



WHAT IS A HEALTHY CHURCH?



What is the Gospel?

1 Corinthians 15:1–11

This morning, we are beginning a new sermon series called “What is a Healthy Church?” In this series, we want to answer basic questions about the life of a local church.

1. What is the Gospel?
2. What is a Church? (Nathan Klahsen from Knollwood)
3. What Does it Mean to Belong to a Church? - We'll talk about membership.
4. Why Do We Practice Baptism & The Lord's Supper? - Why those two and not others? Why those two repeatedly?
5. What is the Work of Elders in the Church?
6. The Purpose and Power of Preaching (Earl Marshall from GCC)
7. What is the Work of Deacons in the Church?
8. What is Church Discipline? Pt. I
9. What is Church Discipline? Pt. II
10. What Is The Great Commission? (Ian Havercroft from RBC London)

These are important matters we need to understand as we walk together in the coming years as a church.

Over the next quarter, this sermon series will be supplemented in at least four ways:

1. The adult teaching hour on Sunday mornings will be a discussion of the previous week's sermon subject. The week the sermon is preached, there will be space for notes and some discussion questions in the service booklet. Take notes, answer the questions, and come the following week with your notes and questions.
2. The men's bible study is working through material from Discipleship Essentials about the church and worship.
3. Nov. 25 - the What Is A Healthy Church conference at Hespeler Baptist Church in Cambridge. Mark Dever.
4. In January, the adult teaching hour will be a course called Basics, and this will serve as the adult teaching topic as well as a preparation course for those of you who want to be baptized and/or become members of CBC.

My philosophy of preaching and pastoral ministry is fairly simple. I want to study God's word, and then I want to say what it says, and then I want to do what it says. So as we walk through this sermon series, and have discussions in the adult teaching time, and as the men do their study on Saturday mornings, and as (I hope) many of you sign up for the conference... As we keep learning from God's word, we should continue to be conformed to, both individually and corporately as a church.

That means that as we study and learn, if we see something that's missing or something that's off, we want to correct it towards what God's word teaches. And that, more than anything else, is fundamental to having a healthy church.

INTRODUCTION

This morning, we want to answer the question: What is the gospel? There's been a fair amount of confusion about this question.

A couple of decades ago, when I was a younger Christian and on the path to becoming a pastor, the hot new thing was the so-called “Emerging Church” movement. The leaders of this movement sought a “nuanced,” “expanded,” and “positive” definition of the gospel. As a result, they downplayed aspects and implications of the gospel message, like sin and repentance. The gospel wasn't just words; it was “doing good things.” Even “not knowing exactly what the gospel is” was counted as a virtue.

As with many movements, the Emerging Church movement took pride in complicating what was actually quite simple. The gospel message is simple. The outworking of the gospel in our lives? The implications of believing the gospel? The good works that accompany the gospel? Communicating the gospel into various cultures? Sure, there is discussion to be had there. But the gospel message itself is not complicated.

This complicating of the gospel was not a new or unique turn of events. This is cyclical. It has happened before, and it will happen again. So let's start with defining the gospel. Let's be reminded and continue to remind each other.

1. The Gospel Defined (1 Corinthians 15)

The Resurrection of Christ

1 Now I would remind you, brothers [and sisters], 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.

Paul is writing to remind them to stick to what he's taught them. By sticking to that teaching, by believing it and living it, they are, he says, “being saved.”

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, 5 and **that he appeared**

And from there to v12 he explains that Jesus appeared... Both to individuals and to groups of people. And then also to Paul, who is both surprised and thankful for that fact. Because he knows he doesn't deserve such favour.

But look again at v3-5 at what it was that he preached to them. He calls this THE GOSPEL - the good news of Jesus Christ! These things that he preached to them, he says, are "of first importance". In other words, these are the most important parts. They are more important than anything else

Now, that doesn't mean that everything else is a worthless waste of time. Thousands of books have been written about the gospel and its implications, many of them are of great value. But these four things ARE the Gospel, they ARE the Good News

And what are they?

1. **That Christ died**
2. **That he was buried**
3. **That he was raised on the third day**
4. **That he appeared, alive and well, to many after his resurrection**

This is the core of the gospel. This is what Paul preached. This is what he instructed others to preach. And this is what we continue to preach today

The resurrection is a uniquely original part of the message! Everyone was born. Everyone dies. But no one else was raised the way Jesus was. And no one ever appeared to many people in a resurrection body the way Jesus did. We count this the fundamental truth of our faith: our risen saviour!

So now why, Paul wants to know, if this is true... Why are some people saying that there is no such thing as a resurrection?

The Resurrection of the Dead

12 Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? 13 But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised.

If this is being proclaimed. And it is being proclaimed by God's chosen messengers – the Apostles. Then how is it that some of them say it didn't happen?

Maybe they thought of it as an embarrassing handicap to spreading the Gospel. You know, the life of Jesus has a certain appeal to people - it's a story that people are impressed with. Even his death can be seen by someone without faith as a noble thing to do. I mean, this is what happens to people who really go against the grain. It's a badge of honour. Something upon which you can found a movement

But resurrection? Coming back to life after having been fully dead. I don't know... kind of a hard sell, don't you think?

Maybe, like a lot of people today, they were more interested in fitting in. As not being seen as mentally unsound. As not being seen as gullible and naïve. Not wanting to be accused of believing fairy tales...

So, let me ask you: What do you believe about the resurrection, the unique and central focus of the gospel? Do you believe it happened? Do you believe that it is important that you believe it happened? Or is it just a "take it or leave it" dish on your menu.

The gospel is this:

That Christ died

That he was buried

That he was raised on the third day

That he appeared, alive and well, to many after his resurrection

The gospel is a message and this message must be proclaimed.

2. The Gospel Must Be Proclaimed

"I Was Sent For This Purpose"

We read this in Luke 4:42-44.

[42] And when it was day, Jesus departed and went into a desolate place. And the people sought him and came to him, and would have kept him from leaving them, [43] but he said to them, **I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose.**" [44] And he was preaching in the synagogues of Judea.

Similarly, in Mark – And he said to them, Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out. And he went throughout all Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons."

We hear Jesus saying something here that we don't often pay attention to. Jesus was sent to preach. Have you ever considered

that? There are many things that we say he came to do or was sent to do, but in his own words, he describes the main component of his mission as preaching, as proclamation. I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose."

These words deserve our attention. I must preach," Jesus says, because I was sent for this purpose." Jesus was sent for the purpose of preaching; he was sent for the purpose of proclaiming the good news. And he is eager to do that as widely as possible. His time is short, and he wants to get to as many places and people as he can.

Anointed to Proclaim

Even before this, earlier in Luke 4, right after the temptation by the devil, what is the first thing we find him doing? He is teaching in the synagogues. Then on the next Sabbath day, we find him in the synagogue again, participating in a worship service, reading from scripture, and proclaiming the truth about himself. We learn that he was anointed to proclaim this good news.

Luke 4:17-21

And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written,

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives
and recovering of sight to the blind,
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down.

And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

To proclaim good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to the captives, to proclaim recovery of sight to the blind, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.

Use Words, But Only When Necessary?

All of this evidence brings into question a phrase that some are fond of repeating: "Preach always; when necessary, use words." Is this a valid statement? Does it stand up to the evidence from Scripture? Do actions always speak louder than words? Do you believe that a Christian should "Preach always, but only use words when necessary"?

These words are often attributed to Saint Francis of Assisi, but that's unlikely. No biographies written within 200 years of his death contain the saying, and the evidence about his life indicates that he himself was a constant and effective preacher!

I worry that we have so believed this that we now avoid using words when they ARE necessary. We can't escape that the gospel is news, good news, and that communicating news involves using words.

The gospel is first and foremost a reality, a series of events, of facts, of ultimate truth. It is words about that event, and then it is the actions that result from believing those words and the one they are about. Of course, we want our actions to match our words as closely as possible, but the gospel is news. It is the communication of facts about an event. When seen in its essence, you can no more communicate the message of the gospel by actions than you could a news report. You know, it could be communicated by actions, but that would be one very looooong game of charades. As one person

cleverly put it: "Saying 'Preach the gospel; if necessary use words' is like saying 'Tell me your phone number; if necessary use digits.' (@J.D. Greear). The gospel is information, but it is information that, when believed and responded to, leads to transformation.

So we might more helpfully say, as author Mark Galli said some years ago: "Preach the gospel – use actions when necessary; use words always."

The gospel must be verbally proclaimed because it is new. In Romans 10, we find another reason why the gospel must be proclaimed.

Romans 10:13-15 – For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!"

Let's think about the people we live and work, and play with. Here in Romans 10, Paul's argument runs like this:

1. People can't call on Jesus if they don't believe in him
2. People can't believe in him if they've never heard about him
3. People can't hear about him without someone preaching to them
4. People can't preach unless they are sent

Can you make a stronger case for the necessity of words in sharing the gospel?

But here's what else we'll find if we engage in clear proclamation.

3. The Gospel Will Be Opposed

Jesus Rejected

Let's look at some examples of opposition. First, in Mark 6, we see Jesus facing rejection:

1 He went away from there and came to his hometown (Nazareth), and his disciples followed him. 2 And on the Sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astonished, saying, Where did this man get these things? What is the wisdom given to him? How are such mighty works done by his hands?

They had seen him grow up. He had lived among them for 30 years. And now he's been gone for a bit but he's back and teaching in the synagogue in a way they've never heard him speak before.

Well, who does he think he is? Where did he get these things? He hadn't studied with the top rabbis. What is the wisdom given to him? How are such mighty works done by his hands? In behind these questions, you can already hear the jealousy, the hate.

3 Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him.

These are more attempts to slander him. A carpenter - IOW - just a regular working guy?!?

The son of Mary? It was unusual for a man to be identified by his mother, not his father - unless the father was unknown! What are they getting at? "This is the son of Mary, remember that girl who got pregnant before she was married? Yeah, her son! Can you believe it!? We don't even know who the father is!"

4 And Jesus said to them, A prophet is not without honour, except in his hometown and among his relatives and in his own household." 5 And he could do no mighty work there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them. 6 And he marveled because of their unbelief. And he went about among the villages teaching.

Now, it's not that it was impossible for him to do mighty works there, but he held back because of their unbelief. He refused to force himself on those who didn't want him. And leaves to continue his primary mission.

Jesus faced opposition.

John the Baptist Martyred

In the same chapter, we see the following:

14 King Herod heard of it, for Jesus' name had become known. Some said, John the Baptist has been raised from the dead. That is why these miraculous powers are at work in him." 15 But others said, He is Elijah." And others said, He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old." 16 But when Herod heard of it, he said, John, whom I beheaded, has been raised."

Herod hears about all of this gospel activity happening nearby. Rumours swirl - Elijah, John, prophets back from the dead. Something supernatural is going on! Herod has this tortured conscience because he's had John the Baptist killed.

Background story... John spoke truth to power (repentance) and paid for it with his life.

Paul's "Light Momentary Affliction"

And then we see Paul's summary of the opposition he faced.

Read 2 Cor 11:24-28. We know how Paul thought of this extreme opposition... This light momentary affliction..."

Paul could have skipped all of these events, all of this pain, this torture. All of this happened on account of the Gospel. Why bother? Why endure the beatings, the stoning, and the imprisonment?

And I have to wonder... About you, about me, about every Christian in North America. What if THAT kind and amount of opposition was the cost of being a disciple of Jesus Christ? What if a gun to the head was what you knew was coming if you said you believed. What if a beating, imprisonment, torture... What if saying you believed in Jesus was writing your own death sentence? Or if standing for what you believe costs you your career?

What would you do?

Because I believe in the gospel, I submit to the consequences of this belief. I believe that the difficulties of this life. The sacrifices required. The worldly pleasures declined. Are all worth it because I am convinced that Jesus is the Son of God. And I am convinced that not only did he die and get buried in a tomb. I believe that he rose from the dead and came out of that tomb in bodily form. And appeared to many people after that

Jesus calls us to go and speak the truth of the gospel, to call people to repentance. And the more gospel-speaking there is, the more opposition there will be.

Matt. 10:16-20 (NLT)

16 Look, I am sending you out as sheep among wolves. So be as shrewd as snakes and harmless as doves. 17 But beware! For you will be handed over to the courts and will be flogged with whips in the synagogues. 18 You will stand trial before governors and kings

because you are my followers. **But this will be your opportunity to tell the rulers and other unbelievers about me.** 19 When you are arrested, don't worry about how to respond or what to say. God will give you the right words at the right time. 20 For it is not you who will be speaking—it will be the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.

So, why endure this opposition?

Hebrews 12:1-4

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. 2 We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honour beside God's throne. 3 Think of all the hostility he endured from sinful people; then you won't become weary and give up."

This is the life of Jesus, this is the life of faithful Christians throughout history. Suffering is temporary, but joy is eternal. In this world, you will have trouble, but "I have overcome the world," Jesus says. And so we set out from this place of gathering to tell others about Jesus, to follow wherever God leads, and accept the consequences of that, keeping our eyes on Jesus and looking forward to the eternal joy that is waiting for us.

And here is the part of the message that will face much rejection and opposition

4. The Gospel Must Be Believed

Back to 1 Cor. 15...

v14 And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain.

If it didn't actually happen, if this key and central point of the gospel never happened. Then the lives of preachers are pointless. All the time I spend reading and praying and studying and writing and preaching about Jesus is a giant waste of time! And you sitting here and listening to me, or praying with me, or coming to the classes I teach - that's a waste of time too. And if you take what you've heard here and share it with others, hoping that they, too will believe it? Well, if it isn't true, then what are we doing?!?!

If I have committed my life to preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ. If you have committed your life to placing your faith in Jesus Christ. And if what I'm preaching is untrue. And if what you believe is untrue. Then our lives are pointless!

16 For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised.

17 And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.

18 Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.

If Jesus was not raised from the dead, then your faith is in vain, it is futile! Your faith has no purpose, and it is incapable of producing anything useful! Without the resurrection, you might as well not believe in anything about Jesus! The resurrection is the central part of the gospel. If there's no resurrection, there's no point... preaching is in vain! So is faith!

Paul makes his point clear: If this resurrection thing isn't true, then we're all fools. If Jesus wasn't raised from the dead, then our faith in him is pointless. If Jesus wasn't raised from the dead, then we are

still in our sins, and that means we are not reconciled to God. That we are without hope of forgiveness or eternal life. And we're no better off than anyone else. In fact, we're worse!

Listen to what he says next:

v19 If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.

The things that our faith demands of us in this life make no sense if there is no life after this one. We are to be pitied...

Has anyone ever thought that about your life? Has anyone thought of you as a fool for the way you live? Are there any ways in which you look like a fool because you believe the gospel?

Has your life been made any more difficult by the fact that you believe in the good news about the resurrected Christ? We have it so good here in North America. Our faith costs us so little. This is changing, but compared to most of the world, we have it good. It is not this way in other parts of the world where people face real violence if they proclaim Christ.

How foolish, how foolish of these people. How sad, how vain, what a tragic waste of their lives. If it turns out they believed in something that never happened. If they staked their lives on a fairy tale

And how about the Apostle Paul. Who would have been set for life with riches and power and privilege, if only he hadn't believed in the gospel. And yet he believed so firmly that he endured all kinds of afflictions and torture, and abuse.

Here is what the bible proclaims about the resurrection...

FIRSTFRUITS AND HARVEST

20 But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

BUT IN FACT – Paul says, Christ has been raised from the dead. He has - there is no doubt. Jesus is the beginning of the resurrection. The “the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep”. The firstfruits; the first of many; the beginning of the harvest.

Jesus is just the beginning of the resurrection. He is the first one to experience the resurrection that we will all experience if we believe the gospel and are saved. He has gone first, and when he returns, this is what all who belong to him will experience.

There must have been a big debate, a deep struggle to believe in the resurrection. Because he keeps coming back to the same line of reasoning

v32 If the dead are not raised, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."

If the resurrection is just a fairy tale then. Eat. Drink. Overeat. Drink too much. Get drunk. Live it up. Party every day. Get as much money as you can. Have as much sex as you can. Do whatever drugs you ve always wanted to do.

Because if there is no resurrection. Then, when you die, we have a funeral for you, and that s it! No punishment, no reward. Just nothingness... the end.

If this life is all there is, then it makes sense to live a certain way. If it s not true, then we should just feel free to indulge in every sensual pleasure that comes to mind. We might as well party, eat, drink, and

experience maximum personal pleasure with no regard for anyone else.

But no, Paul rebukes this attitude

33 Do not be deceived... 34 Wake up from your drunken stupor, as is right, and do not go on sinning.

Living in intentional ignorance of the truth of the gospel is futile. Because the resurrection DID happen. Living as if it didn't happen may lead to some pleasures in this life, but ultimately it leads to death. It leads to eternal death

But do you see his point? The gospel demands a decision: Either it is true, you follow Jesus, and you submit your will to his. Or it is not true, you don't follow Jesus, and you live however you see fit.

There it is: make your choice.

Believe!

Paul is not alone in calling us to believe. In the Gospel of John, Jesus himself calls on us repeatedly to believe.

The Benefits of Belief

John 1:12 tells us that believing secures for us the right to become children of God

In John 5:24, Jesus says that "whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life."

John 6:40 "For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day."

John 6:47 "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life."

If you are someone who struggles to believe, I want you to know that the cure for unbelief is not "proof". I could make a case for the historical proof of the resurrection. But when dealing with the supernatural, "proof" will only take us so far.

Proof is not the cure for unbelief. The cure for unbelief is... belief. If you're someone who struggles with faith and belief, that sounds terribly simplistic - I know. It was something that was difficult for me to accept as well.

But at the end of it all, Jesus demands of you a choice: either you believe in him, and in his Father who sent him, and in the power of his resurrection, or you don't. There are consequences to both of those options.

Because if what Jesus says is true – and I believe that it is. Then your choice to believe or disbelieve has eternal consequences. If you choose to believe, you will spend eternity in the presence of God. But if you choose not to believe, your fate will be very different. You will spend eternity apart from God in hell.

In 1 John 5:10 it says that

Whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself. Whoever does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has borne concerning his Son."

John 3:18 says that "Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God." [expand]

These are hard words for me to swallow. As a natural skeptic, I do not believe things easily. I have, at different times in my life, been

proud of my skepticism, my discernment, my unbelief. Proud of my avoidance of the appearance of gullibility. And yet when it comes to things of God, the things clearly stated in God's word, this is pride, and it is a sin.

Doubt is something different from unbelief. We can struggle to believe something while trying to believe it, and this is not a sin. But bold, intentional, blatant unbelief IS a sin. John Stott said this about unbelief. Unbelief is not a misfortune to be pitied; it is a sin to be deplored. Its sinfulness lies in the fact that it contradicts the word of the One True God and thus attributes falsehood to him." [expand: I want to believe" (Fox Mulder) vs. I refuse to believe"]

The Bible says that both belief and unbelief produce results. Belief results in having the truth of Christ inside us. Unbelief results in becoming an accuser of God. And this, obviously, is not a favourable position to be in.

Unbelief results in condemnation.

Listen again to John 3:18 - "Whoever believes in him," John says in his gospel, "is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God."

And so this morning is an important morning. This demands a response. And this response determines your eternal destiny. Believe or disbelieve. A choice is required, and you will live with the consequences of that choice. Jesus Christ came, lived, suffered, died, and was raised back to life in order to secure the opportunity for you to be forgiven of your sins and reconciled to God.

I'm pleading with you to read God's word and believe that the words written there are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the

Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." (John 20:31)

CONCLUSION

Every time that Christians gather, we gather to proclaim that we believe that Jesus was the Son of God, that he died, that he was buried, that he rose from death back to life, and that he appeared to many people after that.

Do **you** believe that? Do you actually believe that Jesus was a real person, that he lived and died and came back to life and that he appeared to people after his resurrection? We mention resurrection so often that I think we might take it for granted. Do we realize the claim we're making when we say we believe in the resurrection? We are saying that we believe in something for which we have no tangible physical evidence. No one alive on the earth today was an eyewitness to the events. You can't prove the resurrection by a scientific experiment. So do you believe it? Can it be believed?

Many people deny the resurrection. Some even foolishly deny that Jesus even existed. And Paul, the biblical writer, has something to say about the truth of the resurrection.

Here in 1 Cor. 15, Paul tells us that, in fact, if we believe in the resurrection and all the implications that flow out of the resurrection, and if it turns out that what we believe in is false if it never happened... Then we are delusional fools who are wasting our lives! Because if the resurrection didn't actually happen, then Jesus is not who he claimed to be and our hope in him truly **is** delusional.

This passage of Scripture lays down a challenge to everyone. If you already believe in Jesus and in the resurrection, this is a reminder. If you do not already believe in Jesus and in the resurrection, this is a moment of choice.

Let's go back to the question we started with: What is a healthy church?

1. A healthy church knows what the gospel is.
2. A healthy church knows that the gospel must be declared
3. A healthy church knows that the gospel will be opposed - I've spoken with a number of you about your desire to reach the community of Ilderton. I share your goals and your passion. But we have to realize this: when we become more public, more outspoken about our beliefs, there will be varying amounts of opposition. We should not be deterred by this. Rather, we should speak the truth in love, recognizing that it is not by eloquent words of wisdom that people's souls are saved, but by the power and Spirit of God. We preach the gospel; he does the work.
4. A healthy church knows that the gospel must be believed - Believe in the gospel this morning, call on the name of Jesus, and you will be saved.

Let's pray.

The content of this booklet was written by Michael Krahn, lead pastor of Community Bible Church in Ilderton, Ontario. We are a gospel-centered church devoted to the faithful teaching of Scripture, the building up of believers, and bearing witness to Christ in our community and beyond. To learn more, join us for a Sunday service, or connect with us directly, scan the QR code or visit:
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