

Series: Core 2011
Preached @ ECCC by Grant Peers on 14th August, 2011

Scripture: Matt 28:19-20,
2Cor. 5:21

INTRODUCTION

This week we are starting a new series that will take us into the first part of September (and then we're back into Luke). Every year I try to spend some time talking about who we are as a church and where God is leading us. The reason is that it is so easy to get sidetracked in this life, or to get too comfortable in just rolling along. Like the little saying goes: the main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing. So... what's the main thing? We need to know what the main thing is and work hard to keep it there.

But also consider this: a church is an organism – it only has life because of God. In fact the life of Christ flows through us because Christ himself has given us real life. We're alive because he is alive! The life and power of the Holy Spirit thrashes through our lives as individuals and as a corporate body. Now, since God GAVE us life he also tells us HOW to use this life and how to live this life. In other words: God tells us what the main thing is!

THE MAIN THING

The main purpose of all creation is to give glory to God: that is what the physical creation does as it pours forth speech day after day (Ps 19), that is what humans are to do as they find forgiveness and freedom from sin in the salvation that God offers and live for his praise and glory (Col 1:28-29), that is what the church does as community of believers doing life together (Eph 4:11-16).

Whenever I hear someone say that (or say it myself) I feel like it need some kind of qualification – what does that mean: 'glorify God'?

And the NT makes is plain, it is unambiguous: God is glorified by:

1. A life regenerated by God – when you get saved,
2. lives growing to be more like Christ,
3. and more lives regenerated by God (which is the same as the first except for others!)

And that is what Matthew 28:19-20 is saying, that Great Commission – go, make disciples, and baptise and teach.

It's kind of like God gives us an evaluation form with which we can assess our progress as Christians and a church community – like report cards that kid's get at school today, or that you use to evaluate performance at work. 1 = poor, 2 = needs work, 3 = good, 4 = excellent. Are people getting saved? Are people growing as Christians?

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A GOSPEL COMMUNITY ON MISSION

How are we going to bring glory to God? For East Claremont it is encapsulated in this statement: a gospel community on mission. Over the next few weeks we will see how that is supported biblically.

We will start this week simply with 'the gospel'. Why? Because it is the gospel that calls us to Christ, it is the gospel that calls us into community and it is the gospel that sends us out on mission. So we have to get the gospel right!

WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?¹

The gospel is not just a minimal set of beliefs that allows you entry into the Kingdom of God. If I asked the average Christian: "what is the gospel?" They would perhaps say: "it is the message of hope that Jesus lived, died and was resurrected so that we could be reconciled to God". And there would be nothing wrong in that statement. But the gospel is so much more!

A WORLDVIEW

The gospel is not the ABCs of Christianity it is the A–Z of Christianity. The gospel is sufficient to bring us into relationship with God, but also to sustain us in that relationship, and to take us home one day. Again: as a Christian, you grow by accepting, applying and reapplying the message to your life every day.

You see the gospel is a unique framework on which you hang the whole of your life; or to use the words of CS Lewis:

I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen: not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else.

People have beliefs: South Africa is going to win the world cup again; the South African Cricket side are chokers. But those kinds of beliefs don't help you decide whether or not you should be a racist, or what kinds of things you are going to invest your life in. No, those things are far more fundamental – they come from your worldview – the grid, the framework that gives structure and direction to your life.

The gospel is a worldview that changes the way that you see and do everything. The gospel is radical – and it radically affects everything in your life. There is no compartment of your

¹ Outline followed here is from Tim Keller

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life into which Christianity neatly fits – to be taken out on Sundays and Wednesdays. It is not a slice of the pie in a well-balanced life; it's the pie dish that gives shapes to everything else!

A MORALISTIC FRAMEWORK?

If you are not a Christian and you're here this morning let me ask you: what is your impression of the Christian worldview? Most people think that it is a moralistic framework – if you do enough good things and not too many bad things that God will allow you into heaven. The unique thing about Christianity is that it is unlike every other religion and worldview.

THE GOSPEL IS RADICAL: SAVED BY GRACE

1. GOOD NEWS NOT GOOD ADVICE

We are saved by grace because the gospel is new about what Jesus has done and not advice about how to live. That is grace. You see news is basically about what has been done, but advice is about something you need to do. PRIMARILY

This means the Christianity is vitally linked to the events and miracles of Jesus: virgin birth, perfect life, death on the cross, and victorious resurrection. If those things are not true then there is no truth in Christianity.

But with other religions, no disrespect intended, the exact historical nature of the events and possible miracles are, not as important, because you are saved keeping the 5 pillars of Islam, or by obedience to the Vedas. In other words you are saved by the teaching of the founder and not the founder.

It is the complete opposite for Christianity: it is not good advice about what you must do to get saved. No, it is good news about what Jesus has done (quite apart from you) to give you the gift of salvation.

If you are not a Christian and you are here today, can you see the unique nature of Christianity? Something happened in history, it changed the world for ever, and it will change your life now.

So this is the gospel of grace: Jesus lives the life that you should have lived, and dies the death that you should have died, so that God could receive you not for the sake of your record, but for Christ's record and sake.

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2. STATUS NOT REWARD

We are saved by grace because the gospel is a status you receive now not a reward you receive later. This means that we have the security of the unconditional acceptance of God, PRIMARILY. Again: in other religions you base your status on your works. The question is always: how how/good is enough? So in this life you can't be sure if you've done enough until you're done.

There are many Christians who still stumble at this point. Many still think that salvation is a second chance: the slate is wiped clean but you have to make sure you keep it clean! Jesus gets you in, but you have to keep yourself in. Thank the Lord that is not the way it works – otherwise I would have been lost long time gone. That is not salvation by grace; it's actually a salvation by works!

This is what the bible teaches:

2Corinthians 5:21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

This verse tells us that we receive a righteous status/standing before God.

Did Jesus actually become sinful on the cross? No, he was treated as if he was sinful and given the punishment that sinners deserve. In the same way we become that we were not. It does not mean that I actually become perfect in this life (although we will one day). No, I am treated as if I am perfectly holy and righteous on account of the righteousness of Christ and his death which took away my sin. So God treated Jesus as if he had done everything I had done, and treats me as if I was perfect like Christ. That is radical! And that is grace!

Now here comes the tough part: until you believe that you are a sinner saved utterly by grace, all the good things you do you do for yourself and not for God. Charles Spurgeon used this story to bring home this truth:

A long time ago there was a gardener who lived in a kingdom on a farm. And one day he grew a carrot – and it was the biggest and best carrot that he had ever or would ever grow. So he brought it to his king cause he loved his king, and said, 'Oh my king I would like to give you this carrot, it is the biggest and best carrot I have ever grow; it is for you are a symbol of my appreciation. The king was so touched, he discerned the man's heart and said, 'I own the field that is right next door to your field – I want to give you that field because you are a good gardener and I want you to be twice the gardener you have been. So the farmer received it with gladness and

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went away. Now there was a wealthy nobleman in the court who overheard this exchange and he thought – if you get 3 acres for a carrot what would you get for a horse. So the next day he comes to the king and says, ‘Oh my king, I want you to know that I raise horses and this is the greatest and best horse I have ever raised and I want to give it to you as a token of my appreciation and esteem.’ And the king took the horse and said, ‘thank-you very much, I appreciate that.’ And just took it away. And as the nobleman’s jaw hit the floor the king said, ‘let me explain: the farmer gave the carrot to me, you were giving the horse to yourself.

What Spurgeon was saying was that until you believe that you are a sinner saved by grace alone, everything you do, you do for yourself; that you can do nothing good for God until you’re doing it as a response to all that you already have and not to earn what you think you need. If you are still dealing with God on a merit-basis then everything you do will not be out of love for God, but out of an attempt to win his favour back, or so that you can store up favour to twist his arm later on. Think about it! You can only give and serve freely when you know the freedom with which you have received.

For example, if you give money to the poor (whatever act of service you want to put in there, EVEN repent) because you think that put you (back) in God's good books then you have not done it for him but for yourself. Your motivation is then fear, not love of god.

And if you ask: 'where is the motivation then for serving God'? Here is the counter question: 'if all you do disappears because you were only doing it to keep your salvation, then what were you doing for God anyway'? True gospel based motivation comes freely from a heart overflowing with love and thanksgiving for the unbelievable, unconditional love that it has already received.

CONCLUSION

Two things: (1) you have got to get the gospel! It is radically life changing. We are a gospel community; we’re on a gospel mission. The gospel changes everything we do.

(2) If you have been working slavishly trying to earn what can only be yours by grace then come to the cross and find rest! This is the gospel of grace: you are more wicked and flawed than you ever dared believe, but you are more love and accepted than you ever dared hope at the same time.