

Different To Make A Difference

Speak Boldly – Part 2

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September 3, 2006



SPEAK BOLDLY – PART 2 Acts 2:14-41

We are looking at 5 reasons why the Word of God must be central in our worship. Last week we began looking at Peter's sermon in Acts 2 using that as an example of how the Word was central. We began to talk about the Word's magnitude. Because of the Word's magnitude we talked about the significance of God's revelation; the fact that he has revealed Himself as the Word and He has revealed Himself through the Word. We talked about the seriousness of man's proclamation of the Word. The preacher has the responsibility to expose the voice of God, not in his own voice, in order to exalt the greatness of God. We magnify God by magnifying His voice.

Five Reasons Why The Word Of God Must Be Central In Our Worship Because of the Word's authority.

I want us to pick up where we left off last week and look at the second reason why the Word of God must be central in our worship. That reason is because of the Word's authority. What I want you to do is start with me in verse 14 and begin to look over this sermon again. I want us to think about the authority that was found in this message. Look at verse 14. The Bible says: "Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd" (Acts 2:14). We talked about how that word "addressed the crowd" literally means to speak with great gravity or seriousness. He begins to preach – first Christian sermon:

Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. These men are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning! No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: 'In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord. And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved' (Acts 2:14-21).

Now those verses he just quoted are from Joel. Does anyone know where in Joel? Joel 2:28-32. Either we have Bible scholars here or they have a little note down at the bottom of their Bibles that tell them. Joel 2:28-32 – instant Bible scholar status. So he quotes from Joel. Out of the first part of this sermon we have a pretty heavy Old Testament emphasis. Then we get to verse 22:

Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through

him, as you yourselves know. This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him. David said about him: 'I saw the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will live in hope, because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. You have made known to me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence' (Acts 2:22-28).

Now there he is quoting from Psalms. Anyone know where? Psalms 16 – you're catching on. Alright verse 8 – 11. He is quoting from Psalms. Now we have Joel then we have Psalms 16. Then he continues:

Brothers, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne. Seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body see decay. God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact. Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear. For David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said, 'The Lord said to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet"' (Acts 2:29-35).

Where is he quoting from there? Psalm 110:1. Then he comes to a conclusion: "Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36).

What I want you to see as we read through this first Christian sermon is that it is packed full of Old Testament Scripture. This sermon has authority in Acts 2 because it was saturated with the Word. You have just about half of the verses that are describing the sermon here that are direct quotations from the Old Testament. Peter knew that if he was going to stand to speak with authority on this particular day he had a responsibility to stand and to use the Word of God. That was where the authority would come from. What we see from the very beginning is a precedent being set in public worship for the Word to saturate the worship of the church; for the Word to saturate what happens when the believers gathered together.

I had it described to me when I went to seminary to study under a good friend of mine named Dr. Jim Shaddix. He has preached here before. He has been my mentor over the last 6 or 7 years. I remember in preaching class he said, "Guys we are going to look at sermons and how we use the Word of God in worship and especially in preaching like a swimming pool." Now follow along with the illustration. He said,

There are a lot of folks who think when it comes to preaching that the Word is the diving board. So what they do is they stand up and they read a couple of verses and then they close the Bible and they move on to what they want to talk about the rest of the time, never to return to the Word; giving their own ideas, their own opinions. That is the diving board. Second, many people use the text, the Word of God, as the pool furniture. You kind of swim over to the side every once in a while, take a little dose from the Word here, take a little

dose from the Word over there, make reference to it every once in a while but you are really enjoying the time you have got in the pool on your own.

How many of you have ever heard sermons where the Scripture is the diving board or the Scripture is the pool furniture. He said, "Instead of using the Word as the diving board or pool furniture, let's use the Word as the pool itself. Let's jump into this thing. Let's swim around in it. Let's saturate our worship with the Word. Let's walk through it in and out. Let's enjoy all that is in there."

Apart from the Word, the preacher is helpless.

Now why dive into the Word? Why would we need to dive into the Word? Two reasons – because number one – apart from the Word the preacher is helpless. Peter, if you could just put yourself in his shoes on this particular day. What you have are the sounds of a violent wind. You have got tongues of fire resting on their heads and then there are all of his friends speaking in different languages and Peter, the pressure is on. You have to stand up and explain all of this.

So Peter stands up and he knows that he is helpless apart from what the Word has said about what is going on there. He knows that his authority is completely based on his knowledge of the Word and his explanation of the Word. There is a tone of prophecy throughout this thing. What Peter is saying, it is exactly what we see from the prophets in the Old Testament when the Spirit would come upon people they would proclaim the Word of the Lord, all throughout the Old Testament. That is exactly what we see happening here in Acts 2. It even says when he is quoting from Joel that the Spirit is going to come upon you and you are going to prophesy. The responsibility of the prophet was to take the Word of the Lord and to speak it.

Don't miss it. We have to grab hold of this. If the prophet doesn't have the Word of the Lord then he has nothing to say. I want us to draw the connection to preaching today. If the preacher does not have the Word of the Lord then he has nothing to say. The whole thing was these prophets would stand up in the Old Testament and say "thus sayeth the Lord," and they would start to give the Word of the Lord. The preacher today, his responsibility, my responsibility is to come before you and say "thus sayeth the Lord" and to deliver the Word of the Lord to the people. That is exactly what we see happening here.

Now at this point we need to remember that there is a slight difference between the preaching of the New Testament and the Old Testament and preaching today - the role of the Word in the Old Testament and New Testament worship and the role of the Word today.

In that day I think it could be summarized by three different types of communication. You had first of all, fresh revelation that came from God. A lot of this stuff that we see is written in Scripture – first time it was coming down the shoot – God giving it to His people and the people proclaiming it. We even see that in Jesus when He says, "a new command I give you". He begins to give fresh revelation from God.

Then at other points you have explanation of the revelation that had already been given. Peter is doing that right here. We have revelation of the Old Testament – here is how to explain it today. You have even Jesus saying, "you have heard that it was said" in talking about what was said before. Then you have people persuading based on those things. So you have this fresh revelation sometimes; sometimes you have explanation of what has already been said; and they are using that to persuade people.

When we come to preaching today and for the role of the Word in our worship today we don't have the first element. All we have is explanation and persuasion. We don't have fresh revelation. Now by that I don't mean that God is not still speaking to His people. He is obviously still speaking to His people, but I do mean this – God is not sitting back in heaven thinking, "Man, I really wish I would have included some more things in that book. David, could you bring a fresh word that is completely separate from what is in the Bible?" That is how cults begin isn't it?

Somewhere along the way doesn't the contemporary face of preaching look like we need to add to this because it is just not enough. We wander around looking for a fresh word from the Word. I remember sitting in a worship service one time; the guy who was supposedly preaching that day had forgotten to bring his Bible. You don't forget to bring your Bible when you are preaching, but he forgot to bring his Bible. So he stood up and for half an hour he basically, the thesis of his message was, "I did everything I could to try come up with a word from the Lord to bring to you today. He said - I took walks. I thought about it everywhere I went. I prayed. I did this and that;" and he told some humorous stories in between that made everybody laugh. Then he came to the end and said, I did everything I could to come up with a word from the Lord and I just couldn't come up with one. So he closed down and said, "Maybe that means the Lord doesn't have a word for us today."

I sat there thinking, you have 66 books that you know are the Word of the Lord. Just stand up, open to Leviticus if you want, and preach it and you have a word from the Lord. You don't have to wander around looking for something to preach. You have it right here. Just proclaim it. That is the job of the prophet and if you don't have this then you have nothing to say to the people that you stand before. Apart from the Word the preacher is helpless.

I will be honest. This frees me up. I don't have to spend my week wandering around trying to think about what new word or innovative word I'm going to bring to you for today. I'm not the chef. I don't cook the food. I just bring it to the table. I try to bring it hot, alright. I don't have to create something to bring to you. We have got the Word and the authority of the Word here. But what we have done in contemporary preaching today and in our worship today is we have taken the authority of the Word and we have put it in the background and instead we have put up the authority and the experiences of the preacher at the forefront. We have reversed it.

As a result so many sermons are long on story-telling and the preacher's experiences. People even say, "Well, David you can't preach on anything if you haven't experienced it." Let's think about that for a second. Would it be required of me in order to preach on drunkenness to experience drunkenness? Would it be required of me to preach on a variety of different sins we just won't go into for me to experience those things? Absolutely not! Ladies and gentlemen, my authority to stand before you today is not based on my opinions or on my experience. It is based on the Word of God. That is the only authority there is. Apart from that a preacher falls flat on his face.

I remember preaching one time in east Tennessee. I was preaching at one of these good old fashioned revival meetings throughout the week. It was one of those areas of the country where they still bring out some steaks every once in a while. I was preaching every night but during the day they wanted me to go to some of the schools to speak and try to get people to come that night. Of course they said, "Well, you can't preach from the Bible and you can't mention Jesus. You just got to give a speech."

So I did. And some guys can do that really well. Some guys can really draw a crowd in that way. I think that is great, but I learned really quickly that week that apart from the Word

and apart from Christ I am not a very good communicator. Some of you might think that I'm not a good communicator even with the Word, but you should see without the Word. It's even worse. I realized and God began to show me very clearly at an early point in my ministry that apart from the power of His Word I fall flat on my face.

Some people ask me – "Well, David, how long do you spend preparing a sermon for Sunday?" I usually tell them around the number of hours that I spend. Sometimes people will say, "Why do you spend all of that time? Why don't you just stand up and let the Holy Spirit speak through you when you come to church on Sunday?" Here's why. Not that I don't think the Holy Spirit could do that, but if I'm going to stand up to say "thus sayeth the Lord" I better know what the Lord sayeth before I come before the people.

Apart from the Word, the church is powerless.

Apart from the Word the preacher is helpless. Not only that but apart from the Word the church is powerless. This is the central foundation upon which the church is built here in Acts 2. That's why the first thing it says is "*They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching*" (Acts 2:42). If we had time, we would go through the whole book of Acts and see the role of the Word and the proclamation of the Word that goes throughout the building of the church. It is the foundation for the power in the church.

Now we know in Acts 2:42-27 the Bible says not only did they devote themselves to these things but "*Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles*" (Acts 2:43). What you have is a picture of the Word going forward; it is advancing, being proclaimed. What is happening is miraculous signs and wonders are being done that validates the Word and help enlighten the power of the Word. It happens all throughout the book of Acts, particularly when the Word is going to new places that it hasn't gone before.

The thing is it is happening all around the world today. You go to other countries, particularly countries where the Word is not known and you see miraculous things happening and hear testimonies. Even in Indonesia where we were in June to hear stories about what God is doing to bring Muslims to Christ.

There is one leader of the mosque, they are called Imams, this leader of the mosque was in the mosque one Friday as is the ritual. He is praying and bowing down in this whole bowing down ritual and he is bowing down on this mat. One time when he is bowing down he opens his eyes and he looks and there on the mat he sees the image of the face of Christ.

Now that would cause you to take little second look if you are a Muslim praying to Allah and you look down and you see the face of Jesus with a smile on His face saying, I want you to come to me? So he found this lady who he knew was a believer, came to faith in Christ. Stories of miraculous things happening.

I remember one dream/vision type story where they was a woman who wanted to have an abortion. The abortion rate in Indonesia is sky high. There was a lady I was talking to who had a home for unwed mothers to help them find alternatives to abortion. This particular woman who was going to have an abortion went to sleep one night and saw in her dream a vision of a guy. She didn't know who it was. He was holding some sheep in his hands and had lambs surrounding him and he came to her in that dream and vision and said, I don't want you to kill that baby that is inside of you. I have put it inside of you for a reason and it belongs to me.

She got really scared and so the next morning she decided, I'm not going to go through with the abortion. She went to the doctor who was going to do it and said, I'm not going to do this. The doctor said, you need to go to this home that has some help for mothers that are in a situation like you are in. So she goes there and she walks into this lady's office. When she walks in she sees a picture of Jesus on the wall. She didn't even know who had appeared to her in her vision. She looks up and she says, that man appeared to me in a dream. Who is he? She begins to tell her about Christ. She becomes a Christian, her and her father both. She has the baby and he gets adopted by a Christian family there in Indonesia. God is doing amazing things around the world.

Now here's the question with I wrestled with over the last 6 months in particular. The question I wrestled with is why don't we see things like that happening here? We hear stories like this. How come we don't hear those kind of stories in Birmingham? The best conclusions I've come to based on studying the Word and talking with folks is two things.

Number one I think on the whole we are just not aware of the supernatural around us. The enlightenment has affected us so much that everything is explained by reason or rationalism and we are just not open to the fact that there are supernatural things that happen in the world that we just can't explain.

The second reason, this is where coming in to what is going on here in the book of Acts, you see, and I mentioned it earlier, you see these wonders and signs happening when the Word is going to new places. That is exactly what you see in the world today, but in places like Birmingham where the Word is already there those wonders, those miraculous signs are not necessary because the power is inherent in the Word. If the Word is there then we need know miraculous signs to validate it.

Remember Luke 16 when Luke tells about the rich man and Lazarus? The rich man is in hell and he say, "Send somebody to my brothers to tell them the truth. Send somebody who would perform some kind of miracle to show them." What does Abraham say? He says, "They already have the Law and the Prophets. They have the Word. Even if somebody was raised from the dead they still wouldn't be convinced." I am convinced that today we have the power inherent in the Word to see amazing things happen in Birmingham. The question is will we be a church that takes God at His Word; that listens to His Word; studies His Word and depends on the authority of the Word? We have got to make the Word central in our worship because of the Word's authority.

Because of the Word's relevance.

Third reason to make the Word central in our worship – because of the Word's relevance. I want you to see what happens here in Acts 2. What kind of precipitates the sermon is in verse 12 and 13. The people as they watch what is going on are: *"Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, 'What does this mean?' Some, however, made fun of them and said, 'They have had too much wine. Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd"* (Acts 2:12-14).

So what you have are the people asking, what is going on? There is something that has happened on that day that needs an explanation. So Peter takes the Word from the Old Testament and begins to apply it to today. I want you to see two characteristics of the Word here.

The Word speaks to contemporary needs.

Number one – the Word speaks to contemporary needs. It addresses the present situation here in Acts 2 but don't miss it. Peter addresses the present situation with writings that were written literally hundreds of years before that.

The Word speaks about eternal promises.

So the Word speaks to contemporary needs, but listen to this, the Word speaks about eternal promises. What you have is a timeless word that Peter is applying to a contemporary context. That is exactly what the prophet or the preacher does. They are kind of a bridge builder bridging the gap between... okay these words were written thousands of years ago now – how do they apply to our contemporary context? The Bible is timeless and relevant enough to speak not only in Acts 2, but for us to study this Word today and see how it applies to our lives in the 21st century. The Word speaks to contemporary needs. The Word speaks about eternal promises. It is a both/and here that we are seeing set up.

Now let's be honest. At this point we think and some of us would say but are kind of afraid to say, "Well, I don't understand why we study the Bible because it is pretty antiquated. It doesn't really address a lot of the pressures that we face in the 21st century." Some of you are thinking that, "I have got this, this and this going on right now in my life. This happening right now in my life and you're going to come in here today and speak about what happened 2000 years ago. Tell me about the Jebusites and the Ammorites. What does that have to do with me? Is the Bible really worth listening to when it comes to the 21st century and all of the pressures and concerns, difficulties, trials, decisions that we have to make? Should we even listen to the Bible?"

It is at this point that I want us to dive in and just think for a minute about the eternal promises that speak to contemporary needs. I have a list. I want you to remember Joshua 1:8-9 says, "*Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful*" (Josh. 1:8).

That is not material prosperity or material success. Let's not be so Americanized that we look at success and prosperity just through material eyes. It is talking about success and prosperity in your life and your family even if that means difficulty. The Word brings prosperity and success.

Psalms 19 says the Word converts our soul, makes us wise, gives joy to our hearts. It gives joy to our hearts. It makes wise the simple; enlightens our eyes. Psalm 19 goes on to say it is everlasting. It is true. It is righteous, invaluable, and sweet to the taste.

Psalms 119:105 says the Word of God gives guidance and direction for the future. "*Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path*" (Ps. 119:105). You want to know God's will, God's purpose for your life? Go to the Word. It gives guidance and direction for your life.

Isaiah 40:1-11 talks about comfort and strength in our troubles. "comfort, comfort my people" is how Isaiah 40 starts. It comes to the end and it says you will mount up with wings as eagles. You will run and not grow weary. You will walk and not faint.

Comfort and strength in our troubles. John 1:1-14 tells us that the Bible, the Word of God, reveals Jesus Himself. John 17:17 says that it is the source of truth and holiness. Philippians 4:4-7 says it gives us peace: "*Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God,*

which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:6-7).

Second Timothy 3:14-17 talks about how the Word gives wisdom for salvation, teaching, rebuke, correction and instruction. It matures and prepares us to serve God. First Peter 2:2 says the Word gives spiritual nourishment.

Is the Bible relevant? If I could I would like to add to that list. Is the Bible relevant? When we feel alone and isolated and the Word tells us in Joshua 1:5, *"I will never leave you or forsake you."* "I will be with you always."

When we are confused about decisions to make in our family or in our job the Word tells us in Proverbs 3, *"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight"* (Prov. 3:5-6). When it feels like the world is caving in around us, the Lord says in Zephaniah 3:17 *"I will quiet you with my love and I will rejoice over you with singing."*

How about one chapter – Romans 8. When we are struggling with sin the Bible gives us a promise that *"There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus because the law of the spirit of life has set you free from the law of sin and death"* (Rom. 8:1-2). When you are uncertain and fearful about the future and Romans 8 says:

"For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father.' The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory" (Rom. 8:15-17).

How about when things aren't working out the way they are supposed to and Romans 8:28 comes to our hearts and says that all things our God works together for good for those who love him, who have been called according to His purpose (Rom. 8:28). How about when we are facing those seemingly insurmountable trials and Romans 8 says, *"If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things"* (Rom. 8:31-32).

How about when that husband or wife leaves or when the mom or dad is no longer in the house and God whispers to our hearts: *"That neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate"* you from my love (Rom. 8:38-39).

How about when we are afraid and we don't know what is coming in the future and God says in Isaiah 43,

"Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the LORD, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior; Since you are precious and honored in my sight, and because I love you (Is. 43:1-4).

Ladies and Gentlemen, Mark 13:31 says, *"Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away."*

Why would we want to listen to anything else?

You see how the question becomes not should we listen to the Bible, the question becomes why would we want to listen to anything else? Why would we fill our worship with anything but this Word? A preacher's job is not to make the Bible relevant. The Bible is relevant. The preacher's job is to show the relevance of the Bible, that it speaks to contemporary needs, about eternal promises.

Because of the Word's purpose.

Fourth characteristic – because of the Word's magnitude, its authority and its relevance – fourth because of the Word's purpose. Now here is where I want us to really dive in deep into God's agenda in Scripture. We have talked some about agendas here at this church. We have talked about how if we have different agendas that we can yield our seats if that would be the best thing to do. I want us to look at God's agenda in Scripture.

God's agenda in Scripture ...

Number one, God's agenda in Scripture is to show us the glory of Christ. We talked last week about how Peter's sermon is radically God-centered. At the focal point of that sermon is the person of Christ. If you even look over in verse 22-24 you see mainly three characteristics of Christ are emphasized here. First of all Christ is a man accredited by God. *"Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles"* (Acts 2:22). Number two, He was a Savior provided by God. Look in verse 23. *"This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross"* (Acts 2:23). God purposed for His son to die to save us from our sins.

Finally He is the Lord exalted by God. God raised Him from the dead in verse 24, *"Freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him"* (Acts 2:24). So the whole purpose here is the Bible is showing us the glory of Christ. Peter is using the Old Testament to show the glory of Christ. When we do Secret Church in a couple of months in November we are going to walk through the Old Testament and one of the fun parts of that evening will be seeing how Christ is in and out of every single page of the Old Testament; how His presence fills all of Scripture. He is the center of this whole thing.

The Bible's agenda is to show us the glory of Christ, then second to transform us into the image of Christ. Now here is where I want us to camp out a do a little bit of turning. I want you to turn with me to Genesis 1. At the same time, hold a finger in Genesis 1, I want you to turn the other hand over to Revelation 21. We're going to have a little fun here. We will go back and forth a little bit. Genesis 1 on one hand and have it ready to flip over to Revelation 21. I want you to see some bookends on the Bible that show us the Bible's purpose.

Genesis 1:1 obviously says, *"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."* So God is revealing His glory through creation from the very beginning but I want you to look with me especially at Genesis 1:26-27. Look at what the Bible says there; first book in the Bible; Genesis 1:26-27 says, *"Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.' So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them."*

So what we see in the very beginning of the Bible is God creating man in His image. In the image of God we were created. But then we get to Genesis 3 and sin enters the picture. I want you to look at Genesis 3:22. What you have is Adam and Eve, man experiencing the effects of sin. Verse 22 says:

"And the LORD God said, 'The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever.' So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken" (Gen. 3:22-23).

Here we have a picture of the image of God being marred by sin in man. So that is how the Bible starts, the introduction.

Now hold your place here and go over to Revelation 21:1. The Bible says, *"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea"* (Rev. 21:1). So what you have is the restoration, recreation, of the earth here in Revelation 21 like it was intended to be in Genesis 1 and 2. So you have those bookends on the Bible where we see the image of God marred by sin in the fall of man in Genesis 3.

I want you to look at Revelation 22. I want you to look with me at verse 1 and 2. This is talking about heaven and it says:

"Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse" (Rev. 22:1-3).

I want you to keep that in mind.

Turn with me back to Genesis 3 and look at verse 24, the verse we didn't read at the end of this chapter. Look at what it says: *"After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the"* (Gen. 3:24)—what? *"...tree of life."* Being banished from the tree of life in Genesis 3; Revelation 22, the tree of life is now bringing healing to the nations because there is no curse any more for God's people.

So what we have is this curse in the beginning as a result of sin. But you have in the end, no longer any curse and you have a whole story in between of God recreating His people into His image. These are bookends of the Bible and the rest of the pages of Scripture are basically one big story of God recreating us, you and me, in His image. We see it throughout the Old Testament how He wants His image to be reflected through His people so in Psalm 17:15 says our satisfaction as people only comes in seeing and knowing the likeness of God. Then we get to the New Testament we see this unfold more and more.

Let me take you on a little tour. Go to Romans 8. I want you to look at a verse actually that I just quoted part of a second ago. I want you to see and maybe underline in your Bibles the places where you see God talking about how we were created to be in His image. Look at Romans 8:28. It says: *"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose"* (Rom. 8:28). Listen to what

verse 29 says though: *"For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified"* (Rom. 8:29-30).

So based on what Scripture is telling us from the very beginning God has predestined for us to look more like Jesus, to be conformed into the image of Christ. Turn over two books to the right to 2 Corinthians 3. What we are seeing is the agenda of the Bible. Second Corinthians 3:18. It is a key verse here. Listen to how it is similar to Romans 8:29. It says: *"And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit"* (2 Cor. 3:18).

So we are being transformed in His likeness so that we reflect His glory. With ever increasing glory we become more like Christ day in and day out. Turn over a couple books to Philippians 3. Look at Philippians 3:20-21. You might underline these. It is showing us the purpose of God in the Bible. *"But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body"* (Phil. 3:20-21).

We can continue on. Colossians 3:10 talks about how we are putting on the image of Christ, the new man, day in and day out. Second Peter 1:3-4 talks about how we are maturing into the image of God. First John 3:2 says that one day *"we shall be like him."* We will be transformed into His presence. This is the whole agenda, the whole purpose of the Bible. Don't miss it. It is to show us the glory of Christ and to bring us, transform us, into the image of Christ.

Now at this point I want us to dive a little deeper into our contemporary context on why the Word must be central in worship. The Word's purpose is to show us Christ and to make us look more like Christ. We've got that on the table, right? Now if that is the Word's purpose then I want us to think about what is not the Word's purpose. I want you to follow along with me here because some of you might hear me say this and think that I'm heretical, but I don't think I am. I don't want you to think I am. So I want you to follow along real close here.

If the Word's purpose is to transform us into the image of Christ then that means the Word's purpose is not to answer every question we may have in life or to give direction for every single circumstance we may face in life. This is not an answer book for every single question that we will face. There are a lot of questions that are not answered in the Bible. We could think of tons in this room. What does the Bible say about dinosaurs? I don't see a lot about dinosaurs in the Bible. Every kid asks what does God say about dinosaurs? I don't know. Maybe let's go a little deeper though in what happens in our lives.

What does the Bible say about raising teenagers? Is the Bible a specific handbook on how to raise teenagers? Well sure there are some principles that are found based on it but this book was not written to give us a how-to manual on how to raise teenagers. The Bible doesn't answer questions like how to walk through divorce recovery. What does the Bible say about walking through divorce recovery, walking through the grief process? It is not a how-to manual for that.

What does the Bible say about managing our money? Two of the biggest needs in churches - how to I handle my marriage and how do I handle my money. What does the Bible say,

practical advice? Is there a lot of specific advice about how to invest your 401k or how to handle your social security or your investments or your stocks or your trading? The Bible doesn't give a lot of specific direction on that. Then there are social issues. What does the Bible say about cloning?

Now obviously, don't get me wrong, there are some principles that are foundational in Scripture for these things. But the Bible was not written to be a handbook or how-to manual for how to deal with every single situation we face in life and answer every single question we may have in life.

In light of that, what we have to ask ourselves is if that is not the purpose of the Bible and the preacher wants to address those issues that are very real in people's lives; if I want to address divorce recovery or how to raise teenagers or how to manage your money because I know those needs are here and the Bible doesn't specifically address those in much depth; certainly there are some things, but in much depth; well then if I want to preach on that then basically I have two options.

Number one, I can start to take the Word and twist it to say things it was not intended to say and give a bunch of good how-to sermons on how to manage your money wisely and how to raise your teenagers wisely, or if that doesn't work I can go to the Christian bookstore and find the latest book on how to raise teenagers and preach that instead of the Bible which is happening across the board today in the church.

The focus in our worship: good stuff or God's stuff?

What we have to ask ourselves is, is the focus of our worship going to be good stuff or is it going to be God's stuff? Let me explain. Good stuff – I am referring to some of the things I just mentioned: how to raise teenagers, how to walk through divorce recovery, how to handle grief, how to manage your money. Good stuff, stuff that is important to all of our lives. I am not going to negate its importance. It is certainly important. God's stuff is the truth that is revealed in Scripture to conform us into the image of Christ. The question we have to ask is, in our worship are we going to focus on the good stuff or are we going to focus on the God stuff?

Now follow along with me. In our worship, if we focus on the good stuff and we neglect God's stuff then what we do is we rob ourselves of the truth that is necessary for realizing God's purpose in our lives. It is not about what we don't get. We get good information on Sunday morning. What we don't get is the truth we need to grow into the character of Christ. We get the practical advice and wisdom from the preacher but we don't get the Word that needs to feed our souls to bring us into the image of Christ.

We rob ourselves of the truth that is necessary for realizing God's purpose in our lives and second we rob God of the glory that is due His name. What we do is we create a church culture where everybody is dependent on the preacher for all the answers and on the preacher for his wisdom and his advice on this or that. Ladies and Gentlemen, can I be honest with you? I am just not that good. I don't have all the answers for every single situation we face. I don't have good enough sound financial advice to give all of you advice on exactly what to do with your investments. I don't have all the answers for how to raise your teenagers. That is not just because I don't have teenagers. Even if I did, I think there are all kinds of different scenarios represented with teenagers; all kinds of different personalities that are represented there with children. There is not one blanket answer for that.

So what we have done is we have created a church culture where the preacher is supposed to come out with a hat on each week and communicate according to this question or that question the people are facing. What happens is we begin to draw attention to the preacher himself. We rob ourselves of the truth that is necessary for realizing God's purpose in our lives and we rob God of the glory that is due His name.

Let me share with you a quote from a guy named Walter Kaiser. He said this:

Many pastors can preach whole messages with little more than a tip of the hat to a clause or two taking from a biblical context that few, if any, recognize. Even more pastors have decided that using the Bible is a handicap for meeting the needs of the different generations. Therefore they have gone to drawing their sermons from the plethora of recovery and pop-psychology books that fill our Christian bookstores. The market forces demand that we give them what they want to hear if we wish them to return and pay for the mega sanctuaries that we have built.

I don't want us to be robbed of the truth or our God to be robbed of the glory that is due His name.

When we focus on God's stuff instead of good stuff ...

When we focus though on God's stuff instead of good stuff we fill ourselves with the truth that is necessary for realizing God's purpose in our lives and we glorify God, catch this, we glorify God by becoming like Christ. It is not that all of these issues whether it is managing money or raising kids or walking through divorce recovery; they are all extremely important, extremely significant issues; but instead of me trying to provide the answers week in and week out twisting Scripture or preaching other books from the Christian bookstore, if we walk through the Word and we are fed the character of Christ and we get in touch in our lives with the power of the Holy Spirit and we begin to walk with the Holy Spirit then we will discover that He has all of the answers. He is able to equip you to follow Christ as you raise teenagers. He is able to strengthen you to walk through divorce recovery. He is able to give you guidance and sustain you by His grace as you walk through the grief process, as you walk through cancer, and as you walk through all the trials that we may face. It is the character of Christ and being in touch with the Holy Spirit that is most important. That happens through being fed God's stuff week in and week out.

I remember when my father passed away a couple of years ago and I began to walk through that grief process. I remember getting emails from people in church who gave me how-to steps to deal with my grief. Here is how to do this; you should do this and this and this and everything will be fine. That was not the most beneficial advice. What was most beneficial to me in those days were the people who told me over and over again before that day that God can be trusted and God is faithful and God sustains by His grace and His mercy and God upholds you with His righteous right hand, and God has conquered death and sin and the grave and so your dad didn't need to worry about what would happen after he breaths his last breath because he was headed to heaven. It was the promises that revealed that God, the character of God, that were most important when I began to walk through those things.

In our worship are we going to focus on good stuff or on God's stuff? And this is why when we say at this church that our agenda is to become like Christ and to make disciples in the image of Christ in all nations. If anybody has an agenda besides that then you are not welcome here as a member because our purpose is to grow into the image of Christ. That comes through our time in His word. It is the Word's purpose.

I want us to stop there. I want to ask you a question. I want to ask you how the image of Christ is being reflected in your life today. Is the character of Christ being developed in your life? I don't want us to ever create a scenario where we come to church week in and week out and we go through the motions and we don't look more like Christ today than we did last week at this time and two weeks ago at this time.

So I want to give you some time to reflect on how the character of Christ is being developed in you. I want us to bring our attention to Christ in a time of prayer. I want to invite you to fix your eyes on Christ. I want invite you to ask yourself one question today. Are you looking more like Him each day in your life? That is the purpose of the Word. That is God's agenda in our lives. I want to invite you to join in God's agenda there.

I know that there are people here and there are many who have never experienced the reality of Christ living in you. You have never begun this process of glorifying Christ with your life. He died on the cross to save you from your sins and he rose from the grave. I invite you to respond to God's Word.

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