, believe all the right things, do all the right things, and still not follow and imitate Jesus.

The kingdom of God is made up of travelers, but our churches are largely populated with tourists. The kingdom is full of disciples, but our churches are filled with believers.

Conclusion: Are you being transformed by the Gospel of Christ? (it is one of the great privileges and aspects of its wonder).

Prayer - O Lord Jesus Christ, grant me such communion with Thyself that my soul may continually be athirst for that time when I shall behold Thee in Thy glory. In the meanwhile, may I behold Thy glory in the mirror of Thy Word, and be changed into the same image. AMEN.