

“PREACHING THE GOSPEL TO OURSELVES.”

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Scripture Texts: I Corinthians 15:1-4

Introduction.

How many of you aspire to be a preacher? Any of you want to be a preacher when you grow up? Can any of you picture yourself as a preacher?

OK, let me ask a different question. How many of you have worries, fears, doubts, anxiety, nagging concerns, negative thoughts, self-pity, self-condemnation?

How many of us are ever worried or stressed about our lives, our families, our finances, our futures, our health, about some situation or relationship?

Guess what, you are already a preacher and just didn't know it. All of us are preaching to ourselves all the time. All our worries, fears, doubts, lingering anxiety, feelings of impending trouble or doom, are all a kind of false gospel that we all preach to ourselves.

It starts as soon as we wake up with the troubles of the day facing us, and it is the last thing we do as we fall asleep. Every quiet moment can be interrupted with a cycle of negative thinking and self-talk.

Who is the most influential person in your life? You are, there is no one who talks to you more than you do. We are stuck living with our thoughts 24/7/365. We can't escape.

We do it at school, at work, in the barn and in the kitchen, while driving, and in fact some of you are preaching to yourself right now as I am preaching to you. In your idle moments what are those voices in your head whispering to you? How often do our thoughts wander back to past failures, past sins, past bad experiences, past hurts, disappointment, defeat, frustration?

All of us are preachers and we don't have to have a pulpit to do it. The truth be told when it comes to preaching to ourselves most of us are pretty terrible. We should stop listening to that preacher and learn how to become a good preacher.

Much of our unhappiness in this life is because we keep listening to those little voices in our head and we haven't learned what to do with them.

So think of these next couple of months as all of us going to seminary to learn how to become better preachers of a better Gospel so we aren't lured away by the false gospel our self preaches.

Who is the Gospel for?

Most of us think the Gospel is for non-believers. We are to go out into all the world and preach the Gospel. The Gospel is what you share with people who don't believe in Jesus.

So here is the underlying premise of all that we will be considering in this next two months. The Gospel is not just for unbelievers and in fact it is first and foremost for believers.

Romans 1:15-16 So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. 16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.

Who is the "who are in Rome"?

Romans 1:6-7 ... you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ, 7 To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints.

Paul is eager to preach the Gospel to the saints, the believers in Rome.

I Corinthians 15:1-2 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.

The Gospel is not just for salvation, it is for life, for daily living. It is the foundation of our lives, it is what we build on. Without it we are nothing and have nothing, life is hopeless.

In India I saw a graphic picture of what life looks like without the Gospel. It is a desperate spiritual poverty that leads to physical poverty. As we drove the streets of Kolkata, there is this oppressive sadness at the desperate condition of millions of lives and what can be done. Their hope is not in social change or government intervention, it is in the Gospel alone.

What is the Gospel?

First, what is it not?

It is not the power of positive thinking. The whole positive thinking movement is about creating your own reality, whatever you want to affirm. I am smart, I am beautiful, I am talented, I can do anything I set my mind to. If I say it enough, I can make it true. It is manufacturing truth out of thin air.

It is not Joel Osteen's Gospel. Listen to some of his book titles:

Next Level Thinking: 10 Powerful Thoughts for a Successful and Abundant Life
Approve Yourself

Think Better, Live Better Journal: A Victorious Life Begins in Your Mind

The Power of I Am: Two Words That Will Change Your Life Today

Just say it, I am strong, I am victorious, I am prosperous.

I Declare: 31 Promises to Speak Over Your Life

You Can, You Will: 8 Undeniable Qualities of a Winner

There is a winner in you. There is greatness in you. The key is to get it out.
You have what it takes to win. You're talented enough. You're smart enough.
Have a positive mindset, expect good things.

That's not the Gospel. The Gospel is about real, objective, unchangeable truth. It isn't in us, it is outside of us. We don't create truth, truth creates us.

What is the Gospel?

The Gospel is good news, powerful, life-changing, life-transforming good news.

It is objective, not in us, but outside of us. The Gospel is first of all what is done for us before it is about what we do.

It is the power of God.

Romans 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

I Corinthians 1:18 For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

In creation we see the power of God put on display. In the Gospel we experience and receive the power of God in our own lives. In the Gospel God does His greatest work.

As the power of God, though the world shuns it, we ought never to be ashamed of the glorious Gospel, but rather value it, esteem it, honor it. We should love it to the degree we love our salvation.

And the Gospel is not just confined to the NT. We see it in the OT. In other words, it is the unifying theme of the entire Bible and the point of all of human history. It starts in Genesis 3:15 when God promises the seed of woman will crush the head of the serpent. It continues through all the five books of Moses that are the foreshadowing of a great High Priest who will come and be the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, who makes atonement for us, and reconciles us to the infinitely holy and just God.

Paul's summary of the Gospel.

We will just summarize it now and explore the depths in the weeks to come.

I Corinthians 15:1-4 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.

Notice, first of all, Paul is writing to Christians and he is not telling them something new, but reminding them of something they already know, the Gospel. We must be continually reminded and reminding ourselves.

It is so easy to forget. It is so easy for the voices in our heads to drown out the Gospel. It is so easy for the world to press in all around us and feel like the bigger reality.

Notice, second, Paul didn't make this up, this isn't positive thinking, this isn't something he discovered within himself or dreamed up. He received it and is passing it on.

He is speaking from the authority of Christ Himself. This is revealed truth from God.

Notice, third, Paul says he is passing on what is of first and foremost importance. This is not just the most important message in history, it is the only essential message in all of human history. Only one thing can be of first importance and only the Gospel is it.

There is one truth that matters more than all the other truths. There is one truth from which all the others flow. There is one truth that we ought to remind ourselves and each other on a regular basis. This is the fundamental reality.

This is the Gospel:

First, we have a problem and the problem is sin.

We are all sinners, born in sin, living in sin, continually sinning in thoughts, words and deeds. We are in desperate need of being saved from our sin.

I don't read this in Osteen's books. He doesn't start with that we have all sinned against God.

Preaching the Gospel to ourselves means we will come face to face with the awful reality of how much of a sinner we are, how rotten and foul the stench of our rebellion is, how much of a wretch we really are, that we agree with that word from the song Amazing Grace.

This bad news leads to the good news.

Second, despite our rebellion against God and in the face of a hopeless judgment and death, there is a Savior who comes to save us, “Christ died for our sins, was buried, was raised.”

To preach the Gospel to ourselves means continually believing Jesus has fully satisfied all of God’s righteous requirements on our behalf and that God’s wrath is completely turned away from us and He accepts us and adopts us as His own.

Third, there is a response. We hear and receive and believe the Gospel. This is how the good news of the Gospel becomes good news to us personally.

Preaching the Gospel to ourselves means saying with complete confidence:

Romans 4:7-8 “Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered;

8 blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.”

Romans 8:1 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

It means we take great joy in believing all the promises of Scripture.

“If we Christians believed half of what God says about us in Scripture, we would never need to prop ourselves up with cheap self-esteem” (Piper).

If we Christians believed and took to heart half of what God says to us in Scripture, we would most likely need a whole lot less counseling.

Notice the careful wording in verse two, “by which you are being saved.”

Not by which you were saved, in the past. No, by which you are continually being saved.

Philippians 1:6 And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

Philippians 2:12-13 work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, 13 for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Our salvation isn’t ever completed in this life, so we always need the Gospel to be at work in our lives, daily.

Our mental and emotional and spiritual health depend on are becoming much better skilled at preaching the Gospel to ourselves to counter all the negative self-talk and lies and condemnation. We must learn to stop listening to ourselves and start talking to ourselves. Rather than let ourselves talk to us, we must talk to ourselves.

We can either continue to listen to our fears, doubts, insecurities, hurts, failures, self-pity and put downs, or we can preach to ourselves life-giving, soul-lifting truth

Implications and application.

How can we apply the key lessons of the gospel to our daily lives?

I am eager for us to grow in a deeper understanding of the Gospel than we have ever had before so that we can benefit from all the fruit that God intends to be ours in this knowledge.

I want us to experience all the life-transforming fruit we can from learning how to change our self-talk into God-glorifying, edifying Gospel truth-talk.

I want us to turn from being Gospel-neglecting, Gospel-abusing, Gospel-ignoring to being Gospel-loving, Gospel-hoping, Gospel-driven, Gospel-dependent. Do you desire that for yourself?

One way is through a small book and small groups. I have come across a wonderful little tool to help all of us to that end.

It's called "*A Gospel Primer for Christians: Learning to See the Glories of God's Love*" by Milton Vincent.

We want to use this little booklet, the meat of it is 40 pages of 31 short devotional type readings each aimed at applying the Gospel to some aspect of our lives.

Would you be willing to take a little time this Lent to read and discuss this together in some small groups? Would you be willing to be open to how the Holy Spirit might open our eyes to some wonderful new insight?

Would you be willing to participate?

Would you be willing to go just a step further and host such a group either in your home or in a coffee shop or restaurant or in a room here at church?

Would you be willing to be a point person or a facilitator of such a group? No special training or knowledge, just able to guide the discussion along to include everyone?

If you are willing to help beyond just participating would you please contact me as soon as possible. We will have books and sign up lists next week beginning next week.

I am not naïve, I know everyone can't do this, I know how busy so many of us are. But to as many as are willing and able, I want to hold out this opportunity with the prayer that the Holy Spirit will do something new and fresh and life-giving because I know the Gospel is the power of God and when we have the power of God in us, truly good and blessed things can happen.